



Spring 2009 Tech 114 D203
Studio Lab 01
report

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group happie hands club

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The Bias of Communication Media

For our class, we did an experiment where we tested four methods of communicating a quote to each other, including paper planes, twitter, interpretive dance, and Morse code, and explored the reasons why they succeeded or failed. In fact, only one of our communication methods worked, the dominant reason being a lack of prior knowledge. Under our limited conditions some communication technologies succeeded while others over complicated the process.

Paper planes - The first technology we tried was paper planes. Unfortunately, this was the high point of our experiment (besides the ten minutes of intense interpretive dance), as it was the only communication medium that succeeded. It worked well because all we needed were simple tools like pencil and paper along with plain English. We did not even have to rewrite the message because we could just refold the airplane and pass it along. It left a physical trace, but only with the final recipient. According to Harold Innis (Wellman & Hogan, 2004), paper is a space biased medium, but in this form it does not fulfill the criteria of travelling far; it can only transfer a message to someone in close proximity.

Twitter - Our experience with this technology was a catastrophic failure. The main reason why it failed was because it is basically impossible to find someone's account on Twitter unless they use their real name, or if we use another technology such as Facebook to find out. On top of that, four out of five members did not have accounts. Also, it may take a long time to reach another member if the member does not check their Twitter account regularly. We also noted that the additional technology of the Internet is needed to access Twitter.



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Interpretive dance - Our interpretive dancing ended up being more like charades, except even more ambiguous because of the lack of rules. As the message was “passed on” it got increasingly distorted and lost. For an average person with no prior training, it is next to impossible to communicate something as specific as a particular quote. However, it was the only technology that did not require any additional tools.

Morse code - This one failed because of time constraints. It would have been feasible to go slowly, copy the message down dot for dot, and translate it using a translator or a code legend, but because of the time limit we rushed and made mistakes while transcribing. We still ran out of time.



From the observation of our communication methods, what we witnessed was anything but a phenomenon of “globalization” (a combination word made out of globalization and localization) as mentioned in “The Imminent Internet.” (Wellman & Hogan, 2004) Instead of these various communication mediums interconnecting us not only globally but locally, we faced some problems such as adaptability and universal protocol-readiness issues. For example, not all of the team members had a Twitter account setup and ready to go. The grim situation was merely a reflection of Neil Postman’s (amusing ourselves to death) (Postman, 1985) dystopian-like view of modern media. Furthermore, Twitter and Morse code served to complicate and block our communication rather than facilitate it. As a result, the experiment left us further questioning McLuhan’s claim regarding bias of communication (Innis, 1972). The medium is not the message, and the medium through which the media travels serves only on a conditional basis. His “global village,” as it turned out, is merely a local village.

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Works Cited

Innis, H. A. (1972). Empire And Communications. pp. 170. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Postman, N. (1985). Amusing Ourselves to Death. London: Penguin USA.

Wellman, B., & Hogan, B. (2004). The Immanent Internet. Toronto: University of Toronto.

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1. Got into groups.

2. Chose technologies.



3. Paper plane - wrote down quote and folded

4. Passed it on to each member successively. Success!



5. Twitter - Signed up for account.



6. Looked for next member's account. Failed



7. Interpretive dance.



8. Fun times!
But failed.

9. Morse code - translated quote with online translator.



10. Tried to transmit it.



11. Tried to translate it back. Failed.

12. Reflect / post mortem.

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Happie Hands Club Members



MIA: BRUCE HU (WE STILL LOVE YOU THOUGH)

