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MEDIA AND GLOBALIZATION

Gilles Rouet*

ABSTRACT

Globalized media follow at least two ways: the mass media are integrated into the globalized economy, but there is also globalization related to this supposed universality of democratic values that the media should be involved in. A perfect media globalization is in many respects a myth because no media is truly global in nature. One of the globalizations concerning media is therefore that of the organization itself and its functioning regulatory systems in place. Another fundamental aspect of the globalization of media is related to the increasing penetration of the same media technology so important in the world. Moreover, can social networks be considered as globalized media now? The global market no longer consists of places, spaces, or habits, for it has no time dimension and no border, it is moving continuously in the digital “cyberspace”; it is reflected on the screens of each computer, the interactive television screens, mobile phones (smartphones), or other screens. The users of media, namely, the citizen-consumers, producers, actors in their own media environment and in public spaces invest in market-media, and they complement each other in a complex way.

Keywords: internet media, globalization, democracy, users

Viviane Reding, the European Commissioner responsible for Information Society and Media (before becoming European Commissioner responsible for Education, Culture, Youth, Media and Sports until 2004), declared in 2005 that *“the media has always been relatively stable because it refers to everyday banality, the Internet’s evolution has converged communications infrastructures, media content, [...] electronic devices that generate new media services and [...] new modes of delivery”* (Reding, 2005), leading in particular to a quite radical change of economic model of the media.

For example, in France, while the traditional media industries are helped by the government, telecommunications or computer services, particularly mobile telephones increase its profits. According to Mrs. Reding, *“globalization is a concept even more dynamic [...] an exchange that has the potential to*

* Prof. Gilles Rouet, DrSc. is Professor in European Studies at the Faculty of Human Sciences, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, and Jean Monnet Chair *ad personam* “Identities and Cultures in Europe” (2009-2014), e-mail: gilles.rouet@umb.sk.

fundamentally affect all areas of public and private life and also to change it. Globalization is much more than just an economic process. It is a process that covers all human relationships and civilization”.

Globalized media follow at least two ways. First, the mass media are integrated into the globalized economy. But there is also globalization related to this supposed universality of democratic values that the media should be involved in as agents of these primordial values, since the criteria are precisely the democratic access to information, but also by messages they generate.

The concept of “global media”, media or global information network, has been established to describe the major flows of information, in a context of growing transnational media and centralization of media control. We must, of course, distinguish the “medium” as the process of mass communication. The media, in the broadest sense, are the instruments of this process that incorporates film, video games, recorded music, books as well as the “news media”, newspapers, radio, television, magazines.

However, a perfect media globalization is in many respects a myth because no media is truly global in nature. Moreover, even the existence of global media, especially the “news media” does not imply that it includes global public space. There is, indeed, no European public space (Rouet, 2009). So then, what about the respect to the entire globe, in a context of unequal access to information?

“Globalization” is obviously not a natural consequence of the evolution of communication and interaction between people and cultures around the world, it becomes not only possible, but in this paradigm, inevitable. In those parts of the world where the Internet access is both possible and allowed to reach the greatest number of population it prompted millions of people to register to use *Facebook* or *Twitter*, to “chat” with a next door neighbour as an encounter with “the Web” in the distance of thousands of kilometres. Applications have integrated communication tools, individually and socially, because it is well above all deliberate human choices that met with development strategies of transnational corporations, international organizations, governments themselves.

However, although the globalization of media is probably present at the industrial level and social level, it moved gradually to the level of media cultures, modes of creation and usage. The capitalist political-economic model is, at least since *Citizen Kane*, the original development of group of international press, television, and publishing. However, this was more of internationalization, like the development of companies or groups in other sectors (automotive,

chemicals, etc.) than a real internationalization, except, perhaps, since the appearance of *Yahoo* or *Google* service providers and therefore contained vectors.

Moreover, the generalization of a logic market based on a capitalist economy led to a questioning of the old economic models of radio and television, especially in Europe where the states had supported the operating costs of these media unlike, for example, in the USA.

The media are now generally included in commerce with objectives in terms of advertising revenue, in the context of privatization of telecommunication companies that were once state properties. In France, the “free radio” authorized under President Mitterrand in 1981 have enabled many to abandon the monopoly of State radio but at the same time opened the way for the development of the logic of business (and the establishment of a regulatory authority in 1982). Then there came the same logic for television. Who accepts now, in a “Western democracy”, a television or a radio entirely under State operation? A radical ideological change took place and now democracy is combined with formal end of national controls.

One of the globalizations concerning media is therefore that of the organization itself and its functioning regulatory systems in place. This logic is determined by the democratic values of freedom and plurality of expression, thus considered in a market economy regulated by control bodies and arbitration.

Most countries are producing more and more programs, mostly music, and therefore content which makes sense concerning the magnitude of the increase and change of function (the market of smartphones has seen a huge development in 2010 which involves the provision of content that cannot all be created by the actors themselves).

“National” or local productions methods are often inspired by current models and we can see some globalization in the USA, Great Britain or Japan and so on. Moreover, the widespread communication tools imply a relative uniformity of the manufacturing process. Of course, national “soap operas” are recorded largely in the local culture, both for the characters and their psychology or scenarios but it is easy to recognise the presence of products known worldwide regarding analysis methodologies connections. Local productions are now often included in a global context, in content and in their methods.

Another fundamental aspect of the globalization of media is related to the increasing penetration of the same media technology so important in the world. Television and the Internet concerns notable part of humanity, but with differences of practice and unequal access they create obviously a very important issue. While in the richest nations it is now inevitable to articulate the use of a large variety of media, in other nations people are still discovering satellite TV and the Internet. Dissemination through the Internet changes everything because it is up to the users now to make their choice (Negroponte, 1995). The crucial question is then, how is this choice made? Knowingly, or not? In a critical or non-critical way?

When using the Internet it is possible for us to determine exactly what we will watch and listen to, when, how and how often. Television is an object of decoration of everyday life, such as radio is one aspect of the sound world of social life in which silence is impossible, unnecessary, and stressful. Television is also often a starting point used to brighten up a living space rather than to allow settling before it carefully monitors successive programs more or less imposed. Switching the TV channels at the same time is another example now as viewers move between Web and TV, or even, increasingly, combine the two at a time.

In 2010, Spanish viewers spent an average of 3 h 49 m a day in front of their television screen that is 6 minutes longer than the previous year (Médadel, 2010, Wolton, 1990). Similar increases are apparent in many countries, particularly in Europe. Furthermore, it also affects young adults. Sporting events, in particular, and throughout the world, contribute to the increased consumption of the time spent by watching television: globalization programs are mainly to be found in the major annual competitions, the European Championships in Swimming and Athletics or, in 2010, the Vancouver Olympics and the FIFA World Cup.

Another example: the TV-Web link integrating social networks. The micro-blogging and *Facebook* were invited into a delivery system and now classic international, multi-platform strategies are developed that allow not just to view but also enable to organize, comment, share impressions online etc. For example, the sporting event is seen as a social experience, as a kind of sharing that allows the simultaneous use, namely the Internet and television.

Can social networks be considered as globalized media now? The example of the dissemination of images of riots in Tunisia or Egypt in 2011 is significant. But this is only possible by integrating the multitasking, the interaction of television with the Internet, in both directions. Television is now connected with

its regular usage and its content, even in its relative poverty or with rudimentary production conditions, is now essential for viewers, regardless of medium. Technology and the multiple interactions are not only possible, but apparently desired, implying the increase in content that could not be made by producers institutional, private and public. The content generated by users themselves overlaps; merges with the content from production strategies.

Globalization remains very imperfect with multiple inequalities: between the rich and the poor in many countries where the Internet connection is an expensive service; between the young and the old, in countries where the 'digital divide' is also generational; between monitoring, control and prohibition, whether of choice dictated by morality or politics.

Hillary Clinton in her speech in January 2011 mentions at least one of the submissions made by the Swedish Pirate Betting (*Piratpartiet*), political party founded in 2006 and scored 7.1% in the European elections in May 2009.

This discourse on the one hand advocates the establishment of a new human right, the right to connection, and the right to the Internet access, and on the other hand exposes a deliberate U.S. policy to help bypass political obstacles, mainly regarding the connection. We can obviously regret that economic barriers, in particular, are not the centre of a particular policy.

We can also add economic barriers and political barriers that commentators and analysts often refer to, especially, in those countries that limit, monitor or manage the Internet access. The reactions of governments in a difficult position, namely Tunisia, Egypt or Libya in February 2011 show that nowadays for some part of the population digital isolationism has become almost impossible. The evolution of the Internet access has reached a high percentage of the population (between 10 and 20%) in previous years by various practices and usages, in many other ways, satellite phone including. The political challenge is therefore essential, not just an imperialist point of view, through a policy of disseminating democratic universal values or in a logical expansion of markets.

The French Minister of Culture, Christiane Albanel said on March 12, 2009, during approval of a bill that *“access to the Internet cannot be considered a fundamental right. We know it is important in all areas of life now, but to have the Internet access at home, knowing that we can access the Internet anywhere, cannot be described as a fundamental right. It would be like going too far”*. The law “Creation and Internet” has since been enacted in France. It gives flexibility to the State to make a cut of the Internet access to users,

believing it would result in the decrease of illegal copying of movies, music or books. This law was not in line with European regulations since September 2008, MEPs adopted Amendment No. 138 to “Telecoms Package” which reaffirms the principle that “no restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms of end users should be taken without prior decision of the judicial authority”. Under French pressure the amendment has evolved in order to incorporate the possibility of an administrative failure under certain conditions.

Recognition of the Internet access as a fundamental right challenges these instruments of control (or prevention) against illegal copying. They are trying to save some of the media industry as well as the creation; but is it not already too late? And, most importantly, changes in social practices make these attempts largely obsolete.

The reference to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union is interesting because although the Charter does not directly address the Internet, Article 11 stipulates that “*everyone has the right to freedom of expression*”. This right includes freedom to hold opinions and freedom to receive and impart information and ideas without being interfered by public authority and regardless of frontiers”. How else can we then receive a large portion of the “information ideas” now, if not, predominantly, through the Internet?

Internet is now the leading global media but it is also more complex; there is convergence between content, technology and communications. This complexity must be related to changes in usage that people are doing, and that producers follow the service.

From a functional standpoint, this globalization has now reached all parts of the world, even the most improbable; content and structures are global, including in local media. Finally, although there is still no global public space a sense of global sharing became widespread; there is now a global audience regarding certain content and experiences like commercials.

The mass media in their various forms, contribute to pluralism but companies have become global conglomerates and this concentration also concerns, of course, control of the media. Concentration on the Internet, which is essentially American, also helps to understand an economic point of view of Hillary Clinton's speech.

Another fundamental change is that the media converge with each other but also with other types of product and build a new economic model. These global media constitute an important cultural and political element now, essential but

difficult to assess.

The foregoing proposed elements of historical understanding and analysis of the globalization process, regarding especially the media, international and global convergence in structures and business models also use more than one uniform content themselves.

The “natural” or the inevitability of globalization (globalizations) is the subject of considerable controversy, and, at least economically, it is not at all certain that these globalizations are actually performed. The impact of a widespread and universal always seems unfair. These globalizations were almost at the same time observed, explained, challenged, and magnified. We have seen that in many cases the term “globalization” is not used to describe a condition but rather an ongoing process, a positive force or negative result regarding the unification of different companies, their integration into a “global village” in an information space available immediately and regardless of distance. This “globalization” would then be implied as a result of technological, social uses approved by the centre of which new types of media are key players; a quasi-organic or natural and inevitable.

However, the description is not easier than the explanation and many disagreements exist concerning the one as well as the other because it is not easy to draw up a complete and consistent picture of the extent of globalization, and explanations of the process and its consequences can generally be classified into two categories.

On the one hand, we have seen that many international organizations or institutions as the IMF or the World Trade Organization have developed a unified concept of globalization: one world, this “global village”, borderless in economic, political or cultural sense. Economies are integrated, as well as technology and shared cultures. Following this worldview, citizens are global (and “values” are universal), so then we can discuss a “global civilization”, a “global governance”, as in the framework of G8-G20-2011. The quasi-monopoly of the only business model focused on the market economy (including the “social market economy” of the Lisbon Treaty) and capitalism, and the ideological predominance of a single model of political democracy contribute to strengthen and legitimize this design that also meets the aspirations of a former humanism. Membership is obviously very strong ideological concerning the opening, the removal of borders, the development of communications, unification of the world for peace, progress and a “sustainable” growth.

In contrast to this view other theories argue that globalization in its current form is a source of economic as well as social problems. Inequalities are increasing rather than levelling out; democracy is hanging in operation that is not in harmony with the culture. In particular, competition is a fundamentally dangerous principle because it can lead to uniformity and not to respect for diversity. It would be better to establish a global cooperation (Carroué, 2004, Brunel, 2006 De Montbrial & Moreau-Defarge, 2005, Hamour, 2004, Castel, 2002).

It is, therefore, of crucial importance to avoid several pitfalls: do not overestimate (or underestimate the way) the reality of (the) globalization (s), which is almost impossible if not illusory, on the one hand, and do not favour one model of economic organization and policy at the expense of a more relativistic modern societies, on the other.

This global market no longer consists of places, spaces, or habits, for it has no time dimension and no border, it is moving continuously in the digital “cyberspace”, it is reflected on the screens of each computer, the interactive television screens, mobile phones (smartphones), or other screens.

Finally, communications and information have followed the development of forms and values and they are dematerialized and thereby becoming virtual. This is the market itself and it is the media now (while the media are always the centre of markets) disposing of excess of the economic factors being imposed by the social. The users of media, namely, the citizen-consumers, producers, actors in their own media environment and in public spaces invest in market-media, and they complement each other in a complex way.

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