

Internet Users Lived Experiences of Cultural (Values, Norms and Verbal Symbols) Changes in Iran Higher Education : Ethics and Philosophy topics

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Abstract: The present study qualitatively assesses Internet users' experiences of cultural changes. The type of method is phenomenological. Research participants were 14 university students from Khorasgan Islamic Azad University with intensity case sampling. The subjects were introduced by the administrator of the Internet site. Data collection was conducted by a semi-structured interview and data were analyzed by Colaizzi 7-step method. Total findings of this study after excluding common codes, including 236 concept codes that represented the experiences of participants in this study, were classified in three main themes as follows: 1 - Change of Values such as Opinions, Beliefs and Morality (" Change of Beliefs " and " Lack of the Observation of Moral Laws ") 2 - Norm Change ("Life Style Changing" that come from Change of Tasks Doing Way, Change of Communication Way, Accelerate of knowledge exchanging and Social Participation Changing and " Change of Identity "that come from False Freedom and Corruption, Distrust, Social Change and Change of Wearing Mode) and 3 - A Change in Verbal Symbols (" Influence of English Words in Farsi "and" Getting Loan Terms from the Internet "). These findings indicate that students have acquired a lot of positive and negative experiences while using the Internet which have affected the norms, ideas, beliefs, ethics and verbal symbols showing cultural changes in the society which mostly affect the young of Symbols, Internet Users

1. Introduction

"What is the culture of a place that is everywhere and nowhere, that is at once global but renders the globe obsolete, which globalizes the individual yet strips our individuality? This is the intriguing paradox that the Internet presents to us, one that requires us to look beyond what we can easily see or hear or touch"(Federman, 2003). The massive networks break geographical and political borders from above the planet and the sound and visual waves intrude all nations live privacies. These have made cultural boundaries pale. Cyber space has influenced language, literature, social identity and other dimensions of human life, and as a group of thinkers believe, culture is a symbol of spiritual growth and progress of a society, and the Internet has been effective in this regard. Giddens considered culture to be a set of values, norms and material goods of a particular group, taking it to be four real and irreducible elements of ideas and beliefs, values, norms and symbols. Therefore, this study combined total values _ the focus of religious beliefs and symbols _ the norms and symbols to be equivalent to the culture. Online interactions that cause these capabilities provide the functionality which can lead to the formation of new cultures. The Internet operates in two ways: first introduces and defines the dominant culture and on the other hand provides pathways for other cultures. Internet users have access to pioneering and leading cultural processes. Internet causes a bilateral connection. It can be said that if it is only used for entertainment, it is properly similar to the TV.

The internet is the global techno – social system that is based on a global, decentralized technological structure consisting of networked computer networks that store objectified human knowledge (Fuchs, 2008: 122).

Cybernetic is, fundamentally, concerned with control and communication and the relationship between a mechanism and its environment (Shaw, 2008: 89).

Cyberspace refers to the collections of human internal communication through computer and telecommunication devices without taking physical geography into account. The online system is a sample of Cyber space in which its users can communicate with each other through mail. Unlike real spaces, Cyber space requires no physical movements and all the acts can be done only through pressure on keys or "mouse" movements (Suler, 2008). Internet can be a lifestyle change that requires no face to face contact and that links thousands of people to each other.

Ogan (2007) notes that interactive media technologies such as Internet are altering the one-way media domination or information flow from the industrialized to the developing nations of the yesteryear (see Dizard, 2000).

From the point of view of globalization, in fact perhaps from any point of view, all of these developments pale in comparison to the creation of the first personal computers in the mid – 1970s, and then Internet in the 1990s. Personal computers and the Internet are now deeply implicated in and essential to all of technological developments mentioned above, as well as most others. Personal computers and the Internet paved the way for global Internet transactions and interpersonal relationships of all sorts (e.g. Facebook)(Ritzer, 2011: 135).

Nowadays, Face book has been able to gather the numbers of people together, regardless of their languages and nationalities, and has been able to make them closed in a friendly network that sometimes causes social changes through extending these communications.

Social changes facilitated by the diffusion of communication technologies in one society may no longer be confined by these artificial boundaries (Lin, 2007: 3).

Even if such changes wouldn't occur, we would deal with cultural changes by rotating the old thoughts and behaviors of people. Such a culture is drawn from cyber space which users can exchange among themselves.

Cyber culture is a life world of online meaning and value production and reproduction that is organized in the form of virtual communities. A virtual community is the subsystem of the cyber culture system of society (Fuchs, 2008: 303).

All this is the evidence of the events that happened and were influenced by the development of technology, information revolution and the Internet. Although technology innovations have the potential to become the equalizer for social, political, and economic development inequities among societies, but information and knowledge gaps exist within the borders an information society. These information and knowledge gaps, along with other cultural changes, are a result of how individuals use communication and information technologies to act as part of the cultural system in different social cultural setting.

It is clear that the influence of these mediated communication technologies has been evolutionary. There is a need to review these events and changes to make their influences clearer. In order to investigate the issue, this article tried to discover the real relationships resulting from due to cultural changes via the approach of phenomenology with regards to the comprehensive experiences of Internet users. This research aims at investigating the effects of the internet on some aspects of culture, like norms, beliefs and verbal symbols from the Internet users' viewpoints.

2. Research methodology

The present research is a qualitative study of phenomenological type. As the subject of study for this research indicates, understanding and experiences of Internet users of cultural changes are the main issue, and the University of Khorasgan was selected as a research environment. So, the researcher referred to the University site administrator to have access to 14 students who had used Internet more than others. After they expressed their willingness to participate and allowed the researcher to record the interview and they were assured of the confidentiality of their information, the interview started. After each interview, the text was transcribed on paper and coded, and then interviews continued one after the other until no more new information was received. Each time the interview took about 20 to 60 minutes, depending on the opportunity and willingness of participants. Interviews were conducted in a quiet part of the site in leisure hours as the students had accepted. Because the interviews were semi-structured, the researcher tried to hold the interview guide questions only in the framework based on the aims of the research. In the end, to ensure that proper content had been obtained, the written text was subsequently sent to their email address for confirmation.

In this study, after the information was clustered in categories of topics, the contents outside the categories were deleted; however, they was not much added content. Thus, the repeated, accurate and relevant facts remained and the validity of the research was established. In qualitative research, more credit is given to reliability. The basic question in reliability assessment is whether the

researchers see what they thought or not. There are three possible error types in this connection: 1) Accepting a relationship where there is no such relationship. 2) Denial of a relationship or a principle where there is a relationship in fact, and 3) finally, asking the wrong questions (Kirk & Miller, 1986: 29-30). The researcher tried to avoid such mistakes, as the Colaizzi process analysis entails. To ensure the accuracy of all general concepts, they were sent to all participants and their confirmations were received. Flick (2006) calls this method "Evaluation of reliability by communication method". The ability to conduct an interview is important for validity and reliability because in this type of research a researcher is considered a research tool. In order to achieve accurate and precise interviews, the researcher conducted two pilot interviews to test the accuracy of the instruments. The researcher tried to "Rebuild Reality" for reporting so that the reality could be expressed according to what is valid and factual.

3. Results

Interview text was analyzed by Colaizzi method. The findings from this study, after excluding shared codes, included 236 concept codes extracted from the interviews that were placed in three main categories and six sub-categories as it is evident in chart (1).

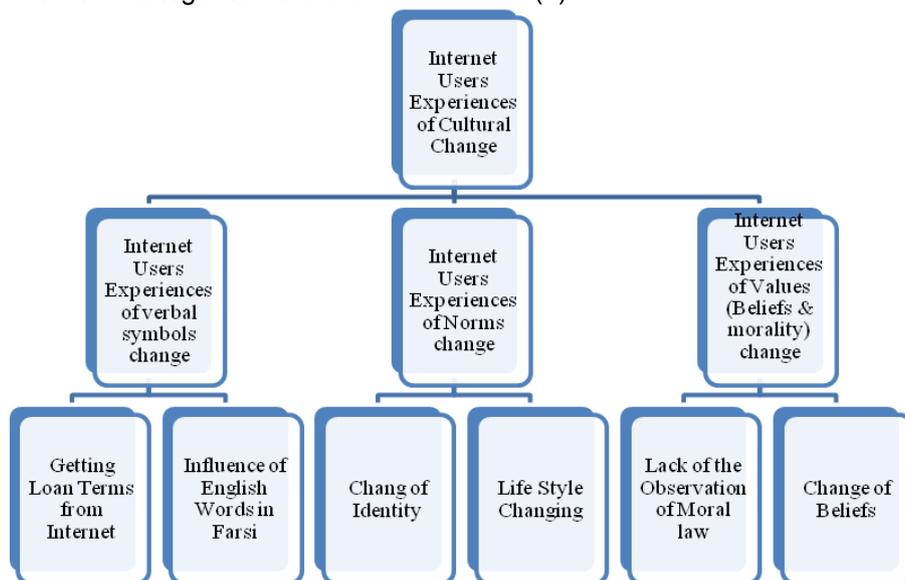


Figure (1) Internet Users Experiences of Cultural Change

3.1 Users' Experiences of Value Changes (Opinions, Beliefs and Morality)

Considering the experience obtained from the students, Internet has caused changes in students' opinions, religious beliefs and moral values, which are all valuable elements. In other words, this main concept consists of two main categories: "changes in thoughts and ideas" and "lack of observation of moral laws" as it is evident in chart (2). Some of the contents obtained from the integration of the concepts and terms employed by the participants are mentioned here: "For example, there are websites that affect the opinions of young people, especially those of beliefs, if the young are not strong "(Participant 9). "A site said, if you click here you will not play anymore" (Participant 8). "Ethics on the Internet are not adhered to and internet crimes are abundant, like hacking" (Participant 5).

3.2 Users' Experiences of Norms Change

Users' experiences significant changes in the circle that is being considered as norm: for example, it can be referred to participant (5) who pointed out that: "I do the services myself and that of my family online." For example, participant (1) says: "changes in communication have caused social changes " or student (10), who says: "When you send an email, it is not necessary to visit your professor.", "We get a conference and chat with some colleagues about the cooperation of various projects that we want to present by brain storming and complete each other's views" (participant 2). The outcome shapes with the group by the title of "lifestyle change and social activities". Also issues such as "In chats 99% of them lie" (Participant 5) and that "They change their identity and alter themselves, after that they may create a new identity and may believe in it and lose their goals" (Participant 8) "or perhaps even one day I may change my identity and say that I am not an Iranian " (Participant 1) or."

For example, some people went to certain sites and became members of a political group, cultural invasion issues or other problems affected them and they were completely changed "(Participant 9). This will be merged in a group by the name "Identity Change" as it is evident in the chart (3).

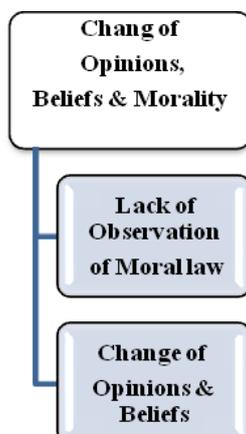


Figure (2) Internet Users' Experiences of values changes (opinions, beliefs and morality)

Katz and Rice (2002) conclude from five successive quantitative surveys (1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2000) that “users tend to communicate with others through other media (especially telephone) more than non – users do, meet more with their friends, and interact more with others in general, although in a more widely dispersed physical environment ... Clearly long – term Internet usage is associated with more, not less, frequent sociability” (Katz and Rice 2002: 135-132)

Philip N. Howard (2004:17), from a study based on more than 5,000 surveys, concludes that “overall, people who join society online believe that they know more people as a result”.

Al Lily(2011) notes the Saudi female population, which is characterized as sheltered, hard-to-reach and conservative, is arousing good interest globally (and nationally). He has provided a background to and justification for a forthcoming study in the form of a literature review, which examine how technology-facilitated communication has shaped the social–cultural pattern of Saudi female experience within academia.

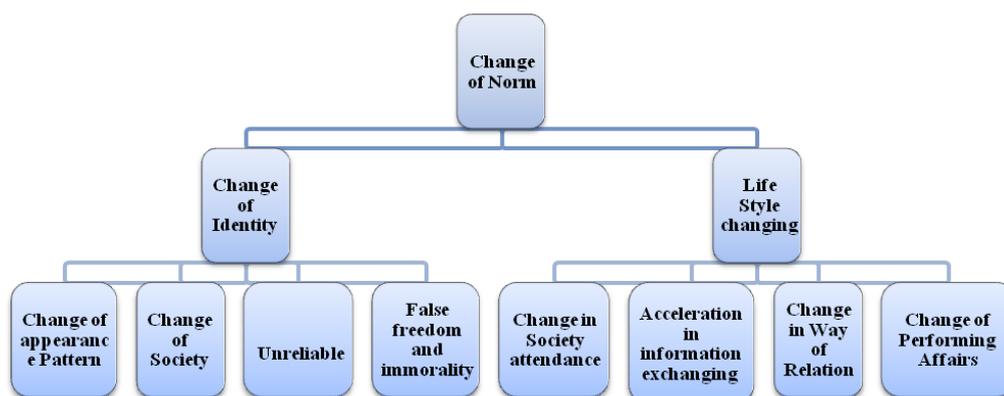


Figure (3) Internet Users' Experiences of Norms Change

3.3 Users' Experiences of Verbal Symbols Change

Research has shown in this part that Internet users have faced changes in cultural symbols, particularly verbal symbols and expressions in Persian as it is evident in the chart (4). For example, participant 6 says: "Internet affects Persian spoken language" or another participant (Participant 8) asserts “different characters and words are a lot and we use them without knowing their history and origin "and also" there are some words that we use in our daily lives and work with and we repeat them, like chat " or participant 7 acknowledged that "because you use the Internet you are forced to use English words, or the English text or know their meanings." The close connection between language, communication technologies, subjectivity and cultural forms is the concern of Marshal

McLuhan in his now famous books "The Guttenberg Galaxy" (1962) and "Understanding Media" (1964). Although Marshall McLuhan's (2001]1967[: 63) pronouncement that "we now live in a global village ..."

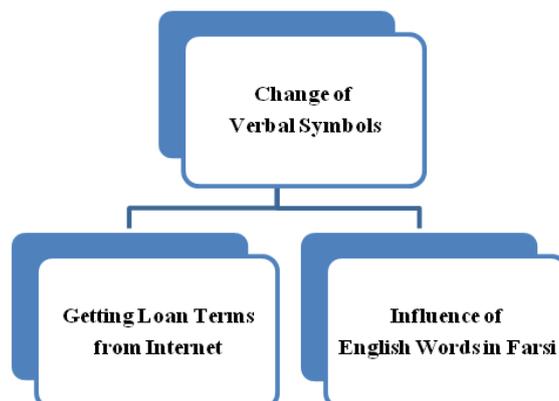


Figure (4) Internet Users' Experiences of Verbal Symbols Change

4. Conclusion

Culture (composed of values, norms and symbols) changes when faced with some new elements. It can be studied better if it is divided into its constituent elements. According to the findings of this study, Internet changes beliefs and religious beliefs and ethics of its users.

Religious belief and laws are regulations for the affairs of society and to develop people. Since the ideas and beliefs of religious communities are usually considered as community values, they are used as control or deterrent forces. Shoemaker (1996:157) stated that the deterrence theory can indicate that the correct and deviant behaviors have two reinforcing elements: an internal control system and an external control system. The hypothesis is that strong internal deterrent and external deterrent insulate the person against perverted behavior. Inner values and beliefs that protect human beings from committing error are the same powerful internal deterrents.

A young person with a weak external deterrent must be guided by the internal control system. If the outer shield is relatively strong and effective, the defense of his internal system should not play a critical role. Similarly, if the internal controls of the young person are not likely to equate common pressures, an effective external defense may help him control himself and provide acceptable behavior. But if internal defense works well, there is no need for the outer structure to intervene (Reckless, 1961: 42 - 46). But if the inner defense is not qualified because of the change in beliefs and opinions, does the external law suffice him? This issue highlights the importance of religious beliefs that can discolor or change false information mixed in cyber space usually with rich and diverse information.

College students were examined to test whether sensation seeking and perceived stress would predict abuse of the Internet by Velezmoro, Lacefield & Roberti (2010). Previous studies have found that disinhibition, boredom susceptibility, and total sensation seeking scores were related to Internet abuse. Because stress has been documented to have a negative effect on students and may be linked to Internet use, it was tested as a possible predictor of Internet abuse. This study also analyzed abuse of the Internet for sexual purposes, because sexuality is prevalent online, and college students are in an age of sexual exploration (Velezmoro, Lacefield & Roberti, 2010).

Clerc (2002) demonstrated in her study that everyday people use the Internet and copyright law reform should come into place. This indicates lack of moral principles and values regarding some issues that approve this research result.

Internet makes new norms which base them on new values but the values are not the former, just the same ideas, new beliefs have replaced them with no similarity because the Internet does not belong to a specific category of opinions and beliefs. Based on this problem changes in values and norms appear.

Other results indicate a change in cultural norms in the two sub-themes of "Changes in lifestyle and Daily Activities" and "Change in Identity" which both suggest nice and developmental changes and a change in national identity, ethnics, nature and Iranian positive characteristics. Findings of Na (2006) acknowledged the increasing use of the Internet affects the suitability of social activities

Hafeznia and colleagues (2006) also presented in their research the fact that expanding the relationship between globalization processes in the form of information and communication technologies (satellite and internet) with national identity showed that increased rate of use of information technology reduces the national interests.

Result of Rahmani & Gholamali Lavasani(2011) research revealed a positive significant relation ($P < 0.01$) between internet dependency with overall sensation seeking and sub scales of disinhibition and boredom susceptibility.

Another main code in this research shows changes in the form of verbal symbols in Persian. Symbols form a part of the culture of people that can spread easily in social interactions, that people learn them willingly or unwillingly. One of the most prominent symbols is language which is under the verbal kind and can be affected more due to different types of changes, especially where one language becomes dominant and the other recessive. Giddens believes that by communications revolution it is possible to connect computers to satellite technology so that one can communicate rapidly at any time with anyone and anywhere in the world, and this instant communication can change many aspects of our lives. It is here that slowly and sometimes with full acceleration, terms of one language drive into another, even sometimes there are no existing equations for some technical terms, therefore the same words are used.

Changes in values, norms and symbols can be considered as changes in cultural norms which ring the alarm for the future. Of course, it is not suggested to traverse all the nice things technology brings, rather we suggest making decisions, planning, guidance and in a word management for this generation and the next generation in order for them to minimize the problems and challenges. These necessary changes double and make clearer the consciousness of the authorities in culture so that they can take measures to preserve traditional values and norms of society in confrontation with new cultural policies and measures. In this regard, strengthening the family institution as a focus to maintain values and beliefs and to avoid deviations is more important than the past. It is also suggested to apply the advice provided by social institutions and civil society forces such as religious leaders, intellectuals and distinguished personalities to stand against the influx of media information more than before.

To prevent deviations, false freedom, and abnormalities that cover concepts obtained from this research, it is imperative to strengthen the national media or programs promoting our own culture as a proposed solution to confront the problems. One of the reasons expressed for changes is the delay of cultural emancipation of the society towards the issue. There should be public education in this regard. This technology is in progress. The professionals should be aware of the problems quickly before it is too late in order to identify the solutions and inform the people before the rising of any problem arises.

Disobedience of the law and ethics, which was one of the obtained codes, necessitates law enforcement units to make appropriate secondary institutions ready at a national level with appropriate technical facilities through all the media to discover lewd men, deception, Internet extortion and various fraud moves. People and families must be notified of existing risks and threats via the proper way, while caring, and suggesting that they should not do away with the Internet in general.

Stephen Coleman (2005) argues that blogs could help establish a new politics of listening in which everyone has a voice. They could become "sophisticated listening posts of modern democracy" and sources "of nourishment for a kind of democracy in which everyone's accounts counts" (Coleman 2005: 274).

Communication technologies have allowed us to share our experiences and cultures wherever these linkages exist. Even though national borders survive today, they're essentially political boundaries maintained by nation – states (e.g., Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Pelton, 2003).

Recchiuti (2003) identified three common motives - information seeking, interpersonal utility, and entertainment – to all three forms of CMC studied. Separate motives found for using e-mail included: (a) convenience, or because it is easy and comfortable; (b) pass time, or when they have nothing better to do; and (c) escape, or to get away from work and other pressures. Three motives were unique to IM use, including (a) escape; (b) companionship, or to overcome feelings of loneliness; and (c) anonymity, out of a desire to be anonymous. Two additional motives were identified for online chat room use, namely, (a) pass time and (b) benefits, which included companionship and anonymity reasons.

Toffler and Toffler (2006) remark that information and communication carry the potential to fundamentally alter our political, social, and economic relations in an age marked as the Third Wave. In addition they note, that information is a nondiminishing resource; that is, although industrial "rival good" like steel are used up when consumed, information is a nonrival good that can remain with senders and receiver

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