

Chapter 61

ICT: A Magic Wand for Social Change in Rural India

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ABSTRACT

The concept of automation was first seeded worldwide by Industrial Revolution. Liberalization and privatization has contributed much in the welcome of updated and upgraded technology in India. World Wide Web being the core connector of earth rightly supports Mc Luhan's concept of the 'Global Village'. ICT-Information and Communication Technology is an initiative cum phenomenon that is taken on Public-Private Partnership (PPP) in order to build a bridge between the two sections of the society (technology haves and have nots) so that it is accessible to all. e-Governance, e-Health and e-Commerce are some of its applications. India has witnessed a number of successful E- Projects. Nonetheless, the argument of social exclusion, questions on technology support communication and information dissemination is still on. The article intends to throw light on various aspects keeping in line with the ICT projects in India, the type of ICT usage and a comparison between the already established communication models.

INTRODUCTION

The seeds of Industrial Revolution and technological innovation have grown up to spread its roots much strongly in the 21st Century in the form of telecommunication, computation and World Wide Web. Landing in the technology driven era where automation is the central concept; distances are shortened and spaces are virtually killed while paving a way to a more transformed and transparent world. Communication technology has made it possible to propagate information in a much faster and easier way. This has enabled to build a society enriched with information – “Information Society”.

Information society is one of the key terms that describe the modern world we live in today. It is said to be an outcome of the industrial and post-industrial society (Sarrocchio, n.d.), where the creation, dis-

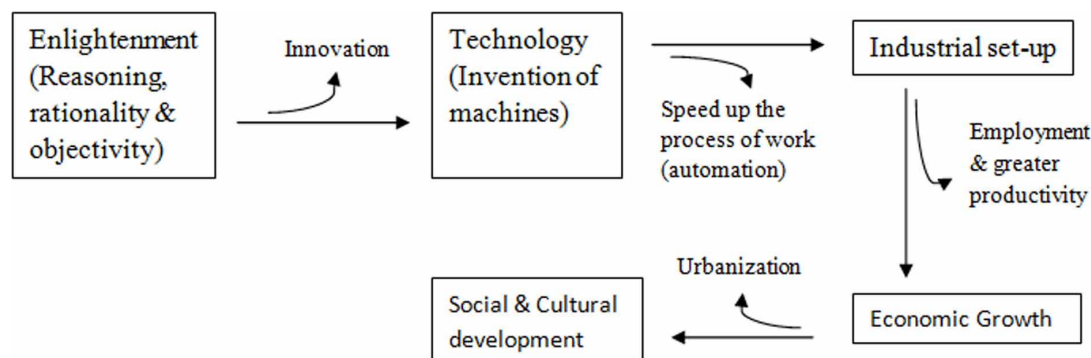
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tribution, use and integration of information is recognized as an active political, cultural and economic activity in order to enhance participation and promote social inclusion (DESA, 2009). But information dissemination alone is not the magic solution of problems like hunger or poverty. In fact 'Right information at the right time' is the key to solution (Chhavi, 2008). Be it the cost of seeds and other raw materials required by farmers or the recent health care planning by the government, that plans to provide free health check up for expecting mothers; information stand alone is not important, but dissemination of it at the right time such that the end users can utilize the information and benefit themselves from the same is vital. Rural population in India are undereducated in terms of the policies, plans and programmes taken to aid them of facilities and amenities required for sustainable development and better living.

Information society concerns the use of information for societal upliftment, social control, management of innovation in order to ensure a better quality of living, break the boundaries of community and ensure better and organized work, that also finds application in solving rural problems of poverty, inequality, illiteracy and environmental degradation (Rahman, 2008). Therefore, information deals with human intellect. In a nutshell, information society combines human intelligence and technical innovation together to give rise to the concept of 'technology-support development' where the 'way to use' a technology is focused at. It can be put in two ways- One, technology providers make use of the right technology at the right place (also referred to as 'context' by some experts), i.e. at the planning and execution level. Two, the end users make use of the technology for their own benefits (with reference to e-literacy). For example, installation of kiosks and computers in rural areas are not enough until it is the right technology for the purpose targeted and the target mass is capable of using them for own benefits.

A quick sneak peak in the history of social & technical development unearths the fact of the matter of the long going debate of technology supporting development. The first seed of development paradigm, as highly known today among the academicians, is the modernization theory or the dominant paradigm of development. This era was marked by technological innovation, capitalistic capability and experimentation to pave the way towards an economic boost. Advocates of the theory- Wilber Schramm (1964), Everett M. Rogers (1969) and Lerner (1958) greatly believed in technology bringing development (Figure 1). Some of the primary features of the industrial society could be categorized as power production, increase of per capita production, high mass consumption, human liberalization and maximization of profit. However the negative peripheries include strikes, labour movement, urbanization and unemployment (Masuda, 1980).

Figure 1. The model describes the course of development according to modernization theory



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