

Probe: A Brief Chart of Media Effects

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[See table of contents](#)

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Probe: A Brief Chart of Media Effects

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Media effects of...

Speech: self-domestication of man

Writing: making public issues

Alphabet: making personal duties a public issue

Print: making class struggle a public issue

Electricity: making remote issues a public issue

Digital: making personal identity a public issue

Speech accompanied and provided a delay in response to environmental triggers. Naming things allowed deliberation and communication. The delay in response, required for it, was detrimental for humans as animals, but it allowed the accumulation of individual and collective efforts in time and space at a level unobtainable for animals. The strategy proved to be beneficial evolutionarily and eventually divorced humans from the animal kingdom.

Deliberation and cooperation also changed the social structure of primordial humans. According to some anthropologists, speech allowed beta-males to conspire against and kill alpha-males. This entailed a social revolution: communication diversified the ways of challenging power in the group. Physical strength ceased to be the decisive factor for procreation and leadership. The strongest ones started to be dependent on the support of the smartest ones; politics emerged. The harem-type family led by the strongest and most violent male grew to become a larger social unit led by the hierarchy of the strongest and savviest males, who shared resources, power and responsibility for

communal well-being. The zoological violence and instinctive protectiveness transitioned to meritocracy and care. Herd became tribe. Thus, speech domesticated men at the levels of sensory reactions and social organization.

Writing emerged as a tool of bookkeeping and taxation for the temple bureaucracy in the first irrigation civilization. Irrigation provided a production surplus and thus invoked the necessity of accounting. The recording of divine/celestial events responsible for the river level also proved to be a source of power. With writing, shamans became priests and magic turned into religion. Thus, irrigation is the mother of writing, and the bureaucrat is the second oldest profession.

The recording of incomes and celestial events maintained the privilege of the temple bureaucracy as a managerial class. To secure class privilege, schools and libraries emerged that accumulated and reproduced the cadres and the monopoly of knowledge. Teaching literacy required reflection on the nature of writing and language. The priests became scholars. Preserving texts in the libraries required classification. The taxonomy of knowledge emerged, followed by the division of disciplines, from dam building and taxation to cosmogony and astronomy. Thus, the necessity to secure the class privilege of the priests-scribes made public matters intelligible. This is why the effect of writing is the making of public issues.

The alphabet detached the signs of writing from the likeness to nature and thus completed the abstraction of writing. The divorce of writing from mimicking nature enabled comprehension of the abstract Absolute, the pure idea that has no semblance nor any tethering in perceivable reality. The communities that developed the first alphabets, the ancient Semites, came up with the idea of a single deity as the ultimate cause of all natural and supernatural forces. The alphabet facilitated monotheism (Logan 2004).

Under polytheism, various forces rule the world, allowing truth to be negotiated. Under monotheism, truth is the Absolute given by the sole God and therefore must be

followed. Religion turned from a collective practical enterprise into an individual moral obligation. Communal togetherness split into personal duties controlled by God and society. This is why the effect of the alphabet is making personal duties a public issue.

Print freed scholars and scribes from the slavish job of copying and thus emancipated countless literate man-hours, which started looking for new content to be recorded. Recording current ideas and events became a habit and duty in the *Respublica Literaria*, a virtual international college of learned men in Medieval Europe. The exchange of news turned into the business and industry of journalism. The increased news supply accelerated trade and entrepreneurship. Print also made the Bible affordable for individual study and interpretation. This weakened the political power of the Church. Thus, economic and political conditions appeared for the emergence of a new class, the bourgeoisie.

Journalism satisfied the demand for business news but also provided the bourgeoisie with a tool for political claims. The class struggle of the bourgeoisie with the aristocracy and clergy led to the development of democracy and capitalism. The further development of capitalism created a new class of proletariat. The self-identification and political claims of the proletariat also relied on printing production and journalism. Bourgeois and worker revolutions marked the age of printing. This is why the effect of print is making class struggle a public issue.

Electricity allowed the instant delivery of distant news and brought international affairs into the agenda of the local news. The telegraph and especially radio bound space at the planetary scale. This entailed the clashes of global empires over the spheres of political influence and resource control. If radio enabled industrial all-out wars, culminating in the two World Wars, television quickly ended the era of full-scale industrial wars by affecting human empathy through images of hostilities. In the era of television, wars turned into hybrid military operations or even commercial, political, and regulatory conflicts.

Either way, the instant delivery of distant news enabled globalization, which means electricity made remote issues a public issue.

Digital media emancipated authorship by giving billions of people access not just to information but to presenting themselves to the world. Human widespread engagement on the internet, blogosphere, and then social media opened new economic opportunities. The personal data and personal time spent on digital platforms became a commodity for the platform owners.

Seeking better engagement, the platforms train the algorithms and the entire environment of response, including other users, to pay more attention to the identity signals of users. The amplification of identity signalling serves both the user's unconscious desire for response and the business needs of the platform. The hyper-focus on identity is an inevitable setting of the digital society. This is why the effect of the digital is making personal identity a public issue.

Reference

Logan, Robert K. 2004. *The Alphabet Effect: A Media Ecology Understanding of the Making of Western Civilization*. Cresskill NJ: Hampton Press (1st edition 1986. New York: Wm. Morrow).