

Globalization and the New Media Content Through Information Communication Technology: A Threat?

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Globalization as defined by John Tomlinson (1991), refers to the rapidly developing process of complex interconnections between societies, cultures, institutions and individuals worldwide. It is also the process which involves the compression of time and space, shrinking distance through a dramatic reduction in the time taken either physically or represently to cross them, so making the world seem smaller and in a certain sense bringing human beings closer to one another. But it is also a process which 'stretches' social relations, removing the relationships which govern on everyday lives from local context to global ones.

Globalization, a phenomena enhanced by Information Communication Technology and advancement in communication technology brings nation and world population closer together. Just like other events in our lives, globalization and in this discussion, the new media content, bring about both positive and negative implications to the world. In this discussion, we will try to address three main threats of globalization and new media content through information and communication technology.

Globalization 'or' imperialism have reached the shores of all parts of the world. Globalization and its impact is being promoted in many fields of study such as economic, politics, culture and the environment. Depending on how one views globalization, some reason it gives better input to us, and some think that it causes difficulties to us and has to be handled intelligently in the short and long term.

In the economic sector, our country has experienced one of the effects of globalization (Richard A Gershon 1996). We allowed the US currency to be used freely and to be traded. Malaysia accepted that the value of its own currency slanted no longer be determined by the Malaysian Government.

Suddenly we found our wealth diminishing as currency traders devalued our currency. Our initial inability to contain the attacks of the currency traders clearly showed that we have not understood, what is meant by globalization and the consequences of giving up control over our own currency. Learning the lesson has been very costly to us. Through tech-

nology currency, Western traders attack our currency, resulting in the devaluation of the Ringgit after the attacks.

Globalization takes many forms. We initially thought that through globalization, we would be able to share the wealth and technology of the rich. But instead, the rich are actually thinking about how globalization would enable them to exploit the untapped resources of the poor using their huge capital and their sophisticated technology (Wheelen T., & Hunger, D. 1998). The attack on the currencies of countries like Malaysia is just one example how they see globalization.

Globalization is considered fair and proper for them, even if in exploiting the poor to enrich themselves, they cause more poverty and misery. We may not reject globalization or even modify it even though we are being destroyed by it. The CNN or Western media coverage of the recent presidential election in US, can also threaten our local media. The recounting of votes also affected our economy whereby our composite index dropped to more than half its original value. Malaysians paid more attention to the presidential election rather than looking at their own country.

Recent scenario about the Palestine and the bombing of Iraq after the elections of J.W. Bush as the new president show that Western media manipulate the real situation and effect our country. The threat of globalization is everywhere through the western media but how we control and handle it, is up to our government and us. Not all is a threat, much of globalization is for a better future, for our younger generation.

1. One of the major and most feared threats of globalization and media content is cultural imperialism (Schiller 1992). This new form of colonization dominates the way of life of the importing countries by penetrating through the people's or consumers' everyday life. Since a lot of media content come from the West, we see many societies imitating the lifestyles of Americans or the British people. Several western lifestyle dominates, for example, the Eastern culture in clothing, music, language as well as food (McQuail 1994).

Today, we see more and more skimpily-clad technology. We hear all sorts of music aired all around us and many people going for take outs and enjoying microwave or frozen foods. This way of life or daily practices are observed and followed by watching movies, television, and listening to music or radio whose content mostly come from alien countries. If we observe WY alone (a program on Astro) it is no wonders why most of our teens want to look like Britney Spears and Jeniffer Lopez. In their videoclips, they portray scantily-clad dressed singers as beautiful and free relationship or expression of affection between the two gender to be very common and 'cool.'

2. Another threat of the effect of globalization and media content is on the economy. To a certain extent, the and importation of foreign content would affect the local market. If we look at the TV programmes which are loved or received high ratings, it would be the imported programmes (Robertson 1994). It is not that Malaysians do not enjoy locally produced programmes, rather it is because we are lacking in these programming. So, to fulfill the yet rising number of media stations as well as attract audience and advertis-

ers, we see more and more content being imported from overseas. This may well affect our economy as they discourage the production of local content. The same can be said about foreign and other branded goods. These products are placed within the content of foreign program (TV movies) and also magazines. Locals then may develop a taste for the foreign or branded goods, thus again allowing for more of our currency to float abroad and eventually affect the economy (Richard A Gershon 2000).

3. Along the line of culture imperialism, another threat is in the change of mind set. On top of changing people's preferences and tastes, globalization and media content may also change people's ideology and beliefs. The consumers/world population tend to look to the West, the biggest content provider and those with money and means to control global media content. For example, when looking to the West, many start to really believe that the United States is the most important or biggest superpower. People tend to believe that it is a great, fair and a democratic country. People may begin to that total freedom of the press is good and that individuality is a virtue all of us should work towards, even though in reality their belief/ideology may not be best for a certain society (Dominic 1996).

Therefore, globalization and new media content is an inevitable experience. To ensure that we are not "lost" and smaller countries are not too dominated, maybe looking back to the original cultural roots and traditions would be most beneficial, together with preparing the new global population with possibilities through education, knowledge and maybe national policies.

By the end of the first week of December 1997, the Thai currency (Baht plummeted by 30 per cent. This forced institutions and corporations that had been taking foreign loans to finance development in the country to immediately freeze their projects. They could not pay back their loans because it is at least one third more expensive. The results were that the Thai finance houses that mediate the foreign loan went down under. On 8th December the Thai government had to announce 56 of the 58 top finance houses in the country closed. With that, immediately 20,000 white collar employees were out of job.

Why did that happen? In the wake of massive global speculation of the Baht and triggered by the awareness that the Thai economy was not as strong as previously believed, the economy went into doldrums. This is an example how globalization can threaten any economy. The rest is history. Indonesia, South Korea, Russia and Brazil went down and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had to offer assistance under terms to be determined by the major sponsor of the world body - the industrialized country namely United States of America.

How could this happen? The demise of a strong adversary - Union of Soviet Socialist Russia and the ideology of socialism - renders capitalism a complete master of the economy. Under the perception of free trade, capitals can be moved in and ushered out of our nation at speed seconds. All this is because of the advancement in the information and communication technology (ICT).

Speculators can buy and sell currency to suppress or push up their values at their whims and fancies. If the central bank of the nation under siege does not have the financial stamina to bail out the falling currencies, these nations would fall flat the next decade. Naturally, this makes the master of ICT and capital as the rulers of the world.

However the bankrupting of a nation by currency players would not serve long term purposes of the supremes of the new ICT's and capitalists. As a matter of chain reaction, the negative economic growth would boomerang at the developed nation itself, making the victory short lived.

Thus, new approaches had been made to fully utilized that potent weaponry of the new ICT like the Internet, saver screen, television contents and mass industry to deal a complete subjugation of the nations of the Third World. This is found in the term cultural imperialism (Benjamin Barber 1995).

Globalization of the media means homogenization of culture. By making the Western (American) culture as the center or axis of the new cultural order (through Hollywood) the old ideas of colonialization is rekindled. Cultural homogenization means standardizing values and taste. It could also be viewed as diffusing new values of consumerism. When there is global consumer pattern and habit, it only means bigger market size for the cultural products of the West (Friedman 1997).

The process of homogenization of culture would naturally take place at the express of local or domestic culture. A prominent evident would be the rise in economic value the international language of English. The language becomes the linguafranca for international trade, education and political rule. This belittled local languages. With this come the evasion of local values and culture too (Ulf Hannerz 1996).

Accelerating this process would be the popular belief in trading in the natural tangibles like tourism where the ease of passage for world tourist and the excitement of host nations would again managed to insert its own cultural imperialism agenda. Adjustments had to be made to the original host nation's culture to attract new income from tourism. However, the business actually fall into the web of global business value and infrastructure. Ticketing business, tour organization, airline systems are mostly the monopoly of the West. These render the homogenization process complete.

ICT is the thrust of this new business order. Advertising, news agency and internet business would usually strike common chart if the portrayal of the idea of progress, justice, freedom, truth and democracy. ICT only perpetuate Western superiority.

Threats that the world will be facing in the context of globalization and the new media content through information communication technology (ICT) can be quite frightening especially if one is not ready for globalization that would involve free trade and open-door policy when the wealthy countries such as the US and Japan as the members of the group.

ICT has profoundly transformed the nature of military power because of emerging weapons systems dependent on lasers and information processing. Satellite remote

sensing and information processing has established an information power and deterrence analogous to the unclear power and deterrence of an earlier era. Global television communication networks such as CNN, BBC and the Star TV have added image politics and public diplomacy to the traditional arsenals of politics and secret diplomacy (Straubhaar, J.D 2000). Global communication networks working through NGOs and interactive technologies such as the internet are creating a global civil society and pressure groups, for example Amnesty and Greenpeace that serve as new factors in international relations,

In the military arena, the double-edged sword feature of communication technologies has led to the paradox of more is less. Now security has meant less security. For example nuclear weapons have been assumed to be a powerful deterrence force. However, their proliferation has meant a greater probability of accidental or intentional nuclear war. Remote sensing by satellites has created a global surveillance system at the disposal of the superpowers, but commercialisation of such information is now leading to its availability to those adversaries who can afford the price. What a threat the conduct of war and resistance against domination are both becoming increasingly robotised and globalised. This is so because the technological system is at once global and local as well as both powerful and vulnerable. Economically there is also a threat when it can create fear especially when rich, develop countries have the upper hand. It could create a new class system of information, have and have-nots within and among nations. Down sizing, unemployment, free market can be threats to one's economy (Hill, C.W 2000).

The threats could also be that of cultural sovereignty and identity. Cultural or Western cultural invasion is also threat from the global communication and new media. Globalization and the new media content through information and communication technology can provide threat of this harmony of the global village where there will be colliding of moral spaces and sporadic violence.

It is only when we consider and treat the globalization issue seriously that we would understand the problem that can arise.

There is a need to turn global communication into a global dialogue. We need to rethink the problems of sovereignty, governance, economy, human rights, civic responsibilities and media system in order to accommodate human unity in diversity. Therefore, we actually talk or even mention about globalization and the new media, and need to address its issues in great depth in detail and in serious thought and considerations.

In other words, globalization can be considered as the convergence of technology, culture, information communication, ICT, mass media and other. It is said that globalization originated from the western world like the United States. Globalization concerns the intersection of presence and absence, the interlacing of social events and social relationships 'at distance' with local contextual ties. There are advantages in adopting the concept of globalization, but there are also negative impacts that can

threaten the world and media content through information communication technology (Thussu, D.K 2000).

The threats the world is experiencing in the context of globalization are threats towards the society, the culture, the economy and even the new media content. Firstly with the existence of the multi-media supercorridor (MSC), there will be investors from foreign countries. Uncontrolled foreign investments will paralyze our local investors, and a lot of businesses will be closed down. With the existence of the internet, newspapers and television will be replaced as the sources of information to the public.

This will lead to uncontrolled flow of information and news the society will be exposed to rumours, with untruthful news which may lead to the instability of the country, and even political instability. This can also lead to the active usage of internet as a propaganda tool. The other threats would be the threats to the world economy where, for example, the economic crisis faced by the American Government influenced the economy of the whole world. With globalization, the increase in fast foods (Sappir 2001) consumption will be practiced everywhere like eating at McDonald, KFC, Pizza Hut etc which are unhealthy. With the introduction of education via virtual studies, the students will be lazy students and this will make the universities won't be needing teachers and lecturers to teach.

The internet will make the information flow freely without any control. It will make the country less dependent on manpower to do jobs as they have been replaced by robots and machines. In language, there will only be one main language in the world that is English and it will make other languages vanished from the world (Richard Collins 1990).

In terms of the new media content provided by the information communication technology (ICT), Cable News Network (CNN) went on air on June 1, 1980 under Turner Broadcasting systems Inc. based in Atlanta, Georgia. This ushered in a new era of satellite television with a-24 hour news service. On the first day on air, it managed to reach 1.7 million households.

The role of international media today has become very important. It embraces a true gatekeeping process and agenda setting, for example CNNI with 'Breaking News' gets to decide for millions of people around the world that they should watch 'how Princess Diana died in a Paris car crash.' There are fatal car crashes everyday but they do not get covered. CNNI today also covers the annual Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca may be with the intention to be seen as balanced in covering on Islamic events.

But what is important today is how ICT is generating all kinds of threats together with globalization, conventional system is unable to keep pace with current changes. And what transformation do as we expect to see in cultures of the world is that it evolved diversely in the face of a global development of the digital network.

Value changes that form the basis of human behaviour will be affected by the digital media. The interaction of new media with existing media today, bring about multi-

tude of choices. In terms of personalizes information, are we willing to provide personal information and how will this be handled by various institutions such as banks and the mailing lists?

Next is the emergence of new spheres of convention – the internet provides a forum to be heard but increasingly there are people who are abusing its use by trying to spread lies and falsities. We are not sure whether the mobile phone or the internet truly enriches our lives because today young people have mobile phones just to be fashionable while the internet or the world wide web can be really distracting. A lot of information on the internet is unverifiable therefore today there are people facing a gap of reality and perception.

Privacy is a major issue on the internet as well as the mobile phones where many people have easy access to phone numbers as well as e-mail addresses.

Redressing inequalities – this is the problem of the digital divide between the North and the South. In a country like Malaysia, computers with internet access are clustered in the Klang Valley. But what about Long Pasia?

Today people who are not computer literate tend to be left behind. Therefore there should be a provision for the generation that did not grow up with computers be provided with training to be able to adopt this technology.

The dangers of globalization and media content (Riding 1999, December 14, p. E1) in the ICT are that it can culminate in a state of centralization and oligopoly. A networked society enables dispersed production systems, but at the same time there is a danger of companies that operate software in computers like the search engines to be dominated by a limited number of players (just like the consolidation of the world media like AOL and TIME and WARNER merger to become a media giant).

The rise of a new culture where today young children go to wired schools and carry mobile phones even if it is just to get in touch with the parents to ensure their safety will be a common phenomenon in this era.

There are naturally the pros and cons of globalization. We as a society should control the flow of globalization impact with the help of the government because without noticing it, there are a lot of impact and threats towards the society, culture, economy and even the new media content through information communication technology. Globalization and the ICT revolution is happening very fast and people are faced with new challenges but since these are going to be the norm, we either try to keep abreast with the development or else got left behind.

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