



American Communication Journal

Volume 4, Issue 3, Spring 2001

The New Communications Landscape: Demystifying Media Globalization

**Current
Issue**

G. Wang, J. Servaes, & A. Goonesekera.

Routledge, 2000

Archives

352 pages

Hardback: \$90.00 US

**Editorial
Info**

Reviewed by: [John Couper](#), [Pittsburg State University](#)

Search

Interact

[copyright](#) 2000, 2001, ACJ

Imagine being a scholar of Christianity in the 3rd century, or of colonialism in the 18th. For a 21st century scholar of communication, globalization has similarly totalizing effects on cultural, social, economic and political realities. This volume attempts to "demystify some of the theoretical clouds surrounding media globalization" (p. 2). Rejecting any single understanding of globalization, it assembles 16 varied perspectives on its topic's unfolding complexity. These authors suggest its range and depth; analyze selected aspects of globalization's dynamics and structures; and provide an interdisciplinary way to take readers through the major terrains of an overwhelming landscape. Many chapters take advantage of a historical analysis without being overly constrained by it. Most impressively, *The New Communication Landscape's* chapters are remarkably coherent and focused, despite their wide range of topics and perspectives. The book's integrated cultural and structural explanations are much more useful than reductive (if essentially valid) concepts like "cultural imperialism."

Two authors central to the book's efforts are Giddens (whose "structuration" figures interactions between institutions, politics and culture) and Anderson (whose "imagined communities" are aggressively re-imagined through globalization). Another integrating concept is Bourdieu's "cultural capital," which many authors use to help explain inequities of distribution.

The book's introduction and concluding chapter serve as both conceptual and literal bookends. The introduction, by the editors, surveys many perspectives of previous authors as well as those in this volume, rejecting any single current approach as sufficient. The final chapter, by Liu and Servaes, offers a "people-centered" conception of globalization, describing it as spanning the international and the local: two sides of the same process. They argue that consumption and identity (both pressured by globalization) work in "modal points" of symbolic meanings that are empirically accessible—a point that is more provocative than practical. For scholars of international communication, this chapter alone might be worth the price of the book, by providing a framework for making sense of globalization's many levels and interactions.

A recurrent theme is that communication technologies change the function of "proximity" in ways that have significant economic, political, and cultural consequences. Spa and Lopez, for example, develop and apply the idea of proximity as a criterion for globalizing impact. Their analysis links the symbolic (identity), the legal (regulations) and the economic (marketplace forces). This approach suggests the kind of interdisciplinary yet specific analyses that are surely needed to describe any part of the globalization elephant.

Iwabuchi analyzes the complex response among Japanese to cultural imports that some might oversimplify as cultural imperialism. Using theoretical and empirical elements of the subject to shed light on each other,

this chapter adapts the concept of "hybridity" well by making it relevant to the experiences of actual groups and individuals.

Siriyuvasakea's chapter on class antagonisms in Thailand combines critical sensibilities with sensitivities, intriguingly, from Anderson's "imagined communities." Keeping to a critical structuralism that is still open to cultural dynamics, this chapter includes many memorable examples, such as a Miss Thailand who resides in the U.S., although the chapter offers limited explanations of underlying processes.

Other chapters sustain this book's pattern of diversity and probity. Jian Wang's examination of the ad industry provides an excellent overview of the role of advertising in globalization, trying to make sense of the complexities of the industry's omnivorous use of meanings in search of profit. Tsai's more conventional cultural-studies approach to soap operas and cultural identity demonstrates the process of "glocalization."

Most authors link theory and specific practices, mostly in the context of culture and sociology. Goonesekera discusses how technology, both directly and through new options, encourages a "new type of community"; Hong analyzes the tension between open economics and protectionist political culture in Chinese television; responses by Scottish journalism to regional pressures (especially from the E. U.) are the focus of Schlesinger's examination of "nested power structures." Straubhaar applies and extends the concept of social capital in an effort to understand identity and information flow/dependency.

The New Communications Landscape addresses both the breadth and levels of globalization constructively, and with scholarly authority. While some chapters would be strengthened with more analysis of the implications and political sources of change, this book manages to cover many aspects of globalization's landscape without losing its central focus or succumbing to reductionism. Most chapters use a method and theory that best fits the topic, instead of picking those that fit a favorite theory.

This volume will annoy some readers. Though postcolonial theorists are likely to appreciate many of its themes and terms, they might criticize most chapters as insufficiently prescriptive and unwilling to take a political position. Most of the volume's authors take an approach that could be called "modular," assembling elements of various disciplines in ways that might disturb insular disciplinarians (a synthesis that does introduce its own problematics). Certainly, this book is not for anyone who hopes to cram a huge topic into a familiar mold, or even someone discomfited by interdisciplinary or multi-level analyses. Many readers, as I did, could find the montage of theories and sites invigorating as well as scattered.

On many levels, *The New Communications Landscape* provides an ambitious, inevitably limited, but provocative and productive examination of the processes and significances of globalization. Exactly because globalization creates new links between so many significances, it is important to tease apart its many interactions and structures, for both academic and ethical reasons.

Perhaps the best test of an analysis is whether it makes the reader want to re-apply it to their own work; most of these chapters are likely to have just that effect, for established as well as emerging communication researchers.

[Back to Top](#)

[Home](#) | [Current Issue](#) | [Archives](#) | [Editorial Information](#) | [Search](#) | [Interact](#)