

## Examination and Analysis of the Effects of Information and Communication Technology on Social Identity of the Youth Living in Meshgin Shahr City

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### Extended Abstract

#### 1. Introduction

Information and communication technology is not bound by geographical borders; it transforms and revolutionizes social constructs across human settlements such as cities and villages. This technology alters various lifestyles, and expands and deepens the effectiveness of social interactions in rural societies while replacing traditional identities with modern ones. Since a considerable number of rural residents, particularly the youth, use modern information and communication technologies for pastime, they are influenced by a set of values promoted through such technologies. In this study, the effects of information and communication technology on social identity of rural youth are discussed and examined.

#### 2. Review of Literature

There are two perspectives employed in this study. In the first view, information and communication technology is regarded as a process transforming mindsets and objectivity by embracing all aspects of life. By integrating the world organically and changing it to a larger, more unified collective (i.e. the bigger “us”), this technology results in various cultures to become more inclined towards being adapted to one another. Yet, according to the other perspective, there is a purpose behind the expansion of information and communication technology. Meanwhile, the West seeks to rule the information realm and dominate other countries by exploiting different technologies, especially digital and satellite communication technologies and offering them to other countries through cultural homogenization and value integration, the West is promoting its transcendental culture across countries. These two perspectives are employed in order to provide explanations for the research questions.

#### 3. Method

The present inquiry is a descriptive-analytical survey study with development purposes. In this study, data collection was done using surveys (primary data) and library studies (secondary data). The instruments used were questionnaires and interviews. The total population of the study included the entire young residents of

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villages with ICT offices around Meshgin Shahr city. Of 49 villages with ICT offices, 14 were selected using random sampling. Accordingly, the total population of the study was 9942 individuals out of whom 370 were selected as the sample population using simple random sampling. On the other hand, 370 residents of rural areas with no ICT offices were also selected as the control group. Raw data were collected in order to measure the indices through interviews, observations, questionnaires, and library documents.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

During the past decades, rural regions have been witnessing significant transformations by shifting to modernity which follows developments initiated by expanded social communications and increased interaction of rural residents with individuals outside rural societies. Therefore, it is the duty of authorities in the area of rural development to pay special attention to these social changes caused by the expansion of modern communication technologies in their planning.

In this study, social identity was examined according to the geographical aspects of villages with and without information and communication technologies. To this end, first the findings were described and then explained. To assess the significance of variables, Mann–Whitney U test was employed. According to the results of this test, the villages with ICT offices enjoyed more religious, national, collective, and gender identities as compared to the villages without ICT, except for family and individual identities.

#### 5. Conclusion and Suggestions

The results of the study showed a positive relation between national identity and gender identity variables at 1% error. According to this relation, the more youngsters use such technologies, the more their social identities shift towards transformation and modernization. Moreover, a significant difference at 5% error was observed between the villages with and without ICT offices in terms of religious and collective identities. In addition, no significant difference was observed between these two types of villages in terms of family and individual identities. Ultimately, given the findings of this study, it is worth pointing out the necessity to take certain steps in line with enforcing the local culture and social empowerment of the youth living in Meshgin Shahr rural areas. It is also essential to enhance their cognitive capacities and utilize various sources of knowledge on culture so as to promote and protect positive elements of the rural culture, particularly for the youth living in the region of the study. This can prevent identity and the *meaning crisis* and enable identity restoration. It is essential that religious conventions as well as the traditions and customs of Meshgin Shahr rural youth be protected and that sufficient information should be offered so that these conventions can be internalized.

**Keywords:** Information and communication technology, Social identity, Rural youth, Rural development, Meshgin Shahr City

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