

INTERNET AND DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AMONG SCIENTIFIC PRACTITIONERS IN KERALA – A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Binu. K¹ & Ranjith Raja²:

Abstract

Internet and associated technologies have altered the pattern of social relationships in modern society. As a communicative device, it has reconstructed a new form of personal and professional relationships by replacing with traditional forms and means. The present study focuses to assess the effect of information technology on social relationships of scientific community and its pros and cons in social life. The survey of 139 scientific practitioners from three zones of Kerala, highlighting the subsequent forms of social relationships and new social of networks and emerging dynamics with the utmost epistemological quest and sociological interpretation.

Key words: ICT- Interpersonal Linkages, Personal and Professional Relationships, Social Networks.

Introduction

Internet as an open interconnection of computer networks has become a fundamental part of human communication today. It is an incredible system of communication that allows anyone with a computer to connect to the global technical resource and populace. Information and commutation technology is providing new forms of virtual realities and acts as connecting bands between people and societies. All these factors have a very important role in the utilization of technology for personal and professional purposes. (Lim 2004) The majority of such relationships are mediated or channelized by the most modern technologies and developments. Internet technology in modern society has a dual role today (Singh 2003) in one dimension it acts as a social network or a network of networks that assist people in their personal transactions with other individuals and in the second dimension it acts as a mechanism of social support or social network. (Kotz and Gray, 1999). The process of modern social structure formation can be summarized with the help of nodes and ties relationships. These are the reciprocal types of relationships responsible for the formation of social relationships in modern society. (Lim 2004) There can be many types of ties between the nodes. A social network is the

¹ Assistant Professor Department of Sociology Vimala College, (Autonomous) Thrissur. Phone- 9846678530

Email binuk@vimalacollege.edu.in Phone- 9846678530

² Assistant professor, Department of sociology, Zamorin's Guruvayurappan College, Kozhikode

interconnection of nodes and ties. The network is responsible for the generation of social capital. (Kotz and Gray, 1999). This bondage of interpersonal relationships in modern society can be termed as social networks or social support or social capital. (Chen and Tan, 2004). The study is oriented to evaluate the role of internet technology on the concurrent pattern of social relationships and its dynamic effects resulting in the reconstruction of the social framework.

Problems Identified

Internet and associated technologies have altered the intrapersonal relationships of modern societies. Technologically mediated communication has replaced -to-face intimate relationships and paved the way for the formation of practices and relationships due to the advent of internet technology. The present study tries to analyze the role of the internet on the personal relation including personal and professional relations of the modern societies

Objectives

- To study the effect of the internet on interpersonal relationships among scientific practitioners in Kerala
- To summarize the emerging dynamics of social relationships in the context of information and communications technology

Research Methodology

This study is descriptive and survey-based; the survey has been designed to understand the effect of the internet on interpersonal relationships among scientific practitioners of Kerala from selected originations. For the present study, the author interviewed 139 Practitioners with well-designed interview schedules and conducted qualitative interviews to substantive quantitative findings. A stratified random samplings procedure was followed and data was collected from 3 zones like, the southern, central and northern. For this study both qualitative and quantitative primary data were collected and classified and categorized on the basis of the objectives of the study and advanced Statistical analysis was done with the help of SPSS and results were formulated on the basis of prescribed objectives

Results and Discussions

Table no.1 presents Age, Sex, Marital Status, Organization, and Education are some of the basic factors which determine the lifestyle of a person. Age is the primary indicator of relationships and productivity. The interpersonal relationships have also some relations to the sex of the person. It is a common belief that the males have more chance to get related with others because of the socio-cultural condition of the society or patriarchal nature of the society. Marriage is another turning point in human life. It thrusts more social responsibilities and obligations on both the partners. Organization is the place at which professional relationships originate and develops. Education is another important parameter to assess the degree and magnitude of relationships in the

modern society.

Table.1 Effect of Internet Personal and Professional Relationships with Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Variables	Degrees freedom	χ^2	P-value
Age	3	1.862 ^{ns}	0.602
Sex	1	1.595 ^{ns}	0.207
Marital status	1	6.544 [*]	0.011
Organization	3	7.899 [*]	0.048
Education	1	1.913 ^{ns}	0.167

ns - Not significant

To assess the relationship between the basic demographic characters like Age, Sex, Marital Status, Organization, and Education with the effect of internet, the chi-square test was conducted. The result indicates that in the case of age, the p-value 0.602 is greater than 0.05; So, the association is non-significant. In the case of sex, the p-value is 0.207; the value is greater than the 0.05, so the association is neglected. In the case of Marital status, the p-value is 0.011 which is lower than 0.05; so, there is an association between marital status and the level of improvement in interpersonal relationships due to the emergence of the internet. In the case of an organization, the p-value is 0.048 which is lower than 0.05: So, there is an association between the level of improvement in personal and professional relationships and the organization in which they are working. To understand the association between education and the level of improvement, a chi-square test was carried out and the p-value 0.167 is higher than 0.05; so, there is no association between education and the level of improvement. From the table, it is clear that age, sex and education have not influenced the level of improvement in personal and professional relationships, and internet usage, whereas marriage and organization have influenced the degree of personal and professional relationships and internet usage in Kerala society.

On the basis of the above data, it can be concluded that age, sex, and educational status of the scientific communities are not influencing the intensity of personal and professional relationships in scientific communities. That is scientific communities from all age groups, gender and educational qualifications are extensively using internet technology for maintaining their relationship. But in the case of marital status and organization, the association was found to be significant because there are some remarkable differences in the usage of internet technology between married and non-married persons and scientists who belong to different scientific organizations.

Interpersonal Relationships and Internet

The Internet is the latest means of communication. It is a network of computers around the world. Email helps us to send and receive messages through computers. These means of communication will be a great boon to mankind because they have brought different countries closer to one another. Interpersonal relationships are considered as the chemistry of social life. In modern society, the nature and magnitude of such relations are changing due to the interplay of various forces. There are some arguments explaining about how internet shrinks the face-to-face communication and social relationships. Emergence of internet and other communicative devices shrink the personal relationships like family and friends. It has increased the contact between the person who stays abroad and reduced the family and neighborhood relations. However, there are some differences between the internet and traditional communication manners. Internet can contribute the estrangements between the adolescents and their family. The following section deals with the use of internet for personal and professional communication in the daily life of members of the scientific communities.

Table .2 Effect of Internet on Personal Network

Factors	Yes/percent	No/percent	Total
Increased interpersonal relationships between scientists	134 (96.4)	5 (3.6)	139 (100)
Increased family Relationships	116 (83.5)	23 (16.5)	139 (100)
Effect on dealing with family matters	15 (10.8)	124 (89.2)	139 (100)
Increased face-to-face communication with friends	100 (71.9)	39 (28.1)	139 (100)
Get enough time to spend with their children	72 (51.8)	67 (48.2)	139 (100)
Increased the relationship with neighborhood	118 (84.1)	21 (15.9)	139 (100)

(Values in the brackets are percentages)

Table.3 Effect of the internet on professional networks of scientific communities

Statement	Yes		No	
	Number	%	Number	%
Increased academic contact between scientists	136	97.8	3	2.2
Internet Creates a new form of interpersonal linkages	133	95.7	6	4.3
Relationship between the colleagues in the organization relationships	20	14.4	119	85.6
Creates a new form of technocratic consciousness	116	83.5	23	16.5

Table No 3, reveals the effect of the internet on various academic contacts, accessibility to new technological links and the nature of new interpersonal linkages, and the formation of new technocratic consciousness among scientific communities in Kerala. This section is trying to understand how the internet is influencing the day-to-day academic contact between scientists. Professional networking is a proven method for building academic relationships. Academic contact is the highly systematic interpersonal relationship between two academic persons or organizations. 97.8% of the scientists say that the internet has a strong positive effect on the creation of new academic contacts with the co-scientists and academicians living far away from their motherland. New forms of interpersonal linkages are the modern professional ties among scientists and researchers. The fundamental characteristics of such ties are that they are purely based on academic and research-oriented relations. These relationships may make professional proximate ties and professional distant ties. Both these relationships are channelized by the internet and associated technology.

The percentage analysis shows that 95.7% have the opinion that the internet helped the formation of new technological links with other scientists and the latest websites for research. 85.6% of the respondents say that the internet has not reduced their relationships with colleagues and other co-scientists and 14.4% say that the internet has reduced their relationships with other scientists. 83.5% believe that the internet creates new technocratic consciousness among the scientific community. Technocratic consciousness is the feeling of technology as an alternative to all professional activities, or, in other words, the feeling of technology substitute's human rationality. This is a socio-psychological sentiment that stimulates the feeling that technology helps the person in his intellectual needs

and crises. It is a kind of instrumental rationality or such thoughts that enable the scientific community to think and work. This technocratic feeling is a psychological condition that may lead to the formation of technological phobias and manias. The Internet, as a communicative device, is creating and mediating new forms of technocratic relationships the modern Kerala society. In Kerala, a considerable number of people of the scientific communities are members of professional research organizations such as the Internet Educational Equal Access Foundation (IEEAF) and the Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU).

The words of a senior scientist, B.D. from Cochin University of Science and Technology strongly attest to those findings:

Sure, basically I am using the internet for research purposes, i.e., for review of literature, collection of research tools, research software, analysis of data, and also for downloading various software, PowerPoint for teaching, collecting information regarding bioinformatics and biomedicine. It is an endless source of the latest information for my research. The Internet provides a lot of information from different fields. We can compare the usefulness of different software and select the most appropriate software for the application of my research through the internet. The Internet is a good source of a large number of open software suitable for scientific production. Very good and reliable software is available today. I am using the internet for professional communication and personal interaction. I always advise my students that Google is their best friend and an open source of information. Google helps to get every type of information under the sun, you need to ask anybody else, and the search engine will provide everything. In a nutshell, the internet has transformed the conventional system of teaching, research, and learning.

On the basis of the above qualitative and quantitative findings, it is very clear that the internet is redefining the professional ties of scientific communities in the forms of,

- Interpersonal socio-technical capital- social capital mediated by internet technology.
- Removes barrier to interaction- more professional and academic connectivity.
- Expanding professional interaction networks – inter-organizational, intra-organizational, domestic and foreign relationships.
- Large distribution of findings and data and funding (one sender, many recipients).
- Notifications – information about national, and international Symposiums, seminars, and workshops.

Maintaining professional ties by spending less time.

Conclusion

The Internet is one of the most advanced and sophisticated forms of technological communication. The main objective of this chapter was to analyze the changing pattern of communication as a result of internet technology among the scientific communities. The first part of this chapter was focused on the nature of current communication and it describes the various means of communication used by the scientific communities in Kerala. The subsequent sections describe the present form of personal and professional communication. In personal communication, the influence of the internet on the communication pattern of family, friendship, and neighborhoods was analyzed by using appropriate statistical tools and the next section deals with the changes in professional communication as a result of internet technology. The highlight of this chapter was the changing dynamics of interpersonal communication in scientific communities as a result of the internet. The results clearly indicate that the deployment of the internet is increasing among the scientific communities of Kerala to supplement their personal and professional relationships or the internet is reconstructing the current structure of the communication system to most modern forms. It is very evident that the scientific communities are the direct or indirect dependents of internet technology for their day-to-day communication. The Internet has become an important part of the social life of scientific communities. It is influencing the personal life of the scientific communities, especially their day-to-day relationships, family, face-to-face contact with friends, children, and neighborhoods, and recreational activities. On the basis of the nature, degree, and distance of communication, internet technology-mediated relationships can be classified into Personal or Professional ties. Personal ties are intimate, close kin ties based on sympathy, affection, and love. These personal ties can be divided into Personal Proximate ties and Personal distant Ties. Personal proximate ties are the relatives and family members living away from the home but near to the scientific communities within the country but personal distant ties are the family members and relatives living far away from the home or motherland.

The Internet has restructured the conventional types of family relationships among scientific communities in Kerala. The emergence of the internet has some unfavorable effects on the process of early socialization of children. While a majority of the scientific communities admit the fact that the internet has not reduced the direct face-to-face connection between them and their neighbors, some of them admitted that they are using the internet for contacting co-residents and neighbors. But even today the effect of the internet has no serious impact on the neighborhood's relationships.

In the professional life of the scientific communities, Internet has a strong positive effect on the creation of new academic contacts with the co-scientists and

academicians who live far away from their motherland. New forms of interpersonal linkages like new professional ties are formed among scientists and researchers. The ties are purely based on academic and research-oriented relations. These relationships can be both Professional proximate ties and Professional distant ties. Professional proximate ties are the academic class of people who are living in close areas or proximate areas of the scientific community, or the nearby organizations or institutions, and professional distant ties are those scientific communities who are living far away from their residence. Both of these relationships are channelized by the internet and associated technology.

From the study, it is very evident that almost all scientific communities are using one or another form of technological device for communication purposes. Internet technology is mediating or channelizing or transforming previous communication processes and the formation of new interpersonal relationships or the internet can change the magnitude and dimension of personal and professional relationships among scientific communities in Kerala. To understand the rationality behind the usage of the internet, the psychological conditions of the respondents were assessed. This technocratic feeling is a psychological condition that may lead to the formation of technological phobias and manias. Internet as a communicative tool is creating and mediating new forms of technocratic relationships among the community in modern Kerala society. The degree and magnitude of such interpersonal relationships directly or indirectly determine the intensity of internet technology utilized by the scientific communities in the Kerala context. Another important finding indicated that the highest cases of internet-based interpersonal communication are now focused outside Kerala but within India.

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