



From the Guest Editors

ICTs for Leisure in Development: A Case for Motivation, Exploration, and Play in the Global South

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Photoshopping the newlyweds' pictures, downloading the latest movies, teenagers chatting on social network sites, and virtual gaming may seem like typical behavior in the West; yet in the context of a village in Mali or a slum in Mumbai, it is seen as unusual and perhaps an anomaly in their new media practices. In recent years, some scholars including the guest editors (Arora, 2014; Arora & Rangaswamy, 2013; Rangaswamy & Cutrell, 2012) have encountered these leisure-oriented behaviors and argued for the need to emphasize and reposition user practices within larger and contemporary discourses of media consumption. Yet for the most part, studies in information and communication technologies for development (ICTD) have duly relegated such enactments as anecdotal. This is partly due to the fact that much of this research is driven by development agendas with a strong historical bias toward the socioeconomic realms.

The ICTD domain has evolved to include a range of technology artifacts, their affordances, and a variety of specific geospaces of usage, collaborating with scientists across disciplines from computer science to interface design to anthropology. However, we aim to re-focus the ICTD gaze on the so-called non-instrumental, non-utilitarian uses and impacts on communities, groups, and individuals from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds that are not yet a subject of singular, sustained investigation. We hope to establish the relationship between discreet technology practices such as those for livelihoods and those for leisure (entertainment, pleasure, play) as legitimate components of an integrated technology experience.

Specifically, we explore how experience with technologies could potentially contribute to "development-friendly" skillsets, life chances, and opportunities. We call for a renewed examination of the premises of ICT use in resource-constrained environments, particularly those which valorize and equate

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development as utilitarian. We hope to provoke a reimagining of the ICTD community's core presumptions and values to problematize the notion of developmental well-being.

Adopting a narrow development lens can miss the actual engagements and ingenious strategies marginal populations use to instate technologies into their everyday. Here, seeking entertainment and pleasure as sustainable engagements becomes a key behavioral tool to strategically use, emotively connect to, and play with technology. Indeed, this may require us to broaden our view of how we think about what underlies a good ICTD research project and how we view a range of human behaviors as incremental to development.

The motivating question for this special issue is: *What are the implications, impacts, and pivotal roles of ICTs as leisure (entertainment/pleasure/play) artifacts in the context of emerging economies?* We believe this line of inquiry is timely, largely unexplored, and valuable to the ICTD domain. Despite studies yielding insightful commentaries on ICTs in this arena, we believe resource-constrained environments generating rich usages that are not overtly utilitarian have remained hitherto unexplored.

In this special issue, we put together various original research studies that reconceptualize ICT mobilization and serviceability to extend beyond a conservative understanding of developmental value. This will help us focus on the heterogeneous and life-enhancing aspects of technological use encompassing both experiential and purposive elements of ICT adoption.

We strive to drive home the following points, namely:

- Leisure is a critical area of technology infusion that leads to discovery and magnification of digital literacies. Moreover, leisure offers an experimental space to informally diffuse learnings and impart social impacts that bind people and technologies.
- As mobile technologies move beyond urban areas and the upper classes who can afford them, it is essential to bring together stories about crafting technologies that include a spectrum of playful behaviors as mainstream ICTD research.
- The ICTD community at large is poised at a juncture where interdisciplinary crossings are pushing the boundaries of established themes and subject matters. This provides an opportunity to move away from ICTD's established viewpoints to discuss and modify some of the basic premises of technology use in development contexts.

All articles in this special issue speak convincingly and compellingly about the importance of digital leisure for understanding technology practice.

For instance, Sey and Ortoleva's "All Work and No Play? Judging the Uses of Mobile Technologies and ICTs in Developing Countries" moves across disciplines of philosophy, psychology, and anthropology to understand the potential of play for ICTD practice. The authors examine the ramifications of the exponential growth of mobile technologies in emerging economies and their impacts on the sociopersonal development of marginalized publics by fusing social, playful, and pleasure-oriented needs.

We see an emphasis on the personal element in Oreglia's "ICT and (Personal) Development in Rural China." Shifting contexts to rural China, the author draws our attention to the unlikely users—old people, rural women, people with little disposable income or education—whose ICT use is often motivated by social purposes such as connecting with family in far-flung places, being entertained and in general, passing time. While it is hard to prove a direct impact of these personal uses on GDP, the author argues that to ignore the indirect benefits accruing to this population misses their powerful influence on social equity and inclusion in the era of mobile telephony.

In "Relax, You've Got M-PESA: Leisure as Empowerment," Gajjala and Tetteh investigate mobile technologies but focus their energies on the much-hyped M-PESA initiative, a cellphone-based money transfer system in the Kenyan context. Here, leisure is used as a strategic digital instrument to promote the platform and sustain the interest of current users. Through this effort, the authors explicitly bridge the

field of new media studies and ICT4D, linking scholarship on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter social practices to M-PESA.

While the leisure thrust in mobile technology uses have resulted in their viral dispersion among disadvantaged populations, the need of the hour is to recognize leisure as not only a social act but also a critical cultural space. In Kolko and Racadio's article, "The Value of Non-Instrumental Computer Use: A Study of Skills Acquisition and Performance in Brazil," leisure is situated in telecenters, libraries, schools, and other public places. This extends the rich conversations on the virtual public sphere to urban contexts, underlining the need for us to look at both the material and the digital domains as complements of each other. And within these cultural geographies, the authors argue for the complex relationship between instrumental and non-instrumental uses of technospaces.

Talking of the public sphere, Tully and Ekdale twin the discourse of hashtag publics in media studies and the ICTD realm. In "Sites of Playful Engagement: Twitter Hashtags as Spaces of Leisure and Development in Kenya," the authors reveal the everyday leisure and entertainment practices of popular hashtags on Kenyan Twitter as melding politics and entertainment in rich and playful ways. Through hashtags, the authors argue that Kenyans use Twitter as an instrument of collective protest against government corruption, and as a platform to share jokes, comment on media misrepresentations of their country, and communicate with people across the globe. Clearly, a link exists between context and use in understanding people's participation and empowerment through ICTs. Initiating a discussion on what we mean by ICT for leisure involves identifying the lived realities of specific geospatial spaces united by their common relationship with broken and strapped infrastructures. The confluence of nine researchers and five articles in this special issue provides excellent opportunities to question, discuss, and modify some of the basic premises of technology use in development contexts.

Rounding out this special issue is a book review by Pamela Abbott, "Connecting ICTs to Development: The IDRC Experience."

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