

On April 2nd, 2013, the first International Day of Happiness, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon addressed a speech at the High-level meeting on “Happiness and Well-being: Defining a New Economic Paradigm”. In his remarks, the Secretary General recognized that “while material prosperity is important, it is far from being the only determinant of well-being” (United Nations, 2013). He introduced a new term, Gross Global Happiness that identifies indivisibility and parity of social, economic and environmental well-beings (United Nations, 2013). As the UN Secretary General pointed, well-being is a multi-dimensional concept, and material wealth is merely an external factor that may have some influence on well-being. More determining factor of well-being is subjectivity, namely how people feel and think about themselves and their environment. There is an example of how subjectivity dominates for evaluation of one’s well-being. When UNICEF Report Card 7 presented that Japan has the highest number of children who agreed with the statement “I feel lonely” among the surveyed 24 OECD nations, Japanese children’s well-being was called into question. Japan is considered as one of the wealthiest countries in the world, and Japanese children are more materially well-off than children living in less wealthy countries. However, living in materially well-to-do society does not give Japanese children competitive advantage particularly to their emotional well-being. Simply because living in a world of wealth does not guarantee overall well-being of people.

Hämäläinen takes notice that there can be a gap between how people perceive their social condition and the actual condition (2009). For example, people do not necessarily feel insecure because they encounter a social risk factor such as unemployment. When people conclude that they can not manage the risk, it is the time they feel insecure. Hämäläinen states that insecure feeling can be attributed to their inability to meet the requirement of the time (2009). As society progresses, social systems become more complicated, and today’s people live in intertwined realities. Fulfilling requisites of modern society needs high degree of knack (Hämäläinen, 2013). Acquiring knowledge and skills for survival in modern times is arduous tasks that our previous generations are unheard-of. There is even more demand for further complicated know-how in highly technologised society. This demand can cause a great degree of stress, and it can make people feel insecure.

From the beginning of the twenty-first century, we have seen infiltration of technological devices at various levels of society. We see “how much a digital screen has replaced traditional face-to-face transactions” (Watling and Rogers, 2012, p. 9) such as on-line shopping, booking travel ticket and communicating with family and friends through e-mail and text message. Growing up in such environment today’s children are “digital natives” (Turkle, 2011, p.xxii) whose mobile

connections to the internet are indispensable (Watling and Rogers 2012). The adults who are introduced to digital technology later in their life are at least its “naturalized citizens” (Turkle 1995, p.77). Digital technologies have been significantly changed our way of living. Turkle points that communal activities and places that used to bring people together such as town meetings and main streets are diminishing their capacity of connecting people after digital technology is so infiltrated into everyday lives (1995). People tend to concentrate on building community inside a computer that was “once conceptualized as a tool to rebuild community” instead of being involved in actual community activities (Turkle, 1995, p.244).

Despite the fact that pervasion of modern technological devices to our everyday life is so immense that can change the bedrock of our human culture, we are not necessarily paying enough attention to the venture. It seems that we are too busy to adjust ourselves to new technological devices, and we have little time for discussion of its long term and broader influences (Watling and Rogers, 2012).

Social Work Profession and Digital Technology

Social work profession needs to be aware of technological development and its impact on human-beings for two reasons. First, social work is a profession that focus “individual well-being in a social context” (National Association of Social Workers, 2008, p.1, ad.1). The International Federation of Social Workers addresses that “social work recognizes the complexity of interactions between human beings and their environment, and the capacity of people both to be affected by and to alter the multiple influences upon them including bio-psychosocial factors” (2000). Social work profession’s focus on dynamics between humans and their environment is well depicted in “person in environment” perspective. This social work concept is based on a notion that to understand an individual and his or her behaviors, it is necessary to grasp his or her surroundings such as social, cultural, and physical environment (Kondrat, 2011). To understand an individual in highly technologised society from person in environment perspective, it is necessary to comprehend how digital technology is influencing the person because digital technology has been eroded to every facet of our life including work, family, friendship, community and so on. In her newly published article titled Turn Up the Tech in Social Work, Belluomini states “the clients we serve integrate technology into their lives like the weaving of thread in a fabric. Technology is another color of thread. If we are not assessing the impact of technology on our client population, then this is a disservice to them and our profession” (2013, p.26). Rafferty and Steyaert stress social workers’ need to expand their knowledge of digital technology. They expresses that “We live in a digital society which has significantly changed the information landscape affecting every aspects of our lives. The current wave of technological innovation is part of the context in which social work students, practitioners and service users and carers operate” (2007, p.165).

The second reason for social work profession's necessity to develop critical views of technology and its influence on humans is that digital technology particularly internet may reinforce existing social inequality and marginalization. When internet was introduced to the general public, some people saw it as a liberating tool that promotes democracy because censoring is harder in the internet world than in the traditional media such as newspaper, TV and radio. The people hoped for altruism in the world of internet, but soon they noticed that commercialism is more dominating on the net (Watling and Rogers, 2012). "Digital information and communication technologies are not neutral; they are socially shaped and reflect the exiting social and political environment in which they are designed and delivered" (Watling and Rogers, 2012, p.29). Digital technology is built upon our current social and cultural footings. It does not exist in a vacuum. Thus, prejudice, discrimination, and social inequality that existed in our society are also transmitted to the digital screen. Some warns that digital technology may aggravate existing social injustice and marginalization due to so called digital divide (Belluomini, 2013 and Watling and Rogers, 2013).

Technology and Human Culture

Although practical definition of technology differs depending on the context it is used, dictionaries define it as advanced scientific knowledge used for practical purpose especially in industry. The term, digital technology device usually indicates device applied binary system which is a method of computation using only 1 or 0 to store information. Computer, smart phone, and other electrical items we regularly use are under the category of digital technology.

Throughout the history, humans have made efforts to improve their life conditions by developing new technology and tools. Turkle states that "technologies in every generation, present opportunities to reflect on our values and directions" (2011, p.19). In our times, accelerated by urbanization and mass consumption, new technological devices have been continuously released. Most of those products are targeted for multitaskers who seek for ways to save their time. To make the products appealing to the target population, their sales copies include words associated with time saving. The examples are convenience, mobility, practicality, usability, lightweight, and speeding-up (Hara, 2007). Those words conjure up an image that new technological products are futuristic gadgets that rescue people from their busyness. When such idealization takes place, people lose their rational standpoint for the new technological products. There is not much room left for consideration on what we give in to receive the services of convenient and time-saving technological products (Hara, 2007).

People in modern times are beneficiially of the modern technological products, and it is almost impossible to make our living without the benefit. Being surrounded by technological products and receiving those services became our "second nature" (Hara, 2007, p.xiii). Hara stresses the importance of analyzing what trade-off we made to gain our convenient life supported

by various technological devices because such recognition is a prologue for further understanding of how modern technology is affecting human culture (2007).

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