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The Impact of the Information Society on the Library and Information Science Profession

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Introduction

In the modern world, information has the power to transform the lives of people and nations. National development is influenced by the amount of available information. The idea of an "information society" is connected to this fact. There are different definitions of "Information Society." Access to information is crucial, and it is influenced by many factors. Balance among the factors is essential to shrink the digital divide (Rao, 2006).

Martin (1995) defined an information society as

a society in which the quality of life, as well as prospects for social change and economic development, depends increasingly upon information and its exploitation. In such a society, living standards, patterns of work and leisure, the education system and the marketplace are influenced markedly by advances in information and knowledge. This is evidenced by an increasingly array of information-intensive products and services, communicated through a wide range of media, many of them electronic in nature.

The information society is driven by information and communication technologies (ICT), along with new skills for the population, government support, and sustainability (Rao, 2006). Rao notes that ICTs can be seen as an instrument or an industry. ICTs are expanding into developing countries, but there is a large gap between those who can afford it and those who cannot. ICTs can have a positive impact on development and help close the gap.

Technology can be both a tool of development and a divider of the populace. It also can be misused. ICTs can strengthen education, public service, government, agriculture, and other industries.

Implementation of the Information Society

In developed countries, the Internet is a mainstream medium, but this is still not the case in developing countries. There are 500 million Internet users in the world, and 80 percent are in the developed world, while in developing countries only two percent of the population has access to the Internet (Rao, 2006). There is both anecdotal and theoretical evidence about the impact of the Internet and other features of the information society (Rao, 2006).

Political Implications

Governments are the largest producers and consumers of information. Governments organize and disseminate statistical data, which is used for decision-making. E-government allows direct participation by citizens in matters of public interest. Although the pace of change to e-government is not as quick as it could be, particularly in developing countries, changes are inevitable.

ICTs influence the lives of poor people in developing countries in different ways. It might take time before the impact is visible. Implementation has different implications for different areas of a country, and these factors must be taken into account when attempting to measure impact. The Internet has hosted social networks, activism, community networks, and e-government initiatives. Challenges include inadequate access, poor electricity, high costs, and lack of skills, infrastructure, and sustainability (Neelameghan, 1999). Governments accustomed to tight media control may be surprised by the instant global dissemination of information. This has resulted in Internet filtering in a number of cases. Also, despite the new opportunities for industry and culture, there is concern about the hegemony of Western culture enabled by globalization.

ICTs must be incorporated in the development plans of a country. ICT should ideally be driven by the government, with a clear ICT policy that contributes to the eradication of poverty. The policy should cover knowledge creation, transfer, and innovation. There must also be people in government who understand the ICT and can move it forward (Geldof, 2005). The use of ICT can influence the delivery of government services, as well as access to them and participation by citizens. Models of e-government include the wider dissemination model, and the service delivery model. One issue of particular concern related to e-government is Internet governance, including not only ownership, but also governance of and on the Internet. This is a complex issue which can be politically sensitive.

Social Implications

ICT has affected all aspects of life in both positive and negative ways. This has led to consideration of information ethics. Geldof (2005) observes that introducing ICTs is a social process. The social implications are as important as the technology. ICT is transforming communication. ICT can have a significant impact on the position of women in society. ICT has the potential to help poor women to improve their lives, but women are also often vulnerable, and may need protection from the negative aspects of ICT, as with human trafficking via the Internet. Social and cultural norms may constrain women's participation in ICT, as so a lack of literacy and education, language, infrastructure, as well as high costs (Geldof, 2005).

ICT can have an important impact on poor and marginalized people, and can improve education, training and employment. ICT can be used to alleviate poverty. There are still concerns about the social impact of ICT. If the digital divide becomes more severe, new generations could become estranged from their own culture.

Moral Implications

Froehlich (2004) notes that information ethics has grown as a discipline in library and information science, and has been embraced by many other disciplines, including journalism and business. Important work in the field has been done by Robert Hauptman, Barbara J. Kostrewski, and Charles Oppenheim, among others. The development of the Internet has had a profound impact on the field of information ethics.

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