

Role of Immersive Technology in the Business Communication Today

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Abstract

Mediated Communication has created a mindless maze of human interaction in the 21st century where we are laughing, crying and progressively doing business together. Very interestingly, this phenomenon of prolifically growing human networking is not restricted either by geography or by culture anymore. Hence, this schmoozing is confidently permeating the global fabric today. A significant deterrent that is hindering this digital socializing is human language or the diversity of it across the world. As a result, the fast track movement from living in a shrinking 'global village' to that of intimate 'customized cottages' is also majorly challenged by the languages that we speak across the world. On the other hand, the business also struggles with factors like literacy and the lack of it. Especially in contexts like India, business communication thus contends with this double jeopardy of a multilingual society where dialects change every 100 kilometers, along with the poverty induced problems like illiteracy and semi literacy. As a result, business campaigns and promotions frequently lose their edge with changing dialects. In addition, and very recurrently, commercial promos and text driven advertisements often draws a blank as the target population remains apathetic to reading. All this adds up to ask for a paradigm shift where one intrinsically realizes that new wars cannot be fought with old weapons. Communication must be reinvented, and mediation reinforced in the process of communication. New interventions in the process of communication would, by and large, require the adoption of new technology with an implicit understanding of their governing principles. One such domain is that of the unfolding 'immersive technology' which has already found a gain stay in defense research & studies and medicine. Based on simulation and augmenting reality, immersive technology offers an array of possibilities that appears to be the new panacea for 21st century business communication.

Keywords

Shrinking World, Changing Dialects, Illiteracy, Paradigm Shift, Mediated Communication, Immersive Technology.

1. Introduction

A critical if, not the foundation of globalization is ‘business’. New needs of expanding trade and commerce across national and geographical boundaries require a new attitude and a capacity to accommodate. This accommodation would primarily be in terms of diverse culture and the plurality of languages. No longer the outlook, ‘different is strange’ and ‘strange is evil’ can survive in a globalized context as the need for expanding trade would necessarily mean an expanding clientele. In the global context, this growing clientele would mean a natural connect with different and differing cultures, customs and worldview. In this context, the relevance of a link language or a language that would take the ‘product’ to the client across the boundaries that business has travelled still remains a very difficult challenge. The pragmatic solution so far has meant adapting to the local culture and lingo as far as possible. This has its own costs and overheads. Big business can afford this and most has with an *élan* and hence we are today looking at a congenial market today where brands from ‘strange lands’ have found a comfortable niche both in our homes and hearts. But, as said before, this comes with a price tag that cannot easily be picked up by many enterprises.

Along with the multiplicity of languages and culture, comes the challenge posed by poverty in developing contexts like India. A major factor in such circumstances is literacy and the lack of it. Where, first with the frequently changing dialects, scripts also change and with the changing scripts, transformation comes in taste and attitude. Thereupon comes the next hurdle of a barely literate and the illiterate segment of society who are the major constituent of an ever-growing market. Business cannot afford to ignore them and must contend with the entire scenario. Added to this, the 21st century business also must reckon with the other constituent of the market the growing population of a young and upcoming generation that is progressively getting apathetic to read but simultaneously is technology savvy and hence well informed and

capable of taking major decisions for themselves. In such a situation, text-driven business promotion ideally should get supplemented with if not replaced with something more appealing and entertaining but equally capable of carrying the message home to the client or target audience.

2. Infotainment - Integral for Communication

A fundamental principle in communication believes that ‘seeing’ is better than ‘hearing’ but the best results are achieved when the audience is made to ‘experience’. Traditional communication has matured enough to almost perfect ‘audio-visual’ communication and the result is our electronic mass media. Across the globe, we witness a sustained evolution of this media which is consistently used by business communication. The rampant ‘commercial breaks’ that often interrupt the programme we enjoy are at the brunt of global audience rebukes, but the wise knows the undeniable economics behind it. The electronic media has taken communication to the next level where amazing outreach has become possible. But this also has come at the price – the intimacy and charm of a communication based on near proximity.

Familiarity with and ownership of content, the proximity between the interlocutors, homogeneity and an unchanging pattern of communication are significant typicality of the folk media which, in an increasingly urbanized context has become fragile and anemic today. But, paradoxically, it is still exotic enough to seek may be even demand attention from both academics and the enterprise. Attention it deserves as one realizes the typical constraint of this unique media – its fundamental apathy and inertia towards imbibing technology. With this functional divorce from technology, folk media restricts itself and mostly surrenders to the limitation of distance and the familiarity of a stereotypical community. This makes this media almost completely dependent on community generated, approved and appreciated the content. This, in turn, tends to deprive it of both novelty and scope for innovation in most instances. For the audience, the message is by and large anticipated and becomes a recurring pattern. Predictability and familiar pattern rob this media from all possibilities of knee jerk reactions that could impinge in the imagination of the audience. This leaves little

scope for persuading the audience for the new and the different. The mass media overcomes this to achieve impressive outreach. But, diminishing the distance in turn, take away the comfort and reverie of the familiarity of the hand holding ‘little community’ that folk media thrive in. This disconnect of mass media achieved with help of progressive and evolving technology is the legacy of the Guttenberg Press and as mentioned earlier, carries its own price tag. This time the cost is the loss of ownership of content, participation induced bonhomie and the celebration and festive mood of the folk media to create a sense of detachment between the audience and the communicator. Despite this detachment, the electronic media has taken outreach to the next level and we witness the global phenomena of ‘the mindless consumption of media’. Undoubtedly, this has provided solace to the angst of solitude that urbanization has brought in the life of most, but beyond that it is difficult to say how it has positively influenced human behavior in the march of solidarity with sustainable development. Business communication by and large has exploited the electronic media and its outreach. But, as said at the onset that, especially in contexts of cultural and linguistic plurality coupled with poverty and infrastructure paucity like absence of electricity business must reinvent its communication to reach out to a new audience and here it necessarily toys with emerging technology for better result.

Very interestingly, we can today detect a discernible change in the pattern of consumption and production of information. This is referred to as the “Media convergence,” where the dominant pattern is different and differing genres coming together to represent, interpret and perhaps even expose “reality” to the audience. [8] This takes the audience to the next level of awareness and consequently, we are progressively witnessing a growing body of educated and proactive patrons, participants and clients of the media today. We call them educated because of the awareness that we see in them and they are proactive because they are not only capable of but do galvanize the media itself. And the *hyper connectivity* demanded by this ever-growing mass of consumers is shaping the face of infotainment systems. Infotainment is the information or content which is meant to entertain and to inform. Infotainment combines information

with entertainment. It is a recent development specially seen in television programme, web site features and or other presentations that combines information with entertainment. Most of today's popular fact-based television shows, such as those on the Animal Planet channel, could be classed as infotainment. [9] Communication, especially business communication cannot either deny or ignore this as this caters to the new emerging market mention at the onset of this discussion.

3. Mediated Communication - The Communication Technique of 21st Century

Technology enabled communication forays into the domain of mediated communication. Technology has helped communication to bridge distance and even time. This is what 'growing business' needs in a shrinking world or in another sense, this is what shrinks the world for business to grow. Speed and diminishing distance have come at the cost of intimacy, comforting familiarity, spontaneous expressions which candidly allow the interlocutors to take each other for granted in a highly positive manner and similarly use the conventional, stereotypical and the clique at ease and without much ado. In current technology-based communication, message flows to receivers with an emphasis on how communication techniques influence the formation, transmission, and reception of messages. Social, political, and organizational forces also influence the creation and use of communication technologies. [5] Business is not alien to this paradigm and its communication has already adapted well to this.

Computer-mediated communication hosts a wide range of communication that passes through various channels to communicate on a global scale. In the current scenario, where computer or technology-based communication is used everywhere, email has become a standard form of communication and so has texting using smartphones as the most personal form of business communication. Undoubtedly it is non-disruptive and takes less time than a phone call, but it is still an elite paradigm of communication. Similarly, for the white collar operations, business management tools like Google Docs, Microsoft One Drive etc. helps to track the progress of projects, Google Hangouts and Skype let

businessmen expand business in other locations by communicating through video conferencing, Social Networking Sites like Facebook, LinkedIn help in relation building and relationship marketing, Blogs and Websites helps in spreading the information, [6] mobile Apps offer many features like e-shopping to virtual tour etc. But, as repeatedly mentioned earlier, these are options for the urban elites and the upcoming generation of youth who are naturally technology savvy irrespective of their social background. What is the new concern for business is the vigorously emerging market comprising of the marginalized population occupying the base of the population pyramid. This is the population that is still poorly literate, victims of drudgery and poor infrastructure facilities, but are progressively growing aware due to the impressive dissemination of information done by the aggressively progressive mass media especially the electronic media. So, what we have on our plate, here is a community that must access to information. What makes them vulnerable here is the quality of information as well as the continuity of the flow of the information which often is poor. Added to this we also have the growing aspirations that we can now witness in this segment of our society and their progressively increasing capacity to purchase. In such a situation, the disconnect and the impersonality could be overcome with the finesse and the power of customization of the evolving technology. If the visual communication of the electronic media graduates to the personalized output of immersive technology through games and myriad applications, not only shall we add glamour to communication, but business will also possibly foray confidently into new markets with personalized attention to a huge population segment hitherto treated as an amorphous lump with no individuality, little taste, no choice and very shallow pockets.

4. Immersive Technologies - The Future of Business Communication

Technologies like Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality surrounds the viewer in digital content, whether that is in a VR Headset or via AR, which places digital assets into our world to enhance it. [11] Researches are being done to make Immersive technology more realistic and cost-effective.

Immersive technology is perceptual (input to the user) and interactive (output from the user) hardware technology that takes the user from physical world to a simulated or digital world which is difficult for that user to experience in reality because of barriers like money, time or accessibility etc. The penetration of immersive technologies is growing daily in multiple spheres, such as medical, military, simulators, education, entertainment, gaming and telecommunications etc. Virtual or augmented environments are being created for such purposes. Multimedia technologies are being developed to create realistic digital world. We sense our environment through our five basic senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. Researches are being done which are targeted to give rich immersive experiences to users where such five senses can be involved. We are already aware of 3D, 4D technologies. Currently, commercial research and development targets Visual, Auditory and Tactile impressiveness. [10]

An article on Advrtas.com explains that Immersive Technology creating reality by leveraging the 360-degree space. It extends reality by coating digital images on a user's environment. It also creates a new reality by completely shutting a user out from the rest of the world and immersing them in a digital environment. The different types of Immersive Technologies are 360, (Virtual Reality) VR, (Augmented Reality) AR, (Mixed Reality) MR, and (Extended Reality) XR and so on. Immersive Technology gives brands the opportunity to make use of consumers' emotions. Brands are now able to showcase the benefits of their products to prospective buyers in a realistic virtual environment. For example, someone who wants to buy a new car; can test ride a car in showroom itself even before the launch of the car. Such form of advertising is a new concept which is bringing good results not only for sellers, but buyers are also like it. For example, you can see how your home would look after painting in some particular color. Paint companies and buyers can save a lot from this and earn benefits. New ad technology takes advantage of mobile phone's features to create effective advertising. Some students have developed a Virtual Reality game that would immerse cancer patients during chemotherapy and would distract them from their pain. Immersive Technology allows medical students and doctors to do

surgery simulations. Virtual reality can help students learn about the difficult processes or visit historical or futuristic places virtually. [12]

5. Conclusion

Genesis of man is the domain of scientific speculation. His evolution is documented with more certainty. But what is even more certain is the concomitant evolution of human communication. Since, we are still evolving both as biological and social beings so naturally are our manner and means of communication. New wars need new weapons so does communication to rise to the challenges of the 21st century. Technology has given speed to communicate but has diluted or not robbed it of its emotions. It has divided society much more poignantly than literacy did. But, unfortunately, literacy is creating a further wedge in this digital divide. Having mastered technology, man has begun to feel and emotive again with a vigor that hankers for bonding and humane networking and there are those segments of the population who are emerging with new vigour, new capabilities and new interests. Communication, especially for and in business, must reckon with this as well. A panacea to all this appears in the Immersive Technology which is unfolding the possibility of communicating to impinge on the minds and emotions of the users and influencing their behavior like never. Business communication works to influence the choice of its clients and entice potential ones. Virtual ‘walk throughs’ used by the Real estates is a typical example of this. More and more can follow suit with greater results.

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