Use of Internet and its effects on our Society

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Abstract: *The scope of this paper is to analyze the effects of Information Technology (IT) on senior citizens, adults and teens in perspective of their relations, education, entertainment, socialization and the problems that a digital divide can bring in our society. Technology can have both positive and negative consequences on people of different walks of life at different times. The need is to understand the true impact of IT so that every body gathers benefits that yield a healthy society. Over the last decade, the revolution in IT has brought in advancement that shows increasingly visible effects on the life of the average people of Pakistan, in particular, and the world in general. These innovations affect largely how people work, communicate, do business, trade, learn, teach, inform and research. In this paper, an empirical study is conducted to examine whether the contacts via e-mail, on-line chatting and availability of information through Internet would lead us in a better learned, connected, and participatory society or in a society of loneliness. These issues are explored in detail and suitable solutions are proposed to counter the negative affects of IT on our society.*

Keywords: *Internet, Society, Empirical study.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Technology is continuously changing. These growing changes bring social and economical consequences on different aspects of our daily life. In the last decade, some of these changes were difficult to cope with. In the future, these changes will happen faster, with less time to prepare. Thus two aspects of this changing technology emerged that is "Positive and Negative impact" on the users. Our approach is to avoid wrong choice otherwise our technology will destroy us. Automobiles provided quicker and convenient mode of transportation caused freedom from family bonds and mixing with different cultures and new communities. Television became source of entertainment, learning and information, virtual tour around the world sitting in TV lounge, with social impacts like family interaction, leisure time, aggressiveness, mixing up of different cultures and fashion. Household appliance spared time and people became able to indulge in other civic, social and entertainment activities. These things which were thought as luxuries have become necessities.

The Internet has influenced different aspects of society. It is important to understand what the consequences of the diffusion and high use of the Internet are for people's lives. In the book of Marry and Isherwood [1], necessities are defined as those goods which are bought in same quantities regardless of change in price or income. A.

Venkatesh [2] surveyed in his paper that all technologies create an impact of some sort. For example, the television technology has had an impact on the media habits of the public, their attitudes and behaviour towards entertainment and the interaction between family members. Cole [3] assessed the need of Internet as a mainstream medium that may soon be as pervasive as television although speed of its diffusion seems much faster. Kraut et. al. [4] conducted a longitudinal study on the effects of Internet on social involvement and psychological well-being. It is shown in their findings that the greater use of the Internet was significantly associated with decreased community within the family, a decreased local social network, and loneliness and depression. In a report of SIQSS, N. Nie [5] has sustained the negative consequences of the Internet that are consistent with the findings of the Kraut group [4]. Katz and Aspden [6] made a survey using 2500 respondents, out of which 8 percent were Internet users. Comparing users with non-users, they found no evidence of Internet use reducing people's membership in social and religious organizations. Among users, greater use of the Internet was associated with increased contact with family members and an increased participation in online communities. This survey contradicts the findings presented in [4] and [5]. Wellman [7] made a survey on "the National Geographic Society website" and came out with the suggestions that the Internet is increasing interpersonal connectivity and organizational involvement. However, this increased connectivity and involvement not only can expose people to more contact and more information, it can reduce commitment to community.

New technologies may try to create new life. Some technologies have had greater social impact than others. Wellman & Frank [8] defined Network Capital as relations with friends, neighbors, relatives, and workmates that significantly provide companionship, emotional aid, goods and services, information, and a sense of belonging. McAdam [9] have documented in his work that the social capital consists of more than going through the motions of interpersonal interaction and organizational involvement. When people have a strong attitude toward community, have a motivated, responsible sense of belonging; they will mobilize their social capital more willingly and effectively.

Putman [10] documented a broad decline in a civic engagement and social participation in United States over the last three decades. In his opinion citizens avoid to cast their votes, attend church less, less inclined to discuss on government policies with their neighbours, reluctant to become member of voluntary organizations, visit fewer dinner parties and generally get together less for civic and social purposes. The consequences of those social

disengagement affected social structure and individual lives. At a societal level, those social disengagements could be associated with more corrupt, less efficient government that caused more crime. In contrast, when citizens were involved in civic life, they produced better quality education, approached their politicians easily and live in peace and harmony. At the individual level, social disengagement brought poor quality of life and diminished physical and psychological health. When people have more social contact they are happier and healthier, both physically and mentally.

The above inconsistent impacts of Internet are affecting both individual as a single and society as whole. One school of thought considers that Internet is making people isolated, depressed and lonely. People who use internet remain cut off their environment and lose face to face relations which are strong by spending time in virtual reality with unknown people, which results in weaker relations. Second school of thought supports the mixture of people and they become more social, have chance to meet variety of people of their interests without any time and space barrier. Some found Internet as neutral without any significant affect.

The goal of this study was to take an in depth look at the effect of the Internet on the ethics and morality of the people that use it, irrespective of their color, creed, culture, gender, age, education and profession, as compared to other forms of mass media. In order to achieve a better understanding of the Internet's effect, a questionnaire was designed and interviews were conducted to analyze the effect of the Internet in Pakistani society.

2. METHODOLOGY

The following questions were chosen in the questionnaire:

  i)   Do you use computer?
  ii)   Do you use Internet, if not, mention reason?
  iii) What kind of difficulties do you face?
  iv)   When do you use computer and Internet?
  v)   How long you have been using Internet?
  vi)   For how many hours do you use Internet daily?
  vii) What do you use Internet for?
  viii) How long do you chat in a typical week?
  ix)   How long do you use email in a typical week?
  x)   Activities keep you online longer?
  xi)   Chats most of the time with (gender)?
  xii) Any change after using Internet?
  xiii) Multiple questions related with the use of Internet (see appendix A).

2.1 Data Sources

A sample is taken from the population having different demographics like teens, adults and senior citizens of different professions like teachers, doctors, students, organizers, employed and unemployed both males and females. In this study, data is not analyzed separately according to their sex, age and education rather taken as one entity.

3. RESULTS

Internet may or may not isolate people from the real world depending how they use Internet. On the other hand, it is facilitating people to make face-to-face relations stronger by remaining in touch with them without any gender, geographical, racial or societal barriers. It is not only helping people to bond in friendship but also emerged as source to bridge different kinds of people from a little to a greater extent.
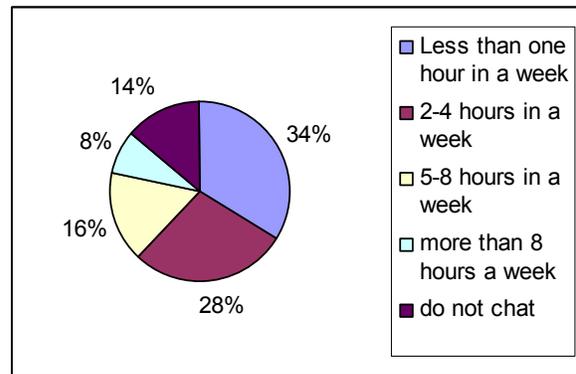

Figure 1: Chatting hours using Internet in a typical week.

In Fig. 1, a pie chart is shown divided into different responses that depicts the percent of Internet chatting, gathered based on the questionnaire. Survey shows that only 14% of the people do not chat at all. Only 8% do chatting more than 8 hours a week. Thus the ratio of chatting using Internet is not large as far as time is concerned. Only 24% people do Internet chatting ranges from 1-8 hours in a week.
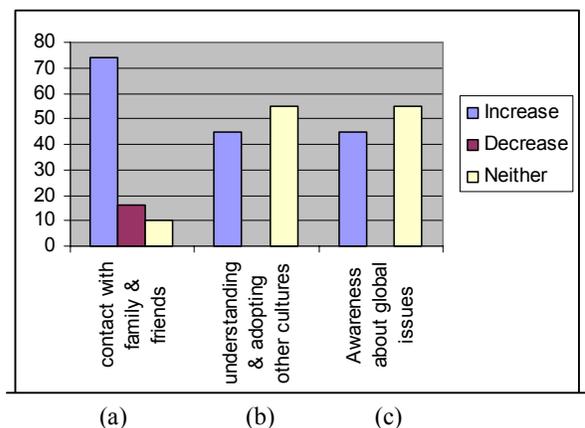

Figure 2: Internet impacts: (a) Time spent with family and friends, (b) Familiarity with different cultures and (c) Awareness about global Issues.

It is shown in Fig. 2(a), that the people are developing their social contacts and are remaining more in touch with

their friends and family by using Internet. Very less ratio reported to have less contact with their friends and families due to use of Internet. From survey it has appeared that the ratio of people is becoming familiar with the other cultures has slight edge than no change, see Fig. 2(b). Thus the use of Internet has not greatly contributed to the understanding and adopting other cultures. Similar trend is observed in the awareness about global issues.
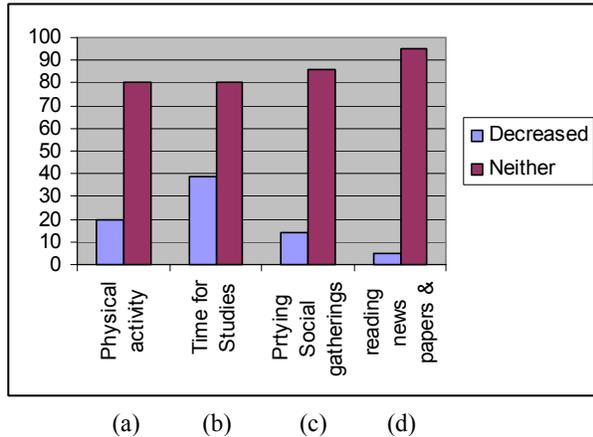

(a)   (b)   (c)   (d)

Figure 3" Internet usage time spent on (a) Physical activity (b) Studies (c) Partying social gathering and (d) reading newspapers.

Fig. 3(a) shows the 20% people have made Internet responsible in the decline of physical activities. However, 80% remain silent. Fig.3 (b) shows that the Internet is decreasing the amount of studies in conventional manner but making people more aware. Very little ratio of people said that they have decreased time to read newspapers and attending social gatherings. But it is not known whether before used to get online they had habit of reading newspapers or not. Thus the overall effect of Internet is not significant.

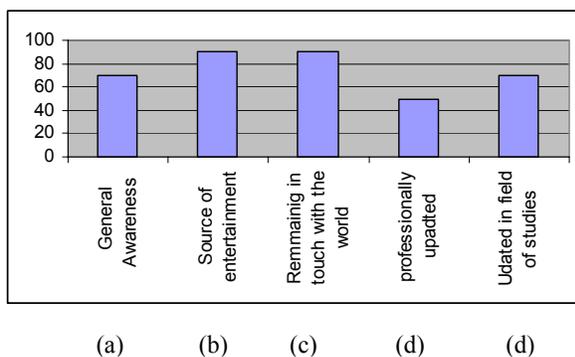(a)   (b)   (c)   (d)   (d)

Figure 4: Effects of Internet: (a) General Awareness (b) entertainment (c) Remaining in touch with the world (d) Professionally updated and (e) Updated in the field of studies.

It is found from survey that professionals, teachers and students are using Internet for educational and employment purposes, like research, job searching, e-mailing, net surfing, and online education. Though many of the respondents said that staying online reduces time of studies but still it is very helpful with their educational and professional field, see figure 4.
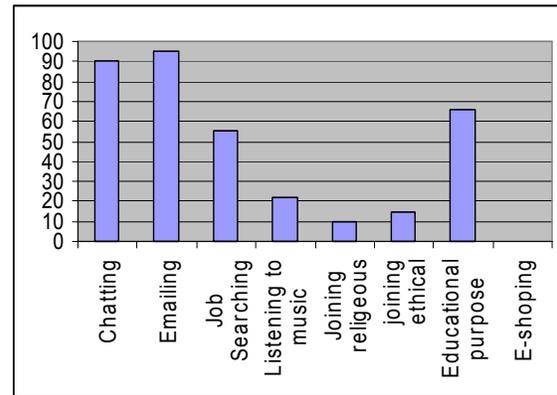

Figure 5: Various activities performed by the Internet user.

In figure 5, various activities performed by the Internet users are shown. New users and teens are mostly using it for chatting and emailing purposes. Novice are found less aware that how Internet can be useful in other ways. Trends like joining religious, ethical activities are at low level, however listening to musical programs is slightly above the religious and ethical activities. It is observed that the e-shopping facility is not fully introduced in our society. During survey none of the persons reported that they are visiting pornographic sites but after interviewing, Internet operators reported that this trend is very common in youngsters.

4. ANALYSIS OF SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals that the majority of the youngsters use Internet for the sake of enjoyment. The big number of such users is aged between 16-25 years. It is fact that one cannot express his/her feelings in writing. Despite this, most of the female interviewers found Internet the only way to connect interactively with the outside world. This bridges the gap between opposite sex and consequently both male and female develop relations without knowing each other. That kind of relations some time brings misunderstanding between the Internet users and causes break-up of relations. The other trend found in children is that they are more prone to learn abusive language by having online friends. Educated parents are always vigilant of their children and their peers/friends. Most of the parents are not aware about Internet and its consequences. These types of parents are negligent what their kids are doing on the Internet? What kind of sites they frequently visit? What kind of circle of friends they are indulged? It is said that the knowledge is power but the balance in knowledge is the requirement of the time.

Parents must get computer literacy in order to check what their children are doing while they are on computer. Computer should be at some common place so that

children do not remain alone with computer for longer period.

When people feel lonely they get online and start chatting with anonymous users. The excessive use of Internet isolates the user from real world and find less time to spend with their friends and families. Excessive use of Internet may lead to a person in depression. This happens with those who are already in depression and finds Internet as an escape. Thus, the cause of loneliness can be attributed to Internet. If a person found using Internet for longer time in his/her daily practice, keeps busy in chatting and other unconstructive activities, this trend can be termed as destructive to the mental growth of the Internet user. In such situations, it is the responsibilities of the parents and teachers to give extra attention in order to keep such Internet user away from computer and divert his/her attention towards constructive activities.

In the contemporary world every body is busy in their activities in search of competitive capital. They have a little time to share with their senior citizens. In western countries this trend is common and parents are left alone to spend most of their time roaming in the streets, parks and other public places. This tendency causes depression. Thus the need is to make such senior citizens computer literate as well. Through Internet they can get information related with their health and religion, and can communicate with their friends and do on-line shopping and consult with doctors without being dependent on their children. Also there is a need to design special web sites for elderly people so that they can use it comfortably for their entertainment and information.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, results of a survey on the use and effect of Internet on Pakistani society are presented. The results suggest that, in general, majority of the users do agree with the potential of the Internet as informative source for general public and realize the effort involved in effectively utilizing this valuable resource. The survey shows that the ratio of users of Internet chatting is significant; however they use it for a very small portion of time. Very small amount of people do not chat at all. This could be attributed to the lack of computer knowledge. In contrast, Internet is emerged as a source of developing social contacts among people and keeps friends and families in touch using email facility. From survey, it appears that the Internet can be proved helpful in understanding and familiarizing oneself with other cultures. Internet also provides a platform for the educationist to get updated on-line information with a single keystroke. In addition, the Internet has enhanced their knowledge as far as reading and research interests are concerned. As far as teachers are concerned, majority of them think that the Internet has helped them in collecting updated material for teaching in their courses, and that the Internet has enhanced their knowledge for teaching and research purposes.

In this study, 80% people have declined the effect of Internet on their routine physical activities. However, the trend of off-line study is decreasing in a predictable manner, however, people are becoming more aware of global knowledge. It is observed that the youngsters

frequently visit pornographic websites. The tendency of learning abusive language is common among the children due to their online friends. This trend is observed at net cafés. Most of the educated parents keep a vigilant eye on their children while they use Internet and do online contacts with their friends. This vigilance is not possible for most of the parents who are not computer literate and they do not know about the Internet and its consequences. As a measure against the present low Internet-skill levels of most parents, emphasis may be made on awareness and training programs. Although it is clear that the Internet does increase people understanding and motivation, the problem of plagiarism and unethical practices does exist. To cope with this trend, attention should be laid on effective measures to prevent people from committing such immoral practices. A firm policy be adopted and fines and penalties be imposed on those who violate the rules.

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Appendix A

Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree
1	2	3

		1	2	3
A	Use of internet increased regular contacts (face to face) with family and friends.	☐	☐	☐
B	Use of internet decreased regular contacts (face to face) with your family and friends.	☐	☐	☐
C	Use of internet decreases your any physical activity like exercise/sports.	☐	☐	☐
D	Use of internet decreases your time of studies.	☐	☐	☐
E	Use of Internet decreases your amount of time reading newspapers and magazines.	☐	☐	☐
F	Use of internet decreases your participation in social activities like going in parties/religious gathering.	☐	☐	☐
G	You spend most of your time online chatting.	☐	☐	☐
H	Internet is helpful in getting information of health and nutrition.	☐	☐	☐
I	Internet helps you in your studies.	☐	☐	☐
J	Internet helpful in your research work.	☐	☐	☐
K	Find material on internet on which you cannot discuss with anybody openly.	☐	☐	☐
L	You get awareness of global issues due to Internet.	☐	☐	☐
M	Feel depressed when you stay online for long hours with friends.	☐	☐	☐
N	Internet is helpful understanding and getting knowledge and adopting other cultures by using Internet.	☐	☐	☐
O	You trust on online relations and think that these relations can stay longer.	☐	☐	☐