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A Review of the Reimagined Network Society's Link Between ICT's and Social Work

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is going through a very significant cultural shift that is based on ICT (information and communication technology). The social incarnations of the internet, cellphones, and tablet computers are among the new technology that are influencing communication patterns and helping individuals blend their online and offline lives. This topics paper makes the theoretical argument that, in order for social work to be relevant in the age of the network society, it must get over its historical resistance to embracing ICT. It does this by drawing on the idea of the Network Society through reviewing related articles. Specifically, we contend that social workers should start a conversation about the necessity of practice-led ICT systems with IT developers, social service managers, and funding agencies. This study looks at the tumultuous history social work has had with technology advancement and comes to the conclusion that a practice-led approach to ICT usage in research, practice, and education offers a solid basis for rethinking the interaction between ICT and social work.

Keywords: Online; Social Work; Social Work Education

Introduction

Ogunsola & Aboyade (2005) Nigeria and a large portion of the global population are undoubtedly seeing the fastest technological and cultural change in human history. Virtuality becomes an essential dimension of our reality is the result of a total shift brought about by fundamental changes in communication patterns over the course of two decades, made possible by a revolution in communication technology (Ropoly 2015). The idea that Nigeria is quickly moving towards a future in which most people will have access to strong information and communication technology (ICT) at their fingertips is not hyperbole. Social work must interact with the network society in this rapidly changing environment and create practices that address the drawbacks as well as the benefits of technology advancement (Cascio & Montealegre 2016). Social work, however, has had a tumultuous connection with technological development and ICT up to this point, according to historical perspectives (Reisch 2013).

The main cause of this tumultuous connection is the way social work practice has been forced to adapt to technological development (Freenberg 2010). In order for the social work profession to play a significant role in collaborating with other professions to create and execute fresh approaches to address the demands of the network society, it believe that a shift towards a more practice-led approach is needed (Hawkins & Wilson, 2017).

In order to address the issues regarding technology-led methods that have been brought up in the social work literature, this study starts by describing the historical relationship between social-work and technological transformation. Next, the suggest that a more practiced strategy to utilising ICTs in the modern setting and take into account any potential ramifications for social work practice, research, and education.

Power within Network Society

Van der Merwe & Van Heerden (2009). A complex idea, power in social networks is essential to determining relationships, influence, and interactions within the network. Social networks are made up of people or groups linked together by many kinds of interactions, such friendships, professional connections, or common interests. Cross & Parker (2004) these networks have power structures built into them that affect the decisions and actions of the people who are a part of them. Comprehending the power dynamics within social networks may offer valuable perspectives on the distribution and use of influence, impacting both individual and group behaviours (Ibarra & Andrews 1993).

Technological Development and Social Work: An Unsettling Past

Blin & Munro (2008) the theme of ongoing adaptation, transformation, and occasionally resistance characterises the history of technology progress and its effects on social work. Technology's rapid advancement presents social workers with both possibilities and problems, requiring changes to practice, communication, and service delivery. The dynamic interplay between technology improvements and the profession's dedication to serve vulnerable communities is shown by this stormy history (Norris et al. 2008).

Early Evolution: The Telephone's Arrival

Frischer (2023) the first big technical shift that affected social work was the invention of the telephone in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The telephone transformed communication, making it possible for social workers to interact with clients more effectively and swiftly. It made agency collaboration easier and gave people in need of assistance a lifeline. But there were also worries regarding the quality of connections between social workers and clients and the possibility of less in-person engagement due to the telephone (Waugh & Streib 2006).

The Revolution of Computers: Paper to Digital

Maschi & Killian (2011) the computer revolution of the late 20th century had a significant impact on social work practice. The digitalization of records made possible by computers increased the accessibility and efficiency of information management. With the advent of case management software, social workers could now monitor the development of their clients, communicate information among agencies, and automate administrative duties.

Social Media's Ascent: Outreach and Engagement

Rumbawa et al. (2016) the social work field has seen significant change as a result of social media platforms. These platforms provide creative means of advocating for social justice, increasing awareness, and interacting with clients. Social media may help social workers reach a wider audience, spread information fast, and inspire community members to take action together (Bingham & Conner 2010).

Modern Innovations: Telehealth, Big Data, and AI

Amjad et al. (2023) technological innovations including big data, telemedicine, and artificial intelligence (AI) have started to transform social work practice in recent years. Large volumes of data may be analysed by AI and big data to spot patterns, forecast results, and guide evidence-based behaviour. Social workers may now offer services remotely thanks to telehealth platforms, which makes them more accessible to clients living in underserved or rural locations.

Specifying an ICT-led Approach for Practice-led Social Work Practice

Baker et al. (2018) when it comes to the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in social work, a practice-led approach places an emphasis on integrating these tools and systems in ways that are determined by social workers' needs and practices rather than just by technological breakthroughs. This strategy makes sure that technology supports and improves social work practice rather than detracts from it and is consistent with the fundamental ethical standards and values of the field (Reamer 2015).

Social workers and ICT in the Workplace

Symon (2000) the workplace has seen a substantial transformation as a result of the social work profession's incorporation of information and communication technology (ICT), which presents both possibilities and problems. ICT is having a significant influence on social workers' duties, practices, and workplace dynamics as it develops. This shift calls for a sophisticated knowledge of the ways in which ICT might improve social work practice while recognising the possible drawbacks that come with technology improvements (Suskin 2015).

ICT and Social Work Research

Though the above-mentioned workplace-related concepts start to take social work in a more practice-led direction, additional research is required to create and assess practice-led methods in order to lay a solid foundation for more comprehensive structural alterations. The effects of what Barnes & Rudge (2005) referred to as the "culture of real virtuality" have been the subject of research in recent years. Research on ICT interventions for historically disadvantaged groups, including youth (Chan 2018), recent immigrants (Taylor, 2011), and those with disabilities (Barak 2008), is always growing. Studies examining the effects of ICT use and training on senior citizens are becoming more numerous.

When compared to a control group that did not receive the training, research by Frisque et al. (2008) that looked at the effects on elderly participants (mean age of 80) who received computer and internet browsing instruction found significant improvements in measures like life satisfaction, depression, loneliness, and self-control. Similar advancements have been seen by other investigations (Sum et al., 2008; Wright, 2000; Xie, 2007).

Lastly, study on the most effective ways to deliver the advantages of ICT to the social work field while simultaneously protecting secrecy and privacy (Garrett, 2005; Gelman, Pollack, & Weiner, 1999). In fact, one of the most important concerns facing the industry in the new millennium may be that of internet privacy.

Conclusion

For the field of social work, the fast development of technology and the ensuing social and cultural changes predicted by Barnes & Rudge (2005) will present both possibilities and problems. In the past, social workers have been crucial in helping people and communities deal with the difficulties brought on by the quick advancement of technology. The current environment makes it clear that social workers must think about how network logic and network forms of power are influencing their work and how they might innovate and modify their current approaches to suit these new demands. It is imperative for practitioners to adopt and utilise novel technology for the benefit of their clients, communities, and practice. There's a good chance they won't be able to come up with fresh, creative answers to the big problems facing us if they don't accept technology as a practicing tool. The social work profession will be better equipped to address the issues of the network society if social work's connection to ICT is reimagined based on practice-led principles.

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