Overview

• Research into how we humans treat media (movies, games, tv, computers, etc.)

• If this dog smiled and said hello, a novice user would smile and say hello back
  • Is this surprising?

• Hypothesis: *media = life*
Examples

• Presidential candidate in a debate walks closer to the cameras
  • Home audience approved
    • Not because of what he said
    • Because he narrowed distance between himself and viewer

• AI research team demonstrated a new robot to computer specialists using vocabulary of human psychology
  • E.g. robot could learn new instructions, bred for intelligence, has a personality
  • No one thought the robot was a real person – just convenient to talk about the robot as human

• Treat media as life
Who does this?

- Kids
  - Why? Because they’re young and don’t know better
  - TV popcorn example
- Novices
  - Lack of experience
- Experts
  - Easier, efficient
- Everyone! It’s very common
- Testifying to congress, the owner of a sock puppet was asked if she agreed with Lamb Chop’s opinion

http://www.nndb.com/people/689/000116341/shari-lewis-1.jpg
Critics

• Well as long as you think about it, are more experienced, etc. you will not treat media as real life
  • Not true! Why?
  • Takes *effort!!!*

• Reeves & Nass started doing research called Social Responses to Communication Technologies
  • Findings show interactions with media are fundamentally social and natural just like real life interactions
Testing the media equation

• How people treat media

• Example
  • If a product designer asked how you liked her product
    • You would be polite and say it’s fine (whether you believed it or not)
  • If someone else asked you
    • Your evaluation might be less positive

• Social rule of politeness – also applies to media
  • Computer performance example

• 35 studies conducted with media taking the place of real people and places
  • All demonstrated that media = real life
Building their research

- Occasionally people might confuse media with real life
- Could be easily changed
- But... people don’t think they make this confusion
- Participants in their studies weren’t aware they equated media with real life
- Social and natural responses to media aren’t conscious
  - Makes verifying the media equation difficult
  - Can’t just talk to people, listen to stories or ask questions on a survey
- So... to study their idea they had to figure out how to observe what people do that they can’t themselves describe
Research Methodology

1. Find some social science research about how people respond to each other or the natural environment
   - E.g. how people express politeness, respond to different personalities, stereotype by gender, negotiate personal space

2. Find where the researchers summarize the rule
   - People like other people who have personalities like their own

3. Replace “person” / “environment” with “media”

4. Find out how the researchers tested the rule
   - Personality: 2 people talked across a table and tried to solve a puzzle
Research methodology

5. Again, substitute one of the people or description of environment with media
   • Personality: 1 person and a computer tried to solve a puzzle

6. Run the experiment
   • Collected data were summarized, statistically analysed and interpreted using same standards as the original social science research

7. Draw implications
   • How can the experiments and findings inform designers, directors, consumers, etc?
This allows

- Improving design of media
  - Humans are experts at social and natural interactions
  - Media consistent with these rules will be more enjoyable to use
- Evaluating media
  - Media designers are discovering the intricacies of how media work
  - Informs how to change what we don’t like
- New methods for research
  - Social science methods are different from typical methods used to study media, e.g. focus groups
Conclusions

• Throughout human evolution, everything that exhibited any intelligence was life – responses to social and natural stimuli were automatic

• Technology is still new – human brain evolved in world where only humans exhibited social behaviors
  • So… while puppets and robots are obviously different from humans when thinking about it, they’re close enough to fool ‘old’ brains