

Death of Distance: The Impact of New Media on Cultural Globalisation

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Abstract

Our world has turned out to be a small neighbourhood due to the impact of globalisation and communication technologies. In this new world, different communication means and various cultures increasingly affect each other, leading communication and culture to transform into two organic structures that influence each other. The ever-increasing ubiquity and functionality of the new media has become the driving force accelerating the trend of globalization. The new media has taken human interactions to a whole new level, making the human society highly interconnected. This interconnectedness has increased the significance of new media in cross-cultural communication. More scholars are increasingly getting involved in the investigation of the relationship between new media and cross-cultural communication, with particular focus on the impact of national/ethnic culture on the development of new media and the impact of new media on cultural/social identity. However, the scenario created by the emergence of the new media introduces yet more challenges especially in the context of intercultural differences. This paper sets out to examine the direct outcomes of the impact of new media on cross-cultural communication in the era of growing globalisation. Adopting an analytical approach, the work aims at determining the relationship between new media and intercultural communication. It was shown that the new media has not only reduced the world to global village but promotes intercultural adaptation, intercultural relationships while eliminating intercultural conflicts.

Keywords: .New media .Globalisation .Cultural globalization .Intercultural

Introduction

The wind of globalisation and developments in communication technologies are gradually catching up with every facet of the global environment. In this present global structure, cultures and communication tools have begun intertwining and interacting by each passing day. Communication and culture affect and nurture each other. The culture in which individuals socialize determines how they will communicate. In our day, information is transferred by news media very swiftly. This increases the significance of news media in intercultural communication. By stating that the medium is the message, McLuhan (1964) aimed to focus attention on the medium changing people's frames of mind rather than the message. As a result, both culture and communication are directly affected by the medium used. The rapidly rising use of social media and its applications in our day turned it from being a communication tool into being a part of culture and communication. For this reason, it is very important to examine the effects of social media on the process of intercultural communication and cultural globalisation.

The history of human communication spans all ages and transcends human civilization. Spanning over a period of time, the dissemination of messages has rapidly moved from the spoken words, to written script, to print, and then to wired electronics and wireless electronics and finally digital communication. However, the greatest revolution in the exchange of information and the monumental changes in message

dissemination in recent history occurred with the introduction of computers and the Internet in the early 1990s. The Internet revolution brought about drastic change of communication medium which has significantly affected humans' perception of the media, the usage of time and space, the reach and control of the media. Harvey, (1990) notes that in the present age of digital communication, time has been compressed by reducing the distance between different points in space, and the sense of space has led people to feel that local, national, and global space becomes obsolete. The use, control, production and consumption of media contents now extend to all people, instead of a limited audience. The control of message production and dissemination is no longer a privilege possessed only by few individuals and the state.

These innovations in the media landscape have changed and continue to change the way we think, act, live and conduct all our affairs. Chen (2007) observes that the impact of digital or new media on human society is demonstrated in the aspects of cognition, social effect, and a new form of aesthetics. By its very nature, new media influences the way people use media. The most obvious impact of new media is the effect of *demassification* (Olson & Pollard, 2004). The conventional large, homogeneous audience in the media environment is disappearing and is fast being replaced by a specific and individual appeal, allowing the audience to access and create the message they wish to disseminate.

Technology has actually reduced the world community into a global village. Chen & Zhang (2010) wrote that from the social and cultural perspective, globalization has changed the perception of what a community is, redefined the meaning of cultural identity and civic society, and demanded a new way of intercultural interaction. On the economic front, global competition in business and commerce has enormously intensified. A company operating in the global environment, for instance is required to not only understand the local markets in order to meet their global clients' needs, but also seek out open markets globally, and foster effective management in global business transactions (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2007). The new media is the main force accelerating the trend of globalization in human society. By creating new social networks and activities, the new media redefines political, cultural, economic, geographical and other boundaries of human society, expands and stretches social relations, intensifies and accelerates social exchanges, and involves both the micro-structures of personhood and macro-structures of community (Steger, 2009). That is the hallmark of globalization.

Statement of Research Problem

The study of globalization began in the early 1990s, a time when the trend of globalization significantly increased its impact on human society in terms of scope and scale. Most scholars agree that without media and communication, globalization will not emerge as such a great impetus of the transformation of human society, the role of media and communication in the theorization of the concept of globalization remains vague and less specified (Pieterse, 2009; Waters, 1995). Surprisingly, according to Rantanen (2006), scholars from the field of media and communication have made far less contributions to globalization discourse than scholars from other disciplines such as anthropology and sociology.

Rantanen (2006) observes that the most studies have hardly made any connection between the two concepts of "media" and "globalization." In the past, such integration has at best been skeletal. Beginning with early studies focusing on international communication and speech communication and continuing on to recently developed intercultural communication, communication studies as an academic field tends to ignore the relationship between people and media, or how people use media in different cultural contexts, and how that closely relates to the globalization of human society. The problems that exist in media studies and cultural studies are like those that appear between the studies of international communication and intercultural communication. More studies in this direction are still needed to cover the interrelationships among the critical themes of

communication, culture and globalization. It is then the purpose of this paper to integrate these concepts through the examination of the impact of the new media on cultural globalisation.

Theoretical Framework

The work was based on Technological determinism, a reductionist theory that provides a causative link between technology and a society's nature. It tries to explain as to whom or what could have a controlling power in human affairs. Technological determinism theory is hinged on two hypotheses provided by Langdon Winner. The first states that the technology of a given society is a fundamental influencer of the various ways in which a society exists. Second, changes in technology are the primary and most important source that leads to change in the society. The theory questions the degree to which human thought or action is influenced by technological factors. The theory, coined by Thorstein Veblen, revolves around the proposition that technology in any given society defines its nature. Based on this postulation, Technology is viewed as the driving force of culture in a society and it determines its course of history. This researcher believes that this theory is the most apt for this work because as Karl Marx explained, technological progress lead to newer ways of production in a society and this ultimately influenced the cultural, political and economic aspects of a society, thereby inevitably changing society itself. Marx explained this statement with the example of how a feudal society that used a hand mill slowly changed into an industrial capitalist society with the introduction of the steam mill.

Technological determinism framework will be complemented in this study with Henry Jenkins "participatory media culture. The thinking of Jenkins is that media culture allows the audience the opportunity to take on roles of consumer and producer of media simultaneously, resulting in a new category of the "prosumers." Jenkins postulates that people are able to creatively respond to media content by creating their own cultural commodities in their attempts to decipher and find meaning in media products and messages and with the current media culture, there are low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement so people are able to more easily respond, contribute and critique media messages and meanings. This process of interaction also creates some degree of social connection with others involved in media consumption and creation.

Review of Relevant Literature

Cultural globalization

Cultural globalization refers to the transmission of ideas, meanings, and values around the world in such a way as to extend and intensify social relations (James, 2006). This process is marked by the common consumption of cultures that have been diffused by the Internet, popular culture media, and international travel. The process started with exchange of commodity and acquisition and colonization of geographical areas which have a longer history of carrying cultural meaning around the globe. The spread and circulation of cultures enables individuals to partake in extended social relations that cross national and regional borders. Cultural globalization involves the formation of shared norms and knowledge with which people associate their individual and collective cultural identities. It brings increasing interconnectedness among different populations and cultures.

Cross-cultural communication is the outcome of cultural globalisation. It looks at how people from differing cultural backgrounds communicate, in similar and different ways among themselves, and how they endeavour to communicate across cultures. Cultural globalization has increased cross-cultural contacts, but may be accompanied by a decrease in the uniqueness of once-isolated communities. Globalization has expanded recreational opportunities by spreading pop culture, particularly via the Internet and

satellite television. Religions were among the earliest cultural elements to globalize, being spread by force, migration, evangelists, imperialists, and traders. Globalization has strongly influenced sports. *Encyclopædia Britannica* (2008) records for example that the modern Olympic Games have athletes from more than 200 nations participating in a variety of competitions. The FIFA World Cup is the most widely viewed and followed sporting event in the world, exceeding even the Olympic Games. In 2006, more than 30 billion viewers in 214 countries watched the World Cup on television, and more than 3.3 million spectators attended the 64 matches of the tournament. Globalization triggers the preservation of musical heritage where archivists attempt to collect, record, or transcribe repertoires before melodies are assimilated or modified. Local musicians may struggle for authenticity and to preserve local musical traditions.

New Media and Globalization

As earlier stated, the rapid development of new media, with its distinctive and unique nature has been the main force accelerating the trend of globalization in human society in recent times. The convergence and the mutual enhancement of new media and globalization have led to the transformation of almost all the aspects of human society. The powerful impact of globalization, enhanced by the advent of new media, is revealed in its dynamic, pervasive, interconnected, hybridized, and individually powerful attributes (Chen & Zhang, 2010). First, globalization is a dialectically dynamic process, which is caused by the pushing and pulling between the two forces of cultural identity and cultural diversity, or between localization and universalization. Second, globalization is universally pervasive. It moves like air penetrating into every aspect of human society and influences the way we live, think, and behave. Third, globalization is holistically interconnected. It builds a huge matrix in which all components are interconnected with networks. Fourth, globalization represents a culturally hybridized state, which allows cultural transmission via new media to take place at a very rapid rate by permeating and dissolving human boundaries. Finally, globalization increases individual power in the new media society, which pluralizes the world by recognizing the ability and importance of individual components.

Driven by the new media, globalization has led to revolutionary changes in people's thinking and behaviors, redefined the sense of community, and restructured human society. The impact of the integration of new media and globalization can be summarized into five precise effects, namely, a shrinking world, the compression of time and space, close interaction in different aspects of society, global connectivity, and accelerated local/global competition/cooperation (Chen & Starosta, 2000). In other words, boundaries of human societies in terms of space, time, scope, structure, geography, function, profession, value, and beliefs are swiftly changing and transforming into a new pattern of similarities and interconnectedness. Although the interdependent relationship of new media and globalization is seemingly evident, the specific connection between the five distinctive characteristics of new media (i.e., digitality, convergency, interactivity, hypertextuality, and virtuality), and the five manifest features of globalization (i.e., dialectically dynamic, universally pervasive, holistically interconnected, culturally hybridized, and individually powerful), remain a valuable research topic for scholars to further pursue.

The rise of new media has increased communication between people all over the world and the Internet. It has allowed people to express themselves through blogs, websites, videos, pictures, and other user-generated media. Flew (2002) stated that, "as a result of the evolution of new media technologies, globalization occurs." Globalization shortens the distance between people all over the world by the electronic communication. Cairncross (1998) expresses this great development as the "death of distance." New media "radically break the connection between physical place and social place, making physical

location much less significant for our social relationships" (Croteau and Hoynes 2003: 311).

With globalisation, very rapid and important relations have developed between intercultural communication and social media (Lazar, 2012, p.291). Until very recently, face-to-face communication had been very important, while it is not as important as it used to be right now due to communication processes developed through social media. Social media collectively describes all the channels that make online personal communications possible. From sending a text message to posting on Facebook, there are endless uses for digital media (Wooley, 2013, p. 41). Besides being a practical tool in the spreading of messages, at the same time, social media plays a very important role in creating new forms of multicultural relations (Piechota, 2014, p. 38). Beyond being related concepts, social media and intercultural communication are phenomena that affect and shape each other. For this reason, with the use of social media in intercultural communication, an adjustment and sense of community emerge. Adjustment is an essential factor in intercultural adaptation, and social media influences this process. Sawyer (2012) has examined the interactions of migrants that arrived in America with social media in the process of adaptation to intercultural communication. According to this study, in the adaptation process to the American culture, migrants had acquired lots of information by using social media before coming to America. In other words, social media plays a significant role in intercultural adaptation. In addition, it has also been an influential factor in the development of sense of community. Intercultural communication creates sense of belonging and integration processes to the new culture; these processes are supported by social media, which plays an important role in their development. Likewise, through social media they are able to easily continue their communication with friends and family they have left behind. Social media provides an outlet where people have the opportunity to communicate with friends and family in order to stay updated, aware and informed of current events.

Impact of the New Media on Cultural Globalisation

New media influences the form and content of information/messages. In addition, it also affects how people understand each other in the process of human communication, especially among those from different cultural or ethnic groups. Before the emergence of new media, traditions and innovations in human society co-existed in a dynamically synchronized way (Bagdasaryan (2011). But with the speed and impact of the new media, traditional values are no longer able to keep pace with the new cultural values produced by new media. This cultural gap has caused difficulty in understanding or communication between generations and among people in the same culture.

The restructuring of cultural patterns demands that members of a culture realign their communication behaviors within their own community, and to learn a new way of interaction with people from differing cultures. New media fosters a new culture in human society, in which the degree of ambiguity and uncertainty has been reshuffled and has reached its highest point, especially in the process of intercultural communication. How to readjust to this new situation and smoothly achieve the goal of mutual understanding for people from different cultural groups in this chaotic stage of cultural change becomes a great challenge for the practical need of interaction in daily life and research in the scholarly community. It is under this circumstance that we see more and more scholars are becoming involved in the investigation of the relationship between new media and intercultural communication (Allwood & Schroeder, 2000; Pfister & Soliz, 2011; Shuter, 2011).

Culture plays a significant role in affecting the process and outcome of the interaction (Weick, 1983). In other words, culture as a communication context may dictate the use of media. Chen (2000) found that three cultural factors, namely thinking patterns, expression styles, and cultural context, are the three prominent cultural factors that influence how

people behave in electronic media, and the three factors are the manifestation of cultural values (Chen & Starosta, 2005). Based on the distinction of low-context culture and high-context culture categorized by Hall (1976), Chung and Chen (2007) proposed possible communication differences for members in the two groups in the process of electronic interaction. It is assumed that cultural values will influence the social networking process in new media (Vasslou, Joinson, & Courvoisier, 2010; Vinuales, 2011). Hall (1976) proposed the low-context and high-context cultures is one the most common models used in the study of the relationship between culture and media. For example, Kim, Sohn, and Choi (2010) found that cultural value orientations affect a user's attitude when using new media.

Increased Intercultural communication

One of the many positive outcomes of the interface between new media and cultural globalisation is an increasing intercultural communication. It is the "*communication between people of different cultures and ethnicities*" (Neuliep, 2014). Intercultural communication is a significant goal of intercultural contact and, as such, has been widely examined. It generally takes into consideration an ideal type of contact, requiring openness and empathy, and resulting in a deep understanding of the other (Ganesh & Holmes, 2011, p. 81-86). Intercultural dialogue is a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange or interaction between individuals, groups and organisations with different cultural backgrounds or worldviews.

At the heart of community life, media plays an important role and has different effects on society. In our day, young people in particular communicate online (93%) and 63% of the youth is online every day, indicating the power of social media within a society. From this aspect, social media quite naturally becomes a channel not only for personal or organisational communication, but also for social communication. In addition, social media expands and increases its activity each passing day. As it brings people together, social media also brings together communities organised around the same objective. It establishes an environment that connects social movements to each other and accelerates their actuality. This way, a different and broad base was established for intercultural communication (Engin, 2011, p. 37).

There are many cultural components that affect intercultural communication. In general, these are values and norms, social scenarios and roles, ethnocentrism, uncertainty and anxiety, conventional thoughts and prejudices (Kartari, 2014). These factors that affect intercultural communication naturally expose the necessity of questioning the competency of intercultural communication. With the globalisation process in effect, on the one hand, borders are removed, yet on the other, the world disintegrates even more. In this process, on the basis of intercultural dialogue and intercultural communication, the concept of intercultural communication competence becomes even more significant (İlbuğa, 2010, p. 174). According to Wiemann, communication competence is the ability of an individual participating in interaction to choose the most appropriate communication behaviour among the possible choices within the present conditions in order to reach the objectives of both parties during interaction (Wiemann, 1997, p. 198).

Communication has two functions in the process of acculturation/adaptation, which are inter-individual communication and mass communication. Individuals who joined a new community which the individuals know almost nothing about will refer to inter-individual communication in order to acquire knowledge about primary needs in daily life, such as - in the first place - the language of that community, behavioural patterns, clothing, arts, activities, shopping places and food. If they can reach the aforementioned needs, these individuals will primarily prefer to communicate with the members of their own country. However, information that needs to be learned urgently via inter-individual communication about this foreign community may not be learned due to problems derived from both the newly-arrived person and the individual who will provide that

information. In this stage, a communication alternative which is more compatible with a newly-arrived person's psychological state comes to the fore (Gülнар, 2011).

When the basis of the concept of acculturation is examined, acculturation could be defined as changes that occur reciprocally in the original cultural patterns of both groups, when individuals, who are from different cultures, come into direct contact (Redfield 1936, p. 149). In the adaptation process of an individual who has recently arrived to a foreign country, the fact that media can be an important instrument in acquiring information about the behaviour which the individual should learn urgently at the first stage is discussed within the scope of uses and gratification approach. Many researchers who study in the area of acculturation agree that media is an effective instrument in this process (Kim, 1990: 194; Chang, 1972; Gülнар, 2011; Reece and Palmgreen, 2000; Moon, 2003, Sawyer, 2012; Wooley, 2013).

Intercultural Relationships

When two people from different backgrounds come together in the name of love, the cultural challenges can seem overwhelming. Many prove to be irreconcilable. New media, especially social media such as Facebook, blogs, MySpace, YouTube, Twitter, and the Instagram, have enabled people from every corner of the world to represent themselves in a particular way and stay connected in cyberspace. It is obvious that the flexibility of information presented and shared in the new media will directly affect, either positively or negatively, the development of intercultural relationships in the virtual community through the creation of a network of personal connection (e.g., Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Donath & Boyd, 2004; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Walther, 1992). Elola and Oskoz (2009) found that in foreign language and study abroad contexts, the use of blogging not only showed a positive effect on the development of intercultural relationships, but also increased the degree of participants' intercultural communication competence.

In addition to intercultural relationships on a personal level, social media also helps to establish international business relationships (Jackson, 2011). New media also has the tendency to produce a negative impact on intercultural communication. Finally, McEwan and Sobre-Denton (2011) argued that computer-mediated communication can promote and develop virtual cosmopolitanism and virtual third cultures. The authors indicated that through the construction of third culture space, a new, hybrid culture is created, in which interactants from differing cultures are able to gather cultural and social information, build online communities, and form intercultural relationships.

Intercultural Adaptation

We define intercultural adaptation as the process through which persons in cross-cultural interactions change their communicative behavior to facilitate understanding. Put another way, intercultural adaptation refers to the adjustment of communicative behavior to decrease the probability of being misunderstood when speaking with someone from a different culture. For our purposes, understanding occurs when individuals can interpret messages such that the communicative goals of interactants are attained. We assume that the process of intercultural adaptation is goal driven. That is, we assume that individuals are interacting to accomplish some relational or instrumental goal.

The new media enables individuals across cultures to exchange messages for the purpose of understanding one another. It is now common place for immigrants to use new media to communicate with their friends, classmates, and relatives or family members in both their native and host country in their learning process or daily life (Chen, Bennett, & Maton, 2008). As shown in W. Chen's (2010) study, the longer immigrants reside in the host country, the more they communicate with the host nationals via new media, but the frequency of surfing their original country's websites is decreasing. W. Chen also found that the use of new media shows a significant impact on the process of immigrants' intercultural adaptation. In other words, the social interaction

conducted through new media by immigrants proves to be a critical element that can determine whether they can successfully adjust to the host country.

Sawyer and Chen (2011) investigated how international students use social media and how it affects their intercultural adaptation. The result of their study reveals that social media provides an environment for international students to connect with people in both their home and host countries. Such connection helps them strengthen personal relationships and fosters a sense of belonging to the host culture. The use of new media obviously helps international students cope with cultural barriers in the process of intercultural adaptation. The study also found that, due to the influence of culture shock, sojourners tend to rely more on social media in the initial stage of arriving in the host country, to keep connected with those people they know in their home country in order to gain a sense of comfort in the new environment. As time moves on, the use of social media was switched to interacting with the host nationals to help them better integrate into the new culture.

Cultural integration

Cultural integration is a form of cultural exchange in which one group assumes the beliefs, practices and rituals of another group without sacrificing the characteristics of its own culture." This is when the people from a culture adopts the essence of another culture (such as its attitudes and ceremonies) while at the same time maintaining their own culture. This happens in many immigrant homes as a survival tool, regardless of where the individual moves to or is from. Individuals maintain the familiar, usually at home and the community, while they adopt the core practices of the new culture in public. Another facet of cultural integration is people from other cultures introducing elements from their own culture to their new one. This can come in the form of music, food, attitudes, religion, arts and many other cultural characteristics.

Intercultural Conflict

New media provides people and governments with a powerful tool to construct their own image, to define and redefine the meanings of messages, to set the media agenda, or to frame the news or messages. However, cultural dissimilarities result in different ways in media representation on the individual or governmental level. Because the underlying order, perspectives and practical limitations of the media in any society are based on their cultural value orientations, the different forms of media representation tend to reflect the asymmetry of intercultural communication and inevitably lead to the problem of intercultural confrontation or conflict in interpersonal, group, and national levels. The media coverage of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and Google's withdrawal from P.R. China are two good examples of the illustration of intercultural conflict in the media context.

Conclusion

The convergence of new media and globalization brings about new experiences for human beings. These include new ways of representing the world, new relationships between users and new media technologies, new conceptions of the biological body's relationship to technological media, and new patterns of organization and production (Lister, Dovere, Giddings, Grant, & Kelly, 2009). These experiences inevitably challenge the traditional definition of social or cultural identity. The use of new media is shaking the root of cultural identity by weakening or strengthening the intensity of the relationship between people and community (Singh, 2010). The compression of time and space caused by the convergence of new media and globalization creates a universal cyberspace in which new cultural identity is emerging in different virtual communities. Belay (1996) notes that though the new cultural identity fashioned by new media may not change the traditional meaning of cultural identity as a unique product through interaction in a

specific group context, which gives members a sense of belonging to the group, but it will directly challenge the traditional attributes of cultural identity, namely, temporality, territoriality, contrastivity, interactivity, and multiplicity.

More specifically, cultural identity fostered by new media is no longer a product of historical development (i.e., temporality) confined in an avowal process of people in a geographical place (i.e., territoriality). It may still be a distinct collective consciousness based on the members' sense-making process (i.e., contrastivity). It is more or less a virtual community. The virtual community is characterized by a higher degree of heterogeneity and a lower level of interconnection (Van Dijk, 1998). In addition, social interaction (i.e., interactivity) as the foundation of developing cultural identity remains unchanged in the age of new media, but the nature of interpersonal and group relationships via social interaction in the virtual community is unlike those constructed from traditional face-to-face interaction. Finally, it is still unknown if the new cultural identity formed by new media will continue to be a multi-faceted concept or practice (i.e., multiplicity), which can contrast with the six facets of traditional cultural identity indicated by Belay (1996), including sociological identities, occupational identities, geobasic identities, national identities, co-cultural identities, and ethnic identities.

In sum, new media continues to establish different kinds of new communities without the limit of time and space, which makes cultural identity more dynamic, fluid, and relativized, and imposes austere challenges to the autonomy and stability of cultural identity. The impact of new media on cultural identity has become one of the issues intercultural communication scholars are most concerned about (e.g., Chen & Zhang, 2010; Cheong & Gary, 2011; Chiang, 2010; Halualani, 2008; Kennedy, 2006; Koc, 2006; Wang, Huang, Huang, & Wang, 2009; Wang, Walther, & Hancock, 2009; Weber & Mitchell, 2008; William, Martins).

Finally, because the impact of new media on human society is still in its initial stages, the possible effect of new media on human communication mentioned in the first part of this paper remains dynamic and still lacks systematic studies from scholars. Hence, the impact of new media on intercultural communication discussed in this paper is largely confined to the old model of media functions. How to unlock this limitation and shift from the context of traditional media to new media remains a great challenge for scholars to observe in this line of research. In other words, future research needs to observe and study the question, "Is intercultural communication possible?" raised by Shan (2010), under the context of new media in global society.

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