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New Technologies: An Indian Status Report

By

Sushil Bahl
NEW TECHNOLOGIES: A INDIAN STATUS REPORT

by

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Submitted to the AMIC-UNESCO-USM Workshop on
"New Technologies in Communication Research and Documentation"
Universiti Sains Malaysia
Penang, Malaysia
22 June - 3 July 1987
SOME BROAD REACTIONS TO COMMUNICATION THEORY
BY J.P. AND K.B.

A useful piece of exercise/programme indeed. Easy to work on the computer and of high intellectual level. Quite exhaustive and informative. The questions under the sections CHANNEL and EFFECT are particularly interesting.

Problems, if any, are in two areas:

a) the questions are largely in the American context and therefore can be uninteresting to users in other countries;

b) the questions are too many in number under each section and tend to tire out the user.

SUSHIL BAHL
INDIA
30/6/87

SOME BROAD REACTIONS TO THE NEWSPAPER MANAGEMENT SIMULATION GAME
BY J.H. AND W.D.

Excellent piece of simulated exercise for students of Communication working with the computer. Very practical and full of options for the user.

The mixture of tables and graphs is very apt and provides users with good practice of doing/reading figures in chart form and visual graphs.

SUSHIL BAHL
INDIA
30/6/87
India is a vast country with over 750 million people, 26 States, 14 languages, thus making communications a tremendous task. There are today a number of Management Institutes which have Communications as part of their curriculum - at Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, and Bangalore. These institutes are highly professional and have made great progress. Computers are now playing an important role in the Indian communications field.

In this context this workshop is extremely relevant and essential. For me personally the workshop, with all its work - shopping and play included - reminds me of what I have read about in Indian history. In early India, as some of you would know, the pupils used to come to their teachers to study and learn. They would live with the teachers after having come from far-off places. This workshop to me is like that with all of us coming, in this case to a modern PhD Guru DR. Vincent Lowe, and a modern University Sains Malaysia!

I am sure we will all go back having learnt something. This workshop will be a learning experience for me, as in India application of computers and its technologies in communications research and documentation is still somewhat limited and specialised. But it is growing fast, and organisations are gearing themselves to catch up with their counterparts in the West and the Far East, who have made tremendous progress in computers.

As far as India is concerned, I have not come prepared with specific data on the use of new technologies, but I will share with you a few aspects and observations which I could pen down when I realised I have to stand and talk for 10 minutes on the subject.

In the areas of computers our technologies with regard to software are quite advanced whereas with regard to hardware we are still lagging behind. For instance in IBM's headquarters in the USA the largest group of non-US consultants is that of Indians. In India a Company called Tata Consulting Engineers is exporting software to the tune of 30-40 million Indian Rupees!

In the numbers game we are ahead but in qualitative areas we are behind. When it comes to researchers we have plenty of them. Very good ones in quantitative research, but very few and quite poor in qualitative research. Reasons for this: Languages, Diverse Cultures, Poverty? I do not know.
Hardware is lagging behind because of:

- market for computer being small and therefore problems of economies of scale;
- need now for a quantum jump/leapfrogging forward rather than depending on the process of evolution;
- manpower orientation, mental and political blocks, etc.

Communication Research in India falls under two broad categories: Social and Commercial. Under Social Research we have Family Planning, Health Education, and similar public service issues. Under Commercial Research we have research connected with business, marketing, advertising, and media. The Research organisations in the area of Social Research are Government or quasi-Government bodies. Not commercial agencies with commercial objectives as in the West. Commercial research agencies in India are few but professional. Some of them are even linked with international research companies. Both are today involved with Communications Research of different kinds. The government organisations use main-frame computers - which are expensive and more than often dated. The private agencies use PC's and micro's which are flexible and powerful. Only for vast nationwide surveys the use mainframe computers - eg. Readership Survey, and more recently television audience measurement with the help of TV Meters.

In the Social Research areas we seem to suffer from data diarrhoea. We have a lot of information, and collect a lot all the time, but we do not know how to use it and therefore do not use it to benefit. Reasons for this are threefold: a) No resolve (Political), Agencies not equipped or experienced, Television and Radio media government controlled and owned.

This may sound pessimistic, but at the same time we find development and progress. Computer literacy is on the increase at the corporate and student levels, the mental blocks are tumbling, corporations are going in for latest PC's and even networks within the office, branches, and production plants. The advertising profession has taken on to the computer in a big way for creative and media planning functions. The newspaper and magazine publishing houses have adopted the computer and computer systems for a number of their processes. The printing industry is largely computerised today - scanners, computerised printing machine, etc. Our professional and amateur photography industry, along with film and TV production industry, is almost completely dependant on computers and computerised technologies.
In the fields of telecommunications, TV transmissions, space research we are ahead of many countries - softwarewise and hardwarewise. We have over 130 TV transmission stations, and even our own satellite! Soon we are going to get our own Super Computer too.

Presently, we have over half a dozen local computer manufacturers and about a dozen peripherals manufacturers.

As George Santayana said:

"We must welcome the future, remembering that it will be the past, remembering that it was once all that was humanly possible."

This is important for India and many other countries of the world. Progressive countries are soon to realise.

26/6/87