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Essay Class: A

Essay Number: 2

Length of Essay: 1900 words

Certified by : [Signature]

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Personal; examples;
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Modern communications make us more aware of each other, our similarities, our differences and our common interests. What effect, if any, does this have on the Commonwealth?

The first human communication took place when the first caveman knocked out the first cavewoman with his trusty club and dragged her off. Since then we have progressed, from body language to BASIC, from stone carvings to satellites. Communication, in its broadest sense, is the interaction between a sender and a receiver by which ideas, experiences, opinions and data are shared. It has a multitude of uses, of which information is the most obvious. Communication is used for the collection, analysis and transmission of news and ideas. Such information enables people to function as members of a cohesive society, pursuing common goals and taking an interest in vital issues. Another use is that for debate and discussion to bring about agreement between people with opposing viewpoints. Communication is the basic tenet of education, and helps to spread culture and entertainment. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is vital if societies are to be aware of, understand and appreciate each other.

But what are modern communications? Communication by images, arts and language has been in use since the beginning of history. Travel is another means of communication, perhaps the best as it allows personal experience. Group media has been in use for centuries. Fairs, festivals and exhibitions bring information in visually stunning displays to whole towns. But it ends with the introduction of the

printing press that mass, and hence modern, communications ^{has} got off the ground, for this ^{has} heralded the coming of newspapers and mass-produced books. Other developments have followed in rapid succession. The postal system has been established and people now send news all over the world for a token sum. With the invention of the telephone, thousands of miles can be bridged in seconds and the telephone is the basis of one of the largest global communication networks. The advent of the camera and the telegraph ^{has} added radio, cinema and television to the ranks of the mass media and they have an audience of millions worldwide today. Of them, radio is the sole truly mass medium, being cheap, feasible in mountainous, remote regions and accessible to the illiterate. Another increasingly indispensable aspect of modern communications is the satellite, which is crucial to other mass media: banking, commerce, navigation and defense. Finally we have computers, which, together with the latest technology like the teletype, cables and microwave technology, represent an epic new dimension in communications.

All this means that more people have access to information and ideas than ever, and distance has become irrelevant. We are closer together than before and are forced to take notice of each other.

Consequently, a major association like the Commonwealth will be affected in many ways, especially as its real strength lies in the ties of friendship that bind together its member countries. Both individual members and the whole organisation will be affected, in culture, economics, education, politics and world issues.

The social effect of modern communications has only recently been recognised, although it is significant

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in a world where people are becoming more dependent on the many sophisticated means of communication. Communications is the carrier of culture and the mass media, such as the press, radio and television, has the ability not only to reflect but to shape the public's opinions and attitudes, thus bringing about ^{social} integration. Often people live in dangerous tension, having failed to understand one other across barriers of prejudice and suspicion. Fortunately modern communications, like exhibitions, films, radio, television and newspapers, can overcome these barriers by allowing people of different cultures to learn about each other.

In the Commonwealth, Singaporeans learn a little of New Zealand through Maori dances, and of England via BBC radio and television broadcasts. Performances by Australian singers reach Canada and Malaysia; books by Singaporeans are sold in the United Kingdom; and newspapers and periodicals from England are available everywhere in the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Broadcasting Organisation and the Commonwealth Press Union have promoted cultural exchange between member countries. If the people of each land, scattered as they are right across the globe in every clime, learn and understand more about one another, the Commonwealth will achieve a stronger 'family' feeling. This friendship can encourage the peoples of different member countries to visit, work and live in one another's lands. Travel has been aided by the development of more efficient aircraft — yet another tool

of modern communications — as well as more frequent flights and lower fares. There are now many Indians, Malaysians, Singaporeans and people of African Commonwealth nations studying in Australia, Canada and Britain, while engineers, teachers and businessmen ~~at~~ from the developed nations are working in the developing ones. Inevitably this results in intermarriage between races, which may be of benefit, as a blending of cultures occurs that can help eradicate bigotry. Thus the Commonwealth can become more united.

On the other hand, the present monopoly of communications by Western Commonwealth countries can cause the evolution of 'mass culture' in the developing countries where young people, seeing so much more of European culture in the media than their own, adopt the shallowest, most publicised Western values. For example, impressionable fans may emulate the permissive lifestyles drinking and drug abuse of some popular singers, whose songs and lives are broadcast on all the media. This can lead to culture shock, with people being unable to decide which culture they should adopt. If this happens, of course, divisions within the Commonwealth will become greater.

As people become more appreciative of foreign cultures, they are also becoming aware of the potential for economic cooperation between Commonwealth members. This has led to increased trade among them. For example, Singapore is a market for tea and scientific instruments from India, ^{and} meat and dairy products from Australia and New Zealand. In return, she is a centre of oil-refining ^{for the region} and a major port of call for many ships from

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all over the Commonwealth. Modern technology like cable telephone, telex and satellite broadcasting has speeded up communication between trading partners, so that larger volumes of trade can be handled. Thus modern communications have made Commonwealth countries more interdependent. The individual countries have also been affected: the latest, most efficient methods of communication allow sites of enterprises to be situated in distant areas and ^{industry,} banking, trade and farming to have wider choices of locations. ^{The} latest informational techniques have also modernised the marketing system. In other words, more efficient use can be made of available resources within individual countries, leading to economic growth and increased prosperity.

Having more money due to increased trade has permitted many nations to use modern communications for education. Closed-circuit television, video recorders and other audio-visual equipment are being used (with greater impact than books) to spread better farming methods in Africa ^{and} the advantages of family planning in India and Singapore, while children in the Australian outback learn via the wireles. The English language and its literature are taught very effectively by the mass media, and in many countries, entire channels on television and radio are set aside for education. With a better educated public, the Commonwealth can function more effectively and its policies ~~can be~~ received more readily and with better understanding.

With an informed, intelligent population, the media can

influence politics. It can be an outlet for the public's views on government policies, while the State, in turn, can use modern communications to explain them, especially when they are harsh or require the population's collective effort. In Singapore, for instance, many readers wrote to the press voicing their opinions on the new Trades Unions Act, which discourages strikes. Such two-way communication allows for the airing of grievances and leads to a more fruitful relationship between State and citizens, which means progress. During elections, the population can get a clearer picture of candidates if the media are a platform of debate. Not only that, the outside world can also be informed about fluctuating political conditions, which can affect relations between various countries, for better or for worse. In the Commonwealth this is very true: consider the ousting of South Africa after members learnt of her apartheid policies.

Perhaps the greatest effects of modern communications have been in the area of world issues, such as war and disarmament, poverty, natural disasters and the North-South gap.

Responsible newspapers have made people aware that peace concerns every citizen and not only the State. News of others struggling for peace has ^{initiated} a chain reaction. The fact that there is a growing peace movement in Europe must have encouraged the anti-nuclear demonstrators in England, and the Labour Party now demands disarmament. Hence countries are brought together if they have a common goal. Yet communications can magnify differences. Because the media has been used for propaganda and distortion of the 'other' side's actions, the Ulster problem is insoluble. During the Falklands war, the British people united solidly

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behind Mrs. Thatcher when ~~the~~ modern communications honoured the 'noble' cause. Yet no mention was made of possible diplomatic solutions and the war dragged on needlessly.

In other instances, modern communications have given us vivid, up-to-date reports on poverty, famine, droughts and floods, especially via satellite. The resulting outpouring of aid has fostered an atmosphere of hope and sympathy. British-based organisations like the St. John's Brigade and the Save the Children Fund have provided aid when there are floods in India, droughts in Australia and famine in Africa. In Australia, so successful was media coverage of recent bush fires that the authorities pleaded for an end to donations. Sometimes, however, excessive publicity given to disasters gives people in developed countries the idea of incessant suffering in developing countries. Many Singaporeans believe Indians and Africans are forever starving. This creates a climate of indifference, alienating Commonwealth countries from each other.

Finally, there is the ever-widening gap between the industrialised North and the developing South. A minority possess the lion's share of resources and income, while millions go hungry. With more newspapers and television networks coming into being each year, the South is becoming more organised and vociferous in its demands for aid and a larger share of the world's wealth. The North has begun to take notice too, and the issue is now discussed regularly, including at the Commonwealth conference. Better understanding and co-operation in the Commonwealth can result. On the other

hand, the media tends to blame the other side for all its countries' troubles, while justifying the actions of its own governments. Hence Indian, Nigerian and Zambian papers point to the colonial past as the source of all their problems, while the United Kingdom and Canada attribute their reluctance to give aid to the rampant corruption in the developing countries. Such attitudes can only divide the Commonwealth.

All this shows that every aspect of our individual lives is affected by modern communications and this will have a ripple effect on our countries and on the Commonwealth. The consequences of communications are as varied and interlinked as Commonwealth members themselves. There are those which unite the organisation and others which divide it. It is only by just and intelligent ~~and responsible~~ use of the technology available that we can bridge our differences, ^{and} reinforce our similarities and expand our common interests for the ultimate benefit of the Commonwealth.

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