Modern Communication: Judgement of the Past

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Abstract
In this current digital era, Malaysian ideology of modern communication revolves highly around the active participation in online social activities by using computerised digital devices such as smartphones or tablets. Back then, the initial idea of having digital assistant in communicating between human is to solve certain complication or difficulties involving the issue of speed, location and mobility. Never to deny these ideas, the use of modern methods in communicating did manage to send information in a blink of an eye, connecting people from many different places and assisting in maintaining those connections even while travelling. In retrospect to the period of 10 to 20 years back in Malaysia, the usage of digital media communication then is a subject to differ in comparison with the current practice in the country. Long ago, communication technology does not entail as many benefits as to what the current digital media could offer. However, despite of all the obvious advantages, there are several concerns towards the contribution of these modern practices on human vulnerability. With reference to the statements made several decades ago by communication or technology expert; Alan Turing, Walter Benjamin and Ralph Hartley, the speculation on the drawbacks of digital media and communication technology has begun even before the existence of World Wide Web (WWW). Therefore this paper contains the discussion on evaluation and interpretation study based on the past judgement; and how the interrelation works in parallel with the current use of communication technology specifically in Malaysia.

Keywords: Modern Communication, Communication Technology Practice, Previous Technology Speculation, Communication in Malaysia

Introduction

Due to the rapid growth of information and communication technology, the usage of intelligent mobile devices has been adopted into large part of population in the urban cities of Malaysia. Generally in most urban nations of the world, modern communication technology has become inseparable with interpersonal everyday communication as it merged a collective form of personal communities, network sociality and mobile sociality (Petric, Petrovcic and Vehosar, 2011). As the population increases, possible communication channels and media will expand and grow in its complexity.

Modern communication also contributes to modern transformation that happens in many different ways as it took place in various parts of the world. This would result in the globalization form of language where many social communication turns into 'mediated truth' about 'us' and 'others' (Kamali, 2012). In the urban cities of Malaysia, social media plays powerful controlling tools over people's mind-set in which it is a product of a modern culture. One could speculate that communication technology is actually secondary; and the real drives for further development and massive scale of implementation comes from the constant need of technology among people (Kittler, 2014). Hence, it is people's desire that changes their mindset in requiring the extra need of access to technology.

The common use of modern communication in Malaysia currently includes popular mobile applications such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook and many other applications that allow online communication to take place. Especially due to high purchase of intelligent digital gadgets, these social communication platforms are accessible at almost anywhere in the country. However, previous research has shown that excessive usage of modern communication and constant connection with technology contributes to an imbalance lifestyle among active users (Wright, Abendschein, Wambacher, O'Connor, Hoffman, Dempsey, Krull, Dewers and Shelton, 2014). This reflects the situation in Malaysia where the dependency on communication technology does not necessarily reduce users' workload in fact, it increases the capacity due to the improvement of speed hence the higher expectations of productivity as well.

The excessive usage of digital devices has altered the shape of nation's culture and it developed ways of using online social media vocabulary language as an option for primary communication. These computerised social elements are now expected to have 'feelings' however, the growth of online leisure opportunities will actually contribute to computer mitigated feelings of loneliness (Hynan, Murray and Goldbart, 2014). All of these shortcomings have originally been predicted many decades ago even before the existence of modern applications and technology software. There is a statement made in 1836 that says; technology does not only shape by the materials, but at a fundamental level, it was formed by the usage of it as it is reflected by the national cultures (Chevalier, 1836). Basically it suggests that new communication tools could perhaps contribute to ultimate changes in the human condition.

With reference to the past predictions and judgement of communication technology, the author would study and interpret previous predictions involving information

value, users' behaviours and artificial intelligent aspect and how these predictions interrelate to the current communication practice in Malaysia.

Method and scope

The objective of this paper is to conduct an exploratory research as it is used to provide a better understanding of the relation between past speculations with current modern communication practices in Malaysia. The method chosen will be to review previous related literature and analyse the connection by using constant comparative technique. This method is used as the process would be to compare the newly collected data with the previous data. List of literatures varied from publications that were released decades ago and also publications released recently. The explicit study of the content will be based on the suitability of topics and findings related to the objective.

The scope of this study covers three kinds of issues related to the past judgements or concerns towards communication technology which would be; communication messages and its value, participation behaviours and artificial intelligent. All of these previous predictions were made by well-known communication and technology experts; Ralph Hartley, Walter Benjamin and Alan Turing. To understand the relationship between these past speculations with modern communication practices in Malaysia, the author has selected three most suitable area of popular practice which includes; online news distribution, online photo sharing and intelligent personal assistant. The main process is to study and understand the previous decade's existence of idea towards the speculations on modern communication and how it correlates to the current communication practice today.

Past Judgement: Communication messages and its value

Communication is a process of conveying messages that hold meanings and in this current era, modern communication is an act of communicating that involves the usage of intelligent digital tools and programming. Back in the last millennia, Ralph Hartley in the year 1928 had written that the usage of technology in conveying messages might include many other symbols; could appear in words, dots or dashes; before it turns into a readable messages. However, technology has the capability to encourage users to constantly altering conversation subject or changing participants' involvement and this will affect the practice of restraining the 'physical' form of the meaning and values of the messages (Hartley, 1928). As an example, modern communication system during that era; a telephone is able to transmit speech successfully and Hartley's prediction would be that it will remain successful as long as the system remained unchanged.

However, technology system will forever be modified which resulted to a judgement of each messages transferred through a system, the corresponding messages have smaller sums of message value from the initial meaning and this proves that technology system is inoperative in restraining information value (Hartley, 1928). In relation to the current practice in Malaysia, there is a similarity of this prediction with the issue of Malaysia online news portals. Without adapting to readers' point-of-view, news authors typically deliver news from one specific angle or perspective and the damage usually happens when there are readers equipped with knowledge and skills

to alter those messages; intentionally or unintentionally; change the discourse to suit their understanding (Abdullah and Koh, 2008). It is a challenge for readers to select the 'correct' meaning from too many 'official' news websites and should they believe the 'wrong meaning', it could possibly create chaos towards the citizens' reaction on certain issues especially those involving sensitive matters such as Malaysian politics and current affairs.

The author noticed similar issues with the recent incident of Malaysian Airline flight MH370 and MH17. As globally known, this issue involves a missing plane in February and another plane being shot down just few months after in July. From observation, there are too many speculations and opinion being spread online and most of it divert more towards the negative aspect of the situation especially on how Malaysian authorities handle the case. All of these outsiders' speculations do not necessarily help with the situation; in fact it creates more confusion to a point where it affects how citizens from other country view Malaysia as a whole. This unhealthy example of digital media reflects the prediction of decades ago on how having constant exposure to different individuals with constant change of subject will create chaos and lessen the message value.

Past Judgement: Participation Behaviours

It is in human nature to follow what is known to be current and in-trend with excessive numbers of participants of any particular activity. Malaysia is currently experiencing the age of social media in which the changes in contemporary or modern perception is very much related to society's mode of existence and social causes. With reference to a statement made by Walter Benjamin in 1936, mass reproduction is supported particularly by the reproduction of masses; which means the duplication of action. Social activity often changes according to time and to take an event of photography as an example, it often promotes a change in receptivity (Benjamin, 1936). In relation to this, social activity processes are very much connected with the enhancement and development of reproduction and photography technique.

By having to capture big parades, sports events, monster rallies and many other activities on lens, these images were brought face-to-face with other viewers and though it is accessible to human eyes, the missing elements would be the authentic human experiences and privatisation of memories (Benjamin, 1936). Therefore Benjamin also mentioned that this establishes an understanding of which human behaviour tend to favour mechanical equipment and social acceptance rather than exclusivity of genuine feelings. It is interesting that this speculation arises before the existence of smart phone with camera function or social photography sites.

In the current digital communication age, an online website 'wearesocial.net' present a reading in 2014 that Malaysia is extremely mobile friendly where it ranked highest in the daily internet usage in South-East Asia and 98% of internet users in Malaysia are on social media. In social media events, photo sharing activities has been a popular trend that turns into a modern culture in Malaysia. These activities include sharing personal expression and experiences on individual online social network account which are accessible by other users (Mustafa and Hamzah, 2011). These shared photos might at times be a ridiculous habit by sharing pictures of common daily routines such as driving to work, watching TV, eating or even sleeping. A recent

trend in casual photography called 'selfie' is now one of the most popular apparatus of self-snap mobile tools (Jenks, 2013). The idea of this particular self-portrait is to share a quick current photo updates online and receiving feedback from others either by commenting or voting 'like' as a sign of approval towards the photos. It could at time turns into a self-promotion in the lease delicate manner (Hu, Manikonda and Kambhampati, 2014). Such participation behaviours are very common in Malaysia and for most cases; the motivation to this behaviour lies on the fact of the influential excessive growing numbers of users. Hence, this reflects to what was predicted by Walter Benjamin; social behaviours are shaped by duplication of actions of mass reproduction.

Past Judgement: Artificial Intelligent

The ideology of technology in current digital media has drawn a line between man's capability towards their physical and intellectual strength. This happens due to the anticipation towards digital gadgets in carrying out operations similar to a human routine. As results, digital computers are then playing around the idea of artificial intelligent which is constructed accordingly; by having several human principles embedded into the program to mimic actions of a human (Turing, 1950). In this current digital era, it seems that there are no limitations to what a computer can do. As long as human allow computer to 'think' like human, a machine could then adapt to the ability to 'observe' or 'predict' the future of human behaviours and privacy details within a reasonable time.

Even before artificial intelligent starts its practice; there was already an earlier speculation in the year 1950 by Alan Turing towards digital computer's imitation on human action. The perspective of this particular judgement is that a machine will eventually compete with human in terms of physical and intellectual capacities to the point where it will be difficult to select which is more capable (Turing, 1950). Together with this statement, Turing also mentioned that teaching a machine is like teaching children as it can be monitored in order to see how well it learns. But the danger with machine is that it tends to adapt to the command given by human and predict the future activities; thus it has the capability to give orders to human based on previous task.

In Malaysia, there is a newly introduced current practice called 'Voice-Activated Intelligent Assistant' that can be stored straight into the mobile phone. The usage of this would be to command the machine in operating mobile-related communication activities such as; posting updates, replying emails, writing text-messages, web searching or any other similar operations (Miller, 2012). This application is building up its popularity in Malaysia especially among advanced-smartphone users. It seems the advantages of this would be to provide communication assistance in any typing task or researching answers as mobile phones could automatically do the 'thinking' and 'typing' so it can provide users straight with the outcome (Miller, 2012). This reflects to what was speculated by Turing earlier on having computer machine being 'taught' to conduct human routines and activities. Based on previous study, results shows that 'Voice-Activated Intelligent Assistant' called '*Siri App*' on *i-Phone* mobile product have a better task completion time in comparison with manual-typing (Yager, 2013). Henceforth, this reflects to a concern raised by Turing about having difficulties

to compare the capacity of intellectual and physical capability between machine and human.

Conclusion

In this paper, the author explores the comparison study between previous judgements on modern technology against communication practices in the urban cities of Malaysia. The scope of discussion covers three predictions in the area of message values, participation behaviours and artificial intelligence. As readings have shown, complications of using digital gadgets as a tool to communicate bring several drawbacks in terms of the original value of distribution messages, encouragement of imbalance lifestyle and competition between human and machine towards intellectual and physical capabilities. Even in a small country like Malaysia, the current communication practices do relate to all of these shortcomings.

Having the messages shared online is doubtful to the validity of its content, as advance as the current technology, it is difficult to prevent from this issue to occur. This is due to human being captivated and immersed into such digital activities where the influences comes among human itself in wanting to be part of excessive participation activities in order to be part of a current trend. Without realising it, it seems that it is not human that controls technology, it is technology and media that controls human's activity.

From all of the readings and analysis, the author manages to relate several issues based on previous observation and experience. In a recent family gathering, the author notice something strange on how four kids aged from 2 to 4 years old play with each other. As the adults having conversation at one corner, kids were laughing, talking, singing and making silly voices as normal kids would. However as the author glimpse to have a look, it is surprising that those four kids are not actually laughing with each other as each of the cheerful attention is being given to the digital tablet called I-pad. Even while sitting around each other, instead of playing with kids around the same age, these digital savvy kids who most likely are not able to tie their own shoe laces or even converse properly when they are hungry, are much attached to the technology activities that is being exposed at a very young age. The author wonders then, in 20 years to come, how these kids would converse with each other and how the society are going to behave and will this exposure affect their communication and personal skills.

It amazes the author in knowing that the existence of judgement and prediction on how modern communication would react to society begin many years ago even before the people then could enjoy the benefits of what communication technology provide today. Nevertheless, most of the past speculations were made by communication and technology experts whom origins are from far developed countries than Malaysia. However as previous readings have shown, the relations of these past judgements arguably do correlate to the current communication practices even in developing country such as Malaysia. Though the idea perhaps is only applicable to the communication practices in the urban cities of Malaysia hence, it is debatable for the author to conclude that communication and digital gadgets are tools created to serve users despite of the geographical, cultural or any other differences. For as long as human, or specifically any human allow the machine to 'think', 'act' or 'work' like a

human, digital media technology will keep on latching on people's life until it literally might be difficult for human to communicate or even function without it.

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