

Rohan had been subcontracted the job to replace our upholstery by the person whom we had hired. I asked Rohan if he takes jobs independently also and if he had a shop somewhere. He said he doesn't have a shop but does get independent work. So I asked him how is it that people get to know about him. His answer came as a total surprise to me- he said he pays 12,000 a year to advertise on Google and I can find him on the Net!

Technology has obviously permeated across class barriers at least within urban and semi urban India. The other day I saw a Google representative at the place where I go for physiotherapy- he was obviously trying to get the physiotherapist to advertise on Google. Obviously, for people like Rohan and possibly the physiotherapist, this investment would be profitable. But what about R.K. Sweets, the neighbourhood sweet seller who now has a board which says "Find us on Google"? It is not clear to me how the *halwai*, whose custom is mainly from people stopping by to eat *samosas* and *jalebis* would benefit from advertising on Google. But obviously I am missing something.

We are of course quite adept at assimilating and adapting technology as consumers. In the days of expensive call rates, we innovated and started the "Miss call". This ingenious ploy to game the system was used extensively by the Anti-Corruption campaign and since then has also been used by various political parties. Interestingly, what we ended up doing was using a newer technology, namely cell phones to fulfil the functions of an older technology namely pagers and beepers. It was as if we were echoing Umberto Eco in "Turning the Clock Back".

Phones started being used as multifunctional devices quite early on in the evolutionary cycle in India. It started by their use as radios. The labourer working on a building site would have an earphone and listen to FM radio on his basic Nokia 1180. With the advent of basic smartphones, MP3 playback got added to the repertoire. The rickshaw puller from Bihar would go to the neighbourhood mobile store in his slum, the one which advertises "China Mobile, All software & MP3 download" and get the latest Bhojpuri songs downloaded on his mobile. Next came video playback. To the Bhojpuri songs were added the latest bawdy Bhojpuri movies to be seen while waiting for custom.

This was the state of affairs till a new entrant into mobile telephony decided that what the Indian population needed most was free data. The other day I saw my fruit vendor watching a pirated version of the latest Salman Khan film on his mobile. He now has unlimited choice and doesn't even have to pay the shopkeeper to download films! Even crony capitalism can sometimes be a good thing!

Then came WhatsApp and Text messaging became a cottage industry. One could share anything and everything. And share it with many people without incurring any extra costs. But apart from the same New Year graphic which one receives from a hundred different people or stale jokes from the Internet, it has also served as a great facilitator in business. The insurance surveyor asks you to WhatsApp your licence, the service provider will

WhatsApp you the invoice and so on. But for me the best example is of my carpenter who on not being able to come on the agreed time is too sheepish to call and hesitant to type out any messages to me. So he records a message and sends it to me on WhatsApp!

And then there is gaming which seems to have become ubiquitous. An elderly relative of mine is addicted to Candy Crush which she plays incessantly either on the iPad or if that is not accessible, on her phone. The obsession is so pervasive that she doesn't even look up from her device while conversing. The other day during my walk through one of the bylanes of the city, I came across a bunch of young men sitting on a corner. Now this sight of underemployed or unemployed youngsters sitting at the corner of a street to exchange gossip or just ogle at passers-by or play cards or Ludo is fairly common where I live. However, what surprised me was that they were playing Ludo on a phone!

The standard lore in technology forecasting is that its adoption in a society follows an S shaped curve. An initial period of slow adoption followed by rapid growth and then a petering out as the technology matures and permeates. In the case of mobile technology this model is not strictly applicable since the technology itself has kept on evolving- from brick sized basic handsets to the sleek multifunctional smartphones with thousands of apps. Moreover, the market is nowhere close to being saturated- a vast majority of our population still uses a non-smartphone. In the meantime, Rohan is thinking of getting help from one of his friends to start a Facebook page and buy ad words on Facebook too!

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