

New global communication technologies



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The desire for humans to communicate and interact with people from other cultures and countries is no new phenomenon. Since the dawn of civilisation, explorers and traders have been globalizing the world. The technology of the late 1900's however, revolutionised the speed and nature of globalisation through the increased flow of new communication technologies. ' The intensification of global interconnectedness,'(Mcree, 1995, quoted by Tomlinson, J. 1999, p 2) is a simplified definition of globalisation today. Due to rapid technological advances of the last 20 years, especially in the area of communication and travel, globalisation has gained momentum and now infiltrates obscure and distant communities around the world. The importance of national borders and boundaries has been severely tarnished and new lines have been drawn, adhering more to optic cables, telephone lines, satellite reaches and, (as fuel for the technology), natural resources. Theories on Western Cultural Imperialism, Anglification and Globalisation often adhere to a pessimistic view, which believes in the imminent homogenisation of culture through dominant technological, political and economic structures. Through such superior control of these outlets, they believe that the Western concepts of capitalism and consumerism are likely to encroach upon previously harmonious and separate cultures, threatening their traditional ways of life and making them vulnerable to the better informed and financed powers.

In a technocentric society, where communications and information means power and the ' digital divide' leaves ' developing' communities at a disadvantage and the possibility of exploitation is a serious threat.

Communication networks that facilitate the transmission of media and other

information have come to prominence. The optimistic view concedes that open communication between cultures will promote more understanding of diversity and a more globally conscious community. Through new technology, the plight of previously ignored, exploited or endangered cultures can be transmitted to a wider audience. Previously marginalised societies can partake in trade, giving them a greater economic or cultural power. Patterns in culture and society are evident, but the accelerating pace of change means that we are yet to make solid conclusions on the long-term ramifications of a revolutionised world of technology and interconnectedness.

New communication technologies did not create globalisation. A basic understanding of history will reveal the fact that mankind has always had the inclination to be inspired by, exploit, exchange and generally connect with other cultures. Cultural hegemonies and imperialism has always existed. The cultures and nations of today's world were constructed through invasions of imperialists, colonialization, and forced liberalisation. Traditions, social hegemonies, identity and culture are constructs, formed through various power struggles, internal and external influences, geography and ideas on religion, often imposed upon communities through a hierarchal power system (Tomlinson. T, 1999). Since the 1800's, mass global migration has decentralised many traditions and nations and created new ones. The long history of inter-mobility between people from different nationalities, heritage, religions and regions questions the concept of separate cultures with separate identities and traditions (Samovar, L ; Porter, R, 2001). Increased communication and technology has merely increased the flow of inter-

cultural communication through an already half open window of opportunity through which influence and power, and thus, tradition and culture, has been historically constructed.

The more optimistic view of globalisation concedes that through the interconnectedness of cultures around the world, citizens of the ‘ global village’ (a notion developed by media theorist Marshal McLuhan in the 1960’s, discussed by Klein, N. 2001) will be better able to promote and preserve their cultures. Television, newspaper and Internet, travel and trade communication are all mediums, providing Western viewers with a more global perspective and education about geographically or financially remote communities, diversifying and expanding awareness. An analysis of the effects of media is outlined later.

Travel technology has enabled most citizens of the developed world to explore or migrate to distant cultures on other continents. One can now ‘ jet out, observe and photograph the locals in their isolated human zoo.’(Legrain, R. 2002, p311) This interaction and personal experience itself is a preserver of local tradition. The tourist returns to their own country, armed with knowledge to share, promoting or informing others in their own community. The ‘ search for and delight in contrast between societies rather than a longing for uniformity or superiority’ (Urry, J. 1995, quoted by Tomlinson, J. 1999, p200) is a preserver of difference. Tourism is a vital part of a developing world’s economy, bringing in outside funds and educating outsiders to their traditional ways.

Through intensified exports and imports of foreign goods, it can be argued that smaller or economically weak countries can now use a form of globalisation as a tool. They can maintain their cultural presence by promoting and exporting their cultural capital, in the form of marketable goods, to the world. Studies by Jeffrey Sachs and Andrew Warner at Harvard University found that poor countries open to international trade grew over six times faster in the 1970's and 1980's than those who shut themselves off (Legrain, R, 2002, p 50). With many countries in desperate poverty, the influx of capital is necessary, even if it is at the expense of some tradition, after all, how can tradition survive if the people do not.

Communication technology gives less developed areas of the world the choice to drink coca-cola, wear Nike and watch Mexican or American soap operas. Similarly, Western consumers are now exposed to diverse cultural capital in the form of consumer products like Thai foods and clothing, documentaries on the traditions of Afghani women and books detailing the life of Tibetan monks. Some anti-globalisation attitudes reveal a double standard between developed and developing nations, whereby, we (the West) are allowed new choices and change, but older cultures should be preserved for their 'cultural purity,' and remain stagnant. "The culturally fearful often take a very fragile view of each culture and tend to underestimate our ability to learn from elsewhere without being overwhelmed by the experience." (Amartya Sen, 1999, p 129) It is through this increased two way flow of cultural capital that an education of the diverse ways of life in the world are exposed and thus have the capacity to expand and prosper. The optimist doesn't ignore the influence of Western

consumerism, but doesn't concede that extermination of local traditions is necessary.

This view isn't entirely ignored by the realist. It is more the notion of the two-way flow of influence under scrutiny. Focusing upon the in-disputable domination of Western influences, in particular the U. S., the more pessimistic, or realistic view on the expansion of communication technology, concedes that diverse cultures are being suppressed and homogenised through a form of cultural imperialism.(Tomlinson, J, 1999). The unstoppable force of technology has created an outlet through which to impose western ideals, capitalism, consumerism and democracy upon countries with less power and influence. The disparity in access to information and technology distribution is intrinsic to this scenario, with a kind of global hierarchal structure, America and the West being dominant. American Marxist media theorist Herbert Schiller pressed the case that through transnational corporations' (most being American or from the west) the ' homogenised north Atlantic cultural slop' (Shiller 1985, quoted by Tomlinson, J. 1999, p 81) of American culture is imposed upon the rest of the world.

Some policies of US governments have challenged other countries use of governmental control or regulations, in favour of more US-friendly and profitable means, effectively altering the societal evolution of the countries. Most of this is facilitated through their access to superior access to technology in all areas from intelligence, media, Military arms, and trade market force. The most recent example of this is occurring right now, in Iraq. Under the guise of liberation, democracy, global justice and security, the U. S plans to implement a more America friendly democracy in place of the

<https://assignbuster.com/new-global-communication-technologies/>

Saddam's Anti-American party. John Ikenberry, well known international affairs specialist, notes America's ' grand strategy that begins with a fundamental commitment to maintaining a unipolar world in which the United States has no peer competitor.' (Quoted by Chomsky, N, 2003, p 11) A clear example of an effort to impose hegemony in government control and ensure proliferation of the ' New World Order' of today.

Free-trade agreements with countries, both developing and developed, has enabled the influx of US consumer products and the exploitation of raw materials, cultural products, workers and natural resources. The creation of factory work in developing countries has reformed traditional practices and lifestyles, creating an international army of factory hands. The Western capitalist society has eroded and exploited natural resources in many countries, including their own, forcing migration and subservience to aid. Actions of organisations such as the WTO (and many more, often dominated by corporate American business) demonstrate the imbalance of power in trade and economic negotiations. In the 70's, the Trinidadian Government borrowed money from the WTO to develop the nation.

In 1985 they had trouble making the repayments and were forced to go to the IMF for help. As a condition of the aid it was providing, the IMF required the Trinidadian government to make a number of ' structural adjustments' including the introduction of flexible labour markets, the opening of national markets to global competition, the ending of public subsidies, state intervention and exchange controls. These changes were imposed with the knowledge that local Trinidadian businesses, without the capital and technology of its Western counterparts, could not compete on a global scale.

<https://assignbuster.com/new-global-communication-technologies/>

These regulations ensured that Trinidad remained subservient to Western capitalist values, repressing local trades and practices. Today, changes have been made and Trinidad looks forward to an enterprising future. (Hylland Eriksen, T. Liming in Trinidad: The art of doing nothing, <http://www.skettel.com/liming/>, accessed 18/5/2004). Numerous examples of opportunism such as these have transformed the traditional evolution of many countries economy repressed their traditions. This kind of Western imperialism was facilitated by the imbalance in access to superior technology in markets, trade, manufacturing and communications.

The belief in the American Imperialism concept rests mostly on their dominant ownership of key resources, such as satellite systems, television stations, advertising companies, the film industry, multi-national companies, and information technology manufacturing. The West occupies the dominant economic, military, consumer and political position in the world, and through their ownership of powerful communication technologies, is able to export it throughout the world.

International media and communications, in the form of television, newspapers and Internet, influences many cultures of today, even those who don't have access to them. It doesn't necessarily encourage hegemony or the elimination of local and indigenous cultural traditions. With Internet having become a dominant and influential tool of transmission for information, a free society with freedom of speech and a platform on which to voice opinion and transmit it to others, regardless of their location, is opened. Void of oppressive censorship, the virtual world is capable of democratising and empowering the public.

This is a good theory, and relevant to a lot of the world, however the fact remains, that most of the information supplied on the Internet is in English, marginalising the majority of the population in the developing world. Coupled with this is the fact that access is lacking in most areas and computer literacy is non-existent. The digital divide is a logistical problem, which damages or threatens local communities and traditions, made vulnerable as a result of the unfair distribution of information. ‘Information Capitalism’ (Webster, F, 2002, p 81, Edited by Allison, J, 2002) refers to the unequal access to technology which allows the educated, informed or financed to exploit those who aren’t ‘connected.’

For those who are connected, instant access to international perspective and information can better educate and inform otherwise ignorant or isolated people. The virtual connection diminishes the importance of geographical distance, space and time. Unifying the world doesn’t require homogenisation. If used properly, it does promote understanding and unity.

While television is often viewed as a commercial interest of the Western consumer market, it can be another arena in which to educate others of geographical distant locations and cultures, which could otherwise have been ignored or exploited. A great example can be seen through the 1981 ‘Band-Aid’ Concert staged in London, which confronted the International community about Ethiopia’s starving population. By harnessing the powerful forces of the media, the publicity raised millions of dollars and saved lives. The ‘armchair traveller’ is given the choice of being an international citizen with a global perspective and conscious.

Western consumers are the most affected, undoubtedly influenced by the American dominance, with worldwide news distributors such as Reuters encouraging a homogenised attitude towards current issues. Media bias on certain subjects and alternate personal or corporate agendas, with interests other than the truth, can sway public awareness and attitudes. However, the choices available today do allow for variety of opinion and viewing. A rounded and informed view is possible among the multiple avenues of information communication abundant in the Western lifestyle and it is the role of the individual to pursue the truth. Once again, the danger of media manipulation is more prevalent in poorer countries where perceptions are narrow and choice is few.

The accelerating pace by which communication technology is connecting furthest reaches of the world is nowhere near a plateau. Society and culture is dynamic and ever changing, influenced, both by outside forces and power structures within. Through diminishing spatial contours and more porous national and geographical barriers, exposure to Western capitalist trends and corporate business ventures will continue to affect traditional ways of life. Similarly, through increased information flow, the marginalised, remote, poor and threatened cultures are invited into our living room or office to have their voice heard. Increased communication and influence doesn't necessarily result in uniformity of masses. The strength and power of religions such as Islamism and the resurgence of patriotic nationalism are two examples of many that have resisted and even thrived upon the threats of homogenisation.

While western influence can infiltrate even the most remote African village, it is an insult to a community's integrity, intelligence and culture to assume that they will adopt it. Many millions of cultures and tribes around the world choose live in relative autonomy irrespective of the changes in the world around them. Tribalism and traditional ways of life are still dominant in regional areas of countries whose governments subscribe to Western or capitalist culture. The dynamic nature of the concept of culture and tradition itself relies upon varying degrees of influence and connectivity. While technology, communications and media have influence and a varying degree of control, the elimination of tradition is unlikely for those who have faith and loyalty in their culture or beliefs. For those, who have had tradition or culture thrust upon them by virtue of nationality or religion, the choices provided by technology may indeed inspire them to reject inappropriate or oppressive traditions in favour of an identity of their own. Individual strength and integrity shouldn't be underated, even in today's sensationalised climate of change.

Bibliography:

Allison, J. 2002, *Technology, Development and Democracy*, State University of New York press, New York, USA.

Amartya, Z. 1999, *Development as freedom*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, England.

Barker, C. 1999, *Television, Globalisation and Cultural Identities*, Open University Press, Philadelphia, USA.

Chomsky, N. 2003, *Hegemony or Survival, America's Quest for Global Dominance*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, Australia.

Held, D. 2000, *A Globalized World? Culture, Economics, Politics*, Routledge, London, England.

Hylland Eriksen, T. *Liming in Trinidad: The Art of Doing Nothing*, (online), available: <http://www.skettel.com/liming/>, accessed 18/5/2004).

Klein, N. 2001, *No Logo, Flamingo* – HarperCollins, London, England

Legrain, P. 2002, *Open World:/ The Truth about Globalisation*, Abacus, Great Britain.

Martin, N. and Nakayama, T. 1997, *Intercultural Communication in Context*, Mayfield Publishing Group, California, USA.

Tomlinson, T. 1999, *Globalization and Culture*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, USA.

Robertson, R. 1992, *Globalization, Social Theory and Global Culture*, Sage Publications, London, England.

Rowe C ; Thompson, J. 1996, *People and Chips, The Human Implications of Information Technology*, McGraw-Hill, Berkshire, England.

Samovar, L and Porter, R. 2001, *Communication Between Cultures*, Fourth Edition, Wodsworth/Thompson Learning, Belmont, USA.

Reference List:

<https://assignbuster.com/new-global-communication-technologies/>

Amartya, Z. 1999, Development as freedom, Oxford University Press, Oxford, England.

Barker, C. 1999, Television, Globalisation and Cultural Identities, Open University Press, Philadelphia, USA.

Chomsky, N. 2003, Hegemony or Survival, America's Quest for Global Dominance, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, Australia.

Klein, N. 2001, No Logo, Flamingo – HarperCollins, London, England

Legrain, P. 2002, Open World:/ The Truth about Globalisation, Abacus, Great Britain.

Tomlinson, T. 1999, Globalization and Culture, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, USA.

Rowe C & Thompson, J. 1996, People and Chips, The Human Implications of Information Technology, McGraw-Hill, Berkshire, England.

Samovar, L and Porter, R. 2001, Communication Between Cultures, Fourth Edition, Wodsworth/Thompson Learning, Belmont, USA.