

ELECTRONIC DISTRIBUTION OF BEHAVIOR ANALYTIC PUBLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT: The mainstay of professional behavior analytic publications is the venerable quarterly journal transcribed, reproduced and distributed on paper parchment. However, texts and diversified forms of publications are now being distributed via magnetic media. This advancement enables low cost distribution of text and software on 3.5-inch diskettes. Presently available word processors provide the means for generating electronic text, which, in turn, introduces the possibilities for journal distribution by diskette.

If a journal were issued as a diskette the cost per copy would be substantially reduced. Articles with embedded charts, tables, and figures could be accepted on diskette, edited and included in the journal with no retyping costs. This strategy would provide editors and readers with a new options for distributing behavior analytic literature and technology.

Verbal behavior has evolved in form and function. Perhaps initially emerging as a guttural and gestural means of cuing collaboration, such behavior may have facilitated the stalking of prey as well as "communicating" other basic survival interactions (Catania, 1992). Vocal verbal behavior eventually surfaced in the form of rules which were handed down from person to person. Textual verbal behavior gradually emerged, was formally recorded more precisely and permanently on clay tablets and papyrus to be passed on to cohorts and succeeding generations of interested consumers of the written word.

More recent innovations have accelerated verbal transmissions exponentially. Transcription of textual verbal behavior has evolved from manual to electric typewriters to the word processor in less than a generation. And word processing capabilities have moved from large mainframe computers to desk top, then laptop and down (in size) to the notebook computer. While physical structures have steadily diminished, functional capabilities have steadily increased. Yet, curiously, most of the professional and scientific literature presently encoded electronically is reproduced, distributed and decoded from parchment not unlike that transcribed and distributed by our early ancestors.

Emergent electronic technology has also impacted the behavioral community. The past decade has witnessed an explosion in use of electronic transmission by both academic and nonacademic communities. Several avenues along which data are circulated include local area networks (LAN), the Internet, and CD-ROM.

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The LAN, using telecommunication lines, links all computers on a particular campus, all computers within an office and/or a corporation; however, LAN does not allow communication access to others that are not part of that particular communal network.

The advent of the Internet has linked behavior analysts worldwide. [When the term "communication highway" is used to describe information flow, the speaker is describing Internet capabilities.] Internet allows its users to share ideas, exchange views on a topic, display papers to millions of Internet users (estimated to be 100 million by 1998). Paradoxically, today's preferred mode for dispersing professional behavior analytic publications remains the venerable quarterly journal as transcribed on paper parchment. Networking has not replaced this process for several reasons: 1) networking does not lend itself to the extended editing procedures for which many of our most prominent journals are renowned; 2) navigating through the Internet is a complicated process for many new users; 3) although the cost of using Internet is considerably lower than other communication channels, it is nevertheless expensive for those who are not linked through supporting institutions or agencies; and 4) access to many Internet hosts is limited due to the finite number of ports that are available on any particular system. On any given occasion, heavy Internet traffic may preclude a user from logging on to a host.

Certainly CD-ROM provides the most advanced and interesting multimedia collections of full text articles, encyclopedias, video, sound and photos. However, CD-ROM requires CD-ROM drives and benefits from at least 5 MB of hard disk space, 8-bit digital sound boards and other accessories. Many of these components are not yet widely available, and the cost per disc is prohibitive to students (ranging from \$30.00 to \$150.00 per individual disc). More importantly, CDs currently cannot be produced or edited on most personal computers.

But there is a relatively quiet and economical publication revolution in progress within our culture. Traditional bookstores are now distributing magnetic media in conjunction with their typeset parchment. This advance enables low cost distribution of text and software on 3.5-inch diskettes. Educational and recreational information addressing such diverse subjects as statistics, financial planning, basic algebra, calculus, adventure stories, games, and instructions on learning-to-use-a-PC are currently available on disks in many bookstores.

Since most of today's journals are produced using word processors, it would not require too great a leap editorially to incorporate text, charts, tables and figures into a document. And once within a document, these could be easily indexed, footnoted and provided a table of contents. Articles with embedded charts, tables, and figures could be accepted on diskette, edited and included in the journal with minimal retyping expenditure. Most journals are, in fact, created on word processors. The most expensive aspect of journal publication consists of payment to printing houses to convert the transcriptions from 3.5-inch disks to hard copy (i.e., paper). A journal issued on diskette(s) could cost as little as \$2.00 per copy, if the original diskettes are purchased in bulk units. Furthermore, postal distribution of disks is comparatively nominal. This would enable our international colleagues to obtain current research at a relatively low cost. Publishing via diskette would also eliminate

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cost overruns for unused copies. (If a copy is not mailed it would be erased and the diskette reused.) Upon receiving the disk, the reader would have a couple of options. The reader could print out the entire text and read the hard copy, or simply read the text in view mode and switch to display mode when figures are indicated.

In the future we can expect computers to become even smaller and prices to drop even more. Graphical user interfaces will gradually become the standard so that people can point and click at small icon pictures and lists of tasks or text. Laptop computers and even smaller palmtop computers will replace the larger PCs now being used. Computers and modems linked by wireless cellular radio/TV technology will allow a single computer user to go anywhere and immediately interface with other users anywhere in the world. These enhanced communication capabilities will provide the behavior analyst with an almost instant source of current data, which, in turn, will enable faster information flow between co-workers in different offices and colleagues in distant countries. These capabilities will drastically revise the present formats of most, if not all, behavioral journals now in circulation.

One significant aspect of this revision could include development of at least one new behavioral journal exclusively drafted, edited, and distributed via 3.5 inch diskette. The initial focus of this journal might be directed toward advances in communication within behavior analysis, including articles relevant to technical, conceptual, and experimental issues. Such a journal is presently under active consideration and may be a subject discussed in forthcoming international development workshops. At this juncture, we are inviting behavior analysts who are interested in contributing to the development of such a project to contact the authors. The authors would also welcome feedback from interested readers on other challenges to be faced in preparing for the age of the electronic journal.

REFERENCE

Catania A. C. (1992). Learning: Third edition. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.