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COMMUNICATION ON NETWORKS AND STRONG RELIABILITY

MARIE LACLAU, LUDOVIC RENO, AND XAVIER VENEL

ABSTRACT. We consider sender-receiver games, where the sender and the receiver are two distant nodes on a communication network. We show that if the network has two disjoint paths of communication between the sender and the receiver, then we can replicate not only all equilibrium outcomes of the direct communication game (i.e., when the sender and the receiver communicate directly with each other), but also of the mediated game (i.e., when the sender and the receiver communicate with the help of a mediator).

KEYWORDS: Cheap talk, direct, mediated, communication, protocol, network.

JEL CLASSIFICATION: C72; D82.

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1. INTRODUCTION

We study sender-receiver games on communication networks, where the information from the sender to the receiver may have to flow through self-interested intermediaries. The question we address is: When is it possible to emulate direct, or even mediated (i.e., with a mediator), communication between the sender and the receiver as indirect, but unmediated (i.e., without a mediator), communication?

More precisely, consider a sender-receiver game and a communication equilibrium of that game, that is, an equilibrium where the sender and the receiver can communicate privately and securely with a trusted mediator – see Forges (1986) and Myerson (1986). Now, assume that no trusted mediator exists, but there exists a communication network, with the sender and the receiver as two distant nodes – the other nodes are intermediaries. The communication network models the communication possibilities, i.e., who can send a message to whom, and thus naturally induces a multi-stage communication game. The question we address is: When are we guaranteed to have a weak perfect Bayesian equilibrium (henceforth, wPBE) of the multi-stage game that replicates the communication equilibrium? By “guaranteed,” we mean that the answer should be independent of the preferences of the intermediaries, and of the selected communication equilibrium.

We prove that we are guaranteed to replicate all communication equilibria as wPBE of multi-stage games on communication networks if, and only if, there exist (at least) two disjoint paths of communication between the sender and the receiver. The central insight of our analysis is the tight connection with the concept of strong reliability – a close relative of the concept of reliability in Computer Science. To define the concept of strong reliability, consider the following problem: the sender wishes to transmit a message to the receiver through the communication network. The problem is to construct a communication protocol, with the property that the receiver correctly learns the message sent at all histories consistent with at most k intermediaries deviating at every round of the protocol. (Different intermediaries can deviate at different rounds.) We call this property: k -strong reliability. It guarantees that the transmission of the message can tolerate some mistakes, errors or even deliberate disruptions in communication.

We show that 1-strong reliability (for short, strong reliability) is possible on a network if, and only if, there are two disjoint paths of communication between the sender and the receiver. Thus, the wPBE implementation of all communication equilibria on networks

and the strong reliability of communication on networks are equivalent, that is, if the former is guaranteed on the network \mathcal{N} , so is the latter, and conversely.

We now provide some intuition for such a tight connection. There are two states and two actions, and the sender and the receiver want to match the state. Clearly, there exists an equilibrium of the direct communication game, where the sender truthfully reveals the state and the receiver matches the state. Assume now that the communication between the sender and the receiver is intermediated, with all intermediaries preferring the receiver to un-match the state. The equilibrium distribution (of the direct communication game) is therefore the least preferred outcome of any intermediary – any other distribution is strictly preferred. Thus, if an intermediary deviates at any stage of the indirect multi-stage communication game, the deviation must *not* change the distribution to be non-profitable. Now, at any information set which follows the deviation, *sequential rationality* dictates that no other intermediary must have a profitable deviation either, i.e., no other intermediary must be able to change the distribution. Therefore, not only the correct distribution must be implemented at all on-path histories, but also at histories which are reachable via sequences of unilateral deviations. (We stress that this is a consequence of imposing sequential rationality, a novelty of this paper – see the review of literature.) This is what strong reliability achieves.

Two additional observations are worth noting. First, if we restrict attention to the (unmediated) equilibria of sender-receiver games (i.e., when the sender communicates with the receiver), the same condition on the network is necessary and sufficient. Thus, the connectivity requirement does not increase as we move from the (unmediated) equilibria to the communication equilibria. This is particularly important as some communication equilibria can Pareto-improve over all (unmediated) equilibria. In these instances, indirect communication dominates direct communication. In other words, communicating through layers of intermediaries may actually benefit the sender and the receiver (compared to direct communication). Second, the protocols we construct require several rounds of communication and rich communication possibilities. In particular, players must be able to *broadcast* messages to any subset of their neighbors. Broadcasting a message to a group insures common knowledge of the message among the group's members. It is a very natural assumption: face-to-face meetings, online meetings via platforms like Zoom or Microsoft Teams, Whatsapp groups, all makes it possible to broadcast to a group.

We conclude with an insight of our analysis for organization theory. In large organizations, such as public administrations, governments, armed forces and multinational corporations, information typically flows through the different layers of the organization, from engineers, sales representatives, accountants to top managers and executives. Communication is indirect. While indirect communication is necessary in large organizations, it may harm the effective transmission of valuable information. Indeed, as the objectives of members of an organization are rarely perfectly aligned, distorting, delaying or even suppressing the transmission of information are natural ways, among others, for members of the organization to achieve their own objectives. Does there exist organizational arrangements, which mitigate these issues? An insight of this paper is that there is: *matrix organization*.¹

Matrix organization (or management) consists in organizing activities along more than one dimension, e.g., function (marketing, accounting, engineering, R&D, etc), geography (US, Europe, Asia, etc) or products. From the early 60's to the present, large corporations such as NASA, IBM, Pearson, Siemens and Starbucks have adopted this mode of management. A central feature of matrix organization is *multiple* reporting lines, that is, low-level employees report to multiple independent managers. E.g., an engineer working on a project to be implemented in Europe will report to the manager of the engineering division, to the manager of the project and to the manager of the European division. In other words, the information can flow via independent channels. An insight of our analysis is that this is the main reason why matrix organization facilitates the effective communication of valuable information. (See Baron and Besanko, 1996, and Harriv and Raviy, 2002, for economic models of matrix organization and Galbraith, 2009, and Schrötter, 2014, for qualitative analysis.) However, this comes at a cost: frequent meetings and emailing. (In our model, this corresponds to the many rounds of communication required.) The tendency of matrix organization to generate countless meetings was already noticed in the late 70's.

Top managers were spending more time than ever before in meetings or in airplanes taking them to and from meetings. (McKinsey Quarterly Review, "Beyond matrix organization." September 1979.²)

¹We do not claim that matrix organization was designed with this goal in mind; it is rather a consequence, perhaps even unintended, of its design.

²<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/beyond-the-matrix-organization#>

Related literature. This paper is related to several strands of literature. The commonality between these strands of literature is the construction of protocols to *securely* transmit a message from a sender to a receiver on a communication network. The secure transmission of a message requires that (i) the receiver correctly learns the sender's message, and (ii) intermediaries do not obtain additional information about the message, while executing the protocol. Reliability (or resiliency) refers to the first requirement, while secrecy refers to the second.

To start with, there is a large literature in Computer Science, which studies the problem of secure transmission of messages on communication networks. See, among others, Beimel and Franklin (1999), Dolev et al. (1993), Linial (1994), Franklin and Wright (2004), Renault and Tomala (2008), and Renault and al. (2014). This literature provides conditions on the topology of the communication networks for the secure transmission of a message from a sender to a receiver. See Renault and al. (2014) for a summary of these results. An important assumption of all this literature is that the adversary controls a *fixed* set of nodes throughout the execution of the communication protocols. The adversary we consider is stronger in that it can control different sets of nodes at each round of communication. To the best of our knowledge, such an adversary has not been studied in the computer science literature. However, we restrict attention to singletons, while the computer science literature considers larger sets.

This paper is also related to the literature on repeated games on networks, where the network models the monitoring structure and/or the communication possibilities. See, among others, Ben-Porath and Kahneman (1996), Laclau (2012, 2014), Renault and Tomala (1998), Tomala (2011) and Wolitzky (2015). This literature characterizes the networks for which folk theorems exist. An essential step in obtaining a folk theorem is the construction of protocols, which guarantee that upon observing a deviation, players start a punishment phase. To do so, when a player observes a deviation, he must be able to securely transmit the message “my neighbor has deviated” to all other players.

With the exception of Wolitzky (2015), none of these papers have imposed sequential rationality, while restricting the communication to a network. Either the communication is restricted to a network, in which case the solution concept is Nash equilibrium (Laclau, 2012; Renault and Tomala, 1998; Tomala, 2011), or the communication is unrestricted, in which case sequential rationality is imposed (Ben-Porath and Kahneman, 1996; Laclau, 2014). (In the latter case, the network models the structure of observation

and/or interaction, but not the communication possibilities.) Wolitzky (2015) imposes sequential rationality and restricts communication to a network. However, he assumes that either a mutual-minmax Nash equilibrium exists or that players have access to undifferentiated tokens, which can be freely transferred among neighbors, in addition to cheap talk messages. We make none of these assumptions. (In fact, the existence of a mutual-minmax Nash equilibrium imposes restrictions on the preferences of the intermediaries, which is at odd with our analysis.)

This paper is also related to the literature on mediated and unmediated communication in games. Regarding mediated communication, see, among others, Aumann (1974), Ben-Porath (1998), Forges (1986, 1990), Forges and Vida (2013), Myerson (1986), Renou and Tomala (2012) and Rivera (2018). In common with the literature on unmediated communication in games, e.g., Barany (1985), Forges (1990), Forges and Vida (2013), or Gerardi (2004), we show that we can emulate mediated communication with unmediated communication. The novelty is that communication is restricted to a network, albeit for a particular class of games, i.e., sender-receiver games.

Renou and Tomala (2012) and Rivera (2018) consider mediated communication games, where not all players can communicate directly with the mediator. The mediator is a fixed node in a communication network. These authors characterize the communication networks, which make it possible to replicate all the equilibrium outcomes of the direct communication game, i.e., when the players can communicate directly with the mediator.³ There are three major differences with our work. First, we do not have a mediator. In fact, we show how we can emulate the mediator on the network. Second, these authors restrict the communication to be unicast, i.e., group meetings are not allowed, while we consider rich communication possibilities. Third, they do not impose *strong* reliability (in the sense that the transmission of messages is reliable *after all histories consistent with unilateral deviations*). While none of their constructions guarantee strong reliability, these authors are nonetheless able to impose sequential rationality. Renou and Tomala (2012) achieve this by restricting attention to games with either independent private values or with a strict punishment. Rivera (2018) needs three disjoint paths of communication.

³Renou and Tomala (2012) study pure adverse selection problems, while Rivera (2018) extends their analysis to both adverse selection and moral hazard. A common thread of these papers is the need to construct secret and reliable protocols so that players (resp., the mediator) can transmit their private information (resp., private recommendations) to the mediator (resp., the players).

Finally, this paper is related to the large literature on cheap talk games, pioneered by Crawford and Sobel (1984) and Aumann and Hart (1993, 2003). See Forges (2020) for a recent survey. The closest paper to ours is Ambrus et al. (2014). These authors consider simple communication networks (perfectly hierarchical networks) and restrict attention to a particular class of games. Their emphasis is complementary to ours. We ask when it is possible to wPBE implement all communication equilibrium outcomes of sender-receiver games on a communication network, while they ask what are the equilibrium outcomes of their fixed game. Another related paper is Migrow (2021). Building on the work of Ambrus et al. (2014), Migrow shows that indirect communication can improve upon direct communication – suitably designed hierarchies of intermediaries can simulate some of the outcomes mediated communication would achieve. Again, as in Ambrus et al., a particular class of games and communication networks is considered. In addition, a detailed knowledge of the preferences of the intermediaries is needed.

2. THE SETUP

2.1. The problem. We start with some mathematical preliminaries. Unless indicated otherwise, all sets X are complete separable metric spaces, endowed with their Borel σ -algebra \mathbb{B}_X . We write $\Delta(X)$ for the set of probability measures on X . Let X and Y be two complete separable metric spaces. A probability kernel is a function $f : Y \times \mathbb{B}_X \rightarrow [0, 1]$ such that (i) for all $y \in Y$, $f(y, \cdot) : \mathbb{B}_X \rightarrow [0, 1]$ is a probability measure, and (ii) for all $B \in \mathbb{B}_X$, $f(\cdot, B) : Y \rightarrow [0, 1]$ is measurable. Throughout, we abuse notation and write $f : Y \rightarrow \Delta(X)$ for the probability kernel $f : Y \times \mathbb{B}_X \rightarrow [0, 1]$.

There are a sender and a receiver, labelled S and R , respectively. The sender knows a payoff-relevant state $\omega \in \Omega$, with $\nu \in \Delta(\Omega)$ the prior probability. The receiver takes an action $a \in A$. For all $i \in \{S, R\}$, player i 's payoff function is $u_i : A \times \Omega \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$, which we assume to be measurable.

Direct communication. In the direct communication game, the sender directly communicates with the receiver, that is, the sender sends a message $m \in M$ to the receiver, prior to the receiver choosing an action $a \in A$. A strategy for the sender is a map $\sigma : \Omega \rightarrow \Delta(M)$, while a strategy for the receiver is a map $\tau : M \rightarrow \Delta(A)$. We denote $\mathcal{E}^d \subseteq \Delta(\Omega \times A)$ the set of (Bayes-Nash) equilibrium distributions over states and actions of the direct communication game. Note that we may have $\mathcal{E}^d = \emptyset$.

Mediated communication. In the mediated communication game, the sender first sends a message $m \in M$ to a mediator. The mediator then sends a message $r \in R$, possibly randomly, to the receiver, who then takes an action $a \in A$. A strategy for the sender is a map $\sigma : \Omega \rightarrow \Delta(M)$, while a strategy for the receiver is a map $\tau : R \rightarrow \Delta(A)$. The mediator follows a recommendation rule: $\varphi : M \rightarrow \Delta(R)$. A communication equilibrium is a communication device $\langle M, R, \varphi \rangle$ and an equilibrium (σ^*, τ^*) of the mediated game. Thanks to the revelation principle (Forges, 1986 and Myerson, 1986), we can restrict attention to canonical communication equilibria, where $M = \Omega$, $R = A$, the sender has an incentive to be truthful (to report the true state), and the receiver has an incentive to be obedient (to follow the recommendation). We denote $\mathcal{CE}^d \subseteq \Delta(A \times \Omega)$ the set of communication equilibrium distributions over actions and states of the mediated communication game. It is well-known that $\mathcal{E}^d \subseteq \mathcal{CE}^d$.

To illustrate these concepts, consider the game in Figure 1 due to Farrell (1988), where both states are equally likely.

(u_S, u_R)	a	b	c
ω	2, 3	0, 2	-1, 0
ω'	1, 0	2, 2	0, 3

FIGURE 1. An example (Farrell, 1988)

Farrell proves that the receiver takes action b in all equilibria of the direct communication game. The sender's payoff is therefore 0 (resp., 2) when the state is ω (resp., ω'), while the receiver's payoff is 2. As argued by Myerson (1991), there exists a communication equilibrium, where both the receiver and the sender are better off. To see this, assume that the mediator recommends action b to the receiver at state ω' and randomizes uniformly between the recommendations a and b at ω . Upon observing the recommendation a , (resp., b), the receiver infers that the state is ω with probability 1 (resp., $1/3$) and, therefore, has an incentive to be obedient. Similarly, the sender has an incentive to truthfully report his private information. The sender's payoff is therefore 1 (resp., 2) when the state is ω (resp., ω'), while the receiver's payoff is $9/4$. Both the sender and receiver are better off.

As the above example illustrates, the sender and the receiver can benefit from mediated communication. However, this requires the existence of a trusted mediator, a rather strong assumption. A message of this paper is that there is a way to organize the communication between the sender and the receiver so as to emulate the trusted mediator.

The communication must be indirect and intermediated. (As we shall see later, the possibility to emulate the mediator with indirect communication will be independent of the preferences of the intermediaries.) We now turn to a formal description of indirect communication.

Communication game on a network (indirect communication). To model indirect communication, we assume that the sender and the receiver are two distinct nodes on an (undirected) network \mathcal{N} . The set of nodes, other than S and R , is denoted I , which we interpret as a set of n intermediaries. Communication between the sender and the receiver transits through these intermediaries. We let \mathcal{N}_i be the set of neighbors of $i \in I^* := I \cup \{S, R\}$ in the network. Throughout, we assume that the sender and the receiver are not directly connected in the network \mathcal{N} .

A communication game on the network \mathcal{N} is a multi-stage game with $T < \infty$ stages, where at each stage players send costless messages to their neighbors and the receiver decides either to take an action (and stop the game) or to continue communicating.

We first define *communication mechanisms*, denoted \mathcal{M} , as the sets of messages players can send to each others. We allow for a rich set of communication possibilities. Communication can be private, e.g., private emails or one-to-one meetings, or public, e.g., emails sent to distribution lists or group meetings, or a mixed of both. We say that player i *broadcasts* a message to a (non-empty) subset of his neighbors $N \subseteq \mathcal{N}_i$ if (i) all players in N receive the same message, and (ii) it is a common belief among all players in N that they have received the same message (in other words, the list of recipients of the message is certifiable among them). Face-to-face group meetings, online meetings via platforms like Zoom or Microsoft Teams, Whatsapp groups, all make it possible to broadcast to a group.

Communication unfolds as follows: at each stage t , players *broadcast* messages to all possible (non-empty) subsets of neighbors. The set of messages player i can broadcast to the subset of neighbors $N \in 2^{\mathcal{N}_i} \setminus \{\emptyset\}$ is \mathcal{M}_{iN} . Let $\mathcal{M}_i = \prod_{N \in 2^{\mathcal{N}_i} \setminus \{\emptyset\}} \mathcal{M}_{iN}$ be the set of messages available to player i , and $\mathcal{M} = \prod_{i \in I^*} \mathcal{M}_i$ the set of messages available to all players. Few remarks are worth making. First, private messages correspond to broadcasting to singletons. Players can thus send private messages to their neighbors. Second, the sets of messages available to a player are independent of both time and past histories of messages sent and received. The latter is with loss of generality. However, without such an assumption, the model has no bite. Indeed, if the only message player

i can transmit upon receiving the message m is the message m itself, an extreme form of history dependence, then we trivially reproduce direct communication with indirect communication and we can not generate more equilibrium.

Our interpretation of the communication network is the following. In modern organizations, most employees, from top-executives to low-level managers, devote a significant fraction of their time to internal communication: they draft and circulate memos, attend and call meetings, write e-mail, etc. The network \mathcal{N} captures these communication possibilities, particularly who can call a meeting with whom. If there is a link between players i and j and between players i and k , player i can communicate with players j and k both privately (face-to-face meetings) and publicly (group meetings). In organizations, meetings serve several functions, from communicating information to making decisions through generating ideas. The former, i.e., meetings as information forum, is the closest to the role meetings play in our analysis. When player i broadcasts a message to players j and k , player i informs players j and k .

Finally, we need two additional elements to obtain the communication game from the communication mechanism. First, we assume that at each stage, the receiver can either take an action $a \in A$ or continue communicating, in which case he sends a message $m_R \in \mathcal{M}_R$. If the receiver takes the action a , the game stops. Second, we need to associate payoffs with terminal histories. The payoff to player $i \in I^*$ is $u_i(a, \omega)$ when the state is ω and the receiver takes action a , with $u_i : A \times \Omega \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ a measurable function. (If the receiver never takes an action, the payoff to all players is $-\infty$.) Thus, communication is purely cheap talk. We denote $\Gamma(\mathcal{M}, \mathcal{N})$ the communication game induced by the mechanism \mathcal{M} on the network \mathcal{N} .

Strategies and equilibrium. A history of messages received and sent by player i up to (but not including) period t is denoted h_i^t , with H_i^t the set of all such histories. A (pure) strategy for player $i \in I$ is a collection of maps $\sigma_i = (\sigma_{i,t})_{t \geq 1}$, where at each stage t , $\sigma_{i,t}$ maps H_i^t to \mathcal{M}_i . A (pure) strategy for the sender is a collection of maps $\sigma_S = (\sigma_{S,t})_{t \geq 1}$, where at each stage t , $\sigma_{S,t}$ maps $\Omega \times H_S^t$ to \mathcal{M}_S . A (pure) strategy for the receiver is a collection of maps $\sigma_R = (\sigma_{R,t})_{t \geq 1}$, where at each stage t , $\sigma_{R,t}$ maps H_R^t to $\mathcal{M}_R \cup A$. With a slight abuse of notation, we use the same notation for behavioral strategies. Let $H^t = \times_{i \in I^*} H_i^t$. We write $\mathbb{P}_\sigma(\cdot | h^t)$ for the distribution over terminal histories and states induced by the strategy profile $\sigma = (\sigma_S, \sigma_R, (\sigma_i)_{i \in I})$, conditional on the history $h^t \in H^t$.

We write \mathbb{P}_σ for the distribution, conditional on the initial (empty) history. Note that any equilibrium distribution over actions and states is an element of \mathcal{CE}^d .

2.2. wPBE implementation of direct (resp., mediated) communication on a network. We are now ready to define the *wPBE implementation of direct communication (resp., mediated communication) on a network*. We first start with an informal description. We say that the wPBE implementation of direct communication (resp., mediated communication) is possible on a network if for every direct (resp., mediated) communication game, regardless of the preferences of the intermediaries, we can construct a communication game on the network with the property that for any Bayes-Nash equilibrium (resp., communication equilibrium) distribution over actions and states of the direct communication game (resp., mediated communication game), there exists a wPBE of the communication game, which replicates that distribution.

Definition 1. *wPBE implementation of direct communication (resp., mediated communication) is possible on the network \mathcal{N} if there exists a communication mechanism \mathcal{M} on \mathcal{N} such that for all utility profiles of the sender, receiver and intermediaries, for all distributions $\mu \in \mathcal{E}^d$ (resp., $\mu \in \mathcal{CE}^d$) of all sender-receiver games, there exists a weak perfect Bayesian equilibrium σ of $\Gamma(\mathcal{M}, \mathcal{N})$ satisfying:*

$$\text{marg}_{A \times \Omega} \mathbb{P}_\sigma = \mu.$$

In other words, if wPBE implementation of direct communication (resp. mediated communication) is possible on a network, it means that it is possible to replicate any equilibrium outcome of the direct (resp., mediated) game via intermediated (not to be confused with mediated) communication between the sender and the receiver, without the need for a trusted mediator, and regardless of the preferences of the intermediaries.

The solution concept is wPBE. As we shall see later, none of our arguments rely on “crazy” off-equilibrium path beliefs. Moreover, stronger solution concepts, such as sequential equilibrium, are generally not defined for arbitrary games as ours. (Remember that we only require the sets of states, actions, and messages to be Polish.)

3. THE THEOREM

This section characterizes the networks, for which the wPBE of direct and mediated communication is possible. We now illustrate, with the help of a simple example, some

of the difficulties the requirement of sequential rationality introduces. (Recall that the literature on unmediated communication on networks has not imposed the requirement of sequential rationality so far.⁴)

Suppose that there are two states and two actions. The sender and receiver want to match the state, while the intermediaries want to un-match the state. Clearly, there exists an equilibrium of the direct communication game, where the sender truthfully reveals the state and the receiver matches the state. The equilibrium distribution is the least preferred outcome of any intermediary – any other distribution is strictly preferred.

Thus, if an intermediary deviates at a stage in the indirect communication game, the deviation must *not* change the distribution to be non-profitable. Now, at any information set which follows the deviation, sequential rationality dictates that no other intermediary must have a profitable deviation either, i.e., no other intermediary must be able to change the distribution. Therefore, not only the correct distribution must be implemented at all on-path histories, but also at histories which are reachable via sequences of unilateral deviations.

This observation motivates the notion of *strong reliability*, which we introduce next. We will prove that strong reliability on a network is in fact equivalent to the wPBE implementation of direct, and mediated, communication on that network.

3.1. Strong reliability. Consider the following alternative problem: the sender wishes to transmit the message $m \in M$, a realization of the random variable m with distribution ν , to the receiver, through the network \mathcal{N} . We want to construct a *protocol*, i.e., a communication mechanism and a profile of strategies, such that the receiver correctly “learns” the message sent at all terminal histories consistent with *unilateral deviations*.

Before introducing formally the concept of strong reliability, we define what we mean by “consistent with unilateral deviations.” Fix a strategy profile σ . We define $\Sigma(\sigma)$ as the set of strategy profiles such that $\sigma' \in \Sigma(\sigma)$ if, and only if, there exists a sequence of intermediaries (i_1, \dots, i_t, \dots) such that $\sigma'_t = (\sigma'_{i_t, t}, \sigma_{-i_t, t})$ for all t . Thus, $\Sigma(\sigma)$ consists of all strategy profiles consistent with at most one intermediary deviating at each stage. Note that the same intermediary may deviate at several, or even all, stages. We let

⁴Wolitzky (2015) is an exception, but he needs additional assumptions.

$\mathcal{H}(\sigma)$ be the set of terminal histories consistent with $\Sigma(\sigma)$, that is, $h \in \mathcal{H}(\sigma)$ if there exists $\sigma' \in \Sigma(\sigma)$ such that h is in the support of $\mathbb{P}_{\sigma'}$.

We are now ready to define the concept of *strong reliability on a network*.

Definition 2. *Transmission of messages is strongly reliable on the network \mathcal{N} if there exist a protocol and a decoding rule $\mathbf{m}_d : H_R^{T+1} \rightarrow M$ such that*

$$\mathbb{P}_{\sigma'} \left(\left\{ h_R^{T+1} : \mathbf{m}_d(h_R^{T+1}) = m \right\} \middle| \mathbf{m} = m \right) = 1,$$

for all $\sigma' \in \Sigma(\sigma)$, for all m .

The study of the reliable transmission of messages on networks is not new, see Dolev et al (1993), for an early attempt in Computer Science. (See Renault et al., 2014, for a summary of the literature.) Computer scientists assume that an adversary controls at most k nodes and provide conditions on the network for the reliable transmission of messages. An important feature, however, is that the adversary controls the same k nodes throughout the execution of the protocol. This is a natural assumption in Computer Science, where communication is nearly instantaneous. An adversary would not have the time or capacity to take control of different nodes during the execution of the communication protocol.⁵ A distinctive feature of our analysis is to consider a *dynamic* adversary, i.e., an adversary which controls a different set of nodes at each round of the execution of the protocol. (However, we limit our attention to singletons, i.e., $k = 1$.) To the best of our knowledge, this is new.

The notion of strong reliability has a clear and strong motivation. We want the transmission of messages to be reliable not only in the case of errors and unintentional mistakes, but also in the case of intentional manipulations. For instance, without our notion of strong reliability, if a single e-mail were to not reach its recipients, this would entirely disrupt the communication. And if the content of a single e-mail were to be modified, an entirely different message would be transmitted. Strong reliability guarantees that the communication is resilient to these events.

The network in Figure 2 illustrates some of the difficulties with the requirement of strong reliability. There are three disjoint paths from the sender to the receiver, so it is tempting to use a majority argument. That is: to have the sender transmit his message

⁵Formally, the reliable transmission of messages requires that $\mathbb{P}_{(\sigma'_i, \sigma_{-i})} \left(\left\{ h_R^{T+1} : \mathbf{m}_d(h_R^{T+1}) = m \right\} \middle| \mathbf{m} = m \right) = 1$ for all σ'_i , for all $i \in I$. This is a weaker requirement than strong reliability.

to intermediaries 1, 2 and 3, and to have all intermediaries forward their messages. If the intermediaries are obedient, then the receiver obtains three identical copies of the message sent and thus learns it. Suppose now that the sender wishes to transmit the message m . If intermediary 1 reports $m' \neq m$ at the first stage and intermediary 5 reports $m'' \neq m$ at the second stage, the receiver then faces the profile of reports (m', m'', m) . Thus, we need the receiver to decode it as m . However, the receiver would receive the same profile of reports (m', m'', m) when the sender wishes to transmit the message m' , intermediary 3 reports m and intermediary 5 reports m'' . Since the receiver would decode it as m , he would learn the wrong message. Such a simple strategy does not work in general.⁶ We will need a more sophisticated construction.

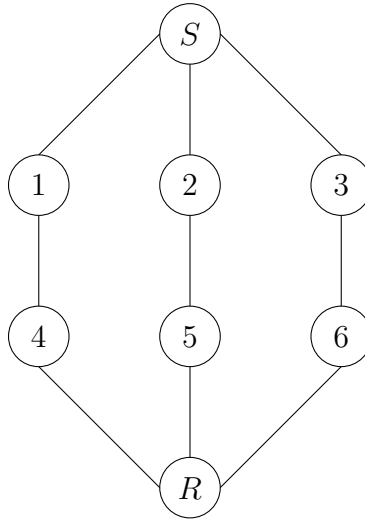


FIGURE 2. Illustration of the difficulties

3.2. The main result. We can now state our main result.

Theorem 1. *The following statements are equivalent.*

- (1) *wPBE implementation of mediated communication is possible on the network \mathcal{N} .*
- (2) *wPBE implementation of direct communication is possible on the network \mathcal{N} .*
- (3) *Transmission of messages is strongly reliable on the network \mathcal{N} .*
- (4) *The network \mathcal{N} admits two disjoint paths between the sender and the receiver.*

Theorem 1 states that if there are two disjoint paths between the sender and the receiver in the network, then wPBE implementation of mediated communication is possible. In other words, we can replicate the mediator through unmediated communication. As

⁶This simple strategy works if there are enough disjoint paths. In that example, we need two additional disjoint paths.

Farrell’s example illustrates – see Figure 1 – this implies that the sender and the receiver may be better off communicating through intermediaries, rather than directly. The theorem also states that the connectivity requirement to implement the communication equilibria is no stronger than the one required to implement the Bayes-Nash equilibrium of the underlying sender-receiver game.

3.3. Proof: the main idea. The proof of Theorem 1 is constructive and relegated to the Appendix. In what follows, we sketch the main idea.

(1) \Rightarrow (4), (2) \Rightarrow (4) **and** (3) \Rightarrow (4). It is easy to see that Statement (4) of Theorem 1 is necessary for all other statements to be satisfied. Indeed, if no two disjoint paths between the sender and the receiver exist, there exists an intermediary, who controls all the information transiting between the sender and the receiver. In graph-theoretic terms, the intermediary is a *cut* of the graph. In games where the sender and the receiver have perfectly aligned preferences, but the intermediaries have opposite preferences, the “cut” can then simulate the histories of messages he would have received in a particular state and behave accordingly. Thus, even in games with perfectly aligned preferences, neither strongly reliable transmission nor wPBE implementation of direct communication holds if there is a “cut” (and, a fortiori, neither wPBE implementation of mediated communication).

(4) \Rightarrow (3). We prove that if there are two disjoint paths between the sender and the receiver in \mathcal{N} , then strong reliability is possible. This is the most important part of the proof, which we now explain in detail.

Suppose that the sender wishes to send the message m to the receiver. We want to find a protocol (a communication mechanism and a strategy profile) such that the receiver correctly learns the message m not only at all on-path histories, but also at all histories consistent with at most one intermediary deviating at each stage of the protocol. We show that such a protocol exists when there are two disjoint paths between the sender and the receiver. Moreover, the receiver learns the message after at most $1 + (n^C - 3)(2n^C - 3)$ stages, where n^C is the number nodes on the two shortest disjoint paths from the sender to the receiver. We now illustrate our protocol with the help of the network in Figure 3. (The protocol we construct is slightly more complicated, but they share the same properties.)

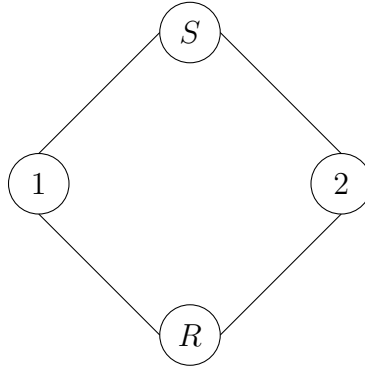


FIGURE 3. Illustration of Theorem 1

The protocol has six stages, which we now describe. To start with, the sender broadcasts the message m to intermediaries 1 and 2 at stage $t = 1$. At all other stages $t = 2, \dots, 6$, the protocol requires the intermediaries to broadcast the message m and an *authentication key* x_i^t , where x_i^t is the authentication key of intermediary i at stage t , an uniform draw from $[0, 1]$, independent of all messages the intermediary has sent and received. Finally, if the sender observes intermediary i broadcasting a message $m' \neq m$ at stage t , the sender broadcasts the triplet (i, t, x_i^t) at stage $t + 1$ (in addition to his other messages). We interpret the triplet (i, t, x_i^t) as stating that intermediary i has deviated at stage t and his authentication key is x_i^t . If an intermediary receives the triplet (i, t, x_i^t) at stage $t + 1$, the protocol requires the intermediary to broadcast that triplet at all subsequent stages.

The receiver does not send messages. At the end of the six stages, the receiver decodes the message as follows. If at any stage, the receiver has received the same message from both intermediaries, then he decodes it as being the correct message. In all other instances, if the receiver has received the *same* message m_i from intermediary i at stages t_1, t_2 and t_3 ($t_1 < t_2 < t_3$), and he has *not* received the triplet $(i, t_1, x_i^{t_1})$ from the other intermediary by stage t_3 , then he assumes that the correct message is m_i .⁷

We now argue that the protocol guarantees the strong reliability of the transmission. To start with, since at most one intermediary deviates at any stage, the protocol guarantees that the receiver obtains at least one sequence of three identical messages from either intermediary 1 or 2. Moreover, if at any stage, the receiver obtains the same message from both intermediaries, it must be the correct message (since at least one intermediary is broadcasting the correct message). So, assume that the receiver obtains

⁷Equivalently, the receiver assumes that the correct message is m_i when he has received m_i from intermediary i at stages t_1, t_2 and t_3 , and all triplets $(i, t_1, y_i^{t_1})$ received from the intermediary $3 - i$ by stage t_3 are such that $y_i^{t_1}$ is different from $x_i^{t_1}$, the authentication key received from i at stage t_1 .

the message m_i from intermediary i at stages t_1, t_2 and t_3 ($t_1 < t_2 < t_3$). If $m_i \neq m$ (hence intermediary i is deviating at stages t_1, t_2 and t_3), the protocol requires the sender to broadcast the triplet $(i, t_1, x_i^{t_1})$ at stage $t_1 + 1 \leq t_2$. The protocol also requires intermediary $j \neq i$ to broadcast the triplet $(i, t_1, x_i^{t_1})$ at all stages after having received it. Hence, the receiver obtains the triplet at stage t_3 at the latest. Indeed, since intermediary i is deviating at the stages (t_1, t_2, t_3) , intermediary $j \neq i$ cannot be deviating at t_2 and t_3 . Since the authentication key received from intermediary j at either t_2 or t_3 matches the key received from intermediary i at t_1 , the receiver learns that the message m_i is not correct. The correct message must therefore be the one broadcasted by intermediary j at stage t_1 , that is, m . Alternatively, if $m_i = m$, the sender does not broadcast the triplet $(i, t_1, x_i^{t_1})$. Intermediary j may pretend that the sender had sent the triplet $(i, t_1, y_i^{t_1})$ at stage $t_1 + 1$. However, the probability that the reported authentication key $y_i^{t_1}$ matches the actual authentication key $x_i^{t_1}$ is zero and, therefore, the receiver correctly infers that the message is m .

We now preview some secondary aspects of the above construction. First, the protocol is robust to deviations by the sender at all stages but the initial stage (where the sender broadcasts m). Indeed, if the sender deviates at stage $t \geq 2$, the two intermediaries don't, and the receiver then correctly learns the message. Similarly, it is trivially robust to deviations by the receiver at all stages but the last one. The protocol we construct shares these two properties, which are key in proving that (4) \Rightarrow (1) as we shall see. Second, the protocol starts with the two immediate successors of the sender on the two disjoint paths to the receiver learning the message m . At the end of the communication protocol, the receiver also learns the message. In general, the receiver is not the immediate successor of these intermediaries; other intermediaries are. The key step in our construction is to show that at least one of the immediate successors of these intermediaries correctly learns the message at the end of a first block of communication. Therefore, as the protocol goes through blocks, the receiver eventually learns the message. Moreover, each block has $2n^C - 3$ stages. (Recall that n^C is the total number of nodes on the two disjoint paths from the sender to the receiver, including them.) Thus, the receiver learns the message in at most $1 + (2n^C - 3)(n^C - 3)$ stages, where the two

immediate successors of the sender learns m immediately and then each of the remaining $n^C - 3$ players, who do not know m yet, learns the message progressively over time.⁸

(4) \Rightarrow (1). The gist of the proof consists in repeatedly using the protocol constructed above to simulate the mediator, with the help of jointly controlled lotteries. To get a flavor of our construction, let us again consider the network in Figure 3. Assume that Ω and A are finite sets. Fix a canonical communication equilibrium $\varphi : \Omega \rightarrow \Delta(A)$. For all $\omega \in \Omega$, let A_ω be a partition of $[0, 1]$ into $|A|$ subsets, with the subset $A_\omega(a)$ corresponding to a having Lebesgue measure $\varphi(a|\omega)$.⁹

The protocol has three distinct phases. In the first phase, the sender broadcasts the state ω to the intermediaries 1 and 2. The second phase replicates the communication device. To do so, the sender and intermediary 1 simultaneously choose a randomly generated number in $[0, 1]$. Let x and y be the numbers generated by the sender and intermediary 1, respectively. Players then follow a strongly reliable communication protocol constructed above, which makes it possible for intermediary 1 to (strongly) reliably transmit y to intermediary 2.¹⁰ Thus, at the end of the second phase, the sender and both intermediaries know ω , x and y , while the receiver only knows y . The third phase starts once the sender and both intermediaries have learnt x and y . At the first stage of the third phase, the sender and the intermediaries simultaneously compute $x + y \pmod{[0, 1]}$, output the recommendation a if $x + y \pmod{[0, 1]} \in A_\omega(a)$, and each starts a copy of the communication protocol constructed above to (strongly) reliably transmit the recommendation to the receiver. Thus, the three communication protocols are synchronized and start at the very same stage. At the end of the third phase, the receiver learns the recommendations sent by the sender and both intermediaries. Since at most one of them can deviate at the stage where they broadcast their recommendation, the receiver decodes at least two identical recommendations and plays it.

⁸We may conjecture that the strategies we construct are weakly dominated. This is, however, incorrect. Indeed, in adversarial situations, if the sender misreports the state and in all subsequent stages, a fixed intermediary always reports the same state, our strategy guarantees that an intermediary obtains his highest payoff. If an alternative strategy is played, with some probability we reach an history inconsistent with at most one deviation at each stage. In that case, the receiver detects a problem and play a static best reply, which strictly decreases the payoff of the intermediary.

⁹E.g., if there are three actions, a_1, a_2 and a_3 , a possible partition is $[0, \varphi(a_1|\omega)), [\varphi(a_1|\omega), \varphi(a_1|\omega) + \varphi(a_2|\omega)), [\varphi(a_1|\omega) + \varphi(a_2|\omega), 1]$.

¹⁰In this subprotocol, intermediary 1 plays the role of the sender, while intermediary 2 plays the role of the receiver.

It is then straightforward, albeit tedious and cumbersome, to define belief systems to guarantee the sequential rationality of the equilibria we construct. To see this, let σ be a Nash equilibrium of the communication game we construct. There are four strongly reliable protocols which are run independently one from another, so we can consider them separately. For each such protocol, consider any history h_i^t consistent with unilateral deviations, i.e., there exists $\sigma' \in \Sigma(\sigma)$ such that h_i^t is in the support of $\mathbb{P}_{\sigma'}$. If intermediary i 's belief at h_i^t is the “conditioning” of $\mathbb{P}_{\sigma'}$ on h_i^t , then strong reliability implies sequential rationality. Indeed, for all $\sigma' \in \Sigma(\sigma)$, for all $\tilde{\sigma}_i$, the concatenated strategy profile $\langle \sigma', (\tilde{\sigma}_i, \sigma_{-i}) \rangle = ((\sigma'_{t'})_{t' < t}, (\tilde{\sigma}_{i,t'}, \sigma_{-i,t'})_{t' \geq t})$ is consistent with unilateral deviations, i.e., $\langle \sigma', (\tilde{\sigma}_i, \sigma_{-i}) \rangle \in \Sigma(\sigma)$. Strong reliability thus implies that $\mathbb{P}_{\langle \sigma', (\tilde{\sigma}_i, \sigma_{-i}) \rangle} = \mu$, that is, $\mathbb{P}_{(\tilde{\sigma}_i, \sigma_{-i})}(\cdot | h^t) \mathbb{P}_{\sigma'}(h^t) = \mu$ for all $\tilde{\sigma}_i$, for all $\sigma' \in \Sigma(\sigma)$. Intermediary i is therefore indifferent between all his strategies at h_i^t (since his belief about h^t is $\mathbb{P}_{\sigma'}(h^t | h_i^t)$). Since the argument does not rely on the specific $\sigma' \in \Sigma(\sigma)$ we select, we have sequential rationality with respect to any belief system, which is fully supported on the histories consistent with unilateral deviations at h_i^t . In other words, as long as the intermediary believes that at most one player deviated at each of all past stages, we have sequential rationality at h_i^t . Similarly, the equilibria we construct are also robust to deviations by the sender and receiver at all stages but the first one, where the sender sends the message, and the last one, where the receiver chooses an action. Therefore, we also have sequential rationality at all histories h_S^t and h_R^t . Finally, at all other histories, it is easy to construct beliefs and actions to guarantee sequential rationality. (See Section A.2 for detail.)

(4) \Rightarrow (2). This follows immediately from the previous step since $\mathcal{E}^d \subseteq \mathcal{CE}^d$. Notice, however, a simpler construction is possible since there is no need to emulate the mediator. We can directly use the communication protocol we construct to prove (3) \Rightarrow (4) in order to (strongly) reliably transmit the message m to the receiver, where m is drawn with probability $\sigma_S^*(m | \omega)$ the equilibrium strategy of the direct communication game.

3.4. Remarks. We conclude this section with some observations about our analysis. First, we allow for rich communication possibilities, most notably, that players are able to broadcast messages to any subset of neighbors. This is necessary for our results to hold. For instance, if players can only send private messages (unicast communication), then reliable transmission of messages, let alone strong reliability, is impossible, on the network in Figure 3. See Dolev and al. (1993) or Beimel and Franklin (1999). Similarly, if players can only send public messages (broadcast communication), reliable

transmission of messages, let alone strong reliability, is impossible on the network in Figure 4. See Franklin and Wright (2000) and Renault and Tomala (2008).

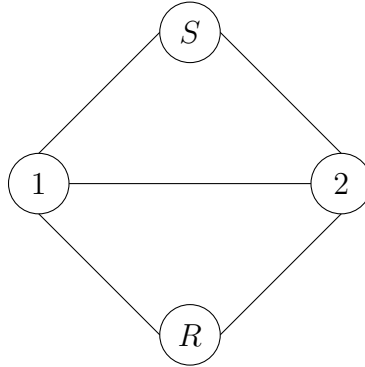


FIGURE 4. Broadcasting to all: reliable communication is impossible

While the formal proofs of these two impossibilities are involved, the intuition is that the receiver is unable to distinguish between two types of histories: histories where intermediary 1 is pretending that the message is m' and intermediary 2 is deviating, and histories where intermediary 2 is pretending that the message is m and intermediary 1 is deviating. The key is that an intermediary can simulate fictitious histories, i.e., histories of messages sent and received when the message is any m , and behave accordingly. As is clear from the example, the protocol we construct makes it possible for the receiver to distinguish these two types of histories. If intermediary 1 deviates and pretends that the message is m' , the receiver correctly infers that intermediary 2 is not deviating. This requires to broadcast messages to selected subsets of neighbors.

Second, our protocol does not restrict the messages players can broadcast to any subset of their neighbors. E.g., in addition to the messages our protocol requires the intermediaries to broadcast, the intermediaries can also send private messages to the sender and the receiver. The equilibrium we construct simply treats these additional messages as uninformative (babbles).

Third, we use authentication keys. While their use is ubiquitous in online retailing, it is less so in the daily activities of most organizations. Their only purpose, however, is to insure that a group of individuals share a common information, which can only be known by individuals outside the group if it is told to them by one member of the group. For instance, at a meeting, the common information can be the color of the tie of the meeting's chair or the identity of the second speaker.

Fourth, a detailed knowledge of the communication network is not needed. To execute our protocol, a player on one of the path from the sender to the receiver only needs to

know his two immediate neighbors on the path and the total number of players on the two disjoint paths.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

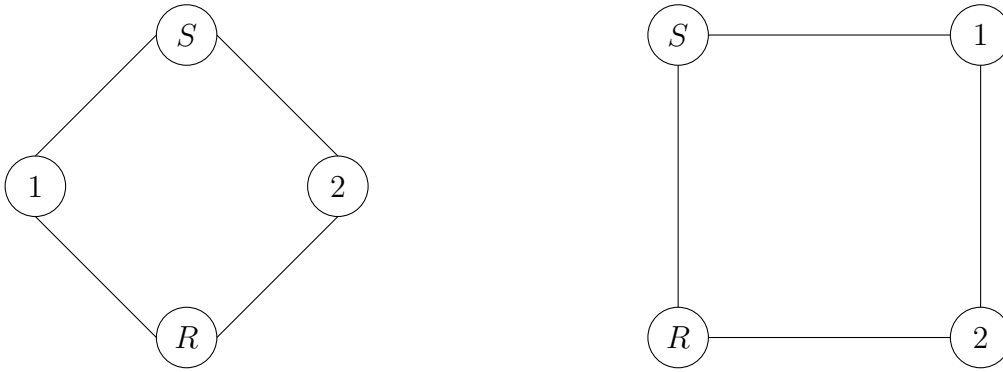
Our analysis extends to communication games with multiple senders. More precisely, consider a direct communication game, where senders receive private signals about a payoff-relevant state, send messages to the receiver, and the receiver takes an action. If there exist two disjoint paths of communication from each sender to the receiver, we can then replicate our analysis to wPBE implement any equilibrium distribution of the direct communication game. The key is to have all senders broadcast their messages at the first stage and then to run copies of our protocol in parallel. Since our protocol is resilient to what a player learns during its execution, this guarantees that the receiver learns the correct messages. We stress, however, that it is essential that all senders move simultaneously at the first stage.

Throughout, we have assumed that the sender and the receiver are not directly connected. We now discuss how our results would change if the sender and the receiver can also communicate directly. Statements (2), (3) and (4) of Theorem 1 extend immediately. More precisely, we would have that wPBE implementation of direct communication is possible (resp. transmission of messages is strongly reliable) if, and only if, either the sender and receiver are directly connected or there exist two disjoint paths between the sender and the receiver.

The extension of Statement (1) in Theorem 1 is more delicate. To start with, notice that if the direct link is the only link between the sender and the receiver, then there is no hope to replicate the mediator, as all communication would be direct. We need to be able to intermediate the communication. We claim that if there are at least two intermediaries, labelled 1 and 2, such that the sender, the receiver and the two intermediaries are on a “circle,” then wPBE implementation of mediated communication is possible.¹¹

We now present an informal proof. As a preliminary observation, note that on the circle, it must be that either the two intermediaries are on two disjoint paths from the sender to the receiver or are on the same path. See the two networks in Figure 5 for an illustration.

¹¹A circle is a collection of nodes such that all pairs of nodes have two disjoint paths between them.

FIGURE 5. \mathcal{N} (left) and \mathcal{N}^* (right)

In the former case (network \mathcal{N}), Theorem 1 applies verbatim. In the latter case (network \mathcal{N}^*), we need to modify the protocol of Theorem 1 to guarantee that intermediary 2 learns the state ω , without the receiver learning it. Once the sender and the two intermediaries know ω , we can then use the second and third phase of the protocol constructed in Section 3 to implement the communication equilibrium.

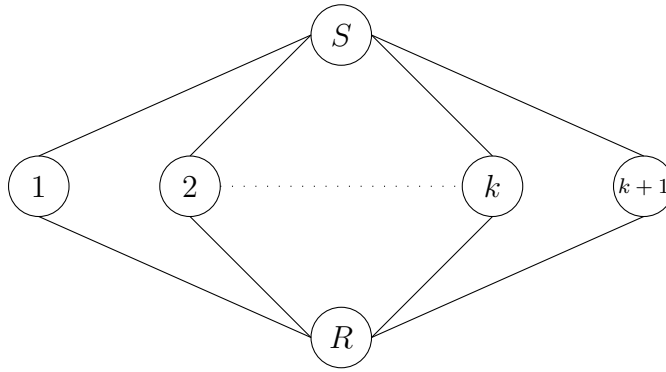
We modify the first phase as follows. We first let intermediary 1 broadcast an encryption key k to the sender and intermediary 2. The sender then encrypts the state ω with the encryption key k and transmits the encrypted message to intermediary 2. The transmission of the encrypted message is achieved via the strongly reliable protocol constructed in Section 3.

It remains to argue that at the end of the first phase, the sender and the two intermediaries know ω . It is clear for the sender and intermediary 1. As for intermediary 2, at the end of the first phase, he knows the encryption key and the encrypted message and, thus learn the state ω . This completes the informal “proof.”

Note that either the sender or an intermediary may attempt to reveal the state to the receiver. We do not preclude this possibility. However, as already explained, the equilibria we construct are such that the receiver does not expect the sender and intermediaries to do so and thus consider their attempts as gibberish.

We don’t know whether the condition of having at least two intermediaries such that the sender, the receiver and the two intermediaries are on a “circle,” is necessary. We conjecture that it is.

Finally, while we do not consider the possibility of k faults/deviations at each stage, we conjecture that our main ideas extend to this situation. (Naturally, the sender and the receiver cannot be faulty.) To see this, consider the network in Figure 6, where there are $k + 1$ reporting lines between the sender and the receiver.

FIGURE 6. $k + 1$ reporting lines

We now explain how to adapt our construction. As in Section 3, we continue to assume that the sender and the intermediaries broadcast the message to be transmitted and authentication keys at each stage. In addition, if an intermediary receives the triplet (i, t, x_i^t) at a stage, he broadcasts it at all subsequent stages. We also require the receiver to validate a sequence of three identical messages from intermediary i , received at stages t_1, t_2 and t_3 , only if he has *not* received the authentication key $x_i^{t_1}$ at stage t_3 or earlier from intermediary $j \neq i$. Unlike our original construction, however, we require the communication to last $1 + [2(k + 1) + 1]$ stages. Intuitively, we need to extend the communication to guarantee that there is at least one intermediary sending the same message three times. Since at most k intermediaries deviate at a stage, at least one intermediary is transmitting the correct message at each stage and, therefore, after $2(k + 1) + 1$ stages, at least one intermediary has transmitted the correct message three times to the receiver. Thus, as in our original construction, the receiver never validates an incorrect message (since he will receive the correct authentication key from at least one intermediary) and is guaranteed to validate the correct message (since he is guaranteed to receive three times the correct message and not the authentication key). Whether we can extend our arguments to all sufficiently connected networks is left for future research.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A. PROOF OF THEOREM 1

It is obvious that Statement (1) implies Statement (2) in Theorem 1 as the set of Bayes-Nash equilibria is included in the set of communication equilibria of the direct communication game. Also, we do not prove that Statement (2) implies Statement (4) as the

proofs follow well-trodden paths, see e.g., Renault and Tomala (2008) or Renault et al. (2014).

A.1. Proof that Statement (4) implies Statement (3). We prove here that two disjoint paths between the sender and the receiver is a sufficient condition for the transmission of messages to be strongly reliable. Assume that the network \mathcal{N} admits two disjoint paths between the sender and the receiver, and denote the two shortest paths by S, i_1, \dots, i_K, R and $S, j_1, \dots, j_{K'}, R$ respectively, for some $K, K' \geq 1$. We let \mathcal{P} be the set of nodes on these two paths, including the sender and the receiver, and let n^C be its cardinality. Throughout, we refer to these two paths as the “circle,” with the nodes $\{S, i_1, \dots, i_K, R\}$ (resp., $\{S, j_1, \dots, j_{K'}, R\}$) as the “left side of the circle” (resp., “right side of the circle”). For each player $p \in \mathcal{P} \setminus \{S, R\}$, we call the *successor* of p , denoted p^+ , his immediate successor on the path to the receiver. Similarly, we call the *predecessor* of p , denoted p^- his immediate predecessor on the path to the sender. E.g., if $p = i_k$ for some $1 \leq k \leq K$, $p^+ = i_{k+1}$ and $p^- = i_{k-1}$, with the convention that $i_0 = S$ and $i_{K+1} = R$. The sender (resp., the receiver) have the same two nodes as predecessors and successors, i.e., i_1 and j_1 (reps., i_K and $j_{K'}$). However, as will be clear later, whenever i_1 (resp., i_K) plays the role of a predecessor, then j_1 (resp., $j_{K'}$) plays the role of the successor and, conversely. Thus, we mostly focus on messages flowing from the sender to the receiver. However, messages will also need to flow in the other direction.

A.1.1. The communication protocol (\mathcal{M}, σ) . Throughout, we write $[1 : T]$ for $\{1, \dots, T\}$.

The message space. Remember that M is the set of messages in the direct communication game and let $m_0 \notin M$ be an arbitrary message, interpreted as a null message. The set of messages player $i \in I^*$ can broadcast to the subset $N_i \in 2^{\mathcal{N}_i} \setminus \{\emptyset\}$ is:

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{M}_{i, N_i} &= \left(M \cup \{m_0\} \right) \times [0, 1] \\ &\quad \times \left(\times_{j \in N_i} \left\{ \{\emptyset\} \cup (\{j\} \times [1 : T] \times [0, 1]) \right\} \right) \\ &\quad \times \left(\times_{j \in I^* \setminus N_i} \left\{ \{\emptyset\} \cup (\{j\} \times [1 : T] \times [0, 1]) \right\}^L \right), \end{aligned}$$

with $L = 1 + (n^C - 3)(2n^C - 3)$.

The set of messages player i can send is $\times_{N_i \in 2^{\mathcal{N}_i} \setminus \{\emptyset\}} \mathcal{M}_{i, N_i}$. In words, each player can broadcast to any subset of his neighbors a grand message composed of: (i) a message $m \in M$ or the null message m_0 , (ii) a number in $[0, 1]$ and (iii) a tuple of triplets, each of them being composed of the name of a player, a stage, and a number in $[0, 1]$. Crucially,

player i can send a *single* triplet about each of his neighbors at each stage. However, player i can send several triplets (at most L) about the other players. In other words, at each stage, player i can send a list of triplets to his neighbors N_i , but no list includes more than one triplet about $j \in N_i$.

The strategies of the players. For any player $p \notin \mathcal{P}$, the protocol requires them to broadcast (uniformly) randomly drawn messages in \mathcal{M}_{i,N_i} at each stage t to each subset of neighbors $N_i \in 2^{\mathcal{N}_i} \setminus \{\emptyset\}$, independently of all messages received and sent up to stage t . In words, they are babbling.

We now define the strategy for player $p \in \mathcal{P}$. We focus on the messages they broadcast to their neighbors on the circle, i.e., to $\mathcal{N}_p \cap \mathcal{P}$. To all other subsets of neighbors, they sent randomly generated messages, independently of the histories of messages sent and received, i.e., they babble. In what follows, when we say that player p broadcasts a message, we mean that he broadcasts the message to the subset $\{p^-, p^+\}$. Remember that for S (resp., R), $\{p^-, p^+\} = \{i_1, j_1\}$ (resp., $\{i_K, j_{K'}\}$).

- **Authentication keys:** At each stage $t \geq 1$ of the communication protocol, p broadcasts a uniformly drawn message x_p^t in $[0, 1]$ to his neighbors on the “circle,” that is, to the two players in $\mathcal{N}_p \cap \mathcal{P}$: this message x_p^t is called the *authentication key* of player p at stage t .
- **First stage:** At stage $t = 1$, the sender broadcasts the message m to his neighbors on the circle, i.e., to i_1 and j_1 , along with his authentication key. All other players broadcast m_0 to their neighbors on the circle (along with their authentication keys).
- **Subsequent stages:** Starting from stage $t = 2$ onwards, the protocol proceeds in blocks of $2n^C - 3$ stages. Denote these blocks by B_b , with $b = 1, 2, \dots, \bar{B}$. (We have at most $n^C - 3$ blocks.) For instance, B_1 stands for the block that starts at stage $t = 2$, B_2 stands for the block that starts at stage $t = 2 + 2n^C - 3 = 2n^C - 1$, etc. For each $b = 1, 2, \dots$, let $B_b := \{t_b, \dots, t_b + 2n^C - 3\}$ where t_b is the first stage of block B_b . In each block B_b , the strategy of p is the following:

– **Transmission of the sender’s message:**

- * if p knows the message m at the beginning of the block, that is, either p is in $\{S, i_1, j_1\}$ or p has *learnt* the message m at the end of the previous block (see below, where the decoding rule at the end of each block is defined), then p broadcasts the message m to his neighbors p^- and p^+

at all stages $t_b, \dots, t_b + 2n^C - 3$ of the current block (the neighbors of S are i_1 and j_1);

- * if p does not know the message m at the beginning of the block, then p broadcasts m_0 to his neighbors p^- and p^+ at all stages $t_b, \dots, t_b + 2n^C - 3$ of the current block.

(Remember that p also sends an authentication key.)

– Detection of deviations:

- * if p detects his successor p^+ making a false announcement about the message $m \in M$ at some stage $t \in \{t_b, \dots, t_b + 2n^C - 4\}$, that is,
 - either p knows $m \in M$ and p^+ broadcasts at stage t the message $\tilde{m} \in M \setminus \{m\}$, interpreted as “*player p^+ is broadcasting the false message \tilde{m} ,*”
 - or p does not know the message m and p^+ broadcasts at stage t the message $\tilde{m} \in M$, interpreted as “*player p^+ is broadcasting the message \tilde{m} although he cannot know it,*”

then p broadcasts the triplet $(p^+, t, x_{p^+}^t)$ to player p^- and to p^+ , where $x_{p^+}^t$ is the true authentication key broadcasted by p^+ at t . Note that if $p = S$ (resp., R), then p^+ is either i_1 or j_1 (resp., i_K or $j_{K'}$).

- * if p does not detect his successor p^+ making a false announcement about the message $m \in M$ at some stage $t \in \{t_b, \dots, t_b + 2n^C - 4\}$, then p broadcasts the triplet (p^+, t, y) to p^- and p^+ , where y is randomly drawn from $[0, 1]$.

The key observation to make is that only players p and p^{++} know the true authentication key of p^+ at stage t . Therefore, p^{++} can authenticate whether p^+ deviated at some stage t by cross-checking the authentication key $x_{p^+}^t$ received from p^+ at t with the key broadcasted by p (and having transited on the circle in the opposite direction).

– Transmission of past deviations:

- * If $p \neq i_1$ is on the left side of the circle and receives at some stage $t \in \{t_b, \dots, t_b + 2n^C - 4\}$
 - from p^+ a message containing the triplet $(p', d, x_{p'}^d)$, $t_b \leq d < t$ with p' on the left side of the circle, then p broadcasts the message to p^- and p^+ at stage $t + 1$.

- from p^- a message containing the triplet $(p', d, x_{p'}^d)$, $t_b \leq d < t$ with p' on the right side of the circle, then p broadcasts the message to p^- and p^+ at stage $t + 1$.
- * Similarly, if $p \neq j_1$ is on the right side of the circle and receives at some stage $t \in \{t_b, \dots, t_b + 2n^C - 4\}$
 - from p^+ a message containing the triplet $(p', d, x_{p'}^d)$, $t_b \leq d < t$ with p' on the right side of the circle, then p broadcasts the message to p^- and p^+ at stage $t + 1$.
 - from p^- a message containing the triplet $(p', d, x_{p'}^d)$, $t_b \leq d < t$ with p' on the left side of the circle, then p broadcasts the message to p^- and p^+ at stage $t + 1$.
- * If $p = i_1$ (respectively $p = j_1$) receives from p^+ a message containing the triplet $(p', d, x_{p'}^d)$, $t_b \leq d < t$ with p' on the left side of the circle (respectively with p' on the right side of the circle), then p broadcasts the message to p^- and p^+ at stage $t + 1$.
- * If $p = i_1$ (respectively $p = j_1$) receives from $p^- = S$ at some stage $t \in \{t_b, \dots, t_b + 2n^C - 4\}$ a message containing the triplet $(p', d, x_{p'}^d)$, with $t_b \leq d < t$ and p' on the right side of the circle (resp., on the left side of the circle), then two cases are possible:
 - (i): If $p' \neq j_1$ (resp., $p' \neq i_1$), then p broadcasts it to both $p^- = S$ and $p^+ = i_2$ (resp., $p^+ = j_2$) at stage $t + 1$.
 - (ii): If $p' = j_1$ (resp., $p' = i_1$) and $p = i_1$ (resp., $p = j_1$) has not received the triplet (p, d, x_p^d) , then $p = i_1$ (resp., $p = j_1$) broadcasts the triplet $(j_1, d, x_{j_1}^d)$ (resp., $(i_1, d, x_{i_1}^d)$) at stage $t + 1$.
 - (iii): If $p' = j_1$ (resp., $p' = i_1$) and $p = i_1$ (resp., $p = j_1$) has received the triplet (p, d, x_p^d) , then $p = i_1$ (resp., $p = j_1$) broadcasts the triplet (p', d, y) at state $t + 1$, with y a random draw from $[0, 1]$.

The intuition is that if p receives from S a message, which reads as “ S claims that both i_1 and j_1 deviated at the same stage d ,” then S must be deviating (since under unilateral deviations, at most one player deviates at each stage).

- * **Auto-correcting past own deviations:** if p has received the triplet $(p', d, x_{p'}^d)$ at stage $t \in \{t_b, \dots, t_b + 2n^C - 4\}$ but didn't forward it at stages $t+1, \dots, t+\Delta$, then he forwards it at stage $t+\Delta+1$. In words, the protocol requires a player to broadcast the triplet $(p', d, x_{p'}^d)$ at stage $t + 1$ upon

receiving it at stage t , to broadcast it at $t + 2$ if he fails to broadcast it at stage $t + 1$, to broadcast it at $t + 3$ if he fails to broadcast it at stage $t + 1$ and $t + 2$, etc, so that unless the player deviates at all stages $t' \geq t + 1$, the triplet is broadcasted at some stage during the block.

The decoding rule. The decoding rule describes how messages are analyzed at the end of each block. Players not in \mathcal{P} do not analyze their messages. Consider now the players in \mathcal{P} .

At the beginning of block B_1 , the sender and his two neighbors i_1 and j_1 know the message m broadcasted by the sender at stage $t = 1$. At the end of each block, only players who do not know yet m analyze the message received during the block. Thus, only the players in $\mathcal{P} \setminus \{S, i_1, j_1\}$ analyze messages at the end of the block B_1 . (The gist of our arguments is to show that the set of players who know m at the end of a block is strictly expanding over time and, ultimately, includes the receiver.) Thus, consider player p , who does not know yet m at the beginning of the block B_b . At the end of the block B_b , he analyzes messages as follows:

- If p has received during the block $(n^C - 1)$ times a grand message containing the same message $m \in M$ from his predecessor p^- , let say at stages d^1, \dots, d^{n^C-1} , where $t_b \leq d^1 < d^2 < \dots < d^{n^C-1} \leq t_b + 2n^C - 3$,
- and if p has not received by stage d^{n^C-1} at the latest from his successor p^+ the message $(p^-, d^1, x_{p^-}^{d^1})$ where $x_{p^-}^{d^1}$ matches the value of the authentication key received by p from p^- at stage d_1 ,

then, player p learns the message m and starts the next block B_{b+1} as a player who knows m . Otherwise, player p does not learn the message. Moreover, once a player knows the message m , he knows it at all the subsequent blocks. If $p = R$ and $p^- = i_K$ (resp, $j_{K'}$), then $p^+ = j_{K'}$ (resp., $p^- = i_K$).

At all other histories, the strategies are left unspecified.

A.1.2. Two key properties of the protocol. The protocol we construct has two key properties. The first property states that no player $p \in \mathcal{P}$ learns incorrectly, that is, if player $p \in \mathcal{P}$ learns a message, the message is indeed the one the sender has sent. Lemma 1 is a formal statement of that property.

Lemma 1. *Let $m \in M$ be the message broadcasted by the sender to i_1 and j_1 at stage $t = 1$. If at most one player deviates from the protocol at each stage, then it is not possible for player $p \in \mathcal{P}$ to learn $m' \in \mathcal{M} \setminus \{m\}$.*

Proof of Lemma 1. By contradiction, assume that player $p \in \mathcal{P}$ learns $m' \in M \setminus \{m\}$ at the end of some block B_b , $b \geq 1$. Without loss of generality, assume that p is the first player to learn m' on the path from S to R where p lies.

For player p to learn m' , during the block B_b , it must be that player p has received a sequence of $n^C - 1$ grand messages from his predecessor p^- , say at stages d^1, \dots, d^{n^C-1} with $t_b \leq d^1 < d^2 < \dots < d^{n^C-1} \leq t_b + 2n^C - 1$, such that (i) the first element of each of the $n^C - 1$ grand messages is m' and (ii) player p did not receive from p^+ the triplet $(p^-, d^1, x_{p^-}^{d^1})$ on or before stage d^{n^C-1} , where $x_{p^-}^{d^1}$ matches the value of the authentication key received from p^- at stage d^1 .

Since we assume that $m' \neq m$, it must be that that p^- is deviating at all stages d^1, \dots, d^{n^C-1} , as we assume that p is the first player to learn m' . Therefore, since we consider at most one deviation at each stage, all players in $\mathcal{P} \setminus \{p^-\}$ are playing according to σ at all stages d^1, \dots, d^{n^C-1} . It follows that player p^{--} , the predecessor of p^- , broadcasts the triplet $(p^-, d^1, x_{p^-}^{d^1})$ to p^- and p^{--} at stage d^2 at the latest, that player p^{---} broadcasts it at stage d^3 at the latest, etc.¹²

Since there are $n^C - 2$ nodes other than p^- and p on the circle, player p^+ broadcasts the triplet $(p^-, d^1, x_{p^-}^{d^1})$ to players p and p^{++} at stage d^{n^C-1} at the latest. Thus, player p does not validate m' with that sequence of grand messages.

Since this is true for any such sequences, player p does not learn m' at block B_b . \square

Lemma 1 states that no player on the circle learns an incorrect message. The next Lemma states that at least one new player learns the correct message at the end of each block, which guarantees that the receiver learns the correct message at the latest after $1 + (n^C - 3)(2n^C - 3)$ stages.

Lemma 2. *Let $m \in M$ be the message broadcasted by the sender to i_1 and j_1 at stage $t = 1$. Suppose that all intermediaries i_1 to i_k and j_1 to $j_{k'}$ know the message m at the beginning of the block B_b . If at most one player deviates from the protocol at each stage,*

¹²Notice that it is possible for p^{--} to broadcast the message $(p^-, d^1, x_{p^-}^{d^1})$ before stage d^2 . For instance it is possible to have a stage $d^{1'}$, with $d^1 < d^{1'} < d^2$, such that (i) p^- is not deviating at stage $d^{1'}$ and sends either m or m_0 depending on if he knows m or not, and (ii) p^{--} is deviating at stage $d^{1'}$ by not transmitting $(p^-, d^1, x_{p^-}^{d^1})$ to p^- and p^{--} .

then either intermediary i_{k+1} or intermediary $j_{k'+1}$ is learning m at the end of the block B_b with probability one.

To be more precise, Lemma 2 states that for all $\sigma' \in \Sigma^*(\sigma)$, the subset of histories at which either intermediary i_{k+1} or intermediary $j_{k'+1}$ is learning m at the end of the block B_b has probability one according to $\mathbb{P}_{\sigma'}$.

Proof of Lemma 2. Given a finite set M , we denote by $|M|$ its cardinality. To ease notation, let $i := i_k$ and $j := i_{k'}$. We want to prove that either i^+ or j^+ learns the message at the end of the block $B_b = \{t_b, \dots, t_b + 2n^C - 4\}$. The proof is by contradiction. So, assume neither i^+ nor j^+ learns the message at the end of the block.

Fix a strategy profile $\sigma' \in \Sigma^*(\sigma)$. Denote by D^i the stages where player i is deviating from σ , by D^{i^-} the stages where player i^- is deviating, by D^j the stages where player j is deviating and by D^{j^-} the stages where player j^- is deviating. From the definition of $\Sigma^*(\sigma)$, the sets D^i , D^{i^-} , D^j and D^{j^-} are pairwise disjoint. In particular,

$$|D^i| + |D^{i^-}| + |D^j| + |D^{j^-}| \leq |D^i \cup D^{i^-} \cup D^j \cup D^{j^-}| \leq 2n^C - 3. \quad (1)$$

Throughout, for any subset D of B_b , we write \bar{D} for its complement in B_b . By definition, at all stages in \bar{D}^i , player i follows σ_i and deviates at all others. Let $\bar{D}^i := \{\bar{d}_1, \dots, \bar{d}_\ell, \dots, \bar{d}_{\ell_i^*}\}$, with $\bar{d}_\ell < \bar{d}_{\ell+1}$ for all ℓ . Notice that $\ell_i^* = (2n^C - 3) - |D^i|$.

Assume that $\ell_i^* \geq n^C - 1$. Since player i follows the protocol at all stages in \bar{D}^i , player i^+ observes at least one sequence of messages such that m is broadcasted $n^C - 1$ times by player i . Consider all sequences $(\bar{d}_{\ell_1}, \dots, \bar{d}_{\ell_{n^C-1}})$ of distinct elements of \bar{D}^i such that all sequences have $n^C - 1$ consecutive elements, that is, if \bar{d}_ℓ and $\bar{d}_{\ell'}$ are elements of the sequence, so are all $\bar{d}_{\ell''}$ satisfying $\bar{d}_\ell < \bar{d}_{\ell''} < \bar{d}_{\ell'}$. By construction, there are $(\ell_i^* + 1) - (n^C - 1) = n^C - |D^i| - 1$ such sequences. All these sequences have different starting stages and, therefore, different ending stages. Recall that player i broadcasts m at all stages of these sequences.

Fix the sequence $(\bar{d}_{\ell_1}, \dots, \bar{d}_{\ell_{n^C-1}})$. The protocol specifies that player i^+ learns m if and only if he has not received the correct authentication key $x_i^{d_{\ell_1}}$ from player i^{++} by the stage $\bar{d}_{\ell_{n^C-1}}$. Therefore, player i^+ does *not* learn m only if player i^- broadcasts the correct authentication key at some stage $d > \bar{d}_{\ell_1}$; the other players do not know the authentication key and the probability of guessing it correctly is zero. Moreover, since the protocol

requires player i^- to broadcast $x_i^{d_{\ell_1}}$ only if player i broadcasts $m' \neq m$ at stage \bar{d}_{ℓ_1} , which he does not, player i^- must be deviating. Therefore, $d \in D^{i^-}$.

Remember that player i^- can broadcast at most one authentication key about player i at each stage. Therefore, since there are $n^C - |D^i| - 1$ such sequences, player i^- must deviate at least $n^C - |D^i| - 1$ times for player i^+ to not learn m , that is,

$$|D^{i^-}| \geq n^C - |D^i| - 1. \quad (2)$$

It follows that

$$|D^i| + |D^{i^-}| \geq n^C - 1. \quad (3)$$

Assume now that $\ell_i^* < n^C - 1$. We have that $|D^i| = (2n^C - 3) - \ell_i^* > 2n^C - 3 - n^C - 1 = n^C - 2$, hence $|D^i| \geq n^C - 1$. Inequality (3) is also satisfied.

A symmetric argument applies to the pair of player j and player j^- , hence

$$|D^j| + |D^{j^-}| \geq n^C - 1, \quad (4)$$

since player j^+ does not learn m either. Summing Equations (3) (4), we obtain that

$$|D^i| + |D^{i^-}| + |D^j| + |D^{j^-}| \geq 2n^C - 2, \quad (5)$$

a contradiction with Equation (1). This completes the proof of Lemma 2. \square

To conclude the proof, it is enough to invoke Lemma 1 and 2, which guarantees that the receiver learns almost surely the message broadcasted by the sender.

A.2. Proof that Statement (4) implies Statement (1). The proof is constructive and relies extensively on the use of the strongly reliable communication protocol (\mathcal{M}, σ) , constructed above. The main idea is to generate a jointly controlled lottery between the sender and one of the two intermediaries i_1 or j_1 to generate a recommendation, which is then (strongly) reliably transmitted to the receiver.

We start with a formal definition of jointly controlled lotteries.

Definition 3. Let $\mu \in \Delta(A)$. A jointly controlled lottery generating μ is a triple (X, Y, ϕ) such that

- X is a measurable function from a probability space $(U, \mathcal{U}, \mathbb{P})$ to $([0, 1], \mathbb{B}_{[0,1]})$,

- Y is a measurable function from a probability space $(U, \mathcal{U}, \mathbb{P})$ to $([0, 1], \mathbb{B}_{[0,1]})$,
- X and Y are independent,
- and ϕ is a measurable function from $([0, 1]^2, \mathbb{B}_{[0,1]^2})$ to (A, \mathbb{B}_A) ,

such that

- (i) the law of $Z := \phi(X, Y)$ is μ ,
- (ii) for every $x \in [0, 1]$, the law of $\phi(x, Y)$ is μ ,
- (iii) and for every $y \in [0, 1]$, the law of $\phi(X, y)$ is μ .

As explained in the main text, when A is finite, any distribution μ over A can be generated by a jointly controlled lottery. The idea is to partition the interval $[0, 1]$ into $|A|$ sub-intervals, where the length of the sub-interval associated with a is $\mu(a)$. Let $f : [0, 1] \rightarrow A$, where $f(r) = a$ if r is in the sub-interval associated with a . Note that $f^{-1}(a)$ is a Borel set and has measure $\mu(a)$. Consider then two uniform random variables X and Y . The key observation to make is that the sums $X + Y \bmod [0, 1]$, $x + Y \bmod [0, 1]$, and $X + y \bmod [0, 1]$ are also uniformly distributed on $[0, 1]$, regardless of the values of x and y . Therefore, if we let $\phi(x, y) = a$ if $x + y \bmod [0, 1] \in f^{-1}(a)$, then the triplet (X, Y, ϕ) generates μ . The next proposition states that this construction generalizes to arbitrary complete and separable metric space A .

Proposition 1. *For any $\mu \in \Delta(A)$, there exists a jointly controlled lottery (X, Y, ϕ) that generates μ .*

Proof of Proposition 1. Let λ be the Lebesgue measure on $[0, 1]$. From the fundamental principle of simulation (Theorem A.3.1, p. 38 in Bouleau and Lepingue, 1993), there exists a Borel function $f : [0, 1] \rightarrow A$ such that f is λ -a.e. continuous and

$$\forall E \in \mathbb{B}_A, \lambda \circ f^{-1}(E) := \lambda(f^{-1}(E)) = \mu(E).$$

To complete the proof, let X and Y be two random variables with uniform distribution on $[0, 1]$ and define ϕ as

$$\phi(x, y) = f(x + y \bmod [0, 1]),$$

for all $(x, y) \in [0, 1]$. It is routine to verify that the triplet (X, Y, ϕ) is a jointly controlled lottery, which generates μ . □

We now explain how to wPBE implement mediated communication on the network \mathcal{N} . Let $\tau^* : \Omega \rightarrow \Delta(A)$ be a canonical communication equilibrium of the direct communication game. From Proposition 1, for each ω , there exists a jointly controlled lottery $(X_\omega, Y_\omega, \phi_\omega)$, which generates $\tau^*(\omega)$.

We let \mathcal{P} be the players on the two disjoint path from the sender to the receiver. We now describe the strategies in the communication game:

$t = 1$: The sender truthfully broadcasts the state ω to the intermediaries i_1 and j_1 .

$t = 2$: The sender and intermediary i_1 draw a random number in $[0,1]$ each. Let x (resp., y) the number drawn by the sender (resp., intermediary i_1). The sender and the intermediary i_1 broadcast their random number.

$t = 3, \dots, 2 + (2n^C - 3)(n^C - 3)$: The players $p \in P$ execute the protocol (\mathcal{M}, σ) with i_1 in the role of the sender and j_1 in the role of the receiver and the message to be transmitted is y .

$t = 3 + (2n^C - 3)(n^C - 3)$: The sender and the intermediaries i_1 and j_1 outputs a recommendation $a \in A$ according to $(X_\omega, Y_\omega, \phi_\omega)$, that is, the recommendation is $\phi_\omega(x, y)$ with ω the state broadcasted at $t = 1$. The three of them truthfully broadcast the recommendation.

$t = 4 + (2n^C - 3)(n^C - 3), \dots, 2 + 2(2n^C - 3)(n^C - 3)$: The players execute in parallel and independently three copies of the protocol (\mathcal{M}, σ) with S , i_1 and j_1 in the role of the sender, respectively, and the message to be transmitted is the recommendation a . At the last stage, the receiver follows the recommendation made a majority of times, if any. (If there is no majority, then he chooses an arbitrary action.)

Since at stage $t = 3 + (2n^C - 3)(n^C - 3)$, at most one of the three “senders” can deviate, the correct recommendation is sent at least twice. It follows that if the receiver is obedient, the receiver chooses the correct action at all histories consistent with unilateral deviations. Moreover, since the receiver observes neither ω nor x , he has no additional information about the state than in the direct communication game, hence he has an incentive to be obedient.

Clearly, in each iteration of the protocol (\mathcal{M}, σ) , no intermediary has an incentive to deviate since it would result in the same expected payoff: indeed, the protocol being strongly reliable, the “receiver” (of the protocol considered) learns the message sent by the “sender” (of the protocol considered) at all histories consistent with unilateral deviations. Also, the sender and intermediary i_1 have no incentive to deviate in stage $t = 2$

since it would not change the outcome of the jointly controlled lottery. Also, the sender and both intermediaries i_1 and j_1 have no incentive to deviate by broadcasting another recommendation than the one obtained by a jointly controlled lottery, as it would not be followed by the receiver who follows the recommendation made the other two (majority rule). Moreover, the sender has no incentives to deviate at the first stage when sending the state ω since the jointly controlled lottery generates the distribution of a canonical communication equilibrium of the direct game, and conditional on broadcasting ω at the first stage, the receiver receives $\tau^*(\omega)$ at all histories consistent with unilateral deviations, including deviations by the sender. Finally, the receiver has no incentive to deviate either. If he stops the game earlier, then his expected payoff is weakly lower as a consequence of Blackwell's theorem. Indeed, the only informative message about ω is $\tau^*(\omega)$ and stopping earlier is a garbling of $\tau^*(\omega)$.

Sequential rationality. We now prove that the profile of strategies constructed above satisfies sequential rationality. Notice first that no deviation can be observed at stages $t = 1$ and $t = 2$ since all messages are in the support of the players' strategies. Sequential rationality has then to be proven starting from stage 3, where the remaining of the communication game is composed of a first protocol where i_1 is the sender and j_1 the receiver, then three simultaneous protocols, where respectively the sender, i_1 and j_1 are the senders of these three protocols, and in all of them, the receiver remains the receiver. As already argued in the text, in each of these subprotocols, sequential rationality is guaranteed at all histories consistent with at most one intermediary deviating at each stage of the communication game. We therefore focus our attention on all other histories, i.e., histories not in $\mathcal{H}(\sigma)$.

Each of these four subprotocols are run independently one from another, so we consider them separately. For each subprotocol, we first consider all intermediaries of this subprotocol (i_1, \dots, i_K) and $(j_1, \dots, j_{K'})$ (with an abuse of notation, as for instance in the first protocol, i_1 being the sender, the intermediaries are in fact (i_2, \dots, j_2) and (S)). We treat the sender and receiver of this subprotocol separately.

Rebooting strategies. We say that player i reboots his strategy at period t if, from any history $h_i^t \notin \mathcal{H}_i(\sigma)$ onwards, he follows the protocol as if he knows that the message is m_0 . That is, at history h_i^t , he broadcasts the message m_0 , an authentication key x_i^t , and random triplets $(j, t_j, x_j^{t_j})$, $j \in \mathcal{N}_i$. At all subsequent histories consistent with at most one intermediary deviating from the protocol at each stage, player i continues to follow the protocol. That is, player i continues to broadcast m_0 , authentication keys and triplet

$(j, t_j, x_j^{t_j})$, as specified by the protocol when a player knows a message (here, it is m_0). At all other histories, player i reboots yet again his strategy, that is, player i continues to broadcast m_0 , authentication keys and triplets, as if the multilateral deviation hadn't taken place.

Beliefs. At history $h_i^t \notin \mathcal{H}_i(\sigma)$, player i believes that all other players on the same side of the circle reboot their strategies, while players on the other side of the circle continue to follow the protocol. (Here, the sender and receiver are assumed to be on the other side of the circle.) In other words, player i believes that all other players on the same side of the circle have also observed a multilateral deviation, while players on the other side have observed no deviations.

We now consider the sender. At all histories h_S^t , the sender continues to follow the protocol as if the observed multilateral deviations hadn't happened. However, he believes that all intermediaries reboot their strategies at period t , while the receiver continues to follow the protocol.

We now consider the receiver. The receiver continues to validate messages as he does in the protocol, i.e., he tests sequences of messages of length $n^C - 1$ received by his two predecessors and validates a message if he has received a sequence of $n^C - 1$ identical copies of the message and has not received the correct authentication on time (see the construction of the protocol for details). To complete the construction of the strategies, we assume that if the receiver validates $m \in M$ and $m_0 \notin M$, then he plays $\tau^*(m)$. Similarly, if he validates two different messages $(m, m') \in M \times M$ or (m_0, m_0) or no messages at all, he plays a best reply to his prior. At all histories, the receiver continues to follow the protocol as if the observed deviations hadn't happened. He believes that all intermediaries reboot their strategies, while the sender continues to follow the protocol.

Finally, we assume beliefs independent between the different subprotocols, in that if an intermediary observes a multilateral deviation in one subprotocol only, he believes that other players on the same side of the circle reboot their strategies in that subprotocol only and not on the others.

Sequential rationality. At history $h_i^t \notin \mathcal{H}_i(\sigma)$, an intermediary expects the receiver to validate a message $m \in M$ from the other side and to validate the message m_0 from his side. Since the receiver takes the decision $\tau^*(m)$ when validating the messages $m \in M$ and $m_0 \notin M$, the intermediary cannot deviate profitably (as, regardless of his play, the receiver validates m from the other side). Therefore, rebooting the strategy is optimal.

Similarly, since the sender expects the intermediaries i_K and $j_{K'}$ to reboot their strategies, he expects the receiver to play a^* and, therefore, cannot profitably deviate. The same applies to the receiver.

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