

The Affects of Abundant Communication in the 21st Century

By Alexander Fell

Introduction

In today's modern society the ways in which we communicate with each other are being expanded into an ever increasing number of mediums. This technology driven expansion has so far been focused on speed and usability, this essay attempts to look into the affects that this is having on interaction between people.

Aims

In this essay I aim to investigate the way in which people are communicating with each other through traditional mediums such as speech and print, as well as more recent techniques such as sms text messaging (and its variations), email and also other internet variations.

Research Questions

In carrying out my research I attempt to address the following issues:

- Attention-spans and how they have been affected by 'enhanced' communication
- The arguments for and against qualitative and quantitative communication
- The changing structure of modern communication

Investigative research

Attention-spans and how they have been affected by 'enhanced' communication

There are many sources that suggest that the attention spans among people of ages are decreasing dramatically. A good example of this is television advertising and its marketing, as demonstrated by the following quote:

"..the low NAAS would make the 5-second television advertising spot the industry standard. "The 30-second spot is dead. The 15-second spot is dead. I doubt you will even see a 10-second spot, except perhaps during the Super Bowl.""

Le Tet, B. National Attention Span Averages published,

This kind of marketing appeals to the lazy, where complex forms of communication are perceived as requiring too much effort to process and so increasingly simplistic alternatives are offered. This also stretches to verbal communication, whether it be transmitted telephonically or spoken, as illustrated in the following quote:

"Marketing studies indicate that the average attention span for adults is 22 seconds. When someone has finished speaking, we remember about half of what we heard. Within a few hours we can only recall about 20 percent.."

Lindahl, K. Practicing the Sacred Art of Listening

The arguments for and against qualitative and quantitative communication

Qualitative communication is generally more personal/emotional in its conveyance of its subject, rich in its levels of meaning which is why it is the ideal form of communication in an informal situation. Quantitative communication however relies upon regular feedback from both parties, the sheer volume of communication intending to compensate for quality of data. The advantage of this is that data can be sent with a near universal understanding at much quicker speeds, taking much less effort to understand. Although this seems ideal I refer to the following quote:

"Generally, strong personal ties are supported by physical proximity. The Internet potentially reduces the importance of physical proximity in creating and maintaining networks of strong social ties"

Kraut, R and Lundmark, V. Internet Paradox

Here the important of informal communication is stressed; in particular a more relaxed visual appearance is generally a good structure for communication to build on.

The changing structure of modern communication

The way in which people communicate is changing very rapidly, this catalysed by the exponential rate at which technology is advancing. No where more evident is this than the postage and telephone industries:

“Average minutes per line increased from 120 to nearly 300 per month”

“Number of cellphones in U.S. increased from 76 to 128 million, while number of all (second-line, CLEC) fixed residential lines has fallen from 190 to 188 million.”

Ward, M. Usage Substitution Between Mobile and Fixed Telephone in the U.S

By moving to more modernised and technologically advanced forms of communication such as sms text messaging and email, short bursts of information are transmitted regularly as part of daily routine. This is mainly due to the mobile nature of the technology, removing the need to schedule time to use landline phones, proof-read letters and more importantly use your own possessions as public access to the internet becomes more wide-spread.

Research Analysis

In analysing the research I was able to identify that in fact the affects of increase in ability to communicate do not directly translate into an increase in communication. This is because of the lack of standards and utilisation of the full range of the English language, where pictorial information and more photogenic information are preferred. What was once held as a valued skill, a good communicator's importance has been compromised by 'sloppy' forms of communication that are marketed at a continually disinterested youth.

Conclusion

In concluding this study I question societies need for increased communication, in that the growth in communication is more a result of marketing and business than an actual social need. Naturally a variety of communication increases socialising, in fact 'texting' is now looked upon as a past-time, being used as a relaxation exercise during breaks from work. This constant repetition of a limited style of communicating helps to connect people almost constantly, but unlike necessary or important communication such as calls for help or personal advice, jokes and gossip are exchanged (again a ploy by marketing companies). This seems to go against the well known phrase "absence makes the heart grow fonder" as it is often the case that when people meet they have little else to say to each other that has not already been transmitted, either this or an iteration of an earlier encounter.

The saturation of communication experienced in any high street is daunting when you consider how marketing is aimed at the shorter attention span so that it is almost impossible not to absorb every form of branding utilised in modern society.

In conclusion the affects of communication in the 21st century are numerous, mostly these take the form of numbing the creative responses society has to more challenging forms of communication.

References

*Le Tet, B. National Attention Span Averages published,
Taken from http://www.thinkudyne.com/steve?story_id=6&issue=01*

*Lindahl, K. Practicing the Sacred Art of Listening
Sourced from http://www.sacredlistening.com/psal_sample.htm*

*Kraut, R and Lundmark, V. Internet Paradox
Taken from Internet Paradox*

*Ward, M. Usage Substitution Between Mobile and Fixed Telephone in the U.S
Taken From Usage Substitution Between Mobile and Fixed Telephone in the U.S*