

**The global village and the networked society:
Reflections on the “media globalization myth”**

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Much has been made of the shifting relationships of power caused by the forces of globalization. Through the intensification of social interconnections, we now can apprehend the world as a single place, aware of our own place and its relative location within the range of world experience. The media of communication are key players in this process, both as causes and outcomes. Like with other areas of research, the kinds of models we use shape our thinking, and in this case they come with a combination of actual research and wishful thinking.

The very concept of media globalization suggests that we aren't quite sure if media lead to globalization or are themselves affected by globalization. It's obviously some of both, but our tendency in the communication field to think in media-centric terms often gives the media a privileged place in shaping a globalized future. That has led to high expectations for international journalism, satellite television and other media to provide a workable global public sphere, making them an easy target if “media globalization” comes up short. In his book, *Media globalization myth*, Kai Hafez (2007) provides that kind of attack.

We can agree that much of the media globalization discussion has suffered from overly optimistic and under-conceptualized research, and that global media technology is a “necessary but not sufficient condition for global communication.” (p. 2) Too much hope has been pinned on emerging transnational media, as the poster child of media globalization. Hafez has an easy target here, including the dubious “CNN effect.” And he accurately observes that Western scholars with high mobility are tempted to overestimate (in the “hotel thesis”) the role of such transnational media, because they are available to them (but relatively few others) in their narrow and privileged travel circles.¹

Hafez provides a needed empirical evaluation of related phenomenon within a precise theoretical framework, but there remain important changes that need to be examined. As someone who has been intrigued with these changes and wants to find a way forward to explore them, I examine Hafez's argument and provide some additional reflections on how we may approach this area of research with a different conceptual framework. The global village image provides an implicit ideal for “media globalization,” but the network society perspective of Castells may provide a more helpful path for analysis.

Media in the global village

Cross-border communication

At the heart of Hafez's concern is cross-border communication, identified as the "core phenomenon" of globalization. This leads to comparing intra to inter-national communication as the key indicator of globalization and bottom line of the book: media globalization fails to produce true transnational media platforms, or dialogs across boundaries---rather a combination of linguistic and digital divides, along with enduring regional preferences, has served to reinforce those boundaries. International reporting, a key component of the would-be global public sphere, flunks Hafez's "global test," incurring the same criticisms others have leveled for years at national journalism: elite-focused, conflictual and sensational, with a narrow, parochial emphasis. It hasn't risen to the level of "global," which Hafez would require giving "dialogic" voices a chance to speak to each other without reproducing national ethnocentrism. The rally-round-the flag, wartime media phenomenon is overcome only with the influence of regionalization (such as the EU-tempered Iraq war policies), not globalization.

Hafez claims that "global village," "networked society," "glocalization of culture," are too abstract to be empirically useful, but in his argument, the global village perspective colors the expectations across these other concepts. A networked society, for example, rather than seen as yielding different lines of cross-border articulation, is expected to produce a giant cluster of inter-linked world state with cultural entities. Glocalization is seen not as the inevitable interplay of local and cultural forces from a distance, but as the uniform imposition of a global (village) standard across a range of local circumstances.

The global village paradigm

In Hafez's view, the implicit global village metaphor brings expectations of an extensive unitary community, with a corresponding set of universal, global values, undistorted by parochial interests and propaganda. These expectations are expressed in his critique within world systems theory to see how reality stacks up against that utopian ideal. Not very well is the answer. The interaction of world media systems has not as of yet yielded the kind of transnational media and programs that would produce such village-friendly content, but rather in his view has reinforced regional and cultural enclave, hindering the desire for "truly global programs."

The global village perspective restricts the global to a degree of "bigness," part of a nested hierarchy of levels of analysis distinct from the local and regional (p. 8). Against this expectation that media report and reach the entire globe, Hafez finds little evidence for "globally accepted networks" (e.g. CNN) or a "world communication system" with "undistorted view of the world"? (p. 4) The normative aspect of globalization theory slips in when advocates are said to seek a "global values based culture." Whether anyone actually has advocated this is a separate issue from the empirical reality. But the global village implies global consciousness, which in Hafez's interpretation means conversion toward a homogeneity of world views, or at least a diverse "dialog of cultures." Again, the global media system, particularly international broadcasting, doesn't live up to that hope. Media globalization would require in his view less

propaganda and more pluralist discourse.

Global village as world system

Using world system theoretical concepts, Hafez concludes that the global village comes up short on three dimensions: connectivity, change, and interdependence. A system connectivity criterion requires the removal of barriers to cross-border communication, something that clearly has still not occurred, but also that the pattern of communication change. For example, Hafez rejects the internet as a global system of communication, because global connectivity does not exceed local and regional connections. (p. 102) Among transnational media, even CNN does not present a single version to the world.

Hafez sees little evidence of system change. Based on his concept of “receiving” and “transmitting” cultures as somewhat fixed entities, he regards the local as resistant of the “global.” In the glocalizing struggle between internal and external influence, domestication outpaces conversion, and any simultaneous local changes dismissed as a common modernizing rather than global response. That seems to require that the “culture” either be transmitted as representing a whole slice of the host culture, (p. 15) or that a new unitary global culture be developed—a CNN-like global “discursive platform.” (p. 17) Hafez finds little evidence on how social movement have changed because of satellite television or internet, or that the internet advances democratization (including with content critical of government).

Finally, Hafez contrasts the national media system with the global system, looking for global media that operate with a more supranational allegiance (equivalent to UN or EU structures). (p. 22) Globalization, in this view, should create greater system interdependence, such that media systems change each other and produce new transnational media forms. Yet few have emerged.

A network approach to transnational influence

In the remainder of this essay, I introduce another way of considering media globalization, a less media-centric approach that opens up changes not accounted for within a world systems perspective. The network society perspective of Castells does not always provide clear guidance for empirical work and can seem overly vague to those accustomed to influence as flowing from cause to effect. But it does provide a way of thinking about media globalization that fits the underlying phenomena, especially when coupled with an emphasis on social practices, elites, and specific geographical spaces,

Do people still watch primarily their own national news, and do journalists still conform to national interests? Of course they do, but the globalizing process, more specifically, takes place through media and the people connected to them, organized into overlapping, crosscutting networks of communication (Reese, 2008). Other important manifestations are seen in the convergent changes in norms at the level of the globalizing elites and professionals, embedded in their own networks and geographical spaces. Although a more nuanced comparative research perspective has emerged to examine media systems and journalistic cultures (e.g., Esser & Pfetsch, 2004), comparing one nation to another still may not adequately capture the crucial phenomena. Subnational global spaces emerge with changing and often tenuous connections to

the host political system. Global political communication now must be understood as a multi-layered phenomenon, taking into account the development of new media platforms and practices, how they facilitate globalizing social structures, and how people themselves who are involved in these changing structures consciously identify with them.

The complexity of the global lies in its scaling at multiple levels, not just a new supra-national level under which the others easily nest (pan-European news organizations, such as Euronews and Eurovision, may illustrate the latter). Thus, the media role must not be regarded narrowly as equivalent to a specific satellite network, journalistic message, or world-wide audience. International channels and flows may be the most visible manifestations, but they constitute the CNN version of media globalization. More broadly conceived, one can imagine a global news arena supported by an interlocking cross-national awareness of events, in a world further connected by networks of transnational elites, media professionals among them, who engage each other through mutually shared understandings. The globalized practices of media and communication, the expectations citizens have of them, the way officials and elites interact with them, within and across national boundaries, provide a synchronized set of pathways through which global influence flows. Identifying those paths is the first step in understanding the kinds of logic that animates them, and the kinds of power relationships they support.

In previous periods, we could speak of a media logic, or journalistic culture that was rooted in a national structure and local community. This logic was both a result of and an integrative force for the national system. A shared set of expectations and norms allowed the system to function and could be distinguished from other logics and cultures in other national settings (e.g., Hanitzsch, 2007). Media systems, by and large, operated with the producers, consumers, and gatherers of news sharing a common national framework. The question now is, in the weakening of that common national framework, what logic is emerging to take its place, or at least take its place among existing ones? This emerging logic has often been cast as either the domination of Western (often American) transnational corporate media, or by others who benignly see the logic as various hybrids arising between the global and local, although that still fails to capture the systemic shift of power.

Writers such as Chalaby make the broad claim that new practices and communication flows lead to new cultures, “pregnant with new meanings and experiences.” (2005, p. 32) But that doesn’t help understand the shape of these new alignments and how these flows matter, how power relationships are realigned and certain values favored in the emerging logic of networked communication. These realignments facilitate the emergence of new cultural forms of all kinds, but of particular interest here is the logic of political communication itself, of the emerging configuration of practices and interactions among press, state, and society. We need to fill in the shape of that logic and how it is developed, the locations where it is embedded, with the same normative expectations as posed within the national contexts: that it facilitates democratic life, creating spaces where citizens can resolve conflict and help resolve social ills.

Spaces and flows of cross-border influence

Broadly speaking, media globalization becomes a question of how political influence cuts across national boundaries. How has globalization led to new spaces, bringing together transnational

élites, local media practices, and citizens? To what extent are these interactions shaped by a globally consistent shared logic, and what are the consequences for social change and democratic values?

Underlying the circuits of global flows are structures of people in professional and institutional roles. In more concrete terms, these are the agents who form the infrastructure of the global in specific local settings. To understand the emergence of new spaces more generally, it is helpful to examine how actors in specific local settings engage with these broader networks.

Transnational elites, globally connected and oriented, interact with others in specific local cultural and political contexts. How do they communicate global issues in local settings? How do they interact with other professionals, through what coordinating global and local associations? What are the routinized structures for their interaction within and across specific locations, and how do they adapt to local circumstances? I argue that globalizing elites represent an important source of influence and social change. They participate in global networks connecting local settings, bypassing official state channels and introducing a their own logic into national spaces, including with local journalistic cultures and media systems.

The work of globalization theorists in geography and sociology leads us to seek the workings of the global in specific local spaces, where the universal becomes particularized, and where the global dimension is articulated. Cities are particularly important nodes in the global networks, with the more strategically located designated as “global cities,” conceived as essential spaces for the coordination of global processes. Transnational groups operating with outposts in such cities provide specific locations where the global is articulated, interacting with the local in the form of embedded “global citizens” in specific localities.

Global connections can create politically significant new spaces within social systems, privileging certain forms of power and social change. This brings a special focus to the globalization of political influence, an area of research that has lagged behind the scrutiny of economic and entertainment flows. Coca-Cola and Hollywood are worldwide commodities, and the export and consumption of such products have led to extensive research within cultural and media studies. Given that democratic structures are inherently rooted in local communities, however, the globalization of politics--and, in turn, the journalism and public communication that supports it--have been slower to develop and less scholarly study devoted to it.

Nation-states still matter, but spaces for democratic action and discourse are opening up in ways not always predicted by the political system. These interstitial activities and deliberative arenas lie outside the strictly national space. The European Union and United Nations-style supranational structures—and the mediated spaces that accompany them—extend logically beyond the country level and are intuitively easier to conceptualize as a new higher level of analysis. But it’s been more difficult to conceptualize these new more informal, unofficial, and non-institutionalized global spaces--and the way media and journalistic practice map onto them.

The mechanism for networked social change

The examination of this kind of global political interaction can be guided by a “world culture” perspective, an approach to sociocultural influence promoted by figures such as Robertson

(1995). Rather than assume that one culture takes over another, the mechanism of social change lies in the reflexive adaptation of cultures over time as they take into account certain universal standards. Globalization leads neither to a single world “monoculture” nor is simply another way to describe Americanization, imperialism, or transnational capitalism, an overly linear and hegemonic view of what is rather a pattern of interactions and global adaptations in light of special local needs and circumstances. Of particular concern is how change occurs in traditionally closed societies, which must adapt, although not without some anxiety, to the inevitable flows of information and professional logics that accompany them. These changes are often unpredictable, counter-intuitive, and non-linear, requiring a more nuanced perspective of the expression of power. Rather than confront state power head on, influence operates through networks, which insert articulation of global flows into local spaces, creating subnational adaptations from the inside out, as it were.

For Castells, globalization is a process based on the networking of networks (2008a). Adopting a network paradigm calls for different terminology that captures how social actors and practices are tied together at a distance in ways that allow global flows to be articulated across boundaries. The global is coupled with the local. The more significant of these articulations help demarcate emergent spaces with their own hybridized experiences and logic. Thus, a network does not exert influence in the traditional causal sense but rather facilitates certain flows and privileges certain actors who are capable of participating within it, particularly those who are strategically located at pivotal junctures in the structure. This is a more dynamic picture of the shifting and fluid interconnections within which modern social actors participate, foregrounding the decentralized and deterritorialized quality of these relationships. This is the terrain over which power is played out, privileging certain groups and interests while excluding others.

We are embedded in communities beyond the ones we live in, ones not defined by place. That doesn't mean, however, that physical space has ceased to matter for global level processes. As appealing as the concept may seem, there is no “global” public sphere per se, floating free of localities, and attempts to theorize one break down in the absence of a more defined and observable social space. Rather, the public sphere itself has become more globalized, through global networks, which don't exist virtually but connect nodes, where people interact locally in real places with key members of other networks, and where they develop common norms and logics necessary for the functioning of complex global exchanges. Thus, Castells' network society (2007) embraces the “space of flows” and the “space of places” and their interactions, recognizing the increasing importance of such global cities as London and New York, where the global and local come together in the interaction of cosmopolitan elites. The importance of such cities in the global geography can be demonstrated by their centrality to world economic and cultural flows, through such indicators as airline connections, financial activity, and presence of branches of transnational firms.

Network analysis requires that every element in a social structure be understood in relation to other elements in the structure and to the external environment. Bourdieu similarly argues that a social field cannot be understood in isolation but rather in relation to other fields in society, and in relation to its own unique historical development. We can't just measure attributes of people within social containers; they must be examined in their relations to each other, and with respect to specific spaces. A global network perspective, therefore, takes into account both the

importance of local spaces and actors, and how they are positioned relative to a multitude of forces beyond the immediate locale. The ability of researchers to conduct comparative, cross-national studies and the analytical tools of network analysis are beginning to converge with and support these more spatially-rooted theoretical ideas.

Media spaces

Having identified some of the key actors and places constituting networks of transnational influence, we need to understand how these actors engage with local platforms of news and media, which could be more broadly construed as forms of public communication. The mediated space is both created by and terrain for the operations of these elites and the networks within which they function. Within the network society tradition, Castells joins traditional mass communication research in privileging the centrality of media, calling it the “social space where power is decided” (Castells, 2007, p. 238). That space is shifting as traditional media, rather than absorb, converge in a contradictory process with new social media (what he calls “mass self communication”) to create a new discursive space of communication.

Old and new media continue to co-exist but become networked and interpenetrating (Reese, Rutigliano, Hyun, & Jeong, 2007). And this, rather than the stand-alone function of any one particular medium, is the significant globalizing aspect. Through these new media, individuals and social movements are able to advance projects and influence by building their own “autonomy” against more entrenched social institutions. Within this larger global space, social movements are able to oppose in the terms of Castells “networks of instrumentality” with “networks of meaning.” As a result, he argues that the public sphere is undergoing an historical shift, from the institutional (both political and media) realm to this new communication space (Castells, 2007, 2008b). We need to understand how elites, positioned within transnational relationships, operate with their various norms and logics to engage with others in their specific local practices to create these networks of meaning.

Final note

Media globalization—if stated in media-centric, global village terms—can be easily debunked. We will continue to find strong resilience in world communities favoring the local and familiar against the external and unusual. Transnational media and programs will be slow to develop and international journalism resistant to reform. But the seeming sameness of these familiar patterns, preferences, and institutions, conceals the changes surely underway in the face of the globalization process. In grappling with the changes in journalism, for example, Deuze (2008) draws on the work of Beck (2002), who identifies “zombie institutions” as those “living dead” categories of social analysis that continue on in their outward form, but inside they have been hollowed out by the new realities. The same goes for the national containers, making it important to get below the level of these traditional systems to find out what is going on in subnational and subcultural spaces. Thus, on the institutional surface, perhaps, it may seem that media globalization has not yielded much systemic change. Taking the network level of analysis, however, encompasses the burgeoning connections to media, among media, and among the people involved with them to better account for life in a globalized world. We still need empirical work to examine these changes, but that will be a multi-layered project.

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¹ Hafez dismisses the importance of elites as the “hotel thesis” of media globalization, that academic analysts overestimate the importance of transnational media because they have access to them. Although elites may disproportionately participate in and benefit from global structures (and transnational media), and their numbers are relatively small, that doesn’t mean they are not enormously influential. They serve as carriers of global logics, articulating them across borders. We just should not attempt to generalize their behaviors to others.