



“Convergence should be of communication, community and institute.”

Dr Anil K Gupta, Kasturbhai Lalbhai Chair in Entrepreneurship, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad

of symbols—also forms a big part of communication, and cannot be ignored. Often, more is said through signs than through words... if you take this away, communication is limited.

One point I would like to make here is that in areas where ‘modern’ communication is weak, intra-community communication is strong, and vice-versa. There is, of course, a paradox to this. As mentioned earlier, convergence should be of communication, community and institute. If you consider analogical communication, there are metaphors involved, which may convey part of the meaning. This involves a sender and a recipient. In the case of digital communication, the entropy is much more.

The other paradox is that societies are created and based on the myths, legends and stories they have passed on. This is what creates a culture. This can go forward only through analogue communication. One needs to apply their mind to understand the meaning. What is also done is allows you to understand, own and derive your own meaning.

In the case of digital communication, there is high entropy. Information is trashed much faster. But things like folklore and folk songs are still alive. These have been passed down through analogue communication.

One main challenge we are faced with is the asymmetry of modern technology. There is a division between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’. There is a need to reduce this, but it is not possible.

By design, any service—including telephony—would like to recover their cost, and wider deployment can help them do this fast. But there

Convergence Is Not Congruence

Convergence is not just about technology but is a combination of technology, institute and culture. Take the case of villages, where physical communication is tough vis-à-vis in the cities. But, despite distances being lesser, communication in cities is poorer than in villages. Technology is not necessary for communication.

In terms of communication, technology is the word while the institute becomes the grammar. Communication within communities where modern means are absent is a study. The real problem is communication within the communities.

In a city, the problem is communication within the community. We send e-mails within offices. Communication is not merely about getting information across. There is more to it. Semiotics—the science

is a cause-and-effect angle to this as well. In such a case, they can survive through innovation. Take, for example, the case of someone in a village who needs to access a doctor or an expert for a crop disease. There are various reasons he cannot; he doesn’t have the money, there is no access to a doctor, or the expert has no knowledge in his area, or there is no research available in the problem he needs addressed. What’s worse is if the wrong problem is focused upon.

A systematic approach could actually help solve this. Let’s re-look the above problem. The common refrain is, “What should I do?” If there were a kiosk, the villager could go and ask the operator for the answers. But what if the operator does not know English and the farmer, too, is illiterate? Does this mean they have to be deprived of the information?

Indian language content is the only solution to this. Although funds have been earmarked for this, they have so far been spent in the wrong manner.

Which brings us to the question, "Who is paying for this?" In India, the poor pay more taxes than the rich. While direct taxes in India are progressive, the indirect taxes are still regressive.

In convergence, culture and language need to be bound very closely. Nuances of language, which may say more than anything else, are better in one's own language than in any other.

India is a diverse country and that is its richness. By trying to do everything in English, we might just kill our own character.

Our language shapes our habit of thought. Different languages shape different thoughts. We need all these languages to thrive if we want different, rich thoughts to be thought out. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can enable this. But for that, we need people who are passionate about diversity.

There are different groups of people with different needs. Those for whom convergence must happen need unique solutions. A VCD player and a black-and-white TV that costs Rs 3,000 can help communities access information that was hitherto beyond their reach. This is convergence.

Convergence solutions need to be robust and cheap, not necessarily interactive. One-way

communication with a time lag is fine—so long as it happens.

Thinking that we need continuous interaction could make people miss out. The Internet is not available in our languages, and depriving people of information till that happens could leave people out in the cold. Providing solutions in ten days is also fine so long as there is an assurance that it will happen.

Innovation, as I said earlier, is the way ahead. Innovation will come through diversity—the very character of India.

Convergence can be a shortcut to diversity. It should not lead to congruence to identical things. Imagine, then, innovation that has come about thanks to convergence, converted into enterprise. A grassroots revolution can trigger globalisation. Sharing these innovations is the way to move ahead and the way to true convergence. Yes, you could charge a licence fee and patents could be granted... but this is the way ahead. ■

Dr Anil K Gupta is a professor at the Centre for Management in Agriculture at IIM-Ahmedabad; co-ordinator of SRISTI (Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions; www.sristi.org) and of the Honey Bee Network; and Executive Vice Chair of the National Innovation Foundation. Honey Bee is a newsletter on indigenous innovations (www.sristi.org/honeybee.html).

1/2 pg H AD