

# Telephone's influence on society

Society



Over the centuries, people have been striving towards a fast, reliable means of communication. At first, those gaps were bridged with language, usable in face-to-face encounters and then written language, which could be transported over vast distances, though the timeliness of the message left something to be desired. Some civilizations used methods other than written languages to communicate messages accurately across long distances. Perhaps the most famous example would be the Incans of South America. When one village had to deliver a message to another village, several colored pieces of string would be knotted in a specific pattern then run to the neighboring village to deliver the message. Other peoples simply used oral messengers to carry the communication to others.

Again, the problems with these systems were two-fold. If one simply sent a messenger, the communication could get lost in the traveling process, and if one sent some sort of written messages, those devices could easily be misplaced. Also, these methods relied on the speed of the messenger, which could vary, and the distance the message had to travel. For instance, in the War of 1812, the English and Americans signed the Treaty of Ghent in late 1814, effectively ending the conflict. However, it took six weeks for word to reach the capital of the United States and even longer for it to reach the outlying cities. Because of this, the bloody Battle of New Orleans occurred after the treaty had been signed, costing the British armed forces over 2,000 lives.

Obviously, the need for instantaneous and accurate communication was reaching a paramount level with civilizations being spread across such vast distances. The telephone, invented by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876,

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solved this problem by transforming human speech into a series of electrical signals that could be sent very much like a telegraph, though on different wires. This invention took quite a while to catch on as the now popular telegraph system had a stable infrastructure already in place. However, the benefits of instantaneous, clear communication eventually outweighed the convenience of the existing infrastructure, and the telephone became the preferred means of communication across distances.

Before the telephone, people generally communicated through written prose, usually some type of letter or other document. Although the telegraph did much to speed up the communication process, it was still too cumbersome for everyday use and was not something that normal people used to communicate with their friends and family. Long letters were the norm, with face to face contact being preferred with neighbors unless there was some sort of dispute to work out. Men and women also spent much more time in face to face communication when catching up with the neighborhood gossip. Local clubs and gatherings were often hot spots for these exchanges.

The telephone made these interactions at once more personal and yet more distant. People were able to communicate instantly (at least they were by the 1960's when telephones were in more than four out of five American homes) and cost-effectively. For exchanges that took place over great distances, this was quite an advantage, as the news reaching these people was no longer outdated. But it also brought a gradual reduction in the time spent in face to face contact with neighbors or other local peoples.

The telephone gradually morphed into many forms involving both wired and wireless technology. From the phonograph to the dial phone to the iPhone these innovations have become almost central to everyday life of modern Americans. And without these products, daily life would be much different, especially with the value people now place upon instantaneous information. This sort of communication is now central to most civilizations, and it would be impossible without the services of the telephone.