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Community-produced videos allow communities to directly "speak" to, and influence, government decision-makers

What is this research about?

Between 19% and 30% of the Canadian population lives in remote or rural communities, which have suffered over the past few decades from the downsizing and outsourcing of work associated with economic globalization. Historically, there has been a bias in government policy-making towards addressing urban needs and issues over those of rural communities. Policies designed with cities in mind, however, may not necessarily translate well to rural/remote communities, and rural issues may not be addressed. Government bureaucrats are often unfamiliar with the issues facing rural Canada, and may not understand how their policy decisions will affect Canadians living in remote or rural communities. Similarly, rural/remote communities struggle with communicating with bureaucrats and providing input on government policy. Participatory video (PV) is one tool that can be used to promote the involvement of rural citizens in the development of policy. These videos are produced in the rural communities and later shown to bureaucrats and politicians to give them a better understanding of the people and communities.

Keywords:

Communication, public policy, rural communities, aboriginal, citizen participation

What did the researchers do?

In 1999, a group of five Aboriginal communities in Northwestern Ontario (Keewaytinook-Okimakank, KO) participated in a demonstration project that introduced broadband information and communication technology (ICT), for example internet access, to select communities across Canada. Over five years, the ICT was used to improve health care, education, and economic development in the communities. The researchers worked with local community members to create a documentary, showing the successes and challenges of the ICT program in KO using voices from the communities. One version of this documentary was later screened for senior federal bureaucrats and politicians. The researchers then conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 federal employees who had viewed the film, to gain insight into their perceptions of the film and the impact community-produced videos have on their decision-making.

About the University of Guelph researchers:

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What did the researchers find?

Five recurring themes were identified in the interviews with the government bureaucrats. First, community-produced videos help provide context for policy makers about communities. Second, videos can be used to inform and motivate bureaucrats who might otherwise be unable to visit the communities. Third, community-produced videos are an effective way to provide bureaucrats with qualitative data. Fourth, videos can act as an event around which to organize a policy discussion. And fifth, the videos have the potential to influence decision makers and therefore the direction of public policy.

How can you use this research?

Community leaders and activists can use this research to understand how community-produced videos can educate policy-makers about community issues and influence government decision-making.
Government bureaucrats and policy makers can use this research to understand how communities, particularly rural or remote ones, can be engaged in the decision-making and policy development process through community-produced videos.

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What you need to know:

A community-produced video highlighted the successes and challenges of an information and communication technology program in remote Aboriginal communities. In addition to motivating bureaucrats and encouraging discussion, the video also directly influenced decision-makers and provided valuable insight into community issues and experiences.

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