



Journalism and Globalization

Stephen D. Reese*

University Station, Austin, Texas, USA

Abstract

Like every other social practice, journalism cannot now fully be understood apart from globalization. As part of a larger platform of communication media, journalism contributes to this experience of the world-as-a-single-place and thus represents a key component in these social transformations, both as cause and outcome. These issues at the intersection of journalism and globalization define an important and growing field of research, particularly concerning the public sphere and spaces for political discourse. In this essay, I review this intersection of journalism and globalization by considering the communication field's approach to 'media globalization' within a broader interdisciplinary perspective that mixes the sociology of globalization with aspects of geography and social anthropology. By placing the emphasis on social practices, elites, and specific geographical spaces, I introduce a less media-centric approach to media globalization and how journalism fits into the process. Beyond 'global village journalism,' this perspective captures the changes globalization has brought to journalism.

Like every other social practice, journalism cannot now fully be understood apart from globalization. This process refers to the intensification of social interconnections, which allows apprehending the world as a single place, creating a greater awareness of our own place and its relative location within the range of world experience. As part of a larger platform of communication media, journalism contributes to this experience and thus represents a key component in these social transformations, both as cause and outcome. These issues at the intersection of journalism and globalization define an important and growing field of research, particularly concerning the public sphere and spaces for political discourse. The study of globalization has become a fashionable growth industry, attracting an interdisciplinary assortment of scholars. Journalism, meanwhile, itself has become an important subject in its own right within media studies, with a growing number of projects taking an international perspective (reviewed in Reese 2009). Combining the two areas yields a complex subject that requires some careful sorting out to get beyond the jargon and the easy country-by-country case studies.

From the globalization studies side, the media role often seems like an afterthought, a residual category of social change, or a self-evident symbol of the global era—CNN, for example. Indeed, globalization research has been slower to consider the changing role of journalism, compared to the attention devoted to financial and entertainment flows. That may be expected, given that economic and cultural globalization is further along than that of politics, and journalism has always been closely tied to democratic structures, many of which are inherently rooted in local communities. The media-centrism of communication research, on the other hand, may give the media—and the journalism associated with them—too much credit in the globalization process, treating certain media as the primary driver of global connections and the proper object of study.

Global connections support new forms of journalism, which create politically significant new spaces within social systems, lead to social change, and privilege certain forms

of power. Therefore, we want to know how journalism has contributed to these new spaces, bringing together new combinations of transnational élites, media professionals, 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? Here, however, the discussion often gets reduced to whether a cultural homogenization is taking place, supporting a 'McWorld' thesis of a unitary media and journalistic form. But we do not have to subscribe to a one-world media monolith prediction to expect certain transnational logics to emerge to take their place along side existing ones. Journalism at its best contributes to social transparency, which is at the heart of the globalization optimists' hopes for democracy (e.g. Giddens 2000). The insertion of these new logics into national communities, especially those closed or tightly controlled societies, can bring an important impulse for social change (seen in a number of case studies from China, as in Reese and Dai 2009).

In this essay, I will review a few of the issues at the intersection of journalism and globalization and consider a more nuanced view of media within a broader network of actors, particularly in the case of journalism as it helps create emerging spaces for public affairs discourse. Understanding the complex interplay of the global and local requires an interdisciplinary perspective, mixing the sociology of globalization with aspects of geography and social anthropology. This helps avoid equating certain emerging global news forms with a new and distinct public sphere. The globalization of journalism occurs through a multitude of levels, relationships, social actors, and places, as they combine to create new public spaces. Communication research may bring journalism properly to the fore, but it must be considered within the insights into places and relationships provided by these other disciplines. Before addressing these questions, it is helpful to consider how journalism has figured into some larger debates.

Media Globalization: Issues of Scale and Homogeneity

One major fault line lies within the broader context of 'media,' where journalism has been seen as providing flows of information and transnational connections. That makes it a key factor in the phenomenon of 'media globalization.' McLuhan gave us the enduring image of the 'global village,' a quasi-utopian idea that has seeped into such theorizing about the contribution of media. The metaphor brings expectations of an extensive, unitary community, with a corresponding set of universal, global values, undistorted by parochial interests and propaganda. The interaction of world media systems, however, has not as yet yielded the kind of transnational media and programs that would support such 'village'-worthy content (Ferguson 1992; Sparks 2007). In fact, many of the communication barriers show no signs of coming down, with many specialized enclaves becoming stronger. In this respect, changes in media reflect the larger crux of globalization that it simultaneously facilitates certain 'monoculture' global standards along with the proliferation of a host of micro-communities that were not possible before. In a somewhat analogous example, the global wine trade has led to convergent trends in internationally desirable tastes but also allowed a number of specialized local wineries to survive and flourish through the ability to reach global markets.

The very concept of 'media globalization' suggests that we are not quite sure if media lead to globalization or are themselves the result of it. In any case, giving the media a privileged place in shaping a globalized future 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 they come up short. In his book, *Media globalization*

myth, Kai Hafez (2007) provides that kind of attack. Certainly, much of the discussion has suffered from overly optimistic and under-conceptualized research, with global media technology being a 'necessary but not sufficient condition for global communication.' (p. 2) Few truly transnational media forms have emerged that have a more supranational than national allegiance (among newspapers, the *International Herald Tribune*, *Wall St. Journal Europe*, *Financial Times*), and among transnational media even CNN does not present a single version to the world, split as it is into various linguistic viewer zones.

Defining cross-border communication as the 'core phenomenon' of globalization leads to comparing intra- to inter-national communication as the key indicator of globalization. For example, Hafez rejects the internet as a global system of communication, because global connectivity does not exceed local and regional connections. With that as a standard, we may indeed conclude that media globalization has failed to produce true transnational media platforms or dialogs across boundaries. Rather a combination of linguistic and digital divides, along with enduring regional preferences, actually reinforces some boundaries. (The wishful thinking for a global media may be tracked to highly mobile Western scholars, who in Hafez's 'hotel thesis' overestimate the role of such transnational media, because they are available to them in their narrow and privileged travel circles.) Certainly, the foreign news most people receive, even about big international events, is domesticated through the national journalistic lens. Indeed, international reporting, as 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. If 'global' means giving 'dialogic' voices a chance to speak to each other without reproducing national ethnocentrism, then the world's media still fail to measure up.

Conceptualizing the 'Global'

For many, 'global' means big. That goes too for the global village perspective, which emphasizes the scaling dimension and equates the global with 'bigness,' part of a nested hierarchy of levels of analysis based on size: beyond local, regional, and national. Against this expectation that media report and reach the entire globe, little evidence exists for a world communication system with an undistorted view of the world. The global village implies global consciousness, which implies a homogeneity of world views, or at least a diverse 'dialog of cultures.' Again, the global media system, particularly international broadcasting, does not live up to that hope: homogenization loses out to domestication. The global village idea even colors the interpretation of related research concepts. The 'networked society' of Manuel Castells (2007), for example, rather than seen as yielding different lines of cross-border articulation can be interpreted to require a giant cluster of inter-linked world, state, and cultural entities. 'Glocalization,' a popular concept in this literature, can be seen not as the inevitable interplay between local and cultural forces from a distance, but as the uniform imposition of a global (village) standard across a range of local circumstances. These interpretations, however, obscure the real complexity of globalization.

Satellite news channels, as mentioned earlier, have figured prominently in the 'media globalization' debate. This has led to these platforms often being regarded as a 'space apart' in a new 'global' realm. Volkmer (1999), for example, ties global news to an emerging world civil society structure. In her study of CNN International, she argues that global political communication constructs a global public sphere, from which emerges global civil society. This global platform, she says, supports the communication

needs of worldwide movements and their corresponding worldwide political organizations. She further argues that the global public sphere is a new political space, with the capacity to pressure national politics and provide communication not otherwise possible on a national level—in, for example, the Arab television network Al-Jazeera's interview with Osama bin Laden, or extra-territorial Websites set up by Chinese dissidents (Volkmer 2002). In a new 'sphere of mediation,' she says journalists work to mediate between nation and extra-societal global political space, between the national and the global, requiring new roles for journalists.

Hjarvard (2001) is among those declining to declare the global public sphere a new autonomous zone, claiming it is rather a process of restructuring and recasting public communication. Indeed, he argues that globalization 'skeptics' dispute the emergence of the global public sphere precisely because they are looking for one that operates similarly to the national public sphere, only on a broader supranational scale. I agree with his argument that globalization of the public sphere means the process by which the national sphere becomes deterritorialized, not a creation of a new and separate global public sphere but a 'multilayered structure of publicity' (p. 34).

Cottle and Rai (2008) also focus on these satellite news channels but explore their content more directly (something they argue has been long needed). An analysis of CNN International and BBC World programs showed frames with the potential to move beyond 'dominance' to cultural recognition—acknowledging and affirming cultural differences. Cottle's more recent work considers the sources who help provide these frames, by examining media savvy NGOs which must promote their humanitarian issues through a 'global media hierarchy' with its associated media 'codes' (Cottle and Nolan 2007). The focus on 'global' news content—what it contains, who it reaches, and the elites who must engage with it—simply reminds us that a globalized journalism is increasingly not a respecter of national boundaries and must be conceptualized accordingly.

Searching for the Global in Journalism

When considering globalization and journalism, it is tempting to come up with new categories of media, practice, professionals, and content and elevate them to 'global' status. To classify 'global media,' for example, or find a group that can be identified as 'global journalists' has presented a definitional challenge, given their dispersal and inter-connectness (Reese 2001, 2008). Who qualifies as a 'global journalist' and is this just a new term for 'foreign correspondent'? This may ultimately be more of a provocative concept than a strictly defined empirical category. A volume entitled *The global journalist*, for example, was in fact a country-by-country survey of professionals (Weaver 1998), with few attempts then or now to explicate the concept. 'Global media' have been variously defined as those having a global reach or in being owned by global transnational corporations (Herman and McChesney 1997). Global news media content also suffers from difficulty separating it out from other forms, although scholars have been experimenting with identifying in content analyses certain intrinsically global issues and perspectives in the news (e.g. Berglez 2008). Some have focused on how certain 'global' events such as summits are covered, while others have begun paying closer attention to the journalistic practices that map onto supranational governance, finding for example that the *Financial Times* is a crucial arbiter and agenda-setter for European Union news (Corcoran and Fahy 2009).

Other studies of the sociology of news have examined how 'global media gatekeepers' affect the flow of news and information. These have included observations of editorial

decisions at specific international news agencies, such as those key hubs in London (Paterson 2001) and more emergent forms of news organization, such as the way news leaders can participate with others across national boundaries to share agreeable stories. An early content and ethnographic look at the Geneva-based Eurovision was provided by Cohen et al. (1996) of what they called the 'global newsroom.' Each of these approaches touches on some aspect of the global, without offering a fully satisfying conceptualization.

In the remainder of this essay, I introduce another way of considering media globalization, a less media-centric approach that helps understand how journalism fits into the globalization process. The network society perspective of Manuel 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. After all, globalization is built on the intensification of connections, so we need a theoretical approach that captures these changing structures. More than a flow of information, journalism is a social practice that adapts to global influences, even if one big 'global village journalism' has not evolved. Rather than speaking of 'flows,' other network-oriented concepts such as 'articulation' capture the sense of influence arising from the coupling across boundaries. Research in this area is relatively sparse, so for now I am speaking more of conceptual pointers rather than specific empirical results.

The Networked Global News Arena

Ultimately, it may be more useful to recognize that globalizing media and journalism simply mean that the creators, objects, and consumers of news are less likely to share the same nation-state frame of reference. To the extent that certain transnational media emphasize this approach to news, we may call it 'global journalism.' And to the extent that certain journalists operate from this perspective we may describe them the same way. Thus, the media role must not be regarded narrowly as equivalent to a specific satellite network, journalistic message, or world-wide audience, however vast. International channels and flows may be the most visible manifestations, but they constitute the 'CNN version' of media globalization. One can more broadly 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.

People, of course, still watch primarily their own national news, and journalists still conform to national interests. 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). Underlying these 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. 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 works and new geometries defined. Identifying those paths is the first step in understanding the kinds of logic that animates them and the kinds of power relationships they support.

To understand the emergence of new spaces more generally, it will be 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. Here, the global is seen in the convergent changes in norms at the level of these elites and professionals, embedded in their own networks and geographical places. The question then becomes: 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? Journalism professionals and media officials are clearly among the globalizing elites who represent an important source of influence and social change. These transnational elites participate in global networks connecting local settings, bypassing official state channels, and introducing their own logic into national spaces, including with local journalistic cultures and media systems.

In earlier periods, we could speak of a media logic, or a more specific 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 (a comparative approach to these 'cultures' is exemplified by Hanitzsch 2007). In the weakening of that common national framework, however, what logic is emerging to take its place, or at least take its place among existing ones? This emerging logic often has been over-simplified as either the domination of Western (often American) transnational corporate media or a benign pattern of hybrids arising between the global and local (e.g. Chalaby 2005). That kind of cultural hybridity view, however, still fails to capture the systemic redistribution of power.

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. Studies on hyperlinked online news and the blogosphere must necessarily tackle this kind of pattern with network analysis, which requires that every element in a social structure be understood in relation to other elements in the structure and to the external environment. Bourdieu (2005) similarly argues that a social field, including journalism, cannot be understood in isolation but rather in relation to other fields in society and in relation to its own unique historical development. We should not just measure attributes of people—including journalists—within social containers; they must be examined in their field relations to each other (such as with European journalists mapped by Kunelius and Ruusunoksa 2008), 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 rise of comparative research, with an emphasis on institutional fields within national cultures, leads us to be cautious about regarding the journalism *within* countries as homogeneous. The cross-national perspective helps sharpen our understandings of how media institutional fields differ, but the institutional level has a tendency to collapse differences *among* a nation's media systems. But certain components of a journalistic field may be more likely to converge toward a global standard, such as television and increasingly online news. The printed press, more firmly rooted in historical styles, may be less likely to change compared to its modern national media neighbors. On one hand, certain globally oriented media are becoming more similar, and satellite news channels, in particular, have helped create a convergent media style, strongly influenced by the Western 'objective' model. Accelerating this tendency, the speed, rhythm, and interconnectedness of online media seems to encourage an idea of news as an 'always on' utility. The headlines of the mainstream press can be distributed quickly to cell phones or laptops, much

like the weather, time, and stock quotes. Another class of media, meanwhile, have been freed to be hyper-local and hyper-opinionated, fragmenting into opinion and analysis for more local and more dispersed audiences. Thus, a globalized journalism, while interconnected, has many faces.

Journalistic Space

Technology has dramatically changed the practice of journalism, transformations deeply entangled with globalization. New digital media connect the world and lower the distinctions between professional and citizen; both can express themselves and be potentially received most anywhere in the world. Old and new media continue to co-exist but become networked and interpenetrating, creating new structures of communication through which journalism happens. This, rather than the addition of any particular new medium standing alone, is the significant globalizing aspect for journalism. Technology-enabled connections permit a redistribution of relationships, creation of new communities, and growth of new subnational, supranational, and transnational spaces. Journalism, the information people need to govern themselves, is changing accordingly to serve these newly constituted communities.

The examination of this kind of global political interaction fits 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 just another way to describe Americanization, imperialism, or transnational capitalism. That overly linear and hegemonic view conceals the actual pattern of interactions and global adaptations in response to special local needs and circumstances. Of particular concern here 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 on 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.

I will not dwell on all the ways the news industry and profession have been dramatically changed by these developments, but in general the practice of journalism has opened up to include more citizen-based expression. Blogging and other social media have helped create an interlocking dialog between professionals and citizens (Reese et al. 2007). Rather than competing against them, professional media take citizens into account and are obliged to embrace their efforts. Through these new media more broadly, 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, 2008). 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.

The complexity of the global lies in its scaling at multiple levels, not just a new supranational level. Emerging structures, with their associated journalistic practices, do not follow national boundaries but can best be understood as creating new spaces inside and among national containers. 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 is 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.

Although a more nuanced comparative research perspective has emerged to examine media systems and journalistic cultures (e.g. Esser and Pfetsch 2004), comparing one nation with another does not adequately capture the crucial phenomena of a globalized journalism. Subnational global spaces emerge with changing and often tenuous connections to the host political system. Global political communication now must be understood as a multilayered phenomenon, taking into account the development of new media platforms and practices, how they facilitate globalizing social structures and, as anthropologist Jonathan Friedman (2002) emphasizes, how people themselves who are involved in these changing structures consciously identify with them.

For research, there comes the question then of where to go to observe these relationships. We are embedded in communities beyond the ones we live in, ones not defined by place. That does not mean, however, that physical place has ceased to matter for global level processes. The work of globalization theorists in geography and sociology leads us to seek the workings of the global in specific local places, where the universal and global becomes particularized and local. As appealing as the concept and its reification 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 do not 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 (Castells 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. 'Global cities' are conceived as essential spaces for the coordination of global processes (Sassen 2002, 2006). 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. Here is where globalization is played out with journalists and media. These are the cities where, as I have suggested elsewhere, certain journalists and other professionals have more in common with colleagues in other national communities than their fellow citizens (Reese 2001). Rather than tracking a group of global media or journalists, this may mean first identifying transnational actors themselves and their various interactions with journalists. Locating these engagements within specific

local contexts will call for ethnographic, thick description with case studies of these global hotspots.

Conclusion

Media globalization and the journalism that goes with it—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 cosmopolitanism. But the seeming sameness of these familiar patterns, preferences, and institutions conceals the changes surely underway in the face of the globalization process. Deuze (2008), for example, points to such changes in journalism by drawing 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 globalization has not yielded much systemic change for journalism. 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.

Journalism has been deeply affected by the process of cultural globalization, in a far more complicated way than the early simplistic predictions would indicate. From citizen-based to corporate mainstream journalism, a proliferation of local projects has taken place around the world, even while forces of homogenization have provoked overblown and dark projections of Western capitalist media domination. But it is not enough to simply go country-by-country to observe the interesting ways journalism has adapted to change; the whole interest in globalization for many lies in its possibilities for adding some new transnational logic to existing cultural and national communities, and we hope that when applied to journalism this will be a more emancipatory than repressive impulse. We still need empirical work to examine these changes, but that will be a multilayered project.

Short Biography

Stephen D. Reese is Jesse H. Jones Professor of Journalism and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the College of Communication at the University of Texas. His research has been published in numerous book chapters and articles, and he is coauthor, along with Pamela Shoemaker, of *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influence on Mass Media Content*. He edited *Framing public life: Perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world* and, more recently, was section editor for ‘Media Production and Content’ in the ICA *Encyclopedia of Communication*. He has lectured internationally at universities in Mexico, Colombia, Spain, Germany, and Finland and was the Kurt Baschwitz Professor at the University of Amsterdam in 2004. Faculty Website: <http://journalism.utexas.edu/faculty/reese/>

Note

* Correspondence address: Stephen D. Reese, 1 University Station, A1000, Austin, Texas, 78712 USA.
E-mail: steve.reese@mail.utexas.edu

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