

REVIEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Network Nation: Human Communication via Computer. By Starr Roxanne Hiltz and Murray Turoff. (Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc., Reading, Massachusetts 01867, USA), 1978. Pp. xxxiv + 528. Price: Hard Bound \$29.50; Paper Bound \$17.50.

The book is organized in three parts with thirteen chapters in total. Each chapter is concluded by a summary and a list of items for discussions.

The nature of computerized conferencing is discussed in the three chapters of Part I; it presents an overview of computerized conferencing and related technologies, tracing the advancements in computers and communication technology, operation research, innovations in areas like computer assisted instructions, new problem solving and information processing techniques. Any system that uses computer to mediate communication among human beings has been referred as computerized conferencing. The computerized conferencing and its diversifications are explained by discussing the features of EIES—Electronic Information Exchange System for scientific research communities, and the EMISARI—Emergency Management Information System and Reference Index developed at U.S. Office of Emergency Preparedness. The role of 'collective intelligence' of a group of people which could be realized through organization of computer based conferences, seminars, assemblies, etc., without participants required to travel and to meet at a common physical venue is emphasized.

Part II has five chapters which cover the potential applications and impacts of computerized conferencing in specific institutional sectors of society—the management of complex organizations, social services, public participation, scientific and technical information exchange and research.

potential impacts and applications of computerized conferencing on managerial and staff functions crisis management, budgeting, coordination, text processing, editing, filing, are reviewed.

The opportunities offered by computerized conferencing and by the associated computer mediated (satellite) communication developments to the poor, underdeveloped, under-employed and physically and mentally handicapped persons are described and thereby possibility of a potent means of lessening inequality of well-being is discussed.

The authors have also explored the potential applications of computer-based communication systems in education, politics, economics, professional services,

electronic fund transfer—EFT, psychiatric or marriage counselling legal or accounting advice telemedicine, and, its general household and recreational use, in addition to the expected outcome of the use of computerized conference system by scientists and engineers.

An overview of high priority research areas related to computer communication systems is presented. Main research imperative in author's view is:

'Study of the impact of the computer as mediator on human and communication systems'.

Part III is entitled 'Projecting the Future: the Technology and its Regulations' and is divided into five chapters. Authors have reviewed some of the most successful kinds of attempts, e.g., Delphi, Nominal Group Technique, at structuring the human group problem solving process in other communication modes, and have suggested how these might be implemented in computerized form. The importance of optimal design of the Human-Machine Interface for maximum utilization of computer conferencing system, the dilemmas and opportunities are discussed.

The technology, economics and utility of computer conferencing have been evaluated, and indicated that presently the costs of computer mediated communication are competitive with those of other media of communications, e.g., face to face meetings, telephone conversations and mail. However, with the expected further drop in cost of computer hardware and the emergence of commercially available software, the cost of human communication via computer will further go down.

In chapter on the policy formulation and regulation issues, authors' plea that at the present juncture as the evolution of computer conferencing system, with the widest possible range of experimentation and with a diversity of different system is called for, it would be unfortunate to see this area stifled by premature regulation and policies that limit the application potential of these systems.

Authors have explored computerized conferencing as a social process that has some unique characteristics that may be strengths or weaknesses depending upon the nature of the group using this medium, their skill and the purpose for which it is applied.

Many remarks throughout the book particularly with reference to time frame and scale of economy may be apt for North American and other technologically advanced nations. While for other countries the data communication infrastructure/facilities are

yet to go a long way for computer networks to be established and to realize computer conferencing and thereby gain from its potentialities.

The purpose of the book—as indicated in the preface to help in understanding the nature and social implications of computerized conferencing—is very well achieved. It is an easy reading, well organized and well written book and presents a lucid overview of this fast developing interdisciplinary technology. In

addition to the list of the references cited by the authors a bibliography of computerized conferencing is also provided at the end of the book. It is recommended for all those who wish to know about the current state of art of computer mediated information system, their implementation, potential applications and technological, economic and social impact.

A. A. SHAMIM.

ASIAN PHYSICAL SOCIETY

At the Asian Regional Conference on University Physics Education held in May 1977 at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, the delegates felt that there is an urgent need for the formation of an Asian Physical Society (APS) on the same lines as the European Physical Society. At the concluding session of this conference, a Pro-Tem Committee was elected by the delegates with Prof. Chatar Singh, Malaysia, as a Chairman.

The Pro-Tem Committee met on 15th September 1979 and examined in detail the draft constitution and bye-laws and a final version of the Constitution was agreed to by an enlarged Pro-Tem Committee which met at Singapore. The members of this Committee unanimously resolved to launch the Asian Physical Society with effect from 15th September 1979 and elected the first Executive Committee with the following scientists :—President—Prof. Chatar Singh; Malaysia; Vice-Presidents—Prof. B. R. Rao, India and Prof. M. Barmawi, Indonesia; Executive Secretary—Dr. S. Radhakrishna (COSTED Scientific Secretary), India; Treasurer—Prof. S. Kupratakuln, Thailand; and Members—Prof. A. Rajaratnam, Singapore, Prof. A. K. M. Siddique, Bangladesh, Prof. S. M. H. Tirmizi, Pakistan, Prof. C. Dahanayake, Sri Lanka, Dr. P. C. W. Fung, Hongkong, Prof. Feline Academia, Philippines and Prof. S. One, Japan. The Committee will hold

office for three years with effect from 15th September 1979.

The main objective of the Society is to promote the advancement of Physics and its allied subjects, both in teaching and research, in all the Asian countries. It will also serve as a forum for the discussion of subjects of common interest and for close collaboration between various Physics organisations and Societies in the Asian Countries.

The Society consists of Institutional representatives, individual members and corporate members from research laboratories and scientific companies. The subscription for the individual member is US \$ 2 per annum.

The Executive Committee has also planned the following activities :— (1) Workshop on Instrumentation and Solid State Spectroscopy in India in April/May 1980; (2) Physics of Solid State Devices in Singapore in April/May 1981; (3) Physics in Industry in Japan in May 1981; (4) Methods of Teaching Physics (at secondary and tertiary levels) in Thailand in November 1981; (5) Mechanics of Physics Curriculum Development in Sri Lanka in 1982 and (6) Physics of Materials in Indonesia in 1983.

Further details can be had from the Executive Secretary Prof. S. Radhakrishna, Department of Physics, Indian Institute of Technology, Madras 600 036.

THE INSTITUTE OF PHYSICS, LONDON CONFERENCE ON DIELECTRICS

The Solid State Sub-Committee of The Institute of Physics is organising a conference on Physics of Dielectric Solids to be held at the University of Kent, Canterbury, from 8th to 11th September 1980. Topics to be covered include :—Dielectric relaxation; Relationship between dielectric, NMR and mechanical

relaxation; Low-temperature and high-frequency phenomena; Charge trapping in dielectrics; Dispersion forces and Charge movements in dielectrics. For further information apply to The Meetings Officer, The Institute of Physics, 47 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8QX.