

# Global Communication



# WHAT IS GLOBAL COMMUNICATION?



Because of his comprehensive view of global communication, the intellectual depth of his writing and the engaging nature of his critical analysis, the essential inspirational source of this chapter is:

## Armand Mattelart (1936- )

Born in 1936 in Belgium, Mattelart studied law and political science at the University of Louvain and completed his studies in Paris. In 1962 he travelled to Chile where he taught at the Catholic University, co-founded a Center for the Study of National Reality, and published, together Ariel Dorfman, the bestseller *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (1975), which was censored in the USA. After the military coup of Pinochet, he returned to Paris and began lecturing at the University of Paris VIII.

Among his major publications are: *Multinational Corporations and the Control of Culture* (1982); *Transnationals and the Third World: The Struggle for Culture* (1983); *International Image Markets* (1984); and *Mapping World Communication: War, Progress, Culture* (1994).

For the study of global communication, Armand Mattelart has taught us to critically reflect on the issue of power and power-relations in global communication.

- First, we need to find a good name for the field of study that this book addresses.
- Then we need to identify the essential building blocks of “global communication”: the flows and stories.
- We should also raise the question of why we should study global communication.
- Finally, we need to analyze the key dimensions of the contemporary context of global communication.

## What's in a name?

Juliet tells Romeo that a name is an artificial and meaningless convention: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (Act I, Scene II).

Indeed, we could call a rose "cow-dung" and its smell would not change. We would still enjoy its beauty and put the dung in a vase. It may be, however, that names are less insignificant than Juliet suggests. Romeo only has to change his name – she thinks – but it is precisely their names that doom the lovers from the very beginning. Many of us have experienced the association of judgments – pleasant or negative – with names of people. The names that parents choose for you may haunt you throughout life. Yet, Juliet is right in proposing that names are conventions. But, the conventions are not meaningless. If the surgeon asks for a scalpel and gets a chisel the patient is likely to have a problem.

Communication among human beings is made possible largely by conventions about how to name things, people, and experiences. Part of all scientific projects is the naming of the phenomena that we investigate, interpret, and hope to understand.

This book proposes that its field of study bears the name "global communication". The same field has also been named "international communication", "world communication", and "trans-border communication". Scholars have offered good arguments for these different names.

- International communication. International usually refers to processes that occur among states, like in international relations. Although it has been suggested that the state is withering away, we have to acknowledge that they are still a formidable reality and – often – powerful agents in facilitating, promoting, or hindering communication across their borders. However, it also needs recognition that the international arena increasingly involves interactions between both state and non-state actors. The international political arena has multiple actors. Particularly since the Second World War, we find such agents as intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), transnational business corporations (BINGOs) and international public service organizations (PINGOs).

Studies of international communication are often inspired by the nation-state as the key concept. This has been seriously challenged by the development of diaspora communities around the world: de-territorialized "imagined" communities that are made up of a great variety of migrants that keep moving back and forth between home and host countries or that settle in host countries but often with strong attachments to their countries of origin. Diaspora communities also will often develop media that produce and distribute content related to their specific experiences.

International communication is in fact communication among states and inter-state communication would be a more appropriate term.

- World communication. This term has a broader meaning than international communication. It remains a somewhat nebulous term, though, and conjures up romantic associations with the “family of man”. Its translation in non-English idioms is not always easy, although one could use in some languages (like French) the word “mondial”.
- Transborder communication. The term sounds awkward but does suggest precisely what the core phenomenon of our explorations will be. The form of communication we will investigate is a “glocal” process in which “messages” flow across national borders.
- Global communication. This is the most fashionable term today. It also has its disadvantages both in translation and in its suggestion that we have achieved the creation of a one-world community. Global represents rather an aspiration than a reality. Communication globalizes but it also remains local. Most TV and film production is not global, but local in origin. Global and local belong together. We do not live in the globe but in specific locations. However cosmopolitan one may be, one’s identity is primarily defined by “locality”: the locus of birth, family, language, jokes. Attachment to the place where you experience the greatest cultural “comfort” – often referred to as cultural proximity – is an essential experience. We are global and local citizens and our communication could possibly best be termed “glocal”. This notion connects the global (e.g. a product for global marketing) with the local (e.g. local tastes and experiences).

Almost inevitably when global communication is mentioned, thoughts are directed towards its largest contemporary infrastructure: the Internet. The Internet as a network is not only a material concept, it is also a psychological concept that brings home to its users the world as a very diversified whole. The network is decentralized, horizontally structured, de-territorialized, but also localized. We are globally interconnected from bounded places! As Appiah has phrased it, we are “cosmopolitan patriots” (1998: 290–328).

Obviously, the “we” in such statements does not include all the world’s people. Global communication has a normative connotation as it suggests the existence of a global society in which all the planet’s habitants participate and equally matter. In the early twenty-first century many people continue to be excluded from global connections.<sup>1</sup> Today, communication can be seen as an “agent” of globalizing processes in economic, political and social-cultural fields that interconnect large numbers of people across the globe. And, equally, as an (institutionalized) process, global communication itself is considerably affected by these processes.



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Is “global communication” the best descriptor of the phenomenon that is the central topic of this book?

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## Flows

Whatever adjective we may prefer, at the core of our interest is “communication”. Yet another “name” that covers a great variety of meanings. As the student of communication knows, the ever-expanding literature offers an almost endless list of definitions. But do we really have to begin with a definition? Do psychologists define the psyche? Do biologists define life? Do mathematicians define number?

The best approach may be to begin with the observation of human behaviour. Seen from another planet, human societies probably look very much like ant hills: permanent movements by little animals that run around moving all kinds of things from A to B and from B back to A. A seemingly senseless perpetuum mobile. If we take the observation of “motion” as a starting point, the extraterrestrial observer would probably agree with Manuel Castells, who wrote that “our society is constructed around flows” (1996).

Flow is a useful concept since it suggests a multidirectionality of movements: linear and circular, top-down and bottom-up, engineered and spontaneous.

## Stories

The messages that the human species transports around the globe are in fact stories. Stories are the key sources of human knowledge and, as Greek philosopher Plato observed, “Those who tell stories rule society”. We learn through stories. Stories provide patterns and structures and thus help us to adapt to our environments. Global communication is a complex multilayered process in which dominant and counter-stories flow cross the globe. The most important producers of TV stories, with hundreds of millions of people watching their products, are the US-based MTV, CNN and Discovery Channel. There is not yet a non-Western TV soap with the global popularity of *Sex and the City*, *Friends* or *Desperate Housewives*. However, counter-stories develop as a result of local production, storytelling in diasporas, and the emergence of new storytellers. New social networks such as YouTube expand the community of global storytellers. YouTube, with all its contemporary “bards”, emerges – from an evolutionary perspective – as an essential instrumental of human adaptation to a complex environment. Surviving in the midst of complexity demands networks through which ever more actors exchange stories among each other. The essence of human communication is its narrative structure. We are “storytellers” and all the global flows of ideas, opinions, observations, knowledge, information, data, sounds, and images can be brought under the umbrella concept of “storytelling”.

Human beings have throughout their history always told stories over large distances and Chapter 3 deals with this.

### Does the study of global communication matter?

Why would one dedicate time and energy to the study of global communication? Why would we study cross-border flows of stories? What is so important about this phenomenon?

## Global communication is the basic flow

Throughout much of recorded history there have been flows of people, flows of goods, flows of money, and flows of stories. The flow of stories deserves special attention since it has developed into the type of movement that is essential to the other flows. Flows of people (such as in tourism and business travel) are today unthinkable without massive volumes of stories about airline tickets, hotel reservations, or purchases by credit cards. The same holds for the traffic of goods, which is impossible without an extensive network of computerized message transmissions. Flows of money have become streams of electronic bits. Banks transport messages about transfer and reception of funds to other banks, to governments, and to clients but do not move the funds themselves.

The cross-border flows of stories provide the essential supporting infrastructure to trading across the world and to global financial transactions. Worldwide transport of people, goods, and money is today unthinkable without global communication.

The contents of global communication provide news, advertising and entertainment to numerous people around the globe. The stories that news providers, ad agencies and entertainment companies produce contribute significantly to how people see other people and how they frame and interpret the world in which they live.

People have always lived with images of the others who lived in distant places. Usually the images were reflections of distorted realities. Atilla the Hun was already aware of the critical importance of images. As a skilled precursor of modern propagandists, he spread wildly exaggerated stories about the supranatural powers of his army in his campaigns throughout fifth-century Europe.

We perceive the world through the stories that we are told! As Alexa Robertson wrote, “Through the agency of storytelling, our situation in the political and cultural landscape, and that of everyone else, is set out, maintained, negotiated and adapted to new circumstances” (Robertson, 2012: 2). And Kenneth Boulding helped us to understand this even better by saying, “It is what we think the world is like, not what it is really, that determines our behaviour” (Boulding, 1959: 120). The international political arena is largely dependent upon stories that nations and their representatives tell each other for diplomatic, propagandistic, public relations or war-mongering purposes. Global communication today is a crucial source for our perceptions of the world and for our sense of belonging to this world.

- Global communication is a key player in the global economy  
As I will discuss in Chapter 4, global communication is facilitated through the industries that manufacture infrastructural equipment, that provide connectivity services and that produce content.
- Global communication is essential to global politics  
Politics provides an important argument for the relevance of global communication as flows of stories build discursive power. This will be detailed in Chapter 9.
- Military operations depend upon global communication

Military activities have worldwide become dependent upon command, control and intelligence systems, and the use of unmanned predator planes (“drones”) as well as the possibility of cyberwar, all of which demonstrate the significance of global communication. This will be discussed in Chapter 11.

- Global communication is a carrier of cultural expressions  
Global communication distributes globally essential cultural icons, is crucial to the development of cultural *mélanges* and is a major cause of local resistance against foreign cultural impositions. These issues will be addressed in Chapter 11.

## The globalization of communication

The rise of a global media system first became visible in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the early development of a global infrastructure of telegraph and wireless connections and global news distribution (through Reuters, Havas, and Wolff). These forerunners were not so much driven by the interests of the imperial powers (Britain, France, Germany, in particular), but rather by commercial and trading interests. The expansion of global communication has often been documented as the history of the struggle of imperial countries to control communication infrastructures. However, Winseck and Pike (2007) have demonstrated – with considerable empirical evidence – that the companies active in these infrastructures were not as closely affiliated with national governments as was often believed. Moreover, “The web of interconnections and interdependence constituting the global media system of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth could also be seen in governments’ willingness to rely on foreign firms to meet their foreign communication and military security interests” (Winseck and Pike, 2007: xvi). And, “the globalization of capitalism was actually a stronger influence on the organization and control of global communication than was imperialism”. In this context, the authors made the interesting observation that “Most zones of empire (Britain) were some of the least connected, worst served places on the planet”. At the same time “Communication networks and information flows, simply put, were densest in areas where world markets were most developed. And in this, the global media system was crucial in two ways: first, the media firms operating in times, and second, these firms provided the networks and supplied the informational and news resources upon which capitalism depended and thrived” (Winseck and Pike, 2007: xvii). There was certainly rivalry among the empires but also a large measure of cooperation. There was “shared hegemony”; some expression of this was found in international legal agreements, for example in the field of post and telegraph.

In the mid-nineteenth century many newspapers regularly published world news and they were served by transnational agencies such as Reuters, Havas and Wolff. In the first part of the twentieth century governments discovered the potential of international propaganda and the film industry emerged as an international medium, with the exports of Hollywood films. The recorded music industry also began early on to globalize.

The arrival of television satellites in the late 1970s broke the principle of national sovereignty of broadcasting space and made it difficult, and ultimately impossible, to offer effective resistance to television transmissions from outside the national territory. The driving forces were also primarily economic: the need in most countries for large volumes of imports, commercial/profit motives, and advertising. Markets for products became global and advertising went overseas. Media products that could fairly easily globalize (i.e. be sold in foreign markets) were news, cinema films, recorded music and TV serials.

Television is still probably the single most potent influence in this media globalization process, partly because, as with the cinema film, its visual character helps it to pass barriers of language. Just as important, however, is the fact that its predominant form of organization and means of transmission are such that it cannot easily be contained within national frontiers or kept out. (McQuail, 2010: 217)

An illustration of the globalizing of communication is provided in the Discovery Channel.

### THE DISCOVERY CHANNEL

The global media enterprise that is Discovery consists of a range of television channel networks launched in 170 countries, and a growing number of digital media offerings distributed via the Internet and mobile telephony targeting global segments of the world's television and media audience.

John Hendricks, the founder of the Discovery Channel, started to promote the plan to create a documentary television channel to potential investors in 1982. Hendricks talked to 211 venture capitalists before bankers Allen & Co, New York, agreed to provide \$3 million in funding.

The Discovery Channel US went into profit in the 1980s and sought new international markets. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s Discovery expanded into Europe, Latin America, and Asia.

Although Discovery's global tier of television channels forms the backbone of the company's distribution of media content, at the beginning of the 21st century the company has increased its efforts to position itself in the digital environment such as the Internet and within mobile telephony.

Branding and marketing had a central role in the development of Discovery in the US and have also been vital to its strategy to globalize the brand.

Although Discovery Channel is a major global provider of factual information, the programs' account of the real world has a defined focus. This also includes a notion of 'government-friendliness' and a certain limit of critical portrayal of the real world in many programs. However, this gives the global television channel a crucial ability to cross cultural, political, and religious boundaries unhindered. There is a certain presence of entertainment

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in Discovery Channel's programming represented by the spectacular. This indicates that—on one level—"the best of many cultures in hopes of forming a truly global culture" involves the worldwide search for the spectacular in various forms and contexts, although within a certain scope of the real world. These themes and stories form parts of television programs or are woven into series distributed by Discovery Channel throughout the world.

This brings us to Discovery Channel and its audience. The television channel attempts to target a global audience throughout 170 segment countries.

The Discovery Channel attempts to appeal to the preferences of a local and global audience through its form of factual television.

From Ole J. Mos (2010). *Media Globalization and the Discovery Channel Networks*. London: Routledge.

There exist today no real global media; there are hybrid forms based upon national contexts. There may be global connections but the *modus operandi* is determined by national standards, objectives, and expectations.

Jeremy Tunstall (2008) argues in *The Media Were American* that most people in the world do not speak English, that most prefer their own jokes, their own music, politics, and sports. In countries with large populations, national and local media are increasingly important and countries like India and China import little TV fare. International media productions are localizing. Major US studios are increasingly using local production facilities in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Columbia TriStar, Warner Brothers, and Disney have set up international TV subsidiaries to produce English language co-productions, to be followed by country-specific programming. Sony has contributed to local-language film production in Germany, Hong Kong, France, and Britain, and television programming in eight languages. STAR TV, part of media mogul Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, aggressively adopted the policy of indigenization in offering localized channels, including: STAR Chinese Channel (for Taiwan), and STAR Japan.

There is increasingly economic interdependence but not media-interdependence. One can observe media-regionalization (especially in Latin America and the Arab countries) but this is not the same as media-globalization.

In spite of the globalizing tendencies in the field of communication, the "national" remains essential (Tunstall, 2008: 450). The national level of media is still dominant in the countries where 90 per cent of the world's people reside. Audiences today prefer their own news, weather, sports, comedy, soaps, games, reality, and other cheap factual programming. By and large audiences, producers, and politicians agree that national content is to be preferred. In the Asian region, for example, we find Korean TV drama, Chinese pop-music, and Japanese comic strips.

Most national media cover significantly more local news than global news. There remains a North–South news gap. In the era of globalization one might have expected an increase in global news. However, this is not the case! The local framing of global news is paramount and global events thus become local stories.

Worldwide, nationalism continues to be a crucial factor in both news and entertainment. The nation-state is still a force to be reckoned with in the age of global communication. Mechanisms applied by national states are import restrictions, quota rules, and giving prime time to local products.

In connection with global communication, globalization occurs as homogenization, but also as an ingredient in a process of glocalization or hybridization, and as the driver of forms of fragmentation and polarization that can be subsumed under heterogenization. (These notions are further discussed in Chapter 11 on the cultural dimensions of global communication.) One reason for the proliferation of transnational channels is the physical movement of people that carry with them aspects of their culture. The issue of identity is central to the migrant’s lifestyle, living as they often do “between cultures” (Bhabha, 1994). The nature of cultural mixing, as Martin Barbero has argued, can lead to a “hybridization” of cultures (Barbero, 1988). Iranian cable television in Los Angeles, for example, has had to tread a careful line between providing programmes which retain a traditional Islamic way of life with those which display the local consumerist lifestyle in the USA. New communication technologies have made it possible for broadcasters from many developing countries to export their media products successfully. Turkey’s TRT launched TRT-INT in 1990 to transmit programmes via Eutelsat to Turkish-speaking populations in Western Europe, mainly aimed at the two million-strong Turkish population in Germany. There are new national and regional storytellers, like Al-Jazeera in the Middle East, the Brazilian TV soap industry, Mexico’s Televisa, or Bollywood, the Indian film industry.

One of the most puzzling questions for the study of global communication is: Does global communication make the world a smaller place? Does it create a “global village”, as Marshall McLuhan suggested? Or is Fortner correct in proposing that “Communication across distances, however, does not reproduce the intimacy that is the hallmark of village life” (Fortner, 1993: 24). As Fortner suggests, a better notion may be the “global metropolis”. Characteristic of the big city is that most people do not know each other and that messages flows are highly unequal.

## The context of global communication

- Trans-localization
  - Globalization: the history
  - Globalization: the analytical tool
  - Globalization: the political programme

- Urbanization
- Institutionalization
- Inequality
- Global risks

Global communication does not occur in a vacuum. The flows and networks mentioned in this chapter, and the stories that form their substance, are part of a real world. Their habitat is life on planet Earth as it evolves and affects its individual and institutional inhabitants.

The study of global communication requires contextualization. This implies that we need to understand the real-world environment. To help this understanding we need a conceptual framework that brings together the most characteristic dimensions of today's world. Key elements of such a framework could be the processes of globalization, urbanization, the prevalence of the nation-state doctrine, institutionalization, large-scale inequality, and the global proliferation of risks.

## Trans-localization

Global communication takes place in a context that is commonly described with the concept "globalization". It is almost impossible to discuss current social developments without reference to this term. It became one of the buzzwords of the last decade in the twentieth century. It is a popular, very fashionable, but also deeply contested concept. It is little understood and some authors even suggest that the concept has no meaning at all or that it merely gives a new name to old phenomena. This latter position warns us of the tendency to indulge in historical forgetfulness. This happens when we think that processes are the unique products of a new era whereas they may be part of evolving historical processes. When Marshall McLuhan launched the idea of the world as a global village, he in fact revitalized not only the thinking of Teilhard de Chardin (about, among others, "cosmic totality"), but "the old Christian myth of the great human family" (Mattelart, 2010: 315).

The first reference to the term "globalization" was probably in 1970 in the radical-leftist magazine *Sinistra Proletaria*, where the "mondialization" of capitalist imperialism was discussed. It gave the computer manufacturer IBM as an example. The concept gained popularity only in the 1980s. The *Oxford Dictionary of New Words* mentioned "global" as a new word in 1991.

It would seem a useful beginning to describe globalization in a simple way as a process in which the distribution of "X" across the globe takes place. In this process, X can be anything, such as goods, cultural artefacts, religious ideas, or trends in fashion. A first question that now pops up is when does this process begin.

### Globalization: the history

There is an ancient phase of globalization which began with the journey of Homo Sapiens out of Africa (between 50,000 and 100,000 years ago) and matured between 500 BC and

AD 1500 with the silk routes that connected Asia with the Mediterranean and parts of Africa (between 200 BC and AD 200), the distribution of the “four great inventions” in China (the compass, gunpowder, papermaking, and printing) to the West, and the export of mathematics from the Arab countries. Between 1500 and 1800, a mercantilist, colonial form of globalization emerged with the adventurous expeditions of the sixteenth century that explored and exploited distant countries and forced foreign histories and religion upon indigenous people. After the industrial revolution (with the advent of steamboats and electricity) a modern form of capitalist globalization emerged in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The globalization phase of the nineteenth century was a process that had an enormous societal impact. Winseck and Pike wrote about this: “Globalization during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth was not just shallow and fleeting, but deep and durable. The growth of a worldwide network of fast cables and telegraph systems, in tandem with developments in railways and steamships, eroded some of the obstacles of geography and made it easier to organize transcontinental business” (Winseck and Pike, 2007: 1).

After the Second World War the pace and scope of global distribution processes rapidly increased. Important factors in this corporate globalization were the mobility of capital and the consolidation of markets through global competition. Characteristic of this phase is the global polarization between the industrial nations and the non-industrial nations, between the centre and the periphery, with the centre nations exercising control over the periphery through what Samir Amin has called the five monopolies of technology, finance, resources, weapons, and communication (Amin, 2000: 602). In the late twentieth century the scope of the globalization process was boosted further by technological innovations and the emergence of institutions that had the promotion of global expansion on their agenda (institutions like the World Trade Organization).

The two essential features of this twentieth-century global expansion are interdependence (e.g. in such fields as climate and health) and the spread of “modernity”: in politics (the idea of parliamentary democracy goes global); in the economy (the free market economy gains massive popularity); and in culture (lifestyles, fashion models, pop music, and fast-food become global icons).

## Globalization: the analytical tool

The concept globalization is used to describe and interpret contemporary social processes. In this application, the concept has both its protagonists and sceptics.

- The protagonists argue that from the 1980s onwards (with the deregulatory policies of Reagan and Thatcher and the demise of communism) more and more people around the globe are living in or are indirectly affected by free market economies. Capitalism has spread from some 20 per cent of the world population in the 1970s to over 90 per cent in the early twenty-first century. More and more people around the globe have become integrated in the global capitalist economy.

The sceptics respond that this is superficially true, but they claim that the “global economy” is in fact the economy of a few rich countries in the world, in particular the OECD countries. They point out that if the world were a global village of 100 residents, six of them would be Americans. These six would have half the village’s entire income and the other 94 would exist on the other half.

- The protagonists argue that today there is more global trading than ever before.

Sweeping reductions in costs of air travel and shipping have facilitated the phenomenal expansion of cross-border trading. In the process, not only the volume of trade has increased enormously, but also its character has changed considerably. Firms are under strong pressure to take a global approach to their sales (e.g. through global brand names and global advertising), and thereby reinforce the globalization of markets.

The sceptics will protest that most world trading is not global but takes place within geographical regions. Moreover, the volume of international trading by the industrial countries has not dramatically increased since the early twentieth century. Actually, some sceptics even present trade figures which demonstrate that the nineteenth-century world economy was far more internationalised than today’s so-called global economy.

- Protagonists will point to the growth of global financial markets and explain that this began in the 1970s with the rapid proliferation of offshore financial markets and the global circulation of vast amounts of money outside the jurisdiction of national authorities. And they will conclude that there is today an unprecedented global financial mobility. This is true, the sceptics agree, but these capital flows refer mainly to one type of capital: short-term speculative investments and not to productive capital. Financial mobility remains very limited where productive investments are concerned and the rapid money causes serious risks for Third World economies.
- Another argument for the protagonists is the increased global mobility of people: there are more refugees and there is more migrant labour around the globe. But the sceptics conclude that most people stay home, most refugees stay within their own region, and most labour is not mobile.
- For the protagonists, globalization as a social process refers to the intensification of global consciousness. The sceptics, however, say that at the surface there is a CNN-type global solidarity but the world is more a collection of many local villages than one global village. People may know the American president better than their neighbours, but in the end they will take sides with the provincial interests of their own tribe. Although more people may have become more cosmopolitan than ever before, this does not yet create a collectively shared cosmopolitan consciousness.

The protagonists argue that increasing economic interdependence leads to social interdependence. The sceptics will answer that this thesis lacks empirical confirmation and that while there may be some evidence of global solidarity, there are equal or even more

demonstrations of the fact that people across the world do not feel part of the global family. Whereas the protagonist like to stress that current social processes lead inevitably to global integration, the sceptics think that the same forces propelling these processes may lead to integration as well as disintegration.

The protagonists and the sceptics therefore disagree about the appropriateness of globalization as an analytical tool. They are also divided on the question of whether the driving force of contemporary social process is primarily technological progress.

The protagonist side of the argument sees globalization as the inevitable consequence of modern technological developments in transportation and communication. The sceptical side argues that an explanation based upon technological determinism is too limited. Technologies undoubtedly play an enabling role, but the crucial variables are decisions made by public and private institutions. Related to this is also a serious disagreement about the significance of the national state. The protagonist argument suggests that the national state has lost its sovereign powers.

Economic processes, propelled by transborder finance flows, offshore electronic markets, and the worldwide marketing of cultural products, affect the decision-making powers of individual states. The sceptics say this is true, but only in a limited way. The financial capacities and political power of the major transnational corporations (TNCs) have certainly increased. Some of these corporations have revenues that exceed the Gross Domestic Products of important industrial nations. However, the sceptics find the claim that governments have become impotent greatly exaggerated. Many powerful companies could not survive without state subsidies (to such companies as Renault and McDonnell Douglas), or without the purchases by states from corporations for defence purposes (such as is the case with General Electric, Boeing, and IBM) or for more general purposes (e.g. Siemens and Alcatel). Moreover, for the efficient and effective performance of large companies the role of law enforcement institutions is crucial. National sovereignty helps the TNCs to avoid the creation of genuine supra-national regulatory institutions that might control their restrictive business practices. TNCs need national governments to guarantee safe investment environments, to create market opportunities through foreign aid or to promote the trade of their “national” companies through their diplomatic missions. They may also benefit from supportive national regulation on technical standards, patent and trademark protection, or acquisitions and mergers.

In the analysis of the sceptics, powerful governments have voluntarily delegated primacy to the marketplace. The state is still decisive in determining the quality of health care, social services, and education. The retreat of the state tends to be partial and from selected social domains, such as social services, and not from intervention on behalf of intellectual property right holders, for example. The sceptics may not deny that states play a lesser role, but they will argue that this is not an inevitable process.




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Is it helpful to describe our world as a “global village”? How can this notion be defended? How can this notion be refuted?

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## Globalization: the political programme

As a political programme globalization represents an agenda that has both its advocates and its critics. The advocates claim that globalization creates worldwide, open and competitive markets which promote global prosperity. The key justification of their political programme is that a global free market leads to more employment, better quality of goods and services, and lower consumer prices. For the critics, the globalization agenda is a neo-liberal political programme that primarily promotes the interests of the world's most powerful players. In their analysis, large numbers of farmers, workers, immigrants, youth, and women are very negatively affected by economic globalization.

The globalization advocates see the process as unstoppable and as ultimately beneficial. It will make all the world's people more prosperous. The critics disagree and say that if there is globalization at all, it is the globalization of poverty. Advocates and critics also disagree about the cultural dimensions of the globalization programme. The advocates defend that globalization promotes cultural differentiation and the critics claim it is merely a new disguise for old-fashioned cultural imperialism.

Both advocates and critics may have a point here, as the global landscape is made up of homogenizing global tendencies, heterogenizing local developments and hybrid forms that are sometimes referred to as "glocalization". The worldwide proliferation of standardized food, clothing, music, TV drama, and the spread of Anglo-Saxon business style and linguistic convention create the impression of an unprecedented cultural homogenization. Yet, in spite of the McDonaldisation of the world, there remain forcefully distinct cultural entities to which the manifold inter-ethnic conflicts are ever so many dramatic testimonies. There is certainly an increase in cultural contacts and more cultural movements that go beyond national boundaries, but this does not yet bring about a global culture. Parallel with the homogenization of consumer lifestyles there is also local cultural differentiation. Although current globalization suggests integration, interdependence and homogenization, locality and nationality continue to play important roles in people's lives.

Globalization is often described as a transfer from the West to the Rest. Inspired by the Hegelian idea that the West is the source of rational thinking, there has certainly been an impressive flow of Western ideas, political constructions, and cultural lifestyles to other parts of the world. However, this Euro-American centrism is increasingly contested by the economic emergence of the new BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) and by proposals (particularly from Asian countries) to break through conventional dichotomous schemes that creates divisions between modern and non-modern, or the de-Westernizing of modern research (Wang, 2011).

Since processes of global distribution are often solidly embedded in localities, this component of the understanding of the world could be best referred to as "trans-localization".



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How cosmopolitan are you really? And how important is your local habitat in the definition of your identity?

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## Urbanization

In the twenty-first century the human species will for the first time in history become an “urban species”. In 2009 half of the global population lived in urban areas and in the years to come this will be some 70 per cent. “According to current projections, virtually the whole of the world’s population growth over the next 30 years will be concentrated in urban areas” (UN Habitat, 2011: ix). The city will be the locality in which people have to find ways to live together and to deal with all the conflicts that go with urban spaces. Latin America is the most urbanized region in the developing world, with 77 per cent of its population – 433 million people – living in cities. The urbanization of Latin America has yet to reach its peak. By 2015, it is expected that 81 per cent of its population will reside in urban areas. Equally, Asia and Africa are regions with a very intense urbanization. Asia alone will account for more than half the world’s urban population by 2030 and in the same year the African urban population will be larger than the total population of Europe.

Global cities are becoming the world’s centres of finance, fashion, the arts, and the media of communication. They are the key hubs in global economic activity and key actors in current processes of globalization. The January 28, 2008 issue of *Time* magazine had a cover story about how three connected cities (New York, London, and Hong Kong, aptly titled Nylonkong) drive the global economy. Their shared economic energy creates a powerful network that both illustrates and explains globalization. They are not only centres of money and high-finance, they are also centres of culture. Cultural production and consumption have become important elements of the economy of the world’s big cities and this has introduced new ways to use urban space for public cultural performances. A variety of cultural roles merge, such as those of spectatorship, tourism, performance, and sales. The big cities have also become key places for all kinds of services, such as legal assistance, marketing, advertising, and architecture (Sassen, 2001).

The world has never before known so many cities and never such large cities as the massive conurbations of more than 20 million people that are now gaining ground in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many of these cities have populations larger than entire countries. The population of Greater Mumbai (which will soon achieve megacity status), for instance, is already larger than the total population of Norway and Sweden combined.

The quality and sustainability of life in the world’s cities will largely depend upon the ways in which the urbanites manage to co-exist with each other. The way cities structure and manage their public space is obviously essential to any effort to enhance social interaction among urbanites. In addition to the management of the physical environment, there are also economic and socio-cultural elements that enhance or obstruct urban social interaction.

Understanding the world requires us to comprehend how urban populations will be able to cope... with such a characteristic of cities as heterogeneity.



**Heterogeneity:** the city is a place of heterogeneity, a place of differences. Dealing with the permanent provocation (Foucault, 2003) that heterogeneity poses is exceedingly difficult for many people.

**Speed:** the city is characterized by the tremendous speed of its movements and interactions. Social interactions demand time. For most city dwellers this means that they have to learn the art of slowing down.

**Mindlessness:** much of urban interaction is mindless. Running without seeing faces, passing others as strangers in the night, without feelings of responsibility towards others; speeding along the urban routes in cocoons that broadcast the signal that I don't mind you, please don't mind me!

It is more characteristic of urban life than of village life that numerous bystanders see a fellow human being beaten and kicked and don't intervene. They may even complain if other onlookers stand in their line of sight.



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If the city is your natural habitat: how well can you deal with the challenges of heterogeneity, speed, and mindlessness?

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## Institutionalization

Like all other living species, the human being searches for adequate adaptive responses (in order to survive and reproduce) to complex problems. These problems stem from human experiences such as the desire to grow and to learn, the need to communicate or the concern about pain, suffering, and death. In the search for adequate adaptive responses, a wide range of institutions has been developed. It is arguably one of the critical distinctions with other species that humans “institutionalize” the satisfaction of basic needs. Not even our closest associates, such as chimpanzees or bonobos, design – for the satisfaction of their alimentary needs – agro-business conglomerates or mega meat-processing institutions! Humans institutionalize, among other domains, education, health care, and public communication.

Institutionalization is a social process of embedding human needs, ideas, values, and desires in organizational formats with objectives, structures, sets of rules, and procedures for assessment. The currently dominant type of institutionalization is the “delivery” institution. This encompasses all those organizations that transform the satisfaction of human needs into the delivery of (often addictive) commodities in the form of professional products and services. The characteristics of delivery institutions are that they commercialize the production and distribution of goods and services, that they are fiercely competitive,

and that are run by professionals. The challenge this raises is whether these features enable human institutions to meet human needs.

## Inequality

A standard feature of today's world is inequality in the access to resources, the experience of recognition, and the distribution of power. The inequality of resources can be illustrated with the observation that the 600 million best-off people have 60 times the income of the 600 million worst-off, or that for 1.2 billion people there is no access to safe drinking water. Worldwide, people's dignity is respected in highly unequal ways as the treatment of women, gay men and women, disabled people, older people, and people with darker skins illustrate.

In authoritarian countries, but also in democracies, the power of decision making is very unequally distributed. Around the globe this is also the case at work and in the family. Global communication functions in a deeply hierarchical and unequal set of power relations and is embedded in structural relationships that rob many people of their fundamental communication rights and that manage to create a culture of denial and silence about these abuses.




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What would be the implications for global communication if there was a more equal distribution of income, wealth, and power in the world?

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## Global risks

Ulrich Beck has coined the notion of the "risk society". An important dimension of the context of global communication is that we live in a global risk society. Human security is threatened by warfare (nuclear, biological, and chemical), terrorism, organized crime, changes in the environment (increasing ultraviolet radiation, rising temperatures, the disappearance of rainforests, a shortage of drinking water, desertification, the depletion of fossil fuels, and decreasing bio-diversity), carcinogen ingredients in food supplies, pollution by poisonous materials (acid rain, chemical products from insecticides or deodorants), series of natural disasters (asteroids, comets, volcanoes, or tornados), and genetic experiments. Much of the content of global communication adds to these risks!

There is hate speech around the world that incites people to ethnic, racial, and religious violence. There is the advertising discourse (Ad-Speech) that persuades people to indulge in a consumption fever that puts a dangerous burden on the planet's sustainability. There are news reports in the mass media that do little to help people understand the world they live in as they frame issues in ways that serve the interests of small, political, and economic elites.

Also, there are developments in information and communication technology (ICT) that facilitate an unprecedented invasion into people's private lives and that create very vulnerable societies. Added to this, there are the combined innovations in robotics, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, and biomedical technology that fly humanity – blindly – towards a future that may not need human beings anymore. These developments also make a new type of global warfare in cyberspace possible.

In the following chapters I will address the different dimensions of global communication. It is important to keep the features of its context in mind and to consider the perspectives and challenges of global communication against the background of trans-localization, urbanization, institutionalization, inequality, and global risks.

## Note

1. [www.nua.com/surveys/how\\_many\\_online/index.html](http://www.nua.com/surveys/how_many_online/index.html)



## Reading spotlight

### Globalisation

Amin, S. (1976). *Un-Equal Development*. New York: The Monthly Review Press.

In a provocative essay Amin analyzes how the advanced capitalist countries have strengthened relations of dependence and dominance between rich and poor countries.

Duchrow, U. and Hinkelammert, F.J. (2004). *Property for People, Not for Profit: Alternatives to the Global Tyranny of Capital*. London: Zed Books.

This book takes up the core issue of capitalist globalisation: property. It offers a critical analysis of the neo-liberal notion of property and argues how this leads to worldwide impoverishment and devastation.

Giddens, A. (1990). *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

In this major theoretical statement, the author offers a new and provocative interpretation of institutional transformations associated with modernity. What is modernity? The author suggests, "As a first approximation, let us simply say the following: 'modernity' refers to modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence."

Gray, J. (1998). *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism*. London: Granta Books.

John Gray argues that a global free market is an artificial construction that does not lead to universal prosperity but to chaotic problems. The book also offers a critical analysis of the Enlightenment faith in reason as a major cause of a laissez-faire capitalism that is presently collapsing.

Greider, W. (1997). *One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism*. New York: Touchstone.

A challenging and penetrating analysis of the global economy that makes enormous accumulations of wealth possible as well as destroys lives of ordinary people around the world.

## Global communication

Fortner, R.S. (1993). *International Communication. History, Conflict and Control of the Global Metropolis*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

A book that offers a broad introduction to the understanding of global communication. The history of international mass media systems is described and their political, economical, legal and cultural dimensions are discussed. A concluding chapter addresses the future of the international communication system.

Golan, G.J., Johnson, Th. J., and Wanta, W. (eds) (2010). *International Media Communication in a Global Age*. London, Routledge.

A reader that offers an overview of recent reseach on global communication. Attention for theoretical insights. Focusses on journalism, public relations, advertising and media ownership.

Kamalipour, Y.R. (2007). *Global Communication* (2nd edition). Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth.

A reader with well-documented chapters on the history, theory, economics and politics of global communication. There are also very insightful contributions about the Internet, national development, culture, propaganda and advertising.

Mattelart, A. (1994). *Mapping World Communication: War, Progress, Culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Mattelart analyzes historical, technical and theoretical aspects of global communication with the support of a broad range of documentary sources. The map he uses directs the reader to the service that communication renders to war-making, to the promotion of progress, and to communication as culture.

Thussu, D.K. (2000/2006). *International Communication: Continuity and Change*. London: Hodder Arnold.

A textbook for students in media and cultural studies. The book offers an examination of important changes in the field of global communication. The author analyzes the expansion of media and telecommunication corporations and explores the impact on worldwide audiences. Case studies are found throughout the book.

Thussu, D.K. (ed.) (2010). *International Communication: A Reader*. London: Routledge.

A comprehensive reader that offers essential academic texts (older and more recent) and policy documents in the field of global communication. References to relevant websites and a chronology of developments in global communication.

## Online resources



Visit the book's companion website at <https://study.sagepub.com/hamelink> to watch the author discussing the theme of this chapter: **Global Communication: The Field**



Visit the book's companion website at <https://study.sagepub.com/hamelink> to access the following journal articles free of charge:

Bilteyst, D. and Meers, Ph. (2000). The international telenovela debate and the contra-flow argument: a reappraisal. *Media, Culture & Society*, 22(4): 393–413.

Boyd-Barrett, O. (2006). Cyberspace, globalization and empire. *Global Media and Communication*, 12(3): 21–41.

Chalaby, J.K. (2005). From internationalization to transnationalization. *Global Media and Communication*, 1(1): 28–33.

Mattelart, A. (1992). An archaeology of the global era: constructing a belief. *Media, Culture & Society*, 24(5): 591–612.

Sparks, C. (2007). What's wrong with globalization? *Global Media and Communication*, 3(2): 133–155.

Sreberny, A. (2005). Contradictions of the globalizing moment. *Global Media and Communication*, 1(1): 11–15.

## Further reading

Albrow, M. and King, E. (eds) (1990). *Globalization, Knowledge and Society*. London: Sage.

Appiah, K.A. (2006). *Cosmopolitanism. Ethics in a World of Strangers*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Beck, U. (2006). *The Cosmopolitan Vision*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Benhabib, S. (2006). *Another Cosmopolitanism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Featherstone, M. (ed.) (1990). *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*. London: Sage.

Fisher, G. (1979). *American communication in a Global Society*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.

Frederick, H.H. (1993). *Global Communication and International Relations*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Hamelink, C.J. (1994). *World Communication: Disempowerment and Self-Empowerment*. London: Zed Books.

Herman, E. and McChesney, R. (1997). *The Global Media: The News Missionaries of Global Capitalism*. London: Cassell.

- Kaplinsky, R. (2005). *Globalization, Poverty and Inequality*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Kofman, E. and Youngs, G. (eds) (1996). *Globalization Theory and Practice*. London: Pinter.
- McPhail, Th.L. (2002). *Global Communication: Theories, Stakeholders, and Trends*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Mowlana, H. (1997). *Global Information and World Communication*. London: Sage.
- Murphy, B. (1983). *The World Wired Up*. London: Comedia Publishing.
- Nordenstreng, K. and Schiller, H.I. (1993). *Beyond National Sovereignty: International Communication in the 1990s*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.
- Schiller, H.I. (1982). *Who Knows: Information in the Age of the Fortune 500*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.
- Scholte, J.A. (2000). *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Palgrave.
- Thomson, J. (1998). Will globalization be good for Americans? *Futures Research Quarterly*, 14(3): 5–18.
- Tunstall, J. and Palmer, M. (1991). *Media Moguls*. London: Routledge.

### RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

What does the growth of urbanization mean for global communication?

Collect data on the growth of worldwide urbanization. Use such sources as the United Nations Habitat Reports.

Write a well-argued assessment of how the process of urbanization may affect global communication: its players, its contents and its effects on global audiences.

Would you interview experts on this question? How would you select them? How would you approach them? What questions would you ask?