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Globalization and New Communication Technology in a North Indian Urban Setting

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Abstract

Globalization and new communication technology affect not only the economy of a given society but have important implications for other social institutions of the society. Societies throughout the world are now passing through the process of profound and rapid change. This change is closely related to the process of globalization & new communication technology. Globalization refers to the increasing interdependence of people across the world. It refers to the increasing impact of living and working in a single global market place but more fundamentally it refers to a basic shift in the institutions of our lives. It has given rise to a debate among the social scientist on the one hand and the policymakers on the other, to access the impact of the processes associated with this wider phenomenon on the social and cultural institutions of the societies particularly those who have adopted a policy to privatize and liberalize their economy in the recent past. The present paper is an attempt to analyse the linkages between the process of globalization and the usage of new communication technology in terms of mobile phone and internet at empirical level among the youth of a north Indian urban setting, namely, Ghaziabad city.

Keywords: *globalization, internet, mobile phone, television.*

Globalization is a process of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nations, a process driven by international trade and investment and aided by information technology. The process has effects on the environment, culture, political system, economic development and prosperity, and human physical well-being in societies around the world.

According to Held et al, (1992:2) "globalization may be thought initially as the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life-from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the spiritual". There is a general agreement among the scholars on the "Inter-connectedness" dimension of the process of globalization, but they differ from each other on other dimensions of globalization. The commentators on globalization, following Held et al.(1999) can be identified into three broad categories: hyperglobalizers, skeptics, and transformationalists.

1. Hyperglobalizers believe that globalization represents a new epoch in human history in which all relationships are becoming integrated at the global level, transcending the nation-state

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and making it increasingly irrelevant ever increasing cross border flow of capital, commodities, people and ideas are defining factors of the new age. Hyperglobalizers can be further divided into two sub-categories: positive hyperglobalizers : mainly those who advocate for open global markets and believe that these will guarantee optimal economic growth and will, in long run, bring about improved living standard for everyone (Ohme 1991, 1995); and negative hyperglobalizers, mainly critical theorists and neo-Marxist scholars (Martin and Schumann 1997, Reich 1991, Beck 1997, Schanapper 1994 and Wiseman 1997, Hopkins and Wallerstein 1996) focused upon negative impacts of globalization critically and rejected the notion of globalization in its totality.

2. The skeptics who also focus on the economic aspect of globalization argue that there is nothing new about this international economic integration. It is comparable to the period preceding the first world war. They generally prefer the term "Internationalization" to globalization (Hirst and Thompson 1996, Weiss 1997) they also argue that the role of the nation-state remains as strong as ever.

3. Transformationalists argue that globalization is the central driving force behind the major economic, cultural, social, and political changes that are affecting virtually all the people in the world today. globalization is seen as the overall consequence of a closely interlinked process of change in the areas of technology, economic activity, governance, communication, and so on. Developments in all these areas are mutually reinforcing or reflexive so that no clear distinction can be drawn between cause and effect. They regard contemporary patterns of cross-border flows(of trade, investment migrants, cultural artifacts, environmental factors, etc.) as without historical precedence. Such flows integrate virtually all countries into a larger global system and thus bring about major social transformations at all levels.

Globalization is deeply controversial. However, proponents of globalization argue that it allows poor countries and their citizens to develop economically and raise their standard of living. While deponents of globalization claim that the creation of an unfettered international free market has benefited multinational corporations in the western world at the expense of local enterprises, local culture, and common people.

To find the right balance between benefits and costs associated with globalization, citizens of all nations need to understand how globalization works and the policy choices facing them and their societies.

New Communication Technology

Technology has been the key to globalization. The new communication technology is the driving force for the current societal change and pulse of social and economical transformation in developed as well as developing countries. The advances in information technology have dramatically transformed the economic and social life of its users. Today, global mass communication is a reality and technology has been a necessary condition of extensive globalization. The communication technology includes the hardware equipment, organizational structure, and the social values by which individuals collect, process, and exchange information (Singhal and Rogers 2001:30-31).

The New communication technology with the internet, telecommunications, broadband, cell phone, handheld wireless mobile devices, and other communication devices have advanced to the point where internet communication across the globe can be so ubiquitous that no one thinks about it anymore. In recent years due to communication technology, the speed and scope of globalization have increased exponentially. Since globalization represents a merger of the developed world, with the developing world the introduction of communication technology with significantly speed up this merger and have a profound effect on culture, society, economy, social life, and politics as we move through the 21st century. Thus, creating new dynamic mutually beneficial business models and cultural exchanges, experiences, and considerations (Singh 2004: 5).

Internet: The advent of the internet brought with it a new concept of sociology. Sociologists are interested in the social implications of this new technology such as new ways of interaction, virtual communities, cybercrime, etc. The internet is a relative phenomenon, while the internet originally developed from ARPANET, dating back to 1969, the world wide web as we know it today was shaped in the mid 1990's. Internet explorer was first released in 1995 and Netscape came out one year later. Google was founded in 1998, Wikipedea in 2001, and Myspace, Facebook, and Youtube in 2003, 2004, and 2005 respectively.

The internet is essentially a network of computers across the world that is linked through global communication although it was originally used only by defense personnel in the United States. Early access to a computer and its related technology has made using the internet a common activity in more recent times. When the internet was first conceived it was seen as more of a tool for research and learning. Now the internet has an important role in connecting people. It allows people in countries around the world to instantly contact each other through emails, chat programs, and video calls. This instant communication has revolutionized social lives in India as well. Due to the internet and other communication technology, we have entered into a new era of globalization in which interactivity, communication, collaboration, and transfer of products and services take place instantly. Moreover, 21st-century version of globalization will transfer the economic, cultural, and political climate of all participating nations for years to come.

While the impact of communication technology has been overall positive, it has led to certain challenges. There is a wide disparity when it comes to access to technology between developed and developing nations. The internet is a genuinely international medium that potentially opens vast new resources for all, But its contents are dominated by Western and English language originators, however its diverse, access is dependent on expensive equipments, significant costs, and language and other skills for developing societies. The Developing nations do not have a proper infrastructure in place which has created challenges for a lot of people in these countries. The Exporting Countries still have a considerable capacity to influence the national media experiences of "receiving" countries but the people demand their media content in their language. There are natural barriers of language and culture that resist globalization' (Biltreyst 1992: 518)

New Communication Technology in India

Now India has bypassed Japan to become the world's third largest internet user after China and the United States and its users are younger than those of other emerging economies. The telecom regulatory authority of India pegged the number of internet subscribers at 164.81 million as of March 31, 2013, with seven out of eight accessing the internet from their mobile phones. Three-fourth of India's online population is under 35 as against just over half worldwide. Men under 35 and women from 35 to 44 are heavier users. But women account for less than 40 percent of all Indian users, a far lower sex ratio than that of other countries. The internet is the key driving force responsible for globalization and the emergence of the information society that needs to be analyse in Indian context.

The present paper aims to find out the patterns of using new communication technology and to evaluate socio-cultural changes in the life of those who are using the internet. The empirical data was collected through a structured interview schedule from 150 respondents in a north Indian city, Ghaziabad, near the national capital Delhi. Most internet users are youth predominantly belonging to Hindus of upper castes, Hindi speaking, unmarried, bi-lingual having higher educational backgrounds. Empirical evidence of this study has amply demonstrated that the use of new technology-internet has started changing users' behavior from passive to active, participatory to avid participation & enabling users with a voice that was otherwise unknown or untapped. Thus, there is a more positive impact than the negative one.

The level of digital literacy of the internet users have some formal degree/diploma in computer and about one-third of them learned computer by experience among those only less than half of them have any formal training of computer. Among the internet users, access to the computer is available to most of them (92 percent). They differ in respect to the place of accessing the internet on a computer. Most of internet users have access to a computer at their home (33.33 percent). Considerable number of them use a computer for educational or academic purposes (34.67 percent). As far as patterns of using the internet are concerned, email is the most popular activity (80.67 percent) among internet users, but it is also used for a variety of purposes like google search, chatting, seeing results and other academic purposes, downloading MP3 MUSIC, searching for reading materials, downloading free software, and networking with friends. Moreover, railway reservations and e-banking are done by a few internet users as well. More than half of internet users send more than 10 emails in a week. Yahoo is the most popular email service provider among users. Most internet users mentioned fluctuating power supply as a problem, virus attacks on the system, and slow speed of internet servers are other major problems, they usually face in using the internet. They have access to the internet from different places like homes, workplaces, cyber cafes, schools, colleges, universities, etc. For more than one-third of internet users, bills are paid either by them or their parents. WindowsXP is the most popular computing platform (operating system) for internet users.

It is visible that the growth of new communication technology is changing behavior, perceptions, and attitudes, as the ease and growth of online social technologies induce audiences to become digital activists; changing users' behavior from passive to active, non-participatory to avid participation, and enabling users with a voice that was otherwise unknown or untapped. Thus, the power of social media and its impacts on individuals, businesses, and society in India has provided an equal opportunity to voice thoughts, and opinions, and share information. The increase in usage and ease of entry provides an attractive interface for anyone to become a creator or advocate of information and ideas by using blogs, microblogs, social sharing, and networking sites.

The magnitude of the impact of using new technology on the social-cultural life of internet users is as follows :

1. It is evident that more than half of internet users have felt a high impact on change in their outlook. They think that their outlook has widened considerably by using this new technology. A little more than one-fourth internet users have a moderate impact while remaining nearly one-eighth low impact. It can be said that the impact cuts across their major patterns of using the internet.

2. Half of the selected internet users have a high impact in terms of change in their attitudes, one-third moderate impact, and the remaining one-sixth low impact. So also the impact is more on those internet users who are mostly digitally literate, comfortable with the computer, and use the computer regularly.

3. More than half of the internet users have felt the impact in terms of change in their social perceptions too much (high), a little more than one-third somewhat (moderate), and the remaining one-twelfth very little (low). It is obvious that those who have a high impact are mostly digitally literate, comfortable with the computer, and use the computer regularly in their homes indicating that impact on perceptions is determined by the patterns of using the internet.

4. Four out of every ten internet users have a high impact so far as change in their behavior is concerned. behavior change is moderate in more than one-third internet users and low in the remaining one-fifth. Impact in terms of behavior change is more on those internet users who are digitally literate, comfortable with the computer, and use the computer regularly.

5. High impact in terms of increase in their confidence has been felt by half of the internet users, moderate by less than one-third, and low by one-fifth. Those who are mostly digitally literate,

comfortable with the computer, and use the computer regularly have more impact than those who lack these patterns.

6. Almost two-thirds of internet users have a high impact in terms of increase in their knowledge, little more than one-fourth moderate impact, and the remaining one-sixteenth low impact. This impact is more on those internet users who are mostly digitally literate, comfortable with the computer, and use the computer regularly. It can be safely hypothesized that the more the use of internet technology, the more increase in the knowledge of the users.

7. A little less than two-thirds of internet users have more impact on broadening their social network. This impact is moderate on two-fourths of selected internet users, while low in the case of the remaining one-seventh here again. The impact has been felt more by those who are digitally literate, comfortable with the computer, and use the computer regularly.

8. Less than half of the selected internet users fall in the high category of impact so far as change in personality is concerned. This impact is moderate on more than one-third, while low on the remaining one-sixth. This impact cuts across their patterns of using the internet.

9. A little more than half of the internet users have become more active by using this technology. They have felt a high impact, while one-third had a moderate impact and the remaining one-seventh a low impact. This type of impact is also independent of their pattern as well as social background.

10. A little less than half of internet users find their participation increased by this technology. They are the users who have high impact, moderate impact on this aspect has been felt by more than one-third and low by nearly one-sixth., here again, patterns of using the internet play an important role in determining the extent of the impact.

11. Four out of every ten selected internet users have high and same proportion moderate impact so far as help in their jobs and businesses is concerned. remaining have low impact, this impact has been felt more by those who are in jobs or pursuing business and are quite comfortable with internet technology.

12. High impact in terms of increasing awareness about health has been felt by more than half, moderate impact by one-third, and low impact by remaining one-twelfth. Those who have felt a high impact in terms of awareness about health are mostly digitally literate, comfortable with the computer, and use the computer regularly in their homes indicating that this impact is determined by the patterns of using the internet.

13. Two-third of the selected internet users have felt a high impact on their buying habits, one-fourth moderate impact, and the remaining low impact. This impact cuts across the patterns of using the internet. It means that all internet users find change in their buying habits as a result of making use of internet technology.

14. A little more than one-third of internet users fall in the high category of impact in terms of help in studies, less than half have felt a moderate impact, while the remaining one-sixth have low impact. This impact is independent of their patterns of using the internet.

15. There is strong criticism of internet technology that it leads to alienation. This has been negated in this study as only less than one-fifth of internet users fall in the high category of impact. a little less than half find moderate impact, while more than one-third low impact. This impact is independent of their patterns of using the internet.

16. Unlike help in education, there are a little less than one-third of internet users with high impact who find this technology hampering their studies. This is supported by less than half of internet users who have a moderate impact and little more than one-third who have a low impact. As the study is not confined to students only, it is difficult to know this type of impact. Hence, a full-fledged study is needed in its own way to find out the impact of using the internet on students of different levels.

17. Impact in terms of making internet users aware of new products available in the market is quite profound as three-fourths of selected respondents have felt a high impact, a little less than one-fifth moderate impact and one out of every sixteen users falls in the low impact category. This impact again is independent of their patterns of using the internet showing that advertisements on internet sites are attracting users a lot.

18. Impact in terms of making the users of internet technology cosmopolitan is also quite profound as six out of every ten internet users fall in the high category followed by more than one-fourth in the moderate category only remaining one-eighth of internet users fall in the low category of impact. Those who have felt high impact are mostly digitally literate, comfortable with the computer, and use the computer regularly in their homes indicating that the impact on making users cosmopolitan is determined by their patterns of internet.

Conclusion

The empirical evidence shows that new communication technology—the internet has led to multi-dimensional changes which have been observed in almost all aspects of life— economic, socio-cultural, educational, communication & travel. The information society is a way for human capacity to be expanded, build up, nourished, and liberated by giving people access to tools and technologies with the education and training to use them effectively. The new communication technologies can offer real opportunities to improve the quality of community life. A major and somewhat neglected dimension of internet usage is that it is making communication substantially cheaper which helps in promoting social interaction. The multi-locational household is increasing in numbers. Internet and mobile phones help such households keep in touch and remit money in safe and secure ways. The Internet enables the development of social relations in non-traditional ways. An area where there is much scope is that of developing internet access through the mobile phone among more and more people as when internet access is added to this, therefore, surely there will be a very substantial transformation in Indian society.

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