



Digital Revolution and the Dawn of the Information Age

***¹Dr. Anupama Sabhapathy**

¹Associate Professor, Department of English, Govt. Arts, Commerce and PG College, Autonomous, Hassan, Karnataka, India.

Abstract

The 21st century heralds a new era, after centuries of the great Industrial Revolution. Scientific research has made quantum leaps since then, redefining not only the scientific world but the world of the common man. Technology has entered into the lives of ordinary people, thanks to the Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation policy (LPG). It has transformed the existence of the people dramatically. The new age or otherwise, the 'Digital Age' or the 'Information Age' has set in, initiating an unprecedented stride in technological revolution. It is pertinent to recall Darwin's Theory of the 'Survival of the Fittest'. Digitalisation has become the new norm of life that has been adopted in all spheres. The world is on the threshold of a new world order. Social thinker, philosophers and scientists view this phenomenon as something that collapses the old, paving way for the new age.

Keywords: Industrial Revolution, Liberalisation, Privatisation, Globalisation, Darwin's theory, Digitalization, Networking, Data, Information and Computing Technology, 21st Century.

Introduction

The 21st century is evolving into an era of transformation of human thought and life. It seems that human history gets revolutionized periodically with pivotal interventions that put the whole life on earth at a different unprecedented level. Human evolution has adapted to new changes in the environments, climates and habitats in its course. Having recognized the fact that it is an evolutionary process, there are certain milestones in its history that have been marked by phenomenal transformation of the whole existence of human life on earth dramatically. The renaissance period of the 16th century signalled the spurt of massive creative narratives in art, literature and music and immediately followed by scientific revelations that altered human thinking for ever. The inventions of the time have been a solid ground work for the industrial revolution of the 19th century. The period ushered in remarkable insights and revelations that have put humanity on the track of modernity. The seeds sown during the time of the renaissance led to significant developments in science, political endeavors and massive trade missions.

The three major influences that have been instrumental in shaping and creating paradigm shifts in our understanding of the universe and human life in the 19th century are:

- Darwin's Theory of Evolution
- Karl Marx's theory of Communism
- Sigmund Freud's Psycho-analysis

These were tremendous impacts on the path of human civilizations that catapulted the whole logic and structure of

human society. The world is still grasping the import of the significance of such potential game-changers. While Darwin's theory has settled the dust as a major scientific triumph that has put to rest all the queer beliefs and practices about the origin of the human species, the economic theory and the psycho-analytical theories have pointed out that it is just the tip of the ice-berg and much ground is to be dug yet. Karl Marx's economic principles have eventually set off ideological negotiations and refutations among countries. The economic and commercial pacts and policies implemented by nations have resulted in a political and economic turmoil at present. History has witnessed the rise of the two super-powers in the latter half of the 20th century that has symbolically been the clash of ideologies. The dissolution of the U.S.S.R has left the USA unparalleled and the rise of capitalism as the ultimate decisive power in the world.

Notwithstanding this huge reality, the other systems of government have either acknowledged the role of the USA as a super-power or have run into opposition, inviting its reaction. This has been augmented by another reality where in all the technical advancements are concentrated and operated by the corporate world with its centre in the USA. The recent decades have seen the phenomenal unabated rise in the number of software companies, corporate banks, commercial establishments that cater to almost every human need. The major breakthrough that signalled the breakdown of the old - world order and heralding the new world order was the implementation of the policies of Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG). The old world that had structured

itself on nationalistic goals and principles crumbled in the wake of the technological explosion that hit the world in the last decade of the 20th century. And from there-on, there is no looking back. Technology and particularly, digital technology has been in quantum leaps. The emergence of the digital era is a world unseen, bringing in its wake, huge shifts in all spheres of human existence.

The Industrial Revolution was characterised by a historic shift to machines and industries. The present Digital Revolution emphasizes a rapid advancement centered on information. The digital world is a world apart from the old wherein technology to an ordinary person meant a tool that assisted or made life more entertaining. Machinery and tool-making were regarded just as tools and nothing beyond that. It is this state of mind and situation that has gone for a mighty transformation. Life is being reshaped from the roots. What was held as solid and established have begun to be viewed as obsolete and dysfunctional and irrelevant. Human history, which was on a continuum has broken the line and entered into a new dimension that is way above the previous world. This new world order demands the present generation to be equipped with an inbuilt ability to keep pace with its accelerated innovations. Manuel Castells, the author of *The Information Age, Economy, Society and Culture* writes about the global interdependence and the new economic strategies and relationships between state and society which he calls, “a new society-in-the-making.”^[1]

It becomes so relevant here to quote him further on this phenomenal transition into which the world has set in. he says, “If by history we understand the moment when, after millennia of a prehistoric battle with Nature, first to survive, then to conquer it, our species has reached the peak of knowledge and social organization that will allow us to live in a predominantly social world. It is the beginning of a new existence, and indeed the beginning of a new age, the Information Age.”^[2]

The prevalence and the ubiquitous software companies have reversed the age-old beliefs and conventions, persuading people to learn the trade soon, the failure of which, in Darwin’s observation would be the extinction of those who do not adapt to change. The change is here, and is here for good. The digital era expects a new breed of humans who strategize themselves to be relevant to the needed times. This is the age of digital proficiency and not mere digital literacy.

What then do we understand by ‘digital revolution’? Digital literacy meant our working with the internet on the basics of Computer Technology. The age is no more about emails or documents or files. It is about ‘BIG DATA’ and ‘Apps’. Artificial Intelligence has crept in every aspect of our lives without any loud announcement. It is here to almost replace human beings. The debate persists between the genuineness of AI and Human Intelligence. But at the moment, it is AI which is ruling the roost. It is declared that AI will decide our lives even with more vigour till the 1950s. The intensity of change that AI has brought in is hundred times faster than the changes brought by Industrial Revolution. It is all about how well we are equipped to train ourselves and be digitally competent and proficient. Does it signify that we should rewire ourselves to suit the emerging trends in the digital age? Obviously, every individual needs to go through a complete transition of the skills that we hitherto had felt was for a life time. The digital age has no time bounds and every day brings in its wake a new set of applications, leaving the old ones behind with no relevance.

It is in this scenario that we need to question if we are

equipped with the following skills:

- a) Computer and software skills
- b) Social-media literacy
- c) Information and Communication Technology literacy
- d) Web applications and mobile fluency
- e) Inter-personal and social net-working skills

The above skills clarify that at the base of this is the requirement of a mobile network. Internet network is the most fundamental requirement. The ambit of network determines our social interaction skills. Digital proficiency is understood to be the measurement of the skills that are possessed to live in the digital era. Possessing digital competency means a mastery or a hold on technology. It also involves the honing of inter-personal skills the fluency with social networks. Besides, it is the professional operational skills of the computers and the understanding of computer applications. As already mentioned, big data and its interpretation form a formidable forte. Individuals are always expected to be aware of the popularity and the rankings of the apps. Life intertwined with a mobile network is the vision of the world in the next two or three decades.

Digital revolution also extends to the operation of the various apps related to all areas of life. Social media, for instance, at present is operated only by a very few and has not been a compelling presence in the life of an ordinary individual. However, this will be a significant factor soon where apps like Instagram, twitter and face-book permeate into the fabric of the natural course of life. An individual not fluent in such apps will be rejected as out-dated and ‘irrelevant’. Latest researches have also shown that generation Z and Generation A (the current young population and the next generation) will be naturally ready with the skills for the digital world. There are no specified skills to master digital proficiency. Yet, with the fear of not meeting up to the challenge posed by technology, it is pertinent that the youth must be trained and helped to organize themselves for every new change that unfolds in the future years.

Theories in psychology have asserted that the brain has the potential to unlearn the traces of the past and rewire itself to respond and interact with robots. Interaction with machines will emerge even more challenging when they are operated with AI. The distinguishing characteristic of AI is its incredible ability to think and act like humans. This was one area which had stood human beings on a strong foothold in the evolutionary ladder. But AI has been evidently forging ahead that it has potential enough to think and perform without human interference. Decision-taking ability was presumed to be the forte of humans. However, with the concept of self-driving cars and other automated machines, human intelligence seems dwarfed in comparison with the precision and speed executed by AI-borne technology. Programming is the key-word and algorithms shall play a major role in deciding human behaviour and functions, even in matters very personal to the individual like food, friends, entertainment and the person who we marry or the school that a child has to be admitted in. Thomas Chatterton Williams cautions and prepares us about the dangers of the flood of access to information. He comments on the Information Age’s “speed over expertise that contributes to superficial culture in which even the elite will openly disparage as pointless our main repositories for the very best that has been thought.”²

This, therefore is a new world that works only when humans are ready to have open mind-sets, willing to learn, unlearn and relearn to keep pace with the tremendous speed of technology.

It requires a mind for innovations and expansive thinking. The old order that was structured on human intelligence had in it prejudiced layers of caste, religion, race and various other hierarchies. Success or acceptance was an inherited status of heredity and lineage. The age of digital proficiency is far ahead and way beyond the constructions and narratives of the human world. It is a world of machines wherein humans would survive if they shape themselves in the mould of machines in order to be safe from becoming extinct, or outdated or rejected. The world of the future is coming up as the age of huge robots that are here to question the relevance of humans. The present and the future generations have a new, unseen world order to stabilise and strategize their existence in the next few decades.

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