

Chapter 63

Information Technologies and Social Change

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ABSTRACT

Since the 19th century, the whole world has experienced the effects of the Information Revolution in varying degrees. Information science and technologies have become areas that their communities give the greatest importance, and they make maximum investments to them in the globalized world conditions. Industrial society left its place to post-industrial society which is an information society in a sense. This chapter explores information technologies and social change.

INTRODUCTION

Change is an inevitable fate for all the communities of the earth. The thing making social change today more important is the speed of this change. In previous historical periods of humanity, changes lasting for centuries today occur in only a few years. On this scale, change requires a dissolution and restructuring from the interaction between generations to all social institutions. To adapt to such radical changes is not easy for any society. In fact, components of the social structure are protectionist and change slowly. Structures such as the culture, family, understanding of religion, economy, politics, and education do not change easily. But today, it is seen that all of these institutions change rapidly. Certainly social change depends on many factors such as cultural, environmental, demographic and so on. This is a natural result of the interaction between man and nature. It is the process of adapting human to life and nature. Thus, a slow and controlled change occurs. However, through the development of communication technologies in the 21st century, in terms of speed and direction, social change takes an unpredictable state.

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The industrial revolution, affected mostly humanity and forced it to change via communication technologies. With the Industrial revolution, especially in Western Europe, the modern type of society emerged. Modern society organizes in hegemony of reason and scientific knowledge. The idea of progress is dominant depending on the Enlightenment philosophy. Accordingly, societies progress continuously from primitive towards the modern. Modern society is the last stop. Industry creates an urban life depends on factory rather than a rural, earthbound life. Economics becomes an activity that occurs outside the households. Family and education change in structure and function. Politics ceases to be an event in king's palace. Relations between the governing and the governed, re-establish in the framework of citizenship.

Enlightened every citizen's political participation within the framework of wisdom and knowledge are accepted. Another important development emerged with the Industrial Revolution and modern society in mass media. Developing since the mid-19th century, high-circulation newspapers and magazines became the most important agents of change in modern society with the mass media such as the radio, cinema, and television. Especially since the 1920s, the role of the media and mass media have been discussed in influencing human attitudes and behavior. Thus, they have affected individuals and communities from the health to leisure, from the consumption to religion and family. They have accelerated social change in an unpredictable manner. Therefore, converter effects of communication technologies on the social structures and social relations will remain as the investigation area of social sciences for a longer time.

BACKGROUND

Classical sociology seeks social change in the relationship between social structures. Accordingly, an element of social structure affects the another structure by changing. Institutions such as religion, economy, family, and education create a social stability. As the first sociologists of modernity, Simon, Comte, Durkheim, Marx, Spencer and, Weber, in order to discover the laws of social change, try to produce information from social phenomenons. Thus, an extensive literature occurs on the issue. In this context, theoretical approaches such as structuralism, conflict theories, evolutionism, functionalism and so on. can be mentioned (Comte, 2001; Weber, 2000; Durkheim, 2006).

In addition to these grand theories, with the development of communication technologies, theories about the culture created by these tools and its impact on human behavior and society remain. Studies on the impact of communication technologies on society and human relations gained momentum especially between the two world wars. Theoretical approaches such as Syringe Model, Limited Effects Approach, Usages and Gratifications Approach and so on. Approaches such as Criticism of Culture Industry of the Frankfurt School is important for literature. However, the approaches expressed in this literature deal with the impact of information and culture transmitted via information technologies on human. It is criticized that information and culture transmitted by the media and the mass media deactivate the society and the society is forced to consume a culture which is not produced by itself.

However, the internet and social networks opened to the public after 1985, giving the opportunity to participate. And their impact on society and human behavior is much deeper. They changed the traditional acceptance about crime, family, education, and leisure completely. Today, no social institution, is as effective on people and society as information technologies. Therefore, the interaction of communication technologies and society, should be re-evaluated based on existing literature. Thus, it can be understood that how every social structure influenced and transformed by this process. This is the aim of this study.

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