ICT for Social Development

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Abstract

The IT sector in India is one of the most blooming sectors and if directed in the right way, it will bear path breaking results not just for the economy but also for the overall development. India is still a developing country and there is a lot that one can improve/build in order to promote growth and development. And, one such sector where ICT can be of perfect use is the social development of the country for that is one place where we all lack and don't match up to the first world nations.

The digital gap that exists in our country can be bridged by making an extra effort in the social development sector, for the poor remain deprived of what the rich has in abundance.

This project is designed to study the use of Information computer technology in bringing about social development in the developing third world countries. It also highlights the spreading of Information technology to remote areas in order to promote development and bring about the much needed digitization. The study aims at bridging the gap between what is and what could be by drawing attention to all the plausible methods of reaching out to the common public who is yet to be aware of the digital world that exists. India is globally appreciated for it developing IT sector, and by bringing ICT to social development as well, it will only promote goodwill and the progression of our country.

To spread awareness, ideate methods of implementing the social development through the technological sector and make things easier and accessible is what this research paper aims at. By highlighting the problems and also suggesting the solutions, we aim to bring in ICT in the social development sector thereby drawing attention to the issues not talked about.

Keywords: Social development, digital gap, digitization, developing country, ICT

Methodology

The content and subject matter of this paper has been drawn from multiple secondary sources, primarily websites and already existing research papers.

There is an extensive need right now to reach out to all the remote areas and ICT is what will help take things further by building up the connectivity. It is through ICT that the needs of various rural areas can be met up to in ways that no other can. Agriculture and health have, in fact, become the centre of many ICT projects given the increasing need of developments and initiations. There are not only government and national institutions that make use of ICT to help its development and reach out to rural locations, but also NGOs and private organisations that help the various sectors prosper. With the advancement that India is seeing in terms of technology, there still exists a digital divide in this world and there still are people who

haven't ever seen a computer or operated the internet. The levels of illiteracy in India can only be eradicated once development is taken on the right side of the graphs at various levels.

Before getting into further details, let us know in details about the digital divide that exists.

The Digital Divide:

The Digital Divide is also called the Digital Split and it is a social issue where there is a different amount of information between those who have internet access compared to those who do not have internet access. The term became popular in 1990's. The nature of the digital divide has been changing over time, both due to rapid change in technology and the highly innovative nature of new ICT applications.

ICT is not only considered as an infrastructure now-a-days but also a tool for economic development. Between 2005 and 2010 the changing nature of ICT was recognized through five emerging trends. These trends were:

1. Universal mobile access started which is a progressing stage.
2. Earlier Narrowband networks were popular but now changes to Broadband network.
3. Cloud Computing.
4. In Mobile we can surf the Internet as well as use many mobile applications.
5. Social networking sites like Twitter, Instagram, Face Book, etc on the Internet.

Mobile networks are available even in remote areas. So the gap has diminished though we may be concerned about affordability. Mobiles are available in much cheap prices now that even a poor person can afford it. Since 2005 mobile network subscriptions have increased worldwide from 2.2 billion to 6.8 billion. Many people have domestic broadband while others have mobile handsets with internet access. So we can say that two-fifths of households have Internet access. It is estimated that 77 per cent of people in developed countries and 31 per cent in developing countries have Internet access.

In International, National and Local Broadband networks people are making investments on a daily basis which increases the capacity of connectivity. High speed cables are used for international connectivity. In these networks high volumes of data are transmitted on a daily basis. The online social networks have made people adopt internet in all countries. Face Book has an estimate of 1.25 billion users and used by 40 per cent of people who uses Internet. The social networks have become so popular that people don't rely on Internet only for information but also started interacting with the people worldwide. Instagram has become popular now and everyone wishes more followers and even competing for the same.

Broadband is considered as the most important driver for economic growth. ICT infrastructure is much better in developed countries where they enjoy ICT usage and ICT innovations then developing countries. Urban areas and high income social groups have advantages over rural and poor section of communities. The groups who are socially or economically marginalized like women, youth, unqualified workers, minorities or people with special needs or disabilities have less access to ICT. Though the value of ICT is known to everyone still not everyone get access to it in the society. We also think that common villagers or old people will not understand ICT. This stereotyping could lead to further social stratification.

Figure 1: Digital Divide

Big IT companies have taken the factor of physical access as important so expanding their market. The mass misconception is that the problem of digital divide is due to physical access to computers. The people are not able to focus on complex socio economic aspects that are deeply occupied in this issue. The people are under the impression that if they need any reliable information that can be searched through the source called Internet. So people have stopped using any other sources of information.

Many researchers say that in the practical level many discussions have taken place about how to digitally connect the villages. But very few promises are kept. The village information centers don't broadcast the proper information about the services which is the biggest problem. So what facilities the villagers can get they are not aware of it. This misconception is due to the non availability of the information.

The access to the Internet is only one aspect but there are many other factors which need to be considered like quality of connection and related services. Today the most important issue is the availability of the access to the Internet at an affordable cost and quality. In an international context if you discuss the problem then certain countries are far more equipped than other developing countries to exploit the benefits from the rapidly expanding Internet. ICT's are means through which transformation of society can happen. It can improve our mutual understanding, remove power differences, and get a truly free and democratic world society and other benefits. Literacy is a point where many people argue that a person should be literate to gain access to Internet. We can say that in the entire world there are still 757 million adults including 115 million youths who cannot read or write a simple sentence.

There are many arguments regarding why closing the digital divide is important:

*Economic equality:*The developed countries provide their citizens' access to Internet as they feel it is a basic component of civil life. In various types of emergencies and due to security reason telephone is seen as important. The people even believe that theircareer, civic life, safety, etc all the information can be provided through Internet. Even social welfare services are sometimes administered and obtained electronically.

Social mobility: The people believe that computer has a very important place in their learning and career, so their education should include that of computing and use of the Internet. The children who belong to lower

socioeconomic group are thus treated unfairly if spoken of digital divide. Government should provide some support to give equal opportunities.

Democracy: The people even believe that Internet provides healthier democracy as there is more public participation in elections and decision making processes.

*Economic growth:*The people even believe that for less developed countries it can act as a shortcut to economic growth. ICT's areassociated with productivity improvements. The exploitation of the latest technologies may give industries of certain countries a competitive advantage.

However, apart from understanding how the divide functions, there are many other very significant socio-economic and political issues that exist. There are many problems that occur at bureaucratic levels, at trying to successfully implement plans that have been discussed, including many cultural and political issues that stop the developments from happening.

Further, talking about e-governance, it has been a very successful initiative that has helped the government function at various levels. The idea of e-governance is to make services available at rural areas and make documents available digitally and thereby enable the implementation of Right to Information act.

In addition to all of this, researchers also say that if digitization is taken to, there is a need for technical training and also this entire process will put an end to all the bribes that the government officials get from the commoners. With the process of digitization, the government officials also aim to make necessary documents like birth certificates, death certificates, and other documents available.

The idea behind such projects is to increase the involvement of rural people and it is a fact that nobody but those people themselves can be a part of such initiatives and help development in the social areas.

While there is no doubting that chances are that spending money on basic necessities is more important than spending on the infrastructure of ICT, however, with time there still are developments that might help. There are many barriers that bar such development which include low levels of education, the fear of machines, and a lot more.

Having said all of that, the significance of ICT lies on how it is has the capability to give information that will in turn increase the information that they have thereby providing resources that help empower a huge number of people. The kind of potential that ICT has to rake in successful results is immense and with baby steps, ICT will gradually be a huge success with time passing by.

The use of technology in present day has increased manifolds and multiple technologies are put to use in order to make them work. With time passing by, such technologies are finding growing importance in various fields and implemented in almost all the fields of our everyday life.

The importance of ICTs on a day to day basis:

-   With the help of ICTs, one can improve the economic capital by strengthening the local financial institutions with the help of programmes aimed at creating awareness and providing various facilities. The wider the reach of community financial management, the better will be the levels of enhancement of the local economy

- This one goes without saying, with the help and spreading of ICT, there also will be availability of education, knowledge and awareness about various issues. In sync with aforementioned point, the spreading of knowledge will also impart social economic development of the community as a whole.
- The idea of ICT is to support socialising and discussing ideas, making innovations and of course exchange knowledge so as to increase the benefits in existing networks at social levels including cooperatives, organizations, etc.
- Last, but not the least, ICT is also helpful in building up resource capital and physical capital (economic) which shall in turn also help in providing employment as well as eradicate poverty to certain extents.

ICT and Social Work Ethics:

The careers of social workers are influenced by ICT. Even the clients social workers serve are dependent on ICT. There are so many technological changes in all the fields that social workers have to concentrate on the changes done in the health care system and infrastructure and how clients are using technology. If Social workers need a change in society by taking an initiative they should be well versed with the ICT, especially if they need to collaborate with professionals of various disciplines who strategize and use ICT.

Even the Work culture and the way of interaction have changed by the use of ICT. As the networking is growing day by day and becoming complex the use of ICT will also continue to grow. ICT is required for training the social workers, giving social work services to the needy and even for the social work research. If ICT is used effectively then many people will get benefitted from it.

Social workers concentrate on human relationships and ICT definitely play a major role in it. Most of the people are using ICT in one form or the other like including electronic messages (email), SMS text message, social networking (e.g., Face book. Instagram, Twitter, etc), instant messaging service, or video chat (e.g., Skype). It is necessary for the social workers to understand how important ICT is for their clients. There is a difference between face-to-face interaction and online interaction but social workers have to understand these communication processes are different. Now-a-days relationships develop online. The groups who have a common purpose come together, many get education online, get social support, etc. They are even called electronic groups, forums or mail groups. ICT has positive effect (Social support) as well as negative effect (cyber-bullying). The social workers only concentrate on in-person relationships but they should focus more on online relationships.

Ethical standard 1.07: The privacy of the clients' whether written or electronic should be protected. Social workers should make sure that the clients' records are stored in a secure location and no one should have access to the same. Now-a-days all the information are stored online to save environment. The social workers should be trained about electronic security and how to get additional information. If they are not trained then the client's record might be compromised which might lead to legal consequences and ethical violations.

Ethical standard 1.15: Social workers should ensure that the services are continued without any disruption especially in the event of natural disasters and personal factors. During any type of crisis situation ICT helps to re-establish services. In a survey done it was shown that 60% of Americans in 2008 tried to get healthcare information online. Most of the consumers would prefer online consultations. In rural areas expert doctor's advice can be taken online.

Ethical standard 2.05: The advice of colleagues should be taken by social workers whenever required. Through ICT professional online consultation is a possibility. Through ICT we can contact experts, You Tube videos and video lectures on treatment of problem.

Ethical standard 3.07(a): Social workers should have enough resources for their clients which can be easily obtained through ICT. Now a day's even open source software is available so that the overall budget of an organization is not hampered. The cost is decreased related to ICT. It has better quality, more reliable, more flexible and lower cost.

Ethical standard 3.08: Social work supervisors should ensure that they are giving continuous education and working for the development of their staff. It should be based on current knowledge and new developments. Distance education is very effective if started online. The students who are not able to attend regular college due to personal problems can take lectures online which will be beneficial to them. Even students prefer different learning styles and have different expectations. ICT helps in student-teacher and student-student interactions.

Ethical standard 4.01:Social workersshould be capable of professional practice and focus on performance of professional functions.They should keep themselves updated with emerging social work ethics. The major research can be done with the help of ICT. If they purchase a journal it would be expensive but online the copies of journals are even available in an open access format.

Social workers need to be competent enough to be able to use the technology and even literate enough to be able to access, manage and create information. Social workers should be able to handle the projects and assignments online.

The social impact of ICT:

Information Communication Technology has the ability to do complete transformation of the society. Millions of people can connect with each other at the same time with the help of ICT. The way we socialize has completely changed in today's time. The positive points are as follows:

- The social networking sites like Face book, Instagram, Twitter, etc has brought the people from the world together where they can share everything.
- If a person needs to do research for any projects or wants to get information it could be obtained online easily. If a local library is not available it helps the people to get information.
- It saves time as well as money. The person doesn't need to travel so the travelling cost as well as money is saved.
- Many people stay abroad and it is not possible for the family and friends to travel over there so they can do video calling on Skype. ICT has brought family and friends together.
- A person should have ICT skills to get a job as in every sector ICT is required. Even work from home option is available if you have ICT at home.
- ICT has started so many online portals that a person can easily get everything online. Even medicines can be purchased online and delivered at home. People can pay bills online so no need to stand in long queues.

ICT has got lot of positive points but at the same time there are some negative points which we cannot avoid. They are as follows:

- Children and Teenagers have become addicted to computers. They like to play online games but don't want to play in an open space because of which their physical development is hampering. Even birthdays are wished through Face book instead of calling friends or meeting them. Even students

are lacking in reading skills and can't even speak confidently in school as their social skills are lacking.

- Family members don't give time to each other. Even the personal health is hampered as they don't get fresh air sitting in four corners of the room.
- Myntra, Amazon, etc are online business which has affected small local businesses. People prefer to shop online due to which other businesses are affected and losing revenue.
- There are many environmental effects as well due to ICT. There is Climate change as so much energy is consumed and many times old electronic items are not disposed properly.
- The old people are facing difficulty to learn new technology and have problems in Banking, bill payments, etc which has started online.
- Even copyright issues have started due to ICT. Movies and Music are easily available online. Plagiarism is common due to ICT as it is very easy to copy paste the material. During project submissions students are using ICT instead of their own knowledge. Thinking Process has become stagnant due to ICT.
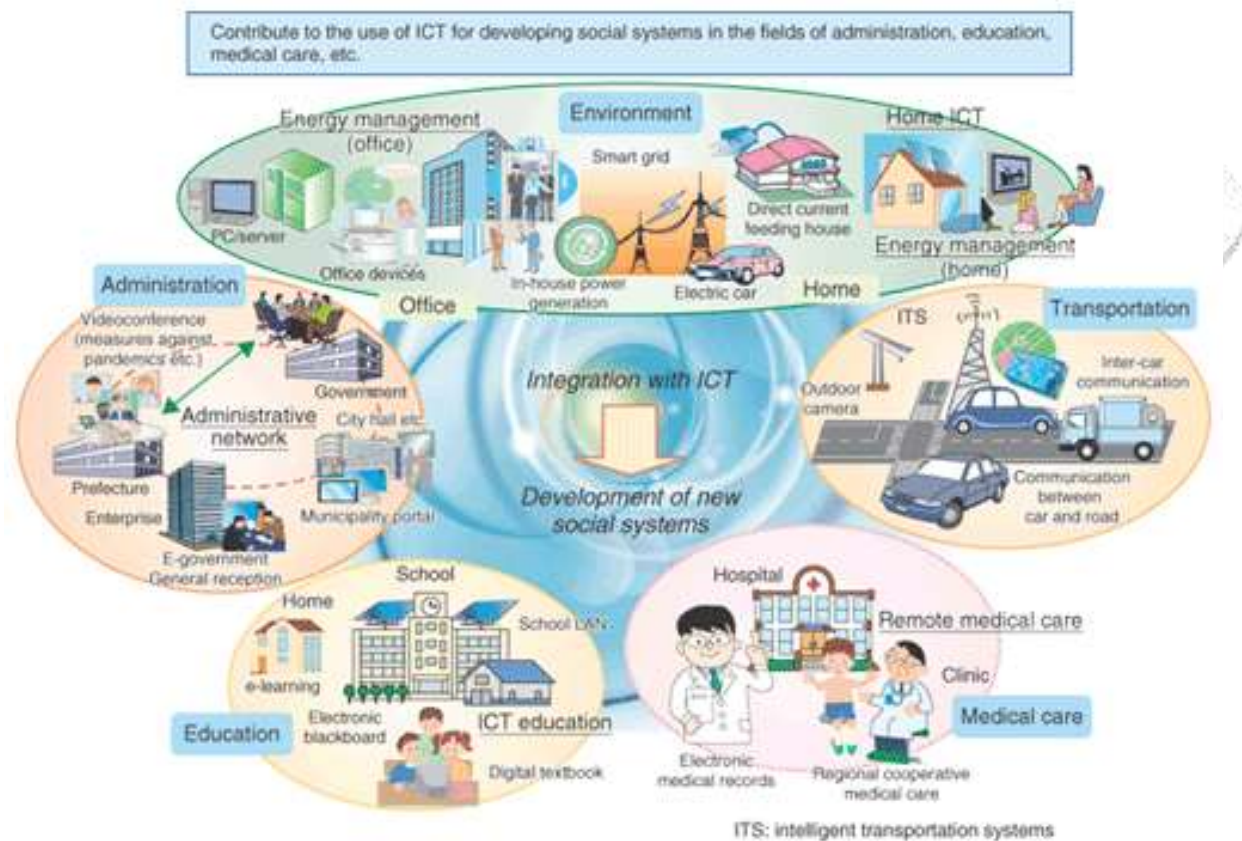- Personal Privacy has become a problem due to ICT as many personal information is stored on computers.

Figure 2: ICT for developing social systems in various fields

ICT is being used as a tool for Social Development. The farmers are using Smart Cards for various transactions in villages. Smart Card has the history of client's credit. NGO's are using ICT as a platform to create awareness about HIV/AIDS, early childhood development, sanitation, etc. NGO's also address gender disparity issues by focusing on women empowerment through ICT. Even local women are taught basic computing skills to make them confident. ICT plays a major role in spreading mass awareness about AIDS and Sex education. The people can get knowledge online without hesitation.

The impact of ICT on business is important. The people share knowledge and advice and start online shops or websites at a very minimum cost. It leads to economic growth. Social businesses have started which has got a social cause but also are making profit online. When a person starts a business he doesn't get an investor especially for a social cause. ICT has lead these social entrepreneurs to start with a click of button without making any major investments. It connects to millions of people so social entrepreneurs are not spreading message only to one community but spreading to many communities all over the world.

ICT for Social Change:

ICT can be used as a means of social change. The users can create websites, WebPages, blogs to promote their cause. For example: A website entitled, Women's Learning Partnership aims to connect the use of ICT to get rid of the marginalization of women. The technology skills are provided through training and various activities to women for gender justice and human rights encouragement. ICT is the only platform which makes people aware of the problems in the society and gives them an option to be a part of social change like cyber-bullying, promotion for feminism, abolition of slavery, or industrial revolution.

A transformation can be seen in our zone of information and communication paradigms as there is multiple point to point communications and the flow is very easy and inexpensive. The digital processing of information can help the people organize almost every kind of work and activity which was previously unthinkable. Even though you have only basic skills of ICT it will open up a lot of possibilities for you which are really empowering. In a traditional society a married woman if owns a mobile phone will keep her closer and in regular contact with her parents. It will keep her connected to them which are a power shift in a patriarchal society. Even an adolescent girl whose mobility is restricted with her growing age may have the similar opportunities. Thus mobile based connectivity can reduce structural isolation.

ICT and Electronic Governance

If put to use correctly, ICTs can help the governance of public services better and thereby empower the society in the overall social and economic development and improve their livelihoods overall. Increasing the effectiveness of use of technologies by providing internet, LANS and various other forms of networks, will help the government function smoothly. Over the past years, there has been a visible up-gradation of the government infrastructure and its impact has been such that one cannot easily ignore it. While there has been a significant development within the inter and intra departmental governance, if proper facilities are provided and there is better inclusion of digitization, the ICT can function effectively and also see a significant growth.

Factors responsible for implementation of ICT for social development in the past:

- The citizen services have a degree of transparency that cannot be displayed anywhere else and is like no other
- The kind of reduction in cost that ICT provides is substantial and it also makes the government process more convenient
- Back-end services are reworked and reinforced in a manner that is visible
- The employees are bound to be more involved as there is a need to train the citizens with the process as well and of course the processes of management undergo a change
- Revenues generated witness an increase for both the service provider government
- The kind of boast that technology has witnessed

Conclusion

The various fields in work, research and various other practices is seeing constant development in ICT. With an aim to uplift various social work practices and values of social ethics, ICT is instrumental and despite the incompetency and illiteracy. It is only such things that will take social workers ahead and help them understand the growth of technology in current day. ICTs might have failed to understand the potential of rapid growth in terms of technology and advancement, but it is necessary to understand the rapid growth of ICT and put it to use in the future in order to uplift and enhance the scenario that exists in various fields of work and research.

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