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INTERACTION BETWEEN EXISTING SOCIAL NETWORKS
AND INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) TOOLS: EVIDENCE FROM RURAL ANDES

Antonio Díaz Andrade

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

This exploratory and interpretive research examines the anticipated consequences of information and communication technology (ICT) on six remote rural communities, located in the northern Peruvian Andes, which were provided with computers connected to the Internet. Instead of looking for economic impacts of the now-available technological tools, this research investigates how local individuals use (or not) computers, and analyses the mechanisms by which computer-mediated information, obtained by those who use computers, is disseminated through their customary face-to-face interactions with their compatriots.

A holistic multiple-case study design was the basis for the data collection process. Data were collected during four-and-half months of fieldwork. Grounded theory informed both the method of data analysis and the technique for theory building. As a result of an inductive thinking process, two intertwined core themes emerged. The first theme, individuals’ exploitation of ICT, is related to how some individuals overcome some difficulties and try to make the most of the now available ICT tools. The second theme, complementing existing social networks through ICT, reflects the interaction between the newly ICT-mediated information and virtual networks and the local existing social networks.

However, these two themes were not evenly distributed across the communities studied. The evidence revealed that dissimilarities in social cohesion among the communities and, to some extent, disparities in physical infrastructure are contributing factors that explain the unevenness. But social actors – named as ‘activators of information’ – become the key triggers of the disseminating process for fresh and valuable ICT-mediated information throughout their communities.

These findings were compared to the relevant literature to produce theoretical generalisations. As a conclusion, it is suggested any ICT intervention in a developing country requires at least three elements to be effective: a tolerable physical infrastructure, a strong degree of social texture and an activator of information.

Keywords: information and communication technology (ICT), human capital, social capital, institutions, developing countries, rural areas
To the memory of my beloved father, Eduardo Díaz Torres

(21st of August 1936 – 1st of May 2005)
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