New Media in Missions

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Abstract

Throughout modern history, missionaries have communicated with people at home and

with nationals through print and electronic media, including television and radio. Today,

the emergence of digital communication technologies is changing the way missionaries

communicate internationally, allowing them to exchange personalized information

immediately.

This project explores how several of today's missionaries utilize print, electronic,

and digital media in the practice of their calling. This study bases its findings on the

content of interviews with ten missionaries. Though their specific practices differ

slightly, all use some or all of these digital media types for missional purposes on a daily

basis. As a whole they saw similar advantages in the digital media, such as a broader

audience and a voluntary receiver, and similar disadvantages, such as a need for

censorship and a loss of the personal touch.

New Media in Missions

In this ever-changing, technologically-driven world, media play an increasingly larger role in the way people communicate with each other. According to Ingle (1986), "The use of media and technology in development has shifted from an emphasis on mass media to personal media" (p. 251). Mass media, as defined by Lorimer and Scannell (1994), involves transmitting information to large, often unknown audiences. In contrast, the recently-emerging digital media allow real-time, interpersonal communication, even when physical proximity is not an option for the communicants (Utz, 2007). With new media, people can interact in real time, both orally and visually, without face-to-face interaction. In other words, Utz (2007) labels them "distance-independent" media (p. 695). Jansen (2007) says these new media have "saturated and increasingly defined American culture" (p. 463). Examples of these new media include web communication services such as e-mail and blogs, telephonic services such as Skype and social media such as the micro-blogging website Twitter as well as Facebook, where people exchange information through personal messages, photos, videos and status updates.

New media have changed and are changing the way people communicate, both in the United States and around the world. More specifically, new media are changing the way missionaries communicate, allowing them to continue relationships from across the world, where they weren't able to before.

But the use of new media in missions isn't just about communicating with people at home — it's also about communicating with the nationals. According to New Media Trend Watch (2009), Facebook is just as popular among young people in Turkey and

Argentina as it is in the United States. Though a smaller percentage of the foreign countries' populations use the Internet, a greater percentage of those Internet users actually use Facebook — 81% in Turkey and 83% in Argentina compared to 51% in the United States (2009). Because of these staggering statistics, missionaries have begun to use new media to connect with people on the field as well.

So just how are new media changing the way missionaries communicate? To answer this question in a contextualized manner, one must consider how missionaries used media in the past.

Media in Missions History

Since the beginning of modern missions, missionaries have used a variety of media to communicate the gospel to the nations and to communicate with other Christians. Missionaries have long used writing to inspire people with stories of God's work, as did the Apostle Paul, arguably the original Christian missionary, who wrote more than half of the New Testament.

If the printing press revolutionized society as a whole, it certainly impacted the way Christian missionaries performed their responsibilities. Among notable examples of this were missionaries William Carey (1761-1834) and Young J. Allen (1836-1907), who used journalism for evangelistic purposes, printing Christian publications in the native languages as a way to spread the gospel to a broader audience. Missionaries, especially women like Charlotte Digges Moon, then wrote letters and articles for print in Christian publications back home, not necessarily to evangelize but to inspire. Missionaries like Clarence Jones have also used the radio in spreading their message to the local people.

William Carey

Carey arrived in India in 1793, but instead of taking the historical approach to evangelism, Carey launched a native-language endeavor to spread the gospel through the written word. Carey established a printing press at the Serampore Mission in Bengal, through which he wrote textbooks, governmental publications and periodical apologetics for Hinduism (Alban, Jr., Woods, Jr., and Williamson, 2005). "[Carey] ignited a journalistic explosion… In many ways, his journalistic endeavors became the channel or vehicle through which he carried forth his missionary work: they were both catalyst and by-product of his efforts" (p. 87).

Carey believed a missionary must preach the gospel, but he must also transform the entire culture through written and oral communication. With this goal in mind, Carey set up a printing press at the Serampore Mission in Bengal. He made his attempt at culture reform by using the Serampore press to attack slavery, abortion and euthanasia while supporting literacy and education, thereby establishing a socially responsible printing press — "one that not only saves souls with the message of Christ but educates those souls on how to live just and responsible lives" (Alban, Jr., Woods, Jr., and Williamson, 2005, p. 98).

Carey also used the Serampore press to distribute the Bible. From 1800 to 1834, the Serampore missionaries translated the Scriptures into 47 languages and dialects. Carey himself was personally responsible for 29 of those translations (Alban, Jr., Woods, Jr., and Williamson, 2005).

Carey and the missionaries also published native-language periodicals, such as *Friend of India*, *Dig Durshana* (Magazine for India Youth), and *Sumachar Durpun* (The Mirror of Intelligence) (Alban, Jr., Woods, Jr., and Williamson, 2005).

Young J. Allen

Young J. Allen is another example of a nineteenth century missionary who used the press to exercise his missionary vision. Soon after he arrived in China in 1860, Allen realized handing out religious tracks in Shanghai was ineffective. Allen took a job as the editor of the *Shang-hai hsin-pao*, which published both foreign and domestic news (Bennett, 1983). Allen's work at the newspaper inspired him to continue his journalistic work, using it as a part of his mission. He was convinced that "the missionary needed to make an intellectual approach to the literati through journalism" (p. 96).

Four months later, Allen founded the *Chiao-hui hsin-pao* (Church News), a weekly newsmagazine designed at first for Chinese Christians (Bennett, 1983). As the editor, Allen was also responsible for supervising the production, distribution and finances (Bennett, 1983). In 1874 Allen changed the name of the publication to the *Wan-kuo kung-pao* (Globe Magazine) to reflect its emphasis on foreign and domestic news and ideas on science, technology, religion, morality and conduct (Bennett, 1983). The name change also allowed the publication to reach a wider audience instead of strictly Christians (Bennett, 1983).

During his journalistic endeavors, Allen never lost his allegiance to missions. Bennett says, "Allen expressed the view that education and journalism were vital to the success of the mission in China because they answered the needs of a people 'thirsting

for knowledge and dying without salvation'" (1983, p. 60). Allen published biographies

of converts and missionaries and comparisons of Christianity with the Chinese religions.

A Chinese Christian contributed a 26-part series entitled "On the Fallacies of

Confucianism," and other authors wrote essays comparing the Ten Commandments to

Confucius's teachings and the Bible to the Five Books (Bennett, 1983).

Charlotte Digges Moon

Not all nineteenth century missionaries who used the printing press for missionary

purposes were male. Throughout her career as a missionary, Charlotte Digges Moon

consistently wrote letters back home describing her life in China and the need for more

workers and sent the letters to her home country for publication. Her letters were often

published in denominational publications such as the *Foreign Mission Journal*. In her

most famous letter, which was printed in the Foreign Mission Journal in 1887, Moon

challenged Southern Baptist women to become involved in missions (Moon, 1887):

> Southern Methodist women, in one year, have contributed to missions, clear of all
>
> expenses, nearly $65,000! Doesn't that put us Baptist women to shame? Why
>
> should we not learn from these noble Methodist women, and instead of the paltry
>
> offerings we make, do something that will prove that we are really in earnest in
>
> claiming to be followers of him who, though he was rich, for our sake became
>
> poor? (para. 2-3)

In this letter, Moon (1887) asked the women to spend the week before Christmas in

prayer and self-denial. Because of Moon's letters and articles, the week of offering and

sacrifice Moon suggested 122 years ago is still in practice today as the Lottie Moon

Christmas Offering through the International Mission Board.

Clarence Jones

Unlike other missionaries previously, Clarence Jones (1900-1986) chose a

different medium for his mission work. At the challenge by his spiritual leader, Clarence

Jones accepted God's call to go to Latin America with the intention of using radio to

transmit the gospel as far as the airwaves could take it. Jones and his family quickly

returned to America, however, when the governments of Venezuela, Colombia, Panama

and Cuba refused to let them start a radio station (HCJB Global, n.d.).

About a year and a half later in 1929, Jones met J. D. and Ruth Clark,

missionaries to Ecuador. As the Clarks and their other team members spoke about the

nation, Jones became convinced he should try his radio endeavor once again. He joined

forces with Clark and three other men to begin the first missionary radio station, and on

Dec. 25, 1931, HCJB Radio broadcasted its first radio show from Quito, Ecuador (Neely,

1980).

As the station grew, Jones was able to purchase bigger and better equipment that

let him broadcast further across Ecuador and into the surrounding countries. Then in 1940

the station's new 10,000-watt transmitter sent the radio programs all the way to Japan,

New Zealand, India, Germany and Russia — indeed, to the ends of the earth (Neely,

1980). Today HCJB continues Jones' vision. The company has launched nearly 400

Christian radio stations in more than 100 countries since its first broadcast in 1931, using

airwaves to take the gospel where people cannot (HCJB Global, n.d.).

Erich Bridges

Today, the endeavors of missionaries using media are increasingly converging. Rarely do they just use print journalism, and rarely do they just do radio. One current example is Erich Bridges (1957-). Bridges did some freelance writing for the North American Mission Board toward the end of his college career, and the week after college he began traveling with a photographer, writing feature stories about long-term volunteers across the United States (personal communication, September 17, 2009). In 1981 Bridges went to work for the International Mission Board as a global correspondent, and in the following years his work expanded to an international scale.

Currently Bridges writes for *Commission Stories*, the quarterly IMB magazine, and he writes a twice-monthly column called "Worldview" for the Baptist Press. Bridges also produces some broadcast multimedia for the IMB and radio networks, and he acts as a spokesman for the IMB during breaking stories. Recently he completed a five-part series for *Commission Stories* entitled "A Tale of Five Cities." With all of these various media to utilize, Bridges and many of his colleagues are using any means available to spread the gospel to the nations.

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New Media

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By understanding how media have been used in missions in the past, one gains a vantage point for making sense of new media as they impact mission work today. Traditional media, then, at least in reference to missions, include radio, TV, photography and the written word. Mass media, as defined by C. R. Wright and quoted in Napoli's article (2010), involve three main characteristics: "(a) content is directed toward large,

heterogeneous, anonymous audiences; (b) content is transmitted publicly, and often

reaches audiences simultaneously; and (c) the communicator tends to be, or operate

within, a complex organization that may involve great expense" (p. 506). New media are

distinguished from traditional media primarily by their interactive capabilities — the

ability of both the sender and receiver to exchange messages and give feedback. (Schorr,

Campbell and Schenk, 2003). These new interactive media encompass much of the

digital and social media, such as e-mail, instant messaging, blogs, Facebook, Twitter and

Skype — collectively, what Park (2007) calls, "computer-mediated communication" (p.

568).

In the book *Communication Research and Media Science in Europe*, Schorr,

Campbell and Schenk (2003) made this statement:

'Interactivity' has become a key term for a number of new media use options

evolving from the rapid dissemination of PCs and Internet access points, the

digitization of the media, and media convergence in the last one and a half

decades. Moreover, from a media expert's point of view, interactivity will become

one of the characteristic features of future media use. In 1984 Rice defined the

new media as communication technologies that enable or facilitate user-to-user

interactivity and interactivity between user and information. (p. 57)

Before the rapid expansion and domination of the Internet, media allowed one

person or group to communicate to a mass audience, but the audience was allowed very

little opportunity to give feedback. Talking with someone in a different city instilled fear

of long distance phone charges, and communicating with someone overseas required a

traditional mail service that took more than a week to deliver. The concept of a personal

computer was almost non-existent. In fact, according to the World Summit on the

Information Society (2005), only a few tens of thousands of people used the Internet in

1985.

However, with the emergence of the World Wide Web, the number of personal

computers in use in the world increased from 154 million in 1993 to more than a billion

in 2008 (World Summit on the Information Society, 2005). Today there are nearly two

billion Internet users (Internet World Stats, 2010). The expansion of this digital

technology led to the invention of first e-mail and instant messaging, both of which

predate the Internet, followed by blogs, Skype, Facebook and Twitter.

Electronic mail, more commonly known as e-mail, was first used in 1965 at the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and instant messaging first appeared on multi-

user operating systems in the mid-1960s (University of Maryland, n.d.). However, neither

became popular with mass audiences until the 1990s. Blogs came into play in the early

1990s as well, beginning as Internet forums and transforming into personal blogs by the

middle of the decade (The Economist, 2006).

According to Technorati (2010), a blog search engine, 112.8 million blogs

currently exist, and more than 175,000 new blogs are created each day. The Technorati

staff (2010) says, "Blogs are powerful because they allow millions of people to easily

publish and share their ideas, and millions more to read and respond. They engage the

writer and reader in an open conversation, and are shifting the Internet paradigm as we

know it" (para. 2).

Skype was founded in 2003, taking instant messaging to a new level. Instead of simply sending text messages, users could now telephonically communicate both orally and visually via the computer (Skype, n.d.). Using Skypeout, people could use the program to call landlines and cell phones, allowing international mobile communication. People could connect with users in other countries and not only send messages, but also see and hear the other person as if they were talking face-to-face.

Then in 2004 Mark Zuckerberg (2010) launched Facebook, which now boasts more than 500 million users. Those 500 million people can maintain relationships with anyone in the world through status updates, wall posts, private messages and photos. Thomas Roach (2009) described the impact of Facebook, observing that "Friends contacting one another through Facebook or e-mail can spread information faster and more effectively because almost everyone they target is a receptive audience member" (p. 6).

Twitter appeared in 2006 and allowed one person to communicate a short update to their "followers" while still allowing, and even finding its success in, feedback from those followers (Levy, 2007).

These new forms of media allow an unlimited number of people to communicate with an unlimited number of people simultaneously and receive immediate and unlimited feedback. The diversity of information and sheer volume of communication has exploded in the past two decades. So how does the digital age apply international communication, specifically done by missionaries?

Sonja Utz (2007) conducted a study on the use of media in long-distance friendships, particularly comparing the use of e-mail and phone calls. She published her findings in an article titled "Media Use in Long-Distance Friendships," in which she drew this conclusion: "People use e-mail primarily for staying in touch, whereas important personal matters are still discussed on the phone" (p. 694).

Utz says that prior to the Internet, people were still able to maintain long-distance friendships with post mail and phone calls, but the internet has provided benefits over both of those media. Whereas post mail was quite delayed, electronic communication is instantaneous. Whereas phone calls required both communicators to be available and ready at the same time, electronic communication does not necessitate convergence of schedules. Utz (2007) said this about the change:

> Letters and phone calls can easily bridge geographical boundaries, but asynchronous forms of computer-mediated communication such as e-mail constitute a fundamental improvement. They are distance-independent not only in use but also in cost; the messages are delivered rapidly, almost in real-time; and the communication is unobtrusive because of its asynchronous nature. Communication partners do not have to coordinate their time schedules to be able to interact. (p. 695)

Although asynchronous media do not allow the same type of immediate feedback that a phone call or face-to-face visit does, the new electronic forms of communication do allow people like overseas missionaries, who maintain long-distance relationships while separated from their home countries. Through the use of new media, anyone anywhere

can communicate to someone else anywhere in the world, whether that be for business or for pleasure. As stated, this project probes this hypothesis and offers a tentative conclusion based on feedback from several current missionaries.

Research Questions

If new media are the means by which missionaries stay connected to the rest of the world, how exactly are they using these new media? Which new media do the missionaries prefer to use? Who are their new media audiences, and why do the missionaries communicate with them as they do? If they have been overseas for more than three years they have probably used different methods of communication in the past than they do now. How has their communication changed with the emergence of technology and new media? Do they communicate more often or exchange different information with the immediacy and interactivity of new media? What advantages and disadvantages have they personally experienced with these new forms of media? In essence, how are new media changing the way missionaries communicate? Answers to questions like these promises to yield foundational conclusions that can be more fully developed in separate additional projects.

Research Method

The research presented here came from a variety of missionaries — in different locations, different ages, with different backgrounds, different lengths of times overseas and different access levels to the Internet. In order to answer the above questions and determine common themes of communication among today's missionaries, these people were interviewed using Skype and e-mail: Ron Barnes in the Czech Republic; Holly

Friesen in Ukraine; John Hawkins in South Korea; Nate and Cherith Logan in Brazil;

Laura McLain in Portugal; Shayne Russell in Kenya; Dan Portugal in Spain; Heather

Farran in South Africa; Jon Trott in Brazil; and Jennifer Thigpen in the Czech Republic.

How the Missionaries Use New Media

　　Ron Barnes. Ron Barnes has served overseas since 2001, first in Hungary and

then moving to the Czech Republic in 2006. As his organization's country coordinator for

Czech, Barnes is involved in many types of communication to many groups of people. To

communicate with his organization and supporters in the U.S., he primarily uses e-mail in

order to document the conversations. However, he rarely uses e-mail for personal

relationships. Barnes said, "I use [e-mail] mostly for business — for my ministry. That's

how I take care of business things" (personal communication, November 10, 2010).

　　For the personal relationships, Barnes uses Skype and Facebook, each of which he

uses for a different purpose. Barnes uses his internet phone for long conversations, and he

uses Skype daily for quick conversations with close friends. He uses Facebook for

conversations with friends that he may not communicate with through Skype. According

to Barnes, Facebook is a much less threatening means for communication and thus, is

more efficient for him: "If [people] send an e-mail, they feel like they have to write a

whole story, whereas with Facebook people can get right to the point and say something

quick and it's not a long drawn-out conversation," Barnes said. "It's a form of

communication that people actually like to use. It's the same information [as through e-

mail], but people don't feel the same sense of obligation" (personal communication,

November 10, 2010).

Holly Friesen. Holly Friesen worked in Peru from 2004-2006 and joined a medical team in Ukraine in 2010. She uses an Internet phone, e-mail, Facebook, and Yahoo texting to talk to family and friends in the U.S. Though Friesen does use Facebook for occasional urgent prayer requests, her Facebook communication is typically more light-hearted and surface-level information.

For ministry-related communication, Friesen uses e-mail and a ministry website (http://www.ukrainemedical.abwe.org/) where she posts pictures, videos and blog updates. Once a month she sends an e-mail prayer letter, and approximately four times a year she mails a printed letter with the help of her family, utilizing both digital and print media to communicate with supporters. Communication with her friends and family is very informal and she discloses personal information about her life, but "with the website and my updates it's definitely more ministry-oriented," Friesen said (personal communication, November 15, 2010).

John Hawkins. John Hawkins has lived in South Korea for the past two years. He uses both e-mail and Facebook to communicate with his organization, family, and friends back home. Facebook has been especially helpful, as his team has used it to show supporters the progress of a building project. Hawkins said the regular updates increased excitement about the project and encouraged people to join short-terms teams to go and help build.

Hawkins' organization also provides an intranet where he downloads ministry resources and watches conferences he would never have been able to attend due to travel costs. When Hawkins and his family first arrived on the field, there were no English-

language worship services available, so they and another family held their own. Hawkins

used his home church's website to download videos of the previous Sunday's service and

the two families watched it together: "It was wonderful to sing with our friends [at home]

and to see how people have changed, even keeping up with leadership changes that

occurred," Hawkins said (personal communication, November 8, 2010). "It was a great

morale booster and brought our two ministry families closer as we worshipped together."

Hawkins also uses videos downloaded from YouTube for ministry in teaching classes:

"Particularly for second-language people, the audio-visual and written combination really

helped to get the message across," Hawkins said (personal communication, November 8,

2010).

Besides Facebook and e-mail, Hawkins also uses Skype and an Internet phone to

keep in touch with his family and grandchildren in the U.S. The Internet phone is

primarily for conversations about serious matters with their immediate family, and Skype

allows them to visibly see their grandchildren grow up because they can't be there in

person. Hawkins said, "I do believe they develop a relationship with us, even though it is

through the electronic media" (personal communication, November 8, 2010).

Nate and Cherith Logan. The Logans moved to Brazil in 2009. They use

primarily e-mail to communicate with churches and supporters in the U.S. directly, but

they also maintain a ministry website (http://www.loganministry.org/) for those

interested. They have created a few videos to share on their website — sometimes a

greeting to their friends and supporting churches, and often including their family in

action, whether singing in church or doing apartment outreaches. The Logans also use

some e-mail, as well as Skype and Facebook to talk with friends and family. When they

update their ministry website, they often put a link to the website on their Facebook page,

but that is the extent of ministry-related information on their Facebook: "We use

[Facebook] just for personal friendships more so than anything ministry-based," Cherith

said (personal communication, November 16, 2010).

> *Laura McLain*. Laura McLain moved overseas in 2006 and has served in both

South Africa and Portugal. She communicates with friends and family primarily through

Skype, e-mail and Facebook, which she limits to personal friendships only. McLain has

another missionary friend in Cameroon, whom she communicates with frequently via

Skype, which she considers the most convenient method of communication to maintain

long-distance relationship. She also utilizes Facebook multiple times per day for close

relationships both locally and internationally. For churches, supporters and other

ministry-related communication, McLain uses e-mail prayer letters and a ministry blog

(http://laurainlisbon.blogspot.com/), which she updates at least once a week.

> *Shayne Russell*. Shayne Russell moved to Kenya in 1995 and has seen massive

changes in communication since then: "Originally our only source of communication was

via satellite phone," Russell said (personal communication, November 22, 2010). "It was

expensive and was used minimally for emergencies and strict needs of communication."

Now he posts ministry updates on Facebook daily and keeps a blog

(http://www.whatintheworldareshayneandtaridoing.blogspot.com/) for more in-depth

information.

Russell also uses e-mail, Skype and an Internet phone to communicate with supporters and friends, sharing information about his family, community and church as well as the culture: "Before new media came along, the crux of our communication was in quarterly newsletters to our family, friends and supporters," Russell said (personal communication, November 22, 2010). "Now we have instant communication with pictures or video to anywhere in the world."

Dan Portugal. Dan Portugal moved to Spain in 2007 and uses primarily an Internet phone for all his international communication. He does use e-mail for communication with his churches and organization, but mostly for facts and important things that need to be in writing. He also uses e-mail to send prayer letters occasionally, sending supporters information about his ministry, financial support, family and the culture.

Portugal is using Skype increasingly to communicate with family: "[Skype] is really different than a phone call because you can see their face," Portugal said (personal communication, November 3, 2010). "There is an element there that adds a different dynamic. To me there's more transparency so it kind of brings it closer." He does not have Facebook because he doesn't want another account to keep up with. However, his daughter Kayla does have Facebook, which she uses to update friends and family in the U.S. through private messages.

Heather Farran. The Farran family arrived in South Africa in 2007 to start an AIDS hospice care center. Since that time Farran has communicated with family, friends and supporters electronically. She uses Facebook, Skype, e-mail and blog

(http://ramblesandrun-ons.blogspot.com/) to interact with people back in the U.S.: "It is wonderful to see what is going on in their lives and be able to make comments and interact," Farran said of Facebook (personal communication, November 23, 2010). "It is very helpful for supporters that we don't know at all or don't know well. It gives us a point of familiarity."

Farran uses Skype for both ministry and personal communication, and she updates a blog a couple times a month for her female supporters who want more of an intimate connection. On the blog she posts information about her children's lives and trials she is going through. Farran said, "It's is the place for all the information that doesn't seem ministry related but is still vital" (personal communication, November 23, 2010).

Jon Trott. Jon Trott became a missionary in 1997 and moved to Brazil in 1999. He started on the field with no high speed Internet, no Facebook and no Skype; he did use some instant messaging, but it was sporadic at best with their poor Internet quality. Now he utilizes just about every instant communication available. He uses Facebook every day for personal and ministry use, Skype for ministry communication, a website for personal and ministry information, YouTube for ministry videos and of course e-mail, even receiving up to 100 e-mails a day.

Trott uses these new media to communicate with friends and supporters overseas. In communicating with the local Brazilians, "they are very much people persons," Trott said (personal communication, December 20, 2010). "To set up the meeting, use all the technology you can, but the actual meeting they prefer face-to-face."

Jennifer Thigpen. Jennifer Thigpen spent two years in the Czech Republic and is planning to return long term in the summer of 2011. While she was overseas, she used e-mail, Skype and an Internet phone to communicate. When she returned to the U.S., she set up a Facebook account to keep in touch with the women she ministered to in Czech: "I learned that with the younger population, e-mail isn't always the best way anymore — you don't always get responses as quickly," Thigpen said (personal communication, November 18, 2010).

Thigpen now maintains a blog strictly for women, where she can be more open and post more personal things she experiences. Once she adds a post on her blog, she sends out a link through a Facebook message for anyone interested. However, even with these new media, she has found that e-mail is the easiest way for her to communicate with mass audiences. Thigpen said, "If you want to pick one thing that people get on for information to pass information along, I would say e-mail" (personal communication, November 18, 2010).

Compilation of Research

The tables below illustrate the compiled research. The first shows what type of media each missionary uses and for what purposes. The second shows how often the missionary uses each media.

Table 1

Missionaries' Use of New Media

	E-mail	**Facebook**	**Skype**	**Website**	**Blog**	**YouTube**
Ron Barnes	Ministry (M)	M / Personal (P)	M / P	M		
Holly Friesen	M / P	P	P	M	M	
John Hawkins	M	M / P	P			M
Nate/Cherith Logan	M	P	P	M		M
Laura McLain	M / P	P	P		M	
Shayne Russell	M	P	P		M	
Dan Portugal	M / P		M / P			
Heather Farran	M / P	M / P	M / P	M	M	
Jon Trott	M / P	M / P	M	M		M
Jennifer Thigpen	M / P	M / P	M / P		M	

Table 2

Frequency of Missionaries' New Media Usage

	E-mail	**Facebook**	**Skype**	**Website**	**Blog**	**YouTube**
Ron Barnes	Daily	Daily	Daily	Monthly		
Holly Friesen	Daily	Daily	Few times a month	Few times a month	Few times a month	
John Hawkins	Daily	Daily	Few times a month			Occasionally
Nate/Cherith Logan	Daily	Daily	Few times a week	Weekly		Occasionally
Laura McLain	Daily	Daily	Few times a week		Few times a week	
Shayne Russell	Daily	Daily	Few times a month		Monthly	
Dan Portugal	Daily		Few times a week			
Heather Farran	Daily	Daily	Few times a week	Few times a month	Monthly	
Jon Trott	Daily	Daily	Few times a month	Weekly		Occasionally
Jennifer Thigpen	Daily	Few times a week	Few times a week		Monthly	

Research Analysis

Through the interviews, multiple trends arose in how the missionaries view new media and some of the positives and negatives they see in their use of it. All the missionaries had at least one complaint about new media, but they uniformly agreed that the positive additions outweigh their negative concerns.

Broader audience. Several missionaries agreed that new media allow them to communicate with a broader audience than traditional media. With e-mail, they are able to send updates to anyone for free, rather than having to pay postage and being limited by the number of home addresses they had for supporters. In an even greater way, Facebook has added to this benefit: "There are a lot of people on Facebook that I don't have their e-mail addresses," Barnes said (personal communication, November 10, 2010). With Facebook he is able to communicate with them despite not having their e-mail address.

Trott found a significant difference in new media usage based on the age of the user. He told this story:

> I just put up pictures on our website and got a lot of hits on my daughter's baptism. About three weeks later I decided to put them up on Facebook, and I got a whole bunch of other hits. What I noticed was that everybody about 30 and under that I'm friends with looked at Facebook, but everybody about 50 and up looked at the website or the e-mail that I sent. A lot of those people on Facebook also get my update through e-mail but they didn't look at it. They didn't go to the website. (personal communication, December 20, 2010)

Trott realized that having the ability to communicate through a specific medium — for

example, having a person's e-mail address — doesn't necessarily mean that information

will be exchanged and communication will take place. He found that with so many media

to choose from, each person has a favorite. Trott said, "That was an eye-opener for me

that I've got to keep up with Facebook" (personal communication, December 20, 2010).

Intentional receivers. The missionaries saw the voluntary nature of new media as

a benefit to their communication as well. Rather than snail mail or even e-mail, in which

the missionary sends information and the receiver may feel obligated to take part in the

communication, now the missionary can post information on a blog or Facebook page

and people can choose whether or not to participate and give feedback.

The Logans started their missionary career writing newsletters, but they soon

realized people weren't reading them: "[It was] too much information and people weren't

interested because it was too much," Nate Logan said (personal communication,

November 16, 2010). Trott has also found that "most people have no interest in reading

[long letters] — it just takes too much time" (personal communication, December 20,

2010). Instead, "Everything that we communicate now we communicate in short

snippets."

Friesen noticed the same response to her newsletter, so she created a blog to host

her more in-depth updates: "I try to keep my prayer letter short, [and] for the people that

like more details I put that on the blog," Friesen said (personal communication,

November 15, 2010). McLain holds the same philosophy as Friesen and keeps her prayer

letter to one page, going more in depth in her blog. If people hear about their ministry and

they want to know more, they can voluntarily go to another source for more information

without the missionary forcing too much information upon them.

Nate Logan learned from experience the potential danger of sending too much

information: "I know a person that sends us something almost every day and I don't even

open it anymore — I just delete it because I just don't have the desire to know more and

more," Nate said (personal communication, November 16, 2010). In his own

communication he tries to apply what he has learned from experience: "It's a balance of

trying to respect people's privacy and their time but also sharing your need. It's such a

privilege … and something I don't ever want to take advantage of."

Immediacy. When missionaries communicate information using new media, the

person at the other end can receive that information and give feedback immediately, even

if they are 8,000 miles away. They no longer need to wait weeks for letters to be

delivered and then another few weeks to receive a response. They can communicate as

fast as their Internet connection will let them. "The instant communication helps you feel

not so far away," Farran said (personal communication, November 23, 2010). Because of

this immediacy, the missionaries agreed that they communicate far more than they did

before these new media. Whether it is giving a weekly update on a project or sharing an

urgent need, missionaries are able to communicate more through new media.

Friesen said that with Facebook she is "more quick to communicate a prayer

request that probably wouldn't have made it into a prayer letter and that people probably

wouldn't have heard about" (personal communication, November 15, 2010).

"We love the instant connection we have with our families and friends," Nate Logan said (personal communication, November 16, 2010). Cherith Logan added that their children have had health problems in Brazil, but that she has been able to tell people about the situation and ask for prayer through e-mail and Facebook: "If we put something on Facebook and start reading the comments, that's pretty cool right away. To know that they were sticking with us was such an encouragement and it really strengthened our faith because we knew people and friends back home were praying and that, for me, is one of the biggest encouragements that the instant communication gives us" (personal communication, November 16, 2010).

Portugal experienced a situation similar to the Logans in 2008. His wife needed emergency surgery and while he took her to the hospital, his daughter sent an e-mail to their entire support list so that within minutes everyone knew what was going on: "We would never have been able to do that with snail mail or even phone," Portugal said (personal communication, November 3, 2010). "So it was a brief comfort for us to know that everybody was praying for us and we got a ton of e-mails back saying they had spent time praying for the whole episode. That was a great advantage and we were really thankful for that."

Connectedness. The missionaries noted that partly because of its immediacy, new media allowed them to feel connected to their life back home. Particularly with Facebook and Skype, they aren't just sharing information, but they are able to share life with their loved ones overseas: "I like how Facebook keeps you up-to-date with some of the more

everyday things that people probably wouldn't tell you," Friesen said (personal

communication, November 15, 2010).

Instead of only having the time or space to discuss major issues, they are able to

talk about their daily activities in a way that they couldn't before these new media.

Thigpen said this about Facebook:

It's more than just giving information and getting information back. You can

really see their lives and you can see a more holistic side of them — their

pictures, other people's comments [and] their quick comments back. It's more

like an everyday reality of who that person is and what they're doing. I think

that's a valuable part of it that you can't get from e-mail or anything else because

you can see their interactions with everybody else too. It's more like a group-

oriented interaction and communication (personal communication, November 18,

2010).

Cost efficiency. For missionaries with a small budget, the low price is a strong

benefit of new media. Internet phones, though not free, are relatively cheap for

international calling: "We can pick up the phone and call anybody in the states without

thinking, 'I'm going to run up a bill.' That's the way it used to be in the 90s," Portugal

said (personal communication, November 3, 2010). The other new media — e-mail,

Facebook, Skype, Twitter, blogs and YouTube — are completely free after the cost of

Internet access. This low cost allows missionaries to communicate as much as they want,

even on a low budget, in a way that they never could before.

Uncontrolled information. One of the negative aspects has to do with the interactivity of new media. Missionaries are no longer communicating only their message — they now have to consider what people might respond in a public forum like Facebook. "People can communicate things you don't want them to communicate," Barnes said (personal communication, November 10, 2010). Thigpen also said, "You have people on there saying things you don't want." Both of these missionaries have had someone post information on their Facebook page, including text and pictures, that they didn't want all of their friends to see. Yet with new media, missionaries can do little about it — they have less control over the information.

Linguistic and cultural challenges. Despite its prevalence over the entire world, new media has not overcome the language barrier missionaries encounter with the national people. Hawkins communicates with the South Koreans he ministers to via e-mail, but he often finds there is miscommunication through the written word. "It is important to ask for verification when sending to a Korean e-mail, or communication you think you have made is not made and miscommunication is accentuated by a language and cultural barrier," Hawkins said (personal communication, November 8, 2010).

Portugal agreed that the language barrier is still a problem and communication often gets misinterpreted with nationals: "A little message that you try to send — you say something and all of a sudden it gets changed and the person misunderstands and then the ball just keeps rolling and it's just no good," Portugal said (personal communication, November 3, 2010). As often as possible, he communicates with nationals face-to-face to avoid this problem.

Over-connectedness. Some missionaries noted that the new media allow them to

be so connected with their life in the U.S. it can become a distraction from their ministry.

"It's really easy to focus on what everybody is doing at home and you're not there,"

McLain said (personal communication, November 13, 2010). In the same way, Farran

saw the immediacy of new media as both a blessing and a curse: "We are constantly

juggling between meeting the communication needs of our family and supporters and

protecting work/family time," Farran said (personal communication, November 23,

2010). Russell found that, although new media appears to save time, the opposite is true

in his life: "I spend more time now communicating with folks, which is good, but that

does leave less time for the ministry here" (personal communication, November 22,

2010).

According to Nate and Cherith Logan, there is a temptation to spend all their time

talking to friends back home instead of making new friends in their new country. Because

they know so much of what is going on at home through new media, they think about

their life in the U.S. a lot more: "You get homesick a lot easier because it's harder to

separate yourself from your family and things back in the states," Nate said (personal

communication, November 16, 2010). Cherith added, "You could become so much a part

of the world you just left that there would be no cutoff and a restarting of friendships."

Virtualization of interactions. Even though missionaries can now communicate

instantly and even face-to-face though video, they miss the personal touch that came with

hand-written letters and packages from home. "With the new technology age, you don't

get that stuff anymore and you miss that," Thigpen said, who receives far fewer packages

from home than she did before the widespread use of Skype and Facebook (personal

communication, November 18, 2010). "It's special because it's more personal. People put

more time into it and you miss that. Technology is nice because it's immediate, but you

do miss the other stuff too."

Although all the missionaries agreed that the new media provide things that

traditional media does not, several said that aspects of traditional media have been lost in

the technology revolution: "No electronic form of written information will have the same

impact as something you can hold," Hawkins said (personal communication, November

8, 2010). Even when they do receive personalized communication, it doesn't carry the

same weight it once did. Russell said, "We rarely receive any letter at all and when we

do, we already know the news because we read it on Facebook" (personal

communication, November 22, 2010).

Expectation of immediacy. Precisely because new media are capable of instant

and unlimited communication, missionaries found that people expected them to use them

in that way. "People do expect more communication," Russell said (personal

communication, November 22, 2010). Farran added, "People don't understand just how

many e-mails you can get in one day and a lot of times they expect a very quick

response" (personal communication, November 23, 2010). According to Portugal, the

American culture demands immediacy. When people don't get an e-mail response within

24 hours, they are already questioning what went wrong and why the person is not

responding. However, with Portugal's ministry, sometimes his answers need to be more

thought-out. He said, "For some weighty e-mails, things that need to take time to think

about, for me it's just like, 'I wish I wouldn't have e-mail. I wish we would have snail

mail that I can just wait here and think about this and I don't have to write back

immediately'" (personal communication, November 3, 2010).

Trott also commented that most people's expectations are based on the

availability of the internet in America, but many missionaries live in places where

availability is far more limited: "People expect a missionary to be able to do all of this —

that they should have the time to do it," Trott said (personal communication, December

20, 2010). "Expectations can be somewhat unrealistic with the technology capabilities

forgetting how far advanced America is compared with most of the world."

Need for censorship. The nature of missions work necessitates that they cannot

share everything with everyone — sometimes for their own security and sometimes out

of respect of the national people. New media are the way missionaries communicate with

people at home, but they are also a means of communication for relationships with

nationals. Because of this broad audience, missionaries must carefully monitor what they

communicate through new media, particularly on public sites like Facebook. Nearly all of

the missionaries interviewed brought up the need to censor what they communicate.

Friesen has become increasingly aware of her communication the longer she has

been overseas and the more national friends she has on Facebook: "Now that I have

Ukrainian friends, I have to think twice — I don't want to say something that will offend

them," Friesen said (personal communication, November 15, 2010).

McLain started her missionary career in South Africa, using Facebook as a tool of

communication to both overseas and national friends. However, a traumatic home

invasion changed her philosophy of how she would use this social medium in the future: "After what happened to me in South Africa, Facebook became my worst enemy," McLain said (personal communication, November 13, 2010). She no longer uses it for ministry-related information, but instead keeps it strictly to personally communication with friends in the U.S.: "I kept it more personal … [and] I control much more of what I let everybody see."

Portugal does not communicate via Facebook, but his daughter does. However, she keeps the ministry-related communication to private messages instead of posting on her public wall in order to censor who sees what information. When Portugal does send e-mail updates, he is very cautious about how much information he includes: "I try to not to be very specific about happenings with people in a personal way," Portugal said (personal communication, November 3, 2010). When he does tell a personal story, he seeks to get that person's approval before including it.

According to Portugal, the need for censorship is also the reason he does not use YouTube to post videos about his ministry. Portugal said, "I struggle with the idea of putting our ministry on YouTube where everybody can watch it and have our neighbors see that" (personal communication, November 3, 2010).

Barnes experienced exactly what Portugal fears when he lived in Hungary. Barnes put a picture in a newsletter of a couple that was close to accepting Christ, but one day the woman was at his house, saw her picture on the refrigerator and asked why. Although nothing negative came out of it that time, the situation could have ended the couple's relationship with Barnes: "It's an experience that's made me a lot more cautious," Barnes

said (personal communication, November 10, 2010). Supporters sometimes put Barnes'

prayer letter on their website or Facebook page, so now he has even more need to censor

what he communicates: "When that information relates to a specific person, you have to

be really careful in how you communicate that" (personal communication, November 10,

2010).

Thigpen said she tries not to include very specific ministry information either

because of her Facebook friends that are nationals. If she posted about everything she

was doing to reach their country, they might feel threatened and she might lose her

relationship with them. Thigpen said, "I want to update in general … but I can't. I can't

have everybody see everything I'm doing" (personal communication, November 18,

2010).

Conclusion

The technology revolution and the emergency of new media have changed the

way people communicate with each other. Throughout the history of modern missions,

missionaries have used the media technologies of their time for missional communication

purposes. As noted, missionaries printed publications and broadcasted programs to

communicate with their target audiences, whether those whom they would evangelize or

those at home who supported them. As happened in the aftermath of previous media

technological revolutions, missionaries have assimilated new media into their

communicational purposes.

The new media present them with a variety of advantages — such as the capacity

for a broad, intentional audience, immediacy and connectedness — as well as

disadvantages — such as the tendency toward uncontrolled information, the expectation of immediacy and over-connectedness. True, missionaries must be conscious of the dangers associated with these new media. Without taking the proper censorship precautions, the use of social media could threaten the ministry and even the life of the missionaries. But even with the potential danger, the new media's immediacy and interactivity allow missionaries to communicate anything they want to people overseas and receive immediately feedback, making communication easier and more efficient than every before. Hawkins said this about how communication has changed on the mission field:

> Missionary friends have often commented on the difficulties of communication only fifteen years ago. There was no Internet available, phone calls were much too expensive to use often and letters took nearly a month to receive. Therefore the strain of separation and isolation was much worse and harder to relieve. Ministry was hampered because of a shortage of supplies [and] problems that required communication to resolve lingered and worsened because of the slower communication links. (personal communication, November 8, 2010)

Now missionaries can communicate unlimited information with anyone in the world immediately — with all the benefits and hindrances that ability entails.

Because personal communication has completely changed in the last 50 years, no one can say for sure what communication will look like 50 years from now. Perhaps a new technology will be invented tomorrow that will again revolutionize society. Certainly the field of missions would be unsuccessful without a personal relationship

aspect, so missionaries will probably never forsake face-to-face communication completely. But more than likely missionaries will begin to utilize the new media discussed here not only for personal communication with family and friends, but also for spreading the gospel among their local acquaintances. Ultimately, no one can say what the future of media in missions will hold, so missionaries must simply wait and see, continuing to use whatever means is relevant to reach the world.

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