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THE MISSING GAP BETWEEN INTERNET USE AND BENEFITS: SENIORS' LIMITED INTERNET EXPERIENCES AND SOCIAL MARGINALIZATION*

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Korea's IT development has been predominated by technology diffusion alone including technology infrastructure, online service access and number of Internet subscribers. There seems to be no doubt that Korea's continuous effort to promote technology spread will promise social integration and development nationwide. This paper challenges such mislead thinking of IT for development by emphasizing the actual experiences of Internet use to meet the end users' needs. Observation is made through listening to the stories of a marginalized group of seniors who have participated in IT education programs at a Senior Welfare Center. Findings suggest that having acquired IT skills did not necessarily enable seniors to extend their personal relationships and social involvement in everyday life. Rather, their use of the Internet was restricted due to the ongoing social marginalization prevalent within their present situation. Policy implications are provided that information policies for disadvantaged groups such as seniors must go beyond technology access and skills provision to include other basic social policies to complement and support people's information use relevant for their social need and circumstances.

Key Words: *IT Development, Social Inclusion, Social Marginalization, Technology Determinism, Internet Use, 'Digital Divide,' Information Policy, Older People*

INTRODUCTION

As the Internet and other online technology is spreading vastly into many people's everyday lives and changing the ways they cope with social problems, optimistic perceptions of the new technology as a key tool to empower people and bring social development has been predominant in the contemporary society. Social policies initiatives, in haste, are linking online to increase social integration, and take its opportunity to reduce and even prevent social exclusion. Such technology driven actions perceive technology as a conduit for social inclusion and 'an important dimension of social exclusion' (Phipps, 2000; Selwyn, 2002; Silverstone and Haddon, 1998). Thus, the ability to use the Internet is regarded as 'the indispensable

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grammar of modern life' and a fundamental factor to ensure citizenship in society (Wills, 1999: 10).

Alternative viewpoints reassess the role of the new technology for social development, suggesting '[n]o specific factor, much less information, can be singled out as a main cause of development' (Menou, 1993: 20). From this perspective, causal relationships between information use and benefits involve the 'complexity of real-life situations' and other 'noninformation-related internal and external factors' (20). This emphasizes multiple situational factors surrounding the 'users' social context, and to consider what kind of information is sought for what purpose, based on the needs and the circumstances of the people considered (McConnell, 1995; Menou, 1993). From this perspective, '"*real access*" ... goes beyond just physical access and makes it possible for people to use technology effectively to improve their lives' (Bridge.org, 2001: 5). Moreover, the nature of the 'digital divide' as a new form of social problem has been reconceived as a multidimensional phenomenon, rooted within a pre-existing social marginalization (Norris, 2001). Social marginalization, in modern society, is considered as a relative concept, which appears differently to different people in a multifaceted way depending on the context (Atkinson and Davaoudi, 2000). As a result, it is essential to consider the purpose of use and its diverse activities based on the users' situational context.

In this respect Korea's IT development based on government policy to promote technology infrastructure and online access deserves to be reconsidered. Korea, in general, is well-known for its success in moving towards an 'online society', taking a world lead in the nation's Internet savvy, Internet use, online services, broadband access, and wireless communications (Kim, 2006). The nation boosts to have linked 79.6 per cent of its total population online (NIDA, 2006). Furthermore, the Korean government has put forward the '2nd Stage of the National Digital Divide Plan (2006~2010)'[1] in order to link 80 per cent of the information disadvantaged groups such as the seniors, disabled, and farmers to IT access by year 2010. There seems to be no doubt that Korea's continuous effort to promote technology spread will promise social integration and development nationwide. Strong assumption prevails that Korea's IT development alone will guarantee the quality of people's living standard. This paper challenges such optimistic thinking by questioning: 'what are the users intending to accomplish by going online', and 'what are they actually

[1] *Jae 2 cha Jeongbogeokcha Jonghap Gaewhek* (The 2nd 'Digital Divide' policy actions) (2006~2010).

doing on the Internet.' Such observation is made through a qualitative case study of a small group of seniors at a senior welfare center in Seoul. Apparently, encouraging older generation to take up the Internet has been one of the key policy goals, whereby Internet access and training programs have been provided through local channels including senior welfare centers and lifelong educational institutions.[2] Based on seniors' interview transcript of how they actually experience Internet use in daily life, the study suggests that delivering Internet access and training services to seniors does not necessarily mean quality of Internet use for social well-being. It is important to note hereby, that the paper is not to reject Korea's achievement of IT development in recent years or the usefulness of the Internet usefulness, but to indicate that social meanings of Internet use can only be complete when considering people's usage patterns and its outcomes. Policy implications are provided whereby shifting focus on other basic social policies may be appropriate to complement and support people's simple Internet take-up so as to enable users to fully enjoy the advantages of the social benefits of information technology.

The paper is organized as follows. First, social characteristics of Internet use, the Internet related to social marginalization and older people, and seniors and IT education programs in Senior Welfare Centers in Korea are reviewed. Second, employment of a qualitative approach using in-depth interview method is described in brief, followed by analysis of interview findings about seniors' Internet use and goal seeking activities. Finally, conclusion is given that overly optimistic thinking about the online activities must be avoided and a more holistic approach of what works for the end users must be taken into account in order to achieve relevance and sustainability of information use for development.

REPOSITIONING THE ROLE OF NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social characteristics of Internet use

As the Internet is spreading widely and deeply into all parts of society more attention has been given to the social aspects of Internet use embedded within the people's everyday life. Emphasis is on the socio-cultural context in which the Internet is used (Haythorthwaite and Wellman, 2002; Kling, 2000; Warschauer, 2003). Thus, examining 'the design, uses and consequences of information technologies that take into account their

[2] Only 7 per cent of the nations' senior citizens use the Internet (Kim and Jung, 2007).

interaction within institutional and cultural contexts' becomes crucial (Kling, 2000: 218). From this perspective, the roles and consequences of Internet use will be socially shaped alike all other social resources. That is, meaningful use of technology to improve people's lives cannot be brought about by the mere presence of Internet access. Rather it is

> ... embedded in a complex array of factors encompassing physical, digital, human, and social resources and relationships. Content and language, literacy and education, and community and institutional structures must all be taken into account (Warschauer, 2003: 6).

For scholars like Kling, the 'Internet does not function on its own, but is embedded in the real-life things that people do' (Haythornthwaite and Wellman, 2002: 7). Anderson and Tracey (2001: 473) argue that the 'Internet and usage of its different applications is not necessarily changing individuals' lives but may be embedded within the normal social change of everyday life'.

Embedded in this socio-cultural context, the Internet is a social resource that can be deployed to achieve different goals (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001; Jung et al., 2001; Lodges and Jung, 2001; Shah et al., 2001a 2001b). For example, some literature argues that to fully understand a person's relations with the Internet, 'what the person intends to accomplish by going online', and 'what the person does on the Internet' must be explored (Jung et al., 2001: 510). Shah et al. (2001b: 142) contend that considering 'patterns of use' is more appropriate than measuring 'hours of use', since the individuals, even those who are equally connected, make different uses of the Internet for different purposes. From this literature, research inquiries arise for this paper regarding 'What do seniors use the Internet for?'

The Internet, social marginalization, and older people

Studies have suggested the potential role of the Internet to 'mitigate disadvantage and create opportunity — to combat social exclusion and promote social inclusion' (Phipps, 2000: 40). Phipps (2000: 63) believes that the wide use of the Internet 'may exacerbate social exclusion but in many ways offer[s] opportunities for social inclusion'. This perception underlies Warschauer's (2003: 211) argument that '[t]he overall policy challenge is not to overcome a digital divide but rather to expand access to and use of ICT for promoting social inclusion.' Policy initiatives have commonly adopted this position, regarding ICTs as 'a ready means' through which the government

enhances social integration within society (Selwyn, 2002: 1). Norris (2001: 19) contests this optimistic role for the Internet highlighting that '[t]he Internet does not drive these movements — these causes are triggered by deeper passions — but it facilitates their organization, mobilization, and expression.' For her, 'it is not necessarily true that all dimensions of the social divide will automatically close as Internet access becomes more ubiquitous' (235).

In modern society, notion of social exclusion is reconceived as a multidimensional phenomenon whereby people can be excluded from various dimensions in the society in which they live (Atkinson and Davoudi, 2000; Vleminckx and Berghman, 2001). This perspective goes beyond income inequality to incorporate the social and cultural dimensions of the exclusionary process (Atkinson and Davoudi, 2000). Vleminckx and Berghman (2001: 35) assert that 'exclusion in one dimension often coincides or even produces exclusion in another dimension'. These multiple dimensions are correlated in a complex way, whereby social exclusion will occur when several of these subsystems breakdown 'as a chain reaction' (Atkinson and Davoudi, 2000: 441). 'Which dimension is central to the cause will depend on the context' (Vleminckx and Berghman, 2001: 35).

Townsend (1987: 37) puts forward the idea of 'relative deprivation', asserting that 'people are relatively deprived if they cannot obtain ... the [contemporaneous] conditions of life ... which allow them to play the roles, participate in the relationships and follow the customs which are expected of them by virtue of their membership of society.' This implies that people can be disadvantaged in certain respects while not in others, and relative to some people, but not to others. In short, social exclusion appears as 'different things to different people' (Atkinson and Davoudi, 2000: 437).

This literature on the relative concept of social exclusion suggests that older people may not perceive social disadvantage although they lack Internet access and use. Within their particular context, other aspects of social life may be more important in creating social difficulties for them. For example, Silverstone and Haddon (1998) suggest some seniors may be excluded from certain activities due to problems that arise from aging, while not being excluded in terms of income or other social capacity.

Regarding older people being further disadvantaged by the on-line society, mainstream studies suggest that promoting Internet use among seniors will increase social participation and benefits for all older people (Curry et al., 2002; Davis, 2003). ICT is perceived as to empower seniors and their quality of life by 'enhancing individual employability of knowledge, which can lead to an increasingly active involvement of older persons' and 'creating on-line networks for information which will even support social

and health services,' democratic participation, social competitiveness, and cultural life enhancement (Davis, 2003: 1).

Norris (2001) disagrees that experiences with the Internet will change all senior users' attitudes and values in society. For her, social and political values are deeply rooted within people's experiences at home, work and society. Lodges and Jung (2001: 537) propose seniors' Internet connectedness using a 'multidimensional conceptualization of the importance of the Internet in a person's everyday life.' This enables them to demonstrate that the Internet may be a different resource for older people with a different information culture, different goals, and different social opportunities to interact with the Internet. They suggest that seniors are more likely to have a narrow scope of goals that they want to achieve through using the Internet (Lodges and Jung, 2001: 553). This is attributed to the socio-cultural history dimension whereby older people are less connected to workplaces and social participation, and they are less likely to have previous experience with Internet use (Lodges and Jung, 2001). Consequently, 'older people may have lower Internet connectedness because they don't want higher Internet connectedness' (Lodges and Jung, 2001: 559). In addition, Haddon (2000) finds that older people often feel 'no need' for new technologies because existing ICTs already facilitate enough participation in the social world. This relates to the literature focusing on the meaning of benefits for end users and the purpose of information use assert that information and benefits can only be evaluated from the users' point of view. Thus, taking beneficial use of information for granted will completely 'ignore the different perceptions of need and benefits held in different societies' (McConnell, 1995: 2).

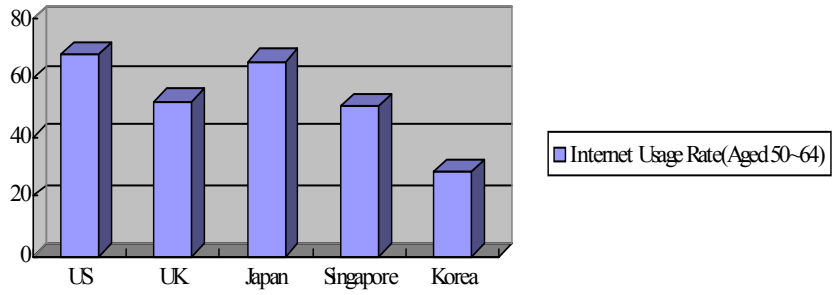
Increasingly, the necessity of qualitative and interpretative approaches in understanding people's different responses and perception of information technologies have been highlighted by considering the socio-cultural context of the people researched (Acre and Hopmann, 2002; Haddon, 2000 McConnell, 1995; Menou, 1993; Sligo and Williams, 2002 Zuboff, 1988). From this perspective, they do not take the benefits of Internet use for granted but emphasize that the meaning of Internet use can only be given through people's willingness, use, and assessment of change, as these aspects are relevant to the 'users.' This approach confirms the importance of my interest in to what extent do senior South Koreans experience the benefits of Internet use relevant to their well-being and success within their life context.

Seniors and IT training programs in Senior Welfare Centers in Korea

As information has been conceived as an important capital in the

'information society', the 'digital divide' has been directly related to social inequality (Selwyn, 2002). In particular, lack of information access and use based on inadequate IT capabilities has been regarded to exacerbate disadvantaged groups' social exclusion. This has been so in the case of Korea, a nation showing one of the highest Internet population in the world, yet a significant problem with its senior citizens reluctance towards the Internet (Korea Press Foundation, 2007; KISDI, 2007). Accordingly, the Korean policy initiatives have promoted Internet training classes have been widely initiated by the government through various local welfare communities including Senior Welfare Centers (Kim, 2008). Although some changes have been occurring among the seniors' attitudes towards the Internet, the overall rate of Internet use among these people remains very low, and many seniors' attitudes toward the Internet are characterized as reluctant and indifferent (Kim, 2008). For example, a recent study reports that while Korea's Internet population aged between 10 and 30s has reached 98.5%, users aged between 50 and 64 only accounts to 28.3% (KISDI, 2007). As shown in Figure 1, such significant 'digital divide' contradicts to Korea's high reputation as one of the strongest Internet nations in which the nation's informatization level ranks third in the world after Sweden and the US (MIC 2007). According to a research focusing on older people aged over 65 and their media use, the low rate of Internet usage drops even further to as low as 7% (Kim and Jung, 2006). This has invoked further research to better understand the older groups' relation to the Internet and develop IT related programs accurately targeting senior learners. Nevertheless, studies specifically focusing on the reality of senior Koreans and the Internet appear extremely limited.

According to a study on seniors' Internet attitudes in Senior Welfare Centers across ten different 'gu's in Seoul, the overall demographic



Source: KISDI (2007).

FIGURE 1. SENIORS' INTERNET USAGE RATE IN ADVANCED COUNTRIES

characteristics of Center seniors were more likely to be highly educated, wealthy, and independent, in comparison to other seniors in the community. Interestingly, the main source of income other than family support (40.8%) was generated from pension/interest savings/ financial assets (27%) and real estate/lease income (20.9%) (KISCA, 2003: 20). This implied that a majority of the seniors did not need to work for their income, which ultimately characterized their purpose of Internet use in their everyday life.

According to the KISCA (2003) project, seniors at the Centers were most likely to have a computer at home (75.6%) and more than half of these respondents' (50.5%) computers at home were owned by the seniors themselves rather than their children (KISCA, 2003: 21). Further, many were using the Internet (72.6%) and some were using the Internet but not taking Internet classes (32.5%) (KISCA, 2003: 21). Locations of Internet use were mainly at home (52.4%) and the Centers (45.4%) (KISCA, 2003: 21). However, the survey shows that while seniors at the Centers had a relatively advanced computer environment, their interactions with the Internet remained limited (KISCA, 2003: 35). This finding provides implications for this paper that computer ownership and Internet access did not necessarily guarantee widespread use, which is examined through interview findings.

Moreover, the project went further to examine the effectiveness of computer classes, by surveying Internet skills of the older 'users' gained from the IT training classes in Senior Welfare Centers and their actual use of the Internet in everyday life. Results showed older learners' Internet skills attained in classes and their actual Internet activities were inconsistent (KISCA, 2003: 24). For example, Internet activities most likely to be experienced by senior 'users' were Internet search, emailing, and entertainment. However, frequency of computer usage in daily life was reported to be relatively low, with even the most frequent activity of emailing appearing only one or two times a month (41.3%) and searching the Internet one or two times a month (35%) (KISCA, 2003: 24). Such findings leave incomplete understandings and raise questions of how and why seniors relate to the Internet in such ways. As a result, this paper takes a qualitative approach to better understand what actually exists among seniors' Internet use.

QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

Primarily, quantitative and positivist approaches have been dominant in addressing the issues of the 'digital divide', by simply assuming that the Internet will benefit all people in all circumstances, and that not having the

Internet is the key problem. As Menou (1993) criticizes that statistical numbers about the distribution and grow is inappropriate and inadequate to understand the role of technology for social benefit. Instead, he recommends that researchers consider qualitative indicators 'as a means of providing a practical background, to help focus on real life application as opposed to general considerations' (Menou, 1993: 127). Taking this point into account, this study adopts a qualitative in-depth interview method which enables the people researched speak about themselves, their experiences and perceptions, which helps us to understand what actually exists in life (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975). It is to note that the purpose of a qualitative research is not to contradict to the mainstream quantitative findings. Rather, it is to complement the richness of understandings about the multifaceted meanings of Internet use based on different usage contexts.

In-depth interview research was conducted using an open-ended interview guideline with thirty senior participants at a Senior Welfare Centre in Seoul, Korea. Senior Welfare Centre is a local community center providing welfare services such as education, recreation, and social care for senior citizens aged 60 and over. The Center has been one of the main channels to deliver IT training programs for older people, thus was an adequate setting to research how the Internet related to seniors' daily life. A structured sampling method was adopted to access individual participants whenever opportunity was provided. This sampling strategy involved an ongoing process where additional and/or unexpected participants were accepted through the research process. Interviews went for approximately 50 to 80 minutes, and each interview was tape-recorded. Analysis of interpretative data was a preliminary one where conversations, observations and circumstances were analyzed throughout the field research. Such spontaneous analysis during the research facilitated teasing out individual themes and concepts that emerged for each participant. Data analysis continued, after returning from the field, at a more detailed and broader level. All words, concepts, sentences, themes were coded to cluster to a particular theme or proposition. The main characteristics of the thirty senior informants are summarized in Table 1, which generally presents low independency and seldom involvement in other social activities.

Among total number of thirty interview participations, twelve seniors were 'users' with Internet experiences, eleven seniors were 'nonusers', and seven were 'dropouts' who had discontinued Internet use. Given that this study intends to focus on the actual experiences and outcomes of Internet use after education attendance, the paper only deals with twelve senior participants who had participated in the Center's IT education program.

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SENIOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Gender	Male	14
	Female	16
Age	Aged 60-64	10
	Aged 65-70	13
	Aged over 71	7
Housing status	Co-residing	18
	Live separately from children	9
	Live alone (widowed)	3
Formal education	None	8
	Primary	11
	Secondary	8
	Tertiary	3
Previous occupation*	Farmer	6
	Officer/soldier	6
	Manufacturer (factory worker)/Manual worker	8
	Sales/services	10
Other community engagement	Yes	6
	No	24
Frequency of Centre visits	Everyday	19
	2-3 times a week	8
	seldom	3

* To an extent earlier life as farmers in rural areas were common among the seniors.

TABLE 2. INTERNET ACTIVITIES OF TWELVE SENIOR USERS

Places of Internet use	Only at the Center		6
	At the Center and home		6
	Other public places		-
Internet Activities	Emailing	With family members	4
		With other social counterparts	2
		Only with Center peers	8
	Internet search	Daily life management (eg., e-banking, e-shopping, public administration, etc.)	2
		Specific information search (eg., traveling, locations, service information etc.)	3
		Health information and service	2
		Reading newspapers, browsing	9
	Entertainment	Games, music, etc.	5

* Responses have been overlapped for each activity.

When looking in-depth at an individual level, each senior interacted differently and gave different meanings to their Internet experiences based on their life circumstances and usage contexts. As seen in Table 2, however,

Internet activities generally remained limited irrelevant to providing opportunities for social participation.

EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES OF IT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

As noted above, interviews with seniors who had participated in IT training programs in a Senior Welfare Center focused on what the users were doing on the Internet and their main objectives of use. Analyses of interview transcripts were based on the senior participants' attitudes, interests, and needs arising from their everyday life style and their social circumstances. Hereafter, Center seniors' general life context will be described in brief, followed by the senior users' diverse interactions with the Internet.

For seniors at the Center, in general, Center was an important venue to maintain their social relationship and development. Common pictures were senior members enjoying leisure and entertainment, seeking education and self-improvement, building social relationships, and pursuing social participation and roles. Given that majority of the seniors were retired and non-employees, as noted above, their everyday activities relied on attending the Center, like Soon-jung: 'After breakfast I get ready to come here. I don't have anything to do or go, but if I come here, I have many people to talk to and lots of things I can do'. As reflected in this quote, many seniors were disengaged from mainstream activities outside the Center. Family and children's relationship were not guaranteed either, whereby some seniors were even alienated from their family and children. As Nam-chul claimed: 'My children live in a different world to me in one house I don't talk to them a lot ... I can't, they don't want to.' As a result, everyday life context of this senior group appeared to be extremely excluded from economic activities, other social engagements, and some from their family and children. Within this isolated environment of the Center, opportunities to attend IT training classes and use the Internet were provided for the senior members. Seemingly, however, majority of seniors' Internet experiences remained limited, therefore, they seldom accepted Internet use as a necessary tool for social well-being. Taking up Internet use per se was not enough to resolve their problems of social exclusion deeply rooted within their life context. In order to demonstrate that beneficial meanings of Internet use for development cannot be taken for granted but can only be determined by its outcomes relevant for users well-being, this paper only focuses on the analysis of senior users, their Internet experiences and life change.

Seniors' Internet use and goal seeking activities

Previous studies on the characteristics of Internet use among seniors report that majority of the users make use of the Internet for emailing family members, building social relationships, managing social tasks, and participate in social activities. This paper further investigates in-depth of how seniors are experiencing Internet use in order to seek their objectives. Findings suggest that the ways the Internet is used differ greatly according to each user's economic, social, and cultural resources, including their roles and relationships with other people and systems in society. Here, interview questions consider 'To whom were they emailing?' "What information were they searching for?' on the Internet, and 'For what purpose?'

1) Emailing activities

Alike other surveys, senior interviewees pointed emailing as a main activity on the Internet. However, Internet transcripts of emailing experiences revealed a more complex story where it had not necessarily facilitated their communication with their family or other social peers. While many participants enjoyed emailing, the purpose and type of correspondent differed according to each individuals' preexisting communication networks. Two women, Ok-jin and Mee-jin, were actively exchanging emails with their children overseas. These two participants had been closely tied to their children before departure. Taking up the Internet had enabled them to regain their previous good relationships with their children beyond distant. However, even within one household, Mee-jin indicated that 'but my husband, even though he knows how to use the Internet better than me, don't email them [their children abroad] because he never really talked with them much'. Such contradicting experiences between Mee-jin and her husband indicate that characteristics of emailing were not simply determined by IT capabilities but rather by people's pre-existing relationships.

Two other senior users were developing communications and even solving problems with their children through emails. Soo-jin, who had special affection for her son and were communicating with her children at everyday base, felt: 'When I write and receive emails it feels different to telephones ... it is more emotional and makes me feel close to them'. Yu-jin, who often visited her daughter-in-law living nearby, had found it useful to email her daughter-in-law because: 'There are some things that are hard to say in words with each other.' Yu-jin had incomplete high schooling, and work experience managing a fish shop. Going beyond the frequency or

efficiency of emailing, she had discovered a way to solve her awkward relations with her children that she had encountered.

Importantly, however, not all of the people were exchanging communications with their children. Among twelve senior users, six participants revealed that emailing was not relevant to build relationship with children. For example, Kee-chan, who seldom contacted his children, asked: 'What is the use of emailing the children? ... They have their own life and there's nothing to talk about with them'. Such different opinions of email communication with children suggest that older people's use of email cannot be guaranteed unless communication and relationships have been developed. Such discouraging experiences of emailing confirm that already development off-line interaction is required to develop online communication benefits.

Further analysis on senior users' emailing experiences with other social counterparts contest prevailing research assumption that Internet use will bring online communication, thus enhance social networks. Instead, stories of the users at the Centre revealed a perception that email was irrelevant for social relationships and emailing friends was rarely found, except to Centre peers. Surprisingly, among 12 users, 8 seniors shared Ji-chan's view: 'We only just exchange emails with our classmates ... see here, we've got everyone's address, so I start from the top.' Similarly, Ok-jin explained: 'I don't have anyone particular to send emails. Who shall an old woman like me to email. So I just exchange emails with my class mates'. A slightest change occurred with Ji-chan, who had tried to broaden his online communication context by emailing computer instructors commenting: 'I want to talk to young people, so I like to email my computer instructor. They give me good replies.' This last quote interestingly shows that because of lack of pre-existing communication network, senior users could not fully experience the benefits of Internet use. Aside from the fact that their friends often did not use a computer, which would limit the utility of email asa communication medium, Kee-chan reflected on a more fundamental reason for limited communication with friends: 'I only meet my old friends twice a year for reunion ... but then there isn't much occasion to call them anyway.' The scope of emailing network among the senior users was confined within the Center seniors which has been noted to be their main social network in reality. Such email contents mainly consisted of downloading new pictures and verses, as part of after-class practices. This suggests that these participants' Internet use was an entertainment activity and an activity shared among their Centre peers, rather than a social tool to provide opportunities to link with the outside world.

2) Information using activities

Generalized assumption that Internet use will enhance seniors' social integration was challenged by actual stories told by senior participants. Although older participants were well aware of the usefulness of the Internet in the larger society, many had not experienced such Internet use relevant in their life context. Among 12 senior users 9 users had not actually experienced social or economical use of the Internet. As Ok-jin explained:

> I've learnt how to do all those things like looking for news information, shopping sites, and going into banks. But I haven't actually used them yet, because I don't have much to do with those things anyway. I didn't do those things without the Internet so why should I do it now?

Seemingly, senior users online activities revolved around browsing websites for entertainment, downloading pictures, and repeating the class curriculums. Consequently, even though an older individual might have obtained Internet skills, experiences of its use remained constraint due to insufficient off-line activities in society. Motivations to experience various Internet activities also appeared limited among seniors, which was strongly influenced by their perception of social marginalization in later life. This shows that social exclusion apparent in seniors' later life reduced the people's motivations to attempt to make use of the Internet in productive ways. In prior to developing ideas of Internet application and actual experiences, an adequate social context in which Internet could function was important.

Only three participants were using the Internet to manage their tasks. For example, Young-chan, who was recently busy looking for a new house for his children, suggested: 'Rather than visiting all the estate companies, it's so convenient to search the Internet ... I can compare prices, and districts.' In addition, Young-chan had not finished high schooling, had migrated to Seoul in his 30s, had shown a hard work ethic, and was providing housework assistance for his co-residing family. Ji-chan, managing his children's household, was using e-shopping services. However, he rejected using e-banking, claiming: 'My son said e-shopping is ok, but e-banking is dangerous.' Although he was making use of the Internet for his tasks, this decision was very much influenced by his son. Ji-chan had high school education, military work experience, worked hard to educate his children, and had provided financial assistance as well as helping with household tasks for his son's family with whom he resided. In the majority of cases, Internet use and on-line communication did not result in an extension of

social networks outside the Centre.

My interviews challenge existing studies, which generalize the purposes underlying people's Internet use. These findings suggest that the Internet will be used for different purposes and for different reasons that are fundamentally shaped by the life contexts of 'users.' Although there were clear differences within the Centre regarding individuals' reasons for and purposes of Internet use, to some extent, it might be argued that the general purpose of Internet use among the Center participants was restricted to entertainment and correspondence within a limited social network. Importantly, senior individuals' ideas and imaginations of what they can and want to do using the Internet very much determined their choices of Internet use.

As a result, the dominant perspective on Internet use assumes that older participants will necessarily perceive computers to be relevant to their lives, and they will invariably value the benefits that flow from Internet use. However, this study suggests that older citizens often will not use the Internet in 'beneficial' ways, that is, ways that improve seniors' social opportunities they desire. Nor will they necessarily perceive benefits from Internet use they perceive important. Here, I agree with Menou (1993: 27) that the 'value of information depends on users' attitudes and behavior vis-à-vis the information ... Its availability alone does not change behavior.'

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Korea's remarkable growth of broadband access, online networks and Internet using population has been widely regarded as one of the most successful models to realize an advanced 'online society' that will enhance welfare service, citizen participation, social competitiveness, and cultural and information exchanges. This assessment is based on technology-centered thinking that once people gain IT access and skills alone, all will be able to make beneficial use of the technology to solve their problems. The main policy objective, therefore, is to extend access provision to those who remain disconnected, increase the rate of technology diffusion, and transfer all social systems online. Measurements of IT policy outcomes mainly surround statistical numbers of technology distribution, access provision and usage take-ups. Not enough concern has been given towards the actual use of technology access relevant for users' social need.

This paper sets to critique such simplistic perceptions of Korea's IT development by reexamining the realistic outcomes of current ICT education programs for senior citizens which has been aggressively

promoted by the government to link older people online. Extending the coverage of senior program recipients, government tends to state that senior welfare will be resolved. This paper interrupts this assumption by asserting that access-based measurements of IT use are inappropriate and inaccurate whereby realistic stories of what actually exists among citizens must be incorporated within their usage environments. In order to demonstrate this argument, a qualitative in-depth interview approach was adopted to a marginalized group of seniors who have attained IT education programs at a Senior Welfare Center. The focus was on seniors who had participated in the program, examining what are they doing online and for what purpose are they using the Internet. Findings suggest that having attained Internet education did not necessarily help seniors to develop new ways to engage with the mainstream society. Rather, the value of Internet activities was shaped by the users pre-existing communication network and social participation. Seniors who had established active relationships with their family and social communities were able to make use of their Internet skills to enhance their engagement, while those who lacked such involvement could neither create interactions through Internet use. However, because most of the seniors at the Center were undergoing extreme social marginalization, their Internet usage context remained limited and incomplete. Internet teaching programs alone were not enough to resolve their fundamental social problems. Interview analysis suggests that the social value of information technology is relevant depending not of the presence of access but rather on the users' usage context within their life situation and needs. Nevertheless, this paper associates limitations in terms of its narrow scope subjected to one particular group of seniors, which makes the findings somewhat difficult to generalize to the total senior Internet users in Korea. In this respect, further exploration could be taken from here to research a large group of seniors who have experienced the Internet and online activities.

Some policy implications emerge from this study related to both seniors 'digital divide' and equal development in the information society. Having shown that simple provision of IT education is inappropriate and insufficient to help seniors to develop social participation and network, implications arise that other social resource other than new technology may more relevant to solve problems of social marginalization. Policymakers must not neglect this important point where critical investigation must be made about the groups' present social circumstances, their problems, and their needs, in prior to applying IT programs. Then, together with Internet training, other subsidiary social services will be developed when designing

information policies to enhance citizens' welfare. Further, rather than focusing on computer skills alone, curriculum to assist people to develop ideas and their capacity to link their attained skills to outside networks in ways relevant to their needs. Moreover, such comprehensive Internet training programs will help people to make beneficial use of the Internet in a more realistic way.

Important policy implications arise regarding recent e-government policies widely promoted in Korea. In the case of South Korea, e-government has been actively promoted at a national level with many welfare services going online. At this point, it must be critiqued that e-government framework is not taking sufficient account of the needs of sub-groups, such as the seniors in this study, who are not adequately motivated or situated to extend their Internet use for government interaction. This implies a serious risk that they will be further marginalized from society over time. Furthermore, policymakers must take into account that such social problems cannot be addressed simply by physical installation of equipment and computer training policies, but through a more comprehensive policy considering what are the needs and circumstances of the people considered.

The paper concludes to warn 'digital divide' policy initiatives to recognize that other complementary elements aside from Internet access are needed to use the Internet to achieve one's goals. Attention must be given to the group concerned rather than the technology diffusion alone. The people's previous socio-cultural background must be considered in order to understand their information readiness. Their present social position must be examined to identify elements that are required to acquire new information beneficially for their needs. Thereafter, the benefits of IT to allow people make use of information to solve the problems that they perceive important for their life development will be relevant and sustainable.

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