E-Educators' Perspective on ICTs and Its Social Implications

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Abstract

Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) has been doing wonders for more than half of the century in every walk of life all around the globe. Though West has explored it in its maximum extents, we "the people" living in South Asian region still need to come up with new implications of ICTs in social sector. Keeping in mind the context, present study aims at exploring the social implications of ICTs in Pakistan. This study finds out the favorable, unfavorable and potential implication of ICTs in social sector. Methodology adopted for current research is quantitative; a 4 point Likert scale is administered through web-survey to know the social implications of ICTs from e-educators. For analysis purpose, descriptive statistics is used. Preliminary findings of the study suggest that ICTs is considered very important tool in order to develop social networks around the world. This study stresses the expansion of ICT in all fields of life in developing countries like Pakistan and opens a discussion for social planners to adopt ICTs as a tool to achieve social sector development.

Keywords*:* Information Communication Technologies (ICTS), Social Implications, E-Educators

Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are making vibrant changes in social life of individuals by influencing all aspects of life. In developed countries, its use has become inevitable and in developing countries it is considered as an important tool for social development. Social life has also been digitally transformed after the initiation of these Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). This technological revolution is so intense that it has challenged traditional thinking patterns and has also influenced the course of human to human interaction. Now different ICT tools are affirmed as an alternative of communication (Paulus and Scherff, 2008). Bonk (2009) argued that ICTs have opened the opportunities in remote areas around the world as people can access high quality learning resources. Proceedings from the 2004 International Workshop on Improving E-Learning Policies and Programs also observed that ICTs are helping in workforce transformation, citizen education and service optimization (Asian Development Bank, 2004).

Increased usage of ICT in daily lives of people brought a wide range of innovations from entertainment to social networking and from distribution to education. Martin (1995) defined ICTs as an information society in which socio-economic development depends

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on information technology. Living standards, work activities, education, entertainment and goods and services are all influenced by information technology.

Information and communication technologies brought drastic changes in social life including, online interaction richness, common group chat to education and in professional fields. Its incredible potentials in development sector have positive and critical facet in social circumstances i.e. social inclusion in terms of achieving educational and economic development goals. Along with positive side, few researchers claim its negative consequences such as digital divide (Caidiand Allard, 2005), social exclusion (Valentine, Holloway and Bingham, 2002), non-participation in socio-economic activities, isolation and inadequate opportunities for communication.

Lives of poor people in developing countries are also influenced by ICTs despite the fact that its implication in poverty alleviation and economic betterment is still in question. ICTs have accepted the challenge of initiating sustainability in different areas of the world (Neelameghan, 1999).

It is being anticipated by United Nations within the Millennium Development Goals that ICT should be very effectual in health facilities, education and poverty alleviation. Its need is recognized to target the poor people and rural communities for facilitating them in productive activities, raising awareness and communication to improve their access to market (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2005). In this context, social implication of ICT can be observed in Maharashtra, India, where a project named "Wired Village" was launched in 70 villages to disseminate information related to agriculture, health and education to local cooperatives that connected farmer's organizations, NGOs, and local government to the Internet. It was a successful initiative and its effectiveness was considered important for future programs as well (Vijayaditya, 2000).

ICT offers many challenges and opportunities. Dissemination of electronic services such as E-health, E-banking and E-learning are facilitating people to save time and money and traditional restrictions, particularly geographical barriers are breaking. Such as E-banking services, facilitate customers to carry out their financial transactions to pay the bill, to exchange bonds or shares in a secure way. All these tasks can be easily handled without any visit to bank and this saves time and energy as well (Cristina, 2008).

The use of ICTs in health sector has also shifted the traditional mode of treatment and medical services into e- health. It enables patients and healthcare staff to improve health conditions by keeping the electronic health record, telemedicine services, health portals, disease prevention, health monitoring and management services. E-health applications allow general public to get information about any disease, preventive measures and available treatment techniques. Patients specifically can access information about their health without visiting the doctor for minor injuries or diseases (European Commission, 2012). Social implication of ICTs can also be observed in education sector. E-learning facilitates students living in far reaching areas who cannot benefit from conventional

education due to social or geographical barriers. They can get quality education through E -learning mode by saving their time and money (Naidu, 2006).

Efficiency and effectiveness of ICT can also be examined in economic activities like E-commerce i.e an efficient market place. This mode of business strings up new and closer relationships between customers, firms and organizations. To compete the economic challenges, and accelerating demand of globalization, E- commerce is providing highly skilled workers and knowledge diffusion, customization, exchange of goods and services; consumption and distribution processes (Coppel, 2000). Friedman (2005) in his book *The World is Flat*, argues that expansion of business and distribution of goods and services for anyone are the outcomes of interaction between people and it is result of active involvement of ICTs in business sector. Role of ICT is undoubtedly significant in women's empowerment as supported by Anand (2002) and Gurumurthy (2004) that ICTs potential is remarkable, it promotes gender equality. Now they are also participating in every walk of life side by side males. Nath (2001) reported that large number of women is employed in big organizations having basic knowledge of information technology. It is supporting women all over the world by giving opportunities for employment.

ICTs sector has been expanding steadily. It facilitates individuals into groups and develops socio- political and democratic growth to facilitate good governance (Mercer, 2004). For efficient public participation in the democratic process ICTs provide new tools in the form of e-democracy and e-voting. Brinkerhoff (2005) stated that the ICT enables the freedom of speech, individualism, and liberal values. Further, Ferdinand (2000) reported that ICTs is mechanism of world-wide democratization. It legitimated the rapid democratization in regions of the world.

Diffusion of ICTs consequently creates productivity gains, distinctiveness of jobs, business activities and professions. Due to ICTs revolution, structures of labor market and organizational forms have also been changed. The instrumentality of ICTs can also be observed in wide-reaching economic incorporation via electronic trade and business activities into the global market (Zembylas & Vrasidas, 2005; Pohjola, 2001; Norris, 2000; Keohane and Nye, 2000). Keeping in mind the social implications of Information and communication technology (ICTs) this paper intends to quantify the E-educators perspective regarding ICTs and its Social implications.

Aim of the Study

The aim of present study is to explore the e-educators' perspective on ICTs and its social implications in Pakistan.

Objectives of the Study

Following are the main objectives of the study:

- To find out the favorable social implications of ICT in Pakistan
- To discover the negative factors that lead towards adverse social implications of ICT
- To explore the e-educators' perceptive regarding potential social implications of ICT in Pakistan

Scope of the Study

This study was based on e-educators' perspective only. E-educators were selected for current research as they are well familiar and equipped with ICTs skills and they better understand the scope of ICT in changing world and the way it can be used for social sector development.

Methods

It is a descriptive study captivating quantitative research approach. As the purpose of current paper was to explore e-educators' perceptive regarding the social implications of ICT so, those educators were approached who were involved in teaching the courses through online learning method. Total 150 e-educators were approached via e-mail for data collection out of which 63 responded the on-line survey. Overall response rate was 42%. The tool for data collection was taken from Okoye (2012) study on Social Implications of ICT. 4 point Likert scale i.e. Strongly Agree 4, Agree 3, Disagree 2 and Strongly disagree 1 was used. Chronbach Alpha of the scale was 0.76. In order to analyze the data, descriptive statistics were used and researcher followed the criteria used in Okoye(2012) study in which mean value of 2.50 was considered as favorable and means scores less than 2.5 were considered as unfavorable.

Results

Data was obtained from 63 e-educators. Out of 63 respondents 26 were males and 37 were females. Age of the respondents was ranged from 24 years to 50 years. Overall mean age of the respondents was 29.57.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics Showing E-Educators' Perception Regarding Favorable Social Implications of ICTs in Pakistan

Favorable Social Implications of ICT	*M*
ICTs facilitate quest for current information	3.22
ICTs foster inquisitiveness	3.24
ICTs provide a platform for development of social capital of friends	3.08
ICTs serve as a search engine for employment	3.38
ICTs is a need of hour for the improvement of communication process	3.48
ICTs is an essential for research purposes	3.59
ICTs help to foster creativity among youth	3.27

Data in table 1 explains the e-educators' views regarding favorable social implications of ICTs. All the items have mean value more than 3.00 which shows that e-educators perceive all the mentioned factors favorable in social implications of ICTs. Specifically, ICT is considered as essential element for research purpose showing the highest mean value of 3.59.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics Showing E-Educators' Perception Regarding Unfavorable Social Implications of ICTs in Pakistan

Unfavorable Social Implications of ICT	*M*
ICTs is a supportive tool of cultural neo-colonialism	3.21
ICTs has created the digital divide	2.84
ICTs has open up the new ways for breakdown of law and order	2.68
ICTs has caused ideological war between nations	2.89
ICTs promote racism and ethnicity	2.38
ICTs induce mass unemployment in developing countries	2.13

Table 2 explains the unfavorable social implications of ICTs as perceived by e-educators. Overall respondents agreed at five items being unfavorable towards social implications of ICTs. Only one item i.e. mass unemployment was not considered as negative social implication of ICTs whereas rest was narrated as negative.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics Showing E-Educators' Perception Regarding Potential Social Implications of ICTs in Pakistan

Indicators of Social Implications	*M*
ICTs (Internet) expand existing social networks	3.41
ICTs promote social exclusion	2.54
ICTs promote social justice	2.24
ICTs induce poverty alleviation	2.35
ICTs facilitate women empowerment	2.83
ICTs provide employment in developed countries	3.22
ICTs facilitate social development in developing countries	.19
ICTs influence cultural pollution	2.56
ICTs foster social inclusion	2.76
ICTs help out to reduce illiteracy	3.0
ICTs can serve as a motivational tool to reduce gender disparity	2.70
ICTs facilitate social transformation	3.8

Table 3 represents the indicators of potential social implications of ICTs in Pakistan. Data shows a mixed result regarding social implications. The major areas where potential social implication is identified are expansion of social networks (*M*=3.41), employment provision (*M*=3.22), reduction of illiteracy (3.0) and social transformation (3.8). And the areas in which e-educators perceive ICTs less suitable are social development (*M*=.19), social justice (*M*=2.24) and poverty alleviation (*M*=2.35).

Discussion

ICTs have turned the individual's life towards new directions. The importance of its prospective social implications cannot be denied. All over the world it has been used as a facilitating tool for social and economic development. Keeping the context of potential social implications and usage of ICTs, present study explores the favorable, unfavorable

and potential social implications of ICTs in developing country like Pakistan. In this regard, survey was conducted with e-educators and their perception was taken.

Diversified dimensions with reference to ICTs favorable social implications are explored in this study. It was found during analysis that ICTs especially internet is considered as most effective tool for exploration. In current world scenario, knowledge or information is not geographically bounded. It has broken the barrier of access and now any type of information is available to all type of individuals and societies and this is an outcome of active processing of ICTs in every sector. In the realm of globalization, it provides proper way to inquisitiveness. Further, its role can be seen with reference to extended e-communities and social networking which ultimately expand the social capital of friends and social grids.

ICTs cannot only be limited to networking and information sharing elements, its implication is also discovered in other areas such as employment, business and education sector. ICTs have not just empowered people through new skills but at the same time it helps individuals to find out employment opportunities within and outside the countries. It has provided exposure to multiple sites and agencies to young people that enables them to explore new job and also gives them an opportunity to find out new work style that help individuals to initiate varied ideas as well as innovations. Communication skills are also improved with help of this medium by using multiple gadgets such as Power Point, webinars etc.

The most distinct function identified by respondents regarding favorable social implications of ICTs is facilitation in research process. Research is inevitable part of all social sectors development, ICTs through its valuable contribution has facilitated this process in many ways such as exploration of information, social statistics, demographic and geographical data as well as cultural variation. Access and exposure to different researches conducted all over the world help individuals to detect new dimensions of any phenomenon. This process ultimately leads to a competitive environment towards innovative cultures.

Despite the fact that ICTs have favorable social implications, there are certain areas where it is not considered as useful as it is. Most unfavorable implication of ICTs was found to be neo-colonialism. Though it has assisted the process of acculturation but this process has brought negative consequences for small nations i.e. amalgamation in larger cultures and loss of cultural identity. Other negative consequences perceived by respondents were digital divide, increase in cybercrimes, initiation of new type of ideological wars and racial and ethnic promotions. One area which is not perceived as negative outcome is unemployment as ICTs have served as job search and placement agency for many individuals.

One of the objectives of study was to see the potential social implications of ICTs in social sector. The areas which are observed as positive towards ICTs implications are enhancement in literacy, social transformation of knowledge and skills, catering the issue

of mass unemployment and social inclusion of individuals in all the sectors of social development. The perceived benefits have large scale implication for social and economic development of any country. Few areas are found less effective to bring social reforms and in this regard respondents identified poverty, social justice and social development unattainable.

Overall it can be concluded that ICTs has observed as positive indicator towards social development. E-educators being well familiar with system and ICTs stated favorable results. ICTs in future can serve to tap those areas as well which appears impossible at the moment as identified in results.

Implications

Present study by exploring the positive and negative social implications of ICTs has created an awareness regarding potential danger of ICTs for developing nations. Further, it has initiated a debate to find out the possible solution of dark side of ICTs. Perceived positive social implications as explored by this study have further supported the fact that ICTs is the possible solution to change the plight of developing word. In this regard, it is suggested that it must be used for the service of humanity.

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