ICT AND MEDIA IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING: THE NEED OF THE HOUR

Abhijit Bora*

ABSTRACT

A World Bank study sometime back has established that a 10 per cent increase in broadband connectivity helped in pushing the GDP growth by 1.4 per cent. Further, the end goal of every developmental activity should be to successfully deliver the meaningful messages to the masses from the original sources from they are being generated. Nowadays, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has already firmly established its position as a catalyst for good governance everywhere. Same is the case in our country also where ICT along with mass communication possess the potential to transform our country into an 'Information Society' with all its associated benefits percolating down to the masses Here we would like to look at things from the mass communication and ICT points of view as this is a discipline that has an overwhelming presence in each and every walk of our life always. On the other hand media has long been considered as the 'fourth' basic human need after food, shelter and clothes. It has become such an integral part of our individual, social and public life that we can't even think of a life without it at all. This paper endeavours to examine how we can utilize the enormous reach of media for delivering education to the masses cutting across any discrimination. This is because the author believes that there is an unimaginably high potential for effectively carrying out such a campaign for the greater benefit of the society in the end by using media as a delivery mechanism for education, particularly in the ODL mode. We would restrict our discussions only to the field of higher education in this paper. There is lot of potential here because today our country's population is served by many thousands of newspapers, periodicals, hundreds of TV/Radio news and entertainment channels 24 hours a day. Only thing is that we just need to tap these resources properly for delivering the goods to the masses who matter in the ultimate analysis. Otherwise how do we justify accumulation of scientific knowledge in research laboratories and institutions because if they can't be applied for human welfare they do not have any value at all. And it is the media which do possess the potential for doing so in the real sense of the term.

Key words: Magic Multiplier, New Media, Target Audience.

Introduction

The overall Gross Enrolment Ratio of the country in the field of higher education today stands at an unsatisfactory 18.8 per cent, according to a recent report of the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development Ministry (MHRD). The report contains comprehensive country wide estimates of GER on the basis of data collected till July 31, 2012, from higher education institution of the country, including universities, college and stand-alone institutions. Against this backdrop the MHRD aims at raising the existing GER adequately by 2020. The move aims to triple enrolments in the tertiary sector from around 13 million to 40 million. This will entail massive capacity building in the future, both at institutional as well as human levels. Besides enhancing the quantum of teachers and faculty in colleges and universities we have also to improve their quality. To fulfil this goal, the MHRD also aims at providing access to educational opportunities to all who desire and need it and achieve a GER of 30% by 2020, and is preparing a five-point action plan, which would be based on new technology. According to the Ministry sources, at present, 26 million students in India go to 600 odd universities and 34,000 colleges. This figure is going to increase manifold in the years to come,

*Associate Prof. & HoD, Dept. of Mass Communication & Journalism, Tezpur University, Assam

which is why the country would need exponential expansion of its college and university system, which can be achieved only through a "technology-oriented approach". However, considering all possible avenues this seems to be a highly ambitious figure to be achieved in five year's time. This is because if we depend only upon the traditional higher education institutions rather than tapping the potential of emerging ICT facilities for spreading education to the masses in the real sense of the term this target shall remain unachievable forever.

Open and Distance Learning: A Highly Potential Alternative

Under these circumstances the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is also a highly potential means of expanding education to the people when conventional classrooms have failed to keep up with the population of the country that has been growing at a geometrical progression. The Government of India has taken up quite a few ambitious and expansive ICT projects for delivery of services to the masses at the grassroots level across the length and breadth of the country taking advantage of the recent advances in this field. These can be utilized towards a better literacy drive in future.

At this point let us look at the definition of ODL as quoted by Garrison & Shale (1987):

Distance education (DE) implies that the majority of educational communication between (among) teacher and student(s) occur non-contiguously (at different times and at separate places – separating the instructor-tutor from the learner). It must involve two-way communication between (among) teacher and student(s) for the purpose of facilitating and supporting the educational process. It uses technology to mediate the necessary two-way communication" p. 11.

The connection between ICT and ODL has also been emphasized by some experts such as --- "Telecommunications-based distance education approaches are an extension beyond the limits of correspondence study. The teaching-learning experience for both instructor and student(s) occurs simultaneously – it is contiguous (same time) in time. When an audio and/or video communication link is employed, the opportunity for live teacher-student exchanges in real time is possible, thereby permitting immediate response to student inquiries and comments. Much like a traditional classroom setting, students can seek on–the-spot clarification from the speaker" (Barker et al, 1989, p. 25). ODL learners are not a homogeneous community. They may include younger ones, middle aged and older ones. They might belong to literate, semi-literate, skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled categories. They may also be employed, physically challenged or differently-abled. Most of the learners belonging to these categories would like to continue their higher education by using appropriate technological tools.

The learner groups will choose the relevant discipline of study to continue their studies. The main components of these to be supplied to the learners include self-instructional materials, audio-video discs, reference books through libraries. At present, the institutes are adopting mechanical delivery system for supply of self-instructional materials and supply information in a semi-electronic manner. At times, learners from research category are attracted towards DE and try to use its tools and methodologies to complete their research programmes.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Countries world over are trying to capitalize on the enormous beneficial developments of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for taking the government services to the people as much as possible. In other words delivering services at the doorsteps of the people. This is because ICT includes a range of technologies and facilitates communication, processing and transmission of information

by electronic means. It helps the rural poor in their daily lives, specially when it comes to practical matters like telecommunications and access to information. They also increase empowerment and give voice to the rural communities (Louis, Fouri, 2008). A World Bank study sometime back has established that a 10 per cent increase in broadband connectivity helped in pushing the GDP growth by 1.4 per cent. Besides, a comprehensive statement of the Union Ministry of Communications and Information Technology of the Government of India (GoI) informed (July, 2011) that several Information Technology (IT) schemes being implemented by it at present would facilitate bringing various electronic and internet-based initiatives of the government to the people living in the remotest parts of the country. However, it needs to be kept in mind that knowledge creation or possession is not enough in itself for a greater development of the society. Delivery and receptivity by people are also equally important, if not more. This is so because unless the masses – the target audiences can understand and absorb the same what would be the utility of creation of such a knowledge base.

ICT, together with internet is making it possible to share vast amounts of knowledge and information and is driving all round socio-economic changes and growth. E-Infrastructure will be the key enabler for the information and knowledge society. It comprises tools, facilities and resources that are needed for advanced collaboration and includes integration of various technologies such as Internet broadband channels, computing power, bandwidth provisioning, data storage, grid based resource sharing etc. To sustain the growth of ICT and to meet the challenges of globalization leading to highly competitive markets, there is a continuing need to invest in quality infrastructure, promote R&D efforts, create intellectual property in communications, internet and broadband technologies, and address the related policy issues.

This paper aims at discussing the potential use of ICT facilities to the optimum level in delivering knowledge contents to the masses in a convenient way through the ever-expanding network of IT superhighway. It is facilitating transportation of an unimaginably high amount of information targeted at benefiting the people in the ultimate end.

A news report published by Press Trust of India (PTI) sometime back reiterated that the number of internet users worldwide is expected to touch 2.2 billion by 2013 and India is projected to have the third largest online population during the same time. "The number of people online around the world will grow more than 45 per cent to 2.2 billion users by 2013 and Asia will continue to be the biggest Internet growth engine", it said. So, one can easily understand the enormity of the potential opening up in front of us in the near and distant future in the direction of providing ICT support to the vast majority of people. ICT is a highly viable option for providing education to anyone anywhere and more importantly any time of the day or night. The important question is whether our institutions of higher education, particularly the independent ODL institutions like universities and also the Correspondence Course Institutions (CCIs) which are a part of traditional universities are adopting these technologies and facilitating learning for their students or learners. Also, whether these are being used to rope in more learners for expanding the scope of education to those yet to be covered by the traditional educational system.

Not only this. There is further encouraging news in store for all concerned. A research report published by The Hindu in June, 2011, says that the Indian youths are increasingly using their mobile handsets to access the Internet. For 75% of the Indian youths, their first exposure to the Internet is most likely to be through mobile phone. In metros, about 57% of Indian youth access Internet using their mobile phones. Mobile Internet in India has seen a growth spurt over the past few years. In 2009, 53.5 million subscribers accessed Internet through their mobile phones. By the end of 2010, 100 million mobile

subscribers are expected to access Internet using their mobile phones. The report also goes on to add that following the 3G allocations in the country, the number of subscribers accessing Internet using their mobile phones is set to grow exponentially in the next few years. By 2012, about 200 million Indian mobile subscribers are likely to be using web on their mobile phones. Some operators are planning to invest heavily on deploying the infrastructure for the third generation technology. Thus, the opportunities are huge. Only that we need to tap them in the right manner to derive the optimum gains. Again, if these are being implemented in the right spirit, we also need to study in details what has been the responses from the learners' side – are they being able to absorb the same and successfully cope with technology for learning or otherwise.

This is necessary to be studied because we should know the practical problems, loopholes in adopting and implementing ICT facilities in educational institutions which are encountered by these institutions during their day-to-day functioning. More so for ODL institutions. These may range from infrastructure lacunae, low enthusiasm among teachers and learners to adopt to them, lack of adequate training and support in the subsequent periods of time etc. It is important to know about these issues because they may go against the spirit and philosophy of ICT for enhancing the learner services in ODL institutions and thereby render the whole exercise an unproductive one.

Scholar Melinda dela Pena-Bandalaria of the University of the Philippines examines how ICTs have high impact on the situation in her own country. Specifically, how ICTs have influenced or shaped the development of ODL in that country. In her paper 'Impact of ICTs on open and distance learning in a developing country setting: The Philippines experience' she says that in a developing country like the Philippines where the 'digital divide' is more the rule than the exception, delivering instructions through the distance mode presents a significant challenge to educators.

In a nation where the concern of most people is meeting their basic need for food, clothing, and shelter, access to ICT, especially the most modern ones, is very low on their list of priorities – and oftentimes, not considered a priority at all, she adds. Nonetheless, ICT had a major impact on ODL in the Philippines. More than availability of these technologies, issues such as geographical location, lack of knowledge and skills to use ICT, and financial constraints, are major considerations in deciding what ICT to use and in what combination. She said that indeed, the use of a particular ICT must not only address certain pedagogical concerns, it must also aim to bridge the digital divide and democratize access to quality education. Experience has shown that when a decision has been made to use a technology in ODL, this decision influences not only the teaching and learning environment, it leads to the development of new cultures, concepts, and understanding. Put simply, the introduction of ICT can alter and raise expectation among users and institutions alike. (*The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, March, 2007*).

It needs special mention here that the UNESCO Institute for Information Technology Education (IITE) has designed a special course in response to the many major changes that are occurring in the developing world in the way education and training programmes are produced and delivered, how educational institutions are organized, and how educational resources are distributed. The immediate driver of this revolution is the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in teaching and as resources for learning, in particular the transmission of information via computers and telecommunications over electronic networks using the Internet and rendered easily accessible through the World Wide Web. Economics is also driving the revolution. At the same time as the cost of electronically

processing, storing and transmitting information has been falling, the cost of conventional education and training has been rising to levels that are particularly unsustainable in emerging economies.

Scholar Delvaline Lucia Mowes from Namibia in his paper 'An Evaluation of student support services in open and distance learning at the University of Namibia' makes a detailed assessment of students support services in the ODL school of that university. He says that the results of this study have provided evidence that adult distance education students indeed value the provision of student support services. Specifically, students in this study placed the greatest importance on student support services related to getting started with their studies, for example orientation sessions about available student support services and contact and communication with tutors and fellow students by means of vacation schools, face-to-face tutorials on Saturdays at regional centres and support through study groups. One of the conclusions of the study was that the institutional policy and the role of management are crucial in the establishment of an effective student support model to facilitate distance learning. Adult learners realized the potential of distance learning programmes as options for learning new skills. Distance learning programme's online format united adult learners with differing backgrounds, life experiences, and geographical locations through the e-learning opportunities. *(website of the African Council for Distance Education, 2012).*

Another scholar Jeane Marie Tuquero (USA) in her paper 'A Meta-ethnographic Synthesis of Support Services in Distance Learning Programmes learning communities' says that e-learning encompassed the distance learning programmes that required information technology (IT), information and communication technologies (ICT), computer-mediated communication (CMC), virtual learning environment (VLE), and computer conferencing (Fischer & Baird, 2006; Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005; Gipps, 2005; Maor, 2003; Marra, Moore, & Klimczack, 2004; Oliver & Conole, 2003; Palloff & Pratt, 1999). (*Journal of Information Technology Education: Volume 10, 2011 Innovations in Practice).*

Scholar Alan Tait of the United Kingdom Open University (UKOU) narrated in detail about the Learner Support Services. "The systems have to be developed which do not hamper the institutional needs by paperwork, meetings and other such activities. They will also diminish the potential for the fulfilment of key quality indicators such as respect for students or timely response to the learners. The development and running of managerial processes to support the delivery of services to learners in ODL, where there is a high degree of invisibility, is not an easy task. The distinctions between single and dual-mode institutions are particularly significant, and the revolution which new technologies bring in is difficult to foresee with any precision. Non-academic support consists of: advising: giving information, exploring problems and suggesting directions; assessment, giving feedback to the individual on non-academic aptitudes and skills, action: practical help to promote study, advocacy: making out a case for funding, writing a reference; agitation: promoting changes within the institution to benefit students; administration: organising student support."

Scholar A Murali M Rao of Indira Gandhi National Open University IGNOU) in his paper Technologies for scaling up ODL Programmes in a seminar on **'**ICT in ODL : Issues and Challenges' opines that ICT is playing a vital role in the ODL mode to meet the requirements and expectations of the learners' in large scale. It is difficult to perform the same using any traditional institutional system due to its limited resources. ICT has various proven tools and technologies to meet the requirements of a learner at various phases of the learning cycle viz the admission phase, the learning phase, the evaluation phase and finally the certification phase as a service. Due to heterogeneous requirements in ODL, there are issues and challenges that are to be addressed in usage of the technology and the service(s) being provided through

ICT. The author highlights the issues and challenges on computing & network infrastructure, portability with respect to hardware & software and various learner support services along with the aspect of security issues of a service in terms of its availability, authenticity, confidentiality and access control so that one can ensure a service to the utmost satisfaction of a learner in the ODL system.

Scholars B K Somayajul and Tata Ramakrishna of IGNOU again in their paper "Support Services for Distance Learners and Support Services: Current Trends and Prospects' maintains that since the literature showed that e-learning continued to expand, online administrations searched for ways to remain sustainable and provided responsive online support service options for adult learners (Dare, Zapata, & Thomas, 2005; McClure, 2007). The advent of the digital age also impacted the designs of learning programmes as institutions searched for ways to improve e-learning opportunities.

The simultaneous growth of the adult learner population and e-learning facilities have created a widening gap between the steady increase of adult learner needs and online support services as higher education institutions worked to attract students.

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in higher education (CAS) of the United Kingdom had 16 standards and guidelines for Distance Education Programmes (2006). A section in part 14 for Educational Support Services, Academic Support Services, section L, CAS (2006) stated : Information concerning academic support services must be made available. Distance learning students should have opportunities for developing learning strategies and getting assistance with content comprehension. Tutoring services, supplemental instruction, and other academic support services should be available to all distance education students. These services should conform to the CAS Standards for Learning Assistance Programmes in terms of their quality. (p. 168)

Palloff and Pratt (2003, p. 121) have emphasized that four prime elements of high quality online programmes include - effective virtual student, effective course design, effective online facilitator and effective student support. Although these divisions of quality online programmes remain mutually dependent with each other, the scope of this study focused on Palloff and Pratt's (2003) subheadings under effective support service components for adult learners in e-learning: (a) technical support and training, (b) learner-centred, (c) offers advising, library services, registration, book store, and records. Distance learning administrations considered the value of adult learners' traits when contemplating effective student support decisions.

By comprehending learners' characteristics, online support provided better learner-centred services and improved overall e-learning experiences. The growth of the adult learner population as major stakeholders in e-learning communities continued to grow. The National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES) reported adult learners in the age range from twenty-four and older in on-line courses increased at a rate of over 50 percent (Palloff & Pratt, 2003; Waits & Lewis, 2003). Further, the commercialization and mass approach to DE created the need for better understanding of the profile of adult learners in e-learning. An essential element for the success of adult learners in e-learning included understanding self-directed learning (SDL). Merriam (2001) and Hiemstra (2003) cited Houle, Tough, and Knowles as some of the key contributors to the foundation of SDL.

Thus, we find that scholars across the world and the country have stressed strongly upon providing a comprehensive and adequate ICT base for facilitating successful students' or learners' support services in the ODL system. This is why this project aims at studying how the ICT mode can act as a catalyst for expanding higher education in the country and also for facilitating a smooth and flawless learner support service in the   near and distant future, both to their optimum possible levels.

Future Potential

Such a kind of initiative can be expected to have a lot of potential towards contributing to the existing volume of knowledge in analysis of ICT support in the world of ODL by finding out the advantages and disadvantages in the implementation of the system. At a time when there are a lot of efforts for expanding education to all the eligible persons in the society in an all-inclusive manner, ODL has been proving its mettle as a viable alternative for realizing this goal in the near and distant future. If we need to strengthen ourselves in future about utilizing ICT for ODL learner support services then it is highly necessary at this point that we did research in-depth into the functioning of the institutions. This would allow us to know in details the problems of implementing ICT for expanding learner support services as well as covering more and more people concerned under the network of ODL mode of education.

Learner Support Services

It is reiterated here again that in the ODL mode of education, learner support services systems (LSSS) shall play a pivotal role in the expansion of the same across the country. The present system comprises activities of finalization of admission process, despatch of course materials and post-admission support. Practically providing support services in a systematic manner may not be an easier task. The LSSS has to be designed and developed in such a way which may facilitate the learner community. Generally every learner expects better support services from the institution where one has enrolled. The institution shall recognise the basic needs of the learners and try to fulfil them to the best of its abilities. The institutions should understand the effects on the learners when the needs are not fulfilled. The support services thus identified are mainly in the fields of Establishment of Centres, Registration; Material Distribution; Library; Media; Examination & Evaluation for the distance learner community. Apart from this, the institution should ensure the availability of qualitative study materials before launching any programme of study.

At this point it is imperative that the responses from both the sides – the service providers as well as the service receivers – the learners or students are also accounted for while implementing the programme so that a balanced development can be expected in the end. This is because despite all our claims to the effect, unless the end-users – the learners or students are satisfied and are able to utilize the services properly there would be no meaning to providing them. Our priority is to utilize ICT in the optimum way for providing a smooth and state-of-the-art and futuristic learner support services to the learning community as well as how to increase the GER ratio through this system in the days to come. As most of the established news media groups are finding it quite difficult to ignore the challenge of social networks and virtual communities via the net, their kind of information dissemination is expected to conform to at least some basic amount of journalistic principles rather than others.

The World of Media

"The Press is the best instrument for enlightening the mind of man, and improving him as a rational, moral and social being," Thomas Jefferson, former President of the USA. "Communication is not only a system of information, but also an integral part of education and development" – Sean MacBride, *One World : Many Voices*. These two statements above is reflective of the immense importance of communication as an integral tool for spreading and disseminating education amongst the masses to the largest possible extent in any society across the world. At this point it needs to be mentioned that in today's era the buzz word is "information is power". This is because only when a person acquires information through any formal or informal mode of communication he or she becomes enlightened and thereby is

expected to become empowered to tackle the challenges thrown up by life's journey ahead. Acquiring knowledge is nothing but acquiring various findings, wisdom which are results of long years of research into both pure and applied aspects of things in our day-to-day life. And after processing the same one has to apply it in real life situation for living a scientific and logical standard of life.

In this world, there is hardly any dearth of knowledge in almost each and every field of our life. It is because the institutions of higher learning, dedicated research institutions in so many fields of life (whether it is pure sciences, medical sciences, engineering and technology or social sciences or humanities) are constantly carrying out path-breaking research with results which possess the potential to bring about far-reaching positive changes in the life of mankind. For example, we have agriculture universities, veterinary colleges, research institutions into various diseases, institutions dedicated to producing medicines, vaccines for different life-threatening diseases etc. both within and outside the country. And they do arrive at results which are highly positive and potentially beneficial if they can be applied to the welfare of the masses. Herein lies the question – how to disseminate these knowledge base to the masses. And at this point the significance of mass communication and media comes to the fore.

Why Mass Media

Mass media is an 'informal university' where each and every issue of the world can be discussed and in which the target audiences themselves can participate by way of letters to editor, articles, write ups published, discussion forums etc.   Further, media is also termed as the 'leader of the society'. So because the media editors, particularly the print media editorial staff enjoy the privilege of dealing with public issues of all kinds day in and day out for many long years. This makes them experienced enough to be able to properly analyse all such issues and offer both sides of it to the public – positive and negative (if any). After this, it is up to the masses to become empowered and to take one side of the issues and mobilize public opinion if required.

Media for Higher Education

From the above discussions we are confident that media possesses the potential for enlightening and empowering the masses to the optimum possible extent and thereby converting them to 'educated persons' in the realistic sense of the term.   It is an irony that in our country even though the literacy rate is 75 % today (India Census 2011), the official definition of a literate person means 'someone who can just sign his or her name, nothing more'. So in reality, it is a matter of one's imagination about what percentage of the 120 crore population of the country is actually literate in the proper sense of the term.   But,   if we are committed to the cause of an all-round development of the country, we must promote an all-inclusive growth pattern by involving every person of the society – whether literate or illiterate. Now, herein comes the big challenge of reaching out to those people at the lower strata of the society who are leading a life without the benefit of formal education in their life.

Formal Higher Education Fails to Deliver

At this level let us take up three important issues for discussion.

First of all – the average percentage of eligible people of the entire Indian population going for higher education is merely 13 %, nothing more. However, according to UNICEF standards this should be at least 20 % for an all-round development of a country like that of ours. This pushes us to the challenging uphill task of enhancing this percentage to at least 20 % from the current one. Secondly, 372 out of a total of 640 districts in the country have been declared as 'educationally backward districts' (EBDs) by University Grants Commission (UGC) – the highest decision-making and regulatory body of general higher

142

education in India. This is according to a statistical data floated in UGC's website in the early quarter of 2010. This means that about 60 % of the country's districts are EBDs even in the seventh decade of Independence today. Thirdly, we all know that (at least those in the higher education business) that the Union Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) has been inspired by the National Knowledge Commission's proposition that there is scope for at least 1,500 universities in the country. And already plans have been afoot for setting up 16 more universities under the MHRD and also an equal number of 'world class universities' in the country.

However, the biggest irony of the entire exercise is that most of the institutions of higher education in the country including science and technology, medical, humanities and social sciences are continuing to run with an average of about 30 % non-availability of teaching faculty. Even otherwise when a recruitment process is carried out for selecting teaching faculty members in any university it is an usual fact that just about 60 % of the posts are filled up while for the rest there is either no suitable candidate or there is no applicant at all. And all these are happening even as the country is about to complete seven long decades of freedom from a foreign colonial power with an established system of governance of our own. Under these circumstances, achieving the target of enhancing our actual literacy rate as well as a meaningful learning and 'empowering' experience for the masses would prove to be too tall an order to be successful in the near and distant future.   This is why mass media must be roped in for helping the country in achieving this target so that people became literate, knowledgeable and empowered in the end and enhance their living standard.

While attempting to achieve this, how do we go about our business. We have mentioned above that there is hardly any dearth of knowledge base with potential for the benefit of the masses. Only thing is that they need to be disseminated to the masses properly in a language they do understand conveniently from the high profile scientific research-oriented language versions available in the laboratories and research institutions.

There can be two distinct aspects of this issue.

First of all, the researchers, knowledgeable persons engaged in such works may not be that media savvy and thereby find it difficult to make the people aware of those findings. Secondly, even though they may be interested in doing so they may not possess the requisite skills and expertise to do it for the benefit of the masses at large. At this moment of crisis, it is the media which must step in to take up the challenge to disseminate those knowledge data to the masses in a language they did understand properly and transform them into 'empowered human beings' in the end. And there is no parallel to media in this regard both from the point of view of reach to the largest and deepest strata of the society and also the magical power to influence the minds of human beings to a great extent. Thus the relationship between media and education – whether it is at the level of higher or lower education – is highly constructive and significant. Both of them must complement each other in terms of facilitating the best benefits to the masses – the end users of all knowledge base of the world. And, if all these knowledge base of the world's best institutions and research establishments do not deliver the goods to the masses in the ultimate analysis, what is the use of having such knowledge at all. We have also said that 'information is power'. All these kinds of information must be made known to the people so that they can derive benefits from them in any which way they might like to do so.

Power of Media

There have been numerous debates about the power of media to influence the masses and the society at large in the final analysis. However, it will suffice to give a few simple examples about the power

of media in the form of three 'information revolutions' repeated over several centuries apart.   First of all – it was in the middle ages in Europe when the pioneer Johannes Gutenberg invented the first ever principle of printing press without even being remotely aware of the far-reaching revolutionary implications this milestone event was going to have on humankind. This epoch-making event paved the way for making religious epics as well as all other books available to the masses making them free from the exclusive clutches of the clergy and the aristocrats. As this event had made knowledge sources much more freely available in more numbers, generations of masses became literate and thus empowered, ultimately leading to the growth of the Renaissance movement driven by Martin Luther King and we all know the rest of the things. Secondly, during the 1960s and 1970s when socialist India's developmental programmes were running at top priority it was the media led by – All India Radio (AIR) which took the lead in mounting a publicity campaign of all types of developmental messages – from family planning to high-yielding variety of seeds, vaccination among others. Things went to such an extent that some of the rice or wheat varieties widely came to be known as 'Radio Rice' or 'Radio Wheat' as it was AIR which had popularized them among the masses. It was AIR because there was presence of hardly any other media at all except print media to a lesser extent.

In fact, several months ago, Verghese Kurien, father figure of India's Green Revolution had written an article in *The Hindu* recalling the way AIR and the print media dedicated their airtime and space to promoting the government's efforts in all fields of development.   Further, in the 20th century the pros and cons of this information revolution has become much more visible in each and every field of life. Today, right from wars to our personal life everything depends upon 'information' which is transformed into knowledge by the masses after being delivered by the media at their doorsteps.

Conclusion

So, it is seen that a judicious blending of media and ICT has enormous potential for expanding the cause of education at all levels from primary to higher though we have confined ourselves mainly to the latter and more so for the field of Open and Distance Learning mode of educational delivery. While a lot of efforts are being taken up by various quarters concerned including UGC-CEC, IITs National Knowledge Network (NKN), Dept. of Information Technology, Government of India, we are yet to achieve a lot. Further, proper implementation supported by a solid networking is one of the best hopes for achieving the same. In today's world of ICT and internet knowledge is a commodity that has a worldwide audience and ready reception if there is quality in it – whether it is in traditional educational system or the ODL mode. Thus, we should put our efforts towards a successful and flawless implementation of the entire strategy so that the results are reflected at a sooner date than otherwise.

References

Arulchelvan, S. (2007). Pattern of usage and perceived effectiveness of internet through higher education students. *Indian Journal of Open Learning*, Vol. 16, No 3, Pp. 201-207.

Brindley, et al. (2005). *Learner Support in Open, Distance and Online Learning Environments.* Studien und Berichte der Arbeitsstelle Fernstudienforschung der Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg, Volume 9.

Baruah, T.D. (2009). *Effectiveness of ICT in Open and Distance Learning: A Case Study*. Digital Learning–learning through ICTs (website).

Das, M., et. al. (2009). *A Report on Selected Innovative Practices in Open and Distance Learning Documentation Unit*. National Centre for Innovations in Distance Education, Indira Gandhi National Open University.

Dash, M.K. (2007). ICTs for professional development of elementary school teachers : a study. *Indian Journal of Open Learning,* Vol. 16, No 3, Sept., 2007, p 235-244.

Hussain, I. et al. (2011). Promotion of e-learning through ICT : Role of Indian government and higher educational institutions. *University News*, Vol. 49, No 39, Pp. 22-24.

(Specialized Training Course 2002). *Information and Communication Technologies in Distance Education* UNESCO Institute for Information Technology Education Study Materials.

Komba, W.L.M. (2009). Increasing education access through open and distance learning in Tanzania: A critical review of approaches and practices. *International Journal of Education and Development using Information and Communication Technology (IJEDICT)*, Vol. 5, Issue 5, Pp.8-21.

Mowes, D.L. (2005). An Evaluation of student support services in open and distance learning at the University of Namibia. *African Distance Education Council*.

Pena-Bandalaria, M.D. (2007). Impact of ICTs on Open and Distance Learning in a Developing Country Setting: The Philippine experience (March, 2007).

Rao, A.M.M. (2009). *ICT in Open and Distance Learning: Issues and Challenges*. IGNOU, Technologies for scaling up ODL Programmes.

Somayajulu, B.K., & Ramakrishna. T. (2008). *Distance Learners and Support Services: Current Trends and Prospects,* IGNOU.

Somayajulu, B.K. (2002). *Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the ODL system – Roles and Responsibilities of the Supporting Personnel,* paper presented at 16th AAOU 2002 Conference, Seoul.

Srivastava, M. et al. (2007). Reaching out to the unreached through ODL: Role of IGNOU in the North-East Region. *Indian Journal of Open Learning*, Vol. 16, No 2, Pp 129-142.

Tuquero, J.M. (2011). A Meta-ethnographic Synthesis of Support Services in Distance Learning Programs. *Journal of Information Technology Education,* Vol. 10.

Yadav, S. & Bhatia, H.K. (2012). Distance learning in higher education institutions: problems and prospects. *University News*, Vol. 50, No 20, Pp. 6-11.