

APPRAISING THE ROLE OF TELEPHONE AS A TOOL OF COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Telephone is an aspect of technological communication that is greatly employed in exchange of information. Gone are the days of grapevine type of communication that was in use during the American Civil War. Nowadays, telephone is used as a common means of verbal communication without physically seeing or meeting one another. It provides great opportunity for immediate feedback and gives chance for the use of telephone as an important electronic medium, an offshoot of telecommunication. As such, this paper assesses the historical perspective of telephone as a means of communication, concept of communication and telephone, importance of telephone, result of findings/discussions and the relationship between communication and telephone. This enables us to discover that communication and telephone have common goal and focus and that one cannot be divorced from the other. Apart from that, it also shows communication as an interdisciplinary field where science and humanities meet, as opposed to the belief of some people that communication as a course is solely humanity in nature.

Keywords: Technological communication, telecommunication, grapevine, interdisciplinary field, electronic medium.

Introduction

Telephone is an all purpose communication tool. It is used at home, at work and in educational sectors. It is a resource to literate, non-literate as well as academic elite. “Telephone is a common means of verbal communication without a personal meeting” (Olasehinde, 2008). That is, it is a device of oral communication that lacks physical and visual association. Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia Dictionary sees telephone communication as “a device that permits two or more users to conduct a conversation when they are too far apart to be heard directly”. A telephone converts sounds typically and most efficiently the human voice into electronic signal suitable for transmission via cable or other transmission media over long distance and replays such signal simultaneously in available form to its users”. Telephone therefore is one of the electronic methods

of communication that is universally accepted and swift at providing immediate feedback in communication (Olasehinde, 2008). From the above definitions, one can see that telephone is an electronic means of communication used to express verbal message. Thus, this paper assesses the historical perspective of telephone as a means of communication, concept of communication, concept of telephone, importance of telephone communication, results of findings/discussion and the relationship between communication and telephone.

Historically, the growth and development of telephone can be dated back to 1792 when Claude Chappe, a French Engineer built the first fixed visual telegraphy system (or semaphore line) between Lille and Paris. However, semaphore line suffered from lack of expensive towers at interval of ten to thirty kilometers (six to nineteen miles). As a result of competition from the electrical telegraphy, the last commercial line was abandoned in 1880 (Bellis, 2015).

According to Bellis (above), the first commercial electrical telegraph was constructed by Sir Charles Wheatstone and Sir William Fothergill Cooke and they commenced usage on 9th of April 1839. Both Wheatstone and Cooke viewed their advance as “an improvement to the existing electromagnetic telegraph” (Berlo1960) while Samuel Morse independently developed a version of the electrical telegraph that he unsuccessfully demonstrated on 2nd of September 1837, his code was an important advance over Wheatstone’s signaling method. The first transatlantic telegraph cable was successfully completed on 27th July 1866, allowing transatlantic telecommunication for the first time.

The conventional telephone was invented independently by Alexanda Bell and Elisha Grail in 1876. Antonio Meuccis device was of little practical value because it relied upon the electrophonic effect and this required users to place the receiver in their mouth as well as the ear to “hear” what was being said. The said commercial telephone services were set up in 1878 and 1879 on both sides of the Atlantic in the cities of New Heaven and London (Bellis, 015). It was similarly presented in an article about inventors that “Elisha Gray & Alexanda Bell entered into a legal battle over the invention of the telephone, which most people know, Bell Won” (Wikipedia, 2015). Telephone can therefore be conceived as a common means of verbal communication without personal or physical meeting or association. It is swift and universally accepted, it provides immediate contact as well as feedback, giving opportunity for modification of approach when

necessary as well as giving room for corrections of errors in understanding (Olasehinde, 2008). Hence, telephone remains one of the earliest convenient methods of external discussion.

Apart from the above exposition about the history of telephone, there have been improvements over the years in telephone communication industries starting with satellite phones which ‘existed before the cell phones’. According to global.com sat phone (2015), satellite phones, “could be used almost anywhere. It was similar to cell phones but weren’t transmitted by towers. They were transmitted by Satellite orbiting the earth”. Following the above were several inventions like the cellular phone invented in the 1960s by Richard H, Frenkiel & Joel S Engel of Bell Lab; also, “on 3rd April 1973, Motorola Manager placed a cellular phone call (in front of reporters) to Dr. Joel S. Engel Head of Research at AT & T’S Bell Labs. This began the era of hand held cellular mobile phone”.

Meanwhile, the inauguration of TAT (trans-Atlantic Telephone) cable came up in 1956 and later the international direct daily were important steps towards putting the continental telephone networks into a global network. The use of the above telephony services in London Streets in the 1980s began the era of users having associations with major telephone companies. One of the early cable operators in the U.K, Cable London conducted its first cable telephone for customer in about 1990 (Wikipedia, 2015). Right from the 1990s, the use of mobile phone began to spread from the very affluence societal people to the average people in different societies. Today, it is not only in use in the developed countries but has now spread to the developing countries like Nigeria. In fact, it has now brought about “a new era of communication” as private-line communication has rightly puts it. This era marks the use of mobile phone as a developmental stage of telephone communication. In fact, the difference lies in its mobility as its called hand set and its movable, depending on the user while the telephone is static and placed in a room. It is not mobile.

Concept of Communication

Communication is not easy to define because it is such a very wide and complex concept. The reason being the fact that communication is central to human life, it helps to solve problems in individual life and profession. In fact, poor communication as believed by experts is at the root of all problems and the solution to such problems is effective communication (Pearson, et al, 2011). Also, various disciplines or professions see communication in various but similar ways. According

to Pearson et al (2011), communication comes from the Latin word “communicare” which means to “make common” or “to share”. In that wise, communication is defined by him as “the process of using message to generate meaning”. Looking at Pearson et al definition, communication is a process which includes activities, exchange and behaviour that occur over time. According to Eyre (1983) cited in Adeboye (2007) “communication is not just the giving of information. It is the giving of understandable information and receiving and understanding the message. Communication is the transferring of a message from one party to another party so that it can be understood and acted upon”. In a similar vein, Ashonibare (2004), also cited in Adeboye (2007) sees communication as “the art of science of conveying information, feelings, desires, ideas, emotions, attitudes or message without distortions from one person to another. Communication can also be defined as the “creation and attribution of meanings”.

Earlier, Berlo (1960) cited in Adeboye (2007) defined communication as “a social interaction where at least two interacting agents share a common set of signs and a common set of semiotic rules. The common held rule in some sense ignores auto-communication, including, interpersonal communication via diaries or self-talk, both secondary phenomena that followed the primary acquisition of communication competences within social interactions”.

Barlund (2008) posits that “communication is a process whereby meaning is defined and shared between living organisms. Communication process requires a recipient, although the receiver need not be present or aware of the sender’s intent to communicate at the time of communication. Thus, communication can occur across vast distances in time and space”.

From the foregoing, it is important to stress that the different definitions have one focus which is comprehensive exchange of ideas. Communication is a process and the process must occur between or among communicating parties who are meant to share common communication ideas which must be complete and understood by them, that is, the sender and the receiver through whatever means or medium they choose to pass the information. Viewing the definitions above, it is evidently revealed that Barlunds definition of communication is relevant and appropriate to the topic of discourse because distance in time and space, awareness or non awareness, presence or absence of the receive do not limit the communication. Similarly, telephone communication which is the main target or focus of this paper has no regard for such as well (i.e. space and time).

Concept and Significance of Telephone Communication

Encyclopedia, the Free Dictionary defines telephone as “the transmission of speed over a distance either by electronic signals propagated along conductors or by radio signals”. Business communication further sees it as “the practice of communication over a telephone”. Looking at the definitions above, telephone as a verbal means of communication is one of the electronic device of telecommunication. “Telecommunication is the transmission of information over significant distances for the purpose of communication” (Schramm, 1954). Telecommunication is further viewed as “a communication over a distance by cable, telegraph, telephone or broadcasting” (Wikipedia, 2015). According to the source, “telecommunication occurs when the exchange of information between two entities (communicators) include technology. Communication technology used channel to transmit information (as electrical signals) either over a physical medium (such as signal, cables) or in the form of electromagnetic waves” (Wikipedia, 2015). From the explanation above, it can be seen that in a telephone network, the speaker and the receiver are connected by switches of telephone buttons at various ends of their telephone exchange stations. The switches are the electrical connections between the two users whenever the caller dials the receivers’ number. Once the connection is made, the caller’s voice is transformed to a signal in a small microphone in the caller’s handset. This signal is called electric signal which passes through the network to the user at the other end, whereby it transforms to sound in a small speaker in the receivers’ handset. This transformation occurs vice-versa to allow and ensure exchange of conversation in the telephone. Similar process occurs with the fixed line telephone.

Telephone communication is significance as follows.

It is a Means of external communication: Telephone is one of the means through which external discussion are easily achieved. Communication with external organization or bodies would have remained problematic due to the distance between the internal communicator and external communicator. But as a result of the existence of telephone, it has become easier for both parties to operate successfully without much stress from either of the parties (Wikipedia, 2015).

Minimum Consultation: Telephones communication has limited the rate at which people and organization are required to consult one another before making transactions of any form

or even take Organizational decisions. In the absence of telephone for instance, Organization A that has intention of transacting business with organization B will have to send their representatives or managers to go and liaise with each other, but telephone communication has made it easy. What is required of organization A is to get the phone number of organization B through its receptionist or phone operator. Once this is done, transaction between the two organizations is made easier. This is one of the essences of telephone operators in large companies (Wikipedia, 2015).

Messages from Telephone are Immediate: Any message sent through telephone, whether written or oral is always immediate unlike post letters. This usefulness was appreciated since the last two decades when the use of GSM has becomes more popular for sending text messages as well as audio messages (Olasehinde, 2008).

It is one of the Useful Modes of Internal Communication: The use of telephone within an organization to transfer information either between one department or section and another or between the top management and their subordinates has in many cases made the use of communication easier because what will take some minutes or hours to execute or to transfer information from one area of the organization using memorandum can just be executed by a single dial of telephone. Example of such is the intercom telephone line in any organization. The only setback of this mode of communication is that it cannot be useful for other organizations because it will only be applicable within one organization and also enhances privacy on the part of such organization (Olasehinde, 2008).

It Generates More Employment Opportunity: Through the invention of telephone, more jobs have been created ranging from official work in the industry (Wikipedia, 2015) such as Globacom Limited, Zain Nigeria, MTN, Visafone Nigeria, where most of higher institution graduates have secured relative jobs/works. Also, it has promoted small scale business ventures like telephone boot, selling of recharge cards which in the long-run reduce poverty to a minimal level in Nigeria and other parts of the world.

Query's and Uncertainty Can Clearly Be Clarified: Through the use of telephone, some uncertainty that may spring from letter of correspondence can be clearly clarified because issues will be explained to one another while queries may be considered without delay or matters been clarified through the process of call making (Olasehinde, 2008).

Constant relationships are maintained: Family members or friends can be in constant

touch with each other through phones, thereby, minimizing worries about one another. In fact, 21st Century women use it frequently to keep their social relationship with friends and make calls regarding doctor's appointments and meetings (Wikipedia, 2015).

Internet Surfing: Internet can be consulted through cell phones instead of going from one cyber café to another (Wikipedia, 2015).

Economic Impact: The society also benefits economically. It has socio, cultural and economic impact on the society because it adds to the gross revenue of the society. Aside that, it is instrumental to modernization and labour, it added to the development of suburbs and the separation of homes and business (Wikipedia, 2015).

Discussion of Findings

This paper has exposed an off-shoot of telecommunication as such that has being a useful tool of communication to individual users as well as the general public. This discussion has led to the discovery of the following findings:

That telephone brings about immediate action: Matters or issues that people may have postpone for further consideration or action can be easily settled through the use of telephone. Telephone has considerably curtailed the problems of writing letter to convey information from an individual to another, and from one organization to another (Wikipedia, 2015).

Cost reduction in business transaction: Money and energy that may be exhausted in the cause of writing/delivery of correspondence are reduced to their barest minimal level through the use of telephone. Also, money and energy that will be spent and burnt when one organization needs to travel from one area or destination to another can be saved through the use of telephone. For instance, if company X needs to transact business with company Y and there is need to clarify some issue amicably, the transport fare that company X will use in the cause of traveling to where company Y locates can be saved (Olasehinde, 2008).

It can be a communication tutorial: This relates to communication improvement. As one gets more involved in telephone communication, the better one becomes skilled in interacting habits over the use of telephone.

It lacks visual association: Through the use of telephone, visual association like factual expression and gestures cannot be felt because in some cases, posture and gesture appearance like signals also give room for proper understanding in communication (Olasehinde et al,

2008).

Prone to error: Messages sent through the use of telephone may sometimes lead to error or misunderstanding of the messages. This means that coded messages can sometimes lack self-expression (Olashinde et al, 2008).

Time wasting and costly in maintenance: Some teenagers get so addicted to phones that they watch video, games and send messages through it that large part of their time is wasted on interacting with their phones. Also, through purchases of recharge cards, money is expended for maintaining contacts on phones. Thus, increasing our recurring expenses.

Class distraction: Phone rings can distract a teacher in the class. In fact, nothing is more distracting than that. Aside that, it can serve as a means of cheating during examination if invigilators are not vigilant.

Health Hazard: Human ear-drums can get weakened if the phone is kept for long. It is even discovered that ear-piece destroys the cells in the ear drum, as such causing damages to the ear of the users. Also, cell phones towers emit strong electromagnetic signals that can be hazardous to those living near-its radiations. It also results in the destruction of natural features like vegetation where it is situated. Again, cell phone surfaces have millions of virus and bacterial that can lead to skin problems. It has also been revealed that long exposure to cell phones can cause cancer and its radiation especially, can cause brain cancer.

Additionally, cell phone batteries can be hazardous to environments if not well disposed (Wikipedia, 2015). In fact, there have been cases of phone blast due to excessive battery heat-up. Apart from the above, excessive use of keypads can cause problems for the hand joints because key pads are not natural for human hands (Bellis, 2015). Again, accident occurs if phone is used during driving because it deviates the attention of drivers.

Nuisance to Quiet Environment: Places like libraries, cinemas and restaurants are not good for receiving calls as it distracts fellow human beings.

Damage to Children Livelihood: Children get so involved in talking on phones when they ought to play and the use of cell phones exposes some of them to bad movies and dirty clips that they fall into bad activities.

As mentioned above, communication is a process that involves at least two interacting agents that share a common message. This process involves the use of channel which is the medium

through which the message is passed; and one of the channels of communication is telephone, an off-shoot of telecommunication. In the etymology of communication, Encyclopedia the Free Dictionary presents it as a French word, “telecommunicare”. ‘Tele’ means “far off” and “communicate” means “to share”. Thus, the word according to this paper, means |to share afar off”. If therefore, telephone is one of the types of telecommunication, then, it cannot be divorced from communication. To be specific, the lexeme ‘telecommunication’ combines telephone and communication which is now one of the most popular modern technological electronic means of passing information from one person to another. With reference to the discussion above, it is noteworthy to mention as presented by Olasehinde (2008) that telephone is used to transfer information in an organization between departments, sections or between the top management and their subordinates. Thus, it is employed as a means of internal communication. The relationship therein lies, in the mode which is telephone, an electronic device used to express messages or information. Further, it is a means of communicating externally between one organization and another. This has been explained above that it saves the different organization the cost and energy expended in sending delegates to negotiate business on their behalf (Olasehinde, 2008). Again, it enhances constant relationship among family members and friends (Wikipedia, 2015).

Moreover, the use of internet as a means of consultation through handset is an evidence of strong relationship between telephone and communication. Apart from the above, communication without visual association reveals the relationship between telephone and communication because verbal communication was believed to involve two or more people physically, but now, it is possible to communicate verbally with the use of telephone. Therefore, communication encompasses telephone communication. This goes to show that telephone cannot survive without communication, but communication can survive without telephone. It also shows the meeting point between science technology and humanity communication. It further exposes communication as an interdisciplinary course through which many technological inventions are implemented or put into use. In short, both are highly inter-related at the level of technological implementation.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, it has been established that communication is a process of passing or conveying comprehensive or effective information and that one of the medium is verbal or oral means from which telephone springs out as an electronic means of verbal communication. The essential aspect of both is that man must interact regarding various endeavours of life and one of the means of interaction is telephone, an off-shoot of telecommunication. Thus this paper has presented the historical perspective of telephone as a means of communication; concepts of communication and telephone; the importance of telephone as well as the relationship between communication and telephone communication. This means that telephone is universal as an aspect of communication and through it, it is now practically possible to communicate to anyone in any part of the world at anytime. The essence of this paper, therefore, is to prove that communication is an inter-disciplinary field. Although, some scholars believe it is in the field of humanity but it is noteworthy that it employs technological devices among which telephone is one. This goes to reveal the fact that communication cannot be divorced from technology but that they are inter-related.

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