

## **Measuring and maximising the social impact of community informatics research**

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**Abstract:** Research assessment is nothing new. There has been much debate around assessing research. However, most research assessment mechanisms and practices have strong foci on evaluating the academic quality of research outputs rather their impact on the broader society. Due to the current tight fiscal environment, there is a growing demand for research, publicly funded or commissioned, to demonstrate its social accountability. For government and public funding agencies, it is crucial that high-impact research projects are well supported and the limited resources are distributed effectively. In terms of commissioned research programs, it is only nature for the industry and community to require evidence on the benefits derived from their investment. Therefore, in research assessment, it is increasingly recognised that not only the quality but also impact of research need to be measured, from both academic and social perspectives.

On the other hand, from an interdisciplinary approach, community informatics (CI) is concerned with the applications of ICT to enable and empower community in specific social and/or community contexts. Similar to other applied research fields, CI research is to inform and provide guidance to practice. Hence, a strong academic-practice/science-society connection is fundamental to CI research. Therefore, it is even more vital for CI research to measure and maximise its social impact. Unfortunately, the field of research impact assessment is still developing and not much literature has been done particularly related to CI. Moreover, research impact is extremely complicated to assess. A range of questions needs to be address in order to assess CI research impact accurately and in a cost-effective manner. First of all, there is the “what” question, i.e. what is precisely research impact, in the context of CI? Secondly, there is the “who” question, i.e. who should be responsible to judge the impact of CI research, researchers? Partners? Thirdly, there is the “when” question, i.e. when is the appropriate time to measure the impact of CI research, since impact can take years to become evident? In addition, there is the big “how” question that draws key stakeholders attention, i.e. how to measure and assess the impact of CI research, in relation to mechanisms, techniques and indicators? There is also the “how much” question, i.e. how much (fiscal and human resources) will be involved to assess the impact of CI research. The list goes on.

My PhD project begins with a thorough environment scan of the current discussions and practices of research assessment. To ensure the comprehensiveness of the literature search, the PRIMISA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) mode is adopted for the searching and recoding of results. Similar process is repeated to outline the current discourse of research impact among CI researchers and partners occurred in literature. Based on a comparative analysis, a list of key concepts and issues are identified. A survey is conducted among key stakeholders of CI regarding their understanding and requirements on assessing social impact of their research. Based on the result, a conceptual model is proposed to measure the social impact of community informatics researcher. In phase three, focus

groups are selected to test the model based on the criteria of feasibility, accuracy and cost-efficiency. Based on the feedback and results, the model for assessing the social impact of CI research will be modified and finalised.