The Globalization of Media in Developing Countries

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**Introduction**

Currently, developed countries form approximately twenty percent of the estimated six billion people who live in this world today. “The other four billion people that live in developing countries¹, seventy percent of those four billion are illiterate and cannot take advantage of information that is presented in print or other forms of media” (Aguolu). Typically these people are farmers, women and craftsmen that are unaware as to how the information that they have no access to would greatly help them with their day to day work. They normally receive information verbally from relatives, colleagues, friends, community members and religious personnel. This situation is typical in countries like Nigeria where approximately seventy percent of the 88 million citizens are comprised of illiterate craftsmen and farmers. Developing countries, such as Nigeria, are in great need of the many new technological and communicative developments that are present today. Unfortunately, these developments are not easy to come by for a developing country. Throughout this paper, I will discuss the positive influences of media on developing countries, some of the problems that developing countries have in trying to acquire information and the effects of the globalization of media on developing countries, specifically in the country of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Literature Review**

**Globalization**

Globalization is considered to be the movement of people, information, goods and service from one country to another. Globalization has led to the spread of cultures

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¹ “Developing country” refers to the less industrialized and economically developing nations, typically with less than $500 per capita income. Developed and industrialized countries have $800 or more per capita income.
around the world and has greatly impacted them. Through globalization, “select people, groups, nations and regions of the world get more and better products and services while others receive fewer and poorer ones. Changes within the basic arrangements of relationships between nations typically mean that the privileged become more privileged, while the underprivileged become less so” (Monge 513). Because of this, wealthier countries continue to advance in their technological capabilities, telecommunicative services and digital products, while poorer countries continue without these advantages.

*Importance of Media*

Information is needed by all people around the globe, not just the privileged in developed countries. Information is “needed to facilitate decision making and engender progress” (Aguolu). People need access to information about new developments and techniques in medicine, agriculture, science and technology, social life and culture, so existing practices can be improved on. Governments “need access to information to make proper decisions, plans and policies” (Aguolu). This is shown in developed countries, such as the United States, Germany, France and the United Kingdom, where information is used as a basic resource. Unlike these developed countries, nations such as those in Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia, “lack the modern information technology and old practices, customs and slow and laborious technologies still prevail” (Aguolu). These nations are typically underdeveloped, poor and under-industrialized. For these countries, access to media and information would greatly impact their way of life and possibly help
skip some stages in the demographic transition model,\(^2\) furthering them along the process to becoming a developed nation.

*The Globalization of Media*

According to the United Nations, “the world’s core countries, which contain about five percent of the world’s population, make up ninety percent of the Internet users” (Marston 96). An important aspect of media globalization is the ‘digital divide’ which occurs between the developed and developing countries. The ‘digital divide’ is the “inequality of access to telecommunications and information technology, particularly the Internet” (Marston 95). The ‘digital divide’ is pushing the wealthier, developed countries farther along the technology path, while leaving the poorer, developing countries in the dust. “The larger the economic gap between nations, the larger the distance between their abilities to access telecommunications products and services, and in consequence, participate in the worldwide whirlwind of communication” (Monge 518). Because of this, wealthy countries such as the United States and those in Europe and Asia are more connected and have by far more technological communication services and products. On the global scale, the globalization of media has made the gap between the plugged in and the shut out larger- reinforcing technological inequalities rather than reducing them. “The millions who struggle daily for enough food, clothing, housing and transportation are unable to afford the hardware, software and service charges associated with information

\(^2\) “The demographic transition model consists of four stages that describe population change over time. It is based on an interpretation begun in 1929 by the American demographer Warren Thompson, who observed changes in birth and death rates in industrialized societies over the past two hundred years or so. This model is an idealized, composite picture of population change in countries. It is a generalization that applies to many countries and may not accurately describe all individual cases.” (Montgomery) With basic information, such as a country’s death rate, birth rate and total population, it is possible to identify the stage at which the country is currently in.
and communications technology. Ironically, in most developing countries there are the privileged wealthy few who many have even more technology than the average American” (Tiene). Because of the wealthy few in developing countries, the difference between those that have access and those that do not is actually a larger gap than those in developed, industrialized countries.

_Bridging the “digital divide”- technology in the classroom_

Access to information is especially important for educational institutions, not only in developed countries but all around the world. Due to the high costs of hardware and software and since this cost is usually burdened on limited school budgets, many educational institutions will not have any computers for teachers or students to use. Before an institution can begin to look for inexpensive machines or build a partnership with a corporation, they are required to have an established and permanent infrastructure for information and communications technology. In remote areas, which are still lacking the electrification and telecommunications services, this presents the biggest problem for the institution. Meanwhile, in areas that there is an infrastructure in existence, typically it is not as secure and reliable as those in developed countries. These infrastructures are usually prone to serious problems such as “surges in electrical lines that can damage hardware, slow telecommunications rates that make Internet access extremely time-consuming, or the cost may be prohibitively expensive for users” (Tiene).

If there is access to the Internet and some of the newest media technologies, they can greatly impact the educational process. With the use of videos on programs such as Windows Media Player and Real Player, students that might not have even ventured outside of their own villages can be exposed to real footage from around the world. The
use of encyclopedia CD-ROMs can “hold more information on a few discs than can be found in the small school libraries in developing countries and its multimedia materials can help arouse interest in topics” (Tiene).

Another opportunity that is possible due to the globalization of media is the concept of distance learning. Through distance learning, people in developing countries have access to educational resources and materials that would not exist without the help of “mega-universities” modeled after the British Open University. These universities connect with their students through “mailed materials, broadcasts, and now over the Internet to hundreds of thousands, thereby significantly expanding the higher education systems of many developing countries” (Tiene). Unfortunately, even though this technology exists, it tends to benefit the wealthy few in the Third World because they have access to the technology to take the classes. Because of this, the average person in the Third World is more likely to take online courses from local companies, which in many instances have no accreditation and no guarantee on the quality of the education.

Challenges with information accessibility

In many cases, developing countries do not have the infrastructure needed to support the technological advances and globalization of media and information. Several remote, small villages are not located close enough to larger metropolises to be able to connect to media and technology. In many instances, these small villages do not even have electricity in their homes, and in this case having access to technology is virtually

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3 The British Open University is the only university in the United Kingdom that is devoted to distance learning. There are no previous qualifications or tests needed to study at the Open University because they feel that everyone should have an equal opportunity to study. Many of OU courses are available throughout Europe and other parts of the world. More than 25,000 OU students live outside the United Kingdom.
impossible. Not only does the location impact the accessibility of information, but "illiteracy, the lack of awareness and need for information, poverty and underdevelopment” are other obstacles that need to be conquered (Aguolu). These are not problems in developed countries because those nations have the capacities and the infrastructure to handle information and make it accessible. Poor communication and transportation facilities in developing countries constrain the transfer of information on both a local and global scale. By having a “poor infrastructure, transportation and postal systems, and telecommunication services greatly impede the free flow of information” (Aguolu). Much of the population of Nigeria live in numerous towns scattered all over the countryside with great distances between them. Because of this, the free flow of information among these communities “requires stable infrastructures such as regular electricity supply, good roads, vehicles, trains, airplanes, and steady postal and telecommunications services” (Aguolu). While some of these facilities are present in developing countries, the quality and quantity of these facilities are typically poor.

If there is no prior use of technology and media services in a developing country, the general level of technological literacy tends to be very low. It becomes a problem to find people with the knowledge required to set up the machines, repair the machines when problems occur and that have the knowledge as to how to operate the system to access information via the Internet. Without the knowledge of how to work the equipment or how to integrate the information into the curriculum, the technology is useless. While the use of technology can greatly improve the educational opportunities in a developing country, it is important that “the efforts be carefully planned, realistically targeted to the appropriate clientele and managed in a cost effective manner” (Tiene).
Providing the ability to have access to online media is still quite costly in the developing world. While in some locations it is possible, the costs are just way too high for it to be practical. In an effort to end this problem, many organizations have developed “tele-centers” where people in the community can come and be connected to the Internet, use telephones, access to a fax machine, printer and a copier. These “Multi-purpose Community Tele-centers” are available to anybody in the community and are used by local professionals to “share expertise in addressing local problems, communicate with colleagues, and help with research in a variety of fields including health, agriculture, manufacturing, and education” (Tiene). Since the tele-centers want to be accessible by the most number of people, the fees they charge are minimal. This is a problem because most tele-centers are not self supporting and require outside financial assistance to operate. Typically when funding runs out, these tele-centers are forced to shut down, leaving the people of the area cut off from information and media. Because of funding problems, the ‘digital divide’ has a ‘catch-22’ associated with it. “How do you provide technology for poor people to help them catch up with the developed world when information and communication technology is so expensive?” (Tiene). If the problem of funding was solved for the tele-centers, they could easily close the large gap between the haves and have-nots.

To end the problems with the ‘digital divide’ and access to media, it will “require help from many organizations such as the international assistance community, industrialized nations, and the developing nations themselves” (Tiene). There are no easy solutions or quick fixes to this problem, but “the worst possible approach would be to completely ignore the situation because it is likely to just get worse” (Tiene).
Piracy of media and media imperialism

With the globalization of media, nations around the world are becoming exposed to parts of other cultures that are new and different to them. For Americans and others of the developed world, we are used to watching scantily clad singers shake their bodies on the MTV music & video award shows, exploring the luxurious lifestyles of the rich and famous on MTV’s Cribs and Newlyweds: Nick and Jessica, and commiserating with the many people who go through physical and psychological pain while altering their appearance to look prettier on programs such as FOX’s The Swan, ABC’s Extreme Makeover, and MTV’s I Want a Famous Face. Even though this is general primetime programming which generates millions of viewers each week, people from around the world might not be ready for this kind of reality television. In developing countries it is very easy to purchase pirated copies of movies, broadcast television, and music off the street, due to the insatiable desire to see American programming. With the development of satellite technology, video cassette recording, and compact disc burners, there is no way to control what media is being pirated and sent out to other countries. According to the British scholar, Oliver Boyd-Barrett, “media imperialism is the term used to describe the unidirectional flow of material from a small number of industrialized countries to the Third World” (Boyd). Through this process, developing countries (with the proper technology) are experiencing the developed world’s programming and are being influenced by what they see. T.L. McPhail noted that “whether it is Sesame Street or Dallas, there is a great deal of vicarious learning about Western society and ways. It leads to a certain mindset and deliver with the trappings of an alternative lifestyle, culture, economy or political message that goes far beyond the momentary images flickering on a screen” (Boyd). The result of this media that is being exported to other
cultures is cultural imperialism. “Cultural imperialism presumes that these countries are 
reluctant recipients of the media flow and that they are caught in a trap, unable to defend 
themselves from the media” (Boyd). With this cultural imperialism, developing countries 
are being exposed to parts of developed countries’ culture (specifically American culture) 
and media that is detrimental to their own culture and country. Entertainment channels 
such as MTV, “play a major role in developing, packaging, and delivering messages and 
images about culture, worldviews, beliefs and values” to other countries around the 
world; the media technologies are not only mirrors of these messages and images- they 
also create, manipulate and spread them” (Palmer). When cultural imperialism happens, 
the primary challenge for parents is to know “how to provide support for children to 
process information, make decisions, and develop cross-cultural competencies- all in the 
context of wrestling the powerful forces bent on globalizing popular and commercial 
culture” (Palmer).

*The positive effects of media globalization*

While the globalization of media has had negative impacts on developing 
countries, it has also helped with problems a developing country might be facing. Nations 
that are facing shortages of drinking water and food have been helped by the Internet. For 
these countries, the Internet provided them with vital and desperately needed information 
about health issues and farming to the people. The best example of this is HealthNet. 
HealthNet is “a networked information service that supports health-care workers in more 
than 30 countries, 22 of which are in Africa” (Marston 96). HealthNet was primarily used 
by doctors in Central Africa to share information during the 1995 deadly Ebola outbreak.
Currently, HealthNet is used by malaria researchers in the northern part of Ghana to communicate with colleagues at the London School of Tropical Medicine.

Even though there are many new forms of media technology, sometimes the older and simpler technology is the best. In many rural areas and developing countries where literacy rates are low, having access to the Internet would not be the best form of media. In these instances, radio, which has been proven to be cost effective instructional medium in developing countries, is more appropriate than something that would require being able to read. Similarly to radio, television has been proven to be “an effective medium to the urban poor who have sometimes been taught literacy skills by watching soap operas or one of the many international forms of Sesame Street” (Tiene). By using one of these older technologies, there is no need for instruction or training while still providing information access within the developing country.

**Discussion**

*Media in Trinidad and Tobago*

Located in the southernmost part of the Caribbean are the small islands of Trinidad and Tobago. Together, approximately the size of Delaware, they make up one republic even though they are two separate entities. It is estimated that the population of Trinidad and Tobago is approximately 1.3 million people, 40% of which are between the ages of 15 and 34. “Twenty one percent of the population lives below the poverty line and recent unemployment data says that approximately 11.4% of the population is unemployed” (Palmer). Even though there is a high unemployment rate, the literacy rate in Trinidad and Tobago is 98% and some students travel the United Kingdom, Canada or the United States to study in universities. With this education and the tourism boom in
Tobago, the 2002 World Fact Book reported “the use of 252,000 landline telephones and 17,411 mobile cellular phones” (Palmer). The globalization of media has also spread into the creation of “four local television stations which are supported by local productions, but also show programs imported from international cable networks through satellite search stations” (Palmer). There are also seventeen registered Internet service providers in Trinidad and Tobago, reaching approximately 120,000 users.

As a member of the Organization of American States (OAS), Trinidad and Tobago were a part of the 2003 Connectivity Conference of the Inter American Telecommunication Commission (CITEL). During this conference, Trinidad and Tobago “endorsed the goals of the Connectivity Agenda for the Americas, which included expansion of access to global knowledge and full integration into the knowledge society; promotion and development of the countries’ telecommunications infrastructure and the establishment of conditions that promote and strengthen free and fair competition in all telecommunications services. The endorsement of these goals indicate that Trinidad and Tobago place global connectivity at the center of its development plans” (Palmer).

While research reports on how media affects children, teens and families around the world, specific data and research in Trinidad and Tobago is almost non-existent. Families in Trinidad and Tobago have some access to technology within their homes through the means of the computer, Internet and television. Through these forms of media, information provides “opportunities for quality of life enhancements, but on the other hand, youth and their families become a captive target for marketing and for potentially commercializing aspects of their lives” (Palmer).

Many of the adults in Trinidad and Tobago were raised on American programs such as *Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company* and now rely on programs similar to
these to educate their children. Unfortunately these programs are geared towards American children, and children from Trinidad and Tobago (plus the many other countries that tune into this programming) are not aware of the hidden influences embedded in the programs. Also with the growth of technology in Trinidad and Tobago and other developing countries around the globe, adults are finding themselves to be reliant on the younger generations as to how to operate the equipment.

To families in Trinidad and Tobago, the many forms of media accessible to them are important staples in the family life. “Similarly to parents in Jamaica, parents in Trinidad and Tobago have an almost unwavering faith in the educational and social values of electronic media - the Internet, videos, and DVDs have become important aspects of family entertainment and education. Many adults view the media technologies themselves and their content as vehicles for helping their children to be able to be competitive with youth in all areas and with other youth worldwide” (Palmer). Because of high migration rates from Trinidad and Tobago to the United States, Great Britain and Canada, many people have begun to use e-mail, telephones, and text messaging as means of communication with families and friends. With this technology, families can be thousands of miles apart, but communicate on a regular basis.

While Trinidad and Tobago are equipped with many forms of communicative technology, like other developing countries, they are still “unable to support an infrastructure that would allow full access to and understanding of media technologies, either to the youth or to their parents” (Palmer). But, with the speed of technological progress and Trinidad and Tobago’s commitment and support to the Connectivity Agenda for the Americas, technological developments in Trinidad and Tobago are in the foreseeable future.
Conclusion

Developing countries may stay part of the developing world for a long time, remaining excluded from the global information and connection because of their state of underdevelopment and lack of basic technological infrastructures—such as regular electricity and equipment all of which the modern information hardware and software requires to function. For these developing countries, the globalization and access to media will continue to be an illusion, unless they are able to end the ferocious circle of underdevelopment. While technological and informational advances in developing countries is beneficial for the people of the country, it can also be detrimental to the culture, unless it is properly managed. With the progress some developing countries are making in regards to media and technology, the global connection is slowly spreading around the world and bringing vital information to people that desperately need it to improve on their current lifestyle practices. Even though the globalization of media to developing countries is a slow and difficult process, in the end, the hard work is well worth it. Like Drew Tiene stated, “the worst possible approach [to the underdevelopment of technology in the developing world] would be to completely ignore the situation because it is likely to just get worse.”
Works Cited and Consulted


