Communication
Theory **&** Research

edited by

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An *EJC Anthology*

Edited by
Denis McQuail, Peter Golding and Els de Bens

Contents

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Preface

The *European Journal of Communication* was founded in 1985 and its first issue appeared in the Spring of 1986. The chief architect of and driving force behind the foundation of the Journal was Jay G. Blumler, of the University of Leeds, strongly backed by our publishers, Sage. The first editors were Jay Blumler, Karl Erik Rosengren (University of Lund) and Denis McQuail (University of Amsterdam), supported by an active Editorial Board and a larger number of corresponding editors drawn from most of the countries of Europe. It is now edited by the undersigned and based at Loughborough University and the University of Ghent.

The publication of this anthology marks the twentieth anniversary of the Journal's inception at a time when Europe was experiencing an acceleration in communication research and an expansion in the number and size of teaching programmes in higher education devoted to media and communication. The then aim of the Journal was to expand the opportunities for publication of theory and research and to make a contribution to the definition and identity of the field. Its particular role, as reflected in the chosen title, was to reflect the range of different traditions of communication research (and issues for research) on the European continent and to contribute to a greater interconnection and dialogue between the different schools of work. It would also serve to make research in Europe more widely known to an international audience.

The field of communication was then, as now, open to alternative definitions and the editors of the first issue identified the central phenomena to be dealt with as 'processes of public communication within and between societies and thus primarily to do with mass media and mass communications'. At the time it could be argued that the study of communication in Europe was more united by way of an imported North American heritage than by a shared approach to issues of public communication. There was, of course, much in the way of shared experience in the history of media development and similarities of media systems. It was already very clear twenty years ago that European media as well as social and political life were undergoing similar changes in response to the same technological and economic challenges. In the first issue of the Journal, the editors argued that 'Europe has provided the cradle for many of the prevailing forms and practices of mass communication and is also distinguished by a shared history, traditions of scholarship and, to a degree, social and economic circumstances'.

Although 'Europeanness', as we rather loosely identified it, was important to the aims and profile of the *EJC* it was not the primary defining criterion for editorial selection. This was and remains the scholarly quality of research, thinking and writing. But there were subsidiary criteria, especially those to do with the need to cover a very diverse field of topics and to try to represent the

perspectives of different countries and regions. The ambition was to be equally interested in theory and empirical research (especially when combined) and normative as well as social-scientific theory. The doors were to be open to younger as well as established scholars and to 'thoughtful professionals in communication as well as academics' (to quote the opening editorial again). One of the most ambitious aims of the original *EJC* was to address questions of intellectual or social significance.

The content of the Journal has inevitably changed to reflect developments in society, culture and media, plus intellectual responses to these. The field of communication has become more specialized and there are many more journals published in Europe, but there still seems to be a need for a generalist publication that deals with core issues. The broad aims of the *EJC* have not changed greatly and it should be possible to recognize much the same lines of thinking in the selections reproduced here, even though they are mainly drawn from issues of the last few years. We are still committed to an open and diverse policy of selection, still concerned with potential intellectual and social significance, still focused primarily on public communication, but recognizing that sharp lines between public and private can no longer be drawn.

The existence of this book and the success of the Journal in its ambitions reflect the efforts of innumerable authors, reviewers, advisers and helpers. On an anniversary occasion it is appropriate to name a succession of dedicated Book Review Editors and Associate Editors. Klaus Schönback, Robin Cheesman and Michael Pickering have served in the former capacity. The latter have included Holli Semetko, Robert Buinett, Margaret Scammell, Tudor Oltean, Wendy Monk, Hilde Jansseus, Liz Sutton, Heather Owen, Dieder van Landuyt, Sarah Rawson and Annelore Deprez. We are much indebted for their collective efforts over the years. In a more immediate sense, we are very grateful to Julia Hall for encouragement and support in the whole enterprise and to Jamilah Ahmed and Fabienne Pedroletti for organizing out the task of production so efficiently.

Denis McQuail
Peter Golding
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Introduction and Overview

Denis McQuail

Origins and development of the field in Europe

Communications and media as a field of research in Europe scarcely predates the Second World War, apart from the case of Germany where a press science (*Zeitungswissenschaft*) was quite well established in some German universities. Much of this work was historical or practical, but theory about the links between the press and society had also been developed by German sociologists (Hardt, 2003). For understandable reasons, this tradition did not have much influence on post-war development although a number of those engaged in the study of mass media and society were part of the 1930s' diaspora, mainly to the United States (Averbeck, 2001), giving rise to an indirect effect. Early French sociologists, notably Gabriel Tarde, had attached great importance to the press and other means of publicity as influences on collective behaviour, the formation of opinion and the transmission to modernity. Pre-Second World War and immediate post-war British sociology, however, was focused on social problems, among which the contemporary mass media did not really figure. In general, the task of post-war reconstruction in Europe was too large to allow much attention to be directed to the media. All in all, at the mid-twentieth century it seemed that the field was largely open for the 'invasion' of American ideas about mass media and methods of enquiry. As Tunstall (1977) observed, not only were the media American, so was media science.

These remarks should not be read as indicating any lack of early awareness in Europe of the immense potential significance of the mass press, film and radio from political, cultural and social perspectives. There was clear evidence of the close involvement of mass media in the unfolding events driven by nationalism, war and totalitarianism. However, social science was under-developed and the field was largely left to speculation and amateur investigation. An exception to this judgement is the pre-war engagement by the BBC in systematic radio audience research. Post-war American influence showed up in a predilection for sample survey enquiries into 'media use' and studies of media effects carried out by statistical methods. It took the arrival of the new mass medium of television to really stimulate media research, especially as it was not only credited with potency and viewed by many as problematic, but also held out a new promise of enlightenment, education and cultural development. In the 1950s and 1960s, the study of media was largely framed according to topics that lent themselves to enquiry within the frames of leisure-time use, effectiveness in political persuasion,

protecting and meeting the needs of children and youth and the merits or demerits of 'mass culture'. Apart from this, a central and growing concern of media industry and others was the measurement of audiences for the various competing media.

From the later 1960s onwards, a new wind was blowing in European social science, perhaps especially from Britain. The dominant paradigm of study of media uses and effects was challenged by critical theory that interpreted the tendencies of media content, especially in news, as a form of hidden ideology designed to maintain hegemonic control on behalf of state bureaucracies or big business. Attention also turned from messages, audiences and effects to include the political economic supports for the media system. Another strand in the new movement was the development, more or less simultaneous in North America and Europe, of sociological enquiries into the media production process, especially of news. The results shed light on the reasons for dominant tendencies of content and supported the view that media tend to maintain rather than challenge the status quo. In addition, a major change had occurred in the study of popular and mass culture, involving a revaluation of the significance of popular forms (particularly in music and fiction) and a rejection of what were perceived as elitist and hierarchical perspectives. Along with this came a break with quantitative methods of enquiry and a turn towards ethnography and qualitative methods in general.

Although European media research has sometimes been claimed as distinctively more 'critical' than American research, in line with Merton's (1957) contrast between American empiricism and European *wissensociologie,* by the time of general upheaval post-1968, there was not much to choose between America and Europe in this respect. The distinctiveness of the European field of media enquiry was not clear at the end of the 1970s, except perhaps in the area of popular culture (in the UK at least), which has been mentioned, and also in a preference for qualitative methodological alternatives to surveys, experiments and statistical analysis. One form this preference took was in the greater use of ethnographic methods, especially for studying audiences, or 'interpretative communities'. Another was to be found in the attraction exerted by semiological theory and methods in the study of media content, largely following the guidance of French theorists, especially Barthes and Grémas.

The institutionalization of teaching programmes

Until this time, the field of media and communication differed markedly from the situation in the USA in that there were very few programmes of media study at any level or for any purpose, whether academic or professional. The study of media was mainly an individual research pursuit or organized in a handful of under-funded research centres. Occasional courses were given within the framework of study of politics, sociology, psychology or education. In some countries there were separate institutions for the professional training of journalists, but these were practical in orientation and made little contribution to research and

theory. The main exception was Germany where several universities had established programmes in communication science and the same was true of Belgium and the Netherlands. However, from the early 1980s onwards more or less the whole of Europe saw a rapid introduction and expansion of undergraduate and graduate programmes in media and communication under various names, responding to demand from growing student numbers and the decisions of educational authorities.

The precise reasons are hard to pin down, but a general explanation can be found in the belief that an 'information society' was being born, in which skills relating to communication of all kinds would be in demand. There was a practical correlate in the expansion of media industries and the growth of professionalization, leading to new work opportunities in the field of communications and media. The enthusiasm for opening courses was not much restrained by the fact that the background of most existing communication research (focusing on media effects on society) was not very suitable or practical for meeting the needs of an information society. Nevertheless, the study of mass media provided the available core that could be expanded to deal with more relevant matters such as organizational communication, understanding new technology and developing practical skills of communication, advertising, public relations and journalism. Particularly important and difficult was the need to bridge the gap between the public communication functions of mass media and the private (person-to-person) communication networks carried largely by telecommunications and subsequently the Internet. Despite the difficulties, a new field of media and communication teaching and research has been forged in Europe that marks a break with its founding period.

European 'exceptionalism'?

Despite the debt owed to the United States for founding principles of 'communication science' and the continuing influence wielded through literature and the dominance of international scientific publication, a distinctively European approach to media and communication has developed. This is not, as is sometimes caricatured, more qualitative or more critical (or more amateur), but different in its agenda of issues and in the relative salience of different themes. The distinctiveness stems ultimately from the fact that European media systems and circumstances are different in many, although not all, respects. Virtually every communication 'problem' takes on a somewhat different definition.

There is no space or need to delve too deeply into the characteristics of media systems in Europe, but they are different because of the history and geography of the region (see Hallin and Mancini, 2004). The first characteristic is that they are very diverse in forms of organization and regulation, despite shared legal and normative principles, especially in respect of freedom and regulation. Media systems are surprisingly varied in terms of habits of use, despite similar social and economic conditions. This opens the way for fruitful and even necessary cross-national comparative analysis that is not really possible in North America.

Second, national history accounts for the fact that, despite a commitment to basic freedoms of the press, each media system has a significant relationship to the state and the political system that seems unusual, even sometimes undesirable, through American eyes. At least these relations are more transparent than they are in the United States. There is no standard model for arranging these relationships, but it means that politics does tend to have some acknowledged interest in media performance and some means of influence. At the same time there are mechanisms in place for managing this relationship to ensure either a degree of independence or of transparency in the arrangements for linking politics with media.

The conditions described have also resulted in persistent concerns about political diversity and balance in the media. This has been a legitimate object of policy making in many European countries. Various forms of economic intervention have been instituted, with particular reference to the newspaper press (broadcasting being separately regulated in this respect) and in some cases limits have been set to the degree of concentration of ownership. With varying degrees of effectiveness, many countries also have adopted self-regulatory mechanisms such as press councils and ombudsmen (see Bertrand, 2003). There have also been safeguards in some cases for the rights of journalists within their employing organization.

In most European media systems, the most distinctive feature, as seen from outside is the existence of a large publicly financed broadcasting service alongside offerings by private channels (although the ratio of public to private is now being reversed). The origins of public control of broadcasting (formerly often under monopoly control) are political as well as technical. Public broadcasting was and remains an important means of linking the political system with the media system. However powers of control have mainly been used to ensure that broadcasting does not upset the balance of advantage between established political interests. Public broadcasting has been an object of more or less continuing and equally balanced praise and criticism and is continually under review, especially now that it offends against reigning neo-liberal principles and requires new justification in an age of abundance and freedom of consumer choice. The most basic form of justification is that it ensures that one media sector at least is accountable to the public and that some public space is preserved for cultural and informational policies that the market cannot achieve. Whatever the balance of argument, there is no doubt that the taken-for-granted presence of a public media sector has left its mark on the agenda of European communication research.

The particular geography of Europe has consequences other than those mentioned. The boundaries set by nation states and often by language create divisions but also provide some natural protection against international competition and incursion, except where small countries are overshadowed by a large same-language neighbour as in the examples of Ireland, Switzerland, Austria and French-speaking Belgium. Within a number of countries, differences of language and historic region have persisted and are either reflected in the media structure or give rise to pressure for recognition. For many countries, it is hard and sometimes impossible to maintain a viable audio-visual sector without heavy reliance on imports. The winds of globalization have blown rather coldly across Europe

for at least twenty years in the age of satellite, cable and Internet, although it is remarkable how little the actual balance of content of what is offered and consumed has changed in that time, leaving aside the greater volume. In any case, it is clear that the discourse of globalization has been widely heard across Europe, although with less resonance in countries such as the UK and Germany that are big enough to manage the challenges.

One of the characteristics of communication research (whether for good or ill) everywhere is that it tends to respond to the circumstances and events in the 'real world'. There is pressure for it to do so because a central feature of the media is the continuous reporting back to society about 'reality' and because news media frequently become implicated in the events they report. Even in the spheres of entertainment and culture, the media are characterized by continuously changing and evolving formats, styles and fashions, requiring a similar response from those who study media culture. In respect of historical events, the general consequence of this time- and space-bound feature of the field is that attention focuses differentially on what is 'locally' most significant (local here referring to Europe). In the period of development of communication science in Europe there have been major themes that are somewhat particular to the region. These include: the Cold War and the 'Iron Curtain' actually dividing Europe; the tensions in relations with America over foreign policy and in the cultural sphere; the gradual movement towards a more united Europe by way of the EC and later the EU; ideological conflicts between left and right; various internal insurgencies and terrorist movements that have afflicted several major European countries, including the UK, Spain, Germany and Italy; varied response to the Balkan wars of the 1990s; the response to immigration into Europe, especially in the later phase of large-scale asylum seeking. These and other matters have often provided the stimulus to research and shaped the pattern of topics.

After the 'communications revolution' of the early 1980s public communication policy increasingly took an economic and liberal turn (Van Cuilenburg and McQuail, 2003). A well developed and flexible media and communication system was seen as a necessary condition of national prosperity in the Information Age. While the rhetoric of the Information Age was heard in the United States, in practice it was left to a narrowly focused and inflexible market system to promote innovation. In Europe, both national governments and the European Community directly subsidized new media and used projects of law to open up new sectors based on the new forms of communication technology. The very fact that there are two levels of communication policy, at national and European level, makes for a distinctive pattern of governance and ensures that a variety of principles of the public interest – economic, social and cultural – are continually in play. Latterly the trend in European countries has been towards setting up a single national agency for the regulation of communication issues affecting different media, ranging from broadcasting and telecommunications in particular, to television and even the press in some respects.

Against this background, we can better understand the evolution of the main themes of European communication research and their particular focus. These themes are dealt with under the following headings, with a few explanatory remarks added.

News research

In fact the study of news content and news use has not differed greatly in priority or shape from its American and other international counterparts. It has been concerned with the staple issues of the reflection (or not) of reality; with the routine newsroom forces that influence selection policy; with many forms of bias (usually unintended) that characterize patterns of news; with the nature of news values; with the process and consequences of 'framing'; with 'learning' from the news, agenda-setting, etc. (see Renckstorf et al., 2001). The diffusion of news has also been studied in Europe. However certain distinctive 'angles' can be observed. To begin with, the obligation of public broadcasting to be informative and objective, as judged not only by traditional journalistic norms, but by reference to regulatory norms, has given a distinctive thrust to news research. Public broadcasting is often compared with the 'private' competition. There has also generally been more recognition in Europe of the fact that 'objective' news' is shaped by implicit ideologies. In an earlier, critical, phase, public broadcast news was often accused of supporting the status quo. In the more recent era of expansion and privatization referred to above, the new, competing, news services of private television have been suspected of departing from the former high standards of television news.

As noted above, news research has continued to be stimulated by successive conflicts and divisions in which the role of news as the informer of society is often put to a severe test. Most recently, the Iraq War and before that military action in Afghanistan and Kosovo have highlighted the pressures on television to meet divided public expectations of fairness and accuracy and also meet expectations of governments committed to controversial policies. The socially contentious topic of immigration and asylum seeking has tested the capacity of a press caught between strong popular prejudice amongst the audience (quite commonly) and the dual wish to be sympathetic and objective.

The study of news has also been influenced by the European traditions of audience reception research and textual analysis. From the audience point of view, the 'news' has to be made sense of from the point of view of the individual and the particular national perspective on events. The interpretation and remembering of news is influenced by many peripheral or seemingly irrelevant thought processes. It is not a rational linear process of learning. The occasion of news use is also very much ritualized in the home, linked to domestic routines and events.

European television fiction

Research into fiction in Europe has been influenced by a number of the features mentioned earlier. The primary issue has been the extent to which Europe can and does develop its own production capacity for the most popular category of television, that of fiction and drama. For the most part this refers to various series and serials dealing with settings related to crime, health and various other

social contexts, plus the general type known as the 'soap opera'. In the earlier period of enquiry, starting in the 1970s, the great appeal of the glossy American serial typified by *Dallas*, proved an object of great interest. The question most asked was why this unrealistic and foreign product could have such a powerful pull on audiences, especially those composed of women. Was it some underlying intrinsic and universal factor of the stories told or simply the high production values and comparability to glossy Hollywood films? More prosaically was it due in part to the relatively low cost of such material to many European broadcasters? While statistically, foreign (especially American) fiction has continued to retain its seemingly dominant position, much has changed in twenty-five years and the same questions are no longer being asked. The great expansion of European television in terms of channels and hours of broadcasting has sustained the demand for the American product but, leaving films aside, there has been a shift in popularity to domestically produced content, where it is available. There is much more home-made basic 'soap opera' in Europe, and this has been shown to reflect both different values and audience interests than the original US model and also to reflect something of the differences between European national cultures.

Journalistic roles and ethics

There is a normative tradition in European communication theory that involves stronger claims on behalf of 'society' than is typical of the United States. Theory is directed against the failings of journalism in terms of accuracy and fairness in reporting as well as against the familiar evils of sensationalism, offences against privacy and personal dignity. Latterly critical attention has crystalized around the allegation of 'tabloidization', meaning a shift to style and content that courts popularity as an end in itself. Depending on the country concerned, and leaving public broadcasting aside, we are likely to find expectations of service to society and to the political and justice system. Sometimes these expectations are reciprocated by professionals within the journalistic profession. In some countries, elements of the press allow themselves to be accountable on essential matters and in some cases law and regulation set demands. However, it cannot be said in general that private media, whether press or television, are especially inclined to put ethics and public duty before commercial considerations. There is little inclination to do so and the development of more open markets in Europe and of policies at European level to develop a single market have made it difficult if not impossible for any large-scale media enterprise to ignore the imperatives of the global market. Even so, there are some bridges between external criticism and internal professionalism.

Audience and reception research

The adoption of critical theory, the re-evaluation of popular culture and the critique of empiricism in audience studies between them exerted a strong influence

on European audience research from the 1970s onwards (Jensen and Rosengren, 1990; Alasuutari, 1999). Attention turned away from surveys of media use and formal studies of gratifications and towards the sub-cultural context of reception and the in-depth study of personal responses to particular media experiences. The move represented rejection of manipulative applications of research in the interests of media providers or would-be communicators, even where these were public broadcasters. The results generally shed light on the numerous interconnections between features of everyday life and media experience, indicating quite a strong degree of audience determination, contrary to the traditional dominant model. Some of the studies carried out showed the apparent anomaly of the attraction of distant and unrealistic content (especially American), showing a capacity for audiences to maintain a critical distance from the values of imported content, while appreciating storylines and features of production. The general proposition that content could be 'decoded' in ways different from the seeming overt message was supported in many studies. Even so, the extent to which audiences could be considered to be 'in control of' their own media experience has remained more or less a matter of belief rather than demonstration.

Content and textual research

There is an inconsistency between the tenets of reception research and the basic assumptions of the semiological tradition that held sway in Europe from the early 1970s. The appeal of the latter had originally been its counterweight to the counting and statistical analysis of the content analysis tradition offered as part of the dominant paradigm. Content analysis treated the 'meaning' of media texts as relatively unproblematic, at least where it concerned the origin, intention and likely effect of messages. Semiology offered the means of uncovering latent or hidden meanings, especially in respect of implicit ideology and 'meta-themes' of content. Elements of Marxist or Freudian theory were also engaged in the interpretation of content (Williamson, 1978). Work of this kind failed, however, to make contact with the emerging ethnographic and reception schools and was gradually marginalized. In its place, various forms of 'discourse analysis' were developed that sought to combine systematic text analysis with alternative modes of interpretation, taking account of the nature of 'texts', context of production and use, etc.

The political economic versus the popular cultural perspective

The development of critical theory in Europe was affected at some point in time by a growing gap between those who emphasized the determination of media ownership on media structures and therefore eventually content and those who focused more directly on the ideological tendencies in content that favoured the status quo and the potential for popular resistance. In the end, the 'culturalist'

branch of critical enquiry largely parted company from the political economic school, leading to separate publications and a cessation of dialogue across the divide. It also moved to a position where popularity (variously defined) became a criterion of merit and a guide to understanding. The political economic school was to some extent vindicated by the large changes to media systems referred to above that were driven by technology, economics and politics more or less in that order. The major shift towards privatization of 'broadcasting' and of the telecommunications sector required a sophisticated understanding of the economics of the case as well as the technology. For the cultural school, there was at least the relative novelty in Europe of popularly driven abundance of media culture. The Internet has opened a large range of opportunities for both 'schools', although it is probably more relevant to note that it has stimulated its own branch of enquiry, with new ideas and models, that is not rooted either in the political economic or the popular cultural tradition.

The public sphere

The notion of a 'public sphere' was widely seized on during the 1990s, especially following the translation of Habermas' seminal study (1962) into English (1989). It offered something of an escape route from the seemingly hopeless pursuit of the goal of more 'democratic media'. Commercial media were flourishing and expanding and the one main sector of the media that was democratically accountable (public broadcasting) was either declining or failing in its perceived public duties. A wider concept of a sphere of free publication, discussion and debate within a larger 'civil society' seemed a more realistic and still worthwhile goal, despite its somewhat mythic origins and its elevation of rational discourse above emotion and popular feeling (Dahlgren, 1995). It was essentially an old-fashioned notion, but it was seen as having a potential for renewal and to provide some solid ground for societal claims against the media and for erecting new structures (for instance in cyberspace). The notion also appealed to those emerging from the stern grip of communist regimes and into the embrace of commerce. For a mixture of reasons, but especially a general response to 'commercialization' of media, the public sphere notion has remained in play as a viable basis for a theory of media–society relations.

Communication policy

The various technological and system changes that have been mentioned as taking place in Europe during the last twenty-five years have to some extent been the result of new policies on the part of national governments and of the European Union (especially in its search for an integrated market in media as in other sectors). Where not policy-led, it has been aided and legitimated by policy, opening up an expanding field of enquiry. Previously, communication policy was largely confined

to regulation of public broadcasting and rather marginal and ineffective efforts at limiting press concentration. In the new era, communication policy topics multiplied to cover: the regulation of private satellite and cable television; many matters of cross-border transmission; rules for ownership and cross-ownership; new copyright issues; regulation of privatized telecommunications; boundaries of operation between the various competing electronic media; rules if any, for the Internet; cultural issues arising from transnationalization; varied plans to stimulate coherent technological change, for instance in relation to digital television; issues arising from the convergence of modes of media transmission and; harmonization of the expanding number of regulatory bodies.

Not least important has been the public demand for governments to respond to some traditional problems associated with new media, especially where they concern the welfare of young people in particular and moral standards in general. The expansion of electronic media has far outpaced the capacity of existing regulatory regimes to deal with questions of potential social or individual harm. The somewhat dormant issue of public service broadcasting has also come back into play, especially because of renewed assaults on its legitimacy, problems of public funding and a general sense that its role in the contemporary world is not always clear. In any case all this has provided the stuff of much conflict and debate and also new and varied thinking and research.

Political communication

The US tradition of election research was initially transported to Europe and the basic model still serves some of the same purposes, especially where it comes to estimating the effect of one or other influence on a campaign outcome and testing certain widely applicable hypotheses, such as those of agenda-setting and framing. The correspondence of European and American research was promoted by the apparent similarity of campaigning trends (more professionalization, political marketing, etc.) and also of media behaviour in relation to politics (negativity, focus on conflict and personality, neglect of fundamental issues, etc.). Over time, European electoral behaviour and attitudes to politics seemed to be converging on an assumed American model (lower turnout and activism, more cynical attitudes).

Even so, there have been differences in the focus of theory and research that can be attributed to features of European politics, especially the greater prominence of political parties and partisanship, the key role of regulated broadcasting in campaigning and the greater politicization of private media, especially the newspaper press. These features allow comparisons to be made between the content and maybe effect of 'neutral' broadcasting and partisan press, and between the various partisan elements of the media system. The typically more concentrated European election campaigns and the limited number of major broadcast channels (in some countries) allow more scope for panel studies and experiments about effects. Comparative research in political communication has been fruitful, despite the 'local' nature of each election event; and the institution

of the European Parliament in the 1970s provided a unique object of study, in that campaigns were fought at the same time in several countries for seats in the same body (Blumler et al., 1983).

In conclusion

This account of some of the prominent themes in European communication research is not and cannot be complete. There is a great deal going on elsewhere under other headings, although a distinctively European perspective may be harder to discern. This applies, for instance, to much research on popular culture, although that has largely found its own alternative home. It applies to feminist theory and research and also to research on many aspects of children and media, both of which have developed within a common international frame of reference. Much the same could be said of research into 'new media', including the Internet, computer games and various uses of new technology. Here too, there is little distinctive about the European situation, although the region offers good opportunities for comparative research.

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International Communication

2 Research into International Television Flows: A Methodological Contribution

P r e b e n   S e p s t r u p

Earlier Research: a Critical Note

Most research on international communication flows is related to a (more or less explicit) discussion of the 'media imperialism thesis' as introduced by Schiller (1969, 1976) and developed and discussed by, among others, Nordenstreng and Varis (1974); Read (1976); Boyd-Barret (1977); Tunstall (1977); Lee (1980); Mattelart et al. (1984); and Lealand (1984).

The essence of the much debated media imperialism thesis is that a few countries – and especially the USA – dominate both international and national media structures and impose their cultures, values and ideologies on the receiving countries. Depending on the specific standpoint, more or less emphasis is given to the 'conspiracy' or 'intentionality' version, that is, that this dominance is consciously aimed at by large, powerful countries (USA) and multinational corporations, not only for the sake of economic profit but also for ideological reasons such as disseminating cultural and political values, business norms, consumption orientation, life styles, etc. The basic media imperialism thesis thus comprises a hypothesis about imbalances in international television trade, a hypothesis about the cultural effects on specific groups as a consequence of these imbalances, and a hypothesis about the reasons for such lack of balance.

The crudest versions of the media imperialism thesis have been criticized, modified and developed by both conservative and radical researchers. Interesting theoretical contributions have come from Nordenstreng and Varis (1974), Tunstall (1977), Mattelart et al. (1984), and Garnham (1977, 1979). Pragnell (1985)

and Tracey (1985) are recent examples of a rigorous rejection of the conspiratorial version of the thesis.

Without going into details of the twenty-year debate about the shape of international television flows and their determinants, it is fair to conclude that the position of West European countries in the media imperialism framework remains uncertain; no authors explicitly exclude Western Europe from the media imperialism thesis. It also seems that empirical evidence about international television flows, and particularly about their effects, is scarce. Until recently the empirical 'evidence' in both major and minor studies of international communication flows has mainly comprised compilations of examples at a 'trade press level' referred to above, plus routine reference to the classic systematic empirical work by Nordenstreng and Varis. More recently, reference has normally been made to Varis (1985), but this has not changed the dominant understanding since the conclusions of this study are similar to that of the earlier joint work (Nordenstreng and Varis, 1974). […]

Proposal for a Conceptual Framework

There is an obvious need for a framework to guide descriptions and analyses in the field of research on international communication flows. Such a framework is suggested in this section. Television is used as an example but the basic elements of the framework apply to all kinds of media content.

The general purpose of all studies on international television flows has been to establish knowledge about the movement of programmes between countries on the assumption that these have cultural and economic effects in specific countries or regions or among specific groups of viewers. Some of the most frequently used concepts in the publications based on these studies are 'international', 'transnational', 'internationalization' and 'transnationalization'. The references listed at the end of this article convey the impression that these concepts are normally used without reference to commonsense definitions to describe both the flows (the independent variable) and their effects (the dependent variable).

An investigation of the application of these notions in a number of central contributions to the literature on international communication flows does not add to conceptual clarity (see Nordenstreng and Varis, 1974; Read, 1976; Tunstall, 1977; Lee, 1980; *Many Voices*, 1980; Janus, 1981; Janus and Roncagliolo, 1979; Hamelink, 1983; Anderson, 1984; Mattelart et al., 1984; Mowlana, 1986; Varis, 1985).[1]

In these publications 'internationalization', and the now more frequently used 'transnationalization', are employed to describe several phenomena: the expansion of something transnational, the global penetration of, for example, advertising, the transcending of borders, the growth of transnational companies or even growth of co-productions, and sundry effects like the homogenization of cultures, the creation of new non-indigenous cultures and cultural synchronization.

All the above mentioned publications are interesting contributions to the study of international communication flows, but none of them offers a general
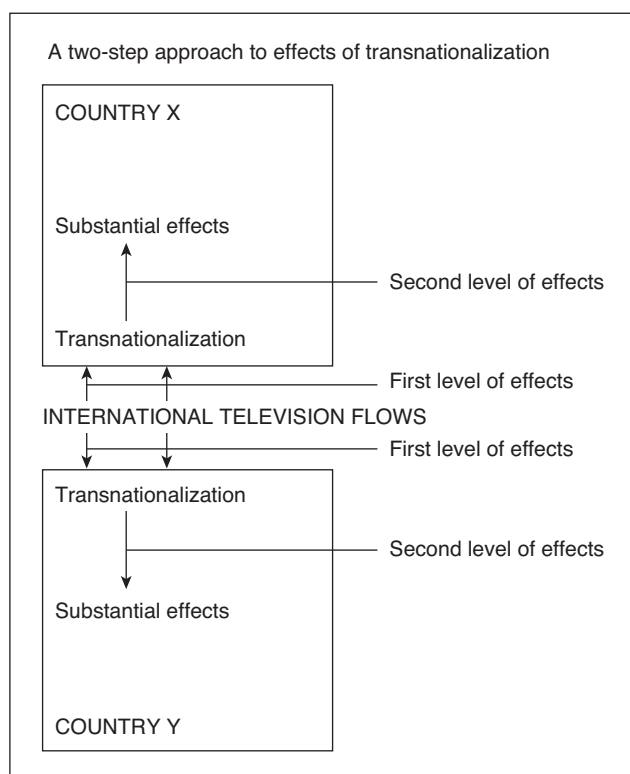
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FIGURE 2.1   A TWO-STEP APPROACH TO EFFECTS OF TRANSNATIONALIZATION

At the first level transnationalization is a dependent variable and at the second level an independent variable.
The independent variable at the first level is 'television flows'. At the second level the dependent variable is 'substantial effects'.

systematic approach which is clearly related to communication theory, or a consistent vocabulary which could be used by other researchers – and which might have improved the accumulated results of this research by preventing the fragmentation of approaches and reported findings.

As a modest beginning towards a general, systematic approach I suggest a two-level understanding of international television flows. First, the flows as defined by Mowlana (1986: 4, see note 1) should be considered as an independent variable influencing or determining the dependent variable, transnationalization, which will be defined in detail below when the basic framework is developed. This means that transnationalization is understood as a 'first-level' effect of international flows.

The second level conceives transnationalization as an independent variable creating or determining the dependent variable, that is, the (substantial) effects which actually can be perceived from a cultural, economic or consumer point of view, such as the formation of values, the contents of television, conditions for national public service broadcasters or patterns of programme consumption (see Figure 2.1).

The first level – transnationalization as an effect of international television flows – must be thoroughly and systematically described before the second and more interesting level of aggregated substantial effects can be examined. In some ways this is not a very exciting exercise – which may be why there are so many attempts to jump from some kind of description of flows to the second-level effects. However, the first step is necessary in order to establish a properly conceived context for approaching the 'second-level effects'.

Concentrating now on the 'first-level' effects, I suggest that the transnationalization variable is related to a specific 'area' like a country, a group of countries or delimited groups of TV viewers.[2] Transnationalization, therefore, is basically perceived as a national phenomenon, which is a consequence of international flows as defined above. Transnationalization of supply therefore is the transnationalization of nationally offered supply which means certain television signals using standard technology that are available to a given country (or group of countries or groups of viewers).

The next step in a systematic approach is to specify the object of 'transnationalization'. The objects normally dealt with in existing research are 'ownership', 'supply' and, to some extent, 'consumption'. I will concentrate here on 'transnationalization of television supply' and 'transnationalization of television consumption'.

In order to define and operationalize 'transnationalization of national supply' and 'transnationalization of national consumption' more precisely, I suggest a distinction between three 'sources' or 'dimensions' of supply and consumption. Television supply may be divided into the national supply of multilaterally distributed television, the national supply of bilaterally distributed television and the national supply of nationally distributed television. These divisions are reflected in the concept of transnationalization and taken together they constitute the total 'transnationalization of supply and consumption'.

The national dimension of national supply and consumption relates to television distributed by the domestic media (e.g. by national public service broadcasters). This is referred to as 'nationally distributed television'.

The bilateral dimension of national supply and consumption relates to television which originates in the domestic media of another country and reaches the nation under consideration (through normal transmission, or by satellite, etc.) simultaneously and unedited (e.g. West German television in neighbouring countries). This is called 'bilaterally distributed television'.

The multilateral dimension of national supply and consumption relates to television originating outside a particular country and with no single intended direction of the flow (e.g. the signals from pan-European satellites). This is called 'multilaterally distributed television'.

Every communication flow naturally has a technical point of origin. In principle the multilateral dimension could be expressed as the sum of bilateral transnationalization transmissions between the specific (technical) country of origin and the countries where the signals are available. However, the substance of the multilateral dimension is the existence of communication flows for which the

'receiving country' is (relatively) unimportant and for which a multiplicity of directions are intended. The classification of television as bilateral or multilateral therefore depends on the motives for distributing the signals. Bilateral television assumes a national anchoring of the distributor and national distribution as the predominant purpose. The distributor of multilateral television has no substantial national relationship and distribution to several countries is the major purpose of the activity.

These dimensions of transnationalization are directly related to the sources of supply created by present technology and are thus convenient for future research because they adapt the analysis of international television flows to the development of information technology in recent years in Western Europe.

Since the last UNESCO-sponsored study on international television flows in 1983 (Varis, 1985), reception from neighbour countries has continued to grow, satellite channels have been established and the numbers of West European television channels have almost doubled (Schrape, 1987; cf. 'Television Programming in Europe', No. 2, 1987). It is now more necessary than ever to keep track of the sources of, and routes for, television output in a given country and also of the distribution of output (and consumption) between the three main dimensions of transnationalization. This type of monitoring may become an important basic tool for both technologically and culturally oriented media policy decisions.[3]

The most substantial argument, however, for separating the three dimensions is the hypothesis that the important 'second-level' effects are related to the sources of transnationalization.

If the two-step approach is accepted, and bearing in mind that transnationalization is basically a national phenomenon with three dimensions, I would suggest the following set of standard transnationalization measures of the 'first-level effects' of international television flows.

Transnationalization of Supply

The Multilateral Dimension

T(m)-S is the supply of television in a specific country which is multilaterally distributed. (T(m)-S may be measured in hours or as a share of total supply of television hours. In principle T(m)-S also applies to a group of countries or specific group of viewers.)

T(m)-S/CO is the supply of television in a specific country produced in a designated country of origin which is multilaterally distributed. (T(m)-S is the sum of T(m)-S/CO measures. T(m)-S/CO may be measured in hours or as a share of total supply of television hours or as a share of multilaterally supply. In principle T(m)-S/CO also applies to a group of countries or specific groups of viewers.)

The Bilateral Dimension

T(b)-S is the supply of television in a specific country which is bilaterally distributed. (T(b)-S may be measured in hours or as a share of total supply of television hours. In principle T(b)-S also applies to a group of countries or specific groups of viewers.)

T(b)-S/CO is the supply of television in a specific country from a designated country of origin which is bilaterally distributed. (T(b)-S is the sum of T(b)-S/CO measures. T(b)-S/CO may be measured in hours, as a share of total supply of television hours or as a share of bilateral supply. In principle T(b)-S/CO also applies to a group of countries or specific groups of viewers.) Notice that T(b)-S/CO normally has two elements – domestic production from the country of origin and imported programmes to that country – which may influence a detailed calculation of an accurate T-S/CO – see next section.

The National Dimension

T(n)-S is the supply of television in a specific country which is nationally distributed and has been produced outside the country under observation. (T(n)-S may be measured in hours, as a share of total nationally distributed television supply or as a share of total supply in the country. In principle T(n)-S also applies to a group of countries of specific groups of viewers.)[4]

T(n)-S/CO is the supply of television in a specific country which is nationally distributed and has been imported from the designated country of origin. (T(n)-S is the sum of T(n)-S/CO measures. T(n)-S/CO may be measured in hours, as a share of total nationally distributed television supply, as a share of all imported, nationally distributed television hours,[5] or as a share of total supply in the country. In principle T(n)-S/CO also applies to a group of countries or specific groups of viewers.)

T(m)-S, the T(b)-S and the T(n)-S measures may be added to one T-S measure covering all transnationalization of supply of television in the country (region or group) under observation. This is also true for a parallel T-S/CO measure.

Transnationalization of Consumption

The Multilateral Dimension

T(m)-C is the consumption of television in a specific country which is multilaterally distributed. (T(m)-C may be measured in hours or as a share of total consumption of television hours. In principle T(m)-C also applies to a group of countries or specific groups of viewers.)

T(m)-C/CO is the consumption of television in a specific country produced in a designated country of origin which is multilaterally distributed. (T(m)-C is the sum of T(m)-C/CO measures. T(m)-C/CO may be measured in hours, as a share

of total consumption of television hours or as a share of consumption of multilaterally distributed television.)

The Bilateral Dimension

T(b)-C is the consumption of television in a specific country which is bilaterally distributed. (T(b)-C may be measured in hours or as a share of total consumption of television hours. In principle T(b)-C also applies to a group of countries or specific groups of viewers.)

   T(b)-C/CO is the consumption of television in a specific country from a designated country of origin which is bilaterally distributed.

   (T(b)-C is the sum of T(b)-C/CO measures. T(b)-S/CO may be measured in hours, as a share of total consumption of television hours, or as a share of consumption of bilaterally distributed television. In principle T(b)-C/CO also applies to a group of countries or specific groups of viewers. Notice that T(b)-C/CO normally has two elements – consumption of domestic production from the country of origin and consumption of imported programmes to that country – which may influence a detailed calculation of an accurate T-C/CO – see next section.)

The National Dimension

T(n)-C is the consumption of television in a specific country which is nationally distributed and has been produced outside the country under observation. (T(n)-C may be measured in hours, as a share of total consumption of nationally distributed television or as a share of total consumption of television hours in the country. In principle T(n)-C also applies to a group of countries or specific groups of viewers.)

   T(n)-C/CO is the consumption of television in a specific country which is nationally distributed and has been imported from the designated country of origin.

   (T(n)-C is the sum of T(n)-S/CO measures. T(n)-C/CO may be measured in hours, as a share of total consumption of nationally distributed television, as a share of all consumption of imported, nationally distributed television hours,[6] or as a share of total consumption in the country.)

   T(m)-C, the T(b)-C and the T(n)-C measures may be added to one T-C measure covering all transnationalization of consumption of television in the country (region or group) under observation. This is also true for a parallel T-C/CO measure.

   A number of measures of transnationalization have been suggested above.[7] Depending on the unit of measurement most of them are addable. Some are rather fictional constructions, others are relatively easy to administer. The exact choice of measures depends on the purpose of registering transnationalization. Generally it is important (1) to realize the diversity of the (first-level) transnationalization effects of international television flows; (2) to be specific about the

OBJECT	Total trans-nationalization in country, region, or social group	Dimension of transnationalization		
		Multilaterally distributed television	**Bilaterally** distributed television	**Nationally** distributed television
SUPPLY	T-S	T(m)-S:1;2 T(m)-S/CO: 1;2;3	T(b)-S:1;2 T(b)-S/CO: 1;2;4	T(n)-S:1;2;5 T(n)-S/CO: 1;2;5;6
CONSUMPTION	T-C	T(m)-C:1;2 T(m)-C/CO: 1;2;3	T(b)-C:1;2 T(b)-C/CO: 1;2;4	T(n)-C:1;2;5 T(n)-C/CO: 1;2;5;6

FIGURE 2.2   SUMMARY OF MEASURES OF TRANSNATIONALIZATION

1: hours; 2: share of total; 3: share of multilateral; 4: share of bilateral; 5: share of national; 6: share of imports.

effects considered; and (3) to agree on definitions and the operationalization of the effects.

The proposed measures of transnationalization are summarized in Figure 2.2.

Future Research

It is indisputable that much more systematic empirical research is needed on the consequences of international television flows. Speculation and guesswork dominate the contemporary scene, and the practice of cross-cultural communication is far ahead of knowledge of its effects.

Future research must relate to some kind of generally accepted framework along the lines suggested here. First- and second-level effects must be clearly separated. The dimensions and subjects of transnationalization must be specified and related to programme contents, consumption, perception and gratification. Local and regional television and bilaterally and multilaterally distributed television must be incorporated and much more work must be undertaken to identify the determinants of transnationalization of supply, together with the receiver-oriented determinants of consumption, and of course the cultural, economic and social consequences of this consumption. The role of commercialization for both 'first- and second-' level effects must be given an especially high priority in research.

These general recommendations can be implemented both in public and private audience research and in individual projects. Substantial developments in research on international television flows can only be achieved by broad international approaches undertaken or sponsored by international organizations – preferably UNESCO – since studies limited in scope to individual countries are of less use. If, however, predominantly impressionistic material continues to result from the more global approach to research that is recommended here, then

regional, sub-regional or even national surveys must be preferred, in order to obtain findings of a sufficiently high quality.

Notes

1. Read (1976: 18) explicitly tries to distinguish between 'international' and 'transnational'. Mowlana (1986: 4) defines what has here been called the general commonsense understanding of transnational or international: 'International flow of information is defined here as the movement of messages across national boundaries between and among two or more national and cultural systems'.
2. For the sake of convenience I primarily associate transnationalization with individual countries in the following presentation of the outline of a conceptual framework for the first level of analysis.
3. To take three examples, one can think of (1) the usefulness of being able to compare coefficients of utilization (the share of supply consumed) related to public and private investments in technical facilities for providing a supply of the categories used here; or (2) the need for (international) competing broadcasters to keep track of the sources and thus the nature of the competition; or (3) that it is easy to imagine that politicians will ascribe different 'values' ('threats' or 'promises') to the transnationalization of supply or consumption caused by nationally, bilaterally or multilaterally distributed television.
4. It appears to be primarily a question of definition whether to include co-production as adding to T(n)-S. The issue may be of some practical relevance if co-produced television hours continue to grow. Unfortunately, the solution to the problem ideally seems to depend on the country under observation and the nature of the co-production.
5. This dominant 'measure' in existing research is unsuitable and often misleading.
6. This measure is unsuitable and often misleading.
7. In research on international communication flows much attention has been given to the ownership of media capital. This aspect of transnationalization may benefit from the use of a parallel to the three dimensions of transnationalization suggested here. Besides that, it is necessary to develop a much more precise approach than has been applied so far. One of the main problems has been to establish a relationship between 'second-level' effects and the potentially multidimensional role of media capital.

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