This paper reviews a book name "The bias of communication" by Harold A. Innis. The purpose of this book is to discuss the effect of changes in media on the history of civilization. This paper consists of two parts. For the first part, I shall review the book content in each chapter. Finally, I would evaluate and conclude at the last part of the paper.

Review

**Minerva’s Owl:** In this chapter, the author proposed that Western civilization has been immensely influenced by communication and those changes have had important implications (p.3). This issue concerned various periods in relation to a number of communication media (e.g. clay, stylus, and cuneiform in Mesopotamia; paper and brush in China; through the invented radio and film in twentieth century).

The author attempted to seek implications of communication media in each period in order to find “knowledge and to suggest that a monopoly or an oligopoly of knowledge is built up to the point that equilibrium is disturbed” (p.4). The author summarized that “sudden extensions of communication are reflected in cultural disturbances” (p.31). He gave examples that the use of clay favored a dominant role for the temples” (on priesthood and religion) (p.31). Furthermore, libraries were introduced in Babylon in order to strengthen the power of monarchy. The use of papyrus assisted the development of political organization in Egypt. In addition, the author presented that Christianity utilized parchment and codex for the Bible.

Moreover, the author added that Greek science and paper with encouragement of writing provided ways to conquer Roman. The author ended the chapter quoting that “…we might end by a plea for consideration of the role of the oral tradition as a basis for a revival of effective vital discussion…” (p.32).

**The bias of communication:** The author began the chapter that “Egyptian civilization was related to the Nile” (p.34). The idea of immortality strengthened the position of the monarch (p.34). The spoken word “was perpetuated in the written word in the tomb” (p.34). The monopoly of knowledge centering around stone and hieroglyphics was challenged by papyrus as a new and more efficient medium (p.35). In Euphrates and Tigris, clay is the medium of writing; stylus was developed; signs were introduced to communicate between scattered cities (p.36). In Babylon, stone was used as a medium (writing and sculptures) (p.37). A flexible writing system expedited the growth of trade, development of cities, and the emergence of smaller nations dependent on distinct language (p.39). The author reported that Persians could quickly build up an empire of Assyrians because of the advantage of new weapon (the long bow and pike) and improved alphabet (p.39). However, Assyrians emphasized on control over space but were unable to solve the problems of time (p.40). In addition, the significance of the oral tradition and its vitality in Greek civilization became evident in its influence on the later history of the West (p.41). “The bureaucratic development of the Roman Empire and success in solving problems of administration over vast areas were dependent on supplies of papyrus” (p.47). The author added
that “parchment as a medium was suited to the spread of monasticism from Egypt throughout western Europe” (p.49). The author also believed that an elaborate development of writing supported the position of the scholarly class in administration (p.50). The presented that “manuscripts which had accumulated over centuries were reproduced and by the end of the fifteenth century printers became concerned with the possibilities of new markets” (p.53). “By the end of the sixteenth century the flexibility of the alphabet and printing had contributed to the growth of diverse literatures and had provided basic a basic for divisive nationalism in Europe” (p.55). Moreover, the author presented that suppression of printing in France limited the attention to language (p.56).

The author concluded that the dominant of knowledge by printing press faced problems with space, continuity and, time. The author presented that “the newspaper with a monopoly over time was limited in its power over space because of its regional character. Its monopoly was characterized by instability and crises” (p.60). The author added that the radio introduced a new era in Western civilization by focusing “centralization and the necessity of concern with continuity” (p.60). The author discussed that the bias of communication in paper and the printing industry was diminished by the bias or radio (p.60).

A plea for time: In this chapter the author attempted to present that Western civilization a stable society is dependent on an appreciation of proper balance between the concept of space and time as stating that “we are concerned with not only over vast areas of space but also over vast stretches of time” (p.64). The author indicated that “in a system of agriculture dependent on irrigation the measurement of time becomes important in predicting period of floods and the important dates of the year, seed-time and harvest” (p.65). The author presented that “in Egypt and Babylonia the principle changes in nature were accompanied by appropriated rituals which were part and parcel of cosmic events” (p.66). “The Babylonian priesthood in its concern with time contributed to the study if astrology and astronomy” (p.67) In addition, a powerful bureaucracy at Rome maintained control over time (e.g. 15-year cycle for tax) (p.70). The Christian system followed Roman religion “in giving a fixed year, that of the birth of Christ, a unique position” (p.72). The author added that “regularity of work brought administration, increase in production, trade, and the growth of cities” (p.72). Moreover, the author stated that the demands of industry on time have been paralleled by the demands of business due to advertising and fame which depends on length of corporate life (p.74). Technological improvements expedited newspaper industry (p.77). The author indicated that the steadying influence of the book as a product of sustained intellectual effort was destroyed by new development in periodicals and newspapers (p.79). The printing industry had been characterized by decentralization and regionalism. However, radio appealed to vast areas, overcome the division between classes (p.82).

The author gave a conclusion indicating that “we must somehow escape on one hand from our obsession with the moment and on the other hand from our obsession with history. In freeing ourselves from time and attempting a balance between the demands of time and space we can develop condition favorable to an interest in cultural activity” (p.90).

The problem of space: The author started this chapter by indicating that a concern with problems of space and time appears to have marked the beginnings of civilization in Egypt and Mesopotamia (p.92). A kingship probably emerged to meet the demands for a uniform system of administration (p.93). A decline of centralization bureaucratic power shifted from an emphasis
on control over space (e.g. pyramid) to a decentralized bureaucratic power with an emphasis on continuity and religion (e.g. writing and use of papyrus) (p.95). The author presented that a more stable political organization accompanied more effective control over space in the use of horses and light wheels (p.99). The author indicated that, in contrast with Egypt (interest in next world and immortal), Sumerian and Babylonian concerned with the systematizing of knowledge, order, and law (p.100). Furthermore, the author believed that the oral tradition and its relation to poetry implied a concern with time and religion (p.102). The author emphasized that language was the physiological basis of oral traditions and religion was the sociological mechanism (e.g. enforcing the co-operation, maintaining group life, creating a lasting organization) (p.105). The use of armed force focused the concept and organization of the society in terms of space rather than time and continuity (p.106). The increasing importance of problems of space was accomplished by improvements in the military tactics (p.112). A monopoly over time stimulated competitive elements in the organization of space. The introduction of paper from China through the East contributed to the development of writing (p.124). A interest in space was reflected in the development of the marine compass and the lens (p.128). The paper and printing industries supported the development of monopolies of space in nationalism and the state. Printing emphasized vernaculars and reduced speed movement of idea (p.129). The author pointed out that the oral tradition implies the spirit but writing and printing are inherently materialistic (p.130).

The author summarized that a decline of the oral tradition meant an emphasis on writing (eye rather than ear) and visual arts (architecture, sculpture, and painting). The significant of time persisted in the character of materials used (e.g. stone and parchment) (p.131). “The emphasis on capitals in Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, Greece, Rome, Constantinople, Paris, Berlin, London, Washington, and Moscow reflected a concern with the problems of control over time and over space” (p.131). “The rise of Palestine has been a tribute to the persistence of the oral tradition as a basis for the organization of time on the one hand and to the increasing pressure of the written and printed tradition toward the organization of space on the other” (p.131).

*Industrialism and cultural values:* The author suggested that we must be aware of difficulty of assessing the quality of a culture both we are a part or not (p.132). The author assumed that culture values are part of the culture and each civilization believes in it uniqueness and its superiority to other civilizations (p.132). The author presented that cultures will reflect their influences in terms of space and duration; however the authored believed that “intense cultural activity is followed by fatigue” (p.133). The author indicated that “cultural activity, evident in architecture and sculpture, capable of impressing peoples over wide area, is designed to emphasize prestige” (e.g. Egyptian’s pyramids) (p.133). It became an index of power for the culture.

In addition, the author added that political power that “was supported by such activities as writing evident in successive bureaucracies’ (p.134). “The success of organized force was dependent in part on technological advance…” (e.g. the use of horses, horse riding, iron) (p.134). The author attempted to use civilizations in the past as mirrors to understand our civilization (p.135). The author has emphasized “the significance of communication in determining the characteristics of earlier civilizations and of changes in methods of communication” (p.138). The author pointed out that the industrial revolution enabled the printing industry to expand faster (e.g. use of steam power in the paper manufacturing) (p.139). The inability to escape the
demands of industrialism on time weakens the possibility of an appraisal of limitations of space. Constant changes in technology that affect communication (e.g. radio and television) are a crucial factor in determining cultural changes.

Finally, the author believed that a shift from a culture dominated by one form of communication to another culture dominated by another form of communication results in cultural changes (p.141).

**The English publishing trend in the eighteenth century:** The author indicated that “the monopoly of the publishing trade had significant implications for the age of enlightenment in England” (p.142). The author pointed out that after the revolution of 1689, public opinion became more effective as the basis of power (p.142). The role of public opinion was determined by the availability of paper and cost of printing. The author presented that “the slow growth of the paper industry in eighteenth century strengthened the position of monopoly in the publishing industry” (p.143).

Copy right was introduced to protect the books’ author rights. The paper taxes were implemented for imported paper. Severe penalties were applied on illegal importers of printed books (p.143). The author presented that news become salable commodity (in the coffee house) because an increased of news demand and writers were enlisted to support parties owing to political strife and European wars (p.143).

The author indicated that literature was supported by patrons partly as a political weapon. The author presented that “Halifax has become convinced that the pamphlet as a political weapon must be displaced by newspaper emphasizing news and well-conceived and concise observation” (p.145). “Addison introduced the leading article to replace the tract and the paragraph” (p.145). The author added that “the periodical essay offset the effects of short lived gossipy newspapers, virulent pamphlets, indecent verses and salacious tales” (p.145). Periodicals were collected in volumes and provided fresh ideas, instructive easy reading of a higher moral level, a more humane feeling, and milder manners (p.145).

The author stated that only most eminent coffee house and few people subscribed to daily newspapers. “At least three-fourths of the paper was advertisements…” (p.149). In addition, the author presented an implication reflected from the restriction of the newspaper. Books had small editions and changes in format due to high cost of paper and limited market (p.149). However, the author suggested that the market for newspaper and books had been improved in 1741 by an extension of post office and a more frequent service from London (p.151). In addition, children books were also introduced around that time (p.151).

The author summarized that the limitations of the hand press had been reflected increased diversity of writing rather than the newspaper as stating that “destruction of legal monopoly of the newspaper industry and increased restriction on newspapers brought further expansion at the expanse of depth and the beginnings of romantic literature” (p.155).

**Technology and public opinion in the United States:** the author presented in the beginning of the chapter that freedom of press in the U.S. had emerged “as a result of clash with restrictive policies in Great Britain in the eighteenth century” (p.156). The author indicated that the power of press was also pointed out in the U.S. Postal Act (1793) that allows newspaper presses to send out their newspaper to other presses free of charges. In addition, newspaper sent to subscribers required only fixed fee regardless the distance (p.156). Politicians recognized the power of the press regarding its possibilities as an instrument of strategy (p.157). In addition, the increased
advertising increased the demand of paper (p.158). Consequently, some newspaper presses reduced the typo size in their newspaper to gain more space.

The author also presented that technological improvements in new production of newspaper and paper supported more competition of new type of newspaper (p.159). New type of newspaper was introduced and focused more sensational news. “The collection and presentation of news and a low price appeared as dominant elements in the success of the Sun,… but an appeal to low income groups exposed the paper to the effects of depressions” (p.161). In addition, the author indicated that the paper demand decreased due to the decline in advertising, bank failures, and fires in 1837 (p.161). However, the author pointed out that newspaper was one of the political weapons for politicians. The author also discussed the relationship between newspaper presses and successes of president elections in various contexts.

In addition, the invention of telegraph was beneficial to a number of presses. The author indicated that “a rapid, prompt supply of news was available and accurate information was provided to meet the demands of the stock exchanges” (p.167). The extension of telegraph and an increase in news demanded faster presses, large sale amount, and low prices (p.168). However, the author believed that “the telegraph weakened the system of political control through the post office and the newspaper exchange” (p.169). The telegraph and the fast press in the metropolitan area diminished the power of party based on the post office, the exchange system, and state capitals (p.170). The demand for news during the Civil War and the extension of newspaper in the large regional centers resulted in the development of press unions (p.175). An organization was introduced as a national co-operative news-gathering association (p177).

The introduced of new medium (the radio) diminished power of the press industry, ending the monopoly of press over space. The author indicated that political organizations also responded to the possibilities of new medium. Radio advertising became immensely profitable (p.188). The author summarized that “the traditions of decentralized of the press were replaced by new traditions of centralized and continuity” (p.188).

**Evaluations and Conclusion**

This book collects relevant papers discussing the effect of changes in media related to the history of civilization. The author presented the overall view that reflected the effect of communication and cultural changes.

The author pointed out several paradigm shifts in communication media resulting in emergence of a number of civilizations in the history. The use of clay affected the temples and religion in the Euphrates and Tigris. The use of papyrus expedited the development of political organization in Egypt. Papyrus and simplified writing supported Greece to develop its democratic organization, literature, and philosophy. Rome applied Greece knowledge with law. Christianity exploited parchments and codex to record the Bible. The introduction of paper and printing affected the development of how we store and disseminate our knowledge evolving to the advent of books and newspapers that had been utilized as political weapons. In addition, radio, as a new medium, was introduced later and become popular in 1928.

My reaction to this book is that communication affects human social relations. People do not stay alone in the vacuum environment. We have to communicate and react to numerous events in our society. We depend upon our preferred modes of communication including their medium (chat, gossip, newspaper, magazine, TV, multimedia etc). As a result, the introduction of a new communication medium shall immensely affect the society as a paradigm shift. An obvious example is the advent of the Internet technology. It redefined a new way of
communication and generated a new economic model. Actually, it is nothing more than electrical signals transmitted throughout all over the places (with any kinds of networked computer). However, it changes people lifestyles.

The author preferred the oral communication instead of writing as presenting that “My bias is with the oral tradition, particularly as reflected in Greek civilization and with the necessity of recapturing something of its spirit” (p.190). In contrast, I do not preferred oral communication because it seems to me that we will lose our knowledge over time (the time problem). It is difficult to transfer what we know to the next generations. To explain more, oral tradition depends on people memory and how well people can communicate through their speech. In addition, I consider myself as a technologist; however I do not prefer the Internet as an ultimate medium. To put in other words, there is a say indicating that most of our knowledge can be found on the Internet. Based on this logic, it seems dangerous because the Internet is volatile medium. It is dependent on electrical supplies and computer technologies. What will happen if we suddenly lose all such technologies (maybe from nuclear wars)? How can we maintain our knowledge? For these reason, I preferred paper based tradition because of its well balance in dimension between time and space.

Finally, I agree with the author’s idea that the use of a medium of communication over a long history will somehow determine the character of knowledge to be communicated, as well as the emergence of a new medium will lead us to a new civilization.