

Past, future and change: Contemporary analysis of evolving media scapes



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“Globalisation” and Related Key Concepts in Communication Studies: Findings of a Qualitative Content Analysis of Journals in the Field

Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz

1. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

This article does not ask whether “globalisation” is the ‘right’ term to describe dynamics and changes in the contemporary world of communication. Instead, it takes “globalisation” as a term which *is* used by scientists and investigates *how* and *why* it is used. What are the alternative and/or related terms? Authors such as Wallerstein, Robertson, Giddens, Beck, Appadurai, Tomlinson and others are standard references in globalisation theory and research. However, sociological or political theories of globalisation often lack a theory of social communication in globalisation – even if they mention the media as vectors of globalisation or “mediascapes” (Appadurai) or as parameters of our life worlds. Seeking to understand how communication studies deal with the notion of the “global”, I faced the same problems Terhi Rantanen (2005: 4-6) described several years ago:

1. Globalisation theories are rarely interwoven with media and communication theories
2. Globalisation is quite a vague term – rarely do globalisation theories differentiate between the process of globalisation and its premises and consequences

As Annabelle Sreberny (2005) and Colin Sparks (2007) show, there is no unified or general theory of globalisation or global communication. However, there seems to be a common and central question, addressing connectivity via media and/or communication in a globalised world. Sparks writes: “*There is agreement that globalization means greater interconnectedness and action at a distance [...]*” (Sparks, 2007: 135). Furthermore, Kai Hafez

offers a view on globalisation theory in the context of communication studies: “Everything in the world appears to be connected to everything else, for good or for ill. This ‘network consensus’ makes cross-border communication the core phenomenon of globalization” (Hafez, 2011: 2). Both, Hafez and Sparks are more or less skeptical on the issue of whether interconnectivity is really taking place between people, or whether it is a more or less idealistic scientific concept without empirical evidence in a world where media systems are still highly dominated by national or world regional media markets, structured by language and intercultural differences, both on the side of the producers and on the side of the consumers of (mass) media.

We will not solve this problem here, but I want to show that the terms ‘globalisation’ and ‘connectivity’ are central to communication studies worldwide. The project “Mapping Media and Communication Research” (University of Helsinki 2006-2008, see Herkman, 2008, Koivosto and Thomas, 2010), which is based on data from the mid-2000s onwards, highlights the globalisation of media and communication as a core future problem, with only very little theory-building and empirical findings in the field of communication studies up to now. The globalisation of communication is not yet a mainstream topic and certainly not in the German research community. The Helsinki report on Germany shows this lack very clearly: terms such as “global”, “transnational”, “international” or “intercultural” are not central terms in this report (see Koivisto and Thomas, 2007). In fact, there is only a small corpus of German-language textbooks dealing with transborder communication (see Hepp and Löffelholz, 2002; Hepp, 2006; Hafez, 2011; Wessler and Brüggemann, 2012; Wessler and Averbek, 2012).

When we look at *Publizistik* and *Medien & Kommunikationswissenschaft*, the central journals in the field of communication research in Germany, the rise of themes and subjects with an explicit global or transnational focus begins in the mid-2000s. Papers focus on the re-evaluation of ‘traditional subjects’, especially the transformation of the ‘public sphere’ into (or not) the so-called “European Public Sphere” (Janzen et al., 2011; Gessner, 2011 [see appendix]). Themes like migration and the media did not come up in German mainstream communication research until the mid-2000s (Gessner, 2011; Thanscheidt and Reinecke, 2011; Assmann and Meissner, 2012 [see appendix]) – which is late compared to other countries. In the French Journal *Réseaux. Communication. Technologie. Société*, migration and its communicative dimensions were a topic of research for at least a decade before those issues arrived in German communication studies journals

(Jacobs and Volk, 2011[see appendix]). Even though the analytical perspective is similar, communication scholars in France, Germany and other countries actually describe migration as a kind of 'transcultural communicative connectivity via technical media' (see Diminescu, 2008; Hepp, 2003; Hepp et al., 2010, 2011; Diminescu and Pasquier, 2010; Madianou and Miller, 2012).

The challenge for communication studies today is the following: to take a closer look at the relationship between communication, media and globalisation or communication change in the context of globalisation, at the 'micro, meso and macro levels'. That means combining "globalisation" with other theoretical concepts and terms such as "mediatisation" (see Krotz, 2005), or the "communicative figuration in a globalized world", in keeping with the figuration concept of Norbert Elias (see Hepp, 2012b: 31). In order to analyse the question of *which* concepts in the globalisation of communication or in communication *in* globalisation are actually discussed, a look at leading journals in the field may be helpful.

The research I conducted was a qualitative content analysis of the journals *Global Media and Communication* and *Global Media Journal* (Mediterranean Edition). The study was validated and extended in two student research projects at the Universities of Münster (2010/11) and Leipzig (2011/12), as I scrutinised several other journals (see appendix). In what follows, explanations referring to the *Global Media Journal* (Mediterranean Edition) are based on two analyses: one was carried out by myself (see Averbek-Lietz, 2011), while a second was carried out by Ulrike Mentel and Diana Mühelberg, who examined more articles from the journal in 2012 [see appendix 1]). In addition to those journals, which have a clear inter-/transnational/-cultural or global focus, we also analysed *Publizistik* and *Medien & Kommunikationswissenschaft (M&K)* from the year 2000 onwards in order to elicit some hints about when and with which themes and subjects cross-border communication entered those two leading German communication studies journals (both – *Publizistik* and *M&K* publish in German, but provide English abstracts). It was only late on, in the second half of the 2000s, that the theme of globalisation arose.¹

Our first step in these two seminar projects was the compilation of a relevant literature syllabus. This process was to some extent erratic and limited by language competences. The corpus refers mainly to English-

1 We did not refer to the latest publication of *M&K*, a special number dedicated to the field of transborder communication edited by Hartmut Wessler and the author (Wessler and Averbek-Lietz, 2012).

French-, Spanish- and German-speaking communities of communication researchers. These first readings show:

- that the research problem of communication and globalisation is structured historically and transnationally by dependency and modernisation theory (mainly focusing on media systems, media structures, inequality, division, ideas of centre and periphery and the standardisation of media products, i.e. 'the macro levels of communication processes') (e.g. see Krotz, 2005; Mattelart, 2009).
- a shift in theory emerged from the early 1990s onwards: more and more attention was paid to the 'micro and meso levels' of uses, media adoptions as well as cultural hybridisations, stemming from dynamics that derive not only from so-called media centres, but also from peripheries and between them (e.g. see Chalaby, 2005; Martín-Barbero, 2006; Mattelart, 2009).

This shift also meant a general break with media-effect oriented modernisation paradigms as well as with dependency paradigms (which both contain a strong implicit theory of linear media effects). Instead, communication scholars formulated new lines of thinking in regard to globalisation and communication, which are considered under the paradigm of "interconnectedness" (Chalaby, 2005: 30) or "connectivity" (Hepp, 2003, 2006).

This analytical shift to the micro level of connectivity between people (migrants, extended 'global' families, colleagues in other parts of the world etc.) provoked critics (e.g. Lull, 2000: 73; Man Chan, 2005; Mattelart, 2009; Sparks, 2005; Hafez, 2011) against considerations *only* at micro and meso levels of globalisation, which might promote a lack of understanding power relations, cultural clashes, economic dependencies, disruptions and intercultural misunderstandings.

Resuming the readings of the secondary literature, we found two arguments, neither of which was very well clarified or integrated: 'Hybridisation-by-global/transnational/transcultural-Communication' concepts and 'Heterogenisation-by-global/transnational/transcultural-Communication'. These are exactly the processes we wanted to look at more systematically by carrying out a journal analysis in the field.

2. QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF JOURNALS

The main question was: how is inter/-transnational/-transcultural communication sketched thematically, theoretically and methodologically? This applied especially to those journals which deal explicitly with these types of communication.

The general assumption, deriving from my work on the history of communication studies and the comparison of different research communities, (see Averbeck-Lietz, 2008, 2010; see also Malmberg, 2005; Cabedoche, 2009; Koivisto and Thomas 2010) was:

A. The corpus of ideas on (global/transnational/transcultural) communication is not uniform internationally.

B. Differences between national and (world) regional communities of communication researchers might concern research objects, denominations and concepts, references to basic theories, references to middle range theories, normative orientations (explicitly or implicitly), methods and methodologies.

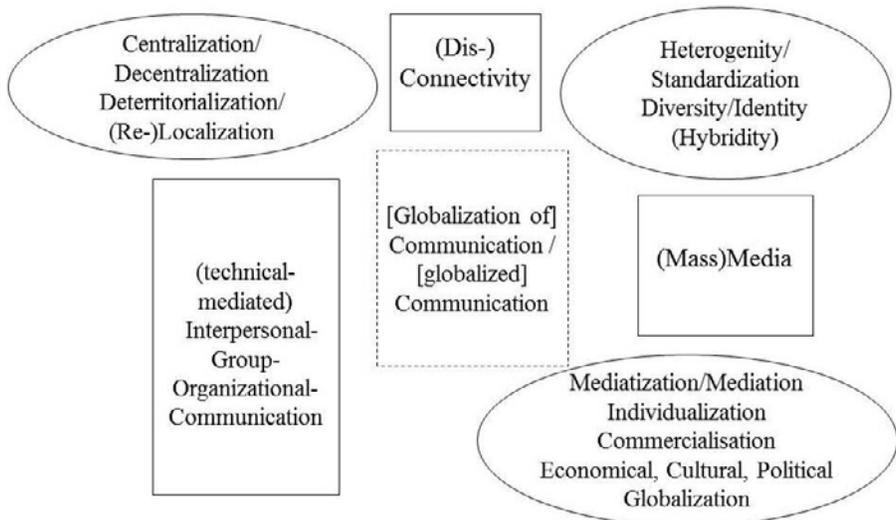
- 1) *Research objects*: Which media are examined? Is the focus on media or communication (or both) and/or on social change?
- 2) *Denominations and concepts* concerned with globalisation and change: Do we find concepts of "space" and/or "connectivity" or others?
- 3) *References to basic theories*: Is the research grounded, for example, in systems theory, social constructivism, semiotics, cultural theories or other similar theories?)
- 4) *References to middle-range theories*: Are there references to theories such as Media Event Theory, Framing, Uses and Gratifications, or similar theories?
- 5) *Explicit or implicit normative orientations*: Is the research grounded in concepts such as participation, democracy, inclusion/ exclusion as a positive or negative consequence, more or less overt reclaimed goals and/or values, going along with transnational, transcultural and/or global communication?

6) *Methodology and methods*: Qualitative and/or quantitative research?
 Long-term or short-term-settings?

For my analysis of *Global Media and Communication* and *Global Media Journal (Mediterranean Edition)*, I selected all articles from every volume of these two journals whose abstract and/or title hinted at the topic of theory-building in global communication. This was the case for 17 articles in *Global Media and Communication* and for 5 articles in the *Global Media Journal. Global Media and Communication* was first published in 2004, the Mediterranean Edition of the *Global Media Journal* in 2006. They are both specialised journals in the field with authors from very different national and/or cultural backgrounds and also from different citation milieus.

The goal of this qualitative content analysis (for the method see Schönhaugen and Nawratil, 2009; Mayring, 2010) was to develop a heuristic scheme and categories which make it possible to characterise the theory-building on global and/or transnational/transcultural communication (also possibly to use them later in a quantitative analysis).

Figure 1: Heuristic scheme: global, transnational, transcultural communication and social change



This scheme is the synthesis from our qualitative content analysis of the journals, contextualised by the knowledge we derived from the corpus of secondary literature. Neither does it explain *how* transborder or 'global' communication functions, nor is it a communication model. It is a mind map which categorises communication researchers' thoughts *about* the so-called globalisation of communication. This categorical scheme should not be seen as complete or 'ready'; it is a tool for meta-analyses of theory-building in the field of communication and globalisation. As a further step it may also serve as a *tertium comparationis* to look at differences in theory-building and core concepts in the field from different research communities or schools – and also at different times. It is certainly not useful for the production of context-free categories. Therefore, in further stages of analysis we have to ask how those terms are thought about in different historical, social and political contexts. The categories in this scheme actually have the status of core concepts in the whole debate on transborder and/or transcultural communication.

The rectangles contain the communication process itself – and – as we find from the diagnosis of our reference literature, not all communication processes are globalised or deal with the consequences of globalisation, but there is globalisation of some communication products and processes and an interdependency with meta-processes such as mediatisation, individualisation, economic, cultural and political globalisation. Here I am referring not only to Friedrich Krotz (2005), but also to Jesús Martín-Barbero (2006) or Roger Silverstone (2005), who conceptualise "mediation" as a meta-process (continually concerning the differences of concepts of "mediation" and/or "mediatization", see Livingstone, 2008; Lundby, 2009; Hepp, 2012a: 35ff.). The whole process of the globalisation of communication is complex and non-linear. Researchers describe this through terminologies of hybridity, and also through dichotomies such as heterogeneity/standardisation or diversity/identity. These concepts are often taken as non-radical poles of the same phenomena – not as excluding categories (as might have been the case ten years ago...). The whole scheme is very fluid. The argumentations I found are – to my surprise – highly dialectical, especially over the last decade.

My analysis raised a number of questions which need more time and space for elaboration: In which manner do those key concepts play together? Are there patterns of key concepts in different research communities? In which theoretical traditions and/or combinations of those traditions are they embedded (systems theory? cultural studies? symbolic interaction-

ism? structuralism? semiotics?)? Are there preferences for certain basic theories (but not for others)? Are these typical of certain research cultures? Which methods are preferred to solve which concrete research problem? Are there preferences for the 'micro' or the 'macro' level of analysis?

3. SELECTED CATEGORIES: CONECTIVITY AND NETWORKS

Kai Hafez (2011), Tristan Mattelart (2009) and Aeron Davis (2010) use "connectivity" (without any regard to each other) or Sparks (2007) uses "interconnectivity" as a term related to media structures and systems. Consequently, media uses are more often modelled in a quantitative, not in a qualitative logic. For example, Hafez's central term is "media connectivity", meaning the connectivity of different journalistic systems via foreign reporting and direct communication (Hafez, 2011: 12f.) Contrary to this concept, Andreas Hepp reflects "connectivity" at the macro-, the meso- and the micro-level, which are interwoven in his understanding. According to him, we have to deal with media uses and social action in relation to "flows" and "networks" of communication, e.g. communicative action and the networking of diasporas via technical-based (online) media (see Hepp, 2003, 2006, 2012).

Networks might be considered as de-central and highly ego-centric (as thought by Hepp) or more or less centralised and isolated, as in the sense of Davis: "*The new cosmopolitan elite networks that emerge from such configurations move between 'global cities' and other 'hubs' (technological, corporate, institutional)*" (Davis, 2010: 123). Connectivity, according to Hepp and other cultural studies thinkers, is always bound to social and personal identity (see Lull, 2000: 11; Hepp et al., 2011; Hepp, 2012b: 34ff.). Its counterpart is social (also economic) disconnectedness at a translocal level (see Hepp, 2003: 196) or "global divides" (Lull, 2000: 13ff.).

4. SELECTED CATEGORIES: MEDIATION / MEDIATIZATION

As a point of reference I use a definition from Terhi Rantanen: "*Globalization is a process in which worldwide economic, political, cultural and social relations have become increasingly mediated across time and space*" (Rantanen, 2005: 8). Rantanen analyses three major works of globalisation theory, those of Giddens, Thompson and Tomlinson. The results seem paradoxical, as they show the potential for optimistic as well as very pessimistic prognoses: they partly describe positive changes in the individual and/

or social life world (i.e. at the micro level), but they predict negative outcomes at the macro level of society:

Their conclusions are surprisingly pessimistic [...]. For Giddens, Thompson, and Tomlinson globalization is intensification caused by interconnectivity. However, the result of interconnectivity is distancing, quasi-interaction and monologic mass-mediated experience. Both Tomlinson and Thompson agree that the crucial difference is between mediated or nonmediated experience (Rantanen, 2005: 11).

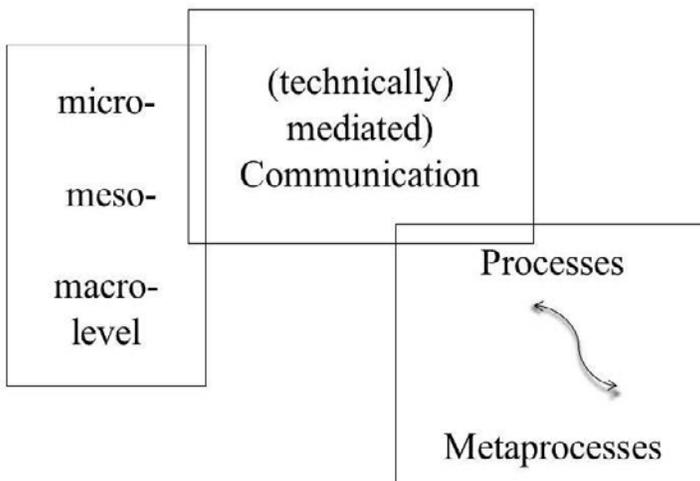
Here we may refer back to Rantanen herself, and also to Hepp, Martín-Barbero, Krotz, Wessler and Brüggemann, whose works are based on empirical data and reflect types of transnational/transcultural communication at different levels. They – and this might be a paradigm shift triggered by communication scholars – break with the “crucial difference between mediated or non-mediated experience” mentioned by Rantanen for classical readings in globalisation theory. What does that mean? The solution, in the works of Rantanen, Hepp, Martín-Barbero, Krotz and others, goes with action theory, symbolic interactionism, social constructivism and also cultural studies: communication and media are not entities in themselves and are not separable from each other – there is action, and life, and experience with and by communication and media. Here we have to mention newer theories on mediatisation and digitalisation as ongoing meta-processes, changing the life world (also changed by symbolic interaction) and going ahead with other meta-processes like globalisation and economisation (see Krotz 2005, 2007; Krotz and Hepp, 2012).

Furthermore, we have to take into account theories on “mediation” as described by Roger Silverstone, Jesús Martín-Barbero or Eliseo Verón, which deal with ‘symbolic representation’ (Martín-Barbero, 1993; Silverstone, 2005; Verón, 1981, 2004; Hartmann, 2009; Averbeck-Lietz, 2010: 414-445; de Cheveigné, 2012) via the public and the so-called “small” or private media, operating online via social networks and/or smartphones.

5. OUTLOOK

Let us reconsider the previous mind map (see Figure 1) and outline it in a more abstract manner:

Figure 2: Meta-categories



With the help of this meta-category scheme, we may ask if a text corpus dealing with global communication (a study, a theoretical framework or an essay) stresses the micro-, meso- and/or macro-levels of communication. How are they connected? Which processes are modelled and which meta-processes are taken into account? This scheme is open to *diverse* directions of thinking, from neo-Marxists to neo-liberals, from functionalism to semiotics. It is a 'lowest common denominator' – derived from our non-representative qualitative study.

There is a need for an epistemology of transnational and transcultural communication, which is open to *different* theoretical backgrounds and to combining empirical research in a qualitative *and* a quantitative way. Epistemology here is meant not in its abstract sense of 'pure' cognition, which produces objective knowledge, but in its historical and social richness. Scientific research and knowledge are rooted in an epoch and its problems, and therefore are not at all stable but in dialogue with the empirical world. In actual fact, from the research sketched out here, we can

deduce good news: in our field of research today we are far from thinking in simple cause-and-effect patterns of globalised communication, and we are also far from a purely Westernised view with universal impact – even if communication studies are still clearly dominated by an American horizon.

Appendix: Research reports of the student projects (qualitative content analysis of journals in the field)

- Assmann, J., Meissner, M. (2012) Phänomene globalisierter Kommunikation. Untersuchung des Forschungsstandes am Beispiel der *International Communication Gazette* 2001-2011. Documentation of a Seminar Project [unpublished manuscript]. University of Leipzig.
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