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New Information Technologies as "Innovations": The Case of Turkey

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Abstract

This paper is organized around the critique of "expectations" and "indications" associated with new information and communicaiton technologies (ICTs). The notions of "expectation" and "indication" reflect a divided attitude endemic in the theory and research on ICTs. The social impact (of ICTs) research focuses on new technologies as entities inherent in the structural properties of social systems while the so-called intercultural research locate ICTs as elements external to the social systems. The former approach loads the signifier of ICTs with expectations while the latter registers them as mere indicators of modernity. Through this division, communication theory fails to see the content of communicaiton that the new technologies enable subjects of the non-Western countries. With reference to C. Wright Mills' "controversial" argument regarding the use of history, the paper concludes with the proposition that there is nothing "new" about the new technologies for countries like Turkey as they might very well be considered "novelties" for the advanced capitalist countries.

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As the official rhetoric positions Turkey's future in the "information society," there are jokes about the fact that "we have actually passed it," with the resulting problem that "we don't really know where we are!" It is always hard to define *from the inside* where one actually is, that is, from within the given time/space intersection. One's perspective is always blurred by media representations and politicians' projections brazenly peppered with promises. Another contribution to this "blurring" is the models of theorists. In the sub-field of communication studies known as "new technologies," even the adjective "new" is prone to a basic logical challenge, for technology is, by definition, changing moment by moment. From a theoretical perspective, what remains unchanged is the ideological attributes given to "new technologies," which are defined by extra-technological parameters. For instance, a technology may be presented as the yardstick for modernization or the agent responsible for the advancement of democracy in an "already modernized" geography. The Internet may be conceived of as an indicator of development as well as a novelty loaded with expectations.

This paper is organized around the critique of *expectations* and *indications* associated with new information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as mobile phones and the Internet. Like many other intercultural phenomena, the diffusion and adoption of ICTs attracts the attention of a particular kind of scholar-in this case scholars of "intercultural communication" and "diffusion," who develop theories

accounting for the presence of objects and practices otherwise alien to a particular culture. Aside from the implications of being an intercultural phenomenon, the development of ICTs always induces fierce debates. The diffusion of ICTs in any given culture is regarded as a force capable of producing a "restructuring of the inherited social structure" (Shields and Samarajiva, 1993: 374). When discussed in these terms, ICTs are presented as elements external to the structural properties of social systems, in particular, of capitalism, and the analysis is usually inspired by a domination-emancipation martrix. That is to say, theoretical debates around the impact of new ICTs are articulated within an existing paradigm of social and economic domination-the questions asked are mostly nothing new to the critical scholar who focusses his or her intellectual energy on the emancipatory potential of social scientific knowledge. In this respect, debates around the social impact of ICTs raise issues relating to "institutional clusters of capitalism," "forces of distribution," "forces of consumption," and "forces of domination" (Shields and Samarajiva, 1993).

However, when it comes to the so-called "intercultural" impact of the ICTs, the discourse shifts from structural issues and the possibilities of human agency in the context of constrictions inherent in the social system, to the issues of development and modernization. "Expectations" and "indicators" enter here. My aim in this rather brief exploratory analysis is to compare and contrast the expectations symptomatic of these two different

research programs, and to offer a critique of the notion of "indication" endemic in the diffusion of innovations paradigm. This paradigm must be considered from a perspective inclusive of but not limited to that of Everett Rogers, its original advocate.

Without a doubt, most new technologies originate from advanced industrial countries and then "diffuse" into the rest of the world. In this regard, the issue is not the path or direction of the new technologies (ICTs), but the way in which their diffusion is theorized and the metatheoretical considerations acting as the basis for this theorization. The problem of the place and impact of ICTs in society, especially computers and computer-supported networks, has given rise to a specific field of study known as "social informatics." The Center for Social Informatics at Indiana University (Bloomington, Indiana) is one among a few formal institutions whose work is solely devoted to the study of information technologies and social change. The main page of the Center's website *"http://www-slis.lib.indiana.edu/CSI"* addresses the viewer with a quote from Rob Kling, the founder of the Center:

> *I hope that important technologies such as computing can be sufficiently well understood by many social groups early on, so that important decisions about whether, when, and how to utilize computer-based systems will be more socially benign than would otherwise be the case.*

In the Center's mission statement, social informatics (SI) is defined as

> *...the body of research and study that examines social aspects of computerization-including the roles of information technology in social and organizational change, the uses of information technologies in social contexts, and the ways that the social organization of information technologies is influenced by social forces and social practices.*

It is clear from this definition that the emerging field of SI does not feel responsible for producing the knowledge of the circulation of these technologies and related practices, despite the much emphasized "barrier-free" nature of the new ICTs. Even a cursory glance at the working papers made available in the

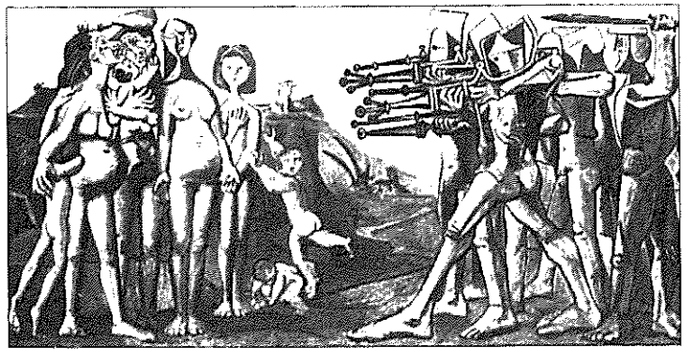
aforementioned website seems to support this judgement. The following table shows the distribution of the topics of these working papers:

Topic	Number
Distance education/reflective learning	4
Information inequality	2
Visual representation	1
Library and ICTs	4
Liberty/emancipation	2
Scientific/organizational use of ICTs	7
Community networks and digital communities	4
Technology-specific issues	1
Total	**25**

As seen in the table, there is not a single item devoted to the intercultural aspect of the new ICTs. However, given the Center for Social Informatics' mission and goals, it would be a misjudgement to evaluate this distribution as a shortcoming on their part. The concern is a paradigmatic rather than an institutional one; we should concentrate on the shift that takes place in the concept of "social impact" when the social scientist defines his or her area of interest and the cultural millieu in which the knowledge of new ICTs is being produced. An example of how a different cultural setting produces a difference in questions relating to 'social impact' can be found in the book *Communication and Imperialism: The Political Economy of Telecommunications in Turkey* (Başaran, 2000).

The title and cover design of the book is suggestive of this difference. On the cover, the publisher has picked a Picasso painting, *Massacre in Korea* (1951) which depicts a group of women and children facing a firing squad in a composition based on Goya's "May 3 1808." Without overemphasising the importance of the cover design, it can still be argued that the choice of a painting reflecting an artist's response to an imperialistic war might at least provide us with a clue regarding the perception of the diffusion of ICTs in non-Western contexts. Başaran aptly formulates the

matter by looking into developmental communication literature at the very beginning of her research. As a result, two significant conclusions emerge from her analysis: First of all, new ICTs, especially technologies of telecommunications, are seen as "indicators" of development without much attention given to the content of the communication they enable. Secondly, the literature reflects an individualistic stance which is well alligned with the instrumental philosophy of West-oriented developmental communication research (Başaran, 2000: 25-34).



Pablo Picasso, Massacre in Korea (1951)

The omission of the content of telecommunications is extremely significant in the context of this critique. In many instances, the issues of development, modernization and Westernization are marked by reductionism and ethnocentrism. Let's call this defect the "Bureau of Applied Social Research Syndrome." As is well known, in the 1950s, Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Reseach and MIT launched a joint research project on communication and development in the Middle East. The most well known product of this research is Daniel Lerner's *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (1958). Mattelart and Mattelart's assesment that the model of development advocated in this work is by no means "innocent," concurs with the critique regarding the fissure between developmental/intercultural communication research

and what is generally called SI research on ICTs (39). A second very influential work in this vein is Everett Rogers' *Diffusion of Innovations*. This work defines "modernization" in terms of "new ideas" integrated into the existing social system through more modern production techniques and a sophisticated social organization. Criticisms of this approach have raised the issue of the power relations specific to the local cultures. Rogers' early work remains vulnerable to the accusation that it does not take into account (actually has no way of knowing) the local power networks which inevitably affect the integration of new ideas (see, for example, Beltran, 1976).

C. Wright Mills asserts that there cannot be trans-historical laws of social change. Generalizations that do not refer to a definite time and space intersection are nothing but nonsensical abstractions and confusing tautologies. In short, for Mills, there are as many principles of change as there are different types of social structures (166). Lerner's assertion that "no modern society functions efficiently without a system of mass media" (55), falls into this category of nonsensical abstraction and confusing tautology. "Efficient functioning" is a term defined within the context of "modern society" based on the Western model of modernity and the modern ideal of progress. It is possible to observe the same fallacy in the three generations of development and communication studies defined by Nordenstreng and Schiller (1979). The first generation of research includes Lerner (1958), Rogers (1962), Lucien Pye (1963), Wilbur Schramm (1964) and Lerner and Schramm (1967). These works all suffer from Mills' aforementioned criticism of the bias regarding development as an ahistorical category. When we look at the second generation of research, we basically see the same figures revising their perspectives. Rogers' *Communication and Development* (1976) and Lerner and Schramm's *Communication and Change* (1976) are two such examples. This group of works demonstrates at least some acknowledgement of ethnocentric bias in the earlier works. This group posits an opposition between national and Western cultures and put the emphasis on domination created by Western

cultural codes. The third generation is defined by Nordenstreng and Schiller as "radical economists" who can be located within the "world system" paradigm developed by Immanuel Wallerstein. Neither Marxist arguments nor the point of view of the first two generations of scholars gives sufficient equivalence to non-Western knowledge or theory. It is my contention that the same judgement holds true when we consider ICT-related research and the split, which I will go on to discuss, between "expectations" and "indications."

In the above argument, the choice of C. W. Mills, who wrote of "confusing tautologies" and "nonsensical abstractions" in 1959, is not a coincidence. Mills' voice resonates today as an archaic warning from a time when globalization was only in few people's imagination. Three decades after the Second World War have been the years when "academic craftsmanship"-to use Mills' phrase-was a secure business under the auspices of modernization theory. In Appadurai's terms, "that was a period when there was a more secure sense of the social in the relationship between theory, method and scholarly location. Theory and method were seen as naturally metropolitan, modern, and Western." Within the confines of modernization theory, the ground breaking Marxist work on the world system, which inspired the third generation of international communication studies, "had no special interest in problems of voice, perspective or location in the study of global capitalism." (Appadurai, 2000: 4).

Perhaps it is time to test one of Mills' arguments on the uses of history, which, in his words, is "more controversial" than others, "but if it is true, it is of considerable importance" (172). To my knowledge, the "controversial" argument summarized in the following quote has not been seriously challenged yet:

> *the relevance of history ... is itself subject to the principle of historical specificity ... Sometimes there are quite new things in the world, which is to say that 'history' does and 'history' does not 'repeat itself'; it depends upon the social structure and upon the period with whose history we are concerned. (173)*

If this argument is true, then we are expected to employ different historiographies (different conceptions of temporality and different conceptions regarding a society's response to novelties) in the analysis of different societies, even if they were inextricably linked up by the single grip of the world system or "globalization." To be more concrete, history might mean one thing for Turkey and another for the United States or Australia. Is this not to say the same thing as Appadurai when he asserts that "globalization ... produces problems that manifest themselves in intensely local forms but have contexts that are anything but local"? (6) Paradoxically enough, such an argument may very well push us to consider mobile phones or the Internet as local and historical phenomena while they certainly are 'novelties' or 'innovations' for the cultures who actually invent, produce, and distribute them. The path that takes us to the modern is by no means the historical succession of events that has shaped the contemporary Western metropolis; yet this old story still seems to shape the unconscious of scholars who did not grow up in North America or Western Europe. The imagination that calls us to arms today requires historicization of innovations or novelties in regional/local contexts. Only then can we assign meaning to statistics on the uses of ICTs in different cultural contexts which, do not seem to make sense on their own. It should always be remembered that the new ICTs move along the corridors of the global state-capital nexus but are consumed and, more importantly, used in the streets, homes, and offices of the local subjects. In this respect, figures describing the frequency of use of the so-called "innovations", such as the Internet or mobile phones, would bear an alternative significance in different pictures or imaginations of the globalized world. The new picture of the globalized world, of course, is yet to be created by those who believe that there can be, and actually are, global flows other than the ones contrived by the state-capital nexus.

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Turkish Televisual Landscape and Domestic TV Fiction

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Abstract

In the new multi-channel television environment which still appears as an unsettled landscape, issues of increasing domestic contents always became a crucial consideration. In Turkey, beginning with the first quarter of the 1990's, commercial television has drastically increased the need for television programs like else where in Europe. During the years, what comes out clearly, however, is Turkish television is able to offer a large number of domestic television programs, especially domestic television fiction. Today, in contrast to the case with many European countries, television fiction is overwhelmingly Turkish in Turkey. In fact, foreign penetration had never been a serious threat for the Turkish television market. However, it must be added that a large offer of domestic programme neither always indicates a diversity of content nor a creative industry. In this context, this paper will summarise the findings of a research that focuses on productive activity and capacity of Turkish broadcasters regarding domestic television fiction. The study also seeks to come to a general understanding of recent developments and new trends in Turkish televisual landscape.