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Theory of Information and Communication

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1.2. Knowledge Society vs. Information Society



We have examined the individual implications of the concepts of Data, Information, and Knowledge and their interrelationships.

These concepts will reappear recurrently to understand the social and cultural coordinates under which society has developed in recent decades. Thus, the ideas of the Information Society and Knowledge Society emerge, considered "multipurpose words." This means that they are terms used widely and often ambiguously, with different interpretations depending on the context in which they are employed. This text will provide an overview of their application in the context of our subject.

In the initial stage, it is necessary to understand the emergence of the Information Society as an evolutionary aspect of societies. If in the industrial society, mass production and machinery were the engines of development, in the information society, the use of technology and the value of something intangible—information—become especially relevant.

From a sociological standpoint, we define the Information Society as specific temporal and social coordinates where there exists a notable capacity for capturing, processing, transmitting, storing, and disseminating:

- Messages of various types (especially),
- Information (to a slightly lesser extent),
- and Knowledge (to a much lesser degree),
- utilizing what we refer to as Information Technologies.

Let's start from the beginning... Who coined the term "Information Society"?

In 1973, the sociologist Daniel Bell introduced the concept of "information society" in his book "The Coming of Post-Industrial Society."

Under the concept of Post-Industrial Society, Bell anticipated the transition from an industrial economy to one based on information and Knowledge. The emergence of the post-industrial society stems from advancements in technology and the expansion of the service sector, marking a transition from an economy centered on manufacturing to one focused on services. In this new societal framework, services precede manufacturing as the primary economic sector. Knowledge-based activities, such as information processing, communication, and research, dominate production processes and the labour force. Unlike the era of mass production, innovation drives growth in the post-industrial society. Moreover, intellectual technologies serve as the foundation for social organization and control, as articulated by Bell in 1973.

In summary, the concept of the Post-Industrial Society implies:

- Transition from manufacturing to service-oriented economies
- Shift from tangible to intangible assets as the focal point of economic activity
- Evolution in occupational patterns towards more technical and professional roles (Blue collar Vs. white collar)
- Growing recognition of education as a critical determinant of social mobility
- Emphasis on communication infrastructure over traditional transportation networks
- Increasing importance of Knowledge as a catalyst for innovation and societal development

Many definitions of the Information Society are deterministic. The Information Society encompasses more than just technological advancements; it represents a new cultural paradigm examined through various sociological, historical, and economic perspectives.

This new society is not an isolated phenomenon but a consequence of a succession of facts, the result of historical evolution and transmission of Knowledge through the centuries, where information appears, unlike the rest of societies, as a new value. It is characterized by the centrality of information technology, globalization, and the rapid dissemination of data and content through multiple digital channels.

Likewise, it is represented by constituting a knowledge-based economy where value is increasingly derived from intellectual capital, innovation, and creativity. It also features phenomena such as Information Overload and the difficulty of managing the generated information, which hampers decision-making. On the other hand, it has significant social implications, such as the digital divide. While primarily a structural disparity between nations, an information gap exists, a novel form of exclusion characteristic of the 21st century.

Different authors have coined new terms and meanings for this idea: here we find terms such as Zygmunt Bauman's Liquid Society, Manuel Castells' Network Society, and Joseph Stiglitz's Weightless Society, each highlighting specific aspects of social and economic transformation in the digital age.

Lastly, the term "Knowledge Society" emerges as an aspirational society. It was coined by Peter Drucker, who introduced the concept of "knowledge worker" focusing on creating an economic theory that places Knowledge at the core of wealth generation (Alfonso Sánchez, 2016).

The idea of fostering knowledge societies is based on the belief that ensuring everyone has access to information is essential for promoting peace, fostering sustainable economic growth, and encouraging intercultural dialogue, as stated by UNESCO. Therefore, the concept of the Knowledge Society goes beyond emphasizing the creation, application, and dissemination of Knowledge as a fundamental resource for social, economic, and cultural development. The Knowledge Society is the ideal ecosystem where the integration of ICT generates equal access to information, education, and equal development among different countries.

As the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, pointed out: "Knowledge is power. Information is liberating."