

How global is the
global media?



With the emergence of globalization, it has enhanced digital communications between suppliers and consumers and flourished the commercial media market. However, are these media systems developing a truly global market? Are they communicating with the public in a truly global perspective versus transnational, national, regional and local? (Martin, 1988, pp 40)

In the twentieth century, global media simply means technology/digital media, the internet is known as our global village where information and communications can reach thousands homes in spite of geographical and cultural distances. Being ‘ global’ means getting internationally united and integrated through interchanging of world views.

During the 1960s and 1970s, globalization primarily refers to the evolvment of Americanization, firms that are originally based in the United States started moving across the globe in a rapid pace. (McChesney, 2001) Since the United States market is already well-developed and only seeking for incremental expansion, these dominant firms aim to invest in the foreign markets so as to strengthen their competitiveness amongst other powerful national corporations. (McChesney, 2001)

Unsurprisingly, these American firms have become the dominant players in the commercial media market after the 1990s, the concentration of specific media industries such as Television networks, Music industries, Film Makings, Books and Magazines publishing, are gradually increasing since dominant parent companies began to set up subsidiaries across the globe. In the twenty-first century, the global media market is basically dominated by seven multinational corporations which are based in America: Disney, AOL

Time Warner, Sony, News Corporation, Viacom, Vivendi and Bertelsmann. (McChesney, 2001) And according to McChesney's findings (2001), these companies own the major U. S. film studios, one of the U. S. television networks, most of TV channels in U. S. and worldwide, they even control up to 85% of the global music market. By all accounts, does a truly global media market include such a high level of media concentration?

Scholars on globalization and cultural equality argued that the American dominance in the media industries has made it difficult for other developing countries to produce and distribute their own form of cultural media products and has limited the degree of cultural exchange between global countries. On the other hand, Morley (1996, pp37) believes that 'Americanization', also refers to media/ cultural imperialism, is just the side effect or process of globalization. He explains that in long run, the U. S. is striving to emerge a set of values and beliefs which largely shares amongst all nations through media. Media plays a significant role in spreading the 'word of mouth' and is redefining the way the global communicates; (Morley, 1996, pp54) The flow of media communications can be multilayered, in this case, the U. S. is just taking the lead, media is going to wide spread across the globe layer by layer (local, regional, nation, transnational, multinational and global).

Cultural media Imperialism

A global media system supposed to be influential and powerful enough to mediate nations (organizations, groups and individuals) to communicate their differences and similarities through cultural exchange.

However, Straubhaar (1991) has identified several key problems regarding the media flow in the 1970s: media and cultural imperialism. The spread of commercial media was seen to have constrained the distribution of media and its usage to a purely national basis. The media was perceived to be a one way flow of television and news from western countries like United States and France and the big four news agencies (Associated Press, United Press International, Agence France Presse and Reuters) respectively, to the rest of the world. (Straubhaar, 1991) Straubhaar's concept of asymmetrical interdependence (1991) is able to explain the imbalanced set of relationships, where the original media flow of the world displays first world countries at the top, and third world at the bottom.

It is very ironic to say that media/cultural imperialism is one of the stages to go through in the journey to media globalization. McChesney points out that the contemporary American culture is the most powerful and influential in history. The unequal distributions of income, the lack of industrial infrastructure, lack of government support and media resources in the third world countries (i. e. India and parts of Africa) not only have constrained them from creating their own media channels, it has also increased their dependency on the U. S for capital, technology and most media products. (2001) In the notion of global media, it encourages ‘ opening up to the world’, ‘ sharing and exchanging’ instead of ‘ protecting your own culture’; however, the dominant media coverage and financial and technologically lagging behind of the third world have even caused small countries to lose their cultural identity. (Morley, 2006, pp34)

Living in a capitalist community, it is understandable for companies to be profit oriented; profits became the motor force to drive the expansion of U. S. media into international sales and investment. Nonetheless, according to Strabhaar’s findings, audience’s preference is as well considered to be a key factor in producing socially determined television readings. (1991) For instance, the massive distribution (exports) of American global films has successfully promoted the U. S. culture and spread knowledge about the Americans to the world. Furthermore, multinational audience’s choice of reading has been assimilated to the American style/layout/format media productions (especially films and dramas). (Martin, 1988, pp52) The international success of the U. S. media industries has flourished the media

market in other European countries such as Britain, North American, Mexico etc. (Martin, 1988, pp 54)

Matter fact that the American influence is giving way to the development of media industries in the third world. These firms are learning to take the first world models, and adapting it to their native settings such as developing non main stream media which is more economical. (Straubhaar, 1991) Accordingly, in less than ten years after the Americanization period, Brazil already owned its national radio station and theatre; India got its own community television channel; Egypt started its national media industry by introducing a new cinema and opera theatre. (Martin, 1988, pp 52)

Cultural proximity and hybridisation

Under the U. S. influence, media industries in Brazil tend to have adapted the American form of commercial media and cultural industry. Telenovela has been considered a distinct cultural industry product of Brazil since 1970s. (Straubhaar, 1991) Morley said that it is often being categorized as American style soap operas since it is translated from soap operas to Latin American by some Brazilian Americans. The Rich Also Cry is the first telenovela that went global which is exported to China, Russia, France, Malaysia, Japan and the U. S. etc. (2006 pp 43) The nature of cultural linguistic markets helps develop cultural proximity within regions more than the mass imported U. S. programs. (Movius, 2010) Telenovela helps spread sociocultural messages worldwide. Small communities like the Hispanic people who share similar cultural norms with the Americans and Brazilians, are attracted to watch Brazil's telenovela even some of them are living in east Asian countries. (Movius, 2010)

Straubhaar argues that even though some countries are sharing a similar culture or a common language, there are many media products, especially television programs being locally transplanted before they enter a local market; (1991) It is also very less likely to see pure imported media programs since the local audience usually prefer programs that are most proximate to them in terms of format, style, culture, tradition, custom and dialect. (Movius, 2010) Take for example, the Disney cartoon movie will be translated to Chinese when it enters the Chinese film industry, all the American slangs and jokes will not be presented in the same way or meaning since they cannot make any sense in Chinese. Regardless of the movie's origin, viewers will interpret them according to their cultural context and portrait it in their own urban lifestyle. (Morley, 2006, pp 35)

To a certain extent, it is nearly impossible to assimilate worldwide cultures to one or else small nations will lose the unique aspects of their home, culture and environment. (Straubhaar, 1991) The global media means to enhance the exchange of cultural ideas, knowledge and values instead of overtaking others cultural image and identity. The success of Brazilian telenovela is considered as a combination of genre traditions and exchange of cultures between nations through media production.

With reference to Martin (1988, pp 51), contraflow describes how the cultures interact and transform, without losing their own genres. Also, the exportation of telenovela ' Ugly Betty' to the U. S. from Colombia is seen to be a great example of contraflow media, it proves that there is no longer a one way flow of media from the America. (McChesney, 2001)

Initially, it represents a dependency upon the first world but succeeds in moving into a ‘ greater, but still asymmetrical interdependency’. (McChesney, 2001)

Cultural difference is no longer a communication barrier in the globalized world. The global media has broadened audience's social horizon as various media bring them new and compelling cultural knowledge. Mass media like radio, cinema and television has reconsolidated social groupings (closed cosmopolitan groups) and renewed cultural forms. (Movius, 2010) Apart of the Hollywood products from U. S., new layers of global production and access have emerged such as the worldwide flow of telenovela, Japanese anime and manga, Chinese Kung Fu films and Bollywood films. (Movius, 2010)

It is not surprised that globalization is often associated with Americanization; the U. S. has indeed written the grammar of television and film production. Yet, starting from the 1990s, the global power has shifted to Asia. (Movius, 2010) Recently, the U. S. and Chinese film industries announced that they are going to set up a Hollywood co-production film studio based in Tianjin, China. (Pulver, 2012) At such, China would be able to nurture opportunities for cross cultural creativity and business investment in the future. This project also allows China to offer its rich heritage culture to the world.

Asian countries seem to be turning the original imperialistic U. S. chain on its head in the 2010s, (McChesney, 2001) South Korea is a prime example of a turn of influential media flow and showing the crucial role of advancing technology. The KPOP (Korean music) culture favours a massive number of foreign listeners; Record companies encourage songs that combined Korean

lyrics with rapped breaks and slogan-scaled English choruses, some of them even produce Japanese or Chinese song albums to attract the foreign market.

In regard of the advance technology, the internet cannot be neglected as it is the most powerful and influential media that bridge communications amongst the global audience. It is known as the global village, the motor force that drives all nations together at once regardless of time and place. (Martin, 1988, pp 45) Social media like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace takes on the job of the mass media to globalize people's identity but in a larger degree, through an interpersonal space. These new global media players continue to grow which have also strengthen social relationships as well as increased accessibility to global information. (Movius, 2010)

However, identities and media relations are still multi-layered with cultural geographical elements (McChesney, 2001) According to Straubhaar (1991), there are tendencies that the communication of media networks will be effected by cultural media traditions and regulatory systems. For instance, Facebook is censored in China due to some political reasons. At the same time, the Chinese media has developed their own social networking sites that function like Facebook: Weibo and RENN. This act has again challenged the notion of global media, showing that there are still countries which want to protect their domestic media and cultural industries to some point. (Straubhaar, 1991)

As a conclusion, there is an initial change in the world media relations from dependence to relative interdependence. Though the United States still

make up a high percentage of media ownership worldwide, other national media industries are consolidating an independent position in the world media market. (McChesney, 2001) The question to media imperialism and power inequality within the global media system is still very complex due to some political, social, cultural and economic implications. The global media is trying to deliver the same message worldwide, however, there are others forces and causes influencing such process.