



Media Ecology: Significance of Time Biased Media in 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is about importance of time biased media in the modern Civilizations and societies that are increasingly getting biased towards the space media. How the space-biased media has transformed the knowledge production and sharing, but at the same time the growing importance of preservation of knowledge for the future generation with time biased media. According to Innis at any given point of time societies are inclined to either time biased media or space biased media. Today the information societies are producing huge data that moves much faster and easier, but it can also be lost easily. The space-based media has created more problems with its lightening speed; it has its impact on many old forms of media as some forms of media has become obsolete, at the same time it has also created huge unemployment. We have moved too fast with the space biased media and have completely ignored time-biased media. If we don't maintain a balance there are chances that the future generation will be at lose. The future generation may not be able to construct the life of the past as we do now.

Key words: Time Biased media, Space Biased media, Media Ecology, Media Environments

Civilizations over the centuries have shifted from oral to written, and from written to electronic means of communication. Knowledge and information was once monopolized by a few during the great civilizations. Simultaneously, time based media has slowly given way to space based media. According to Innis space biased media has democratized the process of knowledge and information sharing. The media became the biggest catalyst in the changing societies, which were emerging with the introduction of papyrus as medium of communication. Before the telegraph was invented the power of communication was limited in terms of geography, and once man learnt its advantages and the power it yields there was no looking back. From telegraph to the latest smart phones, over the years the state and the people have used and abused the communication tools to achieve the desired goals. In the past few decades new inventions including satellite technology has helped in transforming the telecommunication revolution around the world, and the use of computers have democratized the process of acquisition of knowledge. Today we encounter information emanating from a variety of sources. This information can be informative as well misleading; at times it can drive users mad. Armand Mattelart says

The media tropism engenders a reductive vision of the history of communication. Worse, it provokes a historical amnesia that prevents us from discerning where the truly important stakes lie in the current and rapid transformation of our contemporary mode of communication.

In the last few decades the technological innovations in communication have evolved very fast. Communication initially started with one-to-one and point-to-point communication with the use of telegraph and telephone. Today, humans have a choice to go for a one- to-one or one- to-many kind of communication at any given time from any part of the world. The significance of time and space is missing in the present world of electronic communication according to Innis and McLuhan.

The communication tools that people are using have their own unique features that are used for certain purposes that can include self-gratification. The mediums and tools of communication have undergone several changes; manufacturers are solving the challenges arising from time-to-time keeping

in mind the needs of people. In the process humans have undergone a change in their behavior and lifestyle. The communication tools have also enhanced the human brain to solve and absorb the information coming from all directions; today the human brain has the option of rejecting the information but not ignoring it.

According to McLuhan, the nature of the medium, of any and all media, is to creep inside the participant unnoticed: "in the true Narcissus style, one is hypnotized by the amputation and extension of his own being in a new technical form... For any medium has the power of imposing its own assumption on the unwary. Prediction and control consist in avoiding this subliminal state of Narcissus trance" (Understanding Media 15).

People's thoughts, actions and mobility are all dictated by the continuous flow of communication that occurs in our environment. People are gratified by the communication that is transmitted through various media, and these media are acting on the humans in certain way.

With the help of technology the information that was once confined to the clay tablets and papyrus has now come in the form of digital codes. More importantly it is not land based anymore; it comes from the sky and in all directions, and it travels with the speed of light. Clay and papyrus were easily available and were much cheaper; the information that was written on these mediums were not in need of any software to decode, but for the digital information that we use today either to write or to read we need hardware and software, as everything has to be encoded and decoded. We may loose a lot in the process of encoding and decoding.

In The Bias of Communications & Monopolies of Power Innis says that we know a lot about the past history of many civilizations as they depended much on the time biased media. This has helped us to reconstruct the lifestyles of these people and civilizations in the visual form. But it may be difficult to predict if the coming generations will be able to reconstruct the present civilizations and lifestyle of people. People like Brand, Hillis and Kuny say that the "future historians will not be able to find the records to peace together accounts of our times, lives and experiences".

In the globalized world everything is readily available for consumption, but it comes at a cost. Humans tend to go for things which may not require much physical work. We were able to decode the information that was painted, drawn or etched on caves, stones and rocks by earlier humans in various civilizations that are centuries old. But the coming generations may be missing all the information about the present, as we are recording our beliefs, customs, rituals and our lifestyles in digital format; there are possibilities that this information could be easily lost and can also be damaged by any virus or by natural calamity. As we also know everything becomes obsolete after few years, especially the electronic information that is recorded in digital format and this is an opinion shared by many critiques of technology. People have warned about the impending dangers of these modern technologies and its uses by the humans.

Media ecologists have been warning us about the consequences of loosing everything in the future if we do not act and protect the data in the form of time-biased media, for the future generations. It may be possible for the future generations to live only in the present; in the technocivilizations that we are going to see in the future, the past may not exist. The space media has given the advantage to the humans to move the information fast and also to reach unknown places; this information will be lost and die without a trace, like any other radio or digital signal that decays over the distance and time.

A recent study of the computer records of Bronze Age excavations in North East London from the mid 1990s found that the computer records had deteriorated more in one decade than the relics had in thousands (BBC News, 2000).

The future generation may not be having much history because the history recorded now in digital format has limited life. The future generations will be left with nuts and bolts, some scrap and huge junk yards. Technological determinism is making humans more confident in every field; technology has now become an integral part of the human body. Creating robots may not be a good idea. If we examine the predictions of technology futurists, they say that the human brains will be embedded with chips; it may sound strange and seem like science fiction movies that we are used to, but this is going to be a reality says the **Stewart Scott-Curran** and **Tim Lampe**, in an article to cnn.com. If this turns out to be reality, then we can see all the humans performing the same task easily and this may not be a good idea. If we all turn into robots, the unique features and feelings that the humans have will be lost completely. Darwin's theory of natural selection will be redundant the day we have chips embedded in our brains and the human brain is being controlled by outside forces.

Technology and Loss of Employment in Media

Civilizations over the centuries have created employment for its people in different fields; people were given different tasks to perform and they specialized in these works over the time. The people in the older civilizations were very sure that they would pass on the knowledge, traditions and costumes to the next generation in different forms, and for this they used to employ people who are good at etching, drawing, carving; weaving etc. People used the various available resource materials that had durability and could last for centuries (pyramids and temples in Egypt) as these civilizations were time biased. When it came to the media in civilizations, the kings and the religious authorities encouraged the writing on the temple walls, paintings, or building the temples, monuments, or carving the rocks in a given pattern etc that reflected the lifestyle of people and the society. Thousands of people were employed, as all the work was done manually, this massive constructions over a period undertaken by the kings have solved the problem of unemployment, even though it was physically hard and time consuming it was worthy, as people who worked at the sites were emotionally and culturally attached with the work that they were doing. The people doing the specialized work were earning their livelihoods that later became a family tradition and a source of income. The choice of opting for space based media with the introduction of pa-

pyrus and completely ignoring the time-based media was having positive and negative sides on civilizations. Today we have entered a phase where knowledge production, dissemination and consumption is space based media (digital); this according to many critiques may one day lead to a blackout of the traditional knowledge and the history forever.

By the turn of the seventeenth century with the industrial revolution, many civilizations and societies around the world had a new problem to solve – the problem of unemployment; even though the production was increasing at a large scale the unemployment was not. The invention of the printing press with mechanical wheel and the nuts and bolts, and now with the digital revolution have not only produced and replicated the same product in thousands, but have also generated. The gradual phase out of humans at the work place was seen across the countries; few were slow in phasing out and few were fast, we have reached a point where humans are being completely replaced with machines. Few factories around the world produce the products in bulk which can be supplied to the rest of the world population for consumption and use.

One of the very famous examples of how people lost their jobs within few years in Indian context is the workers who painted the banners, posters and cutouts of hero's and heroines in the Indian cinema. Thousands of people in cities like Bombay, Madras and other metros have become unemployed, with the introduction of digital printing. Men and families who were completely dependent on this media have lost their livelihoods. The latest flexi printing machines have stolen the job opportunity from these manual workers forever. The digital machines have every thing to offer the people including the waste that is hazardous to the people and the environment.

Today thousands of products are produced in the industrial factories which are similar in shape and size, people working here have nothing new to offer, they make sure that every thing is similar, the workers have no bonding with the products that they work on, as these products are not different from each other. Innis and Drache argue

The conditions of freedom of thought are in danger of being destroyed by science, technology and the mechanisation of knowledge (Innis & Drache, 1995).

People loved the work that is different and also challenging, the creativity of the workers was seen in the products they made, and today the bonding with products is missing in the factory workers to a larger extent. Also the products they make today no more represents a unique culture. The identity and the uniqueness of the product are lost forever in the globalized world.

Old media Vs New Media

Media demands a lot of physical labor. But with the evolution of technology and sophisticated tools, the work that was supposed to be done by the humans is replaced with machines; even rocks are being cut and carved by the machines. With the digital media we are creating more unemployment and troubles around the world, compared to a few centuries ago.

Instability resulting from a lack of balance between time- and space-biased media, and agitation from the margins of the empire can equally drive social change.

The above prophecies of Innis are turning out to be true in the media industry. In the past few decades we have tilted the balance and are becoming biased to the space based media just as Innis had predicted that at any given point of time the society would be biased to either space or time. This bias towards one media is the cause for resentment among the people who are loosing their livelihoods in thousands. The massive protests around the world are a step forward for setting a new social order. Today we are unable to strike a balance between the time based and space based media, which is resulting in closure of many old and traditional media houses. The people employed in the media houses today are very few and this

may still go down in the next few years. Media and culture reporter Christopher Zara in the International Business Times reported how the landscape of American media is undergoing a change, and how the old media is being rapidly replaced by the New Media. Also according to the IBSI World (the largest independent publisher of US industry research) in its recent report has given the details of 10 fastest dying industries in America, out of which four were from media.

The Photofinishing industry was the largest revenue generator and today it is completely at loss with the coming of new digital technologies and devices. People are sharing the pictures online; sharing the pictures is the order of the day then developing and archiving them in albums. Firms like the Eastman Kodak Company have filed for bankruptcy protection. Another biggest and largest revenue generator and employer was the print industry; today people are opting for real time news through internet through the latest smart phones. Media industries like Recordable media manufacturing, DVD Games and Video Rental shops have closed down due to Internet live streaming and availability of easy downloading options of movies and songs according to choice. We have seen how the Sony walkman was replaced by the ipod and how the cassette industry products like the VHS and Audio Tape are replaced by the CD and DVD's and now even these are being replaced by the live streaming and downloading options of songs and movies on internet, also movies on demand through the television and cable service providers.

"The monopoly of knowledge centering around stone and hieroglyphics was exposed to competition from papyrus as a new and more efficient medium".

In the present world the monopoly of knowledge is centered and revolving around New Media, where in the viewer has the stimulus of all the senses. But it is not necessary that the monopoly of the Internet medium will be constant. Innis argues that this may be challenged by new or the older media; further, even a revival of time based media cannot be ruled out. In the Indian context though the print and radio have suffered with the advent of television and now the Internet medium, surprisingly the print, television, and the radio have come back and are equal, and more prominent in the changing socio-cultural landscapes. One of the reasons for this could be the social, political and ethnic movements, that have come up in different parts of India. Another reason could be the multiplicity of languages and dialects; the domination of popular media is challenged by non-Hindi and English media. The second reason for the reemergence of print media in countries like China, India and other developing nations is because these nations are still lacking behind in terms of technological advancements and the rate of internet users in these countries is minimal, especially in India it is 8.43% (Ibid) of the total population.

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