

DIGITISATION AND INCLUSIVITY: TAKING EVERYONE ALONG

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The inclusivity paradox of the digital age

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the world chess champion. The only existing contraption was the massive ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer) room-sized outfit, prepared under supervision of the century's greatest mathematician, John von Neumann, in the University of Pennsylvania's Moore School of

Engineering and Applied Science (there was no Nobel Prize for economists then to award him for his contributions).

Another brilliant social scientist, the Norwegian Johann Galtung (and a repeated Nobel Peace Prize nominee), predicted the very pathway to digital preponderance (in "A structural theory of imperialism"). This was in

1971, far before digital revolution is commonly traced back to. His final phase sees imperialism emanating from communications, which incorporates anything digital. Military and economic imperialism began the ballgame, he contended, before producing political imperialism, followed by the cultural. Communications imperialism becomes

the final straw. True, British imperialism did not begin with the military in South Asia, but the East Indian Company could come so far to scope economic opportunities only because "Britannia ruled the waves": its navy protected all passageways, from the English Channel through the Atlantic transit into the Indian Ocean. The rest

became sordid imperial history.

Communication imperialism may be the recipe to create and destroy new information. This allows us to prevent others from learning, thereby making access to anything cutting-edge more privileged. Dooming others becomes a vital interest under cut-throat competitiveness.

As a professor, I walk that line constantly, how to prevent myself from not pushing new knowledge to students, many of whose families have put their final *paisas* into educating their children. How that would implode at the cusp of becoming a developed country yet still not finding the final push from its own future, that is, its present students, becomes burdensome. Students, by definition, struggle against acquiring new knowledge given their increasingly less spare time (given this digital age), but because it is being unloaded upon them, unloading cannot go on forever without consequences. The less they learn, the more gaps in our collective country-wide innovative capacities for the forward-pass we are so capable of but invariably fail to get.

This is where free-lancing makes a crucial distinction. Digital marketing has opened jobs that unemployed youths and married women can utilise from their very homes. Outsourcing software programmes, especially to promote corporate public relations, is already a vast and viable industry: Bangladesh ranks behind India in its freelancing business, earning USD 1 billion in foreign exchange, and with 600,000 participants perfectly complementing the SRCLL initiative.

There is more to the "inclusivity" capacity potential of new technologies. Where knowledge is concerned, inclusivity cannot happen in the private market, given how corporate competitiveness over-ride the search for new, often social, knowledge: the government must be involved, and

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**"ALLAH DOES NOT WANT TO PLACE
YOU IN DIFFICULTY,
BUT HE WANTS TO PURIFY YOU,
AND TO BESTOW HIS GRACE ON
YOU THAT YOU MAY BE GRATEFUL."**

The Quran 05:06