

THESIS TITLE: ESSAYS ON DIGITAL SOCIAL INNOVATIONS FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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faced by the artisans, where we explicate the spatial, temporal, informational, financial, capability and capacity separations.

Using DSI as the conceptual foundation, the research objectives in this thesis are two-fold: i) to understand the mechanisms through which DSIs enable development in the quality of education for rural children and livelihood enhancement for artisans and ii) understand the role of digital social intermediaries¹ in enabling DSIs in this context. To achieve this, we inquire into the DSIs by a digital social intermediary over a prolonged period of over twenty-four months (using both qualitative and quantitative research designs) in the context of rural education and rural artisan industry. The data collection effort in the context of rural education involves a case study approach, wherein we study CommunityLink's (a pseudonym for a social entrepreneurial venture) DSI based interventions in the rural education space in West Bengal, India. We rely on participant observations, semi-structured interviews, field notes and archival data, collected over thirty-one months.

In the context of the artisanal industry, we conduct two studies. The first study is a preliminary investigation using a survey design with three groups of rural base of the pyramid (BoP) artisanal women (N=135): 1) group C1-women had no smartphones, 2) group T1-women had their own smartphones and 3) group T2-who received smartphones and digital social intermediary support over two years. We collect data using a survey instrument developed through items in the literature. The second study involves a more in-depth inquiry into the artisan industry through a case study approach. We study the case of CommunityLink and conduct online and offline participant observations, semi-structured interviews and gather different forms of archival data over twenty-four months.

Our findings in the context of rural education revealed how CommunityLink's DSI leveraged the 'complementarities' between the two institutional voids² present in its context in order to fill each void with the help of the other. Specifically, we find how CommunityLink used the dormant knowledge capital of the urban elderly (retired citizens) that is often ignored by the society, to provide holistic education to the rural children from the marginalized communities. We also find how CommunityLink employed an ICT based platform to connect the two communities and overcome the issue of physical distance. Further, in our findings, we elucidate CommunityLink's ICT centred institutional work that was performed to overcome various institutional challenges it had faced. Building on these findings, we theorize the concept of complementary voids and outline the theoretical dimensions of institutional work that may enhance the success of ICT based interventions in these contexts.

Subsequently, our preliminary inquiry using a survey design with rural BoP artisanal women suggests how access to community technologies (e.g. public Wi-Fi) may be difficult for them due to the gendered public spaces in rural regions (Mudliar, 2018). We find that access to consumer technologies (CTs) like smartphones may be the means through which such rural BoP women may be able to access the digital world (Mudliar, 2018; Venkatesh, Tho, & Xu, 2012). We demonstrate how access to CTs can enhance their socio-economic well-being

¹ Digital social intermediaries are agents who use ICTs as central tools to enable buyers and sellers of a product/service complete a market transaction through different supporting activities, wherein they are willing to even accept monetary losses if the disadvantaged party (e.g. poor farmers) in the transaction can make monetary or other gains (Kistruck et al., 2013). Additionally, digital social intermediaries also leverage ICTs to address social issues beyond market transactions like gender equality, caste barriers, sanitation, and issues related to marginalization, among other things (Mair et al., 2016). They can be organized as NGOs, NPOs, social enterprises, government or even individuals.

² Institutional voids are the lack of formal institutions/presence of conflicting institutions that are required for the effective functioning of markets (Mair et al. 2012)

through increased structural social capital (SSC), freedom of movement and entrepreneurial

Kistruck, G. M., Beamish, P. W., Qureshi, I., & Sutter, C. J. (2013). Social Intermediation in Base-of-the-Pyramid Markets. *Journal of Management Studies*, 50(1), 316-66.

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