Investigating and Analyzing Performance of ICT Offices in Providing Services to Rural Regions (Case Study: Rural Regions of Jiroft Township)

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction
ICT is a new approach which was created following the industrial age. It has penetrated, willingly or unwillingly, into contemporary institutions and organizations. The rural field is among those fields have received attentions for development of their ICT infrastructures in the recent decade in Iran. The expansion of ICT offices is one of the policies and strategies for development of rural settlements having been seriously pursued by regional planners in the recent decade. As a result, many offices have been established in villages. In this line, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology cooperating with communications companies in provinces started the project of equipping ten thousand villages in Iran with rural information and communication technology offices and consequently established rural ICT offices.

Methodology
The present study uses a descriptive-analytical method and is an extensive case study. To collect data, two documentary research and survey study techniques were used. To answer the research questions, relying on the theoretical framework, services of ICT offices in the framework were defined in terms of E-banking services, postal services, and Internet services. Evaluation of performances of rural ICT offices was calculated via the Total Performance Index Equation and with regard to the three mentioned dimensions.

$$TPI = (\sum_{1}^{3} \text{Perform})/3$$

The data collection method is field study including interviews with experts, direct observation, and the questionnaire. To analyze the data in the descriptive section, frequency tables, percentage, mean, SD, and coefficient of variation; and in the inferential section, t-test and multivariate regression were employed.

Results and Discussion
To evaluate the performance of ICT offices in development of villages in the study region, the TPI was employed. Findings indicate that mean scores of the performance of those offices in the villages of the study region is 2.511 with SD as 1.263. With regard that the total performance in the study ranges from 1 to 5, it can be said that the performance of those offices in the villages is lower than the average.
In addition, in the present study, dimensions and aspects of performance of ICT offices in providing services in rural areas were investigated. To investigate that the highest performance of ICT offices in providing services were in which dimensions of services for development of villages, the coefficient of variations was used. The results indicated that the area of e-banking services with mean scores as 3.06 and SD as 1.07 has the highest performance. After this dimension, the area of postal services with mean scores as 2.67 and SD as 2.31 and Internet services with mean scores as 2.02 and SD as 0.98 are in the next ranks.

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Conclusion
The development of ICT in rural areas is a necessity because they have been far from the process of economic and social development. Therefore, the thought of ICT offices in rural spaces has been shaped based on this theoretical principle that the function of ICT offices in those areas can contribute to better development of settlements via providing some special and fundamental services. With regard to the results, a rural ICT office, in case of providing its own services such as e-banking, postal, and Internet services can averagely prevent the loss of 9-10 hours of useful time for a rural person. The results of Single sample t-test also indicated that the total performance of ICT offices in providing services is lower than the average. According to this test, the highest performance of the ICT office in terms of rural development in the study area is related to e-banking services, while the lowest use is related to Internet services. The reasons for this issue may be villagers' unfamiliarity with different Internet services, low Internet speed, and insufficiency of equipment required by those offices. In addition, factors affecting the degree of using ICT offices were identified as age, education, income, the number of family members, and the degree of familiarity with computer. These factors can have significant roles in using services of ICT offices. The results of multivariate regression analysis indicated that with the increase in the education level, income, and the degree of using computer, grounds available for developing ICT increases as well.

Key words: ICT offices, post-bank services, internet, rural development, Jiroft County