

Global management and the digital divide



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Introduction

The digital world of today has an uneven distribution between individuals who have an access to Internet and computers from those who are lacking with such opportunities. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a daily necessity to interact and be a part of the digital inclusion today.

However, a question arises if digital divide is only concentrated on the technological provisions or any other factors are to be considered. As per the International Labour Organisation (ILO), ICT significantly contributes to the socio-economic development but produces an insufficient development all alone. Martin and McKeown, 1993 suggested that minimal infrastructure development is required in education, transport, health, social and cultural facilities to enable rural areas to cross the growth. Hence, social inclusion is multiple dimensional processes to bridge the digital divide and increase access to ICT is with suitable strategies to overcome the poverty and achieve the optimal effect.

Social Inclusion

Mark Warschaeur (2003a, 2003b) contributed to important debates based on digital divide argued that information technology within marginalised groups would not remove the digital divide, rather further up the social inclusion process. Warschaeur also proposes his thought for developing ideas on digital divide. A range of resources suggested by Warschaeur, necessary for social inclusion are Physical resources for technological infrastructure of communication devices and computers, Digital resources form the substance made available from the digital sources, Human resources having a skilful

access to the use of digital technologies and finally the Social resources supporting the structures of the community. Warschaeur argues that resources mentioned form an enabler social inclusion and later changed through the process of usage of digital technologies[1]. Contrasting terms for social inclusion or exclusion face difficulties on deciding who to be included, and how these issues can access thorough technological or informational method.

Social inclusion is not only a share of resources but also, “ participation in determination of both individual and collective life chances.” (Stewart 2000) [2]. It is a wide topic with different authors providing a choice of various policies to understand and interpret the concept. To understand the beginning of the social inclusion policies from the social exclusion, focus on Levita’s work[3] of three models as below.

1) Redistributive Discourse (RED) – It says that social exclusion forms due to poverty, which is not seen as subsistence but, when a person or family unit income (not just cash flow but also services) is below average.

2) Social Integrationist Discourse (SID) – It proposes that rewarded work offers integration to the social order and barred for those unemployed. However, this procedure fails to explain the acceptance of social inclusion limitations to accept individuals with low incomes or stay in time consuming.

3) Moral Underclass Discourse (MUD) – It rings the alarm for the penalty of social exclusion and the fear of dependent underclass. In this method, social inclusion supports by aiming at groups of single mothers, truants and rough sleepers to present them with special plan to lessen redundancy.

Levita's typology of social exclusion is helpful as it identifies the principle of social inclusion by moulding and stating the economic and political ideas in this neutral term of social inclusion. Therefore, the social inclusion policy in the three Levita's model directs them to : In RED helps in increase benefits and offer life's probability to those excluded from the society, while in SID it advances access to paid employment whereas MUD provides the excluded crowd with the social order and special approaches. Hence, all the three models form an ideal kind and they track the social exclusion policy to contain strands of an extra approach.

Another approach to understand social inclusion is Harris's multidimensional issue which gives an in depth knowledge to alleviate digital divide with relative public concern social equity, education and capacity building as the lower class have inclusion with no equivalent possession of income, while the higher class may face difficulty of inequality based on gender, age, racism, etc.

The following are dimensions of digital divide[4], which would help in achieving the societal concerns:

- a) Service availability- ICT's should be made freely available to all those who wish to utilise them.
- b) Awareness- everybody should be conscious of using ICT's for his or her own benefits.
- c) Opportunity to learn and use new media- Provide with computer education.

- d) Master of Technologies- Everybody should grasp the tools most suitable for respected tasks.
- e) Experience- With complete utilisation of the potential, familiarity of the subject is obtainable.
- f) Skills- Appropriate skills to perform ICT related responsibilities.
- g) Support- access to suitable aid in any requirement of use of ICT's
- h) Attitudes (Motivation) – Promote confidence to contribute in equal access of ICT's.
- i) Content- Adequate substance with accessibility would benefit ICT's for everyone.
- j) Whereas, the other aspects modified as per the cultural, disability, linguistic, gender and empowerment of civil society so that it belongs to all the traditions of the users, there are no kind of obstacle in the equal enjoyment.

The Harris's multi-dimensional issues state various categories to achieve the desirable societal outcome for the benefit usage and development of ICT's. Though within major groups, lower-income people, the deprived and marginalised sections of the society faces barrier in the usage of ICT is similar to the usage of other resources. Though other specific groups who also face obstacles in good use of ICT's are women who are unaware of the English terminology or the leading language of the social culture, the young, the aged, disabled, mentally handicapped and specific ethnic minorities.

Although, the presence of ICT in various parts of the world is well aware, the other side is still in the dark, which mainly forms of poverty, as they cannot afford to be a part of the digital world. Harris (2004) has considered different technologies, which would help in eliminating poverty with the help of ICT's. The ICT's considered by Harris (2004) are radio, telephone, television, public address system and the internet and the computer.

Radio

Radio has attained a remarkable outcome in delivering constructive information to poor people because of its nature of being ubiquity. Example: Farmers in villages of Nepal were found listening to radio whilst working in the field while, in South Africa, clockwork radios were given out to villagers to facilitate them with listening to development programming.

Television

Television is the equipment with the desired substantial progress. It also helped in the department of education due to various programmes telecasted through cable operators. The observable example proving growth is in China with the presence of TV University and agricultural TV station. On the other side, Vietnam possesses two University stations, broadcasting weekly workshops for farmers, watched by millions.

Telephones

A phone has started behaving as a symbol of status to the owner. It has been found that the modern adaptation of phones have been proved to be sensational. Telephones are mainly utilised for health issues, dealing in business and price exchange. For villagers, telephones provided all the non-economic benefits such as rapid mean of communication, reduced inequality

and improved law enforcement. In China, the villages with the accessibility to phone as a medium of communication sold agricultural goods for an average higher cost rather than the ones without the telephone. Vegetable growers in China claimed that usage of telephone helped them to carry out appropriate production choice. At times, the phone owners also gain an additional income by letting the community people to use it for a certain cost. Finally, telephone access in villages assisted with job searches, emergency medical care, and a help in the natural disaster.

Public address systems

China and Vietnam mainly follow the public address system of delivering daily news and community based information and messages. However, public address system confines to a smaller area than the radio, making it technically cost-effective and simpler to understand. To attain helpful information for broadcasting, communities in Vietnam are planning to connect their public address system to Internet. However, as per Heeks, 1999 findings on the lower community suggest that the direct access of telephone and radio forms as essential ICT tools for bringing a change in the life of the poor.

Computers and the Internet

Telecentres in lower communities form a mean of providing shared access to computer and internet knowledge. The two main features of telecentres are providing a shared access with the motive of growth in the accessed areas, which separates it from the cyber cafes. The staffs at the telecentre acts as the connection between the telecentres and the community making them familiarise with ICT's and the required information. Telecentres can earn

income with the usage of photocopying, telephone, printing, and emails, which would bring a financial sustainability. Although, there has been certain debate with the payment of usage of ICT services by the poor people as some feel that it should be a public service rather than a library service. There has been a mixed outcome with the usage of telecentres as some have experienced benefits with a target audience, while others are still struggling with low connectivity in hesitant communities and only a few have accomplished self-sustaining financial capabilities.

Britain Report (2009)

As per Rt Hon. Gordon Brown MP, Prime Minister, “ Only a Digital Britain can unlock the imagination and creativity that will secure for us and our children the highly skilled jobs of the future. Only a Digital Britain will secure the wonders of an information revolution that could transform every part of our lives. Only a Digital Britain will enable us to demonstrate the vision and dynamism that we have to shape the future.”[5] The Digital Britain primarily seeks to place U. K. as a long-standing head in communications and a fully harnessed Digital technology by generating appropriate structure plan for the business. The U. K.’s digital dividend will seek to alter the methods of business operation, improve delivery services for the public, prepare for the next-generation infrastructure, and resume Britain’s status as the universal heart for media and entertainment. Hence, the Britain final report for the year 2009 mainly talks about being digital and looking forward for a better ICT and more advanced infrastructure for the next-generation. There are various areas of concentration required to bring about the change or to start a new technological development. Being digital and availability of every

matter and solution over the internet is the main concern of the Government of Britain today along with suitable and supportive services. The key communication and information technologies considered are:

Broadband

Broadband is one of the keen areas, which is being looked forward to up-link the speed from what it is today. This has been a major concern of U. K. and for Governments all around the world. The solution to which they have gathered is adoption of fibre material for a faster and easier accessible service.

Mobile phones and network

Mobile plays a vital role in the connection across the country. Studies say that since 1984, the mobile radio networks in U. K. have moved three generations making mobile and network industry a competitive business in itself. With more GSM services entering the market are looking for more call and text services offered.

Television (TV)

U. K. experiences coverage from three types of broadcasting, i. e., digital satellite broadcasting, terrestrial digital TV and cable operated TV, which cover half of the population. All three networks provide a wide range of unique attributes in their own way along with personal services on daily basis.

Radio

Radio possesses a flexible nature requiring a minimal space and transferred through a wide range of technologies. It acts more than a regular stream of

audio forms a different image for every listener. In economic terms, the radio industry is relatively small. However, more than 90% of U. K. population is immune to listening of 1 billion hours a week. In addition, the special position acquired by radio is unguaranteed on the charts, as the changes to which are not immune.

Along with the suggestions for improvement in the communication world of Britain, the report also concentrates on the development of the infrastructure, as only technology cannot bridge the digital divide. The Britain report (2009) also talks about the Government's look out for the projects, funding for various projects, monitoring the work and practically bringing about the change to help with the digital inclusion in the world today.

Affect of Inclusion on Britain Report (2009)

Digital inclusion in the world today is topic most spoken as it provides access to the underprivileged or in the areas of inaccessibility. Warschauer identified four resource categories i. e., physical, digital, human and social resources to overcome the inclusion in the digital world and effective usage of ICT. Similarly, Levita's social exclusion models gave rise to the social inclusion policies and Harris's multidimensional issue with all the dimensions to be considered and providing access and social issues of providing technological assistance to bridge the digital divide along with infrastructure development in the rural areas of developed and developing countries. All the social inclusion policies discussed earlier in this paper proves a direct or indirect impact on the Britain report (2009).

Let us examine Levita's three-model- RED, SID, and MUD. In all the three models, it mainly concentrates on people experiencing poverty, certain groups excluded from the technological world today due to various reasons. The report here mainly focuses on improving and providing all those services in areas of low accessibility. The poverty issue can be fixed with the help of technological development and certain areas in China have already been experiencing these changes with the help of telephones, radios, TV, and computers.

With Warschauer's principles on four resources explains the importance of having all the possessions without any hierarchy for proper utilisation of ICT's. Having physical, digital and human resources automatically bring about the social resource to the culture. Government in U. K. is providing with the hardware for usage, digital content that is understandable and human skills for using the devices which is helping in bringing the desired changes in social inclusion. The report states that the Broadband service is already having substantial investment and is looking forward for future development without any Government interventions, providing a next-generation broadband to half or two-third of the population. The response by the market has also been over-whelming with Virgin Media providing a 50Mbps bandwidth to about 7 million homes whereas, BT has already announced a Capital allowance for development in 500, 000 homes additional. Hence, traces of improvement in the society with appropriate utilisation of resources for the benefit of the country, as a whole is observable in the report.

Harris's multidimensional issue also talks about providing all the dimensional resources to the community so that they are not deprived and can skilfully utilise the resources. In U. K., a company by name Hays PLC is investing £40 million for a web-based technology for application making it easier for the job seekers and the employers. The improvement in the U. K. mobile sector, radio going digital and data centres being created for storage of information for future references shows a great impact of digital inclusion in the Britain final report (2009).

However, providing with resources for usage of the community is the task of the Government while, the proper usage of the technology is solely rely on individuals. No one can impose any kind of compulsion for proper utilisation of the given ICT. Similarly, Warschauer carried out a research to identify the appropriate usage of ICT provided by various Governments all around the world. He observed that the slum area in New Delhi, India, computers given to people at slum for zero cost and observations show that children were using computers for drawing or playing games rather than for learning purposes. There is another observation made by Warschauer in Ireland where huge amount allotted to the winning city in a competition and the runners up were handed with mere sum. The winning city installed computers and provided access to Internet while the runner up cities focussed on mobilising the community. The result later on produced was the runner-ups scored higher in promoting social inclusion with technology rather than the winner.

Therefore, it shows that providing computer, access to internet, affordable telecommunications, going digital and public centre access is not sufficient.

For example, producers of computers and mobile phones find it more effective to produce sophisticated mobile handsets in Western countries rather than producing affordable computers for developing countries. In addition, GSM service with 3G network is being granted. As 20% of the population does not have access to 3G network service whereas the 90% population having access to 3G services face problems of limited coverage. Moreover, mobile operators have to make a tough choice between investing in urban areas and an extended 3G coverage in the rural areas.

Importance of U. K. Global Competitiveness

U. K. is creative in technology and innovation industry by consumers of British companies and from those who have a base in the U. K. From being one of the finance capitals of the world, U. K.'s effort of becoming ahead in ICT will bring a global competitiveness in the world. Every country is in the race to gain the title of being digital. U. K. is ahead in the race and needs to run faster to win the competition. As all nations are working on the development and enhancement of the ICT for a better economy. Being a developed country will prove an advantage in the race, as it would have already crossed certain hurdles. In the world of television, computer and internet, U. K. needs to do something so uniquely to attain the highest position.

The digital inclusion would bring changes in the rural sectors of the country. Making the whole country digital would prove beneficial, as everything will be available on the Internet with access from anywhere. The country would be running on a faster and larger scale in terms of production, consumption, services, etc. For example, with the help of 3G the airline tickets will be

viewed on the mobile phone rather than a print, complaints regarding various services could be registered online even in villages and basic medical care and precautions regarding any disease could be studied online. In addition, in today's schools, the young generation are made aware of technology usage in the classroom to set them for the digital Britain. The process to make U. K. digital is already on a rise as seen from the efforts mentioned above. However, the Government needs to be involved to bring this change in a generalised manner.

These trends form an essential part in public finances with a clear programme of electronic and online delivery, making it cost-effective, and increased levels of satisfaction with adequate time saving. Moreover, the report suggests that as a matter of necessity, a comprehensive model stating the cost, revenue and savings should be prepared resulting from the structure of infrastructure planning.

Conclusion

A link between social inclusion and the digital divide has proved to be a vital reason for backwardness even in the developed countries. Digital inclusion mainly spoke about dividing the people depending on the accessibility to the digital world of mobile or internet today. Development of ICT could strengthen the social inclusion by engaging the marginal or disordered people, alleviating poverty with the help of infrastructure development. The combination of social inclusion policies gave us a further insight into the digital world and showing the possibilities of the outcome. Digital inequalities, Britain Final Report (2009), creating competitiveness has given us an insight in the Digital world and a scope for future study.

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