

Culture and Communication in Web World

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Historians in the recent past had been obsessed with the categorization of world—first world, second world, and third world. Economists classified world depending on the degree of development—developed, developing, and underdeveloped. Sociologists do not talk much about the so called world as other social scientists do, but study societies from methodologically build up perspectives.

With the closure of cold war and with the disintegration of (soviet) communist empire, there developed integrations among nations but on a qualitatively different plank—the web plank. The IT revolution, by its very nature, penetrated into the very functioning of the nation states and brought subsequent changes not only its institutional and organizational framework but in culture and communication patterns as well as in themes. Today, we are living not in the first or second or third world, but in the web world. The whole domain of sociological categories—social structure, social action, functional integration, power, and culture have gone corresponding changes while getting accommodated with the web world. The accommodation is still going on as societies are getting integrated with the tentacles of web.

The terms Internet and World Wide Web are often used in every-day speech without much distinction. However, the Internet and the World Wide Web are not one and the same. The Internet is a global data communications system. It is a hardware and software infrastructure that provides connectivity between computers. In contrast, the Web is one of the services communicated via Internet. It is a collection of interconnected documents and other resources, linked by hyperlinks and URLs. In short, the Web is an application running on the internet (wikipedia).

The very buzz word 'globalization' has so far been understood with reference to liberalization and privatization. However, a little sense of history may go deep down to develop arguments that the very basis of classical economy was based on privatization and liberalization. And international trade and commerce was much older than colonialism and imperialism. But globalization today is qualitatively different. It's is not merely confined to trade across different nation states (globe), but the World Wide Web (WWW) interconnectivity of all institutions and individuals across the globe. This connectivity being qualitatively different from cable connectivity has immense potential to

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make cultural elements especially communication to be dynamic. This cultural dynamics flow beyond boundaries—be it group, community, or nation state and provide a particular fashion to social processes, which in turn, bring and/or get adjusted with the elements of social structure. Computer when introduced to industry created phobia for laborers and labor unions. But today, there is no industry, even a factory, without computer. Here are two different advantages of computer in market economy—one is the part of production process and the other is the market. The computer that helps manage production finds the customers across the globe and transacts not only communication but currency and service. With migration and immigration of manpower to industrial and service sectors spreading across the, let's say, nation, the traditional ticket booking system failed to manage efficiently. This systemic failure called for the internet booking system to clear the backlog at a stroke of mouse button. This is true in banking too.

Increasing economic interdependence would not be possible without these developments. Twenty four hour money markets, for instance, could not have existed previously. Or consider credit cards, which now have twelve billion separate transactions every day, and can be used in the large majority of countries around the world (Giddens: 2007).

The vast network of out sourcing is the immediate outcome of World Wide Web. A sizeable urban youth (boys and girls) spends nights at call centers to attend customers of western continent. This sedentary lifestyle has mobilized social components to create space for certain relations like living together, extra marital affairs, gay marriage and so on. The urban society does create space for such professionals but maintain distance with them. The society raised its objection when gay-marriage was not declared illegal by the Delhi High Court.

These professional groups of the World Wide Web create provide population to outsourcing industry. Any service job can in principle be outsourced if it satisfies characteristics: it involves the heavy use of IT; its output is IT transmittable; it comprises tasks that can be codified; and it needs little face-to-face interaction.

The web world, especially its cultural and communication aspects, is necessarily linked to the building up of the knowledge society. Knowledge for long has been known as power, one of the key components of social system. Every society is stratified with regard to the distribution of power—traditional power since traditional knowledge was the key to maintain social order. With the development of positive and normative science mostly circulated in English, a new community emerged and challenged the traditional power. In the age of computer, the concept of knowledge has again been different. The literacy as known to be confined to three Rs (Reading, Riting, and Rithmatic), has invariably included the computer literacy. This literacy being unusual in nature is not known to many traditionally leaned. This computer literacy has started the structuration process in making the traditionally learned people dependant on them and thereby bringing corresponding changes to the patterns of social interactions.

The knowledge available in the web world does have its impact on organizational functioning and the social actors. Our access to internet / Web World opens in front of us a vast world of knowledge which in turn qualifies or contradicts our cultural ethos. Indian parents discourage their children to access to internet as they may land on pornographic sites or misuse the credit card.

A whole lot of cyber crime is taking place in the Web World. 280 government websites are facing hacking risks. Navy, Jammu and Kashmir Government, National Archives are declared to be vulnerable (Times of India). The network of so-called terrorism is supported by web world. One can call it cyber terrorism when the network systems of a country are treated by other countries. There may be cyber wars in near future in which the communication system of one country will be partially or completely paralyzed by the other country. In that situation, there will be a whole lot of organizational and cultural change across the world. But there are possibilities of cultural conflict even with the scientific truth as it happened with Darwin in his own country. The western products cannot be sold in the Arab world unless there is cultural demand for the same. To create culture conducive for the western goods and services World Wide Web serves both the purposes creating demands and sell goods and services online. Online has become the lifeline of the individuals and institutions across the boundaries of the nation state.

The web world is a virtual world of cyber reality. It makes everybody free but binds together through an invariable and invincible web net that make institutions and individuals work without being bothered of the (components) social structure. It's a unique development of culture and communication that enjoy relative autonomy independently of social structure since indirect (not face to face) and impersonal communications take place through servers located at different places.

The cyber world has had impact on different themes and perspectives that sociological studies incorporate. Even the present upheavals of the Arab world is, to a great extent, linked to the openness of innumerable participants interacting on social network sites like facebook, twitter, orcut, etc. More women entrepreneurs using social networking to further their business (Times of India).

The traditional approach to revolution was either to uproot (as it happened in the Russian Revolution or Chinese revolution) or alter the social structure to rub inequality and injustice. But modernity is very much linked to the technological revolution. Marx paid attention to the human factor of the productive force (proletariat) to be revolutionary. Sociologically it seems to be a paradigm shift in which we search for new paradigm to conceptualize the e-merging Web World. The World Wide Web (WWW) has penetrated deep into the institutional and interactive patterns and has been successful, to a great extent, in developing the so-called global village the integration of which goes beyond even what Durkheim had thought about organic solidarity based on simply division of labor. This web world has augmented the social process, making it work on the line of accommodation and assimilation of alien values.

The information revolution will trigger a sweeping transformation. The question is what physical and functional forms the information revolution will take. What would people and organizations do if they all had computers and all these computers were interconnected?

This is what the Web World is. This is not a material world what we have been accustomed with. Our identities and addresses are unique in this world. We have domain name, URL, password, etc. It's a market; it's a page, it's a property. It's a new social ecology. This new social ecology has developed its own culture and thereby has invariably influenced the culture of the existing social ecology. Its law and order, crime and punishment do have impact on our traditional social systems. The growing reliance on and alliance with the e-business—be it governance or market have brought

significant changes in the traditional cultural pattern. We have virtually created the electronic reality. Our emotions have turned into e-motion, e-merging the world hitherto separated. Michael Dertouzos(1997) in his book, *What Will Be*, argues that the information marketplace will create structural change across organizations. It will also affect human behaviour within organizations. He further argues that the information marketplace will change the role of schools, universities, and the educational community. One of the more obvious effects will be the simultaneous expansion of the student market for schools and the school market for students. Why study at the local school, training centre, or university if you can attend at a distance the best school for your particular interests? This situation stirs up the whole social system, though in different degree, but gets accommodated with certain amount of change.

The internet has emerged as the fast growing communication tool ever developed—over a billion people were estimated to be using internet worldwide. Two individuals located on opposite sides of the planet—in Tokyo and London, for example—not only can hold a conversation in real time, but can also send documents and images to each other with the help of satellite technology. Widespread use of the internet and mobile phones is deepening and accelerating the process of globalization; more and more people are becoming interconnected through the use of these technologies and are doing so in places that have previously been isolated or poorly served by traditional communications. Although the telecommunications infrastructure is not evenly developed around the world, a growing number of countries can now access international communications networks in a way that was previously impossible. Everyday the global media sprout information and link them directly to the individuals who are much aware of their interconnectedness with global issues and processes. This shift to a global outlook has two significant dimensions. First, as members of a global community, people increasingly perceive that social responsibility does not stop at national borders but instead extends beyond them. Disasters and injustices people face on the other side of the globe are not simply misfortunes but are legitimate grounds for action and intervention. There is a group growing cutting across boundaries of the nation state and address social issues and initiate social movements.

One influential early theorist of communication media was the Canadian author Marshall McLuhan. According to McLuhan, an expert of media communication, argues that society is influenced much more by the type of the media than by the content, or the message, which the media convey. A society in which satellite television plays an important part, for example, is obviously very different medium from one that relies on the printed word carried abroad an ocean liner. The electronic media, according to McLuhan, are creating a global village—people throughout the world see major events unfold and hence participate in them together. Over decades there has been a process convergence in the production, distribution, and consumption of information, coagulating cultural conglomeration. It is the internet, however, that is at the heart of this communication revolution. With the encroachment of web world, the traditional forms of media are going to lose the delivery of information, entertainment, advertisement and commerce to media audiences.

Everything that arises does not converge. A more variegated landscape emerging out of e-world is does continue reshaping cultures and reworking societies. A series of reconfigurations,

reformulations, new functions, new contents, new spaces, new grounds, new uses, have emerged and are emerging within global media networks making structuration a dynamic reality.

In contrast to previous eras, the global economy is no longer primarily agricultural or industrial in its basis. Rather, it is increasingly dominated by activity that is weightless and intangible. This weightless economy is one in which products have their base in information, as is the case with computer software, media and entertainment products and internet based services. The emergence of knowledge society has been linked to the development of a broad base of consumers who are technologically literate and eagerly integrate new advances in computing, entertainment, and telecommunications into their everyday lives. The very operation of global economy reflects the changes that have occurred in the information age. Many aspects of the economy now work through networks that cross transnational boundaries. In order to be competitive in globalizing conditions, business and corporations have restored themselves to be more flexible and less hierarchical in nature. In modern societies, we constantly interact with others whom we may never see or meet. Almost all of our everyday interactions such as buying groceries or making a bank deposit, bring us contact—but indirect contact with people who may live thousands of miles away. Now email, SMS, online chatting etc. have become social facts for many people in industrialized countries. Furthermore, internet enthusiasts argue that online communication has many inherent advantages that cannot be claimed by more traditional forms of interactions such as the telephone and face-to-face meetings. The human voice, for example, may be far superior in terms of expressing emotion and subtleties of meaning, but it can also convey information about the speaker's age, gender, ethnicity or social position—information that could be used to the speaker's disadvantage. Electronic communication, it is noted, makes all these identifying markers and ensures that attention focuses strictly on the content of the message. This can be a great advantage for women or other traditionally disadvantaged groups whose opinions are sometimes devalued in other settings. Electronic interaction is often presented as liberating and empowering since people can create their own online identities and speak more freely than they would elsewhere. A survey of internet users carried out between 1995 and 2000 showed that, far from increasing social isolation, internet usage is associated with significant and increased online and offline social interactions. The survey found that internet users tend to communicate with others through other media—especially by the telephone—more than non-users do, meet face-to face with friends more than non-users and interact with others more in general (Katz et al. 2001). The information marketplace has made it possible for anyone to buy, sell, and exchange his or her goods without having to register with or be controlled by a central authority.

In the 21st century, communication technology is such that information can be shared instantaneously and by millions of people simultaneously, almost anywhere around the world. Communication—the transfer of information from one individual or group to another, whether in speech or through the mass media of modern times—is crucial to any society. This means that social and media networks are shaping the prime mode of organization and most important structures of modern society. Modern society is in a process of becoming a network society, just like it is developing into an information society, a related concept. It is in a transition from mass to network society. It was noticed that the dividing lines between these abstractions (micro, meso, and macro) are blurring in reality. On the Internet interpersonal, organizational and mass communication come

together. that the network structure is a dual structure. A combination of scale extension and scale reduction marks all applications of the new media in the economy, politics, culture and personal experience. A dual structure returns in several oppositions: centralization and decentralization, central control and local autonomy, unity and fragmentation, socialization and individualization. To claim that these opposites form a whole and are both to be observed in the causes and effects. Networks both connect and disconnect. They have centres, nodes and relations between them. At these positions we find human beings who participate and decide differently and who are central or marginalized, included or excluded (Dijk: 1999).

The multimedia society is the qualitatively different from the Tonnies dichotomous social change paradigm from community (*gemeinschaft*) to association (*gesellschaft*). This evolution from community to association involves not only structural change in the society but also a change in the basis of social integration of the kind of social bonds that hold a society and its members together—from common moral sentiments to (often grounded in religion) to rational self interest and exchange. From here itself society has had another sea change to e-solidarity. We are living in a world where the 'culture of globalization' pervades all walks of life following simultaneous communication through cinema, television, trade and tourism, compressing the political, economic, and socio-cultural space in the process.

The organizational networks are sets of statuses and roles. All technologies establish or modify networks. Thus the automobile owner is part of a network that includes dealers, mechanics, parts supplier, insurance agents, and junkyard owners. Our great great grand parents were probably part of a network of horse dealers, harness maker, buggy suppliers and blacksmith—a network that has been largely eliminated by the advent of motorized vehicle. In the same way, we have internet providers, web designers, advertisers, programmers, etc., making an internet community with typical identities popularly known as.com.

Interestingly, the culture of globalization has led to the emergence of new patterns of global stratification in which some states, societies and communities are enmeshed in global order whereas others are marginalized. The 'culture of globalization' and 'globalization of culture' strives towards deterritorialization and reterritorialization of political and economic power in the era of borderless world and global village.

Many countries are finding it difficult to contain the demands for group rights based on identity politics within the democratic framework. It is becoming very difficult for them to sustain the demands for group rights based upon rationality and universality within the framework of their existing capacity, leadership, socio-cultural norms, political and economic development. The methodology adopted is analytical, conceptual and comparative.

Perrow (1984) argues that human-made catastrophes appear to have increased with industrialization as we build devices that could crash, sink, burn, or explode. He also pointed out that the increasing complexity of modern technology has led to a new kind of catastrophe: the failure of the whole system (i.e. activities and organizational networks as well as apparatus). Once again we are reminded that technology consists not just of apparatus that can malfunction but also of knowledge and skills that may be deficient and of organizational networks that occasionally breakdown.

Not only do technological changes affect various groups and institutions within a society, and sometimes transform a society, but technology itself is affected by the social conditions prevailing at any given time. The acceptance of a particular technological innovation may depend on prior changes in other aspects of society. Thus Television might not have had as great an impact if it had been invented in the 19th century, where working people had far less leisure time than they do today. Another example is Sony Corporation's attempt to introduce tape recorders in Japan in 1950. Japanese consumers did not perceive any need to use for them. They went unsold. In consequence, the home computer industry is trying to attach modems to computers as simple computers remain unsold. Sociologists recognize that social institutions are often slow in compare to changing technologies owing to cultural lag.

With the end of cold war, the global rearrangement took shape in different dimensions. The global partners had new alignments on the line of free flow of trade. The Multinational Companies developed potentials to influence the governments of different nations. This global business without the system of colonization relied more on technology to access the resources of other countries. By that time, the definition of production got changed. It went beyond the concept of material production. Now, production can be in terms of programme. The system of operating machines got changed. The classical class conflict can no longer remain valid in a world in which programmes operate machines often with remote controlling. This change in the technology brought dramatic change in the so-called class conflict. With the emergence of computer and subsequently the web world, economic activities became wide spread. The classical concept of production and the production system got changed. The ownership of computer cannot necessarily be understood in terms of being bourgeoisie. But through computer one gets access to the web world and interacts with the virtual reality.

The crime in sociology brings attention to social disorganization, deviance, anomie, alienation, etc. It is also understood in terms of failure of law and order, criminal jurisprudence, etc. Such considerations and the corresponding literature are relevant to the conventional world we live in. Here crime and social status stand side by side. Cyber crime is committed by high profile criminals. But in a world of web reality, crime does not necessarily linked to social status or deviant behavior. It's the world of computer literates. According to a 2001 study, there were massively more than 550 billion documents on the Web, mostly in the invisible Web, or deep Web (wikipedia) As of March 2009, the indexable web contains at least 25.21 billion pages (wikipedia). On July 25, 2008, Google software engineers Jesse Alpert and Nissan Hajaj announced that Google Search had discovered one trillion unique URLs (wikipedia). As of May 2009, over 109.5 million websites operated (wikipedia). This enormity of web world does impart influence on the cultural spectrum which in turn keep on balancing centripetal forces of web world and centrifugal forces of societal diversity.

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