

Theories of Harold Innis and the Internet

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



The Internet would have been quite fascinating for Harold Innis because it has mixed oral and written traditions in untraditional ways. The Internet contains vast amounts of information that can overwhelm people by their sheer quantity. The Internet also allows for different forms of social interactions that cut across time and space. By cutting time, it enables people to connect with others 24 because they can interact anytime, and by cutting space, anyone in the world who has Internet connection and communication tools can access, make, or respond to Internet information. Innis would have analyzed the Internet as something else because it promotes both oral and written traditions; however, it also diverges from these traditions and presents an opportunity for balancing them, if only content producers, distributors, and consumers focused on using the Internet for preserving the positive characteristics and ends of oral and written traditions.

The Internet preserves both oral and written traditions to varying extents. The Internet is a form of written tradition to some extent because of its ability to be produced quickly and to be shared efficiently with many people (Week 2, 4). An example is writing a blog that anyone can see if it is set to public viewing. The Internet can also produce shallow information that does not tackle long-term values, as Innis noted about written traditions. The Internet does not preserve written tradition alone, however, because, while Innis' definition of written tradition lacks many features of oral tradition, the Internet can enable oral communication. An example is a video call. I can call my friend and I can hear her voice and see her facial expressions, gestures, and other forms of non-verbal expressions (Week 3, 2). On this regard, the

Internet defies the restrictions of written traditions. Furthermore, the Internet also promotes written traditions because it can “dumb down” human functions for creativity and critical thinking (Salutin). To some extent, the Internet can make people lack creativity and critical thinking skills if it trains people to want to read short articles without full analysis. Nevertheless, the Internet has its oral traditions too. Though not all users practice oral traditions through the Internet, there are social spaces for deeper thinking and interactions. TED talks and forums that encourage real-time or delayed interaction for exploring long-term human values and issues are examples of oral traditions. The Internet can provide spaces for people to painstakingly discuss long-term issues and values. The Internet also follows oral traditions because it is not always isolating people from one another (Week 3, 3). An example is a social networking site, where people connect with one another because they share similar interests, hobbies, and/or ideologies. The Internet is as socializing as oral traditions.

Innis would also analyze the Internet as something else because it can merge oral and written traditions in socially beneficial ways. Through its written aspect, writers can ponder on their subjects more and have time for revision and reflection. The Internet helps people to possibly improve their perspectives because of self-analysis and self-criticism in real-time (Week 3, 1). They can do this more powerfully because the Internet encourages interaction, not only with those who are like-minded, but also to those who oppose oneself. As a result, the person becomes potentially more self-aware and socially aware through open criticism. The Internet can be a medium for critical thinking, creativity, and social changes, as well as stability and

development, as long as people balance the positive characteristics of written and oral traditions, as well as new traditions, that can be found in the Internet.

Innis would have seen the Internet as something different because, while it has old and new traditions in it, it also balances them. It has features that use written traditions for faster production and distribution of information that can lead deeper analysis of long-term values and issues. The Internet is not the perfect medium because it can still be used to bias the message, as Innis says, but it does offer a new tradition, a tradition of connections that can bridge old and new oral and written traditions for the benefit of the world.

Works Cited

Salutin, Rick. "Last Call for Harold Innis." *Queen's Quarterly* 104. 2 (Summer 1997): 245-5. In *Culture and Media*. Web. 29 January 2014.

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