Bringing the World Wide Web into Third World Countries: Integrating Technology Across the Globe

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Abstract

While technology continues to thrive in the Western World, Third World and underdeveloped countries continue to struggle with the idea of incorporating such technology into their culture. After radio and television took decades to expand across most of the globe, the Internet seemed to boom into society within a matter of years. Many developing countries do not welcome the idea of technology, especially the Internet, into their countries. While many have a negative view toward the influence the media might have on their people, many countries simply do not have the resources or financial availability to acquire such technology. Despite the disadvantages of the Internet, there are several advantages that outweigh the disadvantages. Unfortunately, many seem to dwell only on the disadvantages. With cooperation and regulation, Third World and developing countries can use technology to their advantage. Developed countries will only benefit from global interaction. Underdeveloped countries have the possibility to boost their economy while increasing the quality of life by becoming part of the global economic community. Fair trade and employment opportunities are just a few ways to bring the world together for the benefit of all.

Introduction

As media and technology evolve, the desire to connect with the rest of the world also increases. The idea that we can share information and cultures, perform business transactions, educate, and make global decisions within one spectrum of technology is rather impressive. The introduction of the World Wide Web has been not only beneficial for many but also intimidating for some. While there are positives to the convenient knowledge, there are also negative aspects that many are unable to overlook. With North America being the largest Internet provider and subscriber, several Third World countries do not welcome the technology advancements into their countries because of the negative “Western” influences. There are few countries, if any, that have similar First Amendment rights like we have in the United States. However, since the Internet is perhaps the cheapest way to access news worldwide, many countries are accessing the World Wide Web at a high rate of speed. “According to some sources, it took the radio 30 years to expand its audience to 50 million people, television 13 years, and the Internet a mere four years,” (Chernov, 2004, pg. 22). As the fastest growing medium of news, the Internet is indeed essential to the globalization of the world.

With the cost reductions of computers and communication services, the development of businesses and industry has allowed millions of new consumers to aid in market development. With this large increase of Internet users, there are those who are intimidated by the information that is so easily accessed via the web. “While offering mankind basically new solutions and opportunities in virtually all areas of life, the emerging changes in the information sphere also pose new problems and threats…” (Chernov, 2004, pg. 23). The article titled “Global Information Society”discusses several problems that might arise, or already have, when it comes to information spanning the globe. The possibility for a digital divide of countries or regions, regulation of the Internet, freedom of expression and censorship, and imposing certain visions on citizens are all problems that need a solution in order to make a global information society truly successful (Chernov, 2004). One major concern of developing countries is the imbalanced news that predominately travels from advanced Western countries. The strong appeal of Western culture (things like television and films) can influence local cultural traditions, which is not always the desire of some countries. Developing countries pushed for a new order of technology in the 1970’s. When the Western countries strongly opposed this idea and pulled out of the organization, developing countries were left to expand or develop their own news agencies. They still however, cannot compare with those of the Western agencies (Kamalipour, 2002).

Despite the disadvantages of the Internet, there are several advantages that outweigh the disadvantages. Even though this is the case, the disadvantages are often those that are discussed and diagnosed more frequently. Illegal and harmful content, like child pornography or Internet scams and propaganda, make it difficult for some to accept the web into their lives, especially their homes. Regulation of such material, in the United States, does, however, violate First Amendment rights. What about the developing countries that do not have the same rights as those in America? How do they regulate this type of content? What might be considered acceptable in the United States is by no means what is accepted across the world. Many of these underdeveloped and Third World countries protect themselves from this type of material by denying Internet access or communication in general. By denying or filtering access, global development is greatly hindered.

These countries often have a lack of financial support when it comes to communication development. As the research gap continues to widen, the funding continues to be an essential part to the success of global research. In 1999, a world conference in Vienna was organized to help raise money for just this type of research. “It pledged to set up a fund for science and technology projects in developing nations, and the U.S. delegation even proposed setting up a national aid agency to support Third World research,” (Koenig, 1999, pg.1760). Funding research to close the gap is important to the advancement of global communication development.

With the help of the United States and other developed countries, it is possible to bridge the technology gap between the Western world and underdeveloped countries. By incorporating the Internet and opening the lines of communication and trade, developing countries will better their economies and therefore raise their societies out of damaging levels of poverty and unemployment. While this hypothesis seems relatively clear, determining the most efficient way of incorporating technology seems rather complicated due to the fact that several underdeveloped countries do not necessarily welcome the influence from the Western world. To understand the importance of technology integration, we must look at a continent that contains many of the underdeveloped populations in the world: Asia. How do we the incorporate Western world technologies into societies that are resistant? If allowed, how do we possibly integrate computers and technology into communities struggling to provide electricity to its citizens? And finally, who takes financial responsibility for such a conquest?

Rationale

Bringing the Internet into Third World countries is not only beneficial for those countries; it is beneficial for the entire world. With an increase in communication, these countries are able to advance their knowledge of medicine and increase other knowledge to help their cultures and communities survive. All citizens are able to learn from other cultures and societies. The Internet is a key tool to this type of development. However, as essential as this tool might be, we cannot overlook the fact that the Internet is not necessarily cost effective for everyone across the world. One must have telephone access to acquire the Internet, and in countries that do not even have running water, telephone access is not necessarily a high priority. Finding ways to integrate this technology into these countries is already in progress. Everything from undersea cable systems and satellites to low cost computers specifically made for less developed countries have been created to ensure the communication gap continues to become smaller (James, 2001).

Brining the Internet into underdeveloped Third World countries will help strengthen those countries’ economic stature. “Globalization is a process of tearing down barriers between nations. This, of course, includes free trade, but it also implies cultural, political and human exchange. A freer flow of goods and services is part of globalization…,” (Mejia-Vergnaud, 2004, pg. 67). By brining technology into these areas, communication will not only increase revenue, it can also provide opportunities for the country to develop into a competitive trading unit. While the concept of globalization seems to be a logical idea, several countries blame globalization for their poor economic status. In order for this liberalization to succeed, countries need to set regulations with their own individual companies. “Local companies must meet foreign competition by employing new technology, introducing new products, and focusing on quality management,” (Mejia-Vergnaud, 2004, pg. 69).

In his article, “Effects of Globalization,”Andres Mejia-Vergnaud discusses what critics think about globalization. Many think that globalization does nothing but widen the gap between the rich and the poor, while several studies show this is simply not true. The relationship between free trade and the economic growth in these countries is very positive. The studies show that this growth leads to the reduction of poverty,which is often so abundant in underdeveloped countries (Mejia-Vergnaud, 1990). The only way for these countries to become competitive is to compete, and without technological advances like that of the Internet, it is impossible for them to compete with other countries that are easily accessible because of technology. Internet integration will help Third World countries develop financial support needed to provide a better way of life.

Working against Resistance

While it is easy for us to understand the global benefits of bringing technology to all parts of the world, it is not so easy for some of the underdeveloped countries to understand the magnitude of such ideals. While we see technology as the wave of the future, many cultures see technology as a form of corruption and evil influence in their society. In order for the Western countries to integrate technology into less developed countries, these countries have to understand the importance of such integration. While many are afraid of negative aspects of technology; freedom of expression, religious and political influence, and pornography; they must see the benefits such technology could bring to their economies through education, free market trade, and global connections.

In the last few decades, several low income countries in Asia have developed into rather strong markets. Malaysia, for example, has continued to develop into a key component in international markets. At the end of the 1960’s, Malaysia showed a strong base for economic growth, but the country struggled with ethnic inequalities that made for social, economic, and political difficulties. “Raising the levels of education, income and asset ownership of the indigenous Malay population became a key policy objective despite the economic costs this might entail in the short term,” (Kim & Young, 1987, pg. 72). With an increase of education, and a feeling of ownership to the citizens, Malaysia has continued to develop in the global economy by exporting several crops. This has greatly benefited their citizens as it continues to assist their flourishing economy.

Power Supply Shortage

While the idea of integrating technology seems necessary, it is also very challenging. Many of the underdeveloped countries do not have running water, let alone a power supply that can support technology integration. Bringing computers into such countries could have a negative effect on the global economy if the proper measures are not taken first. Countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia have continued to develop over the last few decades into stable economic communities. But not all parts of Asia have relished in such success. Many of the South Pacific countries struggle with severe cases of poverty. Clothing, shelter, and food are scarce and the idea of an economic system is rarely a thought. So how do we integrate technology into such countries?

Education is essential in these parts of the world. Training and improving already existing skills is the first step is establishing any form of economy. Utilizing labor and skills will allow for countries to evaluate and determine what their strongest assets are in the trade world. Once this is established, and a monetary system is developed, a democracy is also needed. With a democratic leadership the people can make decisions for themselves, and provide for their futures. After such communities are established, then technology can start to integrate into the picture. However, substantial amounts of education are needed to train workers on how such technologies work, and how they can benefit the culture. Many of these small countries must rely on trade to be viable. They must learn to utilize their assets and resources adequately. “Improved training, particularly at secondary and vocational levels, will be necessary for the effective functioning of the economies,” (Kim & Young, 1987, pg. 82). With a strong educational foundation, many of these countries will continue to flourish, while others will begin a new venture with economic growth and stability. Building an economic base, education and training can lead to more substantial technology integration. Producing energy and dispersing this energy is the next step. After power supplies are in tact, communities can begin to slowly integrate technology.

In the 2000 article, “Cable communications in Mumbai: integrating corporate interests with local and media networks” by Veena Naregal, one can see how technology integration over a decade has helped one Asian country develop into a stable community. Brining cable television into this country has definitely changed the attitude of people there over the last few years. Political issues and freedoms are a hot topic, as well as learning knew innovative ways to emerge from a lower economic status, are a few success examples noted in this article. The cable services produced a new crop of operators. There is a large competition between the three large cable companies in Mumbai. While this competition has not always been positive for the people of Mumbai, the integrated technology has opened doors for many who would not be where they are today without the introduction of cable television years ago.

Integrating Funding

This ideal of a global economy is not possible without financial aid and support from already developed countries. Boosting the economy of several countries in Asia would not only benefit those specific countries, they would also benefit other trade markets around the world. “Economic globalization and the IT revolution are complementary in a very fundamental sense-they both make markets more competitive than ever before,” (Kehal & Singh, 2005, pg. 317). Brining technology into underdeveloped countries will only help to boost their economic status while lowering poverty levels and unemployment rates.

In the book, *Opportunities and Challenges of the New Economy for East Asia,* authors Kehal and Singh discuss the economic diversity among many of the East Asian countries. Countries like Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong do very well in the global market economy. At the other end of the spectrum, Asian countries like Myanmar and Indochina remain among the poorest countries in the world (Kehal & Singh, 2005). Brining cost effective technology into these poor countries is needed to truly have a global economy. The question remaining is how do we bring expensive technology into economically deprived countries and make it benefit them as well as others in the world. These countries need to utilize the resources that are available in their surroundings, and allow for aid from others to begin technology integration. “Lower information costs for consumers leave them with more resources available for consuming goods and services,” (Kehal & Singh, 2005, pg. 318). With possible donations of computer equipment and volunteer programs, underdeveloped countries can begin to truly utilize their goods and services in their own countries, while boosting their economies by trading those goods in the global trade market.

Review of Literature

In order to truly understand the magnitude of technology integration, we have to understand the significance of the Internet itself. “Internet communication began with a computer crash and unmemorable twaddle,” (Howard & Jones, 2004, pg. xi). The first attempt to transfer information was in 1969, while email began around 1971 (Howard & Jones, 2004). What started as a message sent from one computer to another only five feet away, developed into the fastest growing form of communication to date. Family members are able to communicate more cost effectively, more frequently. People are able to view what is happening locally and across the world at the same time. Shoppers are able to purchase basically anything and everything they have ever wanted or needed online, all because of the Internet. This development has indeed changed society and the world.

When a society goes online, the opportunities that open are endless. Many European, South American, and Middle Eastern countries have introduced their cultures to the Internet. It is estimated that over 300 million people around the world are connected to the Internet, while two-thirds of that population resides in the United States and Canada (Main, 2001). Countries like the US and Europe are able to access the Internet because they are developed countries both economically and technologically.

Many of the Internet companies in the United States have faster connections than most countries. When looking at the underdeveloped countries, the numbers speak for themselves. Twenty-three percent of the world’s population lives in Southeast Asia, but only one percent of that population is Internet users (Main, 2001). It is difficult for some Third World countries to bring the Internet into their society when they have only recently received telephone communication. Thirteen percent of the world’s population resides in

Africa, but in some parts of that country, there is only one telephone per 1000 people (Main, 2001). There are more phone lines in several US cities than many countries in Africa. Until these types of situations are addressed, integrating technology into these countries will be a challenging process.

In order to integrate technology, it will take more than simply installing a few phone cables. Telecommunication infrastructures need to be in place for the Internet to be successful in these countries. Costs of computers and other equipment often hinder these countries from logging onto the web. A basic PC in Africa is almost fifty percent more expensive in Africa than the US (Main, 2001). The dial-up fee is also outrageous for only a short amount of Internet hours. English is the dominant language of the Internet, posing a problem for many countries. Since global communication is made up largely of Internet usage, those who do not speak English might have little desire to become part of the World Wide Web. Perhaps developing more web material in local languages, lower costs of equipment, and providing easier access will help to integrate technology into these less developed countries.

Many countries openly welcome the technology, while some have reservations about the Western influence that is often introduced to their society in the process. Our society has been labeled as having too much control or power when it comes to technology. Since we are the largest supplier of Internet material, it is logical that others might have these ideals. “Ironically, even as the means of both communication and information creation, distribution, and reception have multiplied, the efforts to centralize control over technology and content have likewise intensified,” (Fortner, 1993, pg. 276). With the majority of the information presented on the web being in English, it is not a surprise that some less developed countries would be afraid of the Western influence found on the Internet. Researchers have however identified issues such as these and are working on integrating more languages, opening the Internet to other cultures and societies.

The economic development that is increasing because of the Internet is something that should not be overlooked. How competitive a developing country wants to be depends on how quickly they are able to exchange information globally. If they have quick access to information about conditions of the export market, they can more quickly keep up with changes and respond to the altering prices (Main, 2001). Without this type of access, they will find themselves falling behind, unable to keep up with the high demand of the market. If they are unable to keep up with the market, they will lose money and eventually fall of out the competition. As certain developing countries are joining the Information Age, digital lines are automatically being laid in some countries. This will help speed them along the road of Internet integration, while some countries take a little longer in this process because they are taking the time to switch to analog lines to digital (Main, 2001). Whatever direction the countries decide to take, it is important for them financially to connect with the global information exchange. In order for developing countries to accept the Internet and use it effectively, these countries must agree upon some type of policy to ensure success. “Developing countries must create a framework of political, legal and economic conditions that guarantee equality of opportunities and create incentives for trade and investment,” (Mejia-Vergnaud, 2004, pg.70). Most of these countries still have political systems that are imperfect to those in more developed countries. “In the rankings of economic freedom, most developing countries obtain poor scores in critical areas such as legal stability, size of government, regulation and sound monetary policy,” (Mejia-Vergnaud, 2004, pg. 70). These impediments often keep these countries in poverty. With the Internet and world support, it would be possible for these developing countries to break out of this lifestyle. Some of these countries have not yet accepted globalization and they have not embraced economic liberalization. Perhaps with better campaigning and education of the importance of such ideals, the countries would more graciously accept these concepts and help improve their countries. Most of these countries have political institutions that spend too much money and borrow too much to even consider individual rights for its people (Mejia-Vergnaud, 2004). With our attempts at open trade and cultural integration, it is hoped that technology can help break individuals in these countries free from the oppression they face with such rule.

As mentioned earlier, the article “Effects of Globalization” evaluates countries that have taken steps towards globalization, and it evaluates the progress and fallbacks encountered along the way. At the beginning of the 1990’s, Latin America was trying to recover from a huge debt that was starting to make investors believe the country was indeed falling apart. In order to try and help these countries break free

from this cycle of poverty, many were encouraged to protect their local production from the foreign competition. These countries were also convinced to carry out programs of public investment, many of which were funded by Aid-to-Development (Mejia-Vergnaud, 2004). This program, unfortunately, was not as successful as was intended. The aid that was applied was not enough to help these less developed countries overcome poverty, and some were even worse off than before the aid. “Moreover, as if poverty were not enough, the large size and huge powers of governments in these countries produced extreme cases of corruption,” (Mejia-Vergnaud, 2004, pg. 67). Most of these countries reform was postponed because of such situations. In order for this reform to work, countries need to couple free-market policies along with liberal-democratic politics. When countries did not manage to reform, most likely it was because one of these two characteristics were not being met. Without clear and stable legal rules, it is unlikely that investments will travel from rich countries to poor countries, like that of Colombia. Colombia did infuse a liberal-democratic society with that of a socialist-oriented concept. These ideals that are infused together often cause confusion and uncertainty to investors in the region. Legal uncertainty is one of their main concerns, even more so than terrorism and violence. According to Mejia-Vergnaud, they did gain from the free trade and free flow of capital, but other poor countries will never experience this unless they undergo a huge process of political and institutional reform (Mejia-Vergnaud, 2004).

As aid has been implemented into less developed countries, the idea of global networks benefits everyone involved. In her book, *Global Networks*, Linda M. Harasim studies the effect of such networks and what it would mean to the world if everyone were to become connected. It is indeed a media that connect people with other people. “Global networks, the use of computers for international communication, will further enhance and expand how humans connect, communicate, and create community,” (Harasim, 1993, pg. 3). Not only will these networks open a trade market, political venues, and economic growth, it will also open to world to a new global village, a place where the world can meet. “The extension of human community onto a global scale is unprecedented; we are challenged to understand the scope and implications of such powerful social transformations in order to take part in shaping, socializing, and ensuring the accessibility of networks for the global community,” (Harasim, 1993, pg. 3). With global networks, people from across the world are able to socialize, interact, and learn from one another to create a more accepting world view of others. These networks will not only help with the economical status of less developed countries, it will also help other countries to better work together for a peaceful interaction amongst differences.

As we continue to integrate technology into Third World countries, it is important to continue in the aid of those less developed. It has been proved that these types of global networks will not succeed unless there is some form of democratic policy in place. Without some form of democracy, the people of these countries will be overlooked, and the tyrannical government form will prevail. The technology integration will also fail if accessibility is ignored as well. Countries need to have access to lower cost computers and they need to have easy and affordable access to the phone lines and Internet. As a more developed country, we need to learn from the successful and unsuccessful attempts at integrating technology. Not only will these less developed countries benefit from the integration, developed countries will benefit politically, economically, and educationally.

In the book *Mass Communication Research,* Denis McQuail discusses lessons learned in media policy research. He discusses what needs to continue with media research in order for integration to take place. “Communication is reflexive and interacts with an independently changing environment. Nothing stands still, and little can, in any direct or literal sense, be controlled, except, at best, through knowledge of what is going on,” (Hamelink & Linne, 1994, pg. 43-44). He points out that as times continue to change, so will the technology and media that we try to integrate into these countries. We cannot control the integration; we cannot be a tyrant of the technology that becomes part of less developed societies. We can only provide the materials and the knowledge and education of a political system that works, and hopefully the less developed countries can find a similar system that most successfully works for their culture. When they find this system, the rest of the world will then be able to join in with their success. If we do not continue to expand the integration process, we will lose in the process. Developed countries will lose the political and economic growth that stands to be accepted from those in which we try to integrate.

The next step for Internet integration begins with continued research in international communication. In

the book *New Frontiers in International Communication Theory,* Medhi Semati discusses what essential factors in continuing communication studies are. “Any attempt to refigure the “frontiers” of international communication must acknowledge the various (temporal and topical) organizing dynamics and logics that have shaped the field and the contexts within which they operate,” (Semati, 2004, pg. 5). He stresses the importance of development and modernization framework in developing countries and how that affects the integration process. It is important for developed countries to look into the influence they have on the less developed countries and how exactly this will affect them as they begin to integrate technology. If the correct steps are taken in these situations, everyone will benefit. If developed countries tyrannically take advantage of those less developed, the vicious cycle of poverty will continue, and any change of becoming connected to the rest of the world will never happen.

With the continuation of integration, many companies in the United States are helping countries become connected. MCI recently expanded their IP service to over 90 countries (Carlson, 2005). “Over the past year, MCI has expanded Private IP into Eastern Europe and into Asia, including Taiwan and South Korea. Last week, the company announced that the service is also available in China, India and Israel,” (Carlson, 2005, pg. 20). Other companies like AT&T have also integrated technology into other countries, hoping to expand connection with other parts of the world. Not only are companies in the United States connecting globally, they are using the Internet here in the states to connect with other countries. In 2002, the International Children’s Digital Library launched its 200 titles selected by national libraries and publishers representing 45 different cultures (Trotter, 2002). Its goal is to represent over 100 cultures in just a few years. With these types of advancements occurring in the US, it is encouraging to realize the significance of such progresses when other countries are also finally integrated into technology via the Internet.

As integration continues to revise and meet the constantly changing roles of technology, it is important for developing countries to continue to aid those less developed. With help from politically stable communities, those less fortunate can continue to grow and integrate into the global network of communication. Establish a democratic political structure, provide affordable and accessible equipment and people worldwide will reap the benefits of all cultures and societies.

Evaluation

Communication is more advanced than fifty years ago. The idea of communicating with family members across the globe both inexpensively and regularly was unheard of. With the advancement of technology and the introduction of the Internet within the last few decades, we are now able to send email rather inexpensively and very rapidly. Not only are we able to email via the Internet, we are able to share and access global news, and we are able to access world market information by simply sitting in front of the computer. Why not integrate the rest of the world into this technology phenomenon? With other countries opening their markets and political systems to technology, only positive benefits can emerge.

When looking at the research for the integration of technology there are several issues that need to be addressed. It is obviously impossible for us to integrate the Internet into parts of Africa when there is only one phone per 1000 people. These types of situations need to be addressed first. It is not logical for this type of integration to occur. We must provide phone access to several less developed countries before we can even consider trying to incorporate the Internet into their culture. The cost of computers in these countries are also outrageous. What we might spend on a computer in the US is about fifty percent less than what someone in Africa might spend on one. How are they to spend more money for a computer than us when they do not have the economic status to even provide phone service throughout the many villages and communities? Again, logically, the developed countries can step in on these situations and aid in this essential development. Provide affordable equipment and access to the equipment to get others connected.

Education is also key to this integration. Many countries do not encourage the technology and free market/free trade ideal. They are opposed or skeptical of the Western influence that might also invade their culture. With the proper education these communities can develop a democratic society where people are allowed to view and process information and make logical conclusions on their own. With a tyrannical government, this idea of integration will never work. People in these situations are not valued,

and they are not able to acquire rights that allow them to even consider integration and its possibilities. Poverty is such a huge problem in many of these countries. Unless a political structure is in place, economic development is nearly impossible, and without the economic backing, the poverty will never diminish. Programs implemented in the past by the US and other countries have not always succeeded. Again, this is a case where we must learn from the trials and mistakes of past integration in order to continue in the process today. Not only will the less developed countries benefit, the developed countries will see a boost in political, economic, and educational aspects of all cultures.

Conclusion

In reference to the earlier stated hypothesis, it is possible to integrate technology into underdeveloped and Third World countries. With the assistance of developed countries such as the United States, it is possible to bring technology into communities where poverty levels are low and economic development is needed. Education is the key to this integration, and without proper training and understanding, resistance of the Western influence is likely. When societies learn to utilize their own strengths and resources, the feeling of ownership leads to determination. This determination along with assistance, allows for integration to begin.

As we continue to bring technology into Third World and less developed countries, let us keep in mind the main reason for this integration. It is not to control their markets and trade; it is to bring them to a higher level economically and socially. When we begin to integrate strictly for our own gain, the global network will fail. Tyranny is a main reason many of the countries have yet to become part of the international communication network. When we have connected the entire world via technology, the possibilities are endless. However, if this connection begins to take away from the cultures and their own identities, additional evaluation needs to take place. These countries are already afraid of the Western influence that could possibly corrupt their people and ideals. If we introduce democracy into their society, they have a better chance of surviving in the modern world. Without this type of political framework, they are likely to continue to live under a tyrannical style of government. And without this framework, they are not likely to emerge from the poverty they struggle with daily. Open free trade and a free market to them, let them develop and market that will help support their culture. Open the doors of technology, and a new world is possible.

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