

# Media Globalization and its Effect upon International Communities: Seeking a Communication Theory Perspective

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## Abstract

There is a growing body of research on the topic of globalization, which seems to be a topic of broad-brush interest to scholars in a variety of fields, such as sociology, political science, ecology, international business, anthropology and communication. This paper focuses on the phenomenon of media globalization and examines a variety of theories that address multinational corporations with media properties. While there are many theories that address mass communication (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986; Lazarsfeld, Cantril, & Stanton, 1939; McLuhan & Powers, 1989; Schramm, 1954), this paper highlights the need for new theories which specifically address media globalization and the unique aspects which convergence and new digital technologies offer to the media-user.

## Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing body of research on the topic of globalization. Traditional definitions of globalization focus on economics and the effects of multinational corporations. In the book *Alternatives to Economic Globalization*, authors Cavanaugh and Mader (2002) referred to a number of factors that are identified with the term globalization. These factors are: hyper-growth and exploitation of the environment, privatization of public services, global cultural homogenization, promotion of consumerism, integration of national economies, corporate deregulation, and displacement of traditional nation-states by global corporate bureaucracies (p. 19).

This paper examines the topic of globalization from the perspective of the media. The primary vehicle of the phenomenon of global media is the multinational corporation. Media globalization has aided in both the production and distribution of information. Dominick (2002) has noted that the production rate of information doubles every eight years. In addition, "information is being produced at a rate that is four times faster than the consumption of information" (p. 513). The phenomenon of media globalization along with the increasing abundance of media-text production has produced various effects which are being researched by communication scholars. Media globalization is a broad topic, which includes television, radio, film, music, the Internet, and other forms of digital media. This paper will first focus upon the cultural effects of media globalization, and then discuss various communication theories that address this issue. After examining a number of media theories which address globalization, there will be a discussion on the theory which seems to best address the media globalization phenomenon.

Christopher Dixon, a media analyst for Paine-Webber has stated that a creation of a "global oligopoly" is taking place among a handful of multinational organizations which control worldwide media properties. (McChesney, 2005, p. 81). Campaign (2005) identified a short list of nine global media corporations, which represent a variety of nations, as the major players (p. 98). These corporations and their significance will be discussed in more detail in this paper. Media globalization shall be defined as the phenomenon of expanding multinational corporate media investment, resulting in the emergence of a global oligarchy of first tier corporations, which own and operate a variety of mass media content and distribution technologies including: television, radio, film, music, broadcasting, satellite, telecommunication, cable, newspapers, magazines, publishing companies, Internet content providers, and other forms of converged digital media. [\[1\]](#)

## The Climate of Globalization

Globalization is being driven by increasingly strong international market factors fueled by organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The World Trade Organization was established in 1995 and as of October 2004 had 148 member nations. The WTO

is located in Geneva, Switzerland. According to the WTO, they are "the only global international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations" ("What is the wto?" 2004). The International Monetary Fund was founded in 1945 and is located in Washington D.C... The IMF currently has 184 member nations. The goals of the IMF include: monitoring and consultation, financial assistance, and technical assistance to its members ("About the imf," 2003). Other organizations which promote globalization are: the World Bank (1946) which makes loans to developing nations, and the Trilateral Commission (1973) which focuses on trade between Japan, Europe and North America, "to foster closer cooperation among these core democratic industrialized areas of the world with shared leadership responsibilities in the wider international system" ("About the organization," 2004).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is another significant player regarding globalization policies and discourse. UNESCO was founded in 1945 and is headquartered in Paris, France. As an agency of the United Nations, UNESCO functions as an international cultural think tank, which "serves as a [clearinghouse](#) – for the dissemination and sharing of information" to its 190 member nations in the areas of "education, science, culture and communication." One of the ambitious goals of UNESCO is to "to build peace in the minds of men" ("About unesco," 2003).

MacBride and Roach (2000) pointed out, that the UNESCO constitution which was adopted in 1946 addressed the flow of international information by charging the agency to "collaborate in the work of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples, through all means of mass communication and to that end recommend the free flow of ideas by word and image" (p. 287). In 1978, UNESCO published *The Declaration on Fundamental Principles Concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media*. Article VII of *The Declaration* refers to, "the mass media contribut[ing] effectively to the strengthening of peace and international understanding, to the promotion of human rights, and to the establishment of a more just and equitable international economic order" ("Declaration on the mass media," 1978).

Without question, the driving force behind globalization is motivated by economic interests. Much of the current climate of international investment and global business is a direct result of global reconstruction, which followed World War II. Both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were founded within a few years after the end of World War II. Critics of globalization say that capitalism is the driving force behind world economics. According to Amnesty International (2000), "of the 100 largest economies in the world, 51 are now global corporations; only 49 are countries" (p. 187). Critics of globalization, such as Amnesty International (AI) are concerned that developing nations are losing their national sovereignty and that human rights violations are taking place. According to AI, "They [developing nations] have diminishing power to control mergers, take-overs and liquidations, may not know who plans to buy or sell a major industry or utility; a telephone, TV or water company may change ownership overnight" (p. 188).

## **Media Globalization and Corporate Expansion**

Media globalization has been a natural extension of corporate expansion on an international scale. Post World War II reconstruction through organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund helped to spread globalization through financial investment. In 1974, UNESCO published a study by researchers Nordenstreng and Varis. MacBride and Roach (2000) reviewed the 1974 UNESCO study and noted that, "The study demonstrated that a few Western nations controlled the international flow of television programs, with the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and the Federal Republic of Germany accounting for the largest shares" (p. 289). According to MacBride and Roach (2000), media globalization gained further momentum in the 1980's, when a prevailing policy of deregulation of media in many developing nations along with openness to private investment occurred (p. 289). McChesney (2005) also noted this trend of free-market deregulation occurring in the eighties and the nineties, in the cable and digital satellite systems around the world.

Head, Spann and McGregor (2001) noted that in the mid-1980's privatization and deregulation gained momentum in Europe, in the cable and telephone industries, through foreign investment from companies such as: Ameritech International, Deutsche Telecom, U.S. West, and Bell Atlantic (p. 414). Some nations have only recently allowed foreign investment in communications industries. In the case of China, the

admittance into the World Trade Organization was a benefit that outweighed the past reluctance towards foreign investment in their national telecommunications infrastructure.

China changed its official policy in 1999, as a required component of its acceptance into the World Trade Organization. Under the new policy, China will allow foreign investors to hold up to 49 percent of certain telecommunications companies, including Internet firms. (Head et al., 2001, p. 414)

Critics of media globalization have long held that the United States is far too powerful and that it exercises cultural imperialism over smaller nations by overwhelming them with movies and television programs produced in the United States (McChesney, 2005). According to Dominick (2002), there has been international reaction to charges of cultural imperialism by certain nations "including Canada, Spain, and France [that] have placed quotas on the amount of foreign material that can be carried on their broadcasting systems" (p. 475).

Economist Benjamin Compaine (2005) answered the criticism of American cultural imperialism directly, by stating that in the twenty first century the major players are corporations from a variety of nations:

While Viacom, Disney, and AOL Time Warner are U.S. owned, many non-U.S.-owned companies dominate the roster of the largest media groups: News Corp. (Australia), Bertelsmann (Germany), Reed-Elsevier (Britain/Netherlands), Vivendi, and Lagardere/Hachette (France), and Sony Corp. (Japan). (p. 98)

## **Effects of Media Globalization**

Researchers have noted a variety of effects resulting from media globalization. Some of these observed effects are open to interpretation while others are acknowledged by most communication scholars. Certain researchers tie their observations to their own theories which attempt to explain certain observed effects. In contrast, other researchers may take on a more descriptive approach preferring to describe detailed effects and apply the theories of other scholars as models for explanation.

According to researcher George Gerbner, the most successful television programs are no longer made for national consumption but rather for international distribution. Gerbner further noted that content is affected by the desire to increase the marketability of international television program distribution. Programs that contain violent material are considered to "travel well" according to Gerbner (Jhally, 1994). In contrast, comedy programs which may be quite successful in the United States do not necessarily do well in other countries. Comedy is culturally defined, and what is deemed funny by one cultural group may in fact be offensive to another. In comparison, violent material has a very simple story line of good versus evil. It is universally understood and in many ways culturally transparent.

Robert McChesney is a media historian and political economist. In a recent article by McChesney (2005), he criticized multinational corporations in a number of ways. First, that the global media market is dominated by eight multinational corporations which also dominate U.S. media. These companies are: "General Electric, AT&T/Liberty Media, Disney, Time Warner, Sony, News Corporation, Viacom and Seagram, plus Bertelsmann, the Germany-based conglomerate" (p. 93). Second, multinational corporations are becoming increasingly horizontally integrated, meaning that these companies both create content and own publishing companies or broadcasting networks, and are able to distribute their own product. Third, international deregulation and free-market policies have created a climate that has been conducive to foreign investment in media. Fourth, that the World Trade Organization is threatening local culture by encouraging foreign investment in local media. McChesney has observed a trend of cultural protectionism form developing nations:

In the summer of 1998 culture ministers from twenty nations, including Brazil, Mexico, Sweden, Italy and Ivory Coast, met in Ottawa to discuss how they could 'build some ground rules' to protect their cultural fare from 'the Hollywood juggernaut.' (p. 93)

Fifth, there is a well defined second tier of media conglomerates which are increasingly competing on the international level through foreign investment, mergers, and acquisitions. Half of these corporations are

based in North America while the others are based in Western Europe and Japan. (This observation by McChesney is interesting since the Trilateral Commission encourages economic trade between precisely these three regions.) Second tier corporations include, "Dow Jones, Gannett, Knight-Ridder, Hearst, and Advance Publications, and among those from Europe are the Kirch Group, Havas, Media-set, Hachette, Pisa, Canal Plus, Pearson, Reuters and Reed Elsevier" (p. 94). Sixth, merger mania seems to be the rule of day when it comes to multinational corporations. McChesney noted that sixty or seventy first and second tier multinational corporations control a major portion of the world's media in the areas of publishing, music, broadcasting, television production, cable, satellite distribution, film production, and motion picture theater exhibition. Seventh, McChesney concluded that the effect of the spread of multinational media corporations has resulted in cultural imperialism, a loss of local cultural identity. McChesney summarized the motivation of multinational media corporations as such, "The global commercial-media system is radical in that it will respect no tradition or custom, on balance, if it stands in the way of profits" (p. 95).

Benjamin Compaine (2005) has disagreed with many of McChesney's criticisms of the effects of globalization of the media. Compaine tackled a number of major criticisms head on in his article "Global Media." First, Compaine disagreed with the view that a few large companies are taking over the world's media. Compaine has compared international media mergers to "rearranging the furniture," as companies are repeatedly sold and re-sold:

In the past 15 years, MCA with its Universal Pictures was sold by its U.S. owners to Matsushita (Japan), who sold to Seagram's (Canada), who sold to Vivendi (France). Vivendi has already announced that it will divest some major media assets, including textbook publisher Houghton-Mifflin. (p. 98)

Second, Compaine disagreed that corporate ownership is having a toll on effective journalism. A study by the non-profit organization Freedom House in 2000 researched 186 countries; it suggested "that press independence, including journalists' freedom from economic influence, remained high in all but two members (Mexico and Turkey) of the Organisation [sic] for Economic Co-operation and Development" (p. 99). Third, Compaine disagreed that global media can hurt local content. MTV in Brazil plays music and videos that are selected by local producers. Star TV, distributes satellite TV in India. Star was initially unsuccessful when it showed American television programs. Star TV only succeeded after it hired an Indian television executive who created Indian soap operas. Fourth, Compaine disagreed that the public would be better served by stricter regulation of the media. Media concentration can be beneficial in the case of two small struggling newspapers merging in order to survive, as opposed to one of them going out of business. Licensing and antitrust regulation can act as a barrier to new players entering the competitive landscape. Relaxing broadcast regulation expands competition. News Corp. began its investment in American media when the FCC raised the limit of national television station ownership from seven to twelve, and also struck down the rule that prohibited TV networks from owning their own programming. As a result, Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. was able to build an audience with a core group of television stations and purchase 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. Compaine noted, "Fox was thus able to launch the first successful alternative to the Big Three in 30 years. Its success also paved the way for three other large media players to initiate networks" (p. 101).

Marjorie Ferguson has similar views to Compaine. Ferguson (2002) has stated that cultural homogeneity is a myth which is predicated upon McLuhan's theory of a global village. The myth is not evidenced by real-world observation since identical consumer products, movies, clothes and architectural expressions are not seen in every nation. The new world order and economic globalism is not marching forward in an unchecked manner. As Ferguson has stated, "Paradoxically, we witness an antifederalist ethos competing with a resurgent regional economic protectionism in the EC, the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and the proposed South-East Asian trading bloc" (p. 245).

In a significant historical article, Pike and Winseck (2004) argued that media globalization is not a recent phenomenon at all. Globalization began in the 1850's when "domestic telegraph systems had greatly extended their reach and become linked to a worldwide network of cable communications. . . . British companies dominated, maintaining almost complete control over the manufacture and laying of cables and owning two-thirds of the world's cables by 1900" (pp. 645-646). Pike and Winseck make three major points in their article. First, globalization is not a recent phenomenon. Some scholars have interpreted the

early stages of globalization as being synonymous with imperialism, since "competing western nations utilized communications to aid in the expansion of their empires" (p. 643). Second, there is the technocratic view of globalization. This view linked the technical aspects of globalization with the global spread of modernity and civilization. Third, globalization is a natural extension of "laissez-faire capitalism," which broke through national boundaries to extend the free market economy to a global-world market (p. 644).

## **Communication Theories that Address Media Globalization**

The trends and effects of media globalization will continue to be both observed and debated by communication scholars, sociologists, economist, and politicians alike. With the fall of communism in the USSR in August of 1991, private investment and the proliferation of multinational corporations has continued to march across Europe and the other continents of the world. The trend of continuing media globalization has showed no recent signs of retreat. Both critics and advocates of media globalization agree that there is fierce competition taking place between the first and second tier corporations. The smaller regional second tier corporations don't want to lose market share to the larger multinational corporations. It seems that market forces and shrewd political maneuverings on the part of multinational media corporations will determine the competitive landscape of the future. While this fierce battle is taking place in the corporate boardrooms of some of the worlds largest multinational corporations, communication researchers search for a theoretical basis to interpret various phenomena related to global mass media. What follows is a variety of theoretical perspectives from scholars that are addressing these questions.

## **Cultural Imperialism and Marxism and Critical Theory**

One of the oldest theories of mass media which is also critical of globalization is cultural imperialism. John Tomlinson (2002) has addressed a number of issues related to cultural imperialism discourse. First, Tomlinson recognized that traditional Marxism divided the world into a political-economic dialectic struggle between an elite ruling class and a larger working class. For the Marxist, capitalism is interpreted as a "homogenizing cultural force" (p. 228). The idea is that capitalism propels a sort of "cultural convergence" which people are not able to resist and that cultural imperialism implies a spreading culture of worldwide consumerism. Second, cultural imperialism is used as a term which described a foreign culture invading an indigenous community. Tomlinson has criticized this common view by pointing out that *indigenous culture* can be an ambiguous term. Tomlinson asked, "How does a culture belong to an area?" (p. 226). Since culture is constructed by human beings, how can it be geographically grounded in the same way that plants and animals are? Tomlinson's second point is not a very sound one. Anthropologists and linguists alike can describe how the very words and customs that are incorporated into most indigenous cultures and languages are a reflection of the environment in which the people live (Geertz, 1983). Third, Tomlinson saw cultural imperialism as a critique of modernity. According to Tomlinson, "But on another theoretical level the critique of modernity becomes an argument against the dominant trends of global development. Indeed, it involves an argument about the meaning of 'development' itself" (p. 229).

Critical Theory as popularized by the Frankfurt School, was founded in 1923. It continues to be an important methodology in the study of mass communication. According to Littlejohn (2002), the Frankfurt School is well known for its Marxist traditions. The criticism of the mass media from the Frankfurt School was tied to a "harsh critique of capitalism and liberal democracy" (p. 212). Critical theory and cultural imperialism theory share common roots in Marxist ideology, which are both anti-capitalistic and generally anti-Western in their approach to the study of media globalization. Everett Rogers (1994) detailed how the Frankfurt school was a combination of Marxist and Freudian theories. According to Rogers, the term "critical school" refers to "not only a dozen or so important intellectuals originally affiliated with the Frankfurt school but also to hundreds of other contemporary scholars who consider themselves intellectual descendants of the original Frankfurt scholars . . ." (p. 109).

## Cultivation Theory

George Gerbner (1977) has developed cultivation analysis theory. Gerbner's theory asserts that television has displaced traditional sources of socialization such as: the family, the church, and school:

A culture cultivates the images of a society. The dominant communication agencies produce the message systems that cultivate the dominant image patterns. They structure the public agenda of existence, priorities, values, relationships. . . . The mass media – printing, film, radio, television – ushered in the modern world as we know it. Mass communication changed the production and distribution of knowledge. (p. 205)

According to Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorielli (1986), "television has become the primary common source of socialization and everyday information (mostly in the form of entertainment) of an otherwise heterogeneous population," Gerbner believed that mass media produced images from, "the mainstream of a common symbolic environment" (p. 18). Stephen Littlejohn (2002) commented that Gerbner's theory "is not a theory of individual media 'effects' but instead makes a statement about the culture as a whole" (p. 317). Gerbner predicted that heavy television viewers are far more likely to be socialized through television than light television viewers. Gerbner went on to describe what he called the "mean world syndrome" which suggests that the violent nature of television content will affect heavy television viewers to believe that the world is a violent place, where people cannot be trusted. According to Gerbner, violent television programs "travel well" across political borders since violence is easily understood cross-culturally. In contrast, comedy does not translate well in other cultures since it is inherently culture-bound.

Nancy Signorielli (1990) has done research which seems to substantiate Gerbner's theory, suggesting that heavy television viewers are more prone to be mistrustful of others and to see the world as a meaner place, than do lighter television viewers. Signorielli and Morgan (1990) have written a book titled, *Cultivation analysis: New directions in media effects research*, which contains a wide variety of research regarding cultivation analysis theory, from critics and adherents alike. The Museum of Television has summarized the research and controversy surrounding cultivation analysis theory:

The literature contains numerous failures to replicate its findings as well as numerous independent confirmations of its conclusions. The most common conclusion, supported by meta-analysis, is that television makes a small but significant contribution to heavy viewers' beliefs about the world. . . . In sum, cultivation research is concerned with the most general consequences of long-term exposure to centrally-produced, commercially supported systems of stories. Cultivation analysis concentrates on the enduring and common consequences of growing up and living with television. ("Audience research," 2004)

## Spiral of Silence Theory

Similar to Gerbner, Noelle-Neumann also argued for the dominating effect of mass media upon the public. Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence theory proposed that people are more likely to publicly express their opinions when they perceive that others share their views. The spiral of silence effect refers to individuals choosing to be silent when faced with the potential of criticism by others. According to Littlejohn (2002), "the spiral of silence seems to be caused by the fear of isolation" (p. 19). Elijah Katz (2002) has made the following statement regarding the relationship between spiral of silence theory and the media:

Central to Noelle-Neumann's thesis is the notion that the media have come to substitute for reference groups. It is strongly implicit in the Noelle-Neumann papers that people decide whether or not to be silent on the basis of the distribution of opinion reported (often incorrectly) by the media. (p. 387)

Katz criticized Noelle-Neumann's lack of discussion regarding an individual's participation in reference groups. There remains a delicate balance between reference groups and mass communication. While a person may feel the effects of the spiral of silence in the face of mass media messages that are different than one's personal beliefs, being a member of a reference group with shared values may counter the silencing effect. Katz further pointed out that both Gerbner and Noelle-Neumann agreed that the "media are active agents of false consciousness, constraining people to misperceive their environment and their

own place in it" (p. 386).

## **Dependency Theory**

Dependency Theory is a means to address the role of news agencies in the international distribution of news content. Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Terhi Rantanen (2002) discussed the roots of dependency theory as stemming from the viewpoint that agencies such as Reuters, were seen as significant in certain British territories during the 1930's, in promoting British trade interests. Dependency theory itself arose from South American nations in the post-colonial stage. The theory maintained that prior colonial nations which had been exposed to North American capitalistic investment had become dependent upon western news agencies since the news-system provided a critical link between the developing nations and the larger world economy and corresponding value system. Dependency theory had an impact as part of the nonaligned nations movement, which began in 1955 (MacBride & Roach, 2000). In 1976, Mustapha Masmoudi, the Tunisian Secretary of State for information, spoke at the nonaligned news symposium in Tunis. The outcome of the meeting was to challenge the nonaligned nations to form a *new world information and communication order* (NWICO). The purpose of the NWICO was to advance among the nonaligned nations a "reorganization of existing communication channels that are a legacy of the colonial past" (287).

## **Megaphone Effect Theory**

Bloch and Lemish (2003) have created a new term which they call the megaphone effect. They theorize that cultural texts which become adopted into the popular culture in the United States can be transformed into a global cultural phenomenon, through the international media. The theory suggests a two-step process. First, cultural texts cross the Atlantic (or Pacific) and enter into the culture of the United States. The second step occurs when these texts are then perceived as having wider international appeal, and are then marketed and distributed to the global community. The study analyzed: television programs, news networks, children's culture, and pop music. It suggested that the adoption of local cultural texts into mainstream U.S. culture provided a greater opportunity for their voices to be heard on a global scale. This theory is quite new to the globalization literature and as yet there are few published articles on the subject.

## **Global Imaging Theory**

In his book, *The Roar of the Crowd* (1993), Michael J. O'Neill built a strong case for a more homogenized world culture, as the result of television and mass media. O'Neill is the former editor of the New York Daily News, and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. O'Neill contends that, "communications technology always influences human organization. . . . As the speed of communication rises, social distance shrinks and ever larger numbers of people, widely separated by space, are drawn together into common experiences" (p. 24). O'Neill's book viewed media globalization from the point of view of a news reporter. Winston Churchill was opposed to using television but later conceded to its necessity. O'Neill attributed Margaret Thatcher's rise to political power as stemming from her television appearances in the 1974 election (p. 121). O'Neill's main thesis is that mass communication, on a global scale, drives public opinion:

Whatever the country-by-country variation, a central force in all that is happening is obviously public opinion, mobilized and distributed by mass communications on an unprecedented scale. The rise in people power is having a heavier impact on political institutions than at any other time in history, not only in Western democracies but in many areas of the world where it has never existed before. (p. 104)

O'Neill's view of communication technology as a major force behind human organizations and political movements is similar to Marshall McLuhan's theory of technological determinism. In this view, television like the printing press, and the telegraph before it, are signature technological inventions which affect society as a whole. McLuhan understood that technologies such as the telephone, television and undersea communications cables connected the world's societies together. According to Straubhaar and LaRose (2004), McLuhan used the term "global village" in the 1960's, before the advent of the Internet.

## Tetrad Theory

Perhaps one of the most interesting theories regarding media globalization is one developed by Marshall McLuhan and Bruce Powers (1989) in their book *The Global Village*. [2]McLuhan and Powers present a model which they refer to as a tetrad. The tetrad is a made up of three elements. The first element is visual space which refers to a Western civilization mind set, based on logical systematic, linear, and Platonic reason. The second element is acoustic space, which is more holistic and Asian in approach. The third element is the tetrad itself which is a collision of these two opposing philosophies in a four part metaphor, consisting of enhancement, reversal, retrieval and obsolescence. According to McLuhan and Powers, "The tetrad helps us to see 'and-both' the positive and the negative results of the artifact" (p. 11).

The example is given of the invention of the automobile which greatly aided the need for transportation, but also changed society by transforming workers into distance commuters, dooming the inner city to skyscraper landscapes, while at the same time creating the need for suburbs. The practicality of verifying tetrad theory with social science research seems limited since it seems to be as much a philosophy as a theory of communication.

Gordon Gow (2001) has written an article about tetrad theory and relates it to special metaphor, from an ontological perspective. This approach is used as a model for the study of culture and technology. In this sense, tetrad theory is more of an epistemological perspective than a methodological approach to global mass media research.

In any case, McLuhan and Power's work does offer a number of interesting and almost prophetic observations, considering that the book was written in 1989. Before the Internet existed, the authors describe the interactive nature of the World Wide Web:

For example, the new telecommunication multi-carrier corporation, dedicated solely to moving all kinds of data at the speed of light, will continually generate tailor-made products and services for individual consumers who have pre-signaled their preferences through an ongoing data base. Users will simultaneously become producers and consumers. (p. 83)

## Seeking an Interactive Model for Media Globalization

With the exception of tetrad theory, all of these theories have one thing in common. They all view mass communication from the perspective of the traditional model proposed by Wilbur Schramm (1954). Schramm's theory proposed a one-to-many model in which a highly complex mass media organization (newspaper, television network, radio network, or news agency) created and then distributed messages to a mass public. In Schramm's model, the media organization is depicted as the gatekeeper of information flow. It is from this model that volumes of media effects research such as gate keeping and agenda setting studies have been based (Head et al., 2001, p. 323; Whetmore, 1993, p. 5).

George Gerbner's cultivation theory describes the effects of a top-down, one-to-many mass communication model. It does not offer an explanation for bottom-up content from a large heterogeneous audience. Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence theory offers an explanation for why people do not speak up, when faced with intimidating messages from an impersonal mass media system, with which certain publics do not agree. Spiral of silence theory could also be used in a converse manner. What happens when the media provide a gathering place for similar points of view and expression of meaning? In the case of the Internet, the recent popularity of web logs (a.k.a. blogging) suggests that the antithesis of spiral of silence produces new communities of shared sense-making, which stimulate expression.

Dependency theory and the theory of cultural imperialism are traditionally grounded in Marxist ideology. The criticism of Marxist ideology is that the entire world is reduced to an economic-political struggle between the classes. Culture is seen as being dominated by economics. In contrast, sociologists with a constructivist epistemology believe that humans (not economic struggle) create meaning. Movements such as NWICO are an attempt for local cultural expression to have a voice, in opposition to dominating foreign cultures. Some of these movements are reactionary in nature, and make little attempt to integrate local media-texts into the larger scope of global media. An alternative, Bloch and Lemish's megaphone



effect theory offers the opportunity which Marxist critical theories deny their publics. In short, megaphone theory suggests that local media-text production can have international appeal, and that mass media organizations are seeking new sources of media content for global distribution.

There is now a significant shift which is taking place regarding the globalization of media. As media convergence continues, and a higher percentage of media-texts and content are reduced to the digital domain, a new model of mass communication is unfolding. As Joseph Dominick (2002) pointed out, this new model is not one-to-many but rather, many-to-many (p. 23). Users of Internet content are suddenly empowered with the ability to post messages on web sites; they can also create their own web sites. These messages and sites can then be viewed by millions of Internet users around the world. When McLuhan and Powers' book was published in 1989, there was no Internet, as we know it today. Their prediction that "Users will simultaneously become producers and consumers" has been prophetic (p. 83). Today, anyone with access to the Internet can easily create a web page or post a message on a bulletin board. The traditional one-to-many model has been replaced by a new interactive paradigm.

## **Interactive Global Media Theory**

A theory of media globalization based on an interactive platform is sustainable for many reasons. First, the global spread of the Internet and the increasing trend of digital media convergence. Pavlik and McIntosh (2005) pointed out that feedback in the converged world of digital communication is instantaneous in comparison with traditional analog mass communication (p. 71). Second, television is becoming increasingly interactive. Millions of viewers call in to vote, as in the case of the popular television program *American Idol*. High Definition Television in 2007 will have built in two-way interactive capabilities. Cable television currently has interactive capabilities allowing viewers to order a pizza directly through the cable connection. Third, there is an increasing competitive pressure between first tier multinational media corporations to offer more locally produced content. Compaine (2005) noted that the key to success for Star TV in India was the development of an Indian soap opera created by a local television executive. Jocelyn Cullity (2002) pointed out that cultural nationalism has been the key to success for MTV India. Indrajit Banerjee (2002) argued that there is a significant trend in local and regional programming in developing nations, and that much of this is in response to charges of cultural imperialism. Fourth, the entire discussion of communication convergence in the digital realm, which affects the Internet, telecommunications, television, movies, radio, and satellite distribution of content, is based on increasing interactivity. Consumers and media users increasingly seek interactive environments in which they can use these types of services in a seamless manner (Rushkoff, 2005). Consumers in Europe are already able to use cell phones to make purchases from vending machines. The successful marketers of the future will be those who discover new interactive solutions for a public which seeks ubiquitous solutions from a variety of digital devices. Fifth, interactive capabilities create a new growth curve, which in turn will expand the customer base of mature media technologies. Talk radio has exploded in popularity in the United States. According to Head (2001), "Arbitron reports that national shares for talk radio have risen steadily from 15.4 in 1993 to more than 17 today" (p. 305).

## **Conclusion**

This paper has looked at the phenomenon of globalization from the perspective of the media. The effects of media globalization have been discussed as presented by a variety of communication scholars. Current theories of the mass media that address globalization have been presented and criticized. Finally, this paper has noted the need for more theory which specifically addresses media globalization from an interactive many-to-many model. It is time to break from the traditional one-to-many model as proposed by Schramm (1954). In addition, current communication theory needs to address the rise of the multinational first tier players, and to develop models which take into account the unique aspects of interactivity, which digital technologies provide. As Pavlik and McIntosh (2005) pointed out, the traditional analog mass communication model saw the audience as a large, anonymous public, which was passive in its use of the media. In contrast the new paradigm of digital mass media sees the audience in a completely different manner. The audience is now fragmented, known and addressable. This new audience is engaged, and active in participation. It actively creates media content and new communities of content exchange. This paper is a call for new communication theory to be created which will address

these emerging phenomena.

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[1] In this paper, the term *first tier corporation* shall refer to significant multinational media organizations. The term *second tier* refers to regional corporations, while *third tier* are the smallest players, with only local influence.

[2] McLuhan and Powers collaborated on the project. The book was published nine years after McLuhan died.