Jarice Hanson

UNDERSTANDING VIDEO

Applications, Impact, and Theory

The SAGE COMMTEXT Series

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Volume 19. The Sage COMMTEXT Series

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments 7

Introduction 8

PART I
VIDEO AS VISUAL COMMUNICATION

1 The Development of Video **12**

What Is Video? 12
Development of a Theory of Video Communication 14
Barriers to Video Theory 15
Television's Contribution 16
Videotape's First Frames 18
The Legacy of Film 19
The Development of Improved Video Technologies 21
Summary 23

2 The Characteristics of Video **25**

Comparisons of the Image 26
Comparisons of Time and Space 30
Time and Space for Interactive Video 31
Unique Characteristics of Video 32
Summary 34

3 Perceiving the Image **36**

Environmental Factors 37
Physiological Factors: The Eye and Brain 38
About Signs and Meaning 42
Example: *Smokey and the Bandit* 44
Psychological Perception 48
Sociological Perception 51
Summary 54

PART II
APPLICATIONS OF VIDEO

4 Extensions and Expressions Using Video **58**

Video Art 58
WGBH's *Scarlet Letter* 62
Video and Special Effects for Film 63
Video and Music 65

Satellite Distribution 66
An Experiment in Japan 68
Summary 69

5 Experiencing New Video Forms 71

Cable Television 71
Home Computers 73
Videotex and Teletext 77
Shopping from Home 82
Videocassette Recorders 83
Videodiscs 84
Video Games 85
Security and Privacy 86
Summary 88

6 The Economics of Communicating Through Video Forms 91

Videotex in Business 91
Electronic Mail 94
Teleconferencing 97
Ergonomics: The Human/Machine Interface 99
Assessing Technology's Effect in Business 101
Summary 102

PART III
DEVELOPING A THEORY OF VIDEO COMMUNICATION

7 Extending Video Communication to Social Experience 106

Telecommuting 107
Leisure and Leisure Industries 109
Effects of Technological Change 111
Psychological Effects 111
Infrastructural and Environmental Effects 113
Social and Sociological Effects 115
The Global Impact of Video Technologies 117
Summary 119

8 Toward a Theory of Video Communication 122

Conclusion 126

Glossary 128

Index 131

About the Author 135

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Summary 102

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Psychological Effects 111
Infrastructural and Environmental Effects 113
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The Global Impact of Video Technologies 117
Summary 119

8 Toward a Theory of Video Communication 122

Conclusion 126

Glossary 128

Index 131

About the Author 135

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INTRODUCTION

There is an old folk saying, "Believe all of what you see, half of what you read, and none of what you hear." The importance of *visual* media in our society is something that bears investigation. This book has been written to explore one of the most common forms of visual presentation today, the video image, and the process of creating that image for communication. I owe a debt of gratitude to the many theorists who have contributed to our understanding of the importance of visual communication, most notably, to Rudolf Arnheim, and Gyorgy Kepes, and to the writings in television studies of Herbert Zettl and Arthur Asa Berger.

A fundamental concept to understanding the language of any form of communication is the relationship between the presented object and the nature of the act of perception on behalf of the individual who has observed the subject. Therefore, the concepts presented in this text rely upon the duality of perception; the presentation of an image, and the mental construction of the meaning of the image. To explore the various aspects of the impact of video communication, the text has been organized in three parts.

Part 1 (Chapters 1-3) examines what sets video apart from any other medium of communication. The section lays the groundwork for the construction of a theory based upon the presentational aspects of video as a form of visual communication, and suggests methods of analysis for the examination of different levels of video interactivity.

Part 2 (Chapters 4-6) explains some of the background of video as it has been introduced for specific purposes, such as arts and entertainment, home services, and business applications. This section describes many of the new technologies, their impact in their environments, and ways in which they extend our communication possibilities through video-related technologies.

Part 3 (Chapters 7-8) discusses the impact of the newer forms of communication by exploring the elements that structure our perceptions of their use. Chapter 8 articulates a theory of video that is based upon the unique characteristics of video and how they affect our consciousness.

The theory presented in this book is one approach to understanding the unique language of video communication, paying attention to the importance of the technology and the human elements that structure the individual's perception of the use of video and the video image. But a theory is useless if it does not reflect the many facets of the subject studied. For this reason, the application and impact of video-related technologies are also outlined in this text to provide background for the perceptual analysis of video form and content. The examples in this text are representative of the wide range of video technologies, as they are used today, or projected for use in the near future.

I

VIDEO AS VISUAL COMMUNICATION

1

THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIDEO

Video is a unique form of visual communication that has been influenced by historical factors, technical development, and criticism given to other forms of media.

WHAT IS VIDEO?

We hear the word "video" often today. "Video game," "videodisc," "MTV videos," and "videocassette" are terms that are reflected in newspapers, on billboards, and on television with regularity—but what does it mean? The word *video* is often used to refer to an image on a screen. One definition explains the picture itself; a second definition suggests the process by which the image and sound have been recorded and reproduced by means of videotape. Both definitions have something in common: The image is shown to a viewer on either a television receiver, or something that looks like a television receiver called a monitor, or video screen. But because the technology that presents the image is, or looks like, a television set, is all video television, or all television video? Different applications of the term tend to confuse and frustrate critics, students, and consumers, all of whom think they have some understanding of what "video" really is.

The word video is actually a term that describes the picture component of a televised image. But in recent years, the term videotape has also been abbreviated through colloquial speech to "video," which suggests that the reference is being made to the magnetic tape that records and plays back image and sound. When someone mentions "an MTV video," or renting a "video" from the videocassette rental store—what they are referring to is the use of videotape to store and play both images and sound. In this latter case, the term does not directly refer to the televised image as the predominant feature of the message, but the software. Both definitions have differences and similarities.

The differences between the two definitions suggest an important factor: Video has changed from its early days, during which television was the primary means of using video, to an age in which the availability of video-related technologies has introduced several other contexts in

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