



The Role of Context, Media Richness and Uncertainty Avoidance in Media Choice

**An explorative experimental study in Morocco,
Spain and the Netherlands**

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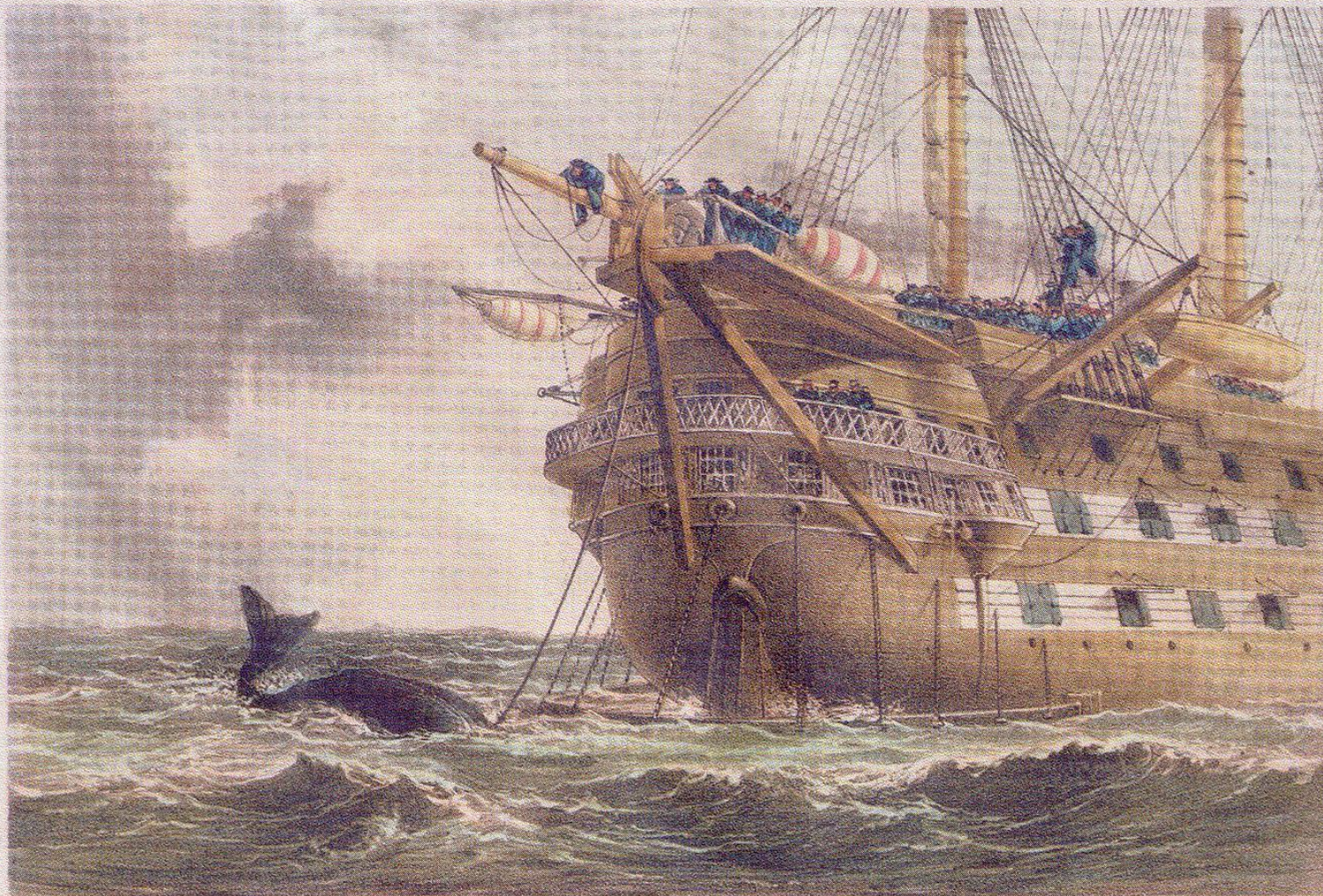
(Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands)

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achtergrond / 150 jaar trans-atlantische communicatie



© M. Beckett from a drawing by R. Dudley

Facsimile by the National Maritime Museum, London

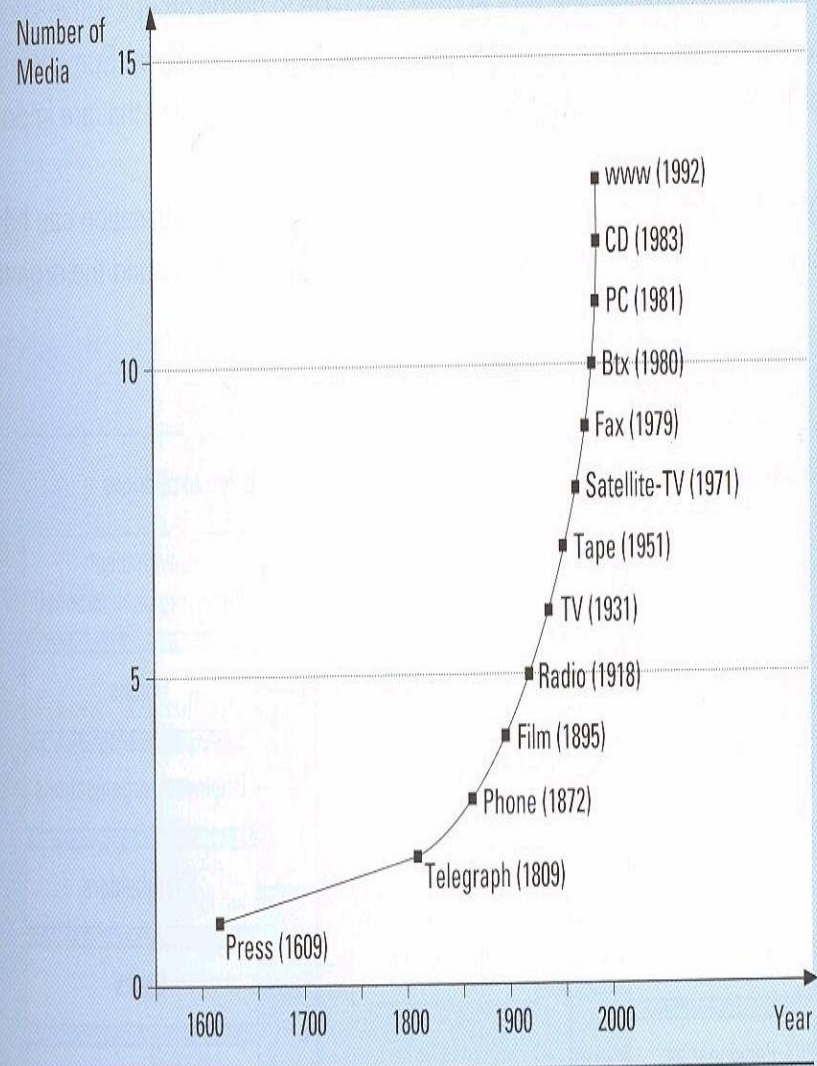
H.M.S. "AGAMEMNON" LAYING THE ATLANTIC TELEGRAPH CABLE IN 1858. A WHALE "BOLETS" THE LINE.

Agamemnon



Uit: Herle Rustema (2005:23)

Figure 1.3 Evolution of the Media







The Context theory of Edward T. Hall

Cultures differ in the extent to which they use context and situation for the interpretation of a message.

In **high-context cultures**, most of the meaning of a message is deduced from the context in which the words occur, for example non-verbal communication, and the setting of the communication

In **low-context cultures**, the meaning of a message is primarily deduced from the words.



Rough classification of high and low context cultures (From Victor 1992:160)

High context

Asian cultures

Arabic cultures

Latin-American cultures

Italian cultures

British cultures

French cultures

North-American cultures

Scandinavian cultures

Germanic cultures

Low context

Swiss-German

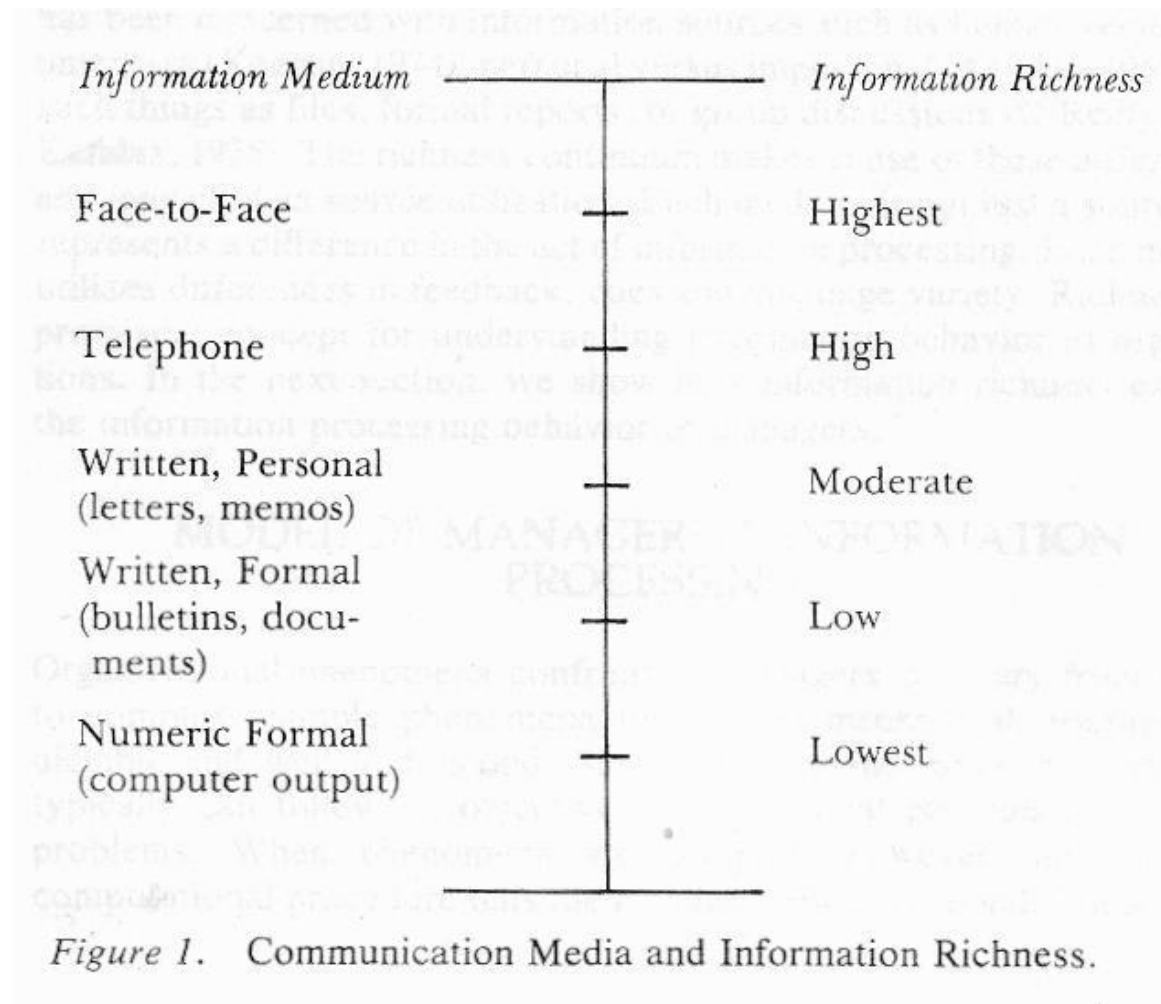


Information Richness Theory

- Daft and Lengel (1984)



Communication Media and Information Richness





Refinements of the Information Richness Theory: Experiments by Webster and Trevino (1995)

Factors that play a part in the medium choice of managers

- **Complexity of message.**
 - Complex: information rich media; simple: information :poor media
- **Distance between sender and receiver**
 - Close: information rich media; far away information: poor media
- **Number of receivers**
 - A few: information rich media; a lot: information poor media
- **Negative versus positive message**
 - Negative: information rich media; positive: information poor media
- **The communication media that are generally used in an organization**
- **The symbolic cues of communication media**



Problems with the Information Richness Theory

- Based only on the perspective of the **sender** of the message
- Based only on research in the **United States**, a rather low context culture



Rough classification of high and low context cultures

(From Victor 1992:160)

High context

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Explorative research in progress on cultural differences in appreciation of media that differ in information richness

- Cultures that differ in **context**
- Perspective of the **receiver** of the message



General expectations based on the Context and the Information Richness Theory

1. Receivers in high context cultures appreciate and prefer information rich media more than receivers in low context cultures
2. Receivers in low context cultures appreciate and prefer information poor media more than receivers in high context cultures



Countries in the study

Rather high context

Morocco (Rabat)

Spain (Madrid)

Rather low context

The Netherlands (Nijmegen)



Expectations for the countries of the study: Appreciation

1. In order to receive a message from their manager.
 - 1a. Receivers from Morocco regard information-rich media as more appropriate than receivers from Spain and the Netherlands.
 - 1b. Receivers from Spain regard information-rich media as more appropriate than receivers from the Netherlands.
 - 1c. Receivers from the Netherlands regard information-poor media as more appropriate than receivers from Spain and Morocco.
 - 1d. Receivers from Spain regard information-poor media as more appropriate than receivers from Morocco.



Expectations for the countries of the study: Preference

2. In order to receive a message from their manager
 - 2a. Receivers from Morocco prefer information-rich media more than receivers from Spain and the Netherlands.
 - 2b. Receivers from Spain prefer information-rich media more than receivers from the Netherlands.
 - 2c. Receivers from the Netherlands prefer information-poor media more than receivers from Spain and Morocco.
 - 2d. Receivers from Spain prefer information-poor media more than receivers from Morocco.



Method: Respondents and design

Morocco	116
Spain	144
The Netherlands	94

Age: M=20,5

Sex: 64% female, 36% male

Studies: Business Administration, Management

Between-subject design: Each respondent answered the questions for one case only



Method: Four testitems (cases)

(1) Simple positive message

Your superior has to inform you that you have been promoted. Your superior is located five hundred metres away in a different building, however at the same premises.

(2) Simple negative message

Your superior has to inform you that your contract will not be extended due to a reorganisation. Your superior is located five hundred metres away in a different building, however at the same premises.

(3) Complex positive message

Your superior has to inform you that you can have a promotion, provided that you work one extra day per week and provided that the project you are currently working on will be finished within the next four months. Your superior is located five hundred metres away in a different building at the same premises.

(4) Complex negative message

Your superior has to inform you that your project will not continue over the next six months, but that after those six months it can continue, provided that you can obtain a subsidy and that you do not need any extra secretarial help. You have already put a lot of hard work into the project. Your superior is located in a different building five hundred metres away.



Method: Measuring instruments - appreciation of a communication medium for a case

Indicate for each communication medium the extent to which you find it appropriate to communicate to you this message

Email

Personal conversation

Telephone

Letter

Fax

Videophone

Text message (SMS)

5 point scale: 1= absolutely not appropriate, 5=absolutely appropriate



Method: Information Richness of the media in the study

Information Richness	Medium	Feedback	Cues
High	Face-to-face (personal conversation)	Immediate	Visual, audio
	Videophone	Nearly immediate	Visual, audio
	Telephone	Fast	Audio
	E-mail	Rather fast	Limited visual
	Fax	Rather fast	Limited visual
	Text message	Rather fast	Limited visual
Lower	Letter	Very slow	Limited visual



Methods: Results of reliability analyses of scale data

The communication media could be divided into two categories,

- High Information richness: Personal conversation, videophone, telephone (.71)
- Low information richness: E-mail, letter, fax, text message (.74)



Method: Measuring instruments- preference for a communication medium for a case

Circle which communication medium you prefer.

Email

Personal conversation

Telephone

Letter

Fax

Text message (SMS)

Videophone

Other

Please, can you give a reason for your choice?

.....



Method: Procedure

- Written questionnaires
- Completed in face-to-face communication with the researchers

Morocco	Jacqueline van Woerkom
Spain	Astrid van Zutven
The Netherlands	Renee Henckes, Charlotte Heeres, Lisette van Engelen
- Level of significance .01



Results appreciation (1= absolutely not appropriate, 5=absolutely appropriate)

Information Richness Medium	Netherlands Low context N=94 Mean	Spain Middle context N=144 Mean	Marocco High context N=116 Mean	Significant differences between countries according to one way anova
High Personal conversation Telephone, Video-phone	3.47	3.76	3.76	NI-S .009** NI-M .01* S-M NS
Low Email, letter, fax, text message	1.91	2.33	2.57	NI-S .000*** NI-M .000*** S-M NS



Expectation appreciation

1. In order to receive a message from their manager.
 - 1a. Receivers from Morocco regard information-rich media as more appropriate than receivers from Spain (**No**) and the Netherlands (**Yes**).
 - 1b. Receivers from Spain regard information-rich media as more appropriate than receivers from the Netherlands (**No**).
 - 1c. Receivers from the Netherlands regard information-poor media as more appropriate than receivers from Spain (**No**) and Morocco (**No**).
 - 1d. Receivers from Spain regard information-poor media as more appropriate than receivers from Morocco (**No**).



Results preference

Information Richness Medium	Netherlands Low context N=94	Spain Middle context N=144	Marocco High context N=116	Significant differences between countries according Chi-squares
High Personal conversation Telephone, Video-phone	95%	84%	83%	NI-S .005** NI-M .005* S-M NS
Low Email, letter, fax, text message	4%	16%	17%	



Expectations preference

2. In order to receive a message from their manager
 - 2a. Receivers from Morocco prefer information-rich media more than receivers from Spain (**No**) and the Netherlands (**No**).
 - 2b. Receivers from Spain prefer information-rich media more than receivers from the Netherlands (**No**).
 - 2c. Receivers from the Netherlands prefer information-poor media more than receivers from Spain (**No**) and Morocco (**No**).
 - 2d. Receivers from Spain (**No**) prefer information-poor media more than receivers from Morocco (**No**).



Summary of unexpected results

- The medium-context culture of Spain and the high-context culture of Morocco find communication media low in richness more appropriate compared to the low context culture of the Netherlands.
- The medium-context culture of Spain and the high-context culture of Morocco have a higher preference for communication media low in richness compared to the low context culture of the Netherlands.
- The medium-context culture of Spain and the high-context culture of Morocco have a lower preference for communication media high in richness compared to the low-context culture of the Netherlands.
- There are not any differences between the high-context culture of Morocco and the medium-context culture of Spain in either appropriateness rating or preference for both communication media high in richness and communication media low in richness.



What can be wrong?

- Theories
- Design
- Respondents
- Test items
- Measuring instruments?



No: Uncertainty Avoidance as interfering factor

The Netherlands	51
Spain	86
Marocco	68



High Uncertainty Avoidance: piece of paper is important for the receiver of the message

It is important to have a written piece of evidence of the message

(Morrocan respondent 836)

It is important to be able to read and reread the message

(Morrocan respondent 828)

It is more formal and you have the possibility to preserve the message

(Spanish respondent 408)



Conclusion

Culture indeed plays a role in the appreciation of and the preference for communication media in cases where employees receive a message from their manager. Numerous aspects call for further research. We select two:

- Culture
- Receiver-sender perspective



Directions for further research

Culture

- Study in cultures with a low context and a high uncertainty avoidance (e.g. Belgium, Germany, Austria) and in cultures with a high context and a low uncertainty avoidance (e.g. Hong Kong, Philippines, Singapore)
- Do cultures differ in the social and symbolic meanings that they ascribe to communication media?
- Do other cultural values play a part in medium appreciation? Power distance, collectivism, universalism-particularism?
- Real life studies: do cultures differ in the media they use?
- Inventory of communication break downs due to communication media

Receiver-sender perspective



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