

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND ROGER'S PARADOX

Yuval Noah Hariri, who investigates human history from a different perspective in his popular book, *'Sapiens: A brief history of humankind'* has an interesting view of the *'Agricultural Society'*, which is thought to have lived 10 thousand years ago [1]:

*"The agricultural revolution is the greatest deception in history."*

The author justifies this claim as follows:

*"Rather than heralding a new era of easy living, the Agricultural Revolution left farmers with lives generally more difficult and less satisfying than those of foragers. Hunter-gatherers spent their time in more stimulating and varied ways, and were less in danger of starvation and disease. The Agricultural Revolution certainly enlarged the sum total of food at the disposal of humankind, but the extra food did not translate into a better diet or more leisure. Rather, it translated into population explosions and pampered elites. The average farmer worked harder than the average forager, and got a worse diet in return. The Agricultural Revolution was history's biggest fraud."*

Interestingly, history repeats itself and similar problems that experienced during the transition from hunter-gatherer society to agricultural society are actually happening again in the digital age. From that perspective, today's Generation X can be thought of as hunter-gatherers, living in the agricultural society, led by Generation Z.

Kevin Neville Laland, in his book *'Darwin's Unfinished Symphony'*, has collected people in two distinctive groups as *'Explorers'* and *'Imitators'* in terms of acquiring information [2]. The basis of this grouping is the *'Social Learning Theory'*. The theory simply proposes that new behaviors can be acquired by observing and imitating others.

The *'Explorers'* that Laland mentions in his book represent the group that tries to reach knowledge by searching, observing or learning through their own efforts, which the author calls *'Asocial Learning'*. This group includes all individuals, trying to obtain

knowledge through their own efforts, from our ancestors who discovered how to make a fire with flints, to the users who search accurate and reliable information on the Internet.

*"Asocial learning may be costly but, in contrast to the alternative strategy of social learning, it garners accurate, reliable, and up- to- date information. Social learning, on the other hand, is information scrounging. Through observation, individuals obtain information cheaply from others—concerning, for instance, where to find shelter or how to escape predators."* writes Laland in his book, and adds:

*"However, social learners are vulnerable to acquiring outdated information or knowledge that is more germane to the individual that they have copied than to themselves, particularly in a changing or spatially variable environment. To get reliable information, individuals need to copy those individuals who have directly interacted with the environment, including, for instance, asocial learners. Consequently, theoretical studies predict a mixture of social and asocial learning in the population."*

In order to acquire information in a society, some search, while others are content with the information obtained by the explorers. As long as the existence of these two groups in societies is in a certain balance, it will not cause a problem in terms of dissemination of information. Indeed, there are even some benefits of it, such as making life easier. Obviously, not everyone can be expected to explore the cure of COVID-19 or how to remove the spilled tea stains on the carpet. Hence, it cannot be considered as a wrong behavior to benefit from the experiences of others in order to access an important amount of information, especially the ones that can be acquired through education.

However, according to Alan Rogers, the problem begins when there are more social learners in a community than asocial learners [3]. If the majority of individuals in a community become satisfied with social learning, the number of explorers in that

community will decrease respectively. As a result, limited amount of new or up-to-date information will be produced, and imitators will have to settle for incomplete or incorrect information.

Again, Hariri's book gives a good comparison of letter and e-mail usage to highlight how technology has lured people into the *'luxury trap'* from ancient times to the present. According to the author, people have gotten used to comfort so quickly in every period of history that it has not been difficult to adopt the convenience that come with technological innovations. As the letters of the past, each line of which were meticulously written, were replaced by e-mails over time, the messages sent also began to become more ordinary. With the emergence of the need for more messaging over time, the comfort provided by e-mail disappeared, leaving its ease to the stress caused by increasing number of messages that need to be replied quickly. In other words, although the use of e-mail was initially seen as easier and more useful in terms of communication than writing letters, the pace of life increased and dragged people in a more tiring pace over time.

It would not be wrong to say that people experienced a similar situation during the transition period from home lines to cellular phones, or when social media was seen as a sacred source of information. People who want to access more information quickly stopped discovering the right information and became content with what was offered to them by search engines and social media, as a result of being tempted by the unbearable attractiveness of being a social learner. This problem is called as *'Roger's Paradox'* in the literature.

Significant number of social media users today are easily trapped to the unbearable attractiveness of social learning. Meanwhile, the number of asocial learners in societies that does not easily believe in the information on social media is gradually decreasing. As a result, it is getting harder and harder to prevent the spread of disinformation on social networks.

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## REFERENCES

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