

## The Globalization of Mass Media Under Neoliberalism: A Literature Review

In a rapid world of ever changing technology, integrated, global social webs keep us connected. Yet, despite this interactive network being a platform for the sharing of new ideas and solutions, it can also be a sticky web full of modern issues, especially when considering the role that our current economic and political systems play behind the scenes. This development has created a linkage in our social fabric, but under capitalism there must be an analysis of power structures that affect different groups of people, as well as individuals at a micro-level. This literature review will define and assess the globalization of mass media under neoliberalism and critique current and past social theories of globalization. Furthermore, this essay will show the development of globalization theory and how it has changed over time. Throughout, it shall become increasingly clear how our modern understanding of globalization has been developed through a free-market system and how this has had direct consequences on the type of information that gets consumed and digested.

First, it is important to understand what Globalization is in order to analyze its relationship to mass media. Simply put, globalization is the global movement of culture. It looks at how people and information move across geographic boundaries, as well as the cultural exchange that results from the interactions between nations. Furthermore, globalization is driven by technology and results in the integration of national economies. At the heart of globalization is an array of multiple transboundary forces and processes that implement control over what happens within national boundaries and enable a set of new political actors to project social, economic, and political influence over long distances. Some scholars argue that globalization is

beneficial because it allows for the global spread of knowledge, but others argue that it is dominated by the west, and thus its capitalist foundation only exaggerates inequalities between nations. Furthermore, many scholars and media experts criticize globalization, claiming it is based on cultural imperialism which implements homogeneity and pushes the narrative that all nations should become more westernized. Homogeneity refers to the increasing sameness in the world as cultural inputs, economic factors, and political orientations of society expand to create common practices, same economies, and similar forms of government (Opgenhaffen, 2012). This is often facilitated by the spread of western brands, products, media, and business conglomerates. Thus, cultural imperialism can deny the agency of viewers considering global media is dominated by a small number of large corporations. The global flow of media is often characterized as media imperialism, in which case the television, the books, and movies, are perceived as imposing on developing countries by the west. Media imperialism undermines the existence of alternative global media originating from developing countries (Boyd-Barrett, 2014). When oversimplified, globalization under this pretense can be held responsible for a homogeneity of imperial powers. While it is true that powerful nations have the tools to exert their power further under one large technological landscape, things are much more complicated than that. Therefore, a more complex understanding of globalization would account for the inequalities in access to technologies that disproportionately affect developing and strictly regulated nations. This means that the exclusion of certain regions from the global circulation of media prevents true democracy under neoliberal capitalism from taking place. On the other hand, heterogeneity pertains to the creation of various cultural practices, new economies, and political groups because of the interactions of elements of different societies in the world. Contrary to cultural imperialism, cultural heterogeneity has to do with cultural hybridization. Thus, platforms

such as the internet can be seen as a platform for sharing alternative media that might have otherwise gone underrepresented.

Studies on globalization started to emerge in the early 1990s in different fields, but mainly in sociology and geography. However, when social scientists started to talk about globalization in the early 1990s, something was missing. Going along the journey of finding this missing piece is media scholar Terri Rantanen. Rantanen mainly focuses on the way in which globalization and mass media are contextualized and studied in an academic setting. He agrees that there is practically no globalization without media and communications as many of the definitions of globalization indirectly acknowledge. Rantanen points out that the role of media and communications is of course obvious in globalization theories, but it is not necessarily visible. This causes problems in two ways. First, the role of media and communications and globalization theory remains vague and unspecified. Secondly, media studies missed the big picture of globalization, and have been contributing little to theoretical discussions on globalization. He goes on to argue that, “On one hand, there was international communication that was interested, almost solely in the media, and on the other hand, there was intercultural communication that was mainly interested in people. What was common to both international and intercultural communication was that neither of them paid enough attention to how people used media. Both were trapped and defending their own positions against each other, and this missed the big picture of emerging globalization, in which media and communications play the pivotal role in people’s experience” (Rantanen, 2005). He prompts questions that experts are still trying to unravel: What does this increasing interconnectivity mean? How does social relations change when they become more intensified as a result of increasing interconnectivity? What happens when people become more interdependent with their consciousness about the world?

When the layers of academic verbiage are stripped down, it can be seen that globalization in all of its nuance refers to an intensified worldwide interconnectedness. However, a basic definition of globalization as ‘interconnectedness’ could not suffice alone to make globalization the central category of social theory. Many modern scholars emphasize the importance of globalization under this context and expand upon this concept. For example, scholar Marko Ampuja maintains that “the world-wide flows, interconnections and networks are today so intensive and speeded up that we have entered a qualitatively different kind of world.” As a result, they also claim that “we are in need of new kinds of analytical framework that will make these qualitative changes comprehensible.” (Ampuja, 2011). This raises the question: what are the driving forces behind the intensification of global interconnectedness and flows? One scholar of globalization referenced by Ampuja, Jan Scholte, argues that these driving forces include the spread of rationalism as a dominant knowledge framework, capitalist development (market expansion combined with decentralized production and consumption), technological innovations (jets, computers, etc.); and changes in international regulatory frameworks such as governance mechanisms.” Furthermore, in order to give it a more extensive definition under modern circumstances, Ampuja claims that globalization is “a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and the exercise of power” (Ampuja, 2011).

When relating this to mass media, it is clear to see how interregional flows and networks of activity are interrelated. Mass media in this case refers to various means of communications such as print media, broadcast media, and digital media. Media circulated globally can be studied through mediascapes, which are transnational flows of media. Mediascapes describe how and

where media is distributed which is often uneven because of disparities in accessibility to information. Online news media is an example of this, because it is available globally but takes on different forms around the world. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan declared that “the medium is the message” (Sharma, 2022) emphasizing that how we receive information is often just as or even more important than the actual information we are receiving as consumers. For McLuhan, the effect of media for society was not generated by its ‘messages’ but by its form, that is, by the medium itself which shapes consciousness and social interaction through its technological features. McLuhan added that different media simultaneously extend and amputate human senses, and that new media may expand the reach of communication but also dull the user’s communication capacities. In the current age of information, media can come and go so rapidly in this globalized world that the average user is often susceptible to an oversaturation of information, or even worse, disinformation. The transnational circulation of ideas, languages, and popular culture is a byproduct of the interconnectedness of our current global media networks. So this raises the question: what role does the media play in the rush towards globalization? Simply put, mass media enhances globalization through facilitating the aforementioned cultural exchange and flows of information between countries through international news broadcast, programming, new technologies, and music. It can also be simultaneously noted that this flow of ideas occurs in multiple directions, resulting in diversification of ideas and lifestyles. But even these general models mask the actual depth and complexity of the global reach of media (Sparks, 2007). As previously mentioned, globalization can infer the transfer of ideas and culture from the developed west to the developing world, resulting in homogenization of consumerist culture across borders that threatens to disrupt and permanently alter indigenous values.

Now that the pillars of globalization theory have been highlighted and the centrality of media and communications have been specified, it is important to focus on the unweaving Neoliberalism as a whole system of thought and understand how this relates to the critiquing of globalization theory. It is argued by Ampuja that many previous scholarly positions of globalization, like McLuhan's for example, are outdated and founded on an overtly media-centric and unhistorical treatment of globalization that lacks a critical materialist analysis of how the global media sphere has developed in the recent decades. It is further argued that such positions can be understood in the context of the rise of neoliberalism that overlaps with the development of globalization theory. Thus, he reiterates the fluidity of globalization under current global economic systems: "Here we arrive at one of the key difficulties of mainstream sociology of globalization: a lack of analytic precision. What it does is make us think of connections between a host of recent phenomena, such as increased trade between nations, satellite news delivery, global protest movements, pandemics, mass exoduses or other developments that are said to exemplify the 'global age'... as many of the forces of modernity, especially scientific activity and technology, continue to expand." Furthermore, he calls into question the excessive preoccupation with new media technologies and assumptions that recent technological developments in media and communication are historically so significant that they necessitate a complete overhaul of social and cultural theory. He argues that at the same time as these globalization theorists have diverted attention to new means of communication, they have shown a massive disinterest in powerful material forces that shape society. He claims that a shift away from the examination of material relations of power is dubious in light of the rise of neoliberalism and the intensification of capitalism which overlaps with the emergence of globalization theory. Similarly, media scholar Collin Sparks argues that for many key scholars of globalization in the past, capitalism is

the master category of the age and they use the term globalization to mean something barely distinguishable from imperialism (Ojo 2007).

It has been covered by scholars in this essay that mass media plays a key role in the extension of the globalization process. They have highlighted that these two components work hand in hand— because of media, there is an extension of globalization and because of globalization there is a broad range of usage of different forms of media. They have also noted that there is an increased access to this range of media that plays an important role in shaping human minds through spheres of influence. Overall, these modern theorists of globalization and mass media suggest that we are in need of new kinds of analytical framework in order to fully understand our ever-changing world full of fast-paced information under new mediascapes. What is certain, however, is that globalization has greatly expanded what information lies within the public sphere of knowledge and that the sharing of this information will continue to have an effect on individuals and their relationship to each other, as well as their relationship with the nation-states that dictate the political, economic, cultural and social sectors of their lives.

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