The Medium of Communication

1. What are "media"?

    a. Media (plural) are any extensions of man (physical or psychical; so this does not simply refer to "mass" media; they includes pencils, light bulbs, cars, airplanes, books, computers, money, etc.--even class notes!)

    b. "Media penetrate daily life, creating the environment where identities are formed. Personal experience combines with media experience as we construct our individual lives under the directing influence of powerful institutions. Media interconnect personal lives and public activities (Grumpert & Cathcart, 1986) and shape our consciousness." (Real, Super Media, 15)

    c. Twelve suggested signal systems through which we transmit messages include (Søgaard, "Applying Christian Communication", pp. 27-8). Note that often media will utilize more than one system (e.g., television uses verbal, pictoral, optical, etc.):

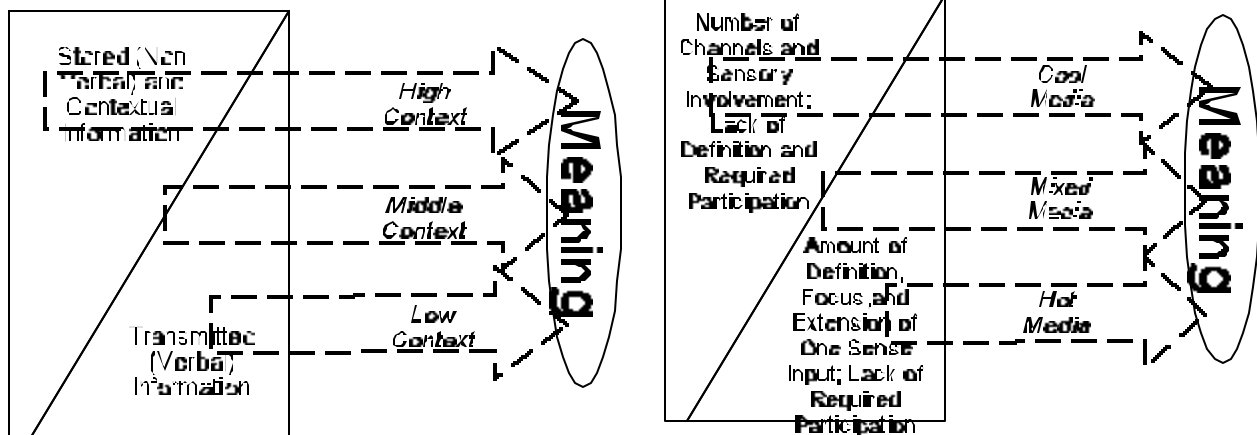| System	Description/Explanation
Verbal	The use of spoken words.
Written	A written system expresses words and ideas that affect the spoken word without the limits of time or space.
Numeric	Numbers by themselves can be used to transfer information, formally in mathematics and less formally as symbols such as 3, 7, 666.
Pictoral	Pictures convey information, but the same picture will convey different information to audiences of different cultures.
Audio	The use of sound. Music is a systematic use of sound, but also audio signals are used apart from music--whistles, tone of voice, bells, alarms, sirens, etc.
Kinetics	Body motion tells much about the messenger and the message, though the precise meaning of body positions varies among cultures.
Artifactual	Objects communicate, as people consciously and unconsciously use those objects in decorations, clothing styles, possessions displayed, even in architectural styles.
Optical	Light and color communicate meaning at both conscious and unconscious levels.
Tactile	We communicate by touch, holding hands, shaking hands, a hug or a kiss, or a blow in anger.
Temporal	Our concern for time will indicate much about us, and our attitude toward other people or the event we are attending.
Spatial	The space immediately surrounding a person that is personal and private varies between peoples; how that space is used communicates information. Use of space in homes, offices, and even in villages and cities communicates.
Olfactory	Smell and taste, as in perfumes or food, are used to communicate, among other things, attitude and intention.

2. No media are contentless; all *intrinsically have their own* messages (in addition to the messages we seek to convey through them; Altheide, Media Power, p. 27).

a.   The "message" of any medium as defined by McLuhan refers to "personal and social consequences . . . [which] result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology" or the "change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs." (McLuhan, Understanding Media, pp. 23-4)

For example, the "railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure."

b.   Media are never *purely* neutral, and can be used for either good or bad, depending on the choice to the source. All media carry a message (for better or for worse) that interacts with (and possibly interferes with) the message we intend to convey. For example, the exact same "message" will have a different impact depending on the media used: television, radio, gossip, newspapers, magazines, books, message boards, street proclamation, etc.

c.   He warns us that we must be aware of the impact of media on society, if we are to be best able to control it. He notes "The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance." (McLuhan, Understanding Media, p. 33)

3.   "Hot" and "cool" media (chart adapted from Duane Elmer; note the similarity to a high and low context paradigm; *General rule of thumb: the more sensory involvement, the cooler the medium (both in quality and quantity of senses)*

	Hot Media (Low Contextuality)	Cool Media (High Contextuality)
DESCRIPTION	"Hot" media extend "one single sense in 'high definition'. High definition is the state of being well filled with data." (Ibid., p. 36) "A 'hot' medium at one time seems to be one that does not maintain a sensory balance, at another, one that comes with the meaning relatively prefabricated and requiring as little imaginative effort as possible to leap from signs to a picture of reality." (Schramm and Porter, <u>Understanding Human Communication</u>, p. 117). They are thus low in respondent participation, as they provide all (or most) of what we need.	"Cool" media, on the other hand, provide only low definition--they have gaps and require the respondent to participate by filling those gaps. The greater the sensory involvement of the participant (in both quality and quantity of our senses), the cooler the media.
ASPECTS	Single sense extended High focus Uncertainty reduction High definition High methodology Low participation Control emotion/expression Provides knowledge, content, answers High order and structure	Sensory diffusion Multi-focus Tolerates ambiguity Low definition High relationships High involvement Free expression Provides presence, care-support Semi-planned; more spontaneous
EXAMPLES	**Radio**, which provides high audio definition and requires little participation. **Pictures**, which provide high visual definition, but nothing else. **Phonetic writing**, which provides all necessary oral/visual data for articulation. **Public speaking**, especially formal presentations with prepared speeches, which provide knowledge, content and answers	**Cartoons**, which are low in visual and verbal definition **Conversation**, which is high involvement and requires much of the listener (e.g., deciphering non-verbal communication) **Hard rock concerts**, which use many sensory channels with low definition in each channel.
DANGERS	Overly propositional theology Cold orthodoxy Legalism Low ownership in worship and ministry God mediated by a few to the many Little individual influence and expression	Experience theology Clarity of Gospel diffused Absolutes become negotiable Authority breakdown; mine is equal to yours Nurture without content Whatever happens is of the Spirit

a. By providing us with so much information, too much "hot" media will tend to overload us, and we need to "cool" down (by processing the data) before reacting to them in significant lifestyle manners (note that we may react immediately in a short-term fashion).

b. Societies can also be characterized by the 'hot' and 'cool' framework (they roughly equate with low and high context respectively). "Hot" societies demand more specialization, fragmentation, and compartmentalization than "cool" ones, and provide less opportunity for participation (note the demand for specialization in education by children at the time they reach secondary school).

c. Where does **television** fit? McLuhan defines it as cool only in terms of the amount of resolution of the picture as defined by the number of dots on the screen which compose the picture; see Schramm and Porter; Men, Women, Messages and Media, p. 117), which has turned some "hot" cultures into "cool" ones which no longer know who they are (e.g., the U.S.; McLuhan, Understanding Media, p. 40).

d. The effects of "hot" media in "cool" cultures (e.g., a 'hot' chapel approach in a 'cool' student context): Nevertheless, it makes all the difference whether a hot medium is used in a hot or a cool culture. The hot radio medium used in cool or nonliterate cultures has a violent effect, quite unlike its effect, say in England of America, where radio is felt as entertainment. A cool or low literacy culture cannot accept hot media like movies or radio as entertainment. The are, at least, as radically upsetting for them as the cool TV medium has proved to be for our high literacy world." (Ibid., p. 43)

4. McLuhan's analysis of Western culture is that the media we have developed have shaped Western culture into one in which the youth are impatient with doctrine, and would rather focus on being, experiencing, and feeling. He even predicts that this will lead to the demise of Christianity in the West and the advent of an "experiential" religious replacement (can this be seen in the New Age Movement?). *If* he is correct, what can we learn from his analysis? Hesselgrave points out two things:

a. "Let us note well that the repeated warnings against communicating Western forms of Christianity rather than the biblical form of Christianity now take on a new dimension. If in the past we have erred in the direction of transplanting Western churches rather than planting biblical churches, we now are in danger of erring in the direction of 'introducing Christ' while planting no churches at all. And this is by the same process of taking excess cultural baggage to the mission field! If the old error was bad--and it was--the new error could be even worse. The East needs very little encouragement from the West to base its religion on personal experience at the expense of doctrine and creed." (Hesselgrave, Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally, p. 388)

b. "The missionary should be aware of the 'message' of his innovations in underdeveloped societies. Missionaries are exporting media with *their* 'messages' as well as taking Christ and *His* message past cultural boundaries!
". . . Missionary-initiated change is not confined to that spiritual regeneration. The missionary is the bearer of a message--a bearer of the greatest story ever told. But the missionary-born message is not confined to the gospel of Christ. For better or for worse, the very media by which the missionary conveys his Christian message will carry their own 'messages' and promote their own changes. Only as the missionary understands this fact will he be able to partially control this extra-Christian change process and assist his respondents as they experience it." (Ibid., pp. 389-90)

5.   "Hard" and "soft" media (chart adapted from Corbitt, "'Soften' Your Media"):

	Hard Media	Soft Media
CHARACTERISTICS	Media that are most concrete in their format and presentation. They require hardware, technology, certain media literacy or knowledge of the medium by the participants, and allow for no change in presentation once the medium has been cast.	Media which allow for dialogue and flexibility during creation and use. Require no hardware, no literacy, allow for dialogue, and can be adapted to each local situation even during the presentation. Allows for the greatest participation of the local community.
EXAMPLES	Books, films, tracts, recordings of any kind (audio or audio-visual)	Conversation (dialogue), storytelling, live improvisational music and drama.

6.   The randomization of a message: entropy

  a.   In every communication event, entropy (randomization) is present to some extent, degrading the intended message.

  b.   Sources of entropy include:

    i.   The differences between the sender's and the receiver's:

      (1)   Cultural maps and

      (2)   Personal specifics (one person may be happy, the other angry; each will interpret a message in light of his/her emotional state at the time the message is received).

    ii.   External noise (generally distractions)

    iii.   Conflicting messages being sent through different channels.

  c.   To help overcome entropy, we are always redundant in our communication (e.g., even in this sentence, the vowels are not absolutely necessary for you to understand the message, though they to help you to avoid misinterpretation).

7.   Receiving the message: By what means do we filter data and determine what we pay attention to and what we ignore? Hall notes the following five sets of activities which must be taken into account (Hall, Beyond Culture, p. 87):

  a.   The subject of activity
  b.   The situation
  c.   One's status in a social system
  d.   Past experience
  e.   Culture

  The patterns used to juggle all of these in each situation are learned early in life and mostly

taken for granted.   Further, "What man chooses to take in, either consciously or unconsciously, is what gives structure and meaning to his world." (Ibid.)

8.   Special caution in use of mass media (see Hesselgrave, Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally, p. 403)

a.   Mass-media have a potentially significant filtering role in defining our understanding of the contemporary world.   The flow should be noted (adapted in part from Altheide, Media Power, p. 34):
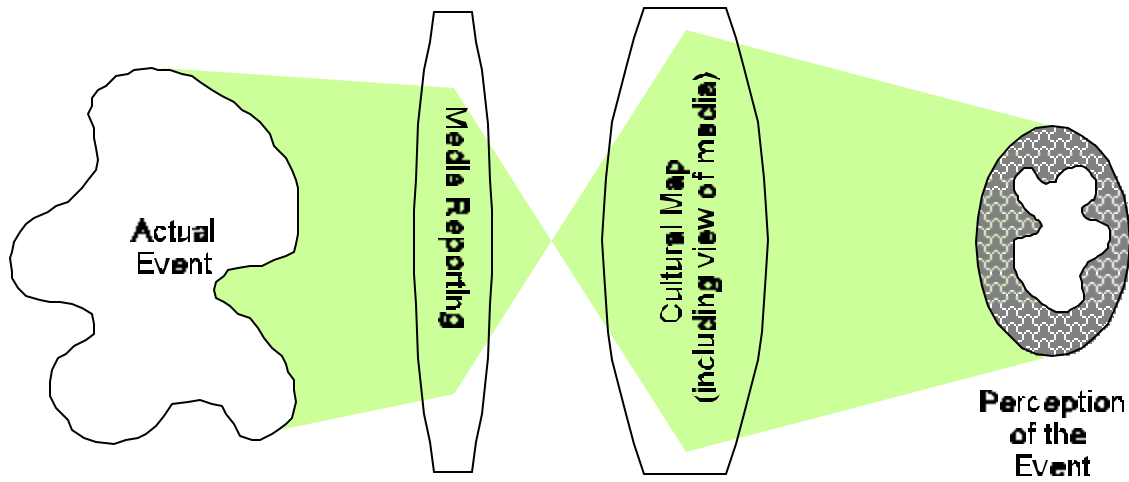
b.   Missionary media users should take care not to jump to conclusions regarding their audiences based on experience in their own culture.

c.   Missionary communicators should take care not to be overly influenced by the more vocal mass media audiences which often are urban and Westernized.

d.   "*The mass media can help only indirectly to change strongly held attitudes or valued practices*. Mass media has never proved very effective in attacking attitudes, values, or social customs that are deep-set or strongly held." (Wilbur Schramm, Mass Media and National Development, p. 132; cited by Hesselgrave, Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally, p. 404)

e.   If possible, we should seek to reinforce the media messages with the backing of appropriate opinion leaders in the culture.