

ICTs, NEW MEDIA AND REVIVAL OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA - KEY TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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***Abstract:** Development is the universal concern. ICTs are important for uplifting the status of masses. The paper puts light on a different angles and highlights that ICTs cannot result in rural development without the use of traditional media. The traditional media needs to be applied through new media. New media has the potential to revive traditional media, which is the key to development in rural areas. The ICT induced environment at the global and local levels provide for the new dimensions to be worked with indigenous forces. The much debated Virtual world is coming out in the real world to result in development.*

***Keywords:** ICTs, new media, communication, revival, traditional media, rural development*

Introduction

Information is a universal activity in every society. It affects each and every aspect of society. It acts as a catalytic agent for social change. Information has been termed as, “Oxygen of the modern age”. It seeps through the walls topped by barbed wire; it wafts across the electrified boarder. ICT’s (Information and communication Technologies) are a powerful tool of socializing through information having multifarious influences. They

empower, enrich and educate all the sections of society. ICT's create the environment of information awareness, lobbying and advocacy for policy change, through various on-line discussion forums and interactive programmes. The access of ICT's has expanded worldwide. The ICT induced environment at the global levels and at local levels provides for the new dimensions to be worked with indigenous forces.

ICTs are related to new media and development is not possible without the application of ICTs at the hands of new media. The interactions between ICTs and new media are generally neglected. The information received through ICTs need to be diffused into the masses in order to become knowledge. Development is the universal concern. ICTs are the integral part of our day to day lives and need to be applied within cultural or socio-economic context. The development and governance is not possible without ICT's. ICTs have proved great reach and penetration with the tools like; internet and sms.

Throughout the twentieth century, people received most of their information from letters, word of mouth, broadcasters or publishers of newspapers and books. The information helped in the development. With technological advancement and the increasing prevalence of the internet and sms the processes have sped up.

India has a dismal record in Internet penetration—just short of 7% of its vast population has access to the Web—but that may change soon with some help from its fast-growing telecom industry. The country has the second largest telecom sector globally Mobile phone penetration stood at 63.22% in December, 2010 according to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India.

ICTs are a revolutionary force which can bring fundamental changes in the society. Keeping with these, United Nations has taken various steps including: The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which call for improvement in human development by 2015. The millennium declaration adopted by U.N. In 2000 underscored the urgency of ensuring that the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication technologies (ICT's) are made available to all. One source that liberates

people from poverty and empowers them is knowledge. It is also now well understood that improvement in quality of life can be brought with the application of ICTs. “There is technological divide – great gaps in infrastructure. There is content divide... ..there is a gender divide, with women and girls enjoying less access to information technology than men and boys. This can be true of rich and poor countries alike”.UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, 2000) .

It is also considered that the ICTs destroy the natural fabric and interfere with the existing natural conditions. The new media is again the target for believing that it is responsible for razing the cultures and values along with the traditional media to the ground. For inclusive and sustainable development the transformation needs to begin at the grassroots’ level. The grass root level is engraved deeply into its culture and traditions. The transformations cannot be imposed or transported. The ICTs are considered to be the change over’s for the rural society. On the contrary ICTs and New media are in fact proving to be the catalyst for the revival of traditional media and in turn for bringing change in the rural areas. The ICT s in the rural sector can revolutionise the developmental processes only by using the traditional means at the hands of the new media which are rooted in the culture and indigenous values of these societies.

ICTs are being used in all the sectors such as agriculture, health, primary education, social welfare, rural energy and e-governance through tele-centres and common service centres. The initiatives emphasise on collaboration and knowledge sharing amongst Government, NGO and private sector. The model used is PPP. These changes are the result of the ICTs and Democratisation of Information. The ability of almost anybody to set up a website and begin publishing or broadcasting content has led to fundamental changes in the media. Companies and individuals can publish anything from text to images to a video using high speed and broad bandwidth digital technology, and deliver them direct to computers or portable devices like mobile phones.

Billions of web sites provide information and commentary on a vast array of subjects, in any language and in different forms. Online communities use the

power of millions of users to create comprehensive encyclopedias on subjects. Search engines provide tools to find the information in a reasonable time and effort. In the arena of ICTs the main concerns which need to be addressed remain the underlying factors which need to be considered for implementing ICTs for development as new media has defined the advent of media characterised by interaction between the source and the receivers of information and content access on-demand. This has blurred the distinction between information-creator and information-receiver. Information flows are now broad, divergent, reversible and accessible

Theoretical Base:

The ICTs rests on two theoretical approaches: Participatory approach and Diffusion of innovation approach.

Participatory Approach

Participatory approach tries to exhibit the democratisation of information through ICTs and the way information is consumed i.e. New media. New media through dissemination potentially affects the development and helps in shifting the monopoly centres to go down to the grassroots' levels. The multimedia characteristics of ICTs help in accommodating indigenous contents. Waisbord (2005:78),US based theorist suggests that over the past 40 years , a consensus has emerged with respect to the relationships between communication for development and participatory engagement with democratic processes . He argues that effective forms of development communication practice must acknowledge “ the centrality of power, the integration of top-down and bottom-up approaches , the need to use a communication ‘tool-kit’ approach , the articulation of interpersonal and mass communication , and incorporation of personal and contextual factors”. Here the challenge remains to meet the huge gap between the theory and the practice.

Diffusion of Innovation

Diffusion of innovation theory considers the role on ICTs in light of Roger's (1962) explanations of inculcating awareness and enthusiasm for technical innovations. Rogers (1995) ignores how socio economic fabric conditions the developmental processes. The innovation process filters through many stages. The concern of diffusion of innovation is to explain the rate and the direction of the adoption of new technologies. The underlying premises for development in this approach are not considered. It is actually these underlying dynamics that give results. This viewpoint is closely related to the need of generating communicative contexts which are akin to the people of that area, which will ultimately result in changing the behaviour and attitudes of people and hence ultimately in development.

These theories may form the broad bases for understanding of the developmental processes. Neither the diffusion of innovation nor the participatory communication traditions explicitly portray a theory of dynamics of the social matrix of communication, that is, the social networks of communication which are representative of diverse culture and traditions across local to distant. It is important to understand the social, economic and political culture of the indigenous societies. The ICTs need to make use of traditional media to get closer to achieve the desired results.

ICTs , Innovations and Experimentations:

It leads to innovation and experimentation and seeking for the possibilities and probabilities for implementing new ideas which can be integrated and assimilated by the existing structure or by reforming those structure. Free and open culture fosters innovation and creativity Technology should be near to the hearts of people and cater to the voices of the people . These voices need to be exhibited through creative expressions and innovative experimentations.

Virtual world is coming together in real world too, it is helping people to come together for shows, contests, opinion making, discussions, varied interests to witness theatre presentations.....

It is in fact bringing people out into the open, bringing the together in reality. It is becoming the power of the masses. It has the potential to shift the power alignments and power centres.

It creates platforms and forums for discussion, debate and argument and leading to finding out solution through various informational inputs gathered through new media. “ The success or failure of the new media campaigns will always be measured by the translation of their online engagements to offline activities.”

New Media @ Traditional Media

Rural development cannot be achieved without using the traditional means of communication through the new means of communication .The success of the projects depend on the integration and incorporation of the existing systems of knowledge into the new ones created by the ICTs. The participation invoked by ICTs should not run contrary to the community norms.

It is important that the new media is used as a tool to enhance the traditional means. New media should be used as a catalyst for bringing change, revival and development. New media is the potent force for the revival of traditional media because of its penetration, personalisation and effectiveness. It is the traditional media which further makes the new media acceptable, applicable and effective.

It is important that knowledge is made friendly through the means acceptable to the local populations. It needs to be made to fit into their systems and seep into the existing cultural values and traditions of knowledge. In finding ways for technology to be of service to people, one must not overlook how culture and the arts help build communities and shape national consciousness resulting in sustainable development.

The new media revives all the above, by making it available to them in their language. It is responsible for bringing people together. Technology which becomes the voice of masses through creative works viz. folk theatre, folk dance, films, pictures posters, drawings etc. New media should amplify the

concerns originating from the grass roots. Not listening to these voices would prove fruitless and disastrous. ICTs are the interface. A glaring example of this is : The Pratibadh initiative which is trying to change the scenario. It is simply a thick broadsheet based wall newspaper since 1996 reaching 40,000 villages in three states of Bihar, Punjab and Haryana through its network of 600 rural reporters. Lately, Pratibadh has enabled all its reporters with ICT training and tools for not only collecting information news and reports but also use ICT tools like Emails, PDF, LCD projectors, PPTs to reach out to rural masses in groups and communities. There are innumerable examples where traditional media is used along with new media and ICTs which is the real key to development.

Understanding Power Alignments:

ICTs help in creating systems of openness and fairness, and bring people together on a range of issues, thereby checking abuse of power and authority by officials at every level. All this is ensued by the use of traditional media because it builds credibility. Through new media in their traditional languages they are able to criticise and judge practices, asses work efficiency and evaluate whether the real development is taking place or not. The dimension of the whole phenomenon which describes the new media as virtual media having virtual effects needs to be relooked into. The so-called virtual medium is resulting in real effects. Virtual societies are coming out in reality as a force to recon with and have started delivering in reality. The virtual media is bringing people together, back into the real gatherings, eg. Anna Hazare's campaign , toppling of governments in Arab world. Virtual is getting turned into the real via new media. Wiki leaks has published dozens of documents revealing corruption and abuse by government and the powerful. Twitter was used to reveal super injunctions in the UK and to inspire mass protests in Iran. New communication technologies have traditionally challenged governments that see individual rights as less important than the right to govern without open opposition. Even before the Internet really took off, Australian journalist and educator Julianne Schultz commented (1994). In this situation, it could be argued that there is greater room for alternative media to manoeuvre, allowing for greater plurality, even given the occasional harassment by the authorities.

In a limited sense, therefore, it could be accepted that there are opportunities for creating counter-hegemonic discourses. The two-pronged pressures of a repressive state and an unforgiving market will determine the long-term existence of any alternative media. Many of these well-meaning but, unfortunately, economically naive ventures need to understand that there is a limit to volunteerism. And, political harassment and repression notwithstanding, there is certainly a need to engage with the market, to sell what is being produced to audiences beyond the converted. Indeed, as Landry et al. (1985, p. 99) point out in their classic analysis of the failure of the radical press in Britain, receiving grants is fine, “but for many projects, there won’t be any form of life at all after the age of grant applications” (emphasis in original). One needs to go back to the original and basics for assimilation. There is clearly a need for a government that wishes to utilise the new media to benefit its development strategies and, by extension, its citizens to understand the constituents of the knowledge economy that ICT is supposed to help realise. As argued by one of the main proponents of the knowledge economy, the renowned economist Joseph Stiglitz (1999, p. 20). Free press, transparent government, pluralism, cultural values and traditions, freedom of thought, open public debate – they are all very nice notions. If the potential of ICT for advancing democratic processes is to be realised, however, everyone – especially governments – concerned about democratic governance, genuine participation and a knowledge economy would need to come to terms with what these notions mean and begin wholeheartedly applying them.

Implications:

Today, information spreads around the globe in seconds. In the developing world, ICTs and new media are used to aid development and provide people living in poverty to access information that helps them make decisions about their lives. ICTs give us the networks where the receivers become the sources and creators of information become web of interactions and connections through Internet, mobile and sms. Such changes offer new opportunities for the dissemination of ideas, opinions and information, but also new ways to censor and control people’s access to information.

Technology should rest with machines and materials. Technology needs to be aligned with men around machines and materials. Men, machines and materials need to work together in a system to result in development. The suitability of application of technology can be evaluated only with human intervention. Considerable efforts are needed to develop a better understanding about the application of ICTs. It is the application of ICTs through New Media and the use of traditional media, which will ultimately overcome the hidden nuances of social, economic and political attitudes and behaviours of the Diasporas to pave the way for rural development.

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