The Japanese Communication Policies on the Use of New Media for Achieving the Advanced Information Society

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In every society, the production, distribution, and use of information play vital roles in the management of events. In modern technological society, these functions have become so prominent as to suggest the description of such societies as information societies.

The development of information societies has been characterised by the innovation and adoption of technologies, changes in mass media sytem, and changing patterns in individuals ways of life.

In the past decade, Japan has moved actively to become an advanced information society. Japan may be credited as one of the pioneers in forming and defining the concept and the term Johoka Shakai or information society.

In the comming 21st Century, Japan has set as a goal and put much effort into becoming the leading nation in communication technologies and to achieve the final stage as an Information Society.

It is, therefore, interesting and useful for other societies to study this matter.

This paper is intended to give an overview of the Japanese concept of information society (Johoka Shakai). The Japanese communication policies concerning the introduction and expansion of the new media for the information society will be explored.

Japanese Concept of Information Society

The idea of "Information Society" has always been controversial, especialy if we try to trace the historical lineage of the information society concept. Some ideas are purely economic while some are mainly sociological characterization of the new social order.

Though the ideas of various scholars may be somewhat different, when taken collectively, the image of the "Information Society" may be said to share some of the following significant characteristics :

1. Informational materialism, or information as an economic commodity;
2. Widely diffused information technology, new communication technology;
3. Many messages and channels;
4. Interconnectedness or networking;
5. A large information workforce;
6. The special status of scientific knowledge.

Japan is one of the pioneered ideas of the information society. Several scholars admit that credit for inventing the concept of the information society should go to Japan, where the term 'Johoka Shakai' was proposed in about 1966 by a science, technology and economics study group formed by the government to provide guidance to economic planners (Bowes 1981, Iteo 1980, Dordick 1986).

Johoka Shakai, literally "informationalized society", was meant to be closely similar to 'Kogyoka Shakai' or industrial society (Ito 1980). Several scholars, such as Tadao Umesao, Kenichi Kohyama and Yujiro Hayashi contributed to the defining of the term "Johoka Shakai". The groundwork for information society was well established in the early 1970's by certain research teams, i.e., the Research Institue of Telecommunications and Economics (RITE) and the Joho Kenkyu Bunkai (Information Study Group). Some of the studies by the RITE strove to measure the extent to which Japanese society and other similar societies had already been 'informationalized'. Two information based indices, the information ratio and the information index, were developed as a means for measurement. Measurement done by the RITE was also considered to assess the quality of life. The idea is that, if being higher on some information society scale is a measure of progress, then there must be some relationship between information and the quality of life. For example, having a telephone is beter than not having one; without TV sets, radio and books, life would be terribly empty. All these information media, therefore, must be important to the quality of life. Apart from measuring expenditures for information activities and equipment, the flow of information or information use were studied by the Joho kenkyu Bunkai. The purpose of the studies was to provide reliable data for communication policy planners so that they could make good decisions on the allocation and development of new media systems.

The RITE report also proposed a definition for the concept of 'post-industrial society' as having the following four conditions:

1. Per capita income more than $4,000.00

2. Number of service workers exceeding 50% of the labor force.

3. University students exceeding 50% of the appropriate aged population.

4. The 'information ratio' more than 35%

According to Herbert Dordick (1986), the concept and the term 'Johoka Shakai' may have been inspired by the work of Fritz Machlup (1962), whose pioneer work sought to 'measure' the philosophers' concept of knowledge and its use. To find out how much knowledege was available and how it was used, Machlup collected and categorized data about communications media. Therefore, Dordick belived that "It should come as no surprise that the Japanese married their 'Johoka Shakai' to Machlup's economic."[1]

However, the Japanese concepts of information society are well accepted and widely quoted by scholars and researchers in this field. Some of the definitions are as follows:

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[1] Herbert S. Dordick, "The Emerging Information Societies", in *Understanding Modern Telecommunications*. New York : McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1986.

"JOHOKA SHAKAI refers to a soceity characterized by abandant information in terms of both stock and flow, quick and efficient distribution and transformation of information, an easy and inexpensive access of information for all members of society. JOHOKA also implies a process of social change approaching the state of JOHOKA SHAKAI."

(Youichi Ito, 1980)

"Our soceity is moving toward a new stage of 'Johoka Shakai' in which more priority is placed on segmented, more detailed information to meet individual needs instead of conventional mass-reproduced conformed information."

(White Paper 1978, Communications in Japan. MPT/)

"In the information society of the 21st century, various media will dissemminate great volumes of diversified information. This vast, varied information exchange will require complex advanced systems for accurate and efficient processing of information.

"It is necessary for such systems to be easy to handle or operate. They must be freely accessible systems that we can readily integrate into our day-to-day lives. New technology that will make such systems possible is considered one of the highest priorities in research and development today."

(Advanced Telecommunications Research Institute International, 1986)

The 'New Media' and The 'Information Society'

Particularly important in an information society is communication technology, including computers, telecommunications and semiconductors. The combination of computer and communications media, telecommunication, etc, create new forms of communication technologies which recently have been widely called 'the New Media'. These new media and new communication systems promise to transform the way we work, learn, play, shop, etc., in our everyday lives. It is this new communication technology that drive the information society.[2]

At present, the term 'new media' is widely used to refer to any new communication technology. However, if we want to narrow down the meaning, it may be distinguished from the older or conventional media, as follows:

> "The new media differ from conventional media (telephone, telegraph, television set, radio, newspaper, etc.) in that innovative technology has been used in at least one of the information collection, processing, transmision and utilization phases... The new media include satellite communication, two-way CATV, satellite broadcast, etc."
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> (Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) The new media Community Plan, Machinery and Information Bureau.)

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[2] Everett M. Rogers and Francis Balle, *The Media Revolition in America and in Western Europe*. New Jersey : Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1988, p. 12.

Masahiro Kawahata from the New Media Development Association of MITI characterized the new media as follows:

> "In contrast to older media, the new media can be characterized by the following features:
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> - Large scale networks
> - Two-way system capability
> - Integration of voice, data, pictures and images
> - Higher capacity and speed
> - The gathering, storing, processing, transmission and utilization-rather than simply transmission of information."

It is not necessary that a certain new media possesses all these characteristics. However, some main characteristics such as two-way capability, or 'interactivity', should be outstanding. The new media may also affect our way of looking at the audience. To use the media is, by its very nature, to be active or not passive. The semantic different between a viewer and user is worth considering. An audience 'view' the old media; an individual 'uses' the new media.

Communication Policies Concerning the Information Society and the New Media

The Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MPT) has legal Jurisdiction over communications policy and industry. However, because of the increasing economic significance of the communications and electronic industry, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) also has significant role in promoting the new communication technology which in some ways effect communication policies in Japan. In addition, several communication institutions and research institutions, such as RITE, NTT, NHK, the Advance Tele-communication Research Institute International and the Advisory Committee on the Advanced Information Society, play important roles in shaping communication policies in Japan.

By 1972, strong government interest in the societal influences of information industries was evident in a report of the MPT entitled "Is Information Exploding?" The government's research team (RITE) also conducted research assessing quality of life in terms of information ratio and information flow.

At the end of 1977, the government announced a national computer policy as follows:

"Japan's information processing industry must compete in an international arena with countries throughout the world."

(Japan Information Processing Development Center, 1977)

In cooporation with leaders in industry, MITI enunciated new policy in a "Plan for an information Society : A National Goal Toward the Year 2000." The MITI set policy to solve life quality problems based on comprehensive utilization of information and information technology. Emphasis was placed on such products of research and development of equipment for telecommunications and the new media.

As for the MPT, by this time the concept of Johoka Shakai has already formed as an ideal society to be accomplished. Communication policy was stated on the MPT's 1978 White Paper as follows:

"Our society is moving toward a new stage of Johoka Shakai in which more priority is placed on segmented, more detailed information to meet individual needs instead of

conventional mass-reproduced conformed information."

Along with enlightening the public on the prospect of the new advanced information society, concrete measures have been devised for its realization. Some experimental projects, such as MITI's Visual Information System Project, the HI-Ovis and the MPT's Tama Coaxial Cable Information System project, were started. These projects were considered as the first stage of the 'Wire City' in Japan.

Even though the result of the experiments were not completely satisfactory, the two ministries firmly continue the policies and plans for achieving the advanced information society :

In the 1980's, Japan is looking forward to the 21 century. Several plans and policies are set for development of the advanced information society in the year 2000.

The Telecommunication Business law was promulgated on April, 1985 to revise or reform the telecommunication system. The new law expresses the policy of privatization and fair and effective competition in telecommunications. Promotion of R & D in telecommunication and standardization of telecommunication technology were also set as the new policy. In concrete terms, high-quality service has been offered through competition. From the user's standpoint, the reform has brought about freedom of choice. One of the direct benefits is a drop in rates. Also, in the future, it is felt that this legislation will stimulate the healthy development of telecommunications corporation.

The Minister of the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication stated that "Japan is transforming itself from a mere industrial society into a highly advanced information society. In this transition, telecommunications are expected to play a key and fundamental role. Under these social and economic settings, it became imperative for Japan to establish a revolutionary telecommunications policy in a bid to achieve the advanced information society plateau of the twenty-first century,"[3]

Therefore, "the ministry is vigorously promoting the Teletopia Plan, the construction of Teleports, and the expanded use of communication networks including integrated services digital networks, or ISDNs. In broadcasting, the ministry promotes the further use of teletext and satellite broadcasting, and the early realization of the very promising high-definition television, or HDTV... The Ministry will continue to established policies appropriate to the changing economic and social environment..."[4]

As for the MITI, the policy toward the achievement of the information society are set as follows :

"... There are still numerous infrastructural and qualitative problems that have to be dealt with quickly and effectively before an 'information society' can be realized. Such problems include the improvment of information-related educational programs and the training of information processing specialists; the elimination of quantitative and qualita-

[3] Masaaki Nakayama, "The History and Current Situation of the Telecommunication Business in Japan." MPT; 1988.

[4] MPT, *Posts and Telecommunications in Japan : Toward a Global Communications Networks*, Fiscal 1987.

tive sortware deficiencies; the construction of data bases; the assurance of interoperability; and so forth.

"Since information networks are global in nature, policies created to handle these issues must be pushed forward in cooperation with other nations.

"These are the points to which MITI will give top priority in its formulation of comprehensive policies toward information society."[5]

The MITI also has its own project called "the New Media Community Plan."[6] The new media community can be defined as an advanced information society that takes full advantage of the new media. In the new media community plan, there are three kinds of areas (model area, application/development area, and planning promotion area) to realize the above society.

Conclusion :

The Teletopia Plan of the MPT and the New Media Community Plan have been serving the Japanese society for more than five years. At present, the two ministries are competing with each other in implementing the information society policies through the above projects. Several new projects are on the way. Though the two ministries well realize that their activities overlap. They are continuously and vigorously developing projects and plans for the promotion of the new media. Achieving the stage of advance information society in the 21 Century is the goal of the Japanese government as well as the Japanese people.

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[5] MITI, *MITI's Policy Toward Information Society, Machinery and Information Industries Bureau*, April, 1988.

[6] MITI, "*The New Media Community Plan.*" Machinery and Information Industry Bureau.

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