

Innovating Public Access for the next two billion: the challenge of Mobile Information Literacy

Sara Vannini

University of Washington Information School – TASCHA Group

Abstract:

This presentation will tackle the idea that I am currently working on, and that follows-up a research project (called: “Telecentres and Mobiles: Synergies and Relations between two Icons of ICTs for Development”) on the use of mobile technologies into public access to ICTs venues (PAVs) in Latin America.

“Telecentres and Mobiles” aimed to uncover, for the first time at a large scale, new practices of mobile technology use in Latin American PAVs, and to understand PAVs’ operators’ perceptions of mobile technologies as a tool for development. PAVs and Mobile Technologies have been extensively studied for their potential to give access to information and enabling underserved communities’ development, especially in the developing world (Donner, 2010, 2015; Wicander, 2010). The field of ICT for Development (ICT4D) looked at them, one after the other, as possible ways to finally bridge the digital divide. At first, the rapid growth of mobile technologies adoption, especially in developing countries, made researchers question the necessity to still invest in PAVs (Chigona, Lekwane, Westcott, & Chigona, 2011). With more than 6 billion mobile subscriptions in the world, and more people having access to a mobile than to electricity or clean water in developing countries, mobiles have indeed been reshaping the technological ecosystem of access (GSMA, 2014; ITU, 2015). Yet, PAVs have not been replaced by mobiles (Sey et al., 2013). While we can envision that PAVs are starting to include mobile technologies to provide their services, very few studies have been considered the topic so far.

Results from my online survey conducted among Latin American PAVs’ operators indicate that PAVs are starting to offer mobile-related services, many of which are related to literacy, and that operators see a greater role for mobile technologies in their work to address education and learning activities. These experiences, however, seem to be isolated and not well documented in the literature. Furthermore, they cannot count on any common framework or curriculum that tackles the issue of mobile information literacy, necessary to retrieve and evaluate the online information, create and share it effectively, and participate safely and securely in the digital information society. With “the next billions” coming online predominantly via mobile in developing countries, digital literacy still being one of the main barriers to bridge the digital divide, and the concerns raised by advocates of the freedom of the net because of these facts, mobile information literacy services are indeed needed and required (GSMA, 2014; Surman, 2015).

This follow-up research “Mobile Information Literacy” aims, then, to map and better understand current practices of mobile information literacy in Latin American PAVs and to co-design a mobile literacy curriculum of reference addressed to academics, practitioners and policy makers to evaluate, re-envision and innovate the PAVs’ landscape. Latin American PAVs experiences, together with experiences from other regions gathered through literature reviews and contacts with experts running mobile literacy projects in other geographic regions, will offer the basis to understand public access users’ needs and inform the design of a mobile information literacy curriculum of reference for the field.

A caveat: Mobile Information Literacy is here defined as a set of ability guiding people to “find and evaluate the quality and credibility of information obtained online understand how to create and share online information effectively, and participate safely and securely” (Day, 2015, p. 5) by using mobile technologies, and not PC, environments.

References:

- Chigona, W., Lekwane, O., Westcott, K., & Chigona, A. (2011). Uses, Benefits and Challenges of Public Access Points in the Face of Growth of Mobile Technology. *The Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries*, 49(0). Retrieved from <https://www.ejisdc.org/ojs2/index.php/ejisdc/article/view/866>
- Day, S. (2015). *Mobile Information Literacy Curriculum*. Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies (JSIS) & Technology and Social Change Group (TASCHA), University of Washington. Retrieved from <http://tascha.uw.edu/mobile-information-literacy-curriculum/>
- Donner, J. (2010). Framing M4D: The Utility of Continuity and the Dual Heritage of “Mobiles and Development.” *The Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries*, 44(0). Retrieved from <https://144.214.55.140/Ojs2/index.php/ejisdc/article/view/746>
- Donner, J. (2015). *After Access: Inclusion, Development, and a More Mobile Internet*. MIT Press.
- GSMA. (2014). *Digital Inclusion Report 2014*. London, UK: GSMA. Retrieved from <http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/digital-inclusion-report-2014>
- ITU. (2015). *Measuring the Information Society Report 2015*. Geneva, Switzerland: International Telecommunication Union. Retrieved from <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/misr2015/MISR2015-w5.pdf>
- Sey, A., Coward, C., Bar, F., Sciadas, G., Rothschild, C., & Koepke, L. (2013). *Connecting people for development: Why public access ICTs matter*. Seattle, WA.: Technology & Social Change Group, University of Washington Information School. Retrieved from <http://tascha.uw.edu/publications/connecting-people-for-development>

Surman, M. (2015, October 7). Smartphone users in emerging markets deserve better than a watered-down Internet. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/innovations/wp/2015/10/07/smartphone-users-in-emerging-markets-deserve-better-than-a-watered-down-internet/?postshare=7141447426888848&tid=ss_tw

Wicander, G. (2010). *M4D Overview 1.0 : the 2009 Introduction to Mobile for Development*. Karlstad: Karlstads universitet. Retrieved from <http://kau.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:320676/FULLTEXT02>