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The Desensitization of Communal Interaction:
How the Advancement of Communication Technology
has Desensitized
Communal Interaction

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Introduction:

In today's society, technology is always advancing for the progression of society in ways of medicine, recreation, art and most importantly, communication. However, as technology continues to advance, there exists a dwindling use of communal interaction physically, as technology has become a primary source of communication in which society connects within itself, by way of social media and text messaging. As technology has progressed, less people communicate orally and face-to-face with one another. Based on research of case studies, statistics have proven that as technology has continued to progress, the need for face-to-face communication has declined. In relation to the critical theory, the decline of communal relations has proven that with the development of communication technology, society has chosen technology as the prioritized medium of communication and the need for communal relation to be desensitized. It has become evident that by way of technological communication, society has deemed it necessary and more of a priority to use technology as a means of interaction. However, by critically analyzing the use of the critical theory, society has a chance of changing its main medium of communication and the importance of that means back to its original medium of communal interaction and face-to-face communication.

Critical Theory on Communal Interaction & Technology:

A critical theory is a social theory focused on critiquing and changing society as a whole (Johnson, 2000). Critical theories openly expose certain values and use these values to evaluate and criticize the status quo, providing ways of interpreting the role of mass media in society (Baran, 2012). Developed by a group of sociologists at the Univer-

sity of Frankfurt in Germany who referred to themselves as The Frankfurt School, critical

theories in sociology are geared towards diagnostically analyzing beyond the surface of

society and discovering the truth behind what society often refuses to address. Two main

goals of a critical theory are to directly associate with society as a whole, relating to its

historical occurrences and to create an improved understanding of how society can bring

about reform by assimilating the use of social science (Johnson, 2000). In order for a crit-

ical theory to be effective it must be explained, applied, and relatable (Horkheimer,

1982). In other words, the theory must explain a current issue existing in the reality of

society, characterize ways to change and/or better the issue, and provide relative norms

and achievable goals for social reform (Horkheimer, 1982). A claim of the critical theory

states, by reevaluating society, we can give priority to the most important human values

(Baron, 2012).

  In correlation to the decline of communal interaction, it seems that society has

placed a "priority" on technology as a means of communication. The issue is that as time

has progressed, society has reorganized what source and medium of communication

should be used and how often it should be used, thus creating a new priority for how we

communicate. Text messaging has become a dominant mode of communication in the

world and with cell phones being used to hold verbal conversations, once the important

issues are discussed most phone users do not find the significance in continuing on in a

conversation, but would rather text. Statistics show that, in present-day, many people with

cell phones prefer texting over a phone call (Pew Research, 2011).

  Overall, society is losing its ability to communicate face-to-face, therefore result-

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ing in the lack social skills from time spent communicating impersonally. Positioning the

critical theory into affect, it is important that society, first, observe the subject of technol-

ogy controlling the means in which people communicate with one another. With society

placing such an importance on the development of technological communication devices,

thus making it a priority, society, too, has place an insignificance on the development of

communication skills. Most do not comprehend the vitality of communal interaction and

the development of effective communication skills. To bring about reform, it is suggested

that society reevaluate the importance of communal interaction and communication, by

way of historical research to observe how important previous civilizations and societies

developed and thrived collectively by way of communal interaction and communication.

Second, it is important to then inform the members of society of the issue and its histori-

cal research, thus making the correlation of why technological communication becoming

a main medium of communication is a concern. Then after, differentiating how to desen-

sitize technological communication and change the focus from hi-tech interaction back to

basic one-on-one face-to-face interaction will be the next step in transitioning. Lastly, the

action of desensitizing communication technology itself and thus, showing members of

society the gain of communal interaction, resulting in proper development of communica-

tion skills is a pivotal phase.

Communal Interaction:

Communication is can be defined as an important and vital social process. H.G.

Mead described a model society as one that unites individuals together, which he be-

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lieved stemmed from the process of communication (Mead, 1934). American philosopher

John Dewey stated that society exists in and through communication; that communication

was essential in giving meaning to events and the society affected by these events

(Dewey, 1925). He defined communication under two principles: (1) communication as

the foundation of society and (2) communication as a necessary condition for the working

of democracy (Dewey, 1925.) By observing the previous arguments of these theorists,

one can observe the importance of communication in the success of an existing democrat-

ic society. At the beginning of human existence, human and communal interaction was

based off of scribes. Overtime, it developed into the production of sound, which later

evolved into language. By way of communication, a society and people are able to inter-

act with each other, transferring history, culture and information. Without the existence of

communication, society dies off and then becomes extinct. In addition, the proof of the

existence of that culture and society inexistent.

      In present-day, the nature of communal interaction has greatly changed.

Communal interaction has changed from face-to-face by way of language to technologi-

cal communication, often times with the absence of human interaction, physically and in

some cases without the presence of vocality. As a result, the development in communica-

tion skills as well as effectiveness in these skills has declined. More people are becoming

unable to verbally communicate in face-to-face interaction. Communication skills now

top the list of qualities employers seek after during job interviews because these skills are

qualities they have a lack of time to teach in their two-week new hire training

sessions. Despite this need, however, the presence of qualified candidates with these

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skills is often times non-existent. The reasoning behind this desensitized and qualified use of verbal and face-to-face communication has been statistically proven to be in corre-lation with the advancement of technology.

<u>Advancement of Communication Technology & Technological Communication:</u>

The evolution of communication technology dates back to the early 1900's with the ideas of the earliest mobile phone and the telex service. In 1906, inventor Charles E. Alden claimed to have invented the best pocket telephone. Despite the fact that Alden never was able to mass-produce the invention, he would start a long-term development and evolution to what is currently known as the "cell phone." In 1946, the first mobile telephone calls were made from cars. In 1983, DynaTAc launched the first US 1G net-work mobile phone by Ameritech and from then on the evolution of the cell phone has continued. In 1920, RCA Communications introduced the first telex service and in 1992, SMS messaging (short message service) was used for the first time by Neil Papworth from a personal computer to a mobile phone. What is currently understood as modern SMS text messaging was first introduced in 1994 under the Radiolinga network. In present-day, the world is able to communicate with anyone, anywhere by the touch of a mobile keypad. In addition, mobile phones now include features in which society can find information, email, Facebook, Instagram, Tweet and text in less than seconds. The use of mobile phones and their abilities to connect different people has changed and ad-vanced the way society communicates.

However, by utilizing the medium in which society most communicates via text, studies have cited means of technological communication such as texting and email to be

the reason communication skills have failed in recent years. *The New York Times* reported in a study by independent mobile analyst Chetan Sharma that "the rate of texting growth is evening out in the United States" (White, 2012). The study stated that texting is topping out at "an average of about 700 messages per month per user" (White, 2012). This shows that texting has become one of the most prominent uses of the way society communicates with one another, thus, further raising the notion of how technological communication has affected communal interaction.

Communal Interaction & Advancement of Technological Communication:

Researchers have found that instant messaging keeps families interconnected online, however, the use of instant messaging can lead to fewer in-person meetings, outings and less time actually talking face-to-face. The Pew Research Center stated in their Internet & American Life Project that today, 85% of Americans ages 18 and older own a cell phone, 33% of those who do not own a cell phone stated that they live in a household were there is at least one working mobile phone (Pew Research Center, 2011). Overall, 90% of all adults live in a household where there is at least one working cell phone. 68% of Americans ages 66-74 stated that they own a cell phone and 48% of Americans ages 75 and over stated that they too own a cell phone (Pew Research Center, 2011). There is an underlying truth that cell phone usage has become one of the most useful ways that society sees as a means of communicating with each other.

Technological communication has become the dominant means of communication and as a result, society has gradually become "hindered from developing its interpersonal communication skills" (Gentilviso, 2012). According to Christina Durano, DailySkiff.-

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com, *"Not only do electronics hinder the development of our interpersonal communication skills, but they can also be just plain rude…I actually deserve people's attention… there are some basic rights everyone deserves – one of which is the right to have a two-way conversation"* (White, 2012). Along with the decline of developing communication skills, technology has also affected the way students perform in the classroom. Studies show that 25% of students have used emoticons in their school writing, 50% have used informal punctuation and grammar, and 38% have used text shortcuts when writing papers (Pew Research Center, 2008). It is evident that there is a direct effect on how technological communication has not only affected society's ability to communicate with one another, but as well academic performance in classroom settings. The reasoning behind why such phenomena, such as mobile phones and text messaging as a means by which society communicates, can be best explained using the critical theory.

The Decline of Communal Interaction on Humanity:

Joseph Grenny, co-author of the book *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High* stated that "the core problem has existed since we've had telephones – probably since the time of a telegraph—we loathe having crucial conversations; we are paralyzed and do what we can to avoid them" (Grenny, 2012). During her Mass Media & Society class, Dr. Cheryl Renee Gooch, Dean of Humanities at The Lincoln University, stated, "Our humanity is at stake." From an analytical standpoint, one cannot help but to agree with her argument. The decline of communication by means of communal interaction, results in a decline of civilization within itself. Humanity's relevance and survival is based off of the survival and relevance of its inhabitants, which is caused by

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effective communal interaction and communication. However, over the last century, society has allowed its relevance to be determined by technology; ultimately, technology has become the source in which human beings determine their culture. Collectively, by means of groupthink, technology has become too much of a priority, thus becoming a major source in which society thrives. In further, societal communications skills have diminished as this new source of communication has come about, which can further be hypothesized as becoming a downfall to "humanity." By applying the previous application of the critical theory, along with the proper solutions aforementioned, there is a possibility of preserving society and humanity by means of communal interaction and communication. In use of the critical theory to correct this dilemma and bring about social reform an assessment of historical communal interaction and communication is essential, along with distinguishing how to weaken the importance of technological communication as a communication medium. It is then, after desensitizing communication technology, that this critique can be applied in action by displaying the gain of communal interaction for the survival of humanity. However, if society do not address this situation and correct it in a critiquing manner, the state of humanity will become at risk and eventually members of society will become inhabitants of a technologically-ran global order.

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