

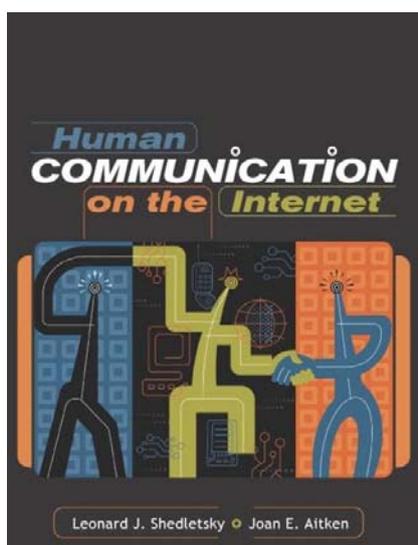
## BOOK REVIEW

### HUMAN COMMUNICATION ON THE INTERNET Written by Leonard SHEDLETSKY & Joan E. AITKEN

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As early adopters of the Internet, Shedletsky and Aitken (2004) suggest us to think about the qualitative aspect of communication on the Internet: how do the Internet and individuals influence each other in the process of communication? The focus is drawn on emerging characteristics of human communication via the Internet. The authors begin their exploration by asking to think of the computer as a pen and a paper – a way to express ourselves such as children’s playing. So, the Internet is described as a communication companion rather than as a mere technological tool; the communication process via the Internet is compared as same as two people are talking face to face. Under this perspective, authors explore the phenomenon of online communication through investigating different areas of our lives such as group discussion, gaming, education, and work places where various online communication patterns can be observed. Fairly, authors’ critical position allows to reveal paradoxical tensions between

idealism and reality: on the one hand, communication via the Internet is a unique way to inspire human beings’ mental universe, on the other hand, such a new way of communication brings inherently side effects. The attempt to counterbalance is consistently reflected throughout the book demonstrating polarization of people and the playful metaphor. In other words, exploration in virtual space through self-generating flow that Internet offers can lead people to flourish or perish.

The book is constituted of four parts which present human communication in general and in particular with the Internet. In part one, readers are invited to reflect how complex human communication can be. It begins with inspiring ideas which call the virtual communication as a new genre of human communication. Then, a general reflection of computer mediated communication is introduced in chapter 2, arguing that technology as a medium forms characteristics of language and writing in specific ways to produce a particular communication process. In following chapter, the paradoxical aspect of human communication on the Internet is discussed and compared to the process of globalization. Different powers are operated on the

Internet where people interact through dialectical tensions. Like any other human communication, sensemaking, adoption, and diffusion of ideas are the processes of communication on the Internet; it reflects complexity of human societies.

In part two, two opposite perspectives of communication on the internet are presented under the macro scope. Chapter 4 begins with arguing that the Internet as a technological advancement becomes a new communication vehicle for searching information with which we can have a lot of benefits comparing to passed generations. However, tensions produced by communication on the Internet are keenly argued in chapter 5 and 6. On the one hand, communication via the Internet is playful and enjoyable (i.e. playing video game) through connecting with various resources regardless of geographical barrier. On the other hand, communication via the Internet polarizes people through digital divide, dissonance, and violence. For example, the anonymity can be used to violate privacy of others, spread rumors, and even commit crimes inducing “hatemongers and terrorists” (p. 107). “Flaming online (p. 105)” is discussed as a dark side of communication on the Internet.

In part three, authors guide us to explore different modes and levels of communication on the Internet. Chapter 7 presents very insightful investigations about how individual level of communication happens on the Internet. The chapter illustrates how an individual can be merged in communicating with himself via the Internet. The state of being online is realized by the process of fusion between an individual and the Internet during discovering a sense of self in the world. In fact, intrapersonal communication online helps a cognitive collaboration when an individual interprets the world via the prism that the Internet offers because his mental universe becomes conversing with himself and with others whom are reified as he perceives them in his imagination. Interpersonal and group communications introduced in following two chapters develop the stage of intrapersonal communication to build and maintain online relationships with others.

Finally in the last part of the book, communication on the Internet is observed in circumstances where human life is expanded such as workplaces and educational contexts. Chapter 10 argues how organizational communication is changed by the Internet concerning roles of workers, tensions between the system and human agencies, and decision making process. Chapter 11 suggests the potential developments of communication on the internet in various institutions. The Internet may intensify learning process that its outcomes are produced in different resources, which allow learners to meet new way of learning overcoming barriers such as time, place, and limited content. The characteristic of e-learning which may generate collaboration among learners is mentioned with a hopeful voice. The book is concluded by giving insights to contemplate future directions in terms of implications with communication on the Internet.

Human communication on the Internet invites us to reflect the unique type of communication on the Internet which allows each individual to paint a picture according to his own interpretations and experiences. Schedletsky and Aitken (2004) contribute to filling the unexplored scope by major studies which generally focus on how people can enhance their skills for using communication technology. Rather, they want to speculate about the nature of human communication on the Internet and the possible influences of the Internet on our communicative lives. This idea can be aligned with Proulx (2005), who argues that the relationship between technology and humans is a sort of social dynamics, so appropriating technology is an act of constituting oneself as a social being since there are different objectives of users. In this perspective, one of the most distinctive originalities of the book comes by showing how intrapersonal communication happens in cognitive collaboration via the Internet. The phenomenon of flow through self-organizing via the Internet activates the stimuli on the mental position of an individual to be situated in meditative state. Individual’s virtual identity is constantly evolving through reification process. This viewpoint aligns with the initial intention of authors who presented the Internet as child’s playing with a pen and a paper to express himself: “The interplay of the cognitive and social interaction can intensify mental or cognitive collaboration” (Schedletsky & Aitken, 2004, p. 131). This aspect of immersive state through intrapersonal communication conceptualizes the Internet as a friendly companion which may open a door to another dimension that help people find their identities in the virtual world. The capacity to connect oneself with exterior world through stimulating human imaginations is definitely empowering and undebatable merit that the Internet can offer.

As the Internet has evolved within a remarkable societal change of 21<sup>st</sup> century globalization, its transformation has been rapidly proceeded. As the book is written more than 10 years ago, some parts of the book need to be updated. For example, the possibility of integrating social media for learning purpose is described as a revolutionary project in the book. However, this hope became real in our contemporary education system in which anyone would not be so overwhelmed by the idea. Furthermore, the book conveys a quite deterministic voice. Even if authors counterbalance positive and negative effects of the Internet in our lives, the way of celebrating the Internet is inclined to technology determinism. Instead of focusing on how each individual as an autonomous agency can appropriate the technology, authors posit the Internet in the center, which leads people to communicate as it suggests. In other words, the Internet seems controlling the pattern of communication of human beings who are supposed to act within given situations. This deterministic position can be compared to Chandler (1996), who argues the determinism in mutual shaping. According to him (Chandler), a certain way of using technology is already framed in a product, so users can appropriate it according to their different objectives and different contexts but within the limited condition that technology allows. In fact, technology is not content-free; every tool has its ideological predisposition from the stage of conception. In other words, technology can be appropriated by users only based on initial purpose of the inventor. Hence, the use of technology in real situations is depending on neither initial purpose of inventor, nor users; both intentions influence to produce a new way of using the technology.

Overall, Human communication on the Internet is a piece which illuminates the aspect of technology as a human's partner, which is different from others' scope to consider it as a mere medium for communication and information. As Levy (1997) argues that the characteristic of cognitive collaboration which happens in virtual space may produce collective intelligence, an artificial intelligence is no more a concept that only science fiction could employ. It is certain that this book must be insightful for people who want to crystalize the Internet as it became a part of our everyday life.

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