

Jennifer Leon

Historical Artifact

Penn-Yan Democrat Advertisement

For the second part of the assignment, I chose to analyze a historical artifact from October 18, 1918. This piece is an announcement that was published as part of the Penn-Yan Democrat from Ontario County in New York. The advertisement is from the New York Telephone Company and they urge the public to avoid using telephones if it's not an emergency. They mention how, in relation to the Spanish Flu, there was a decrease in telephone operators so they were asking for people to decrease their use of telephones to make it easier for people who actually need access to their phone.

I was drawn to this artifact simply because it captures such a similar circumstance that we are going through today, but at the same time it's so different because this took place during a time when the telephone was such a new concept. After a failed attempt to use men as telephone operators, women were the ones behind the operation. However, as the Spanish Flu took over the world, the number of operators kept decreasing which led to the advertisement. As we follow a similar pattern with the COVID pandemic, It's interesting to compare the two circumstances. We have had a decrease in workers from all fields, we don't seem to have a noticeable difference when it comes to technology because we have come such a long way from the early 20th century. In addition, if we were to make direct comparisons, we don't have to worry about limiting the use of phones or the internet because we live in a time where this is all monitored by gigantic companies who can afford to continue functioning through times like these.

Something that does come to mind, however, is Apple's struggle to keep up with the demand for Macbooks. News spread during the summer and early fall that whoever decided to

purchase a Macbook pro would have to go through a long processing and shipping period.

According to The New York Times, Apple revealed that because of the pandemic that led to the closure of factories in China, the company has been dealing with a shortage of supplies (Wakabayashi, 2020). In addition to the pandemic, the shift to online school and work has led to an increase in demand for computers, especially from students like myself. The increase in demand and decrease in manufacturers, has led Apple to have a long processing period leaving customers waiting for their items for more than a couple of weeks.

Looking at these two events, it's really interesting to look at ourselves from different perspectives. Taking into consideration the time period, it's really interesting how social communications have been affected during both pandemics. In 1918, telephones were seen as these new forms of communication that allowed people to communicate with each other without having to worry about distance. However, this form of communication was jeopardized when the advertisement asked people to limit their use and save it for emergencies only. On the other hand, today, as our in-person interactions are limited, we use technology as our main form of communication. Looking at the bigger picture it's important to see how both pandemics forced different groups of people to shift their ways of living to continue to function as best as possible during a pandemic.

Don't Use Your Telephone Unless It Is Absolutely Necessary

Our operating force is seriously depleted by the influenza epidemic.

Untrained employees cannot take the places of the absent operators.

The public is faced with a grave situation.

Under normal conditions the absence of so many operators would be a severe handicap to telephone service.

With the tide of telephone traffic increasing and our operating force decreasing daily from influenza there is but one thing to do.

Telephone traffic must be reduced.

We must have your help---your co-operation.

Don't use your telephone unless for absolutely necessary calls, for example---emergency calls for fire department, etc., for physicians, for government needs or for business purposes of vital importance.

This is a frank statement of the requirements. We are confident that only a word to the public in such an emergency is necessary.



NEW YORK TELEPHONE COMPANY

PENN YAN, N. Y.

Sources:

Earles, H C. "Penn-Yan Democrat. (Penn-Yan, Ontario County, N.Y.) 1822-1947, October 18, 1918, Page 8, Image 8." *Penn-Yan Democrat. (Penn-Yan, Ontario County, N.Y.) 1822-1947, October 18, 1918, Page 8, Image 8 - NYS Historic Newspapers*, A.H. Bennett, nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn83031517/1918-10-18/ed-1/seq-8/.

Wakabayashi, Daisuke. "Apple Signals Coronavirus's Threat to Global Businesses." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 17 Feb. 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/02/17/technology/apple-coronavirus-economy.html.