CLIMATE OF GLOBALIZATION

PRIMER QUESTIONS

1. What does *globalization* mean to you?
2. Do you think people, countries, and regions of the world are growing closer together or moving further apart? In what ways?
3. What factors are causing the world to come closer together or to move further apart?
4. What is the role of travel, communication technology, media companies, and audience media use in bringing the world closer together or moving it further apart?
5. What groups of people from which countries or regions might be dissatisfied with or concerned about the way in which media affect the world coming closer together or moving further apart? What do you think their concerns are?

Globalization is a kind of worldwide climate in which people, industries, governments, and countries across the world are being propelled into closer political, economic, and cultural unions. Though the globalization we are experiencing today appears to be in a period of intense acceleration, in future years the rate of globalization will make the current pace seem quite slow. Because globalization is happening all around us and is affecting the lives of everyone, we need to understand why it is taking place and how it relates to media circulating across the world. As Edward Herman and Robert McChesney chronicle in *The Global Media: The New Missionaries of Corporate Capitalism* (1997), the leading impetus for globalization is a corporate profit-making initiative that is reaching beyond domestic markets to fertile foreign markets in order to secure cheaper labor pools and raw materials, and new consumers for existing and yet-to-be-developed products and services. If you have ever called a help line for a product you have purchased and ended up talking to a customer service representative in another country—perhaps India—you have experienced a single instance of how globalization leads companies to outsource certain functions to cheaper labor markets located in foreign countries. The media industry is just one of many commercial industries worldwide that are contributing to the climate of globalization.

The promiscuity of corporate profit making is leading to increasing coordination among governments and global quasi-government institutions. Organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the United Nations (UN), and the European Union (EU)

are all international bodies to which national governments have ceded control over certain domestic economic and political activities. These international bodies increasingly influence the affairs of member countries.

Globalization is both a modern and a very old phenomenon. In ancient Greece, Plato wrote about a very early kind of globalization in *The Republic*. Though at that time the Greeks thought the entire world consisted of the region in close proximity to the Mediterranean Sea, Plato contemplated what an ideal nation-state would consist of within the known community of nation-states. Six thousand years after Plato, Marshall McLuhan, in *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century* (1992), wrote about a mind-set being created through advances in media technology wherein people all around the world feel connected to each other as if they lived in the same local community.

At the turn of the 2000 millennium, scholars from almost all university disciplines continue to study what globalization means, where we are in the globalization process, what the effects of globalization really are, and what the effects are likely to be. In the field of media, scholars have primarily studied globalization to understand the role of communication technologies both in facilitating globalization and in being facilitated by globalization. Much of the research has focused on the epistemological effects of globalization on human consciousness. Epistemology is essentially the study of how our knowledge is limited by the information to which we are exposed. Significant works that address the epistemology of globalization include Robert Stevenson's *Global Communication in the Twenty-First Century* (1994), Hamid Mowlana's *Global Communication in Transition: The End of Diversity?* (1996), Thomas McPhail's *Global Communication: Theories, Stakeholders, and Trends* (2002), and Yahya Kamalipour's *Images of the U.S. Around the World* (1999).

One area of communication research into epistemological effects of globalization involves a confinement of perceptions about foreign locations due to the particular selection and content of media that are accessed. Works such as Yahya Kamalipour's *Images of the U.S. Around the World* (1999) examine how the USA is perceived across selected countries through films, radio music, and television shows. This research has shown that the exported media tend to portray Americans as having unflattering qualities, such as being rich and boisterous. Ironically, these perceptions are often conveyed by media content exported from the USA. Epistemologically based research also examines this kind of theme from a reverse vantage point—for example, how people in the USA perceive other countries to be dangerous or backward on the basis of a limited range of media content that is generated primarily by USA media outlets. In essence, an epistemological line of inquiry can reveal how residents of a particular country are effectively held captive to a narrow perspective of other countries because of the limited selection of media that are accessed.

FOUR FACTORS STIMULATING GLOBALIZATION

Globalization is being stimulated by at least four factors that are converging through corporate commercialism into an aggressive pursuit of international markets. (See Figure 2.1.)

International Travel

The first factor affecting globalization is the exponential increase in international travel. Simply put, more people are traveling to more destinations than ever before. To fully appreciate the incredible expansion of the number of people traveling abroad, it is instructive to look at
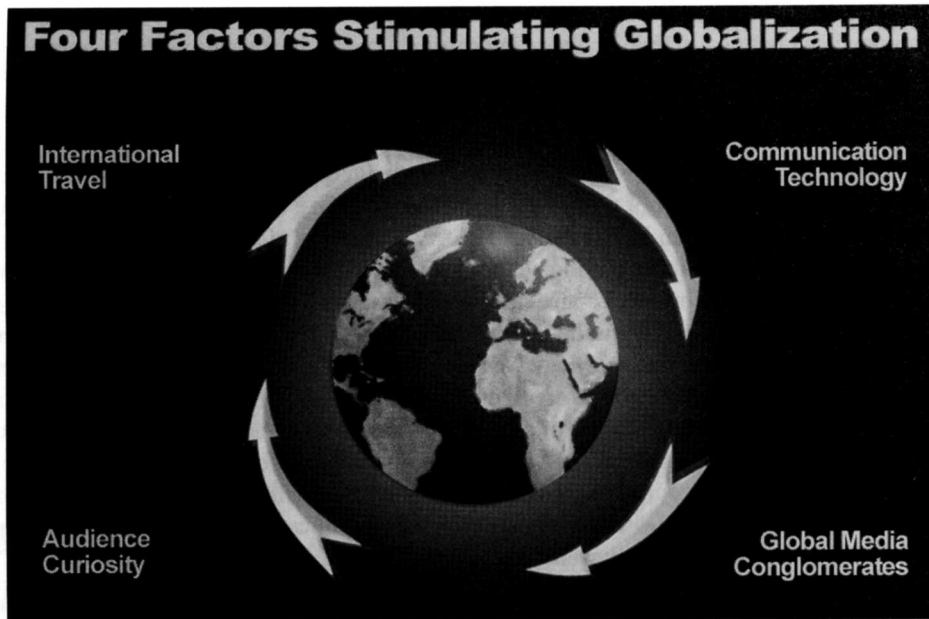
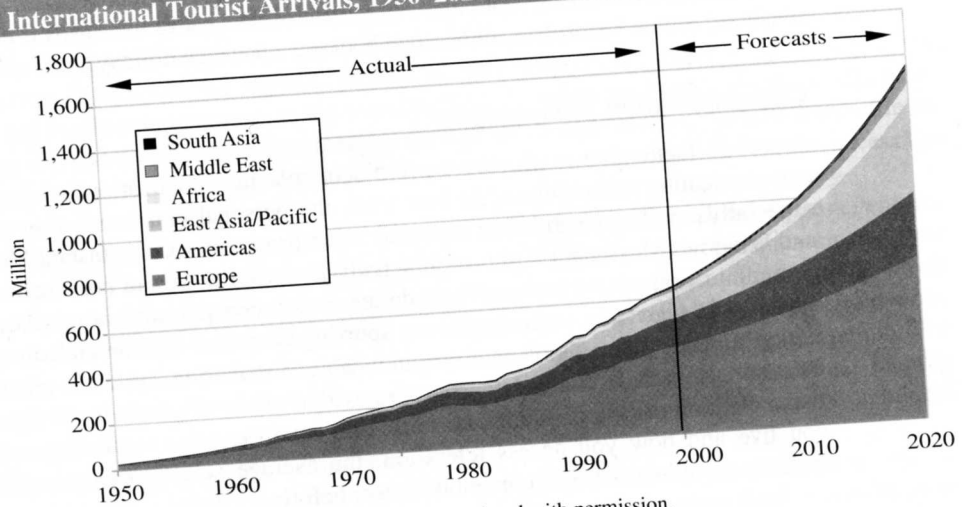**FIGURE 2.1**   *Four Factors Stimulating Globalization*
Source: Laurie Cubria.

data on "international tourist arrivals" from 1950 through 2000, as depicted in Figure 2.2. According to the World Tourism Organization (2002) in *Tourism Highlights* and *World Tourism in 2002: Better Than Expected,* the number of international tourists grew from around 200 million people in 1970 to more than 700 million people in 2002. It is estimated that by the year 2020, international travel will expand to over 1.5 billion people per year.

When people travel to other countries and regions of the world, they set into motion an exchange of information that helps give rise to a greater consciousness about countries and regions of the world. The exchange of information occurs at three levels. First, people who travel abroad gain knowledge about "foreign" countries. Second, people who travel abroad interact with people in other countries and thereby pass on information about their own country to the people in other cultures. Third, people who travel abroad bring back knowledge of foreign countries and spread information—however condensed it becomes—mainly through conversations with relatives, friends, and acquaintances.

Why are more people traveling abroad? Certainly television is helping to smooth the way for increased travel to foreign destinations. On satellite and cable channels in particular, travel shows provide audiences with a glimpse into the look and feel of foreign countries and cultures. These shows help to identify countries that might be interesting to visit because of their history, landscape, architecture, scenery, climate, foods, inexpensive goods, relaxed laws, and other attractive qualities. At a very basic level, travel shows help to demystify countries that previously might have been perceived as peculiar, or not perceived at all.

Source: World Tourism Organization (WTO). Reprinted with permission.

FIGURE 2.2   *International Tourist Arrivals, 1950–2020*

Source: World Tourism Organization (WTO). Reprinted with permission.

In addition, the growth in travel is due to an expansion in the number of airlines and airline routes. According to the Official Airline Guide (OAG), which operates the world's most comprehensive flight schedules database, the number of airlines in the world has increased dramatically. In 1929 there were thirty-five airlines. In 1993 there were 790 airlines. And in 2003 there were 930 airlines. The total number of passenger flights that took place throughout the world in 2002 was 25,652,223. The increase in airlines and airline routes has provided more options of destinations and airline carriers for travelers. In addition, the increase in airline routes has created more competition among airlines, causing a general drop in the prices of plane tickets. Increasingly, international travelers can schedule travel to more locations, and select from a wider range of departure and arrival times with fewer airplane connections.

Another reason that more people are traveling abroad is the internet. According to the Travel Industry Association of America, in 2003 close to 100 million people worldwide booked travel through the internet. Use of the internet for this task is advantageous to both airlines and travelers. Airlines use the internet to sell discount seats on flights that are under-booked. The internet makes it possible for airlines and brokers to sell discounted seats as last-minute trips. The internet also makes it possible for prospective travelers to conduct research into travel destinations by visiting chat rooms in which travel is commonly discussed. Prospective travelers can conduct keyword searches such as "biking travel," which brings up a range of web sites providing virtual tours of biking destinations. In essence, the internet provides travelers with more opportunities to customize their own trips by booking accommodations, transportation, and excursions themselves, rather than by booking a package through a travel company where these activities have been preselected. As a result,

according to a Goldman Sachs study reported in the May 13, 2003, *London Evening Standard,* travelers are saving more than 50 percent of the cost of their trips if they book flights and hotel rooms themselves, rather than booking a package holiday.

Communication Technologies

A second factor that is playing a prominent role in globalization involves advances in communication technologies. At one level, the personal communication technologies—especially email and web-based interactive chat programs such as Instant Messenger, ICQ, and Windows Messenger—plus mobile (cell) phones, PDAs, and fax machines have made communication across national boundaries easier, cheaper, and faster. At another level, advances in television technologies are spurring corporate commercialism and globalization. Primarily because of satellite and cable distribution systems, television listings increasingly include channels and programs that either originate in foreign countries or make mention of people and events in foreign countries. As a result, depending on where you live and how you access television, the average selection of television programs includes more international content than ever before.

Global Media Conglomerates

A third factor affecting globalization is the rise of the global media conglomerate. A **global media conglomerate** is a giant parent corporation that presides over an amalgamation of wholly and partially owned subsidiaries, companies, and divisions that are scattered across the world, and that are afforded great local autonomy within individual countries in terms of product design and distribution. Global media conglomerates grow through mergers between companies, acquisitions of companies, and strategic alliances with other conglomerates. Sometimes it is difficult to trace media content back to a specific global media conglomerate because the company or division that produced the media content is jointly owned by more than one global media conglomerate. Therefore, global media conglomerates are not necessarily distinct entities, but instead are fragmented ownership alliances that sometimes intermingle with each other through joint ventures.

Global media conglomerates have largely replaced multinational companies as the predominant business model for overseas media distribution. As Richard Gershon explains in *Telecommunications Management* (2001), the old model of a multinational company places a central headquarters in a particular country and runs the subsidiary companies and the company divisions abroad according to a set of core values emanating from the central headquarters. In contrast, global media conglomerates have a decentralized value system that responds to local market conditions in individual countries and regions with content that may or may not be desired in home country or other foreign markets served by the conglomerate. For example, Viacom's *MTV* in the USA generally runs less risqué but more violent music videos than those aired by *MTV* in European countries. This example illustrates how media conglomerates have a decentralized value system that gears programming to the perceived unique market demands of individual countries and regions.

Global media conglomerates are greatly diversified, in that they attain revenue not only from a wide range of media products and services, but also from nonmedia products

and services. For example, General Electric (GE) owns the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) television network, the GE Financial Network (which sells auto insurance, home mortgages, and stocks and bonds), and the General Electric Aircraft Engine corporation (which sells jet engines), as well as other properties. Table 2.1 lists the top seven global media conglomerates in the world in 2004. Consider how colossal their media holdings are, and consequently how many of their products and services touch your own life on a regular basis as you read newspapers, listen to the radio, watch television, and access the internet.

Yet, global media conglomerates can be difficult to conceptualize as distinct entities because they are incredibly complex organizations. Typically a giant parent company owns multiple subsidiary companies. For example, Viacom owns the Infinity Radio group, which in turns owns CBS Radio. Because the parent company is not usually in the forefront when media content is exhibited, the parent company can be largely invisible to the public. The subsidiary companies of global media conglomerates have greater name and identity recognition, though sometimes they also remain invisible when media content is exhibited if their branding is not present in the content.

Another complexity is the worldwide reach of global media conglomerates. Since it is impossible for us to be in all of the world's countries at the same time, it is difficult to understand a single instance of media content as one component in the worldwide organizational structure of a global media conglomerate. For example, when you watch a television show, most of the time you probably are not tracing the show back through the channel that carries it to the company that produced it, to the company that owns both the channel and the show, to the parent corporation that owns that company as well as other companies, to as many of the countries you can think of in which the show is distributed.

The rise of the global media conglomerate is challenging the conception of nationality as a primary defining influence on self-identity. Because the global media conglomerate is a decentralized and largely amorphous entity that stretches across country borders, audiences are targeted regardless of where they live. Such cross-border assembling of audiences has led to the conjecture that the role of national boundaries in helping to form individual identity and social cohesiveness is being greatly diminished. Some believe that the emerging conception of self is guided not as much by where a person lives, but rather by the media content that he or she accesses.

However, despite the diminishment of national boundaries, the country as a unit remains a central concept of globalization. That is, though media products are increasingly marketed across country borders, the products are shaped and consumed uniquely within individual countries, and influenced uniquely by regulations within individual countries that set the parameters of media content in response to countrywide perceptions of cultural values. For example, the children's television program *Blues Clues* is distributed in both the USA and in the UK. However, there are two essential differences that are a result of shaping *Blues Clues* as a product according to perceptions of production conventions and audience needs that differ between the countries. One difference is that the host of the program in the USA version is American, whereas the host of the program in the UK version is English. Another difference is that the UK version includes an educational song that the host sings about things children should do when they get ready for bed (e.g., brushing their teeth, and going potty so they "don't have to get up in the middle of the night"). In

TABLE 2.1   Global Media Conglomerates (GMC)

GMC	HOME COUNTRY	SELECTED PROPERTIES (FULL OR PARTIAL OWNERSHIP)	PRODUCTS/SERVICES
Time-Warner	USA	Time Life Books, Book of the Month Club, Warner Books, HBO, HBO en Espanol, HBO Hungary, Warner Brothers Studios, Hanna-Barbera Cartoons, Time Magazine, Fortune, Sports Illustrated, People, Atlantic Group Records, Warner Brothers music, AOL, CNN, New Line Cinema	Books, Cable, Direct Broadcast Satellite, Films, Film Production, TV Shows, TV Production, Magazines, Online Services, Music, Theme Parks, Retail Merchandise
Walt Disney	USA	Miramax Books, The Disney Channel, ESPN, A&E Television, History Channel, Tele-Munchen, Hamster Productions France, Scandinavian Broadcasting System, Eurosport England, Buena Vista Television, Touchstone Television, Walt Disney Pictures, Buenavista International, ABC Television Network, ABC Radio Network, ABC Internet Group, Nascar.com, Lyric Street Records, Mammoth Records, Disneyland, Disneyworid, MGM Studios	Books, Cable, Television Shows, Television Productions, Film Production, Magazines, Newspapers, Online Services, Music, Theater, Theme Parks and Resorts, Retail Merchandise
Bertelsmann	Germany	Random House, Ballantine, Fodor's, Book-of-the-Month Club, Bertelsmann Media, Circulo de Lectores, France Loisirs, Barnes&Noble, CLT-UFA television/radio, RTL TV, VOX television, Channel 5, UFA Film and Television Production, Holland Media House, Radio RTL, Fun Radio, Radio Hamburg, McCalls magazine, Femme magazine, Impulse Brigitte magazine, Nepszahadsa newspaper, Financial Times Deutschland newspaper, BMG, Arista Records, Lycos Fireball	Books, Television Shows, Television Stations, Television Production, Magazines, Newspapers, Music, Online Services
Viacom	USA	Simon and Schuster, The Free Press, CBS Television Network, MTV Networks, Nickelodeon, Paramount Television, Showtime, The Movie Channel, Infinity Radio, Infinity Outdoor, Paramount Pictures, United Cinemas International, Sonicnet.com, Blockbuster, Raging Waters theme park	Books, Cable, Television Shows, Television Production, Radio Shows, Radio Production, Billboard Advertising, Film Production, Online Services, Video Rental, Theme Parks
News Corporation	Australia	HarperCollins Publishing, Hearst Book Group, Zondervan Publishing House, Fox News, Fox Sports,	Books, Television Shows, Television Production, Cable, Direct Broadcast Satellite, Films,

TABLE 2.1 *(Continued)*

GMC	HOME COUNTRY	SELECTED PROPERTIES (FULL OR PARTIAL OWNERSHIP)	PRODUCTS/SERVICES
		Speedvision, Fox Family, BSkyB, National Geographic Channel, the History Channel, DirectTV, Sky Network Television, Sky Movies, TM3, Star TV, DirectTV, Twentieth Century Fox, TV Guide, The Weekly Standard, The Times Literary Supplement, The New York Post, the Sunday Times, The Sun, the News of the World, The Australian, The Sunday Tasmanian, Foxnews.com, Australian National Rugby League	Film Production, Magazines, Newspapers, Online Services, Sports Teams, Sports Leagues, Sports Complexes
NBC Universal	USA	Nathan, Bordas, les Presses-Solar-Belfond, Havas Poche, L'Express, Tempo Medico, Staywell, Knowledge Adventure, Larousse Multimedia, Bonjour.fr 01Net, Vizzavi, Flipside.com, Canal +, Spain Telepiu, Universal Pictures, SciFi Action and Suspense Channel, USA Network, Cineplex Odeon Corporation, MCA Records, Polygram, Decca, Interscope Music Publishing, Universal Concerts, Cegetel, Vivendi Telecomm, Universal City, Universal Studios Japan, Telemundo, Bravo, Trio, CNBC, ShopNBC, MSNBC, Mun2TV, NBC Universal Television, NBC Universal Distribution, Universal Production Studio	Books, Multimedia Publishing, Television Shows, Television Production, Cable, Films, Film Production, Movie Theaters, Magazines, Music, Telecomms, Online Services, Theme Parks, Spanish-Language Television Networks, Film Studios
Sony	Japan	Sony television equipment, Sony camera equipment, Sony audio equipment, Sony computers, 5500 Digital Media Incubator, Spinner.com, AXN Television, The Game Show Network, Bejing Television Arts Center, SkyPerfectTv, Sony Pictures, Sony Music, Columbia House, Epic Records, Duet, Post Pet, Music Choice Europe, PlayStation, Playstation.com, Columbia Tristar, Columbia Pictures, Sony/Loews Theatres, TheStation@sony.com	Electronics, Video Games, Broadband, Wireless, Television Shows, Television Production, Film Production, Film Theaters, Music, Music Publishing, Online Services

Source: Robert McKenzie.

the USA version, the time that would be filled by the educational-song segment is filled instead with advertisements or promotional messages for upcoming television shows.

Audience Curiosity

The final factor affecting globalization is an escalating curiosity by media audiences about other parts of the world. As we have already noted, satellite and cable television in particular is increasingly delivering shows originating from foreign countries, as well as domestic shows that portray foreign cultures. Across the globe, offerings in domestic television schedules and internet sites show an increase in content that is foreign based or centered on foreign countries.

However, for countries isolated by geography and with a limited history of importing media content, the taste for foreign material must be acquired. To the audience with minimal prior direct experience of foreign cultures, imported media content initially is often too "foreign" to be attractive. This is because the ability to understand, appreciate, and enjoy foreign programming is predicated to some extent on being familiar with the look of the foreign people, as well as the production conventions used to create the foreign content and the language that is spoken. In a way, the desire for foreign television programming is similar to drinking coffee or tea, which rarely tastes good to the first-time drinker because these drinks are so foreign—that is, so unlike anything encountered before. But once the taste for coffee or tea is "acquired" after more tries, then a person may seek these drinks out or even feel he or she needs them. Similarly, first-time audiences have little appetite for foreign media content because the taste has not been established yet for unusual styles, structure, and language. But after repeatedly accessing the foreign media content, the taste can become endemic to reading, listening, or viewing habits. This metaphor goes only so far in explaining the reaction to beginning experiences of foreign media content, but it does reveal how a critical stage of developing a taste for imported media content must be reached before foreign content is craved and actively pursued.

CRITICISMS OF GLOBALIZATION

Despite its potential to facilitate a greater understanding of the world, globalization receives three major criticisms advanced by various citizen groups, academics, governments, quasi-governmental bodies, and media professionals. Moreover, the criticisms have occurred at the highest levels of international debate, and have often pitted countries and regions against each other. For the most part, smaller, less developed, and economically poorer countries have been in conflict with larger, developed, and wealthier countries. The basic theme that ties all of these criticisms together is the idea that globalization is unfair or unjust to some countries and regions of the world.

Criticism 1: Homogenization of Media

Some economic scholars and media professionals have concluded that the increasing concentration of media ownership is leading to an incredible amount of "sameness," or **homogenization,** of products and services across the world. The sameness begins with

smaller companies being bought by larger global media conglomerates, leading to a process of consolidation. For example, computer software companies such as Netscape have been bought and absorbed by global media conglomerates such as Time Warner; independent newspapers such as the *Sun* have been bought by conglomerates such as the News Corporation; television networks such as the Black Entertainment Network (BET) have been bought by conglomerates such as Viacom; and so on. These former companies were significant media companies in their own right, but as part of larger conglomerates, they largely serve as brands that take on a wider corporate strategy.

The increasing ownership of more media outlets by fewer companies has caused concern about whether the rise of the global media conglomerate represents a combination of too much power and world reach. Some scholars such as Ben Bagdikian in *The Media Monopoly* (1990) believe that an unhealthy paradox has emerged, in that the number of media choices continues to increase, but the number of ownership bodies behind the choices continues to decrease. In contrast, other scholars such as Benjamin Compaine in *Who Owns the Media?* (1979) counter that the power of global media conglomerates has been overstated because the revenue of the conglomerates today is actually comparable to the revenue of media companies in the 1950s. Regardless of where researchers stand in this debate, there is general agreement that the fundamental shake-up of the media industry has extended programs and publications to new parts of the world, which presents a new power structure that should be monitored.

Examples of formulas that can be used to illustrate how certain media products are homogenized across the world include:

- Newspaper layouts that divide the paper into "sections" placed in the following order: Current Events, Hard News, Feature, Local News, Sports, and Business.
- Radio formats that air only top-selling (pop) songs, and that feature fast-talking deejays often cracking predictable jokes.
- Television reality shows on which contestants are gradually eliminated, and on which some contestants engage in romance.
- Internet web pages with common links such as "about us," "home," and "contact us."

Behind a conglomerate's design and distribution of media products and services that end up being homogeneous is a conservative economic strategy that seeks to maximize profit through proven formulas in the design of content, rather than risk the failure of an unexpected smaller audience as a result of groundbreaking content. What is often difficult to recognize in a homogenized media environment is that that the idea for media content available domestically may have originated in a foreign country at a sister company that is owned by the same conglomerate, or a company that is owned by a separate conglomerate. For example, the reality-based talent show *Pop Idol*—on which viewers judge the contestants—was developed for a UK audience by the Bertelsmann production house Fremantle Media. Ironically, the show did not air on *Channel 5*, which is partly owned by Bertelsmann, but on competing *Channel 4*, because it had a bigger general audience than *Channel 5*. Then, after *Pop Idol*'s successful run in the UK, News Corporation's Fox Network bought a license to broadcast a similar formula of the show to the USA domestic audience under the modified title *American Idol*. Sometimes, the repackaging of media content so closely

mirrors the original content that only the actors, some of the props, and a few colloquialisms are changed.

Criticism 2: Unfairness in Global Information Flow

A second criticism of globalization focuses on an inequality in the flow of information throughout the world's media. During the 1970s and the early 1980s, an agency of the United Nations called UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) was the seat of an emotional debate about the flow of information through media around the world—particularly as it puts developing countries at a disadvantage, while putting Western countries at an advantage. The debate is summarized in *The Global Media Debate: Its Rise, Fall, and Renewal* (1993), edited by George Gerbner, Hamid Mowlana, and Kaarle Nordenstreng. Over the years, the debate has been labeled with various acronyms including the New International Information Order (NIIO), the New World Information Order (NWIO), and the New World Communication and Information Order (NWCIO). The debate lost momentum in 1984 when the USA withdrew from UNESCO, in part because of the criticisms of the information flow debate. Representatives from the USA argued that the First Amendment to the Constitution—guaranteeing the freedom of expression—prohibited any direct government interference in the flow of information into and out of the USA. Skeptics of the withdrawal by the USA argued that global media conglomerates were successful at lobbying US representatives to pull out of UNESCO in order to preserve the exclusive right of media executives to make the decisions about importing and exporting media.

Leading researchers in the area of global information flow include Al Hester in "Theoretical Considerations in Predicting Volume and Direction of International Information Flow" (1973), Robert Stevenson in *Global Communication in the Twenty-First Century* (1994), Mohammed Musa in *Beyond Cultural Imperialism* (1997), Howard Frederick in *Global Communication and International Relations* (1993), and Majid Tehranian in *Global Communication and World Politics* (1999). Essentially, global information flow is the study of how media content moves all around the world through newspapers, television programs, radio programs, web sites, and other media that people can access. Some questions that describe how global information flow is studied include: From which countries or regions of the world does media content going around the world often originate? Do some countries put out more media content to the rest of the world than other countries? To which countries or regions of the world does the media content go? Do people in some countries receive more foreign media content than in other countries? Do people in some countries receive more foreign media content than they do domestic media content? What is the nature of the content? Is the content old or new? Is the content positive or negative? Is the content in a foreign language or a language spoken widely within the home country? Global information flow is about identifying patterns in the movement of media content from and through countries and regions all around the world.

Criticisms about global information flow revolve around perceptions by representatives from developing countries that their countries receive sparse and unfair coverage in the flow of global information. One perception has to do with the use of the phrase *third world nations* to describe developing countries. This phrase has been rejected as being too demeaning to a given country. Historically speaking, the phrase *third world* was invented to

describe countries that did not fit into a (first world) capitalist ideology or a (second world) communist ideology. However, though *third world* continues to be used in some discussions about developing countries, the phrase has largely gone out of favor not just because of its negative connotations but also because it has lost relevancy as countries have emerged that do not fit neatly into a capitalist or communist classification. A second perception has more to do with patterns of information flow around the world that produce inequities in the direction, volume, and representation of information flowing back and forth between weaker (impoverished, developing) countries and stronger (affluent, Western) countries. The criticism has singled out particular countries (the USA and the UK) and regional associations (Europe and North America; English-speaking countries) as being responsible for the unfair information flow. Howard Frederick pointedly refers to the USA in *Global Communication and International Relations* (1993) as "the world's most communicating nation."

Direction of Global Information Flow   The first criticized pattern is **direction,** or the way in which information moves around the world. The criticism is aimed at information flow that is mostly **unidirectional**—that is, when information flows mostly from one country or region to another country or region, but not vice versa. The five main situations cited by researchers as being unidirectional include the flow of information from Western countries into developing countries, from Northern Hemisphere countries into Southern Hemisphere countries, from English-speaking countries into non-English-speaking countries, from larger countries into smaller countries, and from wealthier countries into poorer countries.

Critics contend that countries with little information flowing out of them to the rest of the world are vulnerable to distorted perceptions about those countries being created in worldwide media content produced in foreign countries. We can draw a simply analogy here to help clarify this criticism. Think about a situation in which people have spoken negatively about you for whatever reasons to other people who did not know you. If you found out about this, you likely experienced frustration, the root of which was probably that someone other than yourself was creating perceptions of your identity. This same kind of feeling on a much grander scale corresponds to negative reactions that representatives of some countries have about what they see as problems in the direction of global information flow.

Disproportionate Volume of Global Information Flow   The second identified pattern is **volume,** or the amount of information that flows into or out of a country. Think of a country that exemplifies one of the following three scenarios having to do with the volume of information flow. In Scenario 1, a country's available media content is supplied mostly by domestic media sources. Critics of this scenario would argue that such a country is **ethnocentric** in its global information flow, in that it lacks a global perspective on life. In Scenario 2, a country's available media content is supplied mostly by foreign media sources. Critics of this scenario would argue that such a country is **exocentric** in its global information flow, in that it lacks a homegrown perspective on life. For many critics, Scenario 3 is the most desirable, wherein a country's available media content has a robust mixture of both domestic and foreign media sources. Such a country is said to be **worldcentric** in its global information flow, in that it offers a more global perspective on life.
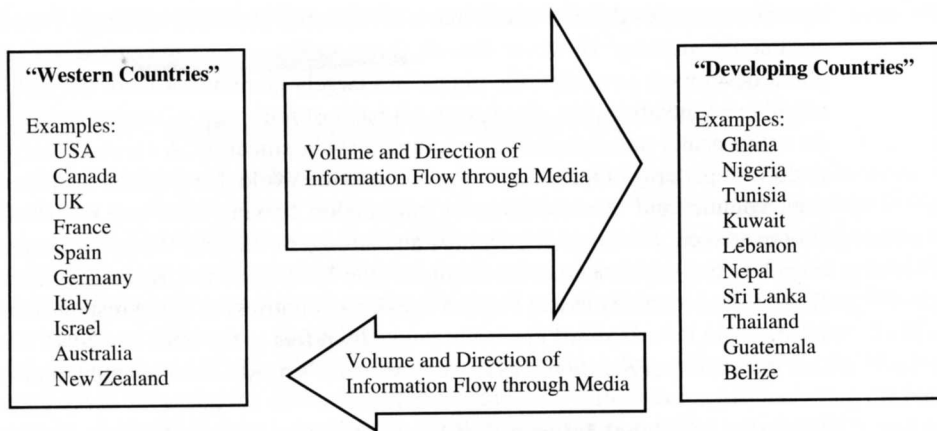
FIGURE 2.3   *Uneven Information Flow between "Western" and "Developing" Countries*
Source: Robert McKenzie.

One particular focus of the criticisms about the volume of global information flow is news flow. Critics argue that global news flow is dominated by Western **news wholesalers,** which sell information ("facts," news stories, audio sound bites, and video footage) to media organizations (primarily newspapers, television stations, and radio stations) around the world. These media organizations either redistribute the information they purchase or use it as a building block for constructing news reports. Global news wholesalers consist mainly of video news services (CNN, Reuters TV, and Worldwide Television News) as well as newswires. Much of the criticism in this area is directed at newswire content, because it provides the basic building blocks of hundreds and thousands of stories delivered by newspapers, radio, television, and the internet across the world. In *Global Communication in the Twenty-First Century* (1994), Robert Stevenson points out that approximately 50 percent of the news that circulates around the globe originates from the "big" newswire services: Associated Press and United Press International (both based in the USA), Reuters (based in the UK), and Agence France Press (based in France). All four newswires are based in Western countries. Facts such as these have led some critics to charge that too much of the global news flow is derived within the ideological framework of a Western-country orientation.

In Figure 2.3, the two main criticisms—direction and volume—about global information flow are depicted.

Country Misrepresentation in Global Information Flow   A third dimension of global information flow that has been criticized is the **misrepresentation** of countries—specifically, that developing countries are routinely portrayed in negative ways by foreign media. According to critics, what makes the impact of this pattern even worse is that information about foreign countries in the domestic media of some countries is meager from the start. As a result, any negative images of foreign countries in domestic media are amplified and tend to

leave an especially indelible impression for audiences not yet familiar with basic background information about the countries in question. In addition, these negative images can become what people instinctively think about when certain developing countries are brought to their attention through the news media or through conversation with others.

To put this to the test, think of a developing country of your choice. What are the first images that come to your mind? Do you think of scenes of starvation, poverty, conflict, destruction, instability, and so on? If so, are these images balanced by any positive images that also readily come to your mind? The answers you come up with to these questions will clarify whether the criticism of misrepresentation is valid for certain countries according to your particular experiences.

Theories about Factors Influencing Global Information Flow   Those who participate in the debate about unequal global information flow commonly acknowledge that a major contributing factor is that some developing countries have difficulty supplying their own residents with domestically produced media content. Several circumstances have contributed to this problem. The first is that developing countries have lacked the technological resources needed to produce and distribute their own media content. Second, even if technology were available, developing countries also need to provide professional training for their would-be media practitioners. This means that a country must have an adequate and experienced supply of writers, on-air talent, directors, producers, engineers, and other personnel. Third, some developing countries have found it difficult to raise the investment capital needed to acquire technologies and to fund the many expenses involved in producing media content. Fourth, some developing countries have been destabilized by political or military conflicts that have affected continuous media operations. Fifth, some developing countries have a high rate of "reading illiteracy" (the percentage of people who cannot read easily), which interferes with the distribution of newspaper content, whereas other developing countries have a high rate of "electronic media illiteracy" (the percentage of people who cannot follow easily the narrative of a television show or the hyperlink structure of a web page—both of which are activities that must be learned).

Building on the work of Al Hester, theorists have proposed a number of factors to explain why information flows more readily between some countries, and more sparsely between other countries. Rather, this research points to the inequities in global information flow as being largely attributable to lateral relations between and among countries and regions. The theoretical factors for explaining information flow between two countries include:

> **Geography:** Are the countries close to each other? Do they border each other? Is one or both of the countries an island? Is one or both flanked by a border of steep mountains, open desert, dense jungle, or large bodies of water?
>
> **Language:** Do inhabitants of the countries speak similar languages and dialects? Do they have similar vocabularies?
>
> **Cultural/Historical Ties:** Do the countries have a shared cultural or historical tradition? Has there been emigration from one country to another? Do the countries celebrate the same or similar holidays?

Trade: Are goods bought and sold between the countries? Are goods made in one country sold in another country?

Military Cooperation: Do the countries have military alliances? Have the countries fought together or against each other in a war or conflict? Do the countries supply or receive military equipment and resources from each other?

Religion: Are the populations of the countries religious? Do the countries have similar or different religions?

You can apply these factors to the country you are in right now. Think of a foreign country, and apply some of these factors to the relationship between that foreign country and the country in which you are living. According to your analysis, do any of these factors seem to explain the volume, direction, and representation of information that flows between the country you are in, and another country?

UNESCO's Recommended Changes   The information order debate that occurred in the 1970s within UNESCO and the United Nations produced a line of thinking that the structure of global information flow possibly needed to be reconfigured and focused on three major changes:

1. Money should be provided by the United Nations to finance new regional newswire services, which would be indigenous to the developing countries on which the news would report. One such example, which grew out of the UNESCO recommendations, is the Caribbean News Corporation (CNC), formerly the Caribbean News Association (CANA), an online and wire service that provides news to island media in the Caribbean.
2. Indigenous news reporters—those who live in the foreign country—should be used by news organizations to report on foreign countries.
3. Editors, directors, producers, reporters, and other news personnel should make a conscientious effort to balance negative news stories with positive news stories when covering developing countries.

Criticism 3: Spread of Cultural Imperialism

A third criticism of globalization is **cultural imperialism** (sometimes referred to also as cultural hegemony), which has been advanced in varying degrees of severity by a host of scholars including Herbert Schiller in *Communication and Cultural Domination* (1976), Jeremy Tunstall in *The Media Are American* (1977), Nicholas Garnham in *Capitalism and Communication* (1990), and Peter Golding and Phil Harris in *Beyond Cultural Imperialism* (1977). Such scholars argue that culture in less media-savvy countries is being diluted by culture represented in the media content imported from more media-savvy countries. The term *culture* is used here to mean rituals, styles, and language that have historical longevity in a country.

Scholars who take a hard-line view of cultural imperialism criticize what they see as a replacement of the domestic culture of a country by a culture in the media from a foreign country. Aspects of a domestic culture are said to succumb to an imported culture if the

imported media represents an inappropriate volume in relation to domestically produced media. The main forces behind the media invasion are said to be foreign governments and global conglomerates seeking to expand markets for their products and ideas to foreign audiences and to government leaders. To do this, they export media that cultivates values that promote an acceptance of the products and ideas they wish to market.

Some scholars have discussed cultural imperialism as a kind of **electronic colonialism,** a phrase that plays off classic colonialism. The old (classic) kind of colonialism involved a combination of military, political, and business strategies deployed by European countries—mainly Britain, Spain, Holland, and Portugal—in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to build empires out of conquered countries. Rulers in these countries commissioned ships to explore parts of the world in search of raw materials and exotic goods such as plants, spices, and minerals. In the process, the European countries colonized countries in Africa and in Central and South America, as well as islands in the Caribbean. The European countries set up extracting or manufacturing facilities in the colonies to bring raw materials or finished products back to the mother country. In many African countries such as Ghana, South Africa, and Madagascar, slaves were captured, bartered for, or purchased and then sold to sugar plantations located on Caribbean islands such as St. Croix and St. Lucia. These plantations produced not only sugar but also by-products like molasses and rum, which were then shipped back to Europe. As a result of colonization, much of the culture of the colonized countries and islands was replaced by the culture of the European countries. In contrast to that kind of colonization, the new kind of electronic colonialism is said to be less destructive but also less conspicuous. It begins with the combination of a desire by developing countries to stimulate their domestic media offerings, and a desire by media conglomerates and advertisers to sell products and services to foreign markets. These two factors lead to activities that facilitate electronic colonialism. One activity has been the gifting or discounting of equipment and old program content. As television and radio networks in the wealthier nations have updated their technology, they have sought to sell their old equipment or give it away to broadcasters in developing countries, as a tax write-off. Often, the program content has long since aired as a new series in the originating country and has been in syndication (sold as a rerun) for several years and maybe even decades. Thus, the argument runs that until a developing country begins to foster its own media content, certain cultural traditions are being diluted by traditions of the foreign culture represented by the imported and outdated media content.

A second level of cultural imperialism has to do with what is seen as an invasion of current media content. The criticism is aimed mostly but not entirely at Western media. The main invaders are said to be the television genres of sitcoms, dramas, movies, reality shows, and music television; the music genre of the pop format; and Hollywood films. The argument runs that people living in heavy media-importing countries are naturally curious about how people live in countries that have high visibility in global information flow. Naturally, these audiences satisfy their curiosities by accessing imported media imported from the high-profile countries. However, in so doing, an incremental but steady process takes place—particularly among younger audience members who are more open to change—whereby people in the importing country begin to dress, talk, and act like those portrayed in the foreign media. In other words, domestic audiences gradually discard their own cultural traditions—often subconsciously—as they emulate attributes of foreign cultures.

A few examples that illustrate the phenomenon of a culture being invaded by imported media are:

- Use of the term *l'hamburger* by French people speaking French, when there is no direct translation for that word in French.
- The widespread wearing of hip-hop clothing (baggy pants, backwards baseball caps, etc.) in countries and regions where mainly traditional clothing has been worn.
- The location of McDonald's, Burger King, Pizza Hut, and other fast-food restaurants in almost every major city, where previously take-out food was sold only by local vendors.

Proponents of cultural imperialism argue that these examples are indicative of an overall trend in the world toward a monolithic, Westernized culture, which is being promoted primarily by Western media exports.

A third level of cultural imperialism has to do with the **conventions used in the production of media content.** The argument here is that some countries import not only the content of media produced in foreign countries, but also ways in which content is produced and shaped. Production and distribution conventions include the financing of media operations (e.g., advertising revenue), the scheduling of television programs (e.g., television shows beginning exactly at :00 or :30 on the hour), the layout of newspaper copy (e.g., hard news followed by soft news followed by sports), the length of a radio song (e.g., less than five minutes), and so on. Critics warn that importing foreign media content leaves domestic media operators vulnerable to importing production conventions—such as plot development, camera angles, and advertising breaks—that automatically accompany the imported media.

Cultural imperialism critics focus much of their criticism on the USA and the UK. The USA receives the bulk of the criticism because it exports more media content than any other country in the world. However, the UK is also singled out as a purveyor of cultural imperialism because it distributes media content across the world through a network of countries that formerly were its colonies. In addition to both countries' role in exporting media content, both countries also play a significant role in training media producers, especially from developing countries. In essence, critics believe the USA and the UK—both English-speaking nations—have too much of a presence in global media operations, and thereby exert too much influence on the cultures of media-importing nations. Some critics argue that the USA and the UK have leveraged this heightened international media presence unfairly through reduced economy-of-scale costs that less developed countries and non-English-speaking countries cannot match. Other critics, as represented in *War, Media, and Propaganda* (2004), edited by Yahya R. Kamalipour and Nancy Snow, argue that "information dominance" of global information flow is part of a comprehensive political, economic, and military strategy by the USA and UK.

One countercriticism to cultural imperialism's focus on the USA and the UK is that the market acceptance of media content and models of media operation from the USA and the UK is merely the result of these countries winning a global business competition. In other words, media companies based in the USA and the UK are offering products and services that people in other countries prefer rather than the options available in their own countries or from other countries in the world.

Another countercriticism argues that countries importing media from the USA and the UK have the ability to absorb pieces of external culture without losing their own cultural

foundations. As long as domestic cultures are robust and well established, any traditions adopted by society alongside the importation of media content are said to attain only secondary status in relation to native traditions.

On the larger scale, those who counter negative appraisals of the overall process of globalization argue that what is happening around the world is merely a natural evolution of cultures meshing together as the planet continues to accommodate population growth. These critics argue that in such an evolutionary context, old ways of doing things will naturally be replaced by new ways of doing things. According to this viewpoint, therefore, countries that import foreign media content are merely witnessing changes on the part of people who are open to change and who want to be more integrated with a world culture rather than to remain part of a parochial culture derived from a local country or region.

SUMMARY

Globalization is a process proliferating out of a worldwide business environment that is effectively blurring national boundaries and shrinking the world. The central force that is propelling globalization is corporate commercialism, which generates varying degrees of criticism and countercriticism from a variety of affected groups. The previous discussion of globalization points the way to issues that should be incorporated into comparisons of media systems between two or more countries, because the issues that have been identified are critical to obtaining expansive and meaningful interpretations from the comparisons. The issues identified in this chapter therefore are to be used to derive meanings in subsequent chapters providing comparisons among the media systems of France, Sweden, the UK, the USA, México, China, Ghana, and Lebanon. In the next chapter, Elements of a Media System, the concept of a media system and the elements that make up a media system are introduced. Then, in Chapters 4 through 12, these elements are elaborated on one by one and compared across the media systems of the eight countries.