



Roles and Impacts of IT on new Social Norms, Ethical Values and Legal Frameworks in Shaping a Future Digital Society.

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1. ["Internet revolution" and "digital civilization,"]

The "Internet revolution" and "digital civilization," the term indicating dramatic changes in our economic system and social structures caused by information and communications technologies (IT), categorically represented by the Internet, have been a hot term uttered quite sometimes globally. That clearly reflects that the IT has been regarded as a major driving force of economic growth and critical factor in social changes, leading to shape our future digital society.

In the 21st century, the ages of IT, we have experienced a dramatic paradigm shift to knowledge-based information society, and subsequently witnessed the impact of IT and emergence of new social norms and ethical values and cultural trends from it.

[Individual point of view vs. public agenda]

For example, people make their own personal websites and blogs to share their memories with others and express ideas to the public. A piece of gossip or personal point of view in the internet could be grown into a big social issue and public agenda attracting big attention. With explosion of mobile communication and UCC, the potential influence of a few video clips in YouTube in the recent US election and mobile communication campaign in the last Korean presidential election are cases in point. Simple individual opinion or voice may not be easily disregarded, because ordinary citizens share thoughts and ideas, and post them online, then, form online communities and participate in social activism, thereby affecting the activities of the governments and political parties. The Internet gives people more of a say in what the government does. Consumers not only do online shopping but also post their complaints on the internet, which has drastically increased consumer power.

2. [Significant Probable Phenomena in the Societal Sphere generated by IT]

Under this circumstance, it is very meaningful to fully understand the impact and consequences of social and cultural changes through IT and correctly forecast what the future society will be. Significant probable phenomena in the societal sphere generated by IT would be described in the following three examples:

[Principle of online security and protection of the privacy and the basic human rights.]

Firstly, when it comes to anonymity in cyberspace, potential conflicts would be brewing between principle of online security and protection of the privacy and the basic human rights. Willful and malicious acts have been prevalent in cyberspace, defaming innocent people. For this, governments seek to restrict online anonymity for the purpose of protecting the human rights of the general public and privacy of individuals.

In contrast, civic groups argue that such measure would be too excessive on the ground that it infringes the right and freedom of speech. Potential conflicts between these two arguments seem to defy resolution, even going worse;

[Issue of trusts]



Secondly, trust in cyberspace emerges as an important issue, once the communications networks enable unprecedented level of convenience in the workplaces, homes, i.e., online shopping and e-transaction, which may affect the quality of life in a positive way. But, with sharing and reserving a large amount of information generated by and through internet, people have been drowned into the sea of information and at the mercy of internet. As a result, sometimes, people are at a loss to choose right information and safety of network security. Therefore, the issue of trusts in information, online commercial transactions and eventual human relationships is a hot issue.

Furthermore, technology developments, such as RFID or sensor network enables us to enjoy ubiquitous communications to some extents. But without common understanding of concrete implication of this development will lead to another issue of trust and privacy.

[Social activism and social capital]

And last but not least, social capital would increase along with explosion of online communities. The development of future digital society would depend on building close relationships with others and restoring common ties that bind people.

For this reason, it is intriguing that the human network and thus social capital, is increasing with the help of the Internet. People meet others in cyberspace, not knowing each other, share their interests, exchange information they need, help each other, and participate in social activism. All of this strengthen human relations and increase social capital.

3. [Current and Probable Cultural Changes through IT]

Likewise, the current and probable cultural changes through IT would be summarized into four aspects:

[Application and combination of IT to human]

Firstly, application and combination of IT to human may lead to major cultural impacts. Simply put, we may experience unprecedented human-cyberspace interactions: e.g., the substitution of mental and physical functions of humans by IT, such as robotics; emergence of "neo-nomadism" by ubiquitous mobile devices; digitalization of human body with the wearable computers;

[Collectivism and individualism]

Secondly, the development of IT may lead to weakening collectivism and feeding individualism, which in turn, increases the benefits of individuals, customized tastes and preferences and the role of pro-sumers;

[Focus on individual creativity]

Thirdly, the development of IT may encourage creative thinking in education, rather than current system of simple accumulation of knowledge. Information society may focus on individual creativity, and consequently may change all forms of education, not only at home, but in school or office, continuously affecting all patterns of work and leisure in the future;

[“Iconic society.”]

And fourthly, we can forecast the advent of "iconic society." The continued development of IT may lead to changes in communication methods and the emergence of iconic society where visual images, especially, moving pictures would be dominant format. Therefore, visual images as a key method of communication would generate extensive social and cultural changes.



4. [Present and Future Pictures and Challenges]

With some examples and prospects, the influence of IT on socio-cultural changes in shaping future digital society was reviewed. However, neither the rosy picture of the present or the future nor the gloomy one is drawn.

One thing for sure is that IT would serve as a catalyst for changes of society and culture and the development for new ways of life, which would act as positive or negative momentum, depending on how we use it.

To create positive momentum, it is essential to fully understand the influence and results of socio-cultural changes by IT and predict the direction of the changes.

Unfortunately, however, such changes have been unfolded in a rapid and diverse way, for which reason we cannot have a clear picture of future digital society and may feel uneasy about it.

However, since finding out where we are and where we are going may guide us to a better future digital society, understanding such changes and setting a direction would be necessary and prerequisite for the consistent and reliable future of internet and digital information society.