

**GROWING USE OF INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN PAKISTAN:
EFFECTS ON FAMILIES AND CULTURAL VALUES**

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Abstract

The Information & Communication Technology-ICT devices are indispensable today. Globally, it is evident that such technologies have variant effects on work and non-work situations. It is generally assumed that these devices are facilitating the fast-moving societies. Though positive effects of ICT usage are improving lifestyle but literature emphasizes over negative consequences of social media on families particularly on child-parent inter-relationships. ICT has well-blended itself to the everyday life of people in modern times throughout the globe. Keeping this situation in view, the current paper presents outcomes of an exploratory study conducted at Islamabad and Rawalpindi with 200 postgraduate students of Allama Iqbal Open University – AIOU. Mainly quantitative approach was employed to have a clearer and reliable understanding about the issue under study. Specifically, to assess the effects of these technologies on family domains at i) social, ii) cultural and iii) individual level, purposive/judgmental sampling technique was used for data collection. The samples consist of both male and female respondents' views, which advance our understanding about how social media is shaping social, cultural aspects of family life and relationships of individuals in families. The study also examined the positive/negative influences of social media, which provided several dimensions helping to offer suitable measures for the optimum beneficial utilization of ICT at family level.

Keywords: *ICT; Education; Internet resources; Usage; Social media; cultural values*

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Today, society's spectrum is dynamically influenced by the usage of ICT, specifically the family institution. The use of technology has a dual influence on family; at the first level, it changed the lifestyle for individuals using technology and at the second level it has strong influence on family interactions (Katz & Rice, 2002). Its usage supplemented people's potential to make their daily routine life much easier and more manageable. Further, it allowed individuals to become more organized while using ICT based technologies by making communication and social interaction worldwide.

In Pakistan, access to social media and ICT technologies have been traced out since early 1990s and according to ITU report (IWS, 2009) reveals that, there are more than 20 million Internet users and about three million bloggers in Pakistan. Moreover, about four million Pakistani use Facebook. Pakistan ranked 26th position in the world in ICT and social media practices. While, the other technologies i.e. cell phones, TV etc. penetration rates are also increasing day by day. These technologies are easy to use, quick, efficient, and reliable to perform different routine tasks. Based on this scenario, the present study hypothesized a clear relationship between ICT/ social media and family institution in Pakistan and reaching effects of this relationship on future of the country. It is presumed that such facilities would allow the family institution to be open in interaction within the family with relatives and friends (and other cultures) irrespective of distance.

The family institution has now; instant access to news and information on topics of interest, issues, events and specially activities of friends and family members. Even, access to; health care, children socialization, utilization of technologies at domestic level, guidance and information on many possible domestic matters of family etc. are convenient. Currently, technology revolutionized the social structure of families and accelerated the pace of social change (Mesch, 2006). Social media and ICT helps

today's busy families stay in-touched with each other. It's a great benefit of these technologies that they make it so convenient for family members to reach in any emergent situation just on one message or call.

However, ICT has its negative influences as well, i.e. can also keep families apart. By observing today's lifestyle of families, it is evident that even if family members are gathered at home for dinner, they are busy with their phones, laptops, TV, checking emails etc. and mostly spend time in such activities. Apparently, the family seems physically close to each other, but is unable to pay attention or focus on each other's' activities. They become more habitual to pay attention to a beep, ping that indicate the delivery of a new message, email or a missed call (Casey, 2012).

1.2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explore family structures of the respondents
2. To assess the usage of social media by respondents
3. To find out positive effects of ICT on socio-cultural life of respondents
4. To assess negative consequences of social media on family life of the respondents
5. To suggest measures to maximize the benefits of ICT for family life

1.3. LITERATURE REVIEW

To assess the influence of ICT on family, current research debates often argued that, flourishing expansion of computer and Internet use will possibly change structure of family internal interactions. These researchers most often visualize centralized patterns i.e. conflicts arising; over children's autonomy, parental authority and control of the computer use (JFC, 2006). Further, the findings demonstrate that access to the Internet reflects existing stratification patterns in society with reference to financial status, education, rural/urban setup, migration, family background, and age. All such variables have strong correlation with adoption patterns.

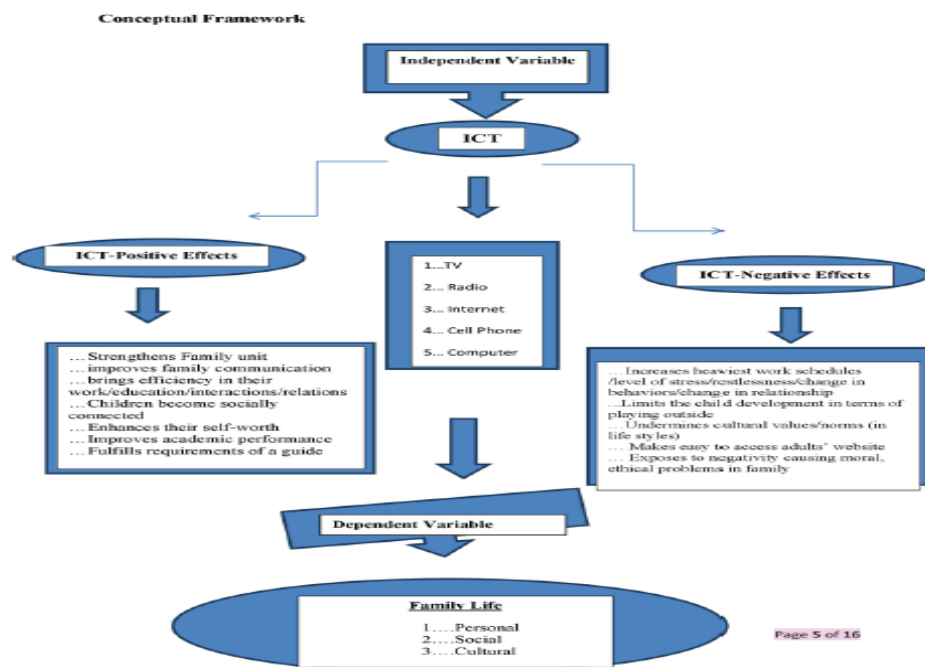
Among these indicators, Age is a strong predictor of adoption, as young people strongly rely on technological innovations for their successful survival in society as compared to older generation who are still distant from its adoption and/or intelligent utilization of such technologies (Haight et al, 2014). Increased utilization of ICT and Internet into the socio economic and family matters can influence the family (and work) relationships. The study JFC (2006) suggests that individuals of low confidence are often identified as major Internet users. This perhaps is a reflection on their behavior with respect to family cohesion. Impact of ICT on family relationships and life was used to demonstrate growing influence of socio economic technological advancement in society (Lanigan, 2009).

In another study involving survey of 178 families, it was revealed that children are more exposed to negative use of technologies and Internet. Perhaps this was because of casual un-informative and uncontrolled use of Internet within households. However, when parents' controls were active, the exposure to negative web content was decreased (Cho & John, 2005). The children's greater access however was major focus and cause of conflicts in family, revealed the study (Van et al, 2009). To solve such issues, the governmental ICT projects in Japan are rigidly focusing on "local community" and local governments are engaged in developing ICT to strengthen neighborhood relationships and regional networks (Umeda, 2014).

The current wave of social media interactions can be used for cohesion of "electronic communities" including distant family members, associates or community citizens etc. Young children could play an important role in frequent communications, informatics and interactions through a shared use of social media websites. New acquaintances and friendships can also be created. However, these may or may not be noticed or controlled by often busy or ICT unfamiliar parents (Kraut *et al.*, 2002). This however, tends to create "individualization" among closely living but "technologically separated" family members (Kaare *et al.*, 1995).

Even though ICT offers good opportunities and has a potential to link young generation with peers and experts of their choice, yet it weakens the traditional family culture. The youth are often “not at home” and spend time with their friends and electronic communities even though they are physically sitting inside home (Hertzberg et al, 2007). Technologies are progressively cutting old family relationships and building new open and largely uncontrolled electronic relationships (Hampton et al, 2011). Another important aspect and perhaps the soft influencing argument is about relationship between education and ICT utilization. In many ways, educational understanding could increase by referring to multiple content, examples and sharing opinions or getting reviews of seniors or peers. Education and ICT can be sound and significant if these kept beyond the political priorities in Pakistan. Urban area of the Pakistan is well equipped with sound facilities and education of recognized quality but rural areas suffer from this experience (Nawaz, et al, 2014).

1.4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



1.5. METHODS AND PROCEDURAL PROCESS

This research paper shares the quantitative analysis of a research performed at AIOU. The study was conducted at Islamabad and Rawalpindi regions with 200 postgraduate students (belonging to various parts of the country) at AIOU. Among sampled respondents, 144 responded and an overall response rate for the current study is 72%.

Specifically, to assess the effects of these technologies on family domains at i) social, ii) cultural and iii) individual level, purposive sampling technique was used for data collection. The sample consisted of both male and female respondents' views, which has advanced our understanding about how social media is shaping social, cultural aspects of family life and relationships of individuals in families. Data for the current study has been obtained by using pre-determined interview schedule as tool of data collection. The responses were recorded on five-point Likert scale and analyzed on SPSS-16 in the form of tables, percentages and discussion.

1.6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1.6.1. Backgrounds of the Respondents

This study emphasizes over the effects of ICT on individual and family life. The demographic data of samples revealed that 29% respondents belonged to urban areas. However, majority i.e. 72% respondents were from rural areas. ICT effects on rural families were also assessed. This may be a reason that more than half of the respondents (60%) were living in joint or extended family system. It is evident through various researches that ICT has very influential role in urban settings but the current study findings indicate that parallel to urban areas social media holds strong impact on rural lifestyle as well.

Finding reveals that share of female students was 53%. It further indicates that 46% of the respondents' monthly income was more than \$500, which reflects the middle-income

family groups in Pakistan. The survey data further reveals that majority (90%) of the respondents had family access to ICT facilities. Furthermore, a majority i.e. 94% were adults between 20-40 years of age. It is further revealed that among respondents 55% were married and 44% were single.

1.6.2. Positive usage of ICT in Family Life

Today, the world is characterized by enormous socio-economic and cultural variability; personal characteristics are often attributed on where a person is raised as child or an adult. Apart from this, the massive differences in living environments, whether rural or urban, an exceptional and amalgamating social media influenced culture has developed. It has in built challenges which usually outstrip the conventional social and family lifestyle.

Table-1 discusses the respondents' opinion about positive effects of ICT/social media usage on family life. The respondents were presented twelve (12) statements to record their view concerning positive role of social media. The families especially children are very much enthusiastic towards the usage of social media.

Findings of an earlier survey revealed (Groebel, 1999), that among usage of ICT, television ranked as most widely used medium by families and children up to 12-year-old globally. However, the current study developed a chain of positive influences on family life which included different questions. In response to 1st statement, "Family becomes close", 40% of the respondents were "strongly agree". However, 35% of them were not agreed and 25% were not sure about the social media role as bonding the family. The analysis of the study shows that still in a society like Pakistan, family cohesion is not strongly dependent on technologies though it has a changing influence (40% positive) on the family institution.

The 2nd statement was “Strengthening Family unit”, in response to this statement 42% of the respondents were strongly agree, 40% were disagree and only 18% were not sure about their point of view regarding that social media has role in strengthening the family as a unit. In continuation to assess the positive effects of ICT and social media on family, the 3rd statement was “improve the quality of family communication”, in this connection majority 57% of the respondents were strongly agree that ICT has enhanced the family communications, however 24% of them not agreed with the statement and only 17% of them were not certain about it. In addition to this, 4th statement “In touch with family when not physically close to them”, elaborates that a vast majority 89% of the respondents were strongly agreed with the statement, only 4% of them not agreed and 7% not responded to the statement.

Table-1: Distribution of the Respondents by their Opinion about “Positive Effects of ICT/Social Media usage on Family Life”

	ICT/Social Media usage has beneficial consequences for family life	Strongly Agree	Agree	Un-Certain	Dis agree	Strongly Disagree	Total
i	Family becomes close	(22) 15.3	36 25.0	36 25.0	29 20.1	21 14.6	144 (100.0)
ii	Strengthening Family unit	15 (10.4)	45 (31.2)	26 (18.1)	37 (26.9)	19 (13.1)	144 (100.0)
iii	improve the quality of family communication	23 (16.0)	60 (41.0)	24 (17.0)	26 (18.0)	11 (8.0)	144 (100.0)
iv	In touch with family when not physically close to them	62 (43.1)	66 (45.8)	10 (6.9)	5 (3.5)	1 (0.7)	144 (100.0)
v	It helps family to know about the schedule changes/dinner plans/sick children	37 (26.0)	61 (42.0)	18 (13.0)	21 (14.4)	7 (5.0)	144 (100.0)
vi	Its usage is beneficial for children in	30	66	19	19	10	144

	today's world	(20.9)	(45.8)	(13.2)	(13.2)	(6.9)	(100.0)
vii	It makes adults/children efficient in their work/education/interactions/relations	41 (28.5)	70 (48.6)	19 (13.2)	9 (6.2)	5 (3.5)	144 (100.0)
viii	Ease of being in touch due to ICT/Social Media enhances regularity in relationships of parents and children	27 (18.7)	53 (36.8)	20 (13.9)	29 (20.1)	15 (10.4)	144 (100.0)
ix	Children becomes socially connected when they use social media	20 (13.9)	51 (35.3)	26 (18.1)	39 (27.1)	8 (5.6)	144 (100.0)
x	Its usage makes children/adults by enhancing their self-worth	23 (15.9)	62 (43.1)	37 (25.7)	17 (11.8)	5 (3.5)	144 (100.0)
xi	Due to its usage children's academic performance improves	25 (17.3)	44 (30.6)	33 (22.9)	34 (23.6)	8 (5.6)	144 (100.0)
xii	It fulfills requirements of a guide for educational/health/other learning needs	35 (24.3)	74 (51.4)	20 (13.9)	11 (7.6)	4 (2.8)	144 (100.0)

Furthermore, the 5th statement is “It helps family to know about the schedule changes/dinner plans/sick children”, for this statement majority 68% respondents were strongly agreed, 19% not agreed and 13% not responded to this question. In the next 6th statement which was about, “Its usage is beneficial for children in today’s world”, majority 66% responded strongly agree along with 21% who were not coherent with the beneficial usage of media for children and only 13% were not given their opinion. In the 7th statement, “It makes adults / children efficient in their work / education / interactions / relations”, a clear majority 77% of the respondents strongly agreed, however only 10% not agreed and 13% were having no opinion on the question. It is evident by several researches as well the current study also supports that social media and ICT have great influence for family specifically in their routine activities including search for

educational materials, interaction among family members, and have an ultimate effect on the bonding of their relationships.

Besides, the above-mentioned statements, next was the 8th statement which was about, “Ease of being in touch due to ICT/Social Media enhances regularity in relationships of parents and children”, 55% of the study respondents were strongly agree with it, however 31% not agreed and only 14% were not express their opinion about the statement. Among respondents, 49% were agree or strongly agree with the 9th statement, “Children becomes socially connected when they use social media”, however, 33% of them not agreed and 18% were not expressed their opinion.

Moreover, respondents were asked in 10th statement about, “Its usage makes children/adults by enhancing their self-worth”, majority 59% of them strongly agreed this positive effect of ICT usage, 15% not agreed and 26% were not express their view about the asked question. When respondents were asked about, “Due to its usage children’s academic performance improves”, to this 11th statement almost half of the respondents 48% strongly agreed with 29% who were not agreed with the relation of ICT and academic performance of children. This identifies that the trend in the social media may be enhanced towards learning of children and families. Such groups may be established and enhanced. In the last 12th statement which was about, “It fulfills requirements of a guide for educational/health/other learning needs”, a vast majority 76% of the respondents were strongly agreed that ICT and social media no doubt playing a role of a guide which is really just on a touch distance for people in dealing their routine matters at family level related to children’s education, health, cooking, interior, and other learning needs. However, only 10% not agreed with these benefits of ICT and social media to the family.

1.6.3. Negative usage of ICT in Family Life

The current study also inquired about inappropriate Internet and social media usage. This may jeopardize the intellectual growth, health, safety, and overall socialization of children. Current research was designed to provide insights into children's/families' exposure to negative social media content and its effects on their inter-familial relationships. Table-2 discusses the respondent's opinion about negative effects of ICT/social media. The respondents were presented ten (10) statements to assess their opinion regarding negative role of social media in different aspects of family life.

Table-2: Distribution of the Respondents by their Opinion about "Negative Effects of ICT/Social Media usage on Family Life"

	ICT/Social Media usage has negative consequences for family life	Strongly Agree	Agree	Un-Certain	Dis agree	Strongly Disagree	Total
I	Increases heaviest work schedules/level of stress/restlessness/change in behaviors/change in relationship	41 (28.4)	67 (46.5)	22 (15.3)	7 (4.9)	7 (4.9)	144 (100.0)
ii	Children becomes socially isolated	40 (27.8)	70 (48.6)	13 (9.0)	16 (11.1)	5 (3.5)	144 (100.0)
iii	Makes children/adults depressed	20 (13.9)	46 (31.9)	41 (28.5)	30 (20.8)	7 (4.9)	144 (100.0)
iv	Children suffers in their academic performances	30 (20.9)	64 (44.3)	27 (18.8)	20 (13.9)	3 (2.1)	144 (100.0)
V	Limits the child development in terms of playing outside	56 (38.8)	65 (45.1)	17 (11.8)	4 (2.8)	2 (1.4)	144 (100.0)
vi	Alienating/isolating family members with/from each other	40 (27.7)	65 (45.1)	18 (12.5)	19 (13.2)	2 (1.4)	144 (100.0)

vii	Undermining cultural values/norms (in life styles)	33 (22.9)	71 (49.5)	21 (14.6)	15 (10.2)	4 (2.8)	144 (100.0)
viii	Makes easy to access adult website	57 (39.6)	59 (41.0)	12 (8.3)	13 (9.0)	3 (2.1)	144 (100.0)
ix	Enhances individuals' exposure to cyber bullying/hacking/pornography/online gambling/harassment etc.	55 (38.1)	65 (45.1)	17 (11.8)	6 (4.2)	1 (0.7)	144 (100.0)
X	Expose to negativity, causing moral, ethical problems in family	56 (38.8)	59 (41.0)	17 (11.8)	11 (7.6)	1 (0.7)	144 (100.0)

In response to 1st statement, “Increases heaviest work schedules/level of stress / restlessness / change in behaviors/change in relationship”, a vast majority 75% of the respondents were strongly agree with the statement that along with the positive effects ICT/social media like a double-edged sword has negative effects for family and children as well. By providing a number of opportunities it increases the possibility of achievement of different tasks which sometimes result in stress and restlessness. Subsequently the behavioral changes influence overall relationships among family members. Among respondents only 9% were not agree with the statement which shows the intensity of this issue. The 2nd statement was “Children becomes socially isolated”, in response to this statement a clear majority 76% of the respondents were strongly agree because now children depending more on ICT applications and find it easy to have friends on social sites as compared to go into the streets and parks for physical existence. For the current statement, 15% were disagree and only 9% were not sure about their point of view.

The 3rd statement was “Makes children/adults depressed”, 45% of the respondents were “strongly agree”, however 26% of them were not agreed with the statement and 29% of them were not certain. In addition to this, 4th statement “Children suffers in their academic performances”, elaborates that majority 65% of the respondents were

“strongly agree” while, 16% did not agree and 19% did not respond. In response to ICT “Limits the child development in terms of playing outside”, for this statement a vast majority 84% was strongly agreed, only 4% not agreed and 12% not responded. In the 6th statement which was about, “Alienating/isolating family members with/from each other”, majority 73% responded strongly agree. About 15% were not expressive with the negative consequences and 13% did not give their opinion. If negative consequences are not addressed, these may affect the future of family life.

The 7th statements, “Undermining cultural values/norms (in life styles)”, majority 72% responded “strongly agree”. Only 13% did not agree and 15% refrained. It is evident by several researches as well the current study also supported that social media and ICT also had negative influence for family. Next the 8th statement which was about “Makes easy to access adults’ website”, a great majority 81% of the study respondents were “strongly agree” with it, however, only 11% not agreed and just 8% did not express their opinion.

Among respondents, 83% were “agree” or “strongly agree” with the 9th statement, “Enhances individual’s exposure to cyber bullying/hacking/pornography/online gambling/harassment etc.”. However, just 5% respondents “disagree” and 12% did not answer. These findings also support the results of (Akhtar et al, 2011). No doubt, such exposure leads towards adults’ websites, bullying, and harassment sort of crimes which are increasing in Pakistani society. Moreover, respondents were asked in the last 10th statement about, “Expose to negativity, causing moral, ethical problems in family”, majority 80% of them strongly agreed this negative effect of ICT and social media usage. Only 8% not agreed and 12% did not respond to this question.

It is impossible to escape pervading influence of social media. In Pakistan, high media exposure had significant negative effects especially on young students (Khan, et al,

2011). The reference also emphasized negative exposure/influence on family relationships.

Since social media is opening global access/exposure to families/individuals, the value system in families will be quite vulnerable. It is envisaged that in future it may become outdated as ICT usage is growing fast. Pakistan is in more susceptible being a Muslim state it has a strong traditional history and it would be difficult to protect its family institution if negative influence is not controlled.

It could aggravate a great agony for the rest of society in near future as unchecked usage and unprotected access by youth, to vulnerable information; e.g. images, videos, and sites are causing a great concern among families. In current global scenario transmission of culture through media is an important factor. Media is considered a strong carrier of cultural values and norms (Akbar,2009). However, it should also take more measures to prevent negative impact on future children.

1.7. CONCLUSION

It's been evident that utilization of ICT at family level has diverse positive and negative effects. As a result, traditional forms of familial relations are increasingly being challenged and often overtaken. Social isolation, limited physical interaction, and undermining cultural norms and values among and between family members were causing intense ethical and moral problems for family institution and society at large. However, major findings of the current study also reflect that ICT and social media have enhanced family relations in situations where physical are not possible. It helps in bringing efficiency in performance of different educational or professional tasks by individuals. Also, it is a great help to get access to information related to learning needs by children and families. It can be envisaged from the current study that proper utilization of ICT offers the opportunities for improvements in today's modern family life. It is essential to equip the new generation with healthy and timely transmission of information to establish

a healthy modern society. The negative influences shall be presented by proper and guided utilization of social media.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The current study respondents were asked to suggest some suitable measures for improvement in the negative consequences and for maximum beneficial use of ICT/ social media. Following are their suggestions to control the negative influence and promote positive usage of ICT and social media:

1. The study results strongly recommend that to control the negative exposure of social media, the respective regularity authorities must ensure that unethical and immoral content is neither communicated nor accessible to the individuals. Pakistan Telecommunication Authority has stated taking initial measures to restrict adult sites in Pakistan.
2. Through dramas, movies and other social media sources Pakistani culture should be promoted. Islamic and traditional norms and values could be preserved and propagated.
3. There should be strict supervision on usage of ICT/ social media by the children and young members of the families.
4. Family members should be encouraged to use such technologies in a guided environment. Unnecessary and negative usage should be discouraged and youth may be educated.
5. Social media sites should be accessible for a specific time in a day so media addiction could be controlled.
6. In hostels/homes/cafes, ICT-social media only be available in common places/rooms rather than at private cabins.

7. Such technologies should be available and accessible for education and valued social relationships. These may also be provided to remote areas so that maximum people can get benefits.
8. A focus on strong ethical, religious, and cultural socialization of children is needed to protect family values.

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