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TOKYO JAPAN

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Globalization with a Human Face

Benefitting All



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Edited by BALTHAS SEIBOLD,
Bureau of Strategic Planning, UNESCO

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MEDIA, COMMUNICATION AND GLOBALIZATION - Summary of the Working Group's Deliberations and Policy Recommendations

Is the mediatization of the world driving globalization or is globalization driving its media-tization? The working group on Media, Communication and Globalization analyzed this question in order to find policy responses that would make media work for "Globalization with a Human Face".

In fact, the two phenomena are closely interrelated. On the one hand, media and modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) like the Internet are among the most powerful engines of globalization. They transport information all over the globe with the speed of light rendering distance irrelevant. They mainstream global agendas in remote places and strongly shape our perception of the world and its globalization. On the other hand, it is the process of globalization that forces deep changes upon media players, audiences and technological choices. In fact, globalization fuels two parallel and adverse trends. It both internationalizes and localizes media ownership, content and audience, leading to a "glocalized" media landscape that feeds globalization and is fed by it.

Members of the working group included: Andrew Horvat, Japan Representative of the Asia Foundation, Hatsuhsa Takashima, Press Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (chairs), Masahiko Ishizuka, Managing Director, Foreign Press Center, Tokyo, Javad Mottaghi, Director, Asia-Pacific Institute For Broadcasting Development (AIBD) Gillian Tett, Financial Times and Shunsuke Suzuki, Director, Association of Medical Doctors of Asia (AMDA), Japan.

The working group identified four major positive effects of globalization on media and communication.

Global media outlets tend to neglect local productions and content.

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF GLOBALIZATION ON MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

Global reach: A large and growing part of the world population can increasingly easily obtain information about a variety of topics and happenings around the world. It is the Internet that has made it possible, at least in the industrialized world, to read a Finnish newspaper in Japan, to know about the weather forecast of a small French village in New York, or to send billions of euros from one point to another. No other medium has ever reached its audience as quickly as the Internet. Of course, this is not true for the entire world, as many people, especially in the developing world, still rely more on traditional mass media such as radio and television, if they are available at all. This growing inequity, the digital divide, will be addressed when analyzing the negative effects of globalization on communication.

New global body of information: New information technologies such as the Internet help us to know much more about "the other" than we did just a few decades ago. The new global body of mediated knowledge present in the minds of many people could be seen as a first and important step towards higher levels of understanding, dialogue and tolerance.

Easy distribution is related to the revolution within technology. Digitalization of all media and communication content is leading to easier, faster, cheaper and more effective creation and distribution of media.

Larger choice: Digitalization can translate into more choice. The most frequently cited example is the proliferation of (international) TV channels through digital satellite and cable technology and the diversity of websites on the World Wide Web. This choice is often a consumer choice, but can also morph into a political choice. New channels or websites increasingly often play a role in balancing government-controlled state media or circumventing censorship. However, a greater choice does not necessarily mean a greater diversity of media content or adequate quality. In fact a negative version of globalization may work against both diversity and quality. The working group summarized such phenomena in seven major negative effects of globalization on media and communication.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF GLOBALIZATION ON MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

Concentration of ownership: Unregulated globalization and liberalization may lead to fewer and, at the same time, more powerful media providers on a world scale. This process of concentration of media ownership has been observed in recent decades on a national level, and has been partly contained by legislative frameworks. Now, it is spilling over on a worldwide scale with

the internationalization of media ownership. This can lead to a de facto reduction in the diversity of content often referred to as a "one-way road" of information or entertainment offer, and it may even threaten freedom of expression.

Sensationalism: This phenomenon is often associated with a certain style of sensational entertainment content featuring "sex and violence" as main attractors of attention. While discussing this issue, the working group concluded that it is very difficult to judge the cultural dimension of such attractors of attention.

Local blindness: Blindness to local content and talent is another noteworthy trend. Global media outlets tend to neglect local productions and content. That is not only true for push-media such as global TV news channels, but also for the seemingly user-centered Internet. A farmer in India, for example, can easily check the weather forecast of New York via the Internet, but he will not find the forecast for his own district in India.

Global agenda setting: The more unified global media content becomes the more it may be able to set a global agenda. That might lead to a situation where media are increasingly able to influence, change or lead public opinion on issues worldwide. This could give media players the power to dramatize, to glorify, or to demonize specific actors, thereby influencing the political world game.

Only a large mix and diversity of players including private, public and community media are able to create a vibrant and engaging global media scene reflecting the world's diversity.

Marginalization: The fact that today's media and communication style is increasingly set by global players may also lead to the marginalization of entire societies from the international public arena. The prevailing international media news code is heavily influenced by the Anglo-Saxon way of communicating, which can be characterized by competition for the latest piece of news, short and easily comprehensible messages aimed at people with different cultural as well as educational backgrounds, and a strong focus on the individual. If other media and news systems are not capable of, or not willing to adopt, that style, they may be less able to get their

message across effectively on the world stage. One example mentioned in the working group was that Japanese society finds it hard to deal with the communication style found in the Anglo-Saxon media. Such a failure to engage more effectively with the international media might undermine the ability of entire cultures to relay their messages to a global public.

Digital divide: The digital divide poses another threat to a world trying to achieve free flow of information for all. The gap in access to media and communication is widening especially amongst the rural poor in developing countries. Participants of the working group agreed that the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) would have to find effective ways of dealing with such negative aspects of globalization in world communication.

Growing distrust: WSIS will also have to deal with a trend that speakers of the working group described as the growing distrust of parts of the public towards commercial media. Reasons for these doubts include media not reporting on marginalized groups, spinning news, or providing poor-quality war coverage.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The key question was how to foster the positive effects of globalization for the good of the media and how to counterbalance the negative ones. In other words, how to ensure that media and communication operate in a democratic manner, stimulate development and create and maintain adequate diversity?

Create and maintain a mix of media players: It was suggested “do not trust anyone when it comes to the question of who should decide media content”. The working group agreed that neither the government, the private sector, civil society, nor the public alone would be able to ensure media freedom and content diversity. Only a large mix and diversity of players including private, public and community media are able to create a vibrant and engaging global media scene reflecting the world’s diversity. Different types of media organizations and ownership models could be fostered to encourage a plurality of sources and operating modes. Some members of the working group felt that such a system of checks and balances could also include a set of rules that limit media ownership.

Foster public broadcasting: The working group recommended promoting and strengthening independent public broadcasting systems worldwide. Key pillars of such a strategy are to give the public broadcasting systems autonomy in content creation, financing and management. This would enable them to promote quality content, local talent and cultural diversity as well as to address marginalized parts of society such as young people, women and minority groups, who may be neglected by private players in the field.

Teach audience to access, choose and judge content: Globalization has made media systems and media messages more complex. That challenges the ability of many people to access, receive, assess, understand and use content. Therefore, education systems and civil society should enhance the level of audience media literacy, especially by empowering children to access, choose and judge media contents.

Enhance communications between the United Nations and society: The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) marked a significant international commitment to development and poverty eradication. World leaders agreed on a set of specific measurable and time-bound targets and commitments. However, outside the development community, knowledge of the Millennium Development Goals and the current status of their implementation are largely unknown. Media and communication technologies could have an important role in raising these issues. Therefore, the working group emphasized the urgent need to enhance the capacity of actors such as international organizations or civil society to deliver strong public relations campaigns in crucial areas such as the Millennium Development Goals.

Support independent media in conflict and post-conflict situations: In conflict and post-conflict situations, it is very difficult and, at the same time, crucial to gather and disseminate non-partisan information. Therefore, the international community should support independent media in countries afflicted by or emerging from conflict by providing technical assistance and legal advice.

Strengthen international cooperation in the field of media and communication: The recommendation is to think about ways to enhance the impact, visibility and outreach of international cooperation such as sharing good practices, raising awareness and providing training in the field of communication and journalism. The international community should think about new ways to combine its efforts to tackle the challenges of creating "media and communication technologies benefitting all" in a globalized world.

"Globalization With a Human Face - Benefitting All" was the theme of the international conference organized by UNESCO and the United Nations University (UNU) in Tokyo, Japan, on 30 and 31 July 2003. This volume contains over 20 viewpoints on the driving forces and forgotten dimensions of globalization.

International leaders probe the effects of globalization on cultural diversity, international dialogue, ethics, education, environmental policy and media. Contributors include Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, Hans van Ginkel, Rector of the United Nations University, Fidel Ramos, former President of the Philippines, Moeen Qureshi, former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Andreas van Agt, former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, and Eduardo Aninat, former Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund.

Here, the idea of "globalization with a human face" is woven into the very fabric of new strategic responses to globalization.

Globalization with a Human Face

Benefitting All



United Nations Educational,
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For further information about UNESCO's activities
related to globalization, please see:
<http://www.unesco.org/bsp/globalization/>

