

‘The quality of written language is being destroyed by social media.’ What is your view?

Introduction

With the advent of social media, there are many subtle but impactful changes on our society that seem to slip through our eagle eye without our conscious awareness. Yet it somehow or another greatly debilitates our lives. As social media permits the public to engage in discussion and generate what social media experts called it as user-generated content, the parameters of the written work in news reporting and other contents presented in social media has altered and affected the readers. One such severe impact as observed by many linguists is that the quality of written language is being destroyed by social media, inducing in them this need to resolve the problem of degradation. On the other hand, some educators feel that the prevalence of social media can promote literacy, especially for the written language as the information transmitted promotes reading, improves written language proficiency and self expression. In view of these polarizing opinions, this essay shares the view that the quality of written language is being destroyed by social media.

Main body

Advocates who frequent the use of social media fail to understand why the quality of written language would be destroyed by social media as they think that there is no disruption of social media in the writing process. In fact, they recognise only how social media promotes reading, self-expression and writing. In today’s media landscape, individuals are exposed to greater information, contents and possess great avenues and formats to express themselves. By being exposed to a variety of writing styles and reading vast chunks of information on a democratic, free flow network of social media, the reader would subconsciously capture nitty key details which would improve their self expression and quality of writing. Whilst on the other hand, the interactive dynamism of social media provides opportunities for individuals to hone their self expression capacities and thus achieve a state where their individuality and personal voice shines through their writing. The Pew Research Center, surveyed US writing teachers in 2013 to look at their experience of the effects of ‘digital tools’ on writing. For the most part, the teachers were unexpectedly positive, with 78 per cent agreeing that digital technologies ‘encourage student creativity and personal expression’.

However such a view holds an assumption-laden perspective that does not apply in the real world. From a purely academic, journalistic standpoint, it can be argued that the quality of written language has indeed been destroyed by social media. The above view assumes and upholds a much lower standard than ever before, taking into account and accommodating the fact that written language has evolved with the fast-paced, interactive and saturated nature of social media. In this case, such evolution is for the worse, not better. When considering written language from this perspective, where the vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, sentence synthesis, spelling are core aspects of good language skills, it is certain that the quality standards of formal written language are destroyed. Take for example internet slang and acronyms like LOL, OMG, LMAO, TTYL, HTHT. These catchphrases symbolize the fast-paced nature of social media where thoughts are instantly communicated into textspeech. Yet, in this case, grammar, spelling and language formality are ignored. Therefore, the quality of written language is being destroyed by social media by such negligent focus as we recognise convenience over significance in writing techniques.

Moreover, it can be argued that the quality of written language is being destroyed by social media as its fast-paced, instantaneous communicative features have brought about restrictive capacity for expression, opening doors to a more nuanced, casual form of expression for users. The interactivity and fast paced nature of social media inevitably has its downfalls. To encourage users to communicate in an instant fashion, social media networks create algorithms and restrictions that bombard the senses of users, forcing users to switch to a text speech manner to communicate their thoughts. As such, this creates information that are largely out of context, in point form or even without proper formality of written language embedded within. On Twitter, trendy uses of punctuation, for instance, cultivates a communication and language culture of casual expression. For example, the ~quirky tilde pair~ or full. stops. in. between. words. for. emphasis. As compared to say a journalistic article, the quality and standards of written language can be argued to be destroyed by the nature of social media. The technological advent seen in social media affects our language proficiency.

In addition, the quality of written language is being destroyed by social media as its dynamic, diverse mediums appeal to the plethora of human senses, thereby inhibiting the proper cultivation and nurturing of proper self expression and conceptualisation of ideas into the written word. The diverse communication via social media includes videos, gifs and emojis. These modes of communicating certain moods, feelings, information, tone appeal to the sense of sight, hearing. This in a certain fact

encompasses a greater fraction of our human senses more so than what written language provides us with directly. Yet this new, alluring, fresh feature radically shapes how we interpret, translate and convey information. In pursuit of other vivid senses, we are unable to properly translate, conceptualize and convert visual information, thoughts and environmental cues into the written word. It is a sort of malaise, a handicap. For example, memes and gifs are becoming ever so popular means of conveying emotions and information to others. According to a study done by the Journal of the Reading Association of South Africa in 2019, the dialogue nature of Whatsapp has resulted in orthographic errors such as the use of abbreviations, unnecessarily shortened words, and use of numbers instead of the complete word form in English Second Language essay writing.

Lastly, it can be argued that the quality of written language is being destroyed by social media as the democratic, open nature of digital communication platforms have spearheaded the rise of public journalism and user generated content, creating cultural standards of frivolous, substandard and mediocre written language. The relatively open, collaborative and connectivity of social media means that large groups, communities of people are connected to the network. This democratized framework greatly empowers the individual. Now he can share, convey and transmit information with a touch of a screen and camera anywhere, anytime. Inevitably, the mainstream normalization of this network would create cultural trends, norms and standards of communication in the written language, which are more often than not lowering a standard from its formal cousin due to the untrained eye, skill and coaching of the everyday “writer” . For example, some terms have even made it into the Oxford Dictionary; ones that have, include: YOLO (You Only Live Once) along with compound words such as “Craptacular” and “Amazeballs”, not to mention the recent social media trend of identifying high-profile couples by combining their first names to form a blend word e.g. Brangelina. Evidently such trends introduce a more colloquial, brash and vulgar form of written language, a stark contrast from the lofty standards upheld in the journalistic, academic realm.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is certainly no doubt that the quality of written language is being destroyed by social media. Opponents of this view may argue otherwise, but they are clearly holding themselves to a lower standard and fixated upon the narrow and perhaps intangible quality of written language: which is the individuality and personal voice. By considering all other foundational core aspects of what makes good written

language coupled with the intoxicating features of social media, it is indeed true that the quality of written language is being destroyed by social media.