*To what extent has new media made us poor communicators?*

        In 2011, the word “retweet” was added to the Oxford English dictionary. Retweeting, or the sharing of another user’s tweet, allows the promotion of users’ personal profiles to a wide audience beyond their immediate circle. Certainly, this new form of communication reflects the increasing convenience and speed of online communication, but it also reveals the decline in the quality of communication, where the authenticity of self-expression is compromised. Over time, communication has morphed in its nature and form given the pervasiveness of new media in our lives. Being a good communicator entails the ability to convey one’s ideas across effectively, to interpret non-verbal cues, and to establish relationships, but new media has compromised on our abilities to do so. Although the rise of new media has brought about an increase in the efficiency of communication, this has often compromised on our effectiveness as communicators.

        Undoubtedly, new media has made us more efficient communicators by providing easy and quick access to various forms of communication. Through new platforms such as Whatsapp and Facebook, geographical and time constraints no longer limit one’s ability to communicate given the speed and outreach of new media. Furthermore, these platforms allow one to communicate to a larger audience than ever before. Businesses may tap on new media to advertise or improve relationships with its customer base, while political activists can use it to rally support. One such platform is Twitter, an application that allows one to express oneself in 140 characters to one’s followers. Being available on smartphones as well as online, Twitter has hastened the speed and ease of communication. Furthermore, an average Twitter user has over 200 followers, and a “hashtag” alone can allow one’s “tweet” to reach out to over 2 million users. Compared to human face-to-face interaction, Twitter allows us to conveniently express ourselves to a vast audience as well, enhancing our efficiency as communicators. Similarly, Facebook, Line and Viber are online applications that improve the convenience of communication as well.  Hence, the rise of new media has been accompanied by a rise in online and technological communication, which has increased the quantity of communication through making us more efficient communicators.

        Moreover, good communication is not limited to a one-sided expression of one’s opinions, but rather, it encompasses the need for a two-way interaction and discussion between the communicator and the recipient. By increasing the ease and quantity of communication, new media encourages the mutual sharing of information and ideas, resulting in more effective communication. Advancements in communications technology has allowed political candidates can use new media to engage in effective dialogue with the general public. Take for example Singapore’s former Minister of Foreign Affairs, George Yeo. With the maximum of 5000 friends on Facebook, Yeo constantly updates his profile by posting pictures and relevant messages, both politically-related and personal. By allowing the general public to comment on and share his posts, as well as replying several comments, he has shown how new media can be used to generate discussion from political dialogue over the Middle East and United Nations to trivial pictures of his pets or his meals. Similarly, the recent presidential elections in India showed how the victor, Narenda Modi, used Twitter to reach out to 4.4 million followers, discussing domestic issues of pollution, water, education and health. As such, this creates a beneficial two-way communication that humanises politicians and improves the relationship between the politician and members of the public.

Indeed, new media has made us more efficient communicators, and increased of frequency of two-way communication, yet this new convenience may have undermined the quality of our communication. It is precisely the ease of online and virtual communication that has somewhat devalued human interactions, which compromises on our interpretation of non-verbal cues, as well as genuine self-expression.

The sheer ease of online communication has compromised on one’s expression and analysis of real life behaviour. The increasing usage of verbal communication through new media has resulted in lesser real life, face-to-face communication, where one is able to read the body language of the other person. Research has shown that non-verbal cues make up 70 to 90 percent of the entire communication spectrum, and this reflects what one is missing out on when communicating online. Furthermore, communication through new media allows one to hide behind a facade, without showing genuine emotion as well. The nature of new media encourages user-generated content, Online communication can thus undergo a series of editing before we hit the send button, allowing us to portray an image, possibly a false one, of who we want to be. In this sense, the authenticity of face-to-face communication is lost. Hence, new media not only undermines our ability interpret physical behavior, but also compromises on self-expression, thereby making us less effective communicators.

Furthermore, new media has made us lazier communicators. Everyday, we are bombarded by hoards of notifications that are often irrelevant or unimportant to us. This communication overload desensitizes us, and we do not take time to process, reflect, and respond to various forms of communication. Our shortened attention spans are exacerbated by new media platforms, as they often encourage us to compress our thoughts into phrases or pictures. As previously mentioned, the 140-character limit on a Twitter update inculcates in us the habit of fragmenting our thoughts and not bothering to complete them. With Instagram, while a picture may convey a thousand words, the usage of this platform does not reflect this. Most users are guilty of simply upload pictures of food, scenery, or themselves without putting much thought into it at all. Therefore, we have become lazy communicators, consumed by the appeal and convenience of new media.

In conclusion, new media has undeniably made us more efficient communicators as we are now able to communicate quickly and easily. However, the increased amount of communication does not correspond to an increase in the quality of communication. New media has made us poorer communicators. The ease of communication has compromised on our ability to express ourselves, and to understand and listen to each other. A simply “retweet” may go a long way in reaching out and relating to one’s followers, but it also represents a thought or opinion that does not belong to us, and thus dampens the quality of our self-expression.

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