Chapter 10

Digitalization, Social Work, and Youth in an Indian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes how presently, India has the largest proportion of youth population in the world and will continue to hold for the next 20 years. The challenge for the country is to increase the human resource potential for the country. The demographic data of the country’s youth is a challenge which needs to be addressed, one of the challenges is not being able to access the digital world due to illiteracy, lack of knowledge on computer technology and social media, and proficiency in manual work. The chapter examines youth work in the context of the Indian sub-continent.

INTRODUCTION

Digitalization has revolutionized the world. It has changed human relationships, the surrounding environment and our professions, including social work (Mackrill & Ebsen, 2018; Walsh, 2006). The internet, particularly social networking sites are widely being used by young and adults alike (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). Communication technology is growing very fast and has changed the way individuals interact with each other i.e. social interactions, learning strategies and choice of entertainment all stand changed in the world of technology (Mishna et al., 2012). So, while there are a common understanding and a positive correlation seen between the digital world and the youth (Jones et al., 2010; Margaryan, Littlejohn, & Vojt, 2011),

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there are certain groups and professions where the use of advanced technology is limited. Social work is one such discipline due to its nature of engagement as seen, traditionally (Webb, 2001).

The proposed chapter examines youth work and digitalization in the context of the Indian sub-continent. While the advantages of social media cannot be denied as it has connected people from faraway places and reduced the distances, a difference of opinion emerges on the use of technology in social work, a profession where observations, narratives, and sentiments matter. Based on the review of the literature and empirical data, the chapter brings to light that, while social workers, both practitioners, and academician may be techno-savvy but, the same is not translated with good rigor into the use of technology at work.

The chapter shares ways in which technology is used for reaching out to the groups by the service providers and how the same technology is impacting the profession of social work. The chapter is divided into seven Parts. Part I introduces the digital world and Part II highlights social work in the digital world. Part III relates India’s youth with digital India; Part IV relates to youth with social work and digital India. Part V of the paper is based on empirical illustrations from the field of Social Work. Part VI enumerates ways by which social workers can use digital India to empower the youth of the country, followed by Part VII as concluding remarks.

The Digital World

The modern world is characterized significantly by digital application into everyday life whether it is at workplaces, public spaces and in personal lives (Hargittai, 2010; Loges & Jung, 2001). While it is said that distance makes the heart grow fonder, the invention of social media and communication has helped to transcend that distance (Gutzmann, 2018; Sponcil & Gitimu, 2012). Hence, technology with all its goodness can be seen as a necessary evil that has come to control the mankind of the 21st century (Ellul, Wilkinson, & Merton, 1964). It has become an indispensable part of human life, central to how people manage their daily life. Whether it pertains to booking the public cab online or taking calls on the mobile; surfing the net for want of information or checking e-mails; ordering food online and much more. Our lives have been taken over by the digital world which can be defined as- forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (e.g., videos).

While the use of technology differs among countries, it’s observed globally that the early 21st centuries were highly varied by way of technology as different technology paradigms existed in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Hall & Pfeiffer, 2013). This included the statistical era in the 1960s, the information systems era in the 1970s and 1980s, the internet era in the 1990s and the mobile era after 2010 (Chan & Holosko, 2016; Chan & Ngai, 2018). Scholars have expressed that while
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