Role of Information and Communication Technologies in Migration and Diaspora

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Abstract

Migration of the natives of any nation or community away from their homeland is known as Diaspora. The Indian Diaspora spans worldwide and is geographically diverse. There are millions of Indians living in other countries. The Indian Diaspora can be categorized into two categories: 'old Diaspora' and 'new Diaspora.' Malaysia, Mauritius, Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji, Guyana, and Suriname are the key countries in the old Indian Diaspora, while all developed countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are important countries with the new Diaspora. For a long time, international migration meant disconnection with the homeland and the state of uprootedness. It is due to the fact that touching foreign lands was related to the loss of majority of communal links. The process of communication with those who were left behind was slow. But the latest development in ICT has emerged as a boon for the Diaspora that connects them throughout the world. It has virtually abolished all geographical boundaries sand has successfully connected individuals. In comparison to traditional modes of communication such as road, train, and airways, the ICT has emerged as the fastest expanding. It serves as a conduit for disseminating social, political, cultural, educational, and environmental issues from the motherland to the diverse Indian Diaspora. People of Indian ancestry can communicate with their homeland via the ICT, which has enabled communication much faster than in the past.

Keywords: Diaspora, ICT, Culture, Migration, Identity, Relationship

Introduction

The significant use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the study of migration and diasporic communities is a relatively new component that has just begun to attract the attention of scholars, from a variety of disciplines and techniques. This is still an unexplored field, particularly when it comes to the study of migrants' usage of ICTs. The importance of technology on migration is evident, just as it is on broader political and sociological events like the Arab revolution (Alqudsi-ghabra et al. 2011). It has promoted the movement of individuals around the world, as well as the establishment, growth, and preservation of diaspora communities and family links. Nowadays personal computers, cell phones, and Internet access, in particular, have become a common asset among migrants who use them to build, maintain, and recreate informal and formal transnational networks in both the physical and digital worlds, while reinforcing and shaping their sense of individual and collective identity, there have arguably been significant changes in migration experiences before and after the creation of the Internet and digital communication medium (Alonso and others).

Information and Communication Technologies and Migration

For a long time, international migration meant being cut off from one's hometown and feeling "uprooted." It is because relocating abroad resulted in the loss of the majority of social contacts. Communication with those who were left behind was slow (if it could be done at all). Thomas and Znaniecky (1918) examine the communication of Polish migrants with their friends and families in their well-known study. They describe scenarios in which a letter takes a month to arrive. The advent of new information and communication technology (ICT) has transformed the pace and character of interaction among international populations substantially since the turn of the twentieth century. This is the Information Age (Castells, 2000). This transformation does not reach the entire world's population but in little more than two decades, public use of the Internet has grown from a small network of academics in the United States to include more than 20% of the world population. The pace of communication has revolutionized the everyday lives of millions of people all over the world in the Information Age (Castells, 2000; Wellman, 2001).

Due to globalization millions of people around the world live in other countries than their countries of origin. Remittances sent home by migrants are an important economic factor across many developing countries. Transnational entrepreneurial activities by migrant entrepreneurs, also referred as diaspora entrepreneurs, involving resources from both the home and the host countries, can contribute to both countries' socioeconomic value creation. ICT solutions can assist in the facilitation and support of such entrepreneurial activities. Awareness of proximity between countries and regions through media images and personal experiences of the world mean that ICTs are in fact "bringing the world closer together" (Pries, 2005: 167). As IOM (2005a) states, migration is not only influenced by ICTs, they have become global drivers of migration. Castles (2007: 2) explains this by suggesting that new communication technologies coupled with developments in transportation and cultural change are "making it normal for people to think beyond borders." Thus it is seen that ICTs have not replaced older forms of communication but that they have greatly increased the range of available options for communications.

ICT and Migratory Experience

Instant communication is possible with new ICT such as mobile phones, which allow for calls, text messages, and email. According to Vertovec (2004), low-cost international calls serve as "social glue" that binds migrants to their family and friends, resulting in continual involvement in their lives. The Internet has evolved from a closed network utilized by a small group of scientists to a worldwide network that allows for both easy consumption and effective production of media material.

Previous research frameworks that viewed migration as a result of the interaction of push and pull factors have been widely dismissed as limited and mechanistic. Transnationalism is widely regarded nowadays as a new paradigm that focuses on explaining how transnational networks of international migrants are generated and exploited. In the migration studies, trans nationalism comprises a variety of dimensions of international movement, including personal and institutional ties, professional participation, civic and economic involvements, and a sense of belonging. Established migrant groups and their transnational activities, on the other hand, are

frequently referred to as "diasporism" rather than "transnationalism" (Morawska, 2011). Ambrosini offers the term "circulatory transnationalism" to describe how transnational connectedness is becoming more important. This form of transnationalism is based not on physical mobility, but on intellectual mobility, which is enabled through the use of ICT to create an "electronic transnational environment."

It is well known that information and communication technology (ICT) plays a vital role in all stages of migration. News, films, and advertisements, according to Wood and King (2001), are among the most essential sources of information for persons considering relocation. Hamel (2009) expands on this notion, claiming that new ICT can help developing countries project the image of wealth and success that wealthy countries have. This information could be helpful in deciding whether to migrate or not.

Hiller and Franz (2004) show that the types of ICT used are dependent on the various stages of migration. The use of ICT to initiate migration is referred to as the pre-migratory phase. Several categories of elements influence the key aspects of ICT adoption. First, it is determined by the sending country's social and economic characteristics. This collection of elements more explicitly refers to the level of infrastructure development and acceptance of new technology. Second, the sending country's political system relates to the major aspects of political organization. Authoritarian regimes, for example, may have control over the Internet. Third, the transmitting society's culture may have either beneficial or negative consequences on the recipient society.

Identities of Migrants and ICT

The impact of ICT is frequently stated as resulting in the "Westernization of the world." Hybrid cultures in which "we are all migrants" are becoming more prevalent (Pieterse, 2009). The ICT enables for the reinforcing of cultural identities of migratory people, resulting in cultural clusters that are diverse. Migrants can live in both the host and receiving nations at the same time. The idea of diaspora is used in studies on migrants' identities and ICT to reflect the form of migration, self-awareness, social structure, and mode of cultural production (Vertovec,

1997). Norris (2001) points out that new ICT facilitates creation of communities of choice that replace communities based on geographical proximity. Compression of time and space by the new means of communication results in creation of global cultures that unite people sharing sense of belonging and identity across continents (Appadurai, 1996).

Migrants' Family Relationships and ICT

Migrants employ various forms of ICTs depending on their migration stage, living situation, and other factors. According to Wilding (2006), information and communication technologies (ICT) are becoming increasingly vital. Because it allows for a new level of connection as transnational families are becoming increasingly popular. Furthermore, the usage of ICT in the family, social interactions are dynamic in nature since they evolve through time and are also culturally diverse. If the concept of "family" is culturally relativist, so is the concept of "groups." The use of ICT by businesses is apparent for many reasons. Transnational families rely on technological advancement and, prior to the 1990s, communication by telephone. The most common method of familial intimacy was regular mail (Wilding, 2006). Before the Internet, Cafes and public phones did not provide sufficient privacy (Panagakos & Horst, 2006), hence personal cell phones were used instead.

The emergence of cheap international phone calls through pre-paid calling cards represents for migrants one of the most important advances in the maintenance of family and personal relationships with people who reside in their country of origin (Vertovec, 2004). Combined with the incredible growth of mobile phone usage around the world, migrants are now able to maintain an almost constant channel of communication despite their geographical distance (Ito and Okabe, 2005). Contrary to the exchange of letters, which can incur weeks of wait time between exchanges, the rise of international telephone services coupled with cheap calling cards makes it possible for families to be in touch on a regular basis, even if it is simply to say hello, a true 'miracle' of technology (Wilding, 2006). Cheap phone cards also reduce the financial strain on migrants who were previously often contacted by their family by means of collect call (Horst, 2006). Through ICTs, the parents are able to offer support, reassurance, and

be part of their children's "academic and emotional growth" while participating in the decision-making processes within the household (horst2006).

Online photo albums, where users can upload and share images, are also allowing migrants to document their lives abroad and give a glimpse of their daily life to the family members. 'Connected relationships', where physically distant members of a family have a sense of proximity through technological mediums, is blurring the distinction between 'absence and presence', and developing a sense of being at home away from home (ibid: 132). With the instantaneous delivery of email and affordable international phone calls, migrants can be involved in the daily happenings of their family to the contrary of letter writing which delivers old news (Wilding, 2006).

Conclusion

Science and technology have made significant contributions to human life. The ICT has reduced distances and made the world smaller. With the advent of the IT, the concept of a global village has become a reality. Geographical distance is no longer a significant barrier to communication because the ICT has enabled to connect the diverse Indian Diaspora. It has become a potent medium for retaining a feeling of identity among the Indian diaspora. It gives them a sense of belonging to their "motherland." It allows Diaspora to stay in touch with their native country in a variety of ways, including culture, politics, social issues, and more. A large variety of ICT tools have made it possible for them to digitally contact with their motherland and foster a sense of belonging. Importantly, current information and communication technology cannot be viewed as a universal cure for the social challenges associated with international migration. While it is undeniable that ICT plays an essential part in migration processes, this does not always imply more informed decisions or social inclusion. It is argued that the Information Age's problems are the digital divide and the cultivation of unfavourable images of migrant communities. It can be said that the right policies on ICT infrastructure and service delivery are not only beneficial to the future of ICT use and its role in development but also it is a key to its success and an important element of migration.

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