

Chapter 19

Rethinking the Shift in Communication Dynamics Post Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

German philosopher Goethe expressed, “Emotions unite people, while ideas separate them,” emphasizing the essential role of emotions in effective communication. The era of the pandemic, which mandated social isolation, underscored the inherent human need for face-to-face interaction. The surge in social media usage post-pandemic and the rapid integration into the digital age have resulted in a decline in face-to-face communication, leading to reduced interaction among individuals. This study seeks to investigate the evolving dynamics of communication in Generation Y, characterized by an increasing social media usage rate, and Generation Z, which is distancing itself from heavy social media usage post-pandemic. Through in-depth interviews, the research will scrutinize how these generations have adjusted their communication patterns within the realm of interpersonal communication giving particular attention to aspects such as listening, empathy, feedback, effective speaking, and appreciation.

“Words are only painted fire; a look is the fire itself”. Mark Twain

INTRODUCTION

The phrase “Actions speak louder than words,” coined by Dale Carnegie, actually emphasizes the role of body language and interpersonal communication in the communication process and how body language takes precedence over words.

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During the pandemic, the inability to fully perceive body language makes communication more challenging because the masks necessary to combat the pandemic conceal the facial expressions we use without thinking, especially those micro expressions that convey and perceive sincerity, trustworthiness, and good intentions (York, 2020).

Communication involves not only body language but also emphasizes the importance of the communication environment. Doğan Cüceloğlu expresses the significance of the communication environment with the following words (Cüceloğlu, 2018:76): “The totality of people, objects, and events within the communication situation, which have qualities that can affect the communication process, is called the communication environment. Every human relationship takes place within an environment. Therefore, before saying something important, a person looks around at their surroundings and wants to see who is present. The communication environment also has a sociocultural aspect. When looking at the socio-cultural aspect of the communication environment, it focuses on how individuals establish relationships within a framework based on values that are important in societal life”.

In the pandemic era, the absence of a communication environment has given rise to misunderstandings and disrupted communication processes. When individuals gather for communication, the use of masks has posed challenges, and even when they are not physically together due to being in different settings, they still encounter communication issues. Pre-existing communication challenges have become more prominent post-pandemic, exacerbated by the habits developed during this period or the distancing from traditional communication settings. Extended periods spent in the digital realm also contribute significantly to this problem.

Digitalization and digital adaptation have accelerated even more with the pandemic, and people’s adaptation processes have shortened because there has been a mandatory need for adjustment. Digital communication, particularly through social media and online platforms, has played an increasingly crucial role during the pandemic in sustaining and strengthening communication. The shift to flexible working arrangements has made digital environments, including spending more time on social media platforms, shopping, and meeting daily communication needs, a mandatory aspect of life. However, individuals experiencing recurring digital fatigue and a need for socialization have expressed a longing for human-centered communication.

Sinan Canan expresses the triggering of dependency by solitude with the following words (Canan, 2020:88): ‘It is known that some individuals are more prone to addiction, while others are more resilient. One of the factors that most influences a person’s potential for addiction is known to be social isolation and loneliness.’

The sense of social isolation and loneliness during the pandemic has led to an increase in social media addiction. The acceleration of digital transformation, the sudden shift of every transaction to digital platforms, and the restrictions imposed by the pandemic have disrupted relationships by affecting people’s moods. The inability to engage in long-term face-to-face communication, which also contributed to individuals becoming more intolerant, has even reached the point of not greeting each other and has been normalized. The new habits gained through digital life have continued even after the end of the pandemic. Generation Z has now added the goal of hybrid working to their career plans and has chosen to adapt to this arrangement.

According to the We Are Social 2022 report, internet users are seen to spend an average of 7 hours online daily, and this time has decreased to 6 hours and 37 minutes according to the latest research. This data alone is an indicator of the importance given to in-person communication after the pandemic (We are Social, 2022).

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