

A Case study on Utilization of Common Service Centre among the General Public

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Abstract

Common Service Centres (CSCs) form a part of the National e-Governance Plan envisioned in providing Government services to the citizens at their doorstep at an affordable cost, and in a sustainable manner. The CSCs are run by Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) as a component of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. (Shadrach and Sharma, 2013). Timely delivery of services through CSC has made life easier for both people and government departments and has increased its efficiency. There are a total of 34 Common Service Centres in Coimbatore district. Various Government and Business-to Consumer services like Aadhaar, Telecom services are provided at an affordable cost through CSC. A study was carried out in one representative CSC, drawn as a case, in Kalveerampalayam, Coimbatore. It was conducted as an ex-post facto research study and percentage analysis was used to analyze the data collected. Three-fourth (76.7%) of the respondents were found to have medium level of utilization of various services provided by the CSC, with Aadhaar being the most used (63%) service. It was prevalent mostly among educated and high-income category of people.

Keywords: Common Service Centre, Utilization, Services, Public, Agriculture

Introduction

The major objective of a Government is to reach out to the people and provide them services through various means. In this digitally revolutionized world those means of dissemination by digitization seem to be essentially needed. The National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) of the Government of India envisions providing Government services to the citizens at their doorstep at an affordable cost and in a sustainable manner. To achieve this, under the NeGP framework, more than 99,000 CSCs have so far been established in rural areas as a means of providing access to

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Received on: 19/03/2017 Accepted on: 04/02/2018

services and technology as well as assuming the task of assisting citizens with the provision of both private and public services (Shadrach and Sharma, 2013).

CSCs are a strategic cornerstone of the Digital India programme. They are the access points for delivery of various electronic services to villages in India, thereby contributing to a digitally and financially inclusive society. These centres, most of which have been operational for more than five years with varying degrees of success, are now entering the second phase of implementation. The CSC's are run by Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs), who are chosen through a careful selection process adopted by Service Centre Agencies (SCAs) that have entered into a service level agreement with the State Governments within the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. One VLE may cover up to six villages. Currently, plans are on to expand the number of these centres from its current spread in over 99,000 villages to each and every 250,000 Panchayat villages in the nation (<https://csc.gov.in>). The common service centres provide various Government to Consumer services such as Aadhaar, passport, PAN *etc.* and Business to Consumer services such as Telecom and Financial services. A total of 34 CSCs were present in Coimbatore district, covering all major rural and urban areas (<http://www.apnacsconline.in>).

This paper attempts to analyze the utilization of Common Service Centres by the people in its service locale with the following objectives.

Objectives

1. To study the socio- economic profile of the users of CSC and
2. To find out overall utilization behaviour of users.

Research Methodology

Ex-post facto research design was followed for this study. Singh (1986) defined, ex-post facto research as a design that draws inferences regarding the relationship between variables on the basis of such independent variables whose manifestations have already occurred. This particular study was carried out in the CSC in Kalveerampalayam, situated on the outskirts of Coimbatore city. This place being a semi-urban area, was purposefully chosen as a representative case as it covered both rural and urban population. Besides, this CSC in Kalveerampalayam was one of the earliest established centres in the district which is being utilized by a relatively a large number of people in the locale.

Simple random sampling technique was used to identify the sample and 30 was the sample size fixed for the study on the utilization of Common Service Centres. The

variable age was measured as the number of years completed by the respondent at the time of collecting the data. Education was measured as the total number of years spent by the respondent under formal education system. Occupational status refers to the primary activity in which the respondents were engaged to meet their livelihood. Annual income was operationalized as the gross income obtained per year by the respondent. Social participation refers to the degree of involvement of the respondents in formal organizations as either member or Office bearer. Mass media exposure refers to the respondent’s utilization behaviour of mass media to gather information regarding Public Services. As regards the overall utilization behaviour of the respondents, it refers to the awareness, degree and frequency of Utilization of various services offered by the CSC. The respondents were further categorized into low, medium and high based on the cumulative frequency method. The data was collected using interview schedule and was analyzed through Percentage analysis and Cumulative frequencies.

Results and Discussion

The profile characteristics of the users of CSC was analyzed and the data is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents based on their Profile Characteristics

Categories	Number	Percentage
Age		
Young	12	40.00
Middle	13	43.33
Old	05	16.67
Total	30	100
Educational Status		
Illiterate	2	6.67
Primary education	2	6.67
Middle Education	3	10.00
Secondary education	6	20.00
Collegiate education	17	56.67
Total	30	100
Occupational Status		
Farmer	5	16.67
Business	5	16.67
Government	8	26.67
Private	8	26.67
Others	4	13.33
Total	30	100
Annual Income		
Low	2	6.67
Medium	10	33.33
High	18	60.00
Total	30	100

Social Participation

No participation	18	60.00
Participation in one organisation	6	20.00
Participation in more than one organisation	6	20.00
Total	30	100

Mass Media Exposure

Category	Frequently		Rarely		Never	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Radio	1	3.33	5	16.67	24	80.00
Television	19	63.33	10	33.33	1	3.33
Newspaper	21	70.00	8	26.66	1	3.33
Magazines	2	6.67	11	36.67	17	56.66
Internet	7	23.33	13	43.37%	10	33.33

It could be seen from Table 1 that almost half (43.33%) of the respondents belonged to middle age category followed by young (40%). More than half (56.67%) of the respondents had pursued collegiate education indicating the awareness on CSC among educated people. Regarding the occupation nearly one-fourth (26.67%) of the respondents were Government servants followed by Private, Farmers and Businessmen. The immense employment potential in the surrounding area has taken farmers out of equation. More than half (60%) of the people belong to high-income category owing to their occupational status. Nearly 60 per cent of the respondents did not form a part of any social organization. With respect to Mass media exposure, Television and Newspapers were the most frequently utilized media, with 63.3 per cent and 70 per cent of the respondents exposed to these media respectively. Generally, people inclined towards mass media tend to be more aware and hence their utilization of CSC was higher.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents based on Overall Utilization of Services

No.	Category	No.	Percentage
1	Low	3	10.00
2	Medium	23	76.77
3	High	4	13.33
	Total	30	100

The overall utilization of services provided by the Common Service Centre was at medium level with 76.7 per cent of the respondents falling under the category as may be seen in Table 2. It is attributed to the fact that only three services were utilized by a larger section of people, though CSC provides a range of various services.

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents based on their Utilization of various Services offered by CSC

S. No.	Services provided	Number	Percentage
Government to Consumer			
1.	Agriculture	0	0.00
2.	Scholarship	2	6.67
3.	License	0	0.00
4.	Birth/Death Certificate	4	13.33
5.	PAN	5	16.67
6.	Aadhaar	22	63.33
7.	Passport	2	6.67
8.	Patta/Chitta	2	6.67
Business to Consumer			
9.	Financial	11	36.67
10.	e- Learning	0	0.00
11.	Travel	2	6.67
12.	Telecom	14	46.67
Consumer to Government			
13.	Grievances	0	0.00
14.	Complaints	3	10.00
15.	Suggestions	0	0.00

It may be seen from Table 3 that Aadhaar was the most utilized service where two-thirds (63.33%) of the respondents benefitted from it. It was followed by telecom services such as mobile recharge where nearly one-half (46.67%) of the respondents used the service frequently. Utilization of few services such as e-learning, agricultural information by the public was not observed.

In order to access the social welfare schemes promoted by both the State & Central Governments, a Unique Identity Number was made mandatory for each and every citizen in the country. Hence most of the people had utilized the CSC to obtain Aadhaar Identity Card. Due to very low level of awareness by the respondents about the existence of e-learning and Agricultural information services, utilization of such services was found to be almost nil.

Table 4. Distribution of Respondents based on Frequency of Utilization of Services

S. No.	Category	Number	Frequency
1.	Weekly	3	10.00
2.	Monthly	8	26.67
3.	Whenever required	19	63.33
Total		30	100

Regarding the frequency of utilization, almost 63.33 per cent of the respondents used the services as and when they required it genuinely (Table 4). Nearly one-third (36.67%) of the respondents used the services more frequently with Telecom services leading the way.

About 86.67 per cent of the respondents reckoned that they received timely services from the CSC. This particular CSC was found to be user friendly with 93.33 per cent of the respondents admitting it. The entire set of respondents paid for the services and they felt that it was affordable and cost effective.

Recommendations and Implications of the Study

Though CSCs have been received well among people, lack of awareness has limited its reach to the poorest and unreached. Ease of access to government services has been the major advantage of the CSCs and hence more and more services need to be incorporated, given the affordable cost. These centres can be expanded to all rural and semi urban areas so as to increase employment opportunities to work as Village level entrepreneurs and render effective services to the people. The time required to get services from CSC can be reduced further to make it more efficient.

The charges for services were collected exorbitantly from the people by the CSC as against the Government prescribed rates. Hence rules should be strictly enforced against the defaulters. Feedback from the users of CSC should be facilitated for the effective functioning of CSCs. In order to enhance the utilization of various services offered by the CSC, publicity may be given through mass media. Under Digital India initiative, more number of VLEs may be recruited so as to extend the services to remote areas wherever poor connectivity issues exist in the country. CSCs should broaden their services in the agricultural sector by providing cost effective, quality Agro-advisory services by working in tandem with the Extension officials of the Agriculture department.

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