

Chapter 11

The Making of the Information Society: Taxonomy of Concepts, Determinants, and Implications

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ABSTRACT

Unlike the decisive occupations which facilitated the unambiguous naming of the agricultural and industrial societies, the present one which is tagged with an array of groupings—Post-Industrial, Service, Knowledge, Post-modern, Wired/Networked, Artificial, so on and so forth—can hardly ever be viewed from the perspective of a single occupation. With technology in the forefront working as the driver of information and knowledge, it supports and causes the rampant changes in the provinces of economy, occupation, spatial relations, and culture. And, together they signify the arrival of the ‘Information Society’. The obvious shift of a considerable population from the landed labour to industrial labour to knowledge workers marks the transitional phase of the society from agriculture to manufacturing to knowledge society. Hence, this chapter proposes that the dominant phase of a society is not to be visualised as an independent system that is divorced from the other two, but to be understood as an extension of its past.

INTRODUCTION

The explosion of information, spawned by the communication revolution, is today a stark reality and its consequences are profound though the causes are less certain. The direction in which the consequences ply is one of progression in the ‘modern’ sense. Indications of a progressive society are commonly visible in the form of tangibles like the rising economic status of its people or an encouraging increase in the Gross National Product (GNP). An advancing society reflects not only its economic strength but also a change of people’s lifestyle into a more sophisticated one. Economic advancements were precedents in the earlier two societies as well; nevertheless, the pace of change that distinguishes the new society leverages the assumption that it is a fast advancing economy triggered by information. More to the

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point, when there existed distinct occupations which described the agricultural and industrial societies, the same is not attributed to the present society, for manifold professions continue to take roots on the impulsive imagination of the 'informed' and the 'enterprising'.

The multiplicity of careers that are available today results in an overabundance of classifications—Post-Industrial, Service, Knowledge, Post-modern, Wired/Networked, Artificial, so on and so forth—prefixed to the term 'Society'. These orderings tend to pre-empt the attempts by social scientists to evolving a definitive and unambiguous name for the new society. Since information underscores most activities of this new economic culture, it is not inappropriate to call it the 'Information Society', at least for the sake of expediency.

The three revolutions, the agricultural (1000 BC to the 1800), the industrial (1800 to 1950), and the information (1960 to the present), according to Bell (1976), are discussed as the major stages in technological history and each period is marked by significant changes in the definition of property and work. Earlier, farming underscored the agricultural society, and later on manufacturing, the industrial society, and now, information and knowledge processing has become the backbone of the 'Information Society' (IS). Like-minded scholars like Peter Drucker (2001) explain the characteristics of the new age as a revolution of 'concepts', and that it is the 'information revolution' preceded by the invention of writing in Mesopotamia about 5000 to 6000 years ago, the invention of the written book in China as early as 1300 BC and Gutenberg's invention of the printing press between 1450 and 1455.

THE INFORMATION SOCIETY (IS)

The last century saw a dramatic shift in the fundamentals of the world of information, which in turn, yielded mass concepts of literacy, education, and communication and all of them were spurred by technologies. Technological inventions not only affected dramatic changes in lifestyle, but also intensified interdependence with the exchange of information and, as Low (2000) perceives, technological inventions run parallel to the evolution of the knowledge and information based economy.

The 'IS' paradigm is presented as the realisation of society that brings about a general flourishing state of human intellectual creativity (Mowlana, 1996) instead of affluent material consumption. The superior intellect of the human being stems from the production, process, and distribution of information. In his attempt at characterising the changed work culture, Rogers (1986) identified the US and several West European countries, which became information societies quite early, and whose citizens reflected visible dramatic changes such as fast life, expanded horizons, increased efficiency, and empowerment of a majority of the communities.

The individual in the new era who is also addressed as the 'information man', is perceived to be educated, affluent, and well-travelled (Wresch, 1996). The *nouveau riche* enjoyed expanded leisure, shifts from achievement to enjoyment and from rational work goals to pleasurable play goals. The well-heeled citizen of the 'IS' tends to experience unimaginable number of opportunities made available to him in diverse forms. The one who alone negotiates for himself a comfortable life in the Information Society is the skilled user of the Information Technologies (IT).

A society that embraces the 'doctrine of technological primacy' undergoes changes at a speed proportionate to the form and sophistication of those technologies used. The rapid changes experienced in the global scenario have stemmed from the accelerated growth of international communication whose

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