IMPLICATIONS OF ICT ON BELIEFS AND TRADITIONAL BEHAVIOR NORMS AMONG THE ARAB YOUTH IN ISRAEL

Zuhaira Najjar and Roseland Da'eem
The Arab Academic College for Education in Israel-Haifa, Israel

Abstract

This study presents and discusses differing views about the implications of information communication technologies (ICT) on Arab traditional culture in Israel. It analyzes perceptions of the participants regarding the contribution of ICT to changes and developments in Arab culture and its implications on youth behavior and cultural concepts. Findings show that ICT is perceived as a technological development that conceals positive and negative consequences. The encounter between ICT and Arab society has created processes of social and cultural change. The accelerated development in ICT dominates Arab youth life intensively. Therefore, youths perceive their traditional culture as meaningless and incompatible with current day life.

Introduction

Culture reflects values, beliefs, perceptions and interaction with the other. In all human societies people consciously create patterns of behavior amongst and between their members and the physical environment in which they live. These patterns usually direct, guide, control and stimulate people towards harmonious social existence (Scupin & DeCourse, 2001). What constitutes people's culture is what they believe and use as artifacts, the way they communicate, their mode of dressing, their thoughts and the way they relate with each other on a regular basis and is equally transmitted from one generation to the other.

The developments of human culture deeply affect the human soul and create in the human being new perceptions regarding the human existence to which he or she belongs (Al-Rasi, 1967). In the current era, developments in information technologies and the increasing employment of computerized systems are perceived as fundamental factors that contribute to the developments in human culture and occupy the main discussion that focuses on various kinds of processes and changes. The development and employment of ICT is obvious in this regard, and it opens different windows onto various worlds and enables open communication with all the parts of the globe.

Digital technologies have transformed the cultural scene profoundly. New forms of creation, production, distribution, access and participation have revolutionized entire industries, such as book publishing, education, arts, entertainment, etc. McLuhan asserts that with every technological and social "advance,"

> All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their
> personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical,
> and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched,
> unaffected, unaltered. ... Any understanding of social and cultural
> change is impossible without knowledge of the way media work as
> environments. (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967/2001, p. 414)

McLuhan's remarkable observation that societies have always been shaped
more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the
content of communication, is undoubtedly more relevant today than ever
before.

Different types of human communication become available by the aid of
different means of communication, starting with oral or written
communication and ending with sophisticated means such as ICT. A culture
that is based on oral communication is different from the viewpoint of
creation, presentation, understanding and preservation of symbols and
messages from written culture, printing or electronic communication. This
difference is connected to ways through which people in such cultures see,
hear, remember, learn, and act. These types of communication affect and
design the manner in which society and culture communicate with themselves
and within themselves. Around them, new social structures are built that affect
and are affected by the means of communication.

The approach of *technological determinism* (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967/2001)
claims that technology, including the computer, has a central power in
designing the given manners and style of society. Technological changes are
likely to cause deep political and cultural changes as they change the structure
of information and knowledge, the power in society and the possibility of
human beings to communicate and associate with each other. Postman (1998,
p. 40), argues that new technologies create new types of human beings:

> A new type of clear determinism is recognizable here with regard to
> the described fictional world; technology has already arrived, and we
> have to use it because it is here; we will turn into the people that
> technology wants us to become; whether we liked it or not, we will
> redesign all our institutes in such a way that fits in with technology…

Carey (2009, p. 160) stated, "Changes in communication technology affect
culture by altering the structure of interests (the thing thought about), by
changing the character of symbols (the thing thought with) and by changing
the nature of community (the arena in which thought developed)".

Arab society in Israel is a traditional society in its basis and has unique
cultural characteristics. Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the Arab
population has been undergoing processes of continuous change in which
many factors, starting from approximation of Israeli culture, and ending in
economic competition and achievements. Among the generations that were
born and educated in Israel, a bicultural system approach was born, which is
also characterized by bilingualism, and internalization of Israeli social values,
etc. (Rouhana, 1987). However, these changes did not affect fundamental
cultural values as the Arabs continued to preserve their cultural experience

and continued living as a minority that is different from the majority, not only in their ethnic origin and their national belonging and attachment, but also in their language, religion, traditions and lifestyle (Al-Haj, 1996; Najjar, 1998). The process of introducing computers into Arab society and the Arab-Education System in Israel started in the second half of the 20ᵗʰ century. In the late nineties, this process was enhanced, and the employment of ICT entered nearly all fields of life. Najjar's (2003) research findings show that ICT accelerated the processes of change in Arab society, increased the number of factors that are active in it and affects its cultural nature and its traditional characteristics.

ICT's accelerated development has intensively dominated Arab society, especially the lives of youth. The youth do not find a meaningful place for traditional values and principles in their everyday life. They are more independent, and their behavior is uncontrollable. They demonstrate superiority to everything called traditional culture, including their parents and their extended family.

This study examines the interaction between ICT and changes in cultural perceptions among Arab youth. It analyzes perceptions of the participants regarding implications of ICT on beliefs and traditional behavioral norms among the Arab youth.

Study Questions

1. Is introducing ICT into the Arab society in Israel perceived as a contribution to the changes and developments in the Arab traditional culture?
2. Are the people who use ICT aware of its implications for youth behavior?
3. Does the introduction of ICT into the Arab society affect cultural conceptions among Arab youth?

Methodology

The present study was carried out according to the qualitative approach in order to examine cultural processes in light of the encounter between ICT and Arab society. This study followed Sabar's method (2006) of examining individuals' subjective realities found in participants' perceptions. Often, the goal is to either describe or understand a certain aspect of human nature or experience. However, rather than use quantitative methods, qualitative investigators adopt a more subjective, personal approach. The developments and changes found due to ICT were examined through participants' subjective realities- realities that help us understand the social and cultural phenomenon through the exposure and examination of individual perspectives.

Sample

The sample includes 33 participants: 11 educators, 11 pupils, and 11 parents. The participants were chosen from 14 schools in Nazareth: 8 middle (junior high) schools and 6 high schools. In choosing the sample an attempt was made to create maximal representation of the population being studied via basic and

specific characteristics such as age, sex, education and socio-economic level. Judgment sample, also known as purposeful sample, is the most common sampling technique (Miller & Salkind, 2002). In it, the researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question.

Data Collection
The data collection technique in this study used structured interviews, with the purpose to learn about the interaction between introducing ICT into the Arab society and the cultural implications and in order to get an impression of the cultural and social components of the study sample.

Data Processing
The data were processed and analyzed according to qualitative research methods. Empirical material gathered from interviews was processed into texts, and each text was analyzed into content units. The content units were categorized and sub-categorized as joint topics and went through a quantitative process (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). After the categorical structure was solidified, the findings were surveyed, analyzed and discussed. The primary categories found were: (a) perception of ICT in the Arab society, (b) implications of ICT on youth behavior, and (c) impact of ICT on cultural conceptions

Findings and Discussion

In the current era, people believe that technology works well, and they rely on it and accept its promises. However, they feel its shortcomings when access to it is not allowed to them when they are satisfied with it (Postman, 1998). Research shows that ICT affects the traditional culture and contributes to significant changes in cultural concepts, especially among the young generation. However, regarding the manner of its affects, they are manifold and diversified. (Barakat, 2000; Najjar, 2003).

Perception of ICT in the Arab society
In general, ICT is perceived in Arab society in Israel as a factor that influences the existing traditional culture, but regarding the manner of its influence, attitudes are diversified: 22% of the educators and the students think that the impact of ICT is positive thanks to the comfortable exposure to international cultures and thanks to the large amount of information that the Web makes available to all users, irrespective of their social or cultural affiliation.

One participant noted:
> ICT is a great comfortable source of information, an international communication tool that approximates people from the whole world to one another. The Internet opens to the Arab woman and the Arab children a window onto the world that is not controlled by the people who surround them. It enables them to reach virtual places that are impossible to reach in real daily life.

In this section of people, ICT is conceived of as a great data base, a practical store of information that gives answers to people with special needs in all fields – a fast and effective international means of communication, which, un-

like other means of communication, breaks the borders of time and place at the lowest cost. Besides, it connects between Internet groups from all parts of the world. Exposure to the culture of the other broadens horizons, and the network that spreads into all directions enables people to visit places that the actual reality does not allow them to reach.

On the other hand, 45% of the participants think that ICT's influence is bidirectional. The way it is used and the degree of exposure to it are the elements that decide the type of its effect – positively or negatively. This attitude is common to all the participants from all the social sections.

One parent stated:

> ICT is a tool that can be used positively or negatively and its effect is also either positive or negative. It is a medium of communication that enables to have a link to all kinds of fields and therefore, it is not just a store of information but beyond that. Exposure to immoral sites has negative effect and forces itself on cultural values.

Communication by ICT is more efficient, and collecting of information is easier and more comfortable. However, the doors that this technology opens for free information allow nonintellectuals to express themselves, to adopt an equivalent status with other intellectuals, and thus, to influence the contents in their own ways and according to their interests. On the other side, it allows them to influence the users and society as a whole. In this context, it is important to point out that people of economic and technological power control the ICT industry. This situation creates imbalance in the information that serves mainly the people who have power.

In view of this, ICT is not a neutral data store; it is beyond that. The goals of communication can lead to a reliable or unreliable information store, and, thus, the effect of ICT on learning and culture will be according to the reliability of the site. The "positivity" or "negativity," the "danger" or "benefit" will be subject to the tendencies of the person himself. But still the person's curiosity to discover the hidden, in addition to the temptation of advertisements that the common sites suggest to the users, interferes in the users' decisions.

On the other hand, there are about 33% of Arab educators in the study who see only the negative influence of ICT. This attitude is due to the free exposure of immoral contents that put the cultural values at a great risk.

According to an educator:

> The effect is negative because the exposure that ICT allows does not contribute to the education of children, but the opposite. We did not protect our fine values and did not change inefficient things, but became more superficial whether in our external appearance or in our behavior.

Behind this conception lies the discernment that non-guided superficial exposure that lacks any educational goals of contents in the net does not deepen existing cultural understanding and does not develop new cultural insight; on the contrary, this conception causes abandonment of high cultural values and contributes to the creation of a tendency of superficiality that is expressed in external appearance and immoral behavior, especially among the young people. This perception is ostensibly realistic but, in its basis, it is not connected to ICT only, but also to the users and the contents that they look for and internalize. It is possible to suppose that this point of view is connected to the students' behavior and the difficulty that the educators find in dealing with such behavior. In this context, Aljabary (1994) argues that Arabs have to adapt themselves to the new reality not out of submission but out of awareness and ability to control the new developments.

Implications of ICT on Arab Youth Behavior
Of the participants, 50%, especially educators and students, see ICT as a factor that has a negative effect on the youth because of the uncontrolled exposure to dangerous information and the parents' ignorance of their children's activity on the Web. This contributes to cultural and value disintegration among the youth and causes health damage to them. This is the view of 71% of the educators, 43% of the students and 30% of the parents.

An educator said:

> The danger of the Internet lies in its influence on the children's behavior that results from their uncontrolled exposure to dangerous information such as pornography, terror, violence and robbery.

A student said:

> I think that's what happens to teenagers, they are losing their direction because they don't know how to act, and the result is less values, aggression, audacity, and physical damage due to prolonged sitting and stress.

ICT is a world in itself where everything is open and penetrable. The children's tendencies and their curiosity, together with the temptation that many sites offer, attract the young generation to inappropriate directions of ethical information such as pornography, and to other sites that represent contents of violence, suicide, murder, robbery and terror.

Tyler (2002) pointed out that because people do not want to, or are unable to, restrain themselves on the Internet, they behave in an immoral way because it creates anonymous conditions for communication and expression. Tyler also introduces similar concerns connected to other arenas on the Internet starting from children's gambling to pornography. In such cases, people use the Internet to behave and perform things that they would not be able to do in non-anonymous situations. ICT provides access and permission to anyone who is interested in sexual materials or gambling or violent and threatening expression on sensitive subjects such as nationality, race, religion, etc.

The ICT communication environment allows applications such as Chat, WhatsApp, and Instagram, attracts the children and occupies a large space of the time that is intended for pastimes and recreation with the family, studies or free time. Communication through these environments is mostly aimless and empty of any cultural or educational content. Subrahmanyam, Kraut, Greenfield, & Gross (2000), found that the youths communicate with their friends through chat in order to exchange a short conversation, some gossip, and news of the day according to their taste. The study findings show that ICT allows creation of relations and acquaintances between boys and girls that are likely to end in a meeting in reality. Such relationships are probably appropriate for Western culture, but not appropriate in the traditional culture, and can lead to undesired outcomes.

These things reflect the new reality of the young people in the era of ICT. As a result, around their E-activity and their connection with virtual communities, the young people build their own secret social and physical circles and groups. They withdraw into themselves, keep away from their family members, and even create immoral virtual relations. From their point of view, this is an expression of dissatisfaction and rebellion against the traditions.

The changes that take place in society today show a phenomenon of over permissibility among young people. In addition, a long sitting opposite the computer screen is at the expense of physical activity, such as sport and physical fitness, which are very significant from the point of view of development and health.

Opposition of educators in this regard is strong and absolute in comparison to parents and students. The difficult mission of education is put on educators – education, teaching, inculcation of cultural values and raising achievements. They are the ones who come into intensive contact with the students and they are the ones who experience the significance of the unguided and uncontrolled exposure of students' behavior, their approach to others and their thoughts. The more the progress develops and the exposure increases, the coping with the youth becomes more difficult. This harms the teachers' commitment to their students and performing the obligations of their position.

In spite of that, it is appropriate to point out that ICT is not free of positive effects on young people. The field points out a lot of samples of the use of ICT by young people for the needs of learning and its contribution to increase their personal, social and cultural awareness, and to provide tools to cope with unknown cultural situations.

ICT is perceived as a technological development that carries within itself positive and negative elements. The kind of impact it has on young people is subject to the goal and tendencies of its user as it is also subject to the contents carried. ICT, according to McKenna and Bargh (2000), is a kind of "social laboratory" in which people test their tendencies before they adopt them rather than a "place" where people hide from the taboo or hidden personal aspects. It enables people to perform activities that they are already involved in in other ways but in a more effective way and more open possibilities in order to meet

their needs. In order to achieve the positive potential at all levels, it is important to inspect children's surfing and limit it to fixed time frames.

Impact of ICT on Cultural Perceptions
A decade after the gradual entrance of computers into Arab society, information technology was conceived of as an additional factor but not the main one, in a series of factors that influence the traditional culture of the Arabs in Israel, though, in most cases, the connection between the two variables was negated (Najjar, 1998). The findings of this study show that in the course of the last decade there have been changes in the point of view of the majority. Today, all the social classes consider ICT as another significant factor that affects the culture of the Arab population in different ways.

Twenty four percent of the participants think that encounters with ICT have positive effects on the existing culture because it affects the consciousness of the people and contributes to openness and social development. These perspectives are common among participants from all social sections but they are more prevalent among students who put a special stress on the relationship between the two sexes:

A parent:

> The traditional culture spoiled our life and turned it into a backward society. The exposure that ICT provides affects traditional attitudes and thoughts that were derived from the era of agriculture. It is possible to feel that our society is being made more flexible, especially towards women and children.

A female student:

> Today, I do not fear the teacher; I argue with him in all issues because today everything is open, and I make him consider my thoughts.

A male student:
> The effect is on the openness of people. Today, girls spend time with boys, the families know about it and agree. This was not accepted before. The change is also affected by the desire of the young people to be free of the ties of the traditions.

Exposure to different fields of information and meeting via the Internet with international cultures assists people to be open and be free of traditional thoughts and conservative attitudes that hinder every initiative of change and progress. The significance of this outlook is that there are people in the Arab society who understand tradition as a tool that prevents development. They oppose the traditional culture and accuse it of blocking development, and they encourage progress and every factor that contributes to the emancipation of society from the ties of the traditions. From this point of view, ICT gains its highest support from the young people who grasp it unequivocally as having positive effects in the cultural context.

The buzz of electronic media predominates youths' lives and their daily communication habits center on tweets, Facebook, Instagram and chats. This technology allows them, especially the girls, to make relationships with the other sex, which is unaccepted by the conservative traditional culture. However, in this era, there are no borders, and the more the observation is strict, the options to evade it increase. Therefore, there are lots of parents who are aware of the fact that the era has changed and the control has slipped from their hands. They are aware of the existence of relationships between their children and other children of the other sex. Some of the parents do not agree to that openly but they do not object to it actually. Some of them even allow their children consciously to enjoy things that they were not allowed to do themselves.

Such parents believe that, in the current era, education has to be open and not threatening, and, therefore, exposure to what used to be considered "taboo", according to the traditional culture, is not necessarily immoral. Exposure can be another additional way to teach and increase awareness of the young people about what is taking place around and inside them. This finding is not consistent with the rules of traditional culture, but it hides within it signs of change in the common traditional concepts. On the other hand, it indicates the contribution of ICT to this change.

On the other hand, 35% of educators see just one dark effect of ICT on society and culture. In their opinion, ICT has negative effects on the Arab culture and its values because the development in information technology, in which the Arabs are not participants, turned them into people who imitate other people and follow them without looking deeply into things or paving a cultural road for themselves.

One teacher said:

> ICT in our life is causing a loss of our cultural and human values. Today, there is no traditional family; the father's authority decreased and the computer separated the members of the family. There is less solidarity and unity and more individualism, and each one is drowned in himself. The children today are not well educated, and they do not give respect to the adults. We received everything ready-made from other societies and stuck them to ourselves without checking what is suitable and what is not. Even our language, which is a basis of culture, is being assimilated.

A large number of educators in the study perceive ICT as a product of the Western culture that includes cultural aspects that are not consistent with the Arab culture and that leads to cultural assimilation. This is obvious in the behavior of the young people and interaction between people. Through their intensive connection with young people, there are educators who maintain that the more the Arabs have a strong connection with ICT, the more they separate from supreme human values in the Arab culture.

The developments in which Arabs are not participants shake their confidence in themselves, just as exposure to the culture of the other and its adoption

shake their cultural foundations. In this context, Sharabi (1991) asserts that since the beginning of the connection with the West till today, the Arabs have adopted in their daily life Western work-styles, ways of thinking and behavior without verifying or assessing them. They accept them just because they are Western!

Barakat (2000) claims that the connection of the Arabs with modernization did not go beyond imitation and estrangement, and it did not develop to the degree of a struggle, opposition and free interaction of equality, respect and appreciation. According to his opinion, the Arabs failed to bring the Arab society to modernization because their connection with the West moved between its imitation, on the one hand, and attempts to keep away from it by withdrawing into themselves and returning to the past as a reaction to the Western hegemony, on the other.

It is possible to see that in the given society, differences are numerous, and the consistency ranges from the radical conservative that blocks progress, to the liberal modernist that turns to progress at any price. Between these, there is a third group in between who are actually lost but is expected to return to its traditional life because the local social atmosphere always pulls back towards traditionalism and conservatism.

The described condition of Arab society in Israel is a product of a long process of change, in which many factors are active including approximation to the Israeli culture, rise in the level of education, increases in economic competition and achievement. The access of ICT into the Arab society accelerated the process of change. It constituted an additional significant factor that affects traditional Arab culture in different ways as the new young generation freed itself completely from its cultural attachment and belonging, and they see in traditionalism a factor that perpetuates social backwardness.

Summary

The present study was carried out according to the qualitative approach in order to examine cultural processes in light of the encounter between ICT and the Arab society in Israel. It presents and discusses different points of view about the implications of ICT on Arab traditional culture in Israel. It analyzes participants' perceptions regarding ICT's contribution to changes and developments in Arab culture and its implications on youth behavior and cultural concepts.

The findings suggest that ICT is not neutral, and it is perceived as a significant influence on cultural conceptions and traditional behavioral norms, especially among youth. All the social groups that participated in the study perceive ICT as a technological development that conceals positive and negative consequences. The essence of its influence on youth depends on the purposes and tendencies of the user as it depends on the contents it stores.

ICT is a medium for unlimited communication that allows access to any area of knowledge. Through the windows of the information, ICT can increase the knowledge, enrich the culture, and deepen people's insights towards

themselves and towards their culture. However, when the discussion is about the effect of ICT on the youth, it is found that its influence is generally negative. The uncontrollable exposure to dangerous and non-cultural information, on the one hand, and the indifference of the parents in the activities of their children on the Web on the other hand, are perceived as principal factors in this context.

With regard to youth behavior, individualism increases; less family cohesion takes place, and contempt for cultural values and detachment from their cultural and historical context grow. To youth, it is an expression of discontent and rebellion against tradition.

This behavior is expressed in disrespect for adults, less tolerance and audacity. This behavior, which contradicts all educational values, is not accepted and is generally rejected, particularly by educators.

ICT represents a modern culture, which is intrinsically different from Arab traditional culture. It is a two-sided currency whose one side illuminates the culture and the other side depresses it. Even though, the Arab society is trying to keep up with it. However, in using ICT, Arabs should focus on enriching and illuminating their superior cultural and social values among young generations in particular. For that, the Arab society is required to be active and creative in order to overcome the challenges with which the ICT era faces the Arab culture.

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Author Details

Zuhaira Najjar
zuhaira@bezeqint.net

Roseland Da'eem
roselandda@gmail.com