

Media Globalization

Summary

In this chapter you will discover:

- The main features of media globalization.
- The pivotal role played by transnational media organizations in the more general globalization process.
- That globalization is a problematic, complex and contested concept that defies simple definition.
- The importance of examining the experiences of audiences in terms of their access to, consumption of and the meanings they derive from globalized media products.
- That while the dominance or hegemony of the globalized media industry is of obvious significance in the twenty-first century we should never underestimate the ability of local media audiences to resist, appropriate or reconstruct globally distributed media messages.

Key concepts

- Globalization
- Media globalization
- Transnational media industries
- Media imperialism
- Homogenization
- Information rich and poor
- Audience resistance
- Hybridization
- Localization
- Glocalization

In writing your media diary in Chapter 1 you were asked to reflect on what portion of your regular media consumption is produced and distributed by media organizations that operate at a global level. In watching television news, going to the cinema, reading a book, surfing the Net, playing the latest computer game or listening to a new recording by your favourite band, DJ or singer, the chances are that you were using or consuming a media product created, controlled and distributed by the global media industry. The production, distribution and consumption of an increasing number of media products now take place in a transnational context. An understanding of what media globalization is all about is a crucial starting point in our attempts to come to terms with media in the twenty-first century. Media globalization has resulted in a radically changed media landscape for media audiences. It is in the context of this rapidly changing milieu that we will address questions surrounding media ownership, production, content and reception.

So what is the real significance of media globalization? Is it responsible for unprecedented social change, the shrinkage of time and space, the perpetuation of global capitalism, the creation of a hierarchy of media 'haves' and 'have nots', the further hastening of cultural homogenization or sameness, or is its importance overblown and overstated?

Whatever about its shortcomings, as a process media globalization represents one of the most complex, fascinating and dynamic questions facing us in the twenty-first century. It is at once both immensely powerful and laden with many contradictions and ambiguities. Media globalization is characterized by *convergence*. It has come about because of the convergence of old and new media technologies as well as the convergence of old and new media organizations to form immensely powerful transnational media conglomerates. It raises new possibilities and new (and not so new) questions for media audiences and media organizations. It poses new challenges for students of the mass media.

In seeking to further explain what media globalization is, this chapter takes the view that we need to fuse elements of both the *macro* theoretical accounts of media globalization with the emerging accounts of the workings of media globalization at the *micro* or local level. The latter draws upon a largely ethnographic research model that seeks to understand how audiences actively engage with the globalized media. We need to appreciate the arguments being made at both ends of the media globalization spectrum – between political economists/cultural imperialists and pluralists – in order to more fully understand what is happening to and with the media.

Having introduced the phenomenon of globalization, this chapter outlines the key features of media globalization in particular. We will place special emphasis on the degree to which a great deal of the reported globalization of people's local lives is as a result of mass mediation. Given the emphasis within globalization theory on the supposed shrinkage between the distant and the local (Giddens, 1999), we examine in the form of a detailed case-study, the reporting in one Western European setting of a Third World news story concerning an impending famine crisis in Sudan. Finally, the chapter considers the relationship between audiences and the globalized media. Our focus here will be on access to, the consumption of and the meanings that audiences make of globalized media products. As an antidote to the emphases traditionally placed by those following a Cultural Imperialist or effects model of media research on the process of media globalization, the localized appropriation of and potential for resistance to media texts produced by the global media industry by audiences are crucial aspects of this equation.

Following Tomlinson (1997), Lull (1995) and Silverstone (1999) we recognize the importance of examining the interplay between the macro and micro processes of media globalization.

What is globalization?

Explaining the social changes associated with industrial capitalism has been a central preoccupation within sociology since its beginnings in the nineteenth century. Traditionally, sociologists explained concepts such as class, community, family and the emerging mass media in terms of how they operated within individual societies and nation states. This emphasis has now firmly shifted and, in recent decades, globalization has become arguably the core concept that sociologists and others use in order to explain the experience of living in modernity or postmodernity. There is no one agreed definition of globalization, and as we will show later on in this chapter the concept is a problematic one – especially so when it comes to understanding the mass media.

EXTRACTED READING 2.1 You should now read Tomlinson, 1994 and consider the following issues:

- 1 To what extent are people's local lives more 'open' to global phenomena as a result of mass mediatization?
- 2 Why is the globalized mass media not a window on the world?

FIGURE 2.1 Definitions of globalization

Globalization is 'the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole' (Robertson, 1992: 8)

Globalization is 'best considered a complex set of interacting and often countervailing human, material and symbolic flows that lead to diverse, heterogeneous cultural positionings and practices which persistently and variously modify established vectors of social, political and cultural power' (Lull, 1995: 150)

Globalization is 'the product of a changing economic and political order, one in which technology and capital have combined in a new multi-faceted imperialism' (Silverstone, 1999: 107)

Globalization 'refers to the rapidly developing process of complex interconnections between societies, cultures, institutions and individuals world-wide. It is a social process which involves a compression of time and space, shrinking distances through a dramatic reduction in the time taken – either physically or representationally – to cross them, so making the world seem smaller and in a certain sense bringing them "closer" to one another' (Tomlinson, 1999: 165)

CRITICAL QUESTION 2.1

Draw up a list of examples of where global phenomena are present in your own day-to-day life. How many are a result of your exposure to and interaction with the mass media?

The latest brand of colonialism?

The globalization of everyday life for a significant number of the world's citizens is as a result of the restructuring of economic and cultural activities on global lines. While the media and communications industries are part and parcel of this more general restructuring of economic activity at a global level, it is they which are primarily responsible for the promotion of the notion of globalism as well as contributing to the qualitative shift in how modernity or postmodernity is experienced by a large number of social actors.

It is worth while thinking about this for a moment. The dominant players in the global media industry continue to represent globalization as an unproblematic given. They repeatedly (and cynically) reproduce the idea – first mooted by the Canadian scholar Marshall McLuhan – of the 'global village' where it is assumed that all the planet's citizens can – if they want to – participate in a global society through their media use. This of course naively (or otherwise) presumes equal access to media technologies and products in all societies and cultures across the globe. It ignores the information deficit that exists between the information-rich and information-poor within the developed world and between the developed and Third World. It downplays the profit motives of the agents of globalization. While the process of globalization is a reality, we need to be cautious of the ways in which it is heralded and celebrated by those interests which benefit most from it.

Main features of globalization

As Figure 2.1 indicates there are a variety of definitions and interpretations of what constitutes globalization. It is, however, usually discussed in terms of the following key features:

- 1 The growing level of connectedness between individuals, societies and nation states at a global level.
- 2 The reduction in the distance between individuals, societies and nation states in terms of both time and space facilitated by technological developments such as the Internet and other media. These are usually referred to as Information Communication Technologies (ICTs).
- 3 The development of ICTs has not only resulted in major changes in the workings of the mass media but also allows the rapid transfer of information, knowledge and capital.
- 4 Increased awareness of global phenomena in people's (local) lives.

- 5 The globalization of culture and economic activity as a direct result of the activities of powerful transnational capitalist organizations.
- 6 It tends to assume a decrease in the significance of other kinds of identities such as the ethnic, the local, the regional or the national in people's everyday lives.
- 7 Globalization has increased the possibility of greater reflexivity amongst social actors. It offers the potential to human beings to become more critical of their immediate environment by allowing them to compare their experiences with those living in other societies or under different political arrangements. Media activities such as watching satellite television news or surfing the Internet offer the potential for this kind of reflexivity in an unprecedented way. The restrictions imposed by the Chinese authorities in 2001 and again in 2002 on Internet use is a concrete example of how powerful interests in that country are fearful of reflexivity amongst its citizens. China is not alone in the regard. There are many historical precedents of governments attempting to censor media content such as newspapers, radio or books.
- 8 Critics of globalization argue that it has resulted in even more exploitation of the Third World. Those whom journalist John Pilger (2002) terms 'the new rulers of the world' exploit both the raw materials and the labour power of the world's poorest people in order to feed consumer demand in the West.

Proponents of globalization theory – especially those who follow either a Global Society or Global Culture approach – argue, perhaps predictably, that the experience of day-to-day living in the early twenty-first century is markedly different from that which has gone before. People's local lives are increasingly lived in the shadow of global phenomena. We can see the 'spectre of globalization' in our everyday experience and it is particularly evident in terms of our working lives, our consumption – especially in our shopping and eating – and our mass-media activities.

A positive view of globalization would hold that the globalization process brings with it the possibility of creating a truly global society. A more critical perspective would argue that globalization is just Western capitalist imperialism under another guise. Both

FIGURE 2.2 The language of globalism



perspectives would be in broad agreement about the crucial role played in the globalization process by the mass media and by television and the Internet in particular.

Theories of globalization

There are a wide range of diverse theoretical positions that seek to explain the concept of globalization. Following Sklair (1999) we can summarize these under four main headings. These can be further subdivided in terms of the relative amount of stress they place on the *cultural* or *economic* aspects of globalization. One thing is certain – there is very little consensus as to what constitutes globalization.

Global society approach



(See Chapter 6 for an elaboration of this theme.)

Proponents of the Global Society approach emphasize the extent to which we all as citizens of the planet inhabit one society that has common concerns and possibilities. The Global Society position points to the increasing consciousness of the global that is said to exist in everyday life. People's local lives are becoming more and more affected by global phenomena. According to this perspective the global media industries play a key role in raising global awareness and in the extent to which global phenomena are said to impinge on everyday consciousness via media products. Environmental issues such as global warming might be an example of where the mass media have raised public awareness of the local implications of a global problem. The approach has been accused of seriously underplaying the continuing extent of global inequalities and of overstating the argument that we live in a 'global village'. The failure of the media in the Western world to report on Third World poverty and famine in a sustained and critical way is an example of one of the contradictions of the Global Society approach. At a technological level it is now possible to beam stories back and forth across the globe in a matter of seconds. This is in stark contrast to the general invisibility of Third World stories in the Western media.

Global culture approach

Those who take a Global Culture standpoint see an increasing level of cultural homogenization taking place at a global level. Members of culturally and politically diverse societies participate in a global cultural experience never before witnessed in human history. Following the logic of this perspective, children in Belfast, Berlin and Budapest all play with the latest Digimon characters. They are likely to want to eat the same kinds of fast food in McDonald's, Burger King or Pizza Hut. Depending on their age and gender they are also likely to be fans of specific kinds of popular music such as 'boy bands' that are marketed on a global scale. There is, according to this perspective, an increasing amount of homogenization or 'sameness' in the cultural practices evident in the early twenty-first century. The Global Culture approach allows little room for either local resistance to or local appropriation and reinvention of globalized cultural products.

The World System approach

Both the World System and Global Capitalism approaches are primarily concerned with explaining the continuing dominance of capitalism. While the World System position is not expressly concerned with explaining globalization *per se*, it has provided us with a model that divides the world into *core*, *semi-peripheral* and *peripheral* societies and economies that are exploited by the capitalist system. The parts needed to assemble media hardware such as personal computers or digital television sets may be produced in peripheral or semi-peripheral societies to feed the consumer demand for such products in the core societies in the West. The production of certain media texts – the animation industry was referred to in Chapter 1 as a powerful example of this phenomenon – takes place in peripheral and semi-peripheral societies in order to maximize profits for transnational multimedia conglomerates and to feed consumer demand in core and non-core countries.

The Global Capitalism approach

The Global Capitalism approach argues that the globalization of capitalism is at the heart of the globalization process. Its key actors are transnational corporations which in many instances are more powerful in economic and political terms than many of the countries they exploit, in terms of labour, raw materials or markets. At the heart of the Global Capitalism perspective is the viewpoint that globalization of this kind depends upon the promotion of the ideology of consumerism. The media industries relentlessly promote consumerism by emphasizing what is considered to be a desirable lifestyle. This is undertaken not only in the form of advertising, sponsorship and product endorsement, but also in the promotion of certain lifestyles as being more desirable than others within a wide range of media settings. Evidence of this desirable lifestyle is embodied, for example, in advertising, where specific kinds of body image for men and women are relentlessly promoted. There are implicit messages that if you buy this product (a car, after-shave, beer, runners, to name but four examples) you will somehow be transformed and become more desirable to men or women. In spite of the overtones of globalism, Western and more particularly American lifestyles are the ones given greatest prominence. The increasingly complex ownership patterns of multimedia conglomerates or oligarchies means transnational media companies may not only be involved in the media industry *per se* but also own or control other kinds of companies producing goods and services for sale in the global market.



(See Chapters 3 and 6 for an elaboration of this theme).

Media globalization

We turn now to examine the pivotal role that the media play in the more general globalization process. The main features of recent media globalization raise important questions that we need to address as students of the media. The anxieties about media imperialism and cultural homogenization raised initially by Herbert Schiller and others concerning the dominant position assumed by the American mass-media industry in the post-war period has now given way to growing worries about the domination of the

BOX 2.1 *Big Brother* goes global?

The *Big Brother* television series has been one of the most talked-about media phenomena of recent years. Strong on active audience participation, the programme is a potent illustration of media globalization. *Big Brother* has been produced in fourteen different locations, namely the United States, Argentina, Australia, Norway, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Switzerland. The programme is a multi-media phenomenon, being television, telephone and Internet-based. The first UK series of *Big Brother* on Channel 4 attracted television audiences of up to 10 million viewers. Its associated Web site recorded over 200 million page impressions, while over 20 million phone votes were made. In addition, the second UK series on Channel 4 and E4 used a combination of interactive digital television, radio and mobile phone. Endemol Entertainment, which owns the *Big Brother* brand, is a European-based multinational television production company. Endemol Entertainment is 100 per cent owned by the Spanish telecommunications and media giant Telefonica, which in turn has a controlling stake in the Terra-Lycos group. The *Big Brother* series is transnational in the sense that the format has been successfully sold to television networks at different points in the globe although it would be worth while speculating exactly how much localizing has taken place in the making of each specific series and the extent to which this has made inroads into the homogeneity of the series format.

global media industry by a small number of powerful transnational media conglomerates. (See, for example, Box 2.2). There are further anxieties about the extent to which access to the media is truly global and democratic. Having outlined the key features of media globalization we tease out more fully the concerns~raised around technological change, ownership and access to the global media. The concerns that have been raised about the global media conglomerates mirror more general fears about the rise of global capitalism itself.

Main features

Following Thompson (1995), we can say that media globalization is characterized by a number of distinct features. These are:

- 1 The emergence of and continued dominance of the global media industry by a small number of transnational media conglomerates.
- 2 The use by these media conglomerates of new information and communications technologies.
- 3 The increasingly deregulated environment in which these media organizations operate.

- 4 The globalization of media content has resulted in a greater amount of homogenization and standardization in certain media products produced and distributed by the global media industries.
- 5 The uneven flow of information and communication products within the global system and the different levels of access that global citizens have to global networks of communication.
- 6 Media globalization is inextricably linked with the promotion of the ideology of consumerism and is therefore bound up with the capitalist project.

Technological change

Media globalization has been made possible by the ongoing changes and developments in information and communications technology. Cable, ISDN, digitalization, direct broadcast satellites as well as the Internet have created a situation where vast amounts of information can be transferred around the globe in a matter of seconds. The merging of the personal computer and the television set in tandem with the rolling out of digitalized television and radio open up even wider possibilities for those who can afford new media technologies. Wireless technology such as the WAP mobile phone allows Internet access. Companies such as Nokia using the Multimedia Messaging System have recently developed ways to deliver text, audio clips and digital pictures via mobile phone handsets.

Media ownership

Media globalization is also defined in terms of the restructuring of media ownership. (See Chapter 3 on media ownership.) The global media industry is dominated by a small number of powerful transnational media conglomerates that own and control a diverse range of traditional and newer forms of media (Bagdikian, 2000). Conglomerates such as AOL-Time Warner, Bertelsmann, Disney, Viacom and News Corporation operate at a global level in terms of the production, distribution and selling of their media products. (See Chapter 1's discussion of *The Simpsons*, for example.) While these companies are transnational in character they emanate from 'core societies' such as the United States, Australia, Japan or Western Europe. Unlike traditional publicly or privately owned media organizations, these conglomerates operate in an increasingly deregulated environment.

The structure of ownership of media conglomerates has become increasingly concentrated, and as convergence has taken place groups such as Bertelsmann (Europe) or AOL-Time Warner (North America) might be more accurately described as multimedia conglomerates. (See Box 2.2 for an overview of AOL-Time Warner's activities.) As we discuss in Chapter 3 a growing number of global media companies are engaged in cross-ownership. They are constituent parts of more general conglomerates with vested interests in companies that produce amongst other things armaments, cars and cigarettes.

Access to the global media

One obvious counterpoint to those who herald media globalization as being unproblematic is to examine the question of access. Those who are critical of media globalization now speak of the 'information-rich' and the 'information-poor' as well as the 'digital

BOX 2.2 The global jukebox

The recording industry is an important example of recent cultural globalization. It is also an industry that is dominated by a very small number of multimedia conglomerates. While technological developments – such as Internet-based MP3 files – pose new challenges for the recording industry, the Napster (2001) experience would suggest that the transnationals remain in a dominant position.

Using a political economy perspective, Burnett (1996) examines the dominance of the global record industry by the then ‘Big six’ oligopoly of Time Warner, Sony, Philips, Bertelsmann, Thorn-EMI and Matusushita. (Further convergence has taken place since.) These organizations control the production and distribution of recordings and their related products. As evidence of their dominant position Burnett notes that:

the transnationals were found to dominate the market in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Italy, Australia, Sweden, Japan, France and the Netherlands. When the total market share of transnationals was taken into account (own labels, licensing distribution) there were five countries (UK, Italy, Japan, Sweden, France) where the transnationals had between 60 and 80 per cent of the total market shares. In the rest of the sample, the transnationals controlled over 80 per cent of the market shares. (1996: 60)

In 1994 in excess of 90 per cent of the gross sales of music products worldwide were produced and distributed by these six organizations. While US\$33 billion worth of sales were achieved in the United States in 1994, Burnett stresses the increasing significance of overseas or foreign markets for these transnational media giants, accounting as they do for half their total revenues. While it is a high-risk investment business the Big six maintain their dominant position through relying upon an ‘open system of development and production’ (1996: 115). Burnett argues that:

The contemporary strategy of the transnationals relies on their exclusive control over large-scale manufacturing, distribution and access to the principal avenues of exposure. With this exclusive control, the transnationals have adopted a multidivisional corporate form linked with a large number of independent producers. This open system of development and production remains under oligopolistic conditions because the transnationals find it advantageous to incorporate new artists, producers and styles of music in order to constantly reinvigorate the popular music market and ensure that no large unsated demand amongst consumers materializes. The innovation and diversity sustained in this open system [are] essential in order to maintain a profitable and secure market. (1996: 115)

BOX 2.3a AOL-Time Warner at a glance

Estimated in 2001 to be worth US\$207 billion.

Key companies within its corporate structure: America On Line; Home Box Office; New Line Cinema; Time Inc.; Time Warner Cable; Time Warner Trade Publishing; Turner Broadcasting System; Warner Bros; Warner Music Group.

Core businesses: interactive media; television networks; publishing; music; filmed entertainment and cable systems.

Location: US-based with a considerable number of joint venture activities in Asia, Europe and Latin America.

AOL's ICQ instant messaging brand has over 88 million registered users worldwide – two-thirds of who are outside the United States. According to AOL, 'Every second of every day, someone around the world registers for ICQ.'

A significant proportion of the revenues generated by its television and filmed entertainment business in the United States and elsewhere is on either a subscription or a pay-per-view basis.

In describing its activities the organization is quite consciously a promoter of globalism. Its corporate Web site speaks of seeing 'a more converged and interactive world emerging' and that the organization's task is to provide 'access to a breathtaking array of choices and new ways to connect to the ever-expanding online universe'.

Time Inc. publishes over sixty magazines with an estimated total readership of 268 million.

The Turner Broadcasting System's Cartoon Network is available to more than 138 million households in 145 countries.

CNN reaches a potential audience of 1 billion people worldwide.

Warner Bros Television owns and distributes prime-time television series such as *ER*, *Friends* and *The West Wing*.

Warner Music Group operates in sixty-eight countries worldwide through a combination of subsidiaries, affiliates and non-affiliated licensees.

Source: AOL-Time Warner corporate Web site, 2001.

BOX 2.3b AOL-Time Warner's activities**America Online**

AOL Service
 AOL Anywhere
 AOL International
 AOL@School
 CompuServe
 Digital City
 DMS
 ICQ
 iPlanet
 MapQuest
 Moviefone
 Netscape
 AOL Music

Time Warner Cable

Bay News 9, Tampa FL
 Central Florida News 13,
 Orlando FL
 NY1 News, New York
 News 8 Austin TX
 R/News, Rochester NY

Joint ventures

Road Runner
 Time Warner Telecom

Time Warner Trade Publishing

iPublish.com
 Little Brown & Co.
 Little Brown & Co. UK
 Warner Books

Time Warner Audio Books**HBO Home Box Office**

HBO
 HBO Plus
 HBO Signature
 HBO Family
 HBO Comedy
 HBO Zone
 HBO Latino
 Cinemax
 MoreMAX
 ActionMAX
 ThrillerMAX
 W MAX
 @ MAX
 5 MAX
 OuterMAX
 HBO Independent Productions
 HBO Downtown Productions

Joint ventures

Comedy Central
 HBO Asia
 HBO Brasil
 HBO Czech
 HBO Hungary
 HBO India
 HBO Korea
 HBO Ole
 HBO Poland
 HBO Romania
 A & E Mundo
 E! Latin America
 SET Latin America
 WBTV Latin America

Turner Broadcasting System

TBS Superstation
 Turner Network Television
 Cartoon Network
 Turner Classic Movies
 Turner South
 Boomerang
 TCM Europe
 Cartoon Network Europe
 TNT Latin America
 Cartoon Network Latin America
 TCM & Cartoon Network/Asia Pacific
 Atlanta Braves
 Atlanta Hawks
 Atlanta Thrashers
 The Goodwill Games

Joint ventures

Cartoon Network Japan
 Court TV (TWE-owned)
 CETV

Network Television

The WB Television Network
 Kids WB!

News

CNN/US
 CNN Headline News
 CNN International
 CNNfn
 CNN/Sports Illustrated
 CNN en Espanol
 CNN Airport Network
 CNN Radio Network
 CNN Radio Noticias
 CNN Newsource

Joint ventures

CNN+
 CNN Turk
 n-tv

CNN Web sites

CNN.com
 CNNfn.com
 CNNfyi.com
 CNNSI.com
 MyCNN.com
 CNN.com.br
 CNN.co.jp (Japanese)
 CNN.com Europe (English)
 CNN.de (German)
 CNN.dk (Danish)
 CNNenEspanol.com (Spanish)
 CNN Italia.it (Italian)
 CNN.Norge (Norwegian)
 CNN.Svergie (Swedish)
 CNN.comAsia (English)

New Line Cinema

New Line Cinema
 Fine Line Features
 New Line Home Video
 New Line International
 New Line New Media
 New Line Television

Warner Bros

Warner Bros Pictures
 Warner Bros Television
 Warner Bros Animation
 Looney Tunes
 Hanna-Barbera
 Castle Rock Entertainment
 Telepictures Productions
 Warner Home Video
 Warner Bros Consumer Products
 Warner Bros Studio Stores
 Warner Bros International Theatres
 Warner Bros New Media
 Warner Bros Online
 DC Comics
 MAD Magazine

BOX 2.3B (continued)**Warner Music Group**

The Atlantic Group
 Elektra Entertainment Group
 London-Sire Records
 Rhino Entertainment
 Warner Bros Records
 Warner Music International
 Warner/Chappell Music
 Warner Bros Publications
 WEA
 Ivy Hill Corporation
 WEA Corporation
 WEA Manufacturing
 Alternative Distribution Alliance
 Warner Special Products
 Giant Merchandising

Joint ventures

143 Records
 Columbia House
 Maverick
 Music Choice
 RuffNation Records
 Strictly Rhythm Records
 Sub Pop Records
 Tommy Boy Records

Time Inc.

Time
Sports Illustrated
People
Entertainment Weekly
Fortune
Money
In Style
Real Simple
Time for Kids
 ON
Sports Illustrated for Kids
Sports Illustrated for Women
Teen People
People en Espanol

FSB: Fortune Small Business
eCompany Now
Popular Science
Outdoor Life
Field and Stream
Golf
Yachting
Motor Boating and Sailing
Salt Water Sportsman
Ski
Skiing
Freeze
Snowboard Life
This Old House
TransWorld Stance
TransWorld Surf
TransWorld Skateboarding
TransWorld Snowboarding
TransWorld Motocross
Ride BMX
Snap
Skiing Trade News
TransWorld Skateboarding Business
TransWorld Snowboarding Business
TransWorld Surf Business
BMX Business News
Time Life
Leisure Arts
Media Networks
Oxmoor House
First Moments
Sunset Books
Targeted Media
Time Inc. Custom Publishing
Time Distribution Services
Time Inc. Home Entertainment
Warner Publisher Services
Mutual Funds
Southern Living
Progressive Farmer
Southern Accents
Sunset
Cooking Light

Coastal Living

Parenting

Family Life

Baby Talk

Bebe

Healthy Pregnancy

Health

AsiaWeek

Wallpaper

Who Weekly

Joint ventures

Bookspan

Essence Communications Partners

Source: AOL-Time Warner corporate Web site, 2001.

BOX 2.4 'The mosque and the satellite: media and adolescence in a Moroccan town' (Davis and Davis, 1995)

We were struck by the pervasiveness and manifest similarity of adolescents' media experience across developing countries. English speaking Inuit (Eskimo) youth 300 miles north of the Arctic circle were sitting with their Inuktitut-speaking parents watching the *Love Boat* or southern Canadian hockey; young men in an Aboriginal settlement in northern Australia were dressing like Afro-American teens and listening to reggae; and Moroccans were discovering Dolly Parton and arguing over who shot J.R. Ewing' (1995: 578)

divide' that is evident both within societies in the developed world and between the northern and southern hemispheres (Campbell and Breen, 2001).

The UN Development Programme, for example, estimated in the year 2000 that 0.1 per cent of Internet connections are in sub-Saharan Africa, where 9 per cent of the world's population is living. South Asia has 1 per cent of Internet connections with 19 per cent of the world's population (Cullen 2000). The categories 'information-rich' and 'information-poor' refer to the degree of access that citizens have to both old and new media. Cullen (2001) notes that

the digital divide may result from factors of social class, geography, educational attainment, from attitudinal and generational factors and from physical disability (see also DiMaggio et al., 2001). One's ability to participate in a wired world, however, is not a given. It is socially and economically determined.


(See Chapter 3 on the political economy of the Internet.)



CRITICAL QUESTIONS 2.2 The globalization of news

- 1 It has become commonplace for many transnational news and other media organizations to use symbols of globalization – usually symbolic representations of the globe itself – to suggest that their news coverage is truly global in its scope. Write a brief report on this evening's news bulletin in terms of how it prioritizes certain kinds of stories as news items.
- 2 In doing this exercise it might be interesting to compare a national news broadcast with one from CNN.
- 3 Of the total number of news items broadcast what proportion are concerned with local/national issues as opposed to international/global issues?
- 4 In what order are the stories broadcast?
- 5 How significant is proximity in determining the news value of the story?
- 6 If stories dealing with international/global issues are broadcast to what extent are they told from an elite nation's perspective?
- 7 Compare your findings with those of your fellow students and discuss the extent to which the 'spectre of the global' is truly evident in television news.

Globalization and media audiences

The Cultural Imperialism perspective, referred to earlier, has many merits, not the least of which is how it has critically examined the dominant global market position of media conglomerates. However, it has paid insufficient attention to what happens to globalized media audiences in their day-to-day lives. (See, for example, Oliveira, 1993; Thompson, 1995; Tomlinson, 1999.) The hermeneutic dimension of globally circulated media texts has been ignored.

Media globalization resulting from the activities of media conglomerates using new technologies has radically transformed the media landscape, but it is not a one-way process. While media audiences now exist in an unalterably changed media environment they continue to possess considerable agency. The pluralist perspective holds that audiences shape and are shaped by media globalization (see, for example, Lull, 1995). They possess the power to appropriate, localize and hybridize globally distributed media messages, resulting in 'glocalization' (see, for example, Husband, 1998).

Silverstone (1999) reminds us that globalization is a dynamic process, stressing that 'cultures form and reform around the different stimuli that global communications enable' (1999: 111–12). In everyday life 'The topic may be global, but it becomes a resource for the expression of local particular interests and identities' (1999: 112).

Media globalization has resulted in globalized diffusion of media texts but it has also resulted in local appropriation and hybridization (see, for example, Liebes and Katz, 1993, and Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 1994). In a fascinating anthropological study of media use amongst Moroccan adolescents Davis and Davis (1995) argue that:

much of the content of Western media images is hard to reconcile with traditional Moroccan values rooted in Islam and a strong extended family. While the young people we interviewed and observed often seemed acutely aware of the apparent contradictions between traditional and modern ways – between the Mosque and the satellite – they did not typically see these contradictions as irreconcilable and most seemed eager to preserve core traditional values while hoping to reap the benefits of the affluent and exciting society promised by the media. (1995: 578–9)

And they also note that ‘for television viewing, about half of both boys and girls said they preferred *both* Arab and Western programs. Many of both sexes seem to want to see what is going on all over the world. The visual character of television makes language differences less important’ (1995: 590). There is also some evidence to suggest that, in the face of media globalization and the threat of cultural homogenization, other forms of local identities actually intensify. Localization, however, is not just restricted to media audiences. As our outline of AOL-Time Warner’s activities demonstrates, the global media giants localize many of their products to ensure market domination and profits (see, for example, Herman and McChesney, 1999).

While media globalization is a powerful process it is not a one-dimensional homogenizing force. The reception or hermeneutic model would suggest that audiences retain considerable power in terms of how globalized media texts are received, interpreted and even resisted.

One of the best examples of research on media audiences in an age of media globalization is by Marie Gillespie. Gillespie’s work (1989, 1993, 1995) has examined the interplay between the globalization and the localization of culture. She has focused on the first-generation Indian diaspora in terms of their media use and the ‘television talk’ of Punjabi teenagers.

Globalization has resulted in the movement of people and the circulation of media texts on a transnational basis. But what are its implications for local cultures? She contends that while the consumption of a growing number of transnational television programmes and films has affected cultural change amongst London Punjabi families she argues that ‘Punjabi cultural “traditions” are just as likely to be reaffirmed and reinvented as to be challenged and subverted by television and video viewing experiences’ (1995: 76).

Her earlier research on the importance of the video-cassette recorder in Indian homes in the United Kingdom stressed:

how the VCR enables families to maintain strong cultural ties with their countries of origin through the consumption of popular film and television exported from the Indian sub-continent. It pointed to the ways in which a ‘new’ communications technology is being mobilized for the purposes of maintaining and reinventing traditions, showing how it is implicated in the construction of ‘ethnic’ identities in the Indian diaspora. (1995: 49)

In *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change* (1995) she uses an ethnographic approach (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of this methodological framework) in her analysis of ethnicity and identity amongst Punjabi teenagers in Southall, south London. Gillespie is interested in the formation of British Asian identity in an era of media globalization. The

research focuses on the media consumption and the ‘television talk’ of some members of the Punjabi diaspora. Gillespie argues that young Punjabis are ‘shaped by but at the same time reshaping the images and meanings circulated in the media and in the market’ (1995: 2). She argues that in Southall ‘the redefinition of ethnicity is enacted in young people’s collective reception and appropriation of television. Transnational and diasporic media representing several cultures are available in Southall homes, offering a range of choices of symbolic identification’ (1995: 206).

Gillespie (1995) observes that in Southall ‘a transnational media product is locally appropriated in ways in which encourage people to refine their conceptions of their own local culture, and at the same time redefine their collective identity in relation to representations of “others”’ (1995: 207). ‘Gossip’ is singled out by Gillespie’s informants as that which characterizes the culture of the Southall Punjabi diasporic community. The ethnography reveals that the Punjabi teenagers have appropriated the main gossip character of the Australian soap *Neighbours* (broadcast on BBC), ‘Mrs Mangel’. According to Gillespie ‘Among young people the term “Mangel” has entered everyday usage as a term of abuse for anyone who gossips: “Oh! She’s a right Mangel!” can be heard commonly’ (1995: 152). Gillespie (1995) underscores the need to understand media audiences as cultural actors, a theme to which we will return in more detail in chapter seven.

EXTRACTED READING 2.2 You should now read ‘The global, the local and the hybrid: a native ethnography of glocalization’ (Kraidy, 1999) and consider the following issues:

- 1 In Kraidy’s account of this example of glocalization how does ‘hybridity’ manifest itself?
- 2 Discuss how Kraidy’s respondents exhibit varying degrees of agency in their encounters with globalized media texts.

Case study

Print media coverage of Third World crises

A great deal of what we know about what is happening elsewhere in the world is as a result of mass-mediatization. The latter determines *what* people are informed about, *how* they are informed and indeed *when* they are informed. This case study of *The Irish Times* newspaper examines how a global issue is interpreted and dealt with at a local level: how a famine in Sudan is viewed from Ireland. Both Sudan and Ireland exhibit a high level of dependence on the global media industries; they rely on foreign news agencies in order to frame the ‘story’ of famine crises. Nevertheless, the local media appropriate these global issues through their own routines of news production (see Devereux, 2000; Devereux and Haynes, 2000).

The 1998 Sudanese famine crisis

In the middle of 1998 it was estimated that between 350,000 and 700,000 people were at starvation point in the war zone in Bahr el Ghazal province in southern Sudan. The Sudanese crisis presented an interesting challenge to the Irish media, not least because of the complexities involved in the 15-year-old civil war raging between the Muslim north and the Christian and animist south. *The Irish Times* provided detailed and analytical coverage of the story. Its commitment to covering such issues was evident at editorial and at resource level. A range of ideological positions is evident in the newspaper's coverage of the issues involved. While dominant understandings of Third World famine – drought, crop failure, food shortages, civil war and local political corruption – can be easily identified in *The Irish Times'* coverage, there is also in evidence a range of explanations which either counter the accepted reasons for the Sudanese crisis or are at the very least critical in their orientation.

The cycle of the Sudanese story in *The Irish Times* began on 6 April 1998 with the initial warnings from aid agencies about the need for assistance in the form of food, seeds and tools. From the beginning it was stated that the Sudanese crisis could be resolved only through a combination of humanitarian aid and the political pressure needed to resolve the civil war. By 18 April the newspaper warned that people were beginning to die from famine in southern Sudan; 350,000 people were said to be at risk. The report noted the logistical problems caused by the refusal of the Khartoum government to give permission for humanitarian flights to drop food and supplies to southern Sudan. The civil war was cited as the key reason for the famine.

Bob Geldof's appearance on the BBC's *Six o'Clock News* served to guarantee further coverage of the Sudanese crisis by the Irish print media. The follow-up report in *The Irish Times* (25 April 1998) conformed to the argument that much of what we learn about the Third World is in terms of the activities or utterances of elite white Western figures. The fact that a heroic (and Irish) figure had made a statement about the potential crisis in Sudan increased the possibility that the BBC story would be picked up by the Irish print media. As a piece of journalism, it is illustrative of the dependence of the Irish media on others in reporting on the Third World. The story is of interest in that it both draws upon the BBC report of the previous evening and uses additional material from the Guardian Service news agency.

The month of May witnessed a number of shifts in terms of how the story was being told to *The Irish Times'* readership. On 4 May the original estimation of those at risk from famine was doubled to 700,000. The international pressure being brought to bear on both sides of the conflict resulted in the resumption of peace talks, although the logistical problems in delivering aid continued. *The Irish Times* then began to concentrate on reporting on Irish aid efforts – how the Irish government and aid agencies were responding to the crisis.

The coverage of the crisis then switched to a more critical discourse as the Khartoum government began to allow a limited number of flights into southern Sudan. *The Irish Times* began to concentrate on how the Khartoum government was attempting to use hunger as a weapon in the civil war. The newspaper also reflected upon the dilemmas facing aid agencies.

The aid agencies realized that the timing of their appeals to their respective publics via the media in the West had to be strategic. If they raised money and the Khartoum

government continued to restrict or refuse flights of mercy to the region, there was a possibility that the public might lose interest or stop donating. The collection and distribution of aid was therefore determined not by the immediate needs of the famine victims in southern Sudan, but rather by the way in which the media could be best managed. The response of the public in Ireland and elsewhere was determined by the flow of media coverage – not by real time, but by media time – within the global media industries.

The newspaper's development correspondent went to Sudan in late May. The immediate result was an obvious increase in the extent of detailed reporting and analysis. His reports described the conditions facing the southern Sudanese and attempted to assess whether they constituted a famine or the threat of famine. The coverage extended to examining the underlying reasons for the crises in Africa and made specific reference to colonialism. Some of the themes of the earlier coverage – the heroic Irish aid worker, the manipulation and misuse of humanitarian aid by the Khartoum government, repeated warnings about the imminence of famine – were central to how the story was told in June. One of the more notable pieces of reporting on the Sudanese crisis occurred on 6 June when the newspaper's development correspondent criticized the role of the Western media in their reporting (or failure to report) on African issues.

The coverage ended in August. For *The Irish Times* and other media organizations the newsworthiness of the story ceased when international humanitarian flights began to get through to the Sudanese and famine was averted. The problems inherent in alerting the public to the crisis without the political dimension being resolved meant that many journalists felt that there was nothing more to add to the famine story. It had lost its newsworthiness.

The local and the global

Tomlinson (1994) has placed particular emphasis on the question of the mediation of experience. (See also Extracted reading 2.1.) While globalization stretches the relations between the distant and the local, he argues that the concept of mediation implies the experience of passing through an 'intermediary'. He is referring to the role of the mass media in linking distant events with the everyday experience of those living in late modernity and is questioning the true extent to which the world has become more 'open'.

The mass media are clearly responsible for the increased amount of information that some social actors are now offered. We are not, however, living in an egalitarian global village where information and knowledge flow freely between continents. The global media industry has immense power in terms of how it covers events outside the developed world. Global news agencies and major broadcasting organizations are primarily responsible for the selection and packaging of news from the Third World. Third World countries have an obvious dependence on the global media industry, and especially in times of crisis when news has to travel fast. In this light, media coverage of Third World issues sustains the unequal relations of power that exist between the West and the Third World.

Global issues such as famine or poverty, although experienced through the mass media, are nonetheless appropriated through a local prism. Media audiences are exposed to stories about faraway places and events, but these stories have a heavy emphasis on local involvement. Thus many of the stories about the Sudanese famine crisis focused on the Irish response, both voluntary and statutory, and celebrated the heroic role of the Irish aid worker. The process of globalization now at work links, in a rather direct way,

locales with large structures and occurrences. But the reverse also holds true: local factors play a strong role in the way global processes are experienced. The latter have to make themselves local in order to become effective.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS 2.3



We have already noted that powerful economic and political interests construct globalization in an unproblematic way.

- 1 How would critics of globalization such as environmentalists or green activists, for example, interpret the globalization process?
- 2 In your experience how are critics of globalization portrayed in a media setting?

Conclusion

While we cannot deny the reality of media globalization we need to approach this complex issue with some caution. By this we mean that students of the mass media should be critical of the way in which the agents of globalization and of media globalization in particular describe their project. Globalization has resulted in the creation of a series of interconnected but unequal global villages. While the global has become more prominent in people's local lives, other forms of identity – the ethnic, the local, the regional, the national, the subcultural – clearly remain potent. They are especially powerful in determining how audiences read media texts. The restructuring of the media industry along global lines has resulted in the creation of a very small number of transnational conglomerates with immense power and control whose *raison d'être* is profit. So far, media globalization has proved itself to be more amenable to particular forms of mass media such as television, film and popular music recordings. While the almost insatiable demands of television have resulted in a diet of reruns and copycat programming – of what the influential late French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu refers to as cultural fast food – we cannot take the arguments about cultural homogenization for granted. Audiences, as we will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 7, possess considerable agency when encountering either locally or globally produced media texts.

Extracted readings

2.1 A window on the world?

John Tomlinson, 'A phenomenology of globalization? Giddens on global modernity', *European Journal of Communication* 9 (1994): 149–72.

The point of maintaining this distinction between modes of experience is that it qualifies the claim about distanced events being 'integrated into the frameworks of

personal experience'. While the mass media provide the most obvious access to 'the world' for the majority of people, this experience is always, in a sense, *contained* within the lifeworld as 'mass-mediated experience'. To compare this with [Anthony] Giddens's claim about the 'provisional' sense in which we experience localities, we might think of mass-mediated experience as a very provisional sense of the global: instantly and ubiquitously accessible, but 'insulated' from the local quotidian by virtue of its very form. If this is so, it has implications for the idea that the world becomes 'open' to us via the mass media. Zygmunt Bauman is sceptical of the idea that television overcomes cultural distance by giving us insight into the lives of 'institutionally separated' others:

Contrary to widespread opinion, the advent of television, this huge and easily accessible peephole through which the unfamiliar ways may be routinely glimpsed, has neither eliminated the institutional separation nor diminished its effectivity. McLuhan's 'global village' has failed to materialize. The frame of a cinema or television screen staves off the danger of spillage more effectively than tourist hotels and fenced off camping sites; the one-sidedness of communication further entrenches the unfamiliars on the screen as essentially incommunicado. (Bauman, 1990: 149)

. . . local exigencies maintain a certain priority even in a lifeworld opened up to the global. This derives from the sheer material demands of local routines tied to the satisfaction of basic needs. But it also derives from the distinctions people routinely make between an 'immediate' local world and the mass-mediated experience of the global which is, for the most people, the commonest way in which the world is opened to them. Clearly the mass media represent a highly significant linkage between local and global experience, and there is a lot of work to be done investigating the phenomenology of this linkage: the precise sense in which, for example, television can be said to bring the world into our living rooms. What I have tried to suggest is that this problematizing of mass-mediated experience is a necessary qualification for Giddens's claims about the 'intrusion of distant events into everyday consciousness'. (p. 160)

2.2 Media globalization

Marwan M. Kraidy 'The global, the local, and the hybrid: a native ethnography of glocalization', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 16 (1999): 456–76.

Young Maronites articulated the discourse of individual freedom primarily with American television programs, with *The Cosby Show* and *Beverly Hills 90210* mentioned the most. Young Maronites liked *90210* because they connected their personal lives with the characters'. Maha and Karine emphasized that the television series showed a higher degree of freedom and openness in intimate relationships than they had personally experienced, and Peter and Antoun told me that they used the program in their daily lives, drawing on its events to articulate their social identity. *The Cosby Show*, broadcast in Lebanon in the eighties and early nineties, also emerged as a major text. Interlocutors indicated that they watched it with their families. Marianne

told me how she ‘exploited’ *The Cosby Show* to gain more freedom from her parents: She would discuss the relationship between the parents on *The Cosby Show* and their daughters, arguing that although the parents were socially conservative, they allowed their daughters to go out on dates because they trusted them. Marianne strongly believed that the show helped her reduce parental restrictions.

In contrast to that favourable reading of *The Cosby Show*, most interlocutors criticized ‘many’ American movies and television programs for containing ‘cheap, purely commercial, sexual scenes’ (Elham, Maha), or to portray ‘excessive promiscuity between teenagers’ (Serge, Rima). Whereas Adib argued that such scenes were ‘OK because, to an extent, they [reflected] real life,’ Antoun and Peter recognized that some movies, such as *Basic Instinct*, effectively used sexuality for dramatic and aesthetic values. When I probed them about their own social and sexual freedom, interlocutors pointed out that they enjoyed less freedom than American youth, but believed that they endured less restrictions than Arab Muslim youth, thus positioning themselves, again, between the contrapuntal ‘Western’ and ‘Arab’ discourses.

Television emerged as my interlocutors’ medium of choice. They adopted and rejected elements from both Arab and Western programs, underscoring symbolic leakage between the two worldviews, and speaking at their point of contact. As a general strategy, this hybrid enunciative posture harnessed three everyday life tactics: a propinquity towards consuming ostensibly hybrid texts, quotidian acts of mimicry, and nomadic reading strategies. Consumption, mimicry and nomadism thus enacted hybridity as the daily condition of Maronite youth identity. (pp. 466–7)

EXERCISE 2.1 Exploring media globalization through the use of focus groups

In this chapter we emphasized the importance of recognizing the role of the audience in examining how media globalization works in practice. This exercise is an example of how a combination of basic quantitative and qualitative research methods may be used to learn more about audiences and the process of media globalization (see Hansen et al., 1998). Think critically about how the phenomena of media globalization are experienced by audience members in their everyday lives. Pay particular attention to the social and cultural factors that might possibly explain differences in how media globalization is experienced amongst your selected audience groups.

Focus groups

Focus groups help capture real-life data in a social environment, are flexible and have high face validity. Such groups often bring to the fore aspects of the topic that might not otherwise be anticipated by the researcher. In this exercise the use of audience groups

offers a real-life simulation of a typical audience situation, where interpersonal factors play a significant role in terms of content effects.

The exercise

Depending upon local circumstances the course lecturer or tutor divides the class or tutorial group into a number of research teams. The research teams select audience groups that are defined – individually or in combination – by such characteristics as age, gender, class, ethnicity or membership of subcultural groupings. Some basic data about the selected individuals should be gathered through the use of a short questionnaire. The remaining data should be collected through the facilitation of audience groups whereby the researchers make use of a schedule of questions. It's best to use a semi-structured interview schedule, as this will allow for some flexibility in taking account of the participants' experiences and viewpoints.

With the permission of the participants, their responses should be recorded and transcribed. The research team then analyses the findings of both the questionnaire and the responses of the informants. At this stage the researchers should be endeavouring to identify key patterns in the data according to the make-up of the audience group. They should then tease out the implications that their empirical research findings have for the theories of media globalization that they have read about in this chapter.

Research or discussion themes

- 1 Access to and use of new media technologies.
- 2 Television news and its coverage of famine and other crises in the Third World.
- 3 Consumption of and meanings derived from globally versus locally produced media genres such as soap operas, radio programmes, television news or films.
- 4 The experience of living in a mass-mediated world.
- 5 'Zappers' or 'grazers'? Audiences in the context of increased fragmentation of mass-media content in an age of media globalization.

Questions for consideration and discussion

- 1 Does a global village exist?
- 2 For local audiences media globalization does not mean a window on the world. Discuss.
- 3 The global media industry is primarily concerned with profit, not media content. Discuss.
- 4 Having read Extracted readings 2.1–2, outline and discuss the key issues concerning audiences in an age of media globalization.

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