

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATTERNS OF ACCESS AND USE OF THE INTERNET BY YOUTH: THE CASE OF DAR ES SALAAM REGION, TANZANIA

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Abstract

This paper reports the results of the study which investigated the patterns of access and the use of the Internet by youth in Dar es Salaam Region. The objectives of this study were to investigate categories of youth [by age, gender, employment status and level of education] who use the Internet Café services; to find out the type of information accessed and how it is used; to gather opinions of youth and Internet Café administrators on potential impact of the Internet on people and to recommend ways for promoting positive use of the Internet especially by youth. Data were collected from 15 Internet Cafés which involved 77 respondents composed of Internet café users, Internet administrators and Internet café owners. Self administered questionnaires, focused group discussions and participant observation methods were used to collect data. The study revealed a high dominance of young educated Tanzanians on the use of the Internet Cafés where males outnumbered females. The study also revealed that the Internet is mainly used as a communication and entertainment tool; the use of Internet for business and e-commerce is very insignificant. The strengths of the Internet were stated as easy, cheap and quick means of communication, easy access to academic materials via online libraries and promotion of business through the web. On the other hand the study revealed that the Internet offers direct exposure to pornography, criminal networks and prostitution sites and that it leads to Internet addiction. The findings of the study revealed that the low use of the Internet for business, education and e-commerce can be improved through development of human resource. ICT infrastructure should be developed in different socio-economic sectors and that Kiswahili should be used in designing local websites so as to enable those with limitations to the English language to use the Internet. Lastly, there must be a clear national policy to guide the development of Internet industry in Tanzania.

1. Introduction

The convergence of Information and Communications Technologies and the emergence of the Internet have facilitated the progression to the information era. Since its development, the Internet has played an important role in

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communications, the transfer of information and knowledge and electronic commerce. In the new millennium, the Internet will play an increasingly important role in facilitating Tanzania's transition to the information society.

The emergence of the Internet has changed lives almost everywhere while creating new ways of accessing information, conducting business and communicating with each other. This tool has brought a great deal of awareness in people and today even people who have no computer knowledge are eager to learn to use the Internet, since it is the easiest and cheapest tool for communication.

The Tanzanian government realizes in wider perspective that computers and the Internet in particular could make a significant contribution to the development processes. Following this realization, and in order to facilitate further Internet connections and use, the then Tanzania Communications Commission [TCC] as provided for in the National Telecommunications Policy of 1997, liberalized the provision of public Internet access services in Tanzania. As of April 1999, TCC accepts applications from any interested party to become a Public Internet Access Service Provider [IASP] and to install and maintain public Internet services. Currently, there are at least 24 Internet Service Providers in Tanzania (TCC, The Regulator, 2003).

A significant development in the use of the Internet in Tanzania has been the fast growth of Internet cafés in large towns of Tanzania. This development has brought the Internet even closer to people through Cyber (Internet) cafés. In the year 2000, it was estimated that there were at least 536 Internet host sites and more than 7,000 Internet users in Tanzania. That is for every 10,000 inhabitants, 0.94 are connected to the Internet (Sangiwa, 2001).

The development in Internet technology in Tanzania has led to the increasing of Internet cafés services especially among the youth. The problem remains that in the absence of legal and regulatory framework on the use of the Internet in Tanzania, most youth have unlimited access to the Internet, which can lead them to accessing undesirable information. The potential dangers of unlimited access to the Internet are reported in surveys conducted in New Zealand [Berson et al, 1999] and in the United States [Finkelhor et al, 2000].

In Tanzania, the public is concerned about the negative use of the Internet by youth and its potential dangers. As it was reported in one of our local dailies the Zanzibar Minister for Education, Sports and Culture Mr. Haroun Suleiman, announced that his office has formed a Censor Board that will have a task of monitoring all Internet cafés in Zanzibar so as to make sure that students are not involved in accessing indecent material in the net (Mwananchi, 3rd March, 2003). However, studies are yet to be conducted to assess the use of the Internet by youth. This study is designed to assess the patterns of access and use of the Internet by youth and to gather their opinion on the potential positive and negative implications of Internet use.

2. Significance of the study

In Tanzania, there has been considerable growth in the use of computers and the Internet. This study intends to contribute towards an understanding of the patterns of access and the use of the Internet among youth. It will shed some light on factors, which determine the level and purpose of the use of the Internet as well as knowledge of the youth on the potential dangers, if any, facing them in view of the unlimited access to the Internet.

The findings of this study will therefore form the basis for suggesting ways to enhance appropriate use of the Internet by youths in Tanzania. Furthermore, the results of this study will assist both academics and others who seek to promote Internet usage, on the best way to make the use of the Internet beneficial to young people. Besides, the study will inform the public policy making process on issues of access and the use of the Internet in Tanzania. In addition, this study can be replicated in other parts of Tanzania to compare and contrast patterns of access and use. Ultimately, this study will contribute to the existing literature on the use of the Internet in Tanzania.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Sample of Internet Cafés

To collect the required information for this study area, purposive and convenient sampling techniques were used. Efforts were undertaken to get a list of all the Internet cafés in the three districts. However, due to the absence of central registration of the Internet cafés in Tanzania it was difficult to get the list. Therefore, a decision was made to consult the relevant ISPs such as Cats-NET, Africa Online and TTCL --DATACOM to obtain a list of the Internet cafes. A list of at least 32 Internet cafés was compiled.

Area sampling was used to determine members of the population to be included in the investigation. Area sampling refers to a method which involves dividing the population according to country, city blocks or other well-defined geographical sections (Ary et al, 1996). In this research initial list of Internet cafés was divided into three sub lists according to the three districts of Ilala, Kinondoni and Temeke. From each district at least five Internet cafés were purposively selected, a total of fifteen Internet cafés were selected for the study. The selection also depended on the provision of their physical addresses by the ISPs. Internet cafés with no physical addresses were difficult to locate and therefore were not selected. Table 1 indicates a sample of Internet Cafés which were included in the study.

Table 1: A sample of Internet Cafés involved in the study

A	ILALA
1	Alpha café - PPF Tower- Ghana Avenue
2	Sip 'n' Surf café - Msimbazi /Tandanti streets - Kariakoo area
3	Cyber Shoppe- Jamhuri Street
4	Omni Café-Upanga- Sea view
5	Cyber World-Jamhuri Street
B	KINONDONI
6	Baby Face Internet Café – Manzese Darajani
7	Nakiete Internet Café- Mwenge Bus Stand
8	K-Net Internet café – Mikocheni B
9	UCC Internet Café – University of Dar es Salaam
10	Mabibo Internet Café –Mabibo Hostel- Ubungo
C	TEMEKE
11	Moonlight Internet Café –Temeke Bus Stop
12	Angel IQ.Com-Chang'ombe-Temeke
13	Midway Communications-Chang'ombe VETA-Temeke
14	A&A Internet Café – Keko –Temeke
15	Nice Internet Café –Maduka mawili- Temeke

Source: Field Data 2002

3.2 A Sample of Internet Cafés Users

Internet café users were conveniently sampled from a group of users that were using Internet services in an Internet café during field research. This method was preferred because due to the nature of the study it was not easy to get pre-planned respondents in the Internet cafés.

3.3 Data Collection

Despite the fact that large samples are more convincing, a sample of 90 users and 15 Internet café owners/staff were selected. The survey method was used to collect data for this study. Through this method, data was obtained by using self-administered questionnaires and focus group discussions with a pre-determined set of questions. To supplement and cross check the information gathered from focus group discussions and questionnaires, observation method was used. However, only 62 (68.8%) user's questionnaires and 15 staff's (100%) questionnaires were collected.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The package provided important analysis such as frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation. The findings for the study are presented by

using tables, charts and illustrations. Data from open-ended questions and focus group interviews as well as secondary sources were analyzed qualitatively by using content analysis method.

4.0 Study Findings

In order to present the study findings systematically data obtained from field research was grouped into categories that respond to the research questions:

1. The characteristics of Internet cafés in terms of location and type of staff by age, gender, education level and working experience.
2. Categories of youth [by age, gender and level of education]
3. Frequency of visits to Internet Cafés
4. Type of accessed information.
5. The use of accessed information.
6. Opinions on potential positive and negative effects of using the Internet.
7. Suggestions on how to encounter negative impacts.

4.1 The Characteristics of Internet Cafés

4.1.1 Location

Location of Internet cafés was important in order to meet the objective number one of this study. Further, this was important so as to understand the status of Internet cafés i.e. where they are located and the types of customers they serve most. The aim was to make sure that all the three districts are equally represented. Five cyber cafés were selected from each district. Almost all Internet cafés visited during the survey were located either in the city center, or along main roads and in/or near institutions of higher learning.

4.2 Characteristics of Internet Café Staff by Gender, Age and Education levels

The survey indicates that most cafés are run by young (major age is 20-24) and relatively well-educated people with secondary education (66.7%) and Bachelors degree 20%. Most of the surveyed Internet cafés had female (53.3%) staff compared to males (46.7%). These results imply that the use of the Internet is dominated by the educated in view of the nature of the Internet language that is English. English language as a foreign language in Tanzania is mostly spoken and understood by educated people, as it is a medium of instruction in secondary and higher levels of education.

4.3 Characteristics of Internet Café Users by Gender, Age and Educational levels

4.3.1 Gender

Research into Internet use has frequently shown that young men are the main users of the services (GVU, 1999; Chachage 2001). The survey on users of Internet cafés indicates that the Internet usage is predominantly male (58% male and 42% female). Access to and the use of the Internet has economic, educational and social benefits so that those who are excluded from these factors are also excluded from Internet participation. In Tanzania, the majority of females are less educated, economically unstable and socially disadvantaged thus making technology, especially new technology such as computer technology and the Internet to remain a male domain. The same scenario was repeated in different studies of Internet use conducted in the US in 1998 where 40% of the users were female (Cyberdilaogue, 1998; GVU, 1998). In German, only 13% of all the Internet users were female (GFK, cited Otto, 1998b) while in Japan and Arab countries female Internet users appear to be the lowest, less than 5% (DIT, 1998; JapanBizTech, 1998). These studies evidently imply that Internet usage is male dominated worldwide.

4.3.2 Age and Educational Levels

The major age category for Internet users was between 20-29 years (87.5 %) see figure 1. below. In general, the surveyed users were relatively educated [see figure 2 below]. Over half of them (51.6%) had secondary education as the highest level of education received. However, 27.4% had university degrees while 19.4% are diploma holders in various fields. The high percentage of young educated Internet users might be attributable to the following factors: Youth are fast in grasping new technologies and have fewer responsibilities compared to adults. Another reason might be the nature of the Internet language communication, which is English. English language is a medium of communication from secondary to higher learning institutions in Tanzania. It follows, therefore, that those with secondary education and above would be more comfortable using English-medium Internet than those of lower level or have not been to school.

Figure: 1 Age of Internet Café Users

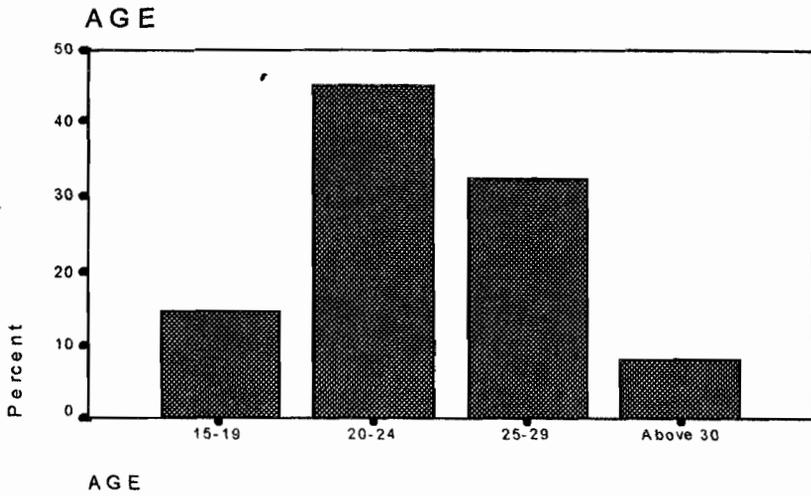
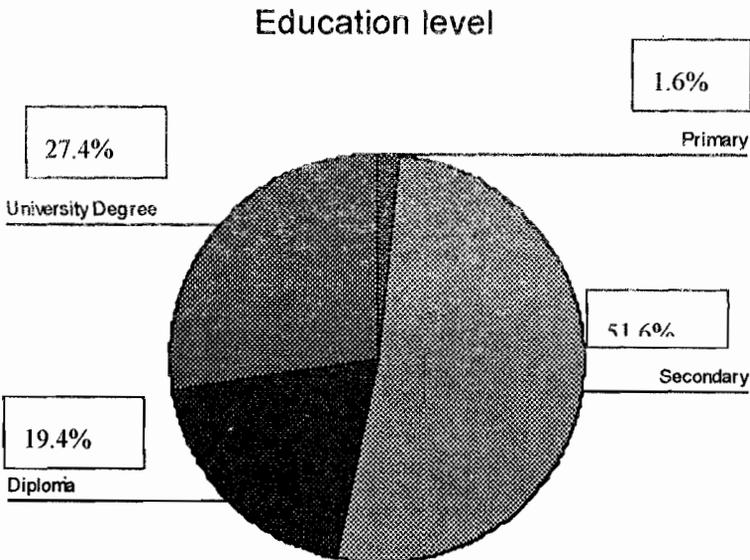


Figure: 2 Education Levels of Internet Café Users



Source: Field Data 2002

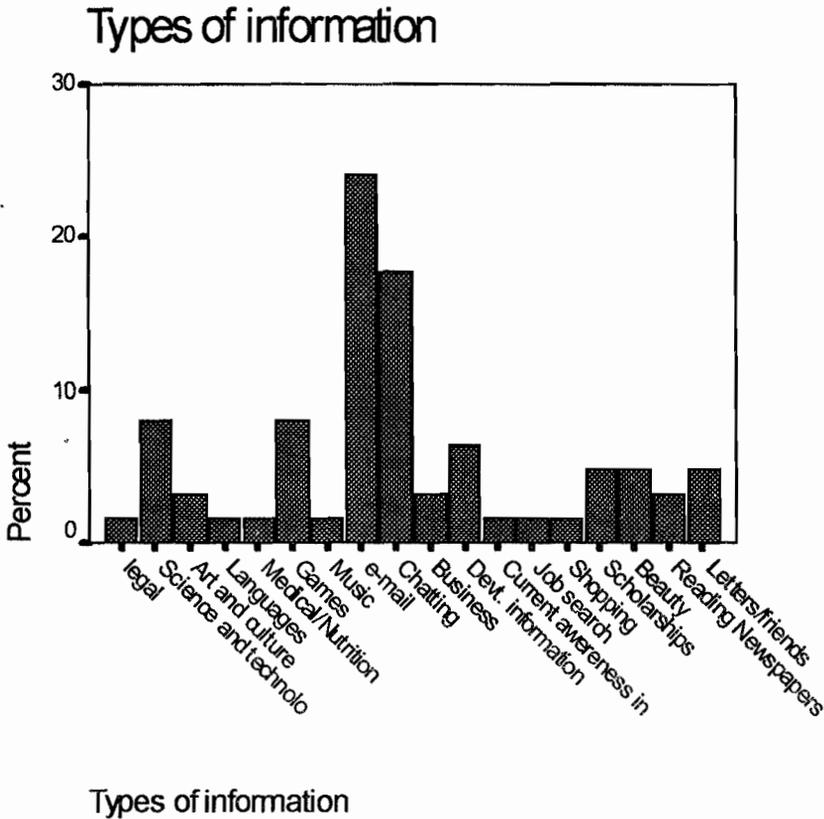
4.4 Frequency of visiting and time spent in Internet cafés

A large number of respondents indicated that they are frequent visitors to the Internet cafés. Whereas 56.4% respondents indicated that they are regular visitors, 24.1% admitted that they visit Internet cafés everyday. 45% of users spend an average of one to two hours in Internet cafés on each visit. When combining these data it can be said that Internet cafés are generally used at least everyday and users spend an average of about an hour in the café. Frequent use of Cyber cafés is attributable to the fact that, Internet cafés are the main Internet access points in developing countries like Tanzania in view of the low purchasing power of most Tanzanians to acquire personal computers and high Internet subscription fees. Another reason for the high frequency in Internet cafés use is the fact that the e-mail supplement the snail mail and the telephone; it has become a quick, efficient and cheap means of communication and more people, therefore, visit the café for the service it renders.

5. Type of Information Services Accessed By Young People

- 1) The survey revealed that the vast majority of young people who use the Internet to read and send e-mail
- 2) The second largest group of respondents indicated the use of Internet chat rooms. However, some clear differences among groups emerged. Through observation and discussions, it was revealed that young adults who use the Internet were interested in funny things like gaming and downloading music or chatting compared to older respondents
- 3) Substantially, more males than females used the Internet for information utility. Although limited, other researches on Internet use suggest that males make more use of Internet applications and for more reasons than females. Studies conducted by GVU (1997) found that male users were fond of Internet games than females. More studies have reported women to be more favorable to e-mail than men. Figure 3 summarizes study findings.

Figure: 3 Types of Information Accessed by Respondents



Source: Field Data 2002

6. Purposes of Using Internet Cafés

Internet Café staff and Internet users indicated almost more or less similar purposes for using the Internet. The main purpose for 33.9% of the respondents is communication i.e. “to keep in touch with friends and family”. The same results have been revealed in other studies. Katz and Rice (2000), Nie and Erbing (2000), also indicate that over 80% of users use the Internet for e-mail, with an estimated four million e-mail messages exchanged in the US in 1998 and 42 % of Americans checking their e-mail daily (UCLA CPP, 2000).

Various reasons may be attributed to this scenario:

- i. It is easy to access the whole networked world at the lowest possible cost compared that of a local call or a snail mail.

- ii. In addition to this economic advantage, individual users can share ideas and feelings instantaneously with people across the world.
- iii. Nonetheless, the e-mail is believed to be the quickest, reliable and cheapest means of communication with relatives and friends abroad. For instance, for half an hour Internet use, a person can send e-mails to more than a dozen people while charged only three hundred to five hundred shillings only.

Although a significant number of respondents (16.1%) indicated that they use the Internet for academic purposes, many of such respondents were those found in Internet cafés located near or within institutions of higher learning. None of the respondents found in other areas indicated this use. This might be due to the fact that, almost all institutions of higher learning in Tanzania have in place computer programs and, further, it is encouraged as the most useful source of information for various disciplines.

From the study findings, it is clear that the Internet usage for business communication and e-commerce is still minimal. The findings of this study show that only 9.7% of all the respondents have used Internet for business purposes. Low level of Internet use for business purposes is caused by the following factors:

- i. First, the payment system does not support the e-commerce since there are very few credit card facilities offered in Tanzania's banks.
- ii. Second, there is lack of awareness and education on the Internet technology.
- iii. Third, weak telecommunication and communication infrastructure coupled with high costs.
- iv. Another factor which has inhibited e-commerce and e-business in Tanzania is lack of skilled labor to implement and run electronic commerce effectively (Mutagahywa and Kajiba, 2002).

Nevertheless, participant observation of the research project revealed that the majority of sites visited by users were for recreational purposes (refer to figure 6); these sites by far outnumbered e-mail sites, and most of these sites were in fact pornographic. Social taboos against pornography may explain why none of the respondents listed this as their purpose of using the Internet.

From the survey and the discussions, it can be concluded that the users of the Internet in Tanzania were primarily interested in e-mail services (as indicated in figure 6) and recreational resources that the Internet offers. They were also interested in reading newspapers through the net and finding information on specific subjects and looking at specific web sites.

7. Opinions of Young People and Internet Café Staff on the Impact of Internet

7.1 Positive impacts of using Internet

From the findings it was evident that most people concur that the Internet has its pros and cons. The positive impacts of the Internet are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Positive impacts of Internet use N=62

Opinion/Perception	Frequency	Percentage
Acquisition of current information	11	17.7
Easy communication	8	12.9
Broaden youth minds	7	11.3
Increase knowledge of world's technology	7	11.3
Cheap means of communication	6	9.7
Increase computer literacy	3	4.8
Increase creativity	3	4.8
Provides reference /library	3	4.8
Getting friends/fiancées	3	4.8
Job opportunities	1	1.6
Scholarship	1	1.6
Academic information	1	1.6
Keeps youth occupied	1	1.6
Not applicable	2	3.2
No response	5	8.0
Total	62	100

Source: Field Data 2002

As indicated in Table 2, Internet is commended for its ability to offer easy and quick access to current information. Among the respondents interviewed 17.7 % acknowledged this fact. Other positive impacts include its ability to circulate ideas to a wide audience, fostering creativity among young people, increase of computer literacy, provision of cheap means of communication compared to telephone, easy retrieval of academic materials through on-line libraries and promotion of business through the web i.e. e-commerce. In this case the Internet is regarded to be the most cost effective in terms of time and monies.

7.2 Negative impacts of the Internet

There was no significant variation between comments, which were provided by café staff and those presented by Internet users. Respondents referred to the negative impacts of the Internet as indicated in table 3 below:

Table 3: Negative Impacts of Internet N=62

Opinion/perception	Frequency	Percentage
Pornographic material	30	48.4
Interference of culture	4	6.5
Time wastage	7	11.3
Radiation effect	3	4.8
Information insecurity	2	3.2
Wrong information	2	3.2
Wastage of money	1	1.6
Not applicable	7	11.3
No response	6	9.7
Total	62	100

Source: Field Data 2002

The majority of the respondents mentioned access to pornographic material as a major concern. This was stated by 48.8% of the respondents. Other adverse impacts were cited as wastage of youth's time, as most of them become addicted to the Internet. Lack of security because information sent via the Internet can be encrypted, higher Internet surfing charges compared to quality of service. In this case users lamented that they are required to pay 300- 500 Tshs. for half an hour surfing and 500-1000 Tshs (depending on the location of internet café) for an hour, however these charges do not exclude connection time which in most cafés is very slow. Further, the Internet was condemned for having an adverse cultural impact especially on youth. It should be borne in mind that most Internet information is foreign thus fostering the western ways of life on Tanzania's youths.

Besides the comments above, a few respondents pointed out that, the Internet is a source of rapid spread of lies and other wrong information and since it a new technology in Tanzania many tend to trust everything from the Internet.

The survey findings suggest that, it is likely that young people in Tanzania easily access undesirable sites e.g. pornography. The absence of laws and regulations that restrict access to undesirable sites in Tanzania has contributed to this situation. Laws enhancement against access to undesirable sites may reduce this situation. The local media has been reporting parents and general public concerns on youth's easy access to pornographic material which is believed to be a contributing factor towards the increase of HIV/AIDS infections among secondary school students.

8. Conclusion

The results of the study suggest that most Internet café are located in busy places like along main roads, near offices and business places. In the city center a good number Internet cafés were found in one location. These locations are preferred by Internet Café owners because many people frequent the areas for various activities thus easy to get customers.

The majority of Internet Cafés are served by young females and that the majority of Internet café users are young adults where on the contrary male users' outnumbered female users. As noted earlier, young people easily grasp new technology compared to elders. A minimal number of female Internet users is attributable to the fact that females are less free with their time for instance young females are expected to help with house chores rather than visiting cafés.

As previously mentioned, in most cases females are disadvantaged in terms of economy, education as well as in technology acquisition. These facts explain why their number is low compared to that of males.

The majority of users utilize the Internet for entertainment and personal communication purposes. E-mail services are the most popular at Internet cafés, followed by general web surfing and chatting. Disgracefully, there is massive access to pornographic sites despite warnings pasted in most cafés walls. This scenario is partially connected to globalization where there is massive intermingle of foreign cultures and practices.

In conclusion, the best part of young Internet users admit to the importance of Internet. They were of the opinion that the Internet has opened avenues to various information which if properly utilized will enhance youth development. There is therefore a need to rectify some anomalies such as the content of Internet information, the environment of Internet cafés, and the extent of Internet coverage and lack of Internet related policies in Tanzania.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the main conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are made. These recommendations are primarily for: Internet cafés owners, Internet Service providers, The Tanzania Communications Commission and The Tanzanian Government.

Development of Human Resource

Since there is relatively low Internet education and low exploitation of Internet resources, greater attention should be devoted to the development of human resources. This can be done through revising the current curriculum at different stages of learning. The revision process should result in a new generation of students who are capable of using computers efficiently and thereby will be able to make use of the Internet.

Formulation of Internet Policy

The TCRA [Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority] should exert control on operations of Internet cafés. This can only be achieved by proper formulation of laws, policies and regulations by the government. The Internet industry is currently run haphazardly as there are no policies, laws and regulations [as noted in literature review] to guide this Internet service provision in Tanzania.

Expansion of Internet Services Countrywide

The Internet is mainly concentrated in the major cities and towns of Tanzania. The government should encourage further investment in ICT and the Internet in particular to enable its expansion to other parts of Tanzania.

User Training

At present, Internet Cafés provide main access to Internet in Tanzania therefore; they could provide basic access to services such as health and education. This can be achieved by providing Internet courses and training in the use of the Internet. Moreover, free or affordable Internet training for users will enhance full exploitation of Internet in Tanzania.

Development of Swahili websites to bridge the digital divide

The language of the Internet is mostly English. Kiswahili should be used in designing and setting up the Tanzanian homepages, this will break the language barrier and bridge the digital divide by enabling those who cannot understand English language to use the Internet.

Development of Infrastructure for e-commerce

Internet is used mainly for communication and entertainment. In order to make use of Internet, Tanzania has to do its best to develop its infrastructure in different socio-economic sectors and execute comprehensive development programme, in other words the information through the Internet should be utilized to enhance national development program. As noted earlier, the Internet is hardly used for e-commerce. In order to accelerate the development of e-commerce sector, a sustained strategy for promotion and creating awareness must be developed, including networks of stakeholders at national and regional levels.

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