

Children, Young People and Media Globalisation

Introduction by Cecilia von Feilitzen, Scientific Co-ordinator of The UNESCO International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media

Economic, political and cultural globalisation in various forms has developed during centuries. However, these processes have intensified rapidly during the last two decades due to the media and new communication technology. In the prevailing globalisation processes, the media are not only intermediaries of economy, politics and culture but are themselves central operators with their own commercial interests. Within globalisation, there is, thus, also media globalisation influencing other aspects of globalisation.

The intricately interrelated processes of globalisation and media globalisation are tightly interwoven with world economy and market forces, with political systems, and with relationships of dominance and dependence between countries and cultures as well as between rich and poor people within and between nations. This complexity gives rise to a great amount of questions about the nature and causes of globalisation and media globalisation – and also about the consequences or influences of these processes.

As regards media globalisation, the last decades have seen an abundance of literature on, for example, the concentration of ownership among media and media conglomerates; the economy of especially the commercial media; the tying together of media contents and other commodities; the relations between governments, (de)regulations and public service/private media; news and popular media culture around the world; the spread of information technology; the technological convergence of media, telecommunications and computers; the increasing “independence” of media communication of time and space; the increasing “interaction” between senders and receivers; modernisation and identity processes; global cultural homogenisation or heterogeneity; information gaps and digital divides; and democracy and human rights.

Much of this literature, particularly that on the influences of global media contents on individuals, cultures and the world, is of a theoretical (and at times

speculative) character, and many scholars emphasise the acute need for empirical evidence.

Little light is shed upon the role of media globalisation in the lives of a good third of the world population who are children and young people under 18 years of age, in spite of the fact that media culture produced for children, and media culture that children come into contact with, constitutes an essential – and perhaps the most rapidly growing – part of media globalisation. We are thinking here of popular music on radio, CDs and cassettes; globally distributed films and TV programmes directed at or watched by children and young people on national and satellite television, video, and in theatres; interactive games and the Internet; certain international print media; advertising and marketing of licensed merchandise worldwide, such as toys, clothes, foods, drinks and other products; as well as the intertextuality and direct convergence of much of these media, media contents and merchandise.

It is therefore of extraordinary importance to bring the two topics of, on one hand, media globalisation and, on the other, children, youth and media closer to each other. But how are we to scientifically approach the comprehensive question of children, young people and media globalisation, if it is to a great extent neglected by research? We must simultaneously take into account the fact that media globalisation embraces all media and all aspects of media – the production, the content and the audience sides – and affects all cultures of the world.

With a hope to stimulate debate, policy, and, not least, further research about children, young people and media globalisation, we have chosen to offer theory, empirical findings and statistics from different angles. Research is presented in the first section of the book, and statistics in the second.

By way of introduction three *research experts on media globalisation* analyse the relation between media globalisation and children, and present overall agendas. The articles elucidate – with said focus on children, young people and media – the relations of the prevailing media globalisation process to economy and market forces, political processes, technological development, dominance/dependence between countries and rich and poor people, cultural identity and human/children's rights. This elucidation is so much more clear, as the articles also take their starting points at opposite poles of the world – the North (exemplified by the U.S.A. and Europe), from which most of the media globalisation emanates, and the South (exemplified by Africa), which is largely excluded from media globalisation.

Two of the articles give policy recommendations of how to counteract the adverse trends in the prevailing media globalisation process. One of the articles suggests a research agenda for how to better understand the consequences of media globalisation – does it contribute to homogenisation, heterogeneity or even to reinforcing existing conflicts between peoples and in the world? This research agenda is formulated from an African perspective but is, in essence, applicable to other cultures, as well.

After that, ten *scholars active in the field of children, young people and the media* present research studies pertinent to media globalisation. These studies,

making up the most comprehensive part of the book, represent many different parts of the world, as well as many different aspects of the media, and are intended to function as illustrating case studies. The articles deal with, for example, computer games; advertising directed at children on the Internet; the strategies of global children's television channels – and their consequences for local children's TV production in smaller and less affluent countries; as well as the use and reception among Argentine, Danish, Indian, Israeli and Sierra Leonean children of global popular culture products and news. These articles theoretically and empirically amplify and concretise the relations of media globalisation to economy, politics, technology, inequality, and cultural homogenisation/heterogeneity.

We have to conclude, however, that despite the variety of approaches and findings, research results about the more long-term influences of media globalisation on children and young people (in contrast to how young users themselves give meaning to and experience global media contents) are generally lacking – as is the case for adults.

In the following, the above-mentioned articles are introduced more in detail:

Robert W. McChesney focuses in his article *Children, Globalization, and Media Policy* on two trends. One is the rapid rise of global commercial media, which – although facilitated by new technology – is driven mainly by a shift to neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism, the author says, is often misleadingly called “de-regulation”. There is still plenty of government regulation, but this is conducted increasingly to suit the needs of the largest businesses instead of the general public. The commercial media system is the necessary transmission belt for businesses to market their wares across the world. At the same time, a whopping three-quarters of global spending on advertising ends up in the pockets of a mere 20 media companies. The other trend is the massive expansion in the commercial media market directed at children. By the late 1990s, the U.S. children market for commercial media had grown to astronomical proportions. Statistics in the article prove that attracting children to commercial media and commercial messages is a major industry. Three sets of policy issues are raised in the article, addressing the overall political economy, the media, and children and children's media, respectively. The main question that must be asked is: What sort of media policies would produce positive externalities for children and all of society? The issue of externalities (the economic and social costs of market transactions that society as a whole must care and pay for, for example, non-desirable influences of advertising or media violence) makes this a mandatory public policy issue. It is therefore imperative, Robert McChesney says, that debates over media and media directed to children receive widespread public participation and deliberation. Without a new direction in media policy, the current trends point to dubious outcomes for democracy, culture and public health.

Cees J. Hamelink writes in his article *Media Globalisation: Consequences for the Rights of Children* that although the process of media globalisation is complex and broad, it can be reduced to three essential dimensions – the global spread of multimedia conglomerates, the spread of the Billboard Society, and the global regime for the protection of content (intellectual property rights).

Since there is at present only limited empirical evidence for a discussion on the consequences of media globalisation, the author reasons about probable consequences for children. Following these arguments, his conclusion is that the prevailing process of media globalisation – the neo-liberal market-centred globalisation-from-above – hampers implementation of children's information rights expressed in The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that is ratified by 191 of the 193 UN member states. Cees Hamelink points to the need of a different humanitarian form of globalisation – globalisation-from-below that is people-centred and prefers the protection of basic human rights to trading interests. Fundamental to the implementation and protection of human rights is an environment of empowerment. This is equally important for grown-ups and minors and maybe even more crucial for the latter as there is in most cultures a strong tendency to silence them and spend more energy on filtering messages for them rather than on producing materials specifically suited for them. Implementation of a humanitarian agenda is urgent, the author says, since the current globalisation process of the media contributes to limiting people's free space for expression and thought, violating their privacy, and undermining their citizenship by perceiving them primarily as consumers. Cees Hamelink also proposes what a humanitarian agenda would imply.

Francis B. Nyamnjoh, as well, underlines the lack of empirical research about the role of media globalisation. His article *Children, Media and Globalisation: A Research Agenda for Africa* seeks to draw attention to the sort of research questions that could meaningfully challenge simplistic assumptions. How true are, for example, assumptions about globalisation of media content as a process of cultural homogenisation? If globalisation is a process of accelerated flow of media content from the global media conglomerates, to most African cultures and children it is also a process of accelerated exclusion and marginalisation. Even elite African children, who can afford access to national and global media content, are often reduced to consuming media burgers conceived and produced without their particular interests in mind, as even their national media are forced to rely on cheap imports as alternatives to local production. The author puts forward the hypothesis that even if globalisation is homogenising consumer tastes, the cultural heterogeneity of children gets deeper. Creative responses by African children may well mean that the final outcome is, rather, a negotiated blend of 'African cultures' and 'Western consumer values'. Francis Nyamnjoh underlines, however, that globalisation also appears to accelerate the production of differences, heterogeneities or boundaries through the structures of inequalities inherent in global capitalism. Poverty accelerates conflict. It may well be that globalisation intensifies age-old boundaries and divisions.

We turn to the scholars active in the field of children, young people and the media. What does their hitherto-conducted research on children and media globalisation tell us?

Joseph Tobin analyses in his article *Pikachu's Global Adventure* the *Pokémon* phenomenon, which began life as a piece of software to be played on Nintendo's Game Boy (a hand-held gaming computer), and which quickly diversified into a

comic book, a television show, a movie, trading cards, stickers, small toys, and ancillary products such as backpacks and T-shirts that all swept across the globe. Entering into production and licensing agreements with Japanese companies and companies abroad Nintendo created a set of interrelated products that dominated children's consumption from approximately 1996 to 2000 and are still popular in many countries. *Pokémon* is the most successful computer game ever made, the top globally selling trading card game of all time, one of the most successful children's television programmes ever broadcast, the top grossing movie ever released in Japan, and among the five top earners in the history of films worldwide. Joseph Tobin's odyssey covers production, content, and children's reception of the game and interrelated products – over time and space. Why did this game succeed, how was it produced and distributed, and what makes children of different ages, genders, socio-cultural backgrounds and in different countries all create pleasures and meanings of *Pokémon*? The article also illustrates the fact that media globalisation does not only consist of U.S.-produced media contents – at the same time as the Japanese producers of *Pokémon* are dependent on collaboration with U.S. companies.

The next three articles deal with the production side of children's television. Tim Westcott describes in *Globalisation of Children's TV and Strategies of the "Big Three"* the globalisation of programme production, particularly the increasing production of animated programmes. He also treats the strategies of (what are, since the acquisition of Fox Family Worldwide by Disney in 2001) three U.S.-based companies – Cartoon Network, Disney and Nickelodeon – which are competing at a global level in the business of making and broadcasting programmes aimed at children. Since Nickelodeon started up in 1979, as the first child-oriented thematic channel, over 113 television services aiming at the same audience have sprung up over the world (2001). The big three have been responsible for almost half of these launches. Where it is not thought possible or viable to set up a local network in a country, the big three either make a local language feed available which is beamed in via satellite, or place a block of programming on a network which contains their programmes and is branded with their name. Although the big three are aiming to expand further, Tim Westcott questions if they will be able to dominate completely, and discusses possible hindrances for further globalisation. For example, Canada and several countries in Europe have started competing with the big three both with child thematic channels and with producing animated programmes, which, thus, today do not always originate from the U.S.A. and Japan.

However, Ruth Zanker points in her article *Tracking the Global in the Local: On Children's Culture in a Small National Media Market* to the fact that only second-level media players – a few big national broadcasters in Europe, Australia, etc. – are grappling to expand into these specialised global media niches for children (child thematic channels, big scale animation) in order to survive, and that the transnational power of the top tier entertainment corporations has been further consolidated by widespread national media deregulation, the collapse of regional and global trade barriers, and recent concerted international

efforts to defend free commercial speech based on American constitutional interpretations. From the production perspective Ruth Zanker analyses in detail how children's media culture in a small (although relatively wealthy) media market with limited public funding, like New Zealand, is shaped by the media outputs of affluent nations. The global audio-visual flows, especially animated global hits, have devastating implications for the viability of local production and the local cultural resources for children. In order to launch the global hits, advertising via television is combined with strategic branding using a range of communication tactics: public relations, media events, promotions, web sites, direct mail from shops and distributors, as well as contra and sponsorship deals. Global entertainment is, thus, used locally in complex cross-media, cross-promotional campaigns for snack foods and other products, and the national local television, partly also through misuse of audience ratings, becomes a powerful 'go-between' or intermediary for influencing the tastes and desires of the country's children.

Clive Barnett adopts in his article "*More Than Just TV: Educational Broadcasting and Popular Culture in South Africa*" a different outlook on television production, discussing an innovative approach to educational broadcasting developed in post-apartheid South Africa. The author argues that the media globalisation requires a rethinking of established understandings of the relationships between media, children, and citizenship. Globalisation does not spell the end of national-level public policy, but it does require an adjustment in the objectives of media policies. And in certain respects contemporary developments open up opportunities for innovation. He illustrates this argument through a case study of the controversial South African 'edutainment' drama series *Yizo Yizo*, the only drama series on television that shows the lives of black South Africans living in townships. This series, with the aim of empowering ordinary people through revealing the depth and complexity of the crisis facing South African schools, has succeeded in establishing and maintaining a large youth audience for educational television by using popular television formats and a multimedia strategy to connect social issues to the everyday life-contexts. What *Yizo Yizo* illustrates is that in an era of media abundance, in which traditional forms of media regulation have been rendered problematic by the spatial restructuring of media markets and technologies, paternalist and protectionist models of children and media policy are likely to be increasingly anachronistic. The success of *Yizo Yizo* indicates the potential for public service broadcasters to reconceptualise children as active participants in mediated deliberation over public issues. Thus, *Yizo Yizo* embodies a distinctive approach to media citizenship that challenges the conceptualisations developed in the North.

From aspects of production we turn to children's reception, which is the topic of the following articles. In *Domesticating Disney: On Danish Children's Reception of a Global Media Giant*, the author, *Kirsten Drotner*, makes a note of the fact that several globalisation theorists have called for more empirical grounding of globalisation theories, including media globalisation. Her main contention is that a user, or reception, perspective is as central to the empirical development

of media globalisation as it is marginal to most contemporary theories on that topic. Furthermore, she argues that children are as visible to media conglomerates as they are invisible to the scholarly eye in most empirical reception studies made on media globalisation. Finally, she suggests that inconspicuous everyday routines are as focal to most media users as they are neglected in conceptualisations on media globalisation. Most studies on media globalisation harbour dichotomous views on these processes (for example, global/local, homogenisation/heterogenisation, or national/universal cultures) that she finds imminent to question and possibly revise. She substantiates this by presenting findings from a study on Danish children's reception of the Disney universe. In their accounts of Disney narratives, Danish children focus on animated films, take in what to them are foreign features and domesticate them so as to serve immediate ends.

Dafna Lemish says in her article *Between Here and There: Israeli Children Living Cultural Globalization* that the older the child, the more he or she relates to the wider world and position him/herself within it. Mastering the English language, playing computer games, surfing the Internet, preferring American movies and television series are all associated with children's exercising of a sense of social belonging and personal distinction. The author presents research findings on how Israeli children in their reception of global cultural products mediate the two forces of globalisation and localisation. Israeli children's readings of global media contents should be understood within the unique context of present Israeli culture, in which issues of war and security, militarisation of civil society, the concepts of "us" and the "others", etc., are central in children's construction of social life. In these circumstances, the Spice Girls, *Pokémon*, *The Teletubbies*, U.S. wrestling television series, soaps, comedies, and drama, the Japanese toy Tamagotchi, and even international news, can never be truly "global" products. In the popular global media contents, Israeli children often perceive and appreciate universal values – friendship, love, cooperation, harmony. They seem to be searching for relief from the social pressure in their everyday life. And while recognizing the foreignness in global and international media contents, a dual process takes place: appropriation of global values and attempts to endow the contents with local meanings, that is, to 'glocalise' them. A hybrid children's culture emerges.

Roxana Morduchowicz focuses on children in low-income families in Argentina, one of the most television globalised countries in the world. In her article *The Meanings of Television for Underprivileged Children in Argentina*, children are, as in the foregoing articles, seen as individual subjects constructed by, and constructing, their lives in their social context, which constitutes the universe of meaning from which they perceive reality and build their own world. Television plays a fundamental role in the life of low-income families in Argentina and is for children an essential part of their cultural identity. The families, often consisting of seven to eight members, usually live in only one room, in which the screen occupies an important place. As their favourite shows, the children choose cartoons from the U.S.A. and Japan on cable, and American action series on national TV. For these children, television means a sense of

community, a family reunion. Television also plays a compensating role for the children, firstly because it is one of the few entertaining activities in which these children participate, and, secondly, because it is perceived as a learning source and is often valued for its educational function. Since streets and avenues are dangerous places for children, and since they must often stay at home to take care of their younger brothers and sisters, television is the only bridge to that closed real world to which they have no access. Children say they 'learn a lot' – information, judgements, beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviours – from the cartoons, action series and other television programmes they watch. Even more important: they learn ways to understand reality.

Keval J. Kumar analyses reception of media events in the form of news. The importance of the economic, political, social, cultural, linguistic, religious and personal context for interpreting media content is also central in his article *Remembering Violence: Media Events, Childhood and the Global*, based on in-depth interviews with three Indian adult generations' memories of media events in their childhood. The study indicates, among other things, that some national events from the childhood are more vividly and accurately remembered than events that are geographically and chronologically distant. For instance, memories of the Indian freedom movement, of the assassinations of Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi are more sharply etched in Indian memory than so-called international events like the Vietnam War, Watergate, the 1968 Student Revolution, or the death of Princess Diana. And according to the interviewees themselves, some events that are considered global in other parts of the world do not qualify as such from their Indian perspective. This gives rise to the question as to what factors make a media event 'international' or 'global'. One major factor is the amount of attention given to such events in the mass media. Thus, the global character of an event or even a personality is dependent in particular on transnational media, which distribute their visual and textual content around the world. Minor events in the United States or in Britain are often reported as 'global'; in contrast, many major events in Asian or African nations are not reported at all by the transnational news agencies. Furthermore, the 'globalisation' of news, and its control by a handful of media conglomerates, has led to round-the-clock distribution of 'global images' of violence. The study shows that from the perspective of childhood these violent 'global images' are stark and real (and often disturbing and frightening), and some of them, more than others, remain buried in the memory long after the child has grown into a young adult. Media images of violence and conflict appear to have a much greater chance of remaining with the person than do other images.

What does media globalisation mean to children and youth in Sierra Leone, the least developed country in the world? *Mohamed Zubairu Wai* describes in *Globalisation and Children's Media Use in Sierra Leone* the situation in Freetown, the capital peninsula, where a third of the population lives. Here, radio is the most common medium. Even so, only about half of the children and young people listen to the radio most days of the week. Other media are used to a lesser extent, and such media as satellite or cable television, computers, elec-

tronic games and the Internet almost not at all. If taking the entire country into account, media use is considerably less. Nevertheless, when thinking of the role of media globalisation in Sierra Leone, one is faced with a complex paradoxical situation, the author says. Although media remain a great luxury for most children in Sierra Leone, the impact that media globalisation is having on them seems great. This is reflected, e.g., in the popular music culture and in advertising, which have implications for children's cultural identity and the way they look at themselves. At the same time, the excessive commercialism opened up by media globalisation is placing much more pressure on children than they can handle. Childhood has been under attack and ruined in Sierra Leone for a long time, and in ways inconceivable, by the civil war. Many children see themselves as grown-ups because of these experiences, and the media are exacerbating the situation. However, the author concludes, at present media globalisation, on the whole, still does not apply to Sierra Leone. Globalisation in its true sense should perhaps be seen as a process for only affluent nations, and for small affluent minorities of the populations in poorer countries.

It is sometimes maintained that if the Internet were accessible to all, it would be a short cut to overcome the media and information gaps in the world. How, then, are the prospects so far that the Internet will provide opportunities for democratic communication, creativity and quality education and entertainment? With the final article we close the circle, focusing again more on aspects of production and contents of the media.

Kathryn C. Montgomery outlines in *Digital Kids: The New On-Line Children's Consumer Culture* a sombre picture from the U.S. horizon. Powerful commercial forces are shaping the new interactive media culture. Advertising and marketing are quickly becoming a pervasive presence in the "kidspace" of the World Wide Web. And the forms of advertising, marketing, and selling to children on the net depart in significant ways from the more familiar commercial advertising and promotion in television. The interactive media are ushering in an entirely new set of relationships, breaking down the traditional barriers between "content and commerce" and creating unprecedented intimacies between children and marketers. Moreover, much points to the fact that online marketing is going to be more important for children and teens than for any previous groups, since the young generation spends more time in front of the computer than do older generations, and since U.S. children's spending power is rapidly increasing. Even if the World Wide Web has made possible a flowering of educational, cultural, and civic content for children, enabling them to create their own websites and form communities across geographic boundaries, Kathryn Montgomery's research shows that most of these are being overshadowed by the much more heavily promoted commercial sites, many of them tied to popular TV shows, films and other consumer products. The author finishes by emphasising, among other things, the urgent need for a multidisciplinary research agenda to guide the development of digital children's media. There is also need for a broad public debate. There is little doubt that this emerging new media system will play a significant role in helping children become consumers. But can the media also

be a positive force in helping raise the next generation to be more engaged as citizens?

In the second section of the book, where *statistics* are exhibited, we present recent statistics on *children in the world* and on *media in the world*, respectively.

The statistics on children in the world comprehend demographic indicators, education, and child labour and economy – for parts of the world and for separate countries. The figures show enormous differences and inequalities as regards the number of children, median age, life expectancy, school attendance, illiteracy rate, working children, and the percentage of rich and poor people in industrialised and developing countries.

The statistics on media in the world display the largest media and entertainment companies, the number of Internet users in different continents, linguistic dominance on the Internet, and the spread of telephones, cellular mobile phones, daily newspapers, radio and television sets, computers, Internet use and electricity consumption in all countries.

These cold figures, closely correlating with the statistics on children, evidence in black and white the immense information and digital divides in the world, their relation to inequalities in world economy, the lack of overall implementation of human and children's information rights, and the fact that media globalisation in certain respects is a deceptive concept: media globalisation covers different parts of the globe asymmetrically (at places, not at all). This media globalisation means different things depending on location in the global economy.