

Chapter 26

Public Access ICT in Mongolia

Tracey Naughton

Socio-Economic Consultant, Mongolia

Ondine Ullman

Educationalist, Mongolia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pact Mongolia conducted a study into Public Access to Information and Communication Venues in Mongolia between January and August 2008. This project was conducted under the auspices of the University of Washington, with Mongolia as one of 25 countries studied. The research examined public access to information venues and the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs), with a specific focus on underserved segments of the population.

As the second largest landlocked country in the world, Mongolia lies between Russia and China, with a population estimated in 2007 to be 2.6 million people, according to the National Statistical Yearbook. Thus, Mongolia is the least densely populated country in the world. Half of the population lives in or near the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, and the remaining population is scattered across twenty-one provinces called aimags.

The study was completed in two phases. The first phase, which was conducted from January

to March in 2008, and researched five venues – public libraries, cybercafés and Internet centers, Khan Bank Information Centers (KBIC), Child and Family Centers, and telecenters. Following a global research workshop held in June 2008, the research into four of the five venues was deepened. Child and Family Centers were excluded from the final review when it was determined they function mainly as community development centers and not as public information access venues. Phase two began the fieldwork and was completed between April and August 2008.

The government of Mongolia recognizes the value of ICTs and has taken steps to ensure its development application. The prime minister has established and chairs the government's Information and Communications Technology Agency (ICTA), through which e-government services are now available. While policy has been created, there remains a gap in the development of grass-roots initiatives that allow the local populations to access and use ICTs.

Geographic location heavily impacts the public's ability to access information in Mongolia. Non-urban populations, including herders who

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60960-771-5.ch026

practice a nomadic lifestyle and the residents of often-remote rural settlements, are at a disadvantage in receiving and being able to access current information and digital services. Exposure to the Internet and user capacity remains low, largely due to the limited number of public access Internet points in these areas. Libraries are unable to meet the information needs of users with their outdated materials, crumbling infrastructure, and the lack of digital services.

The conceptual understanding of users with regard to the value of information, the right to seek information, and where to ask for information remains underdeveloped in Mongolia, and is seen as a common post-Soviet legacy. Public awareness campaigns are needed to highlight the rights of users to access information and to state where information can be found.

The rapid penetration of mobile telephony, and the very widespread use of mobile devices in Mongolia, is testament to the ease with which Mongolian's interact with and absorb new technology. This reality further points to the need for improved communications and information delivery mechanisms. When coupled with the country's high literacy rates, the increased use of digital technology points to an even greater need for a framework that supports physical access and capacity development.

INTRODUCTION

Country Overview

Mongolia is three times the size of France but contains little arable land. It is the largest landlocked nation and the least densely populated in the world. Approximately 30% of the population is nomadic, with herders following seasonal migratory routes in search of pasture for their livestock. The Gobi Desert covers the southern portion of the country, while forests and mountains are found in the north, and vast steppes stretch across the central regions

of Mongolia. Animal husbandry continues to be a primary source of income for much of the population, but the country is rich in untapped natural resources including gold, coal, and copper, and these extractive industries are poised to usher in a new phase of economic development.

Mongolia is divided into twenty-one administrative units known as aimags. Each aimag has an aimag capital, in which health care, government, and administrative sites are located. Aimags, in turn, are divided into soums, and soums into baghs, which are the smallest administrative units. There are between fifteen and twenty soums in each aimag, and there are 330 soums and 1,500 baghs in Mongolia.

Mongolia underwent a transformation from socialism to democracy in 1990, and since then, the country has become one of the most stable democracies in Asia. There are still issues regarding freedom of the press and media impartiality, with ownership issues paramount in limiting pluralism, diversity, and freedom of expression. Many media channels are owned by sitting politicians. Low levels of professionalism among journalists are another factor contributing to the poor quality of information.

Following the national election in June 2008, a state of emergency was declared after violent protests erupted in the center of Ulaanbaatar. Protesters made allegations of vote rigging and corruption by the winning party, the Mongolian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (MPRP). The state of emergency included the closure of all private television stations, with the state broadcaster remaining the only channel on air. Members of the foreign press were banned in a stark clampdown on information flow.

The majority of the population is Khalkh Mongolian and speaks the official language, Khalkh Mongolian. There are a number of ethnic minorities in the country, including Buriad, Bayad, Durvud, Uriankhai, Uuld, Khoton, and Barag. The largest ethnic minority group, the Kazakh, numbers about 7% of the total population, and

12 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/public-access-ict-mongolia/55848

Related Content

Designing and Evaluating Digital Game-Based Learning with the ARCS Motivation Model, Humor, and Animation

Lai-Chung Lee and Kuang-Chung Hao (2015). *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction* (pp. 80-95).

www.irma-international.org/article/designing-and-evaluating-digital-game-based-learning-with-the-arcs-motivation-model-humor-and-animation/126188

Pixel Chix and Digi Guys: Exploring the Experience of the "Digital Citizens" in Two Contexts

Rachel McLean (2008). *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction* (pp. 1-21).

www.irma-international.org/article/pixel-chix-digi-guys/2921

Automatic Facial Expression Analysis

Huachun Tan and Yujin Zhang (2006). *Encyclopedia of Human Computer Interaction* (pp. 60-67).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/automatic-facial-expression-analysis/13101

A Two-Wave Study of the Impact of Job Characteristics and Motivators on Perceived Stress among Information Technology (IT) Consultants

Lars Göran Wallgren and Jan Johansson Hansé (2012). *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction* (pp. 75-91).

www.irma-international.org/article/two-wave-study-impact-job/70763

Evaluating Customer Relationship Management in the Context of Higher Education

Lubov Kosch, Ina Friedrich and Michael H. Breitner (2012). *International Journal of Social and Organizational Dynamics in IT* (pp. 32-52).

www.irma-international.org/article/evaluating-customer-relationship-management-context/64654