

# The communication revolution: blessing or burden

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



The twentieth century has seen a remarkable revolution in communication and information technologies. But whether the fruits of this revolution are a boon or a curse is a moot point. Development of Thought: The technologies of information and communication have made impressive advances. The Information Revolution did not begin in our century. It began when the hunter painted pictures of animals on the walls of his cave.

The nineteenth century saw the advent of the telegraph, the telephone and the camera along with the development of the automobile. But it is in our century that the giant leap was made into the sky with the help of the aeroplane, radio, television, satellite communication and planetary travel. Man can now hear, speak and see at the speed of lightning. While it has brought people together and fostered a feeling of global village, it also provokes fears of cultural invasion and invasion of privacy.

The dilemma of the phenomenal advances of communication is at one level to find out how much of entertainment and consumption produce true contentment and at another to discover how much of information yields true wisdom. But like every other invention of man, the Communication Revolution has its uses as well as misuses. Conclusion: Technology and the way of life it has ushered in, is as much a burden as a blessing. It has brought as much problems as it has benefits. Ultimately it is by cutting down human wants that happiness can be achieved.

It has been an eventful century, a century which has witnessed the collapse of the European empires that had held the various continents under their sway, a century in which another empire rose and fell the Soviet Union, a

century in which the atom was split and its awful potential demonstrated, proving that the smallest of small can be more powerful than the biggest. But the nuclear bomb is not the only symbol of the century. There is yet another the microchip, also small, also potent, which bears out the poet's averment that the world can be seen in a grain of sand and eternity held in the palm of one's hand.

The technologies of information and communication have made impressive advances. The Information Revolution did not begin in our century. It began when the hunter painted pictures of animals on the walls of his cave; it took a step forward when speech was invented and a further one when early societies carved symbols first on stone, then on pottery, papyrus, palm leaf, birch bark, cloth and paper, to record individual impressions and feelings. Then came printing by wooden blocks and later by movable types and identical copies could be prepared of communications and books.

The power of books was recognized quite early. The Vedas were books, the Dharmapada was a book, the Bible was a book, the Kuran was a book. They bore out what Bacon said of books that " they cast seeds in the minds of others, provoking and causing infinite actions and opinions in succeeding ages". The book was not the vehicle only of safe and comforting ideas but ideas that could and subvert authority and prevalent norms. That is why the Church and the State devised censorship and book burning even before books were mass produced by the simple that Gutenberg and his followers conceived.

The communication giant grew up in the nineteenth century with the advent of the telegraph, the telephone and the camera along with the development of the automobile (The steam locomotive had been assembled a century earlier). But it is in our century that the giant leap was made into the sky with the help of the aero plane, radio, television, satellite communication and planetary travel. Man can now hear, speak and see at the speed of lightning. He has at his command machines which have extended the capacity of his memory and is speed of recall a million times.

Entire which normally would have required multi-storey buildings libraries can now be stored in a cabinet? The most complex sums can be solved in the wink of an eye. There is a direct relationship between communication and quality of life. There is no disagreement over the fact that information and communication are vital input for any security. The role of communication in healthcare, family planning and many other aspects of the quality of life cannot be exaggerated

The knowledge base (science and technology) is the most important thing in the present day society and so how knowledge is spread and made use of by various sections of the society becomes an extremely crucial consideration. This places immense responsibility on the groups/agencies, particularly development agencies and action groups, who collect information, analyze and then communicate it to the society. Those for whom the developmental programmes are meant should have full information about the various projects and programmes launched for their benefit by the government.

Modern mass media (television, radio, VCR/cable TV, print media, etc. ) have proved to be of great potential in information transfer, motivation, agenda setting, training, mobilization and feed-back and feed-forward loop. The needed technology is available and what we need is imaginative software and the use of media that can address both demand and supply issues. Communication strategies have the ability to narrow down the socio-economic gap between the various segments of the society, even without major structural changes at the macro level.

However, Mass communication has been used as well as misused. Radio and television have been praised for their contribution to making participatory democracy meaningful. But in their early years, they also presented a temptation to the State to use them for the implantation of qualities, of attitudes that it considered most desirable. The attitude most desired, whatever the complexion of the State in terms of its objectives, was docile acceptance. Hitler and Goebbels used radio to propagate doctrines of one race, one nation and one leader.

And in the eastern end of Europe, the communists used their radio and television for thought control, evoking in George Orwell the terror and the nightmare of the Big Brother watching every citizen. Thirty-five years and many million deaths after Orwell wrote his "Nineteen Eighty Four" came the real 1984 and found the Big Brother sadly sapped of his certitude. And in another six years he was gone. The larger question is what caused this disintegration. The cause obviously is the failure of the economic system of

the Eastern bloc to provide the goods to meet the needs which no amount of propaganda could cover up.

In making the citizens aware of this failure of their masters, satellite communication had a major role to play. Once satellite television began to rain down pictures of everyday life in the "decadent" capitalist countries, Soviet citizens could not but compare what they had been told with the evidence of their own eyes. Satellite communication made censorship and travel restrictions in fruitless. The success of the Soviet educational system (in striking contrast to the failure of its economic system) had meanwhile produced millions of people who could think for themselves, although they lacked the courage to speak out what they thought-

And now satellite technology enabled even the child to proclaim that the emperor wore no clothes. Communication today is the ultimate empowered whom no emperor can withstand. It is not to be imagined that television has always and invariably been the good angel carrying the gift of freedom. Not has it turned out to be the universal educator that some of its pioneers had hoped it would be. In our country, and in a large number of countries, television like its elder sibling, the cinema, has been the seller of impossible dreams. If it provided only escapist fare, the indictment would be mild.

What it does, unfortunately, is to extol a violent way of life and also to foster an insatiable consumerist appetite. Media organizations claim that their function is information, education and entertainment. But the mix changes depending upon the seriousness of a particular institution. Totalitarian states

(including the larger number of fundamentalist societies, which burn books and issue decrees for jailing and killing authors), do as medieval Christian church did, ordain a totally political role for the print and electronic media.

In democracies, the media are free to criticize established institutions and they assist the process of open self-examination which is the essence of self government. But in the world in which communication technology is becoming increasingly expensive, journals, radio and television are becoming steadily more dependent upon bigmoney. The cost of production of a newspaper today is several times more than the price at which it is sold. The difference plus the profit have to earn from advertisements. And advertisements are not an ally to self-examination). A few newspapers of known standing may be able to withstand the pressure of the advertiser, as well as of the State, but the weaker, the needier and the more opportunistic go along. Television is more glaringly involved with big money, having largely become a part of big entertainment rather than of enlightenment. An American tycoon was candid and picturesque in proclaiming that a television franchise was just a license to print one's own money. Because of its emphasis on diversion, television.

In the opinion of some social scientists, is engineering a new kind of illiteracy of the literate, to whom a five-minute treatment of a problem gives the illusion of adequate knowledge and discourages any effort at a more painstaking study. Likewise the availability of machines that store information and disgorge it at the touch of the button subtly alters one of the basic functions of memory- internalizing facts', perceiving, and priorities and

crystallizing insight. Television has been called the chewing gum for the eyes. The same charge was leveled earlier at films.

Yet we know that serious cinema has produced great works of imagination. It has even been said that cinema is the creative medium of our century, as novels were of the nineteenth. But if we praise books, we are ready to concede that very few books, in fact, are the precious life blood of master spirits. Nine-tenths of the books that make their way to the best seller list are monuments to the triviality of popular un-taste. Yet the chewing gum theory sums up what happens when a medium of culture contends itself with being a medium of entertainment.

It has been pointed that the three major television networks of the United States-CBS, NBC and ABC- have not sponsored a Shakespeare play or even a series like Kenneth Clark's 'Civilization' in fifty years. Yet it is another television organization, BBC, which is praised for doing so. Therefore, the failure should not be put against the medium as such but the attitude of the managements of certain media institutions. The anomaly of high-technology communications is that instead of building communities it contributes to disquiet.

Yet it would be dishonest to deny the power to television (and documentary films to perform the job of reportage and enable it to be an eye-witness to the history in the making. The same American networks which have been criticized for their neglect of mind enrichment have shown (and aroused) intense concern for social problems like racial disparities and community neglect. Television ranks alongside the press in being a political watchdog.

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The same relationship that exists between politics and the press exists between politics and television.

The importance of a free press for the functioning of democracy was underscored by Thomas Jefferson when he declared long before modern newspapers with a mass reach had evolved. That if he were asked to choose between government without newspapers and newspapers without government, he, would choose the latter. Millions today seems to have actually made that choice. The major positive point of the communication revolution is that it has brought people together and fostered a feeling of a global village. Some of the minus points must also be taken note of.

The very trend towards the internationalization of the human being provokes fears that identities are being affected, that specific cultures are in peril. The same technology of satellite communication which has been the bearer of the message of personal freedom seems as a fomenter of fissions in many societies. " The dilemma of the phenomenal advances of communication is at one level to find out how much of entertainment and consumption produce true contentment and, at another, to discover how much of information yields true wisdom. Is right to regard modern communications as a blessing which has turned- into a burden?

Is there anything that can be done? Of course, there is. The starting point is to transfer television, at least partially, from a boredom-killing but money-making business to the realm of education which is universally accepted as a social responsibility. Governments have proved inept in using television for this purpose. Private enterprise does not care. There must be a more serious

attempt to devise organizational forms, Public Broadcasting Systems, which are under real popular and not governmental control, which are charged with the task of using television for enlargement of people's minds.

Which are endowed with adequate resources to perform that function, which have links with the universities and the Arts, and which run parallel to commercial television but are not measured by the mundane actuarial yardstick. It is difficult to forecast, or even speculate in H. G. Well's manner, what new discoveries the next century might bring in the various realms of science. It is an even more daunting task to indicate how the hound that has been unleashed can be controlled again.

As the awareness grows that technology and the way of life it has ushered in will pauperize the non-renewable resources of the world. Science has lost its overweening self-assurance. Realism may force us all to adopt what the sages have all along counseled that a sure way to human happiness is the simplification of wants. Preserve Articles is home of thousands of articles published and preserved by users like you. Here you can publish your research papers, essays, letters, stories, poetries, biographies, notes, reviews, advises and allied information with a single vision to liberate knowledge.