

Social Impact of Information Technology

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Background

- That technologies generally have enormous impact on society is self-evident
 - we are surrounded by many examples
- What is not so obvious is the impact of society on technologies
 - different contexts define the functionality, usage and form of technologies
 - we see this in information technology especially in cell phone usage



Background

- The social impact of information technologies is often examined through the lenses of five development issue areas: education, health, job creation, poverty alleviation and governance (political processes)
- The conventional wisdom is that IT in its various dimensions facilitate achievement of development goals. At the same time the imperatives of development shape IT usage and functionality in ways that are both obvious and implicit
- This presentation highlights the impact of society on technology by examining some social communication practices in Nigeria in the context of the cell phone



IT & communication practices

- The cell phone has become the most diffused information technology
 - 2011 global penetration rate of 86% or 6 billion (ITU, 2012)
- Most growth in 2011 occurred in developing countries accounting for 80% of new cellular subscriptions
 - 65% penetration rate in Africa
 - The current growth rate in Nigeria stands at 85% (NCC, 2013)



Akpan-Obong (2013)



IT & communication practices

- It is therefore not surprising that most social impact of IT in Nigeria has occurred in the area of basic communication – business and personal



IT & communication practices

- A particular area of interest to researchers, practitioners and policymakers is the manner through which local practices transform IT usage and functionality
 - ~ cost, access and availability constrain/facilitate communication
 - ~ ‘economy of speech’ redefines common communication patterns



IT & communication practices

- 'flashing' and 'call me back' have entered into common lingo
- the level or presence of primary technologies also affect usage and functionality
- 'network' has become synonymous with 'NEPA' in common parlance



The many faces of cell phone usage



We've got IT, now what?



There are many assumptions about the capacities of information technology especially to facilitate development

~ One of the areas in which information technology is expected to make a difference is in bridging the gap between citizens and government

The Federal Government of Nigeria and various state governments have moved in the direction of e-governance. This often translates in the presence of websites with static information

Some federal government agencies and states have gone further by providing e-services but many are overlaid on conventional paper systems ~ e.g. national passport processing

Conclusion



- The social impact of information technology is evident around us
- This does not however imply that the impact is universal and that all people benefit (or suffer) equally in an IT-diffused society
- Users especially in resource-poor contexts have modified IT functionality in ways that fit their own specific circumstances
- IT manufacturers should therefore do more in integrating local practices in their product designs

Conclusion



- Also, the social impact of IT cannot be assumed.
 - policymakers and industry stake holders need to be more purposeful in implementing IT in the different societal and political processes such as e-governance



Thank you ... and questions

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