Bringing the arts, humanities, and the sciences together

A media researcher’s perspective

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Media research at the IRC

Experimentation with novel configurations of digital media tools, forms, and practices to...

- increase knowledge;
- increase the impact of knowledge;
- measure the impact of media on audiences;
- create novel visual phenomena to advance visual language.
Media research at the IRC

Core staff supporting research is approximately 50% artists, 50% software engineers.
Researchers from UMBC and elsewhere collaborate in the lab.

Multidisciplinary hub for *transdisciplinary* work.

We *integrate* the methods of the arts, humanities, sciences, and technology.
Media research at the IRC

Social focus of IRC research:
  Health
  Education
  Urban challenges
  The environment

We experiment with media to shift beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors in these areas.
Media research at the IRC

Some observations.
Media research at the IRC

A guiding question:

How do you really connect people to knowledge and ideas such that their choices are affected?
Observations

Going back a ways…

The Enlightenment:

  Freedom to discover.

  Freedom to share.

  The truth will guide our choices.

Not so fast.

John Locke by Godfrey Kneller
Human beings are capable of great feats of reason that don’t necessarily determine what we do.
Factors in behavior

So what does influence behaviors?

Two of the most powerful yet flexible forces are:

  Identity
  Culture

  “People like me do things like this.”

Seth Godin
Stories we tell ourselves about who we are

Stories, communicated most powerfully through images, shape identity and culture.

To change the behavior, change the story.

Hence, the profound need for the arts and humanities.
Media research at the IRC

We look for *counter narratives*:

True stories that flip the prevailing narrative.

Two examples...
Euphoria

A science-based, self-help art film.

A feature film to combat substance misuse among youth.

Sponsor: NIDA/NIH
Euphoria

Shaming kids for wanting to feel good in a country built for the pursuit of happiness;
telling them to “just say no”;
all in didactic health films and 30-seconds spots…
wasn’t working.
Euphoria asked young people if they wanted to feel as good as possible for as long as possible.

We shared knowledge (neuroscience and psychology) about how that might work.
The form we used was a continuous stream of high-key visual metaphors.

Ambiguous analogies: an arts method.

They required students to reflect and discuss to unlock the meaning.
Successful transfer of neuroscience knowledge.
Sparked peer discussion.
Engaged student audiences as entertainment more than the *Tornado Chasers* sham film.
(n= 500 high school students.)
Successful at festivals, won awards as a film.
Truth Campaign

The Master Settlement with “big tobacco” yielded tens of billions of dollars for public health.

To counter the ”smoking is bad for you” narrative, ineffective on youth,

*The Truth* campaign media designers told youth they were chumps for industry.
Truth Campaign

Smoking prevalence grades 8,10,12 declined 25.3% – 18.0% between 1999 and 2002.

The campaign accounted for approximately 22% of this decline (Farrelly, et al, 2005).

That’s creative storytelling.
National Academy of Sciences interviews

We interviewed leading scientists including several Nobel Laureates. (Venter, Lefkowitz, Kandel, Gates…)

A counter narrative emerged…
Disciplines are quaint. We made them up. Academia distorts the multidisciplinary nature of research today.

Science is necessary but not sufficient for addressing problems in the human realm. (Here, often referencing global warming as an example issue.)
National Academy of Sciences interviews

Can be seen/heard on iPads handed out at NAS Building; available at App Store, and on the web:

http://nasgreathall.org
We have long marginalized the arts and humanities in addressing our greatest human challenges.

It follows that the problems we’re left are the ones that can’t be solved without them.

We may be neglecting our most promising approaches.
Can public universities demonstrate leadership in research by integrating methods from the arts and humanities with the sciences to address our human challenges?