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## Social Relevance of Information Technology

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### **Abstract:**

*Information Technology is the new mantra of the society today. Children, adults and everyone today is hooked to technology. It has become an inseparable part of life and has enriched the fields of health, education, governance among others. Information Technology has resulted in bringing the world and its people closure to each other. Information travels at high speeds and benefits all. The governments and other organisations are increasingly using technology to improve the lot of various sections of the society. This paper studies the relevance of IT to society in various fields with the help of illustrations.*

### **1. Introduction**

There is a revolution in Information Technology in the present era. This revolution can be very useful in changing the socio-economic lives of the people in a substantial way. One can simply not ignore the tremendous effect of rapid technological growth of our society. The explosion of new technologies and information has changed the way we do business to the way we communicate with each other. Information Technology has been helpful in all the fields i.e. health, governmental administration, business as well as education.

India is a developing country having well developed cities and under-developed rural areas, in which Information Technology can be of a great relevance. The cities provide home to teeming millions and are technology oriented with multi-speciality hospitals, temples of higher learning, modern means of transportation and on the other hand there are under developed rural and remote areas where health, educational and other facilities are just not available. Technology especially Information and Communication Technologies can make a difference here. The country requires a very large number of professional in these fields to provide health facilities to all the people in every nook and corner of the country. Information Technology can offer a viable solution in this regard. This paper examines the role of Information Technology in the field of health, education and other socially relevant fields.

#### *1.1. Health*

Life of a human being is very precious and it needs to be saved by providing modern medical facilities. In the developing countries due to paucity of funds modern medical facilities have yet not reached the rural and remote areas. The medical and para-medical staff located at the far off places can derive benefit of information and communication technology and provide the best of services to the people living in these areas. The databases of a number of health related issues can be helpful in overcoming a number of problems. Not only the medical and para-medical staff but also a patient can contact a specialist sitting in the other part of the world. There are consultations through video conferencing between professional located in universities, medical colleges and other institutions helping in teaching, research and other related activities. In case of health help can come from any part of the world. In this field following areas are of particular relevance:

- Medical reports, x-rays and other tests related documents can be sent across the world to ensure a patient can get the best of treatments in the least possible time;
- Tele-conferencing brings together experts for a meaningful discussion and possible future course of action especially in case of epidemics;
- Data banks, blood banks, organ banks, bone marrow banks and other such facilities can be provided to the patients transcending the political boundaries to help the mankind. In the case of the spread of Ebola, people around the globe have come together to find a possible cure for the patients and give succour to the effected people. The companies that are making the experimental medicine M-Zapp have provided the vaccines at the earliest possible times;
- Medical transcription is another growing area that is benefitting the medical as well as para-medical fraternity. The medical fraternity can save their time by dictating prescriptions and help more patients get healthy; and
- Robotic surgery uses technology to enable doctors to perform surgery without even being present on the location.

#### *1.2. Political*

Campaigning for General Elections – 2014, by some parties especially the BJP to elect the members of the Parliament was technology driven. Following is a brief review of the use of Information and Communication Technologies in this sphere:

- In the election campaign of Mr. Narendra Modi, the present Prime Minister used technology to connect to the people of this country. Since he was the star campaigner of the BJP he had to address a very large number of rallies. Due to paucity of time, technology was the saviour due to which he could address 300 rallies at the same time at different locations across the country (Narendra Modi's Speech to be shown in 3D at 300 places in India: BJP, 2014). ICT connected him to millions of people who were instrumental in electing him and his party to power;
- Mr. Modi has made a paradigm shift in campaigning by using technology to advance his cause and leaving his opponents behind (Singh, S Nihal, 2014). The opponents could simple not match the high tech campaigning.

### 1.3. Tracking Missing Children

The Government of India has a National Tracking System for missing and vulnerable children. It is networked at the State level with State Portals and provides information about missing children all over the country. The site not only provides information about the missing children but also information about child helpline and other related issues (Tracking System for Missing and Vulnerable Children). The information is updated every day. Another web site provides information about human trafficking (Anti-Human Trafficking, 2014).

The power of mobile, media and information technology can do wonders in tracking children. In a recent episode a young girl was kidnapped when she was visiting India Gate in New Delhi. It was the power of social networking and other media devices that the girl was traced in 8 days. The pressure due to enormous exposure of the issue and the photo of the child gave cold feet to the kidnappers and they left the girl safely so that she could reach home. It can be the power the police and tracking agencies tap to track a very large number of missing and kidnapped children.

### 1.4. Government

Governments at the National, State and Local levels can make use of information technology to reach the people in the shortest possible time. Government is using and can use information technology in the following ways to further the socio-economic issues:

- Address the citizens on important issues: Government can address its citizens on important issues. The power of Information Technology was recently tapped by the Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi recently when he addressed the teachers and the students on Teacher's Day i.e. September 5, 2014. Yes, there were problems in the schools to arrange Television sets and other paraphernalia to enable the students to listen to the views of the honourable Prime Minister but since this was the first time the teething problems are but natural. The researcher asked the views of children belonging to different schools in Chandigarh. The children responded with enthusiasm and felt that the PM had spoken to them directly. The way the PM spoke to them it probably left a permanent mark on them;
- On the second occasion on the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi the PM again exhorted the country men through the media for the *Swachh Bharat* campaign. His message reached the citizens and scores participated in the campaign. He conveyed his message through the celebrities too and as a result a large number of them took part in the cleanliness campaign. One can always dispute the fact that it may not carry on. But the fact remains that no such campaign was ever carried out earlier where so many scores of Indians united. There may be many more such campaigns;
- Give information on policies: In India mobile has reached even the remote areas of the country. The government can remove the middle man and reach the people directly through their mobiles and mails. Information about the benefits to the people accruing from the programmes and policies can be given to the people on the click of a button;
- The present government is also reaching people with the help of e mails. The researcher has also received a few mails from the government. The mails relate to child welfare, *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*, even best wishes for the festival and so on;
- Invite suggestions from people on matters of public importance: The web sites have provision for inviting suggestions from the citizens on its policies and programmes. It is not possible for everyone to meet the ministers and policy makers but due to information technology it has been thus made possible for anyone sitting anywhere to give suggestions that can be very helpful;
- Provision of Services: Information Technology is the medium through which the government provides various services to the people. These services range from payment of bills, taxes and other governmental dues online to redressing the grievances of the people. Provision of services with the help of information technology will also help in controlling corruption as the middle man is removed – railways, airways provide reservation and ticketing services, income tax department provides payment of taxes online, banking facilities, online submission of forms for licences and other documents etc; and
- Crime and Criminals: Data bases of criminals can be made available at the shortest possible time to the security forces to enable them to nab the culprits.

### 1.5. Industry

The Present Prime Minister is making use of technology to tackle a number of problems faced by the industry and the labour. Industrialists often cite India's complex labour rules as a major hurdle that have kept away large-scale private investments (Ramesh Vinayak, 2014). In order to revitalise the industry, the PM has decided to usher in the following measures with the help of Information Technology:

- 1.5.1 There are more than 40 central laws and over 150 state labour laws that are time consuming, costly and archaic. The government intends to reduce the earlier 16 forms to a single form and provide a unified web portal to make the compliance process easier for industry through a common window (Ramesh Vinayak, 2014). By simplifying labour laws and employment laws to tackle complicated procedures, reduce red tapism and reducing official harassment (Chengappa, Raj, 2014).
- To end the 'Inspector Raj' by streamlining official raids and reduce paper work. The Companies will now have to fill a single form online for labour laws compliance. The number of departments chasing the companies resulted in the companies getting bogged down in endless paper work. As per the new system there is going to be a system wherein the computerised system will select the inspectors and companies to be inspected and the report to be uploaded in 72 hours (Chengappa, Raj, 2014);
- By launching Provident Fund Portability that allows a worker to retain his *Aadhaar* linked Provident Fund number throughout professional life. It will enable the worker as well as the worker's heirs to claim the Provident Fund. There is a very large sum of Rs. 27,000 crores as unclaimed funds in Provident Fund Accounts (Chengappa, Raj, 2014);
- E-banking facilities are enabling the investors in accessing loans and performing other financial transactions speedily as well as at a lesser cost. There is also a provision of mobile banking that enables transferring money across the continents;
- ICTs help in rural networking so that even the most remote areas can be connected and information made available to them about monsoon, agriculture, disasters etc.

### 1.6. Education

Technological advancements are affecting the way we teach and learn. The world especially the business world demands that our schools and colleges prepare educated workers who can use technology effectively in the global marketplace. Policy makers feel that ICT can bring reforms in education and results in improved learning. Information Technology is helpful in the following manner:

- Improved and interactive learning by means of multi-media devices;
- Customized learning according to the needs of the student;
- Learning by collaborating with students across the globe by making virtual teams;
- Accessibility of resources in digital libraries across the world;
- Accessibility of resources at the time suitable to the learner;
- Accessibility of rare resources in digital form;
- Provides virtual classrooms for online courses that enable students to enhance their education and skills; and
- Provides vast resources for research purposes.

### 1.7. Minimally Invasive Learning

'Information Technology has ushered in a new era in the field of ' has been proved by the 'Hole in the Wall' experiment. The 'Hole in the Wall' experiment conceptualised in 1982 and started in 1999 by Dr. Sugata Mitra of NIIT (Beginnings) establishes the fact that internet enabled computers leads to 'Minimally Invasive Education'. The experiment started from a 'hole' in the boundary wall of the NIIT office in Kalkaji, New Delhi has reached not only different parts of the country but abroad also (News and Events). The results of the experiment have shown that children: (Research Findings)

- have shown improvement in their understanding of the concepts;
- learned to connect with each other and work in a collaborative way;
- academic performance of the children improved;
- belonging to the lower levels of educational facilities gained as much or more as compared to children belonging to higher levels of educational facilities;
- learn computer skills even with any formal knowledge of computers;
- who were out of school have benefitted and their content assimilation improved; and
- peer-to-peer learning patterns were formed due to which the children who learnt taught the skill to others and so on.

The field of education has been immensely benefitted by the ICTs. The research findings which were hidden in books and journals have now been given the shape of e books available to all the people who are interested in a particular field. There has been an explosion of knowledge from which a student can benefit.

### 1.8. Land Reforms and Management

Computerization of Land Records by the state governments has resulted in bringing transparency in the management of land records and bringing reforms. It has also resulted in the farmer being able to procure the details of their land holdings and get loans from the banks for agricultural purposes.

### 1.9. Agriculture

The field of Agriculture is a major benefactor of the ICTs in the following manner:

- Advancing of monsoon can be predicted well in advance and also provided to the farmer as agriculture is still dependent on monsoon;

- Knowledge of the better quality seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides can be made available to a very large number of farmers in their languages even in the remote corners in the country;
- The agricultural produce need not be dependent on the local market only. ICTs and the modern means of transportation has enabled the produce to be sold at the international market in the shortest possible time. E-Commerce has benefitted this market to a great measure.

The scope of ICTs is yet to be fully exploited in the field of agriculture in a developing country like India.

#### *1.10. Disaster Management*

ICTs help in disaster management by providing the latest information to all the people. The course of cyclones and other natural disasters can be effectively tracked to enable the governments and the people to take corrective measure in time and avoid the loss of life.

## **2. Conclusion**

The world is still in the process of understanding the potential of Information and Communication Technology for the benefit of the mankind. The developing countries need to utilize this potential for improving the lives of its citizens. The relevance of ICTs can only be ignored at its own peril.

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