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The rapid integration of the world’s economy, loosely called globalization, has been facilitated by an information revolution driven by communication technologies that provide a nervous system for our world today. Globalization is a broad and inexact term for a wide array of worldwide changes in politics, economics, trade, finance, lifestyles, and cultures. To its critics, globalization is trendy and controversial; they see the world becoming a consumer colony of the United States, led by Coke, McDonald’s, Nike, and the vast pop-culture output of Hollywood. How people feel about globalization often depends a lot on where they live and what they do. With just a visit to a mall, one is struck by the plethora of products and services from many distant lands. In the past thirty years, much of the world’s economy has become increasingly integrated; direct foreign investment has grown three times as fast as total domestic investment. But globalization is more than buying and selling; some see it as a profound interchange of cultures—a communication revolution that is dissolving our sense of boundaries, our national identities, and how we perceive the world. Deregulation of telecommunications systems and computerization have been called the parents of globalization. Three technologies in particular—computers, satellites, and digitalization—have converged to produce a global communications network that covers the Earth as completely as the atmosphere. Today’s era of globalization is characterized by falling telecommunications costs, thanks to microchips, satellites, fiber optics, and the Internet. The popular culture of the West—movies, television shows, music CDs, video- and audio-cassettes, books, magazines, newspapers—has been increasingly flowing
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about the world. It can be argued that the world is beginning to share a popular culture, based only in part on that of the West. Critics differ about what happens when cultures meet. Rather than fight, cultures often blend. Frederick Tipson noted, “More like a thin but sticky coating than a powerful acid, this cosmopolitan culture of communication networks and the information media seems to overlay rather than supplant the cultures it interacts with.”

When cultures receive outside influences, it is said, they ignore some and adopt others, and soon begin to transform them. An example can be something called bhanga pop in India – music that sounds like Jamaican reggae but is played on Indian instruments and then amplified.

Critics of this global media market castigate globalization for several reasons: the centralization of media power, and heavy commercialism, which is linked to declines in public broadcasting and public service standards for media performance. Media are seen as a threat to democracy because of lessened public participation and concern with public affairs. Press critics have other concerns about these corporate giants. The news media, they argue, risk becoming submerged and neglected inside vast entertainment conglomerates that are primarily concerned with entertainment profits.

Most of these criticisms are leveled at Western media, and these critics neglect to consider how globalization has spurred the growth of media and their audiences in the developing non-Western nations.

Others see globalization in more positive terms. It is argued that many millions more people than ever before now have access to news and information, especially in such countries as China and India and much of Southeast Asia. Globalization means that multitudes now have many newfound choices: how they will spend their leisure time; what they will watch or read; what to buy with newly acquired personal income from rapidly rising standards of living. Anthropologist James Watson wrote, “The lives of Chinese villagers I know are infinitely better off now than they were 30 years ago. China has become more open because of the demands of ordinary people. They want to become part of the world – I would say that globalism is the major force for democracy in China. People want refrigerators, stereos, CD players.”

Journalist Thomas Friedman wrote that globalization is essentially about change, which is a reality and not a choice: “Thanks to the combination of computers and cheap telecommunications, people can now offer and trade services globally – from medical advice to software writing to data processing – services that could never be traded before. And why not? A
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three-minute call (in 1996 dollars) between New York and London cost $300 in 1930. Today it is almost free through the Internet.”

The primacy of the issue of globalization reminds us of the extent to which most of us now think and act globally – as a matter of course. In his book The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the 21st Century, Friedman expands his earlier views and sees dramatic changes in the forces for global leveling from the fall of the Berlin Wall, which eliminated the ideological divide in the world, to the rise of the Internet and technological changes that have led to new economic models of production and collaboration, including outsourcing and offshore manufacturing. Now nations such as China and India, as well as others in South Asia, have prospered in dramatic ways. The integration of some 3 billion people into the global economy is of major importance. Just one facet of this global flattening is that the media of communications have become increasingly pervasive in these rapidly modernizing places. Literally many millions are now, through the Internet, cellphones, satellite television, and publications, “in touch” with the greater world. But while the new technologies are closing gaps between parts of India and China and the advanced industrial nations, the gaps between those countries and Africa have been widened. The world’s nations may not have a level playing field, but the world is changing in critical ways. And for many millions in those nations considered to be “developing,” their standards of living have improved rapidly.

Perhaps one of the most significant photographs of modern times was taken during the Apollo 11 mission to the moon. The astronauts photographed the earthrise as seen from the moon, and there was our planet, like a big, cloudy, blue, agate marble. The widely reprinted picture illuminated the fragility and cosmic insignificance of our spaceship Earth.

That stunning image coincided with the worldwide concern about ecology, climate change, and global pollution; even more, it made it easy to grasp why many scientists already treated that cloudy, blue marble as a complete biological system, in which change in one part will inevitably affect other parts.

Certainly in the years since, concerned persons around the world have become more aware of our global interdependence. Although some experts disagree, an important trend of our times is that the world is becoming a single, rudimentary community. Today’s world must grapple with an agenda of urgent and complex problems, most of them interrelated: overpopulation; poverty; famine; depletion of natural resources (especially energy); pollution of the biosphere; regional political disputes; continuing arms buildup,
including the nuclear threat; global warming, and the widening gap between rich and poor nations, which seems exacerbated by economic integration. Recent events have pushed terrorism high on the agenda. Terrorist acts are somber reminders of how much hate and anger divide our diverse societies.

These and other global crises ebb and flow on the world's news agendas, but they are truly international in scope; the amelioration – much less solution – of any of them requires cooperation and goodwill among nations. To achieve that, there first must be information and understanding of these challenges, for these are crises of interdependence. No one nation or even combination of nations can deal effectively with such global concerns as international monetary crises, pollution of the air and oceans, population control, terrorism, regional warfare, and widespread famine and food shortages, yet the blinders of nationalism and modern tribalism continue to influence political leaders everywhere to react to international problems with narrow and parochial responses. The news media in all nations will reflect the national views and prejudices of their own societies on these pressing global concerns. It's not necessary that all nations agree on how to respond – and here is where the news media come in – but there should be general agreement about what the problems are.

Westerners and some leaders of developing countries are becoming aware that population growth is putting intolerable pressures on the Earth's land, water, and energy resources as well as its economies.

The world's population in 2008 was 6.8 billion, with 37 percent of its population living in China and India. The US Census Bureau has projected that in 2025 India will surpass China. The other most populous countries are, in order, the United States, Indonesia, Brazil, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Russia, and Japan. By the end of this century another 3 billion people are expected to be added.

Africa is currently gripped by one of the greatest population explosions ever recorded. Over the past sixty years Africa's population has quadrupled to 1 billion people, an epic baby boom that threatens to trap a generation of children in poverty and strangle economic progress on the world's poorest continent. With low rates of contraception and high social pressures to have large families, African women bear 5.3 children each on average, compared with 2.1 in the United States. By 2050, Africa's population will reach 2 billion. Nigeria's population alone, in a quarter-century, at the rate it is growing, will reach 300 million people (about the population of the present-day United States) living in a country the size of Arizona and New Mexico.
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Scientists and development experts have been racing to increase food production by 50 percent in the next two decades to feed this growing population. The global number of hungry people increased to 1.02 billion in 2009, or nearly one in seven, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. A central problem is whether food can be grown in the developing world where the hungry can actually get it at prices they can afford to pay. Poverty and difficult growing conditions plague the places that need new food production most – in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Finally, global warming makes this more difficult.

Paradoxically, even with greatly enhanced capability of involvement in world affairs, comparatively few people are well informed or even care much about what happens beyond their borders. Many who follow the news on television or other media have only a superficial knowledge of events such as a cancellation of an election in Nigeria or a stock-market crash in Indonesia. But for those comparative few who do follow public affairs closely (and they are found in every nation), perceptions of the world are being formed and reshaped by this revolution in long-distance instant communications.

Our ability, or lack of it, to use the fruits of this technological revolution is directly related to our success or failure to act decisively and in concert as a world community. International experts worry whether the world can organize itself and deal effectively with what have been called the seven major interrelated world problems: mass poverty, population, food, climate change, energy, military expenditure, and the world monetary system. To organize, though, we must communicate, since communication is the neural system of any organization. The extent of its ability to communicate determines the boundaries of any community – be it a primitive tribe in Papua New Guinea or a global society – and only expanded and more effective communication can make possible a viable global community.

The technology to circulate that information exists, but the barriers of illiteracy, parochialism and nationalism, poverty, and political constraints keep too many people in the world from receiving it.

The illiteracy situation is particularly vexing. Here are some facts and figures:

- There are about 1 billion non-literate adults (persons 15 years and above).
- 98 percent of all non-literate adults are in developing nations.
- Two-thirds of all non-literates are women.
- One-half of all non-literates are in China and India.
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- It has been estimated that 30 to 50 million people are added each year to the numbers of non-literates due to population increases.
- So, worldwide the percentage of adult illiteracy is declining, but the absolute number of non-literates is increasing.

Over the long run, worldwide illiteracy dropped from 38.5 percent in 1970 to about 18 percent in 2010. Yet there is much room for improvement: currently about 670 million school-age children are not in school.

One hopeful trend to counter the dilemma of illiteracy is the global spread of cellphones and personal computers in the non-Western world. More communication, whether between sophisticated media or two illiterate peasants, can only be a positive thing.

The Importance of Foreign Information

Much of the essential information we need for our personal lives comes from the news media. Our economy, our society, and our government would have difficulty functioning without the flow of reliable news and information. An open, democratic society without independent news media is impossible to imagine.

Foreign news is a special genre of news. It’s not just from afar but also news of widespread significance. The earthquake/tsunami of late 2004 in South Asia was major news everywhere. Even more thoroughly reported were the devastating earthquakes in Haiti and Chile in January 2010 and Japan in 2011. During 2014, foreign news was dominated by upheavals in Syria and Ukraine.

Serious journalists and editors have long held that important information from overseas should be reported capably and thoroughly, even though most people are primarily concerned about what happens in their own community or to themselves personally. Yet foreign news is perceived through the distorting prisms of culture and personal choice.

Many people rely on television for their news, yet anyone regularly watching network news is aware that foreign news has been typically reduced to several short items (“And now the news from abroad . . .”) unless some video with violent footage is available (50 percent of television’s foreign coverage does portray violence). Critics say that serious foreign news on television has been pushed aside in favor of scandal, celebrity, or the so-called “you news” – self-help and advice stories.
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The public apparently does not mind. A recent survey of the US public by the Pew Research Center found that among regular users of the news media, the topics of most interest were, in this order, crime, local news about people and events, and health news. International news ranked ninth, well behind sports, local government, science, religion, and political news. Another 2001 poll (before 9/11), by Andrew Kohut, found that fewer than one in five Americans were strongly interested in serious news programs and publications – international, financial, government, and politics. Gender, generation, and education are keys: college-educated men over 40 years of age and older have the most interest; lesser-educated, younger women have decidedly the least.

Other surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center in 1997 found that the percentage of people following foreign news dropped from 80 percent in the 1980s to 20 percent in 1990. The decline was most precipitous among young people, who were turned off by such traditional categories as international politics, security, war, and peace. The relatively few serious news stories that attract the attention of adult Americans are those that deal with national calamities or the use of American military force. The obverse is that readers in the affluent West show little interest in tragic and harsh news stories coming out of developing nations.

We agree with Stephen Hess of the Brookings Institution, who argued that we have become a nation with a two-media system, especially in regard to foreign news. Hess wrote, “Our society is awash in specialized information (including foreign news) available to those who have the time, interest, money, and education to take advantage of it. The other society encompasses the vast majority of Americans, who devote limited attention to subjects far removed from their necessary concerns (again, foreign news). They are content to turn to the top stories of television networks’ evening news programs and their community’s daily newspapers for the information.”

We would argue that this happens in other affluent nations as well.

Yet perhaps this diminished interest in international events is not as significant as it would seem. Recent polls show that although the public is turned off by some foreign news, the public does crave engagement in the world’s crises, but not in ways defined by government, academics, and the media. For example, a University of Maryland poll found that 74 percent of people wanted a sharing of power internationally, whereas only 13 percent wanted the United States to assert itself as the only superpower. Also, although Congress held up $1.5 billion in overdue assessments for the United Nations, a Pew Center survey found that Americans hold the
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organization in high regard. The Pew survey found broad support for cooperative action to halt global warming, even if it meant applying fuel consumption standards leading to higher US gasoline prices.

In short, publics everywhere seem highly concerned about issues they see as directly affecting their own lives. The British clearly felt their lives threatened by the July 7, 2005 terrorist attacks. They are also concerned about immigration and trade negotiations that could have an impact on their jobs and taxes, as well as environmental issues such as global warming, resource depletion, health threats, drug trafficking, and other cross-border crime.\(^9\)

Whether the problem is pollution of the seas or proliferation of nuclear weapons, the fact remains that international society is marked by the absence of effective collective procedures, by competition rather than cooperation, and by the lack of a commitment to a common goal. The world is ruled by nation-states, not by an effective international organization, and each state will usually act according to its own interests and needs. In several African nations, such as Somalia, Liberia, and Congo, an even more discouraging trend has emerged: the complete breakdown of a nation into warring camps without a coherent central government. Some academics argue that the apparent thrust toward global unity and globalization is actually misleading. Political scientist Steven Krasner of Stanford believes that the idea that the world has fundamentally changed lacks historical perspective. The international transfer of ideas, trade, and capital has been going on for four or five centuries, he says. Others agree that the idea of global integration has been overblown and that we are not yet up to the late-nineteenth-century standard of integration. They argue that the current globalization is a return to a process interrupted by two world wars.\(^10\) From the mid-1880s to the Great Depression, the world experienced a similar age of globalization. The volumes of trade and capital flows across borders and the flow of labor across borders, relative to populations, in the pre-World War I era of globalization was similar to what we are living through today. But today, powerful communications, including the Internet and the traditional media, drive our current globalization.

Others feel that the world is both converging and diverging at the same time. In 1993, The New York Times listed forty-eight nations where long-suppressed ethnic, religious, and sectional conflicts had surfaced. Policymakers say the ethnic conflicts are actually the third wave of the twentieth century, with the first having taken place after World War I and the second with the explosion of anti-colonial movements in Africa and Asia after World War II. Most of these nations’ ancient rivalries and bigotry have remained largely unaffected by communication technology. The
rise of international terrorism to the top of the world’s agenda is further strong evidence of global divisiveness. Also, the sharp opposition of many Western nations to the US invasion of Iraq certainly indicated a shattering of political consensus.

On the other hand, powerful communication forces are binding the world together -- circulating news, ideas, and information faster and in greater volume than ever before. These technologies are transforming many economic enterprises into truly global businesses. Further, countless more individuals are, through education and media participation, joining the modern world. So, although global integration may seem both real and illusory, there may be encouragement in the futuristic views that science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke expressed nearly fifty years ago regarding the communication satellite:

What we are now doing -- whether we like it or not -- indeed, whether we wish it or not -- is laying the foundation of the first global society. Whether the final planetary authority will be an analogue of the federal systems now existing in the United States or the USSR I do not know. I suspect that, without any deliberate planning, such organizations as the world meteorological and earth resources satellite system and the world communications satellite system (of which INTELSAT is the precursor) will eventually transcend their individual components. At some time during the next century they will discover, to their great surprise, that they are really running the world.

There are many who will regard these possibilities with alarm or distaste and may even attempt to prevent their fulfillment. I would remind them of the story of the wise English king, Canute, who had his throne set upon the seashore so he could demonstrate to his foolish courtiers that even the king could not command the incoming tide.

The wave of the future is now rising before us. Gentlemen, do not attempt to hold it back. Wisdom lies in recognizing the inevitable -- and cooperating with it. In the world that is coming, the great powers are not great enough.\textsuperscript{11} Some signs of this trend are visible; a slow but perceptible movement toward internationalization of the world’s news media is taking place. The world’s news agencies, a few newspapers and magazines, and both radio and television broadcasting (CNN and BBC World in particular) are transcending the national states from which they arose and are serving international audiences. With this has come, from the West, a pervasive popular culture. Such a transition will be welcomed by some as a contribution to better world understanding or resented by others as efforts by some nations to impose their models of mass communication and pop culture on everyone.
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The technological capability for worldwide communication has never been greater, but then never have truly global problems and challenges seemed more urgent. Not enough people anywhere understand these problems or are in a position to cooperate with others in resolving them. Serious questions can be posed about the quality and adequacy of today's system of global news communication, but little doubt exists about the importance to the world of the newspapers, news agencies, and broadcasters that report the world's news to itself.

The audience that receives global news has vastly expanded because so much news is carried on digital platforms -- the Internet, personal computers, cellphones and smartphones. And to more and more millions of people all over globe, especially young people, global news only reaches them through the social media rather than the traditional media that served their parents and grandparents.

Notes