“This book is a superb work clearly expressed by the two authors. They arrange a journey in words and illustrations to satisfy, as well as to inspire, anyone in the field of global communication.”
Hussein Amin, The American University in Cairo

“Comprehensive, timely insights from two leading scholars about the rapid changes in media and their influence on perceptions, politics, and cultures around the world. The chapter on developments in the Middle East is exceptional in capturing current realities through on-the-ground research. This book will be useful to all students and scholars interested in understanding media’s role in the world.”
Sandra Whitehead, Hariri Canadian University, Lebanon

The World News Prism enjoys a well-earned reputation for excellence in its in-depth analysis of the changing role of transnational news media in the twenty-first-century. In the eighth edition of this classic text, the authors expand their discussion of news systems in developing nations and the impact of digital media on traditional societies. A new chapter dedicated to evolving media in Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere in Africa and the Middle East explores the role of the Internet, cell phones, and Al Jazeera in facilitating momentous political change in the region. The book also provides important updates on the decline of print media in the West and the challenges this poses to global reporting now and for the future.

Combining scholarly insights with a concise and accessible writing style, The World News Prism: Challenges of Digital Communication lends remarkable clarity to the fog of today’s global information revolution.


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To the many journalists around the world who have been killed, kidnapped, or jailed for reporting the news.
The World News Prism

Challenges of Digital Communication

Eighth Edition

William A. Hachten
and James F. Scotton
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Preface to the Eighth Edition

No matter where people live in the world, most “news” or public information is local. People care about what happens in their community, their country, their region. Yet in today’s interconnected and globalized world, people everywhere easily learn about and are affected by important international news – terrorist attacks, wars, civil strife, economic upheavals, and great catastrophes such as earthquakes and tsunamis, that occur in distant lands. More than ever before in history, more people are both informed and almost everywhere now have opinions – whether about globalization, the United Nations, nuclear proliferation, or about who should lead their nation. The on-rush of digital communication – the Internet, social media, cell phones – is helping make this possible.

In early 2011, international news made a dramatic comeback fueled by a series of unexpected political revolutions first in Tunisia and then Egypt where President Hosni Mubarak was ousted and then throughout the Arab world in rapid succession to Bahrain, Libya, Yemen, Jordan, Syria, and elsewhere. The streets of long-standing authoritarian Arab states were suddenly filled with angry, mostly young, protestors demanding freedom, democracy, human rights and jobs. Communication media had clearly facilitated the uprisings. Protestors were mobilized and informed by cell phones, the social media of Facebook and Twitter and news of these startling events were transmitted to Arab publics by the Internet and Al Jazeera and other Arabic broadcasters as well to the rest of the world.

Unrest, protests, and brutal repressions continued on including warfare with Libya against NATO forces and rebels.

In March 2011, Japan took over page one when the island nation was struck by a magnitude 9 earthquake followed by a massive tsunami that devastated large areas taking a toll estimated at 30,000 dead and missing victims. Severe damage to several nuclear power plants prolonged the
calamity to the world’s third largest economy. With prolonged revolution in the Arab world and quake/tsunami turmoil in Japan, television coverage of foreign news in 2011 was at its highest levels since the 9/11 attacks ten years earlier. News, it has been said is a process and it may be years before the full implications of the “Arab spring” and Japan’s recovery will be known.

The terrorist attacks on New York’s World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington, DC abruptly altered the lives of Americans and sharply impacted on international news communication. With the collapse of those two skyscrapers and about 3,000 lives lost, Americans (and many others) no longer felt secure and personally safe from the perils of a dangerous world. Terrorist hijackings and bombings were not new – from 1983 to 2001, ten attacks had claimed the lives of 100 or more Americans. But the 9/11 attacks were the largest violent taking of life on US soil since the Civil War. Most of us agreed that the nation was at war with terrorism – the first war of the twenty-first century.

So, as in early 2011, on 9/11 the news media responded quickly, professionally, and at times magnificently. Global television – up-to-the minute and non-stop, with vivid color video and without commercial interruptions – reported the horrifying details of the tragedy to every corner of the world. The horrific but awesome video of the two airliners crashing into the twin towers of the World Trade Center was etched into the minds of millions. Supplemented by radio, the Internet, and print, much of the world saw the same video and reports as Americans and Britons. This elicited unprecedented responses of sympathy and empathetic support from many other nations. Yet in some places of the Muslim world, there was elation and celebration. Yet in 2011, Arabs generally supported the anti-authoritarian uprisings in their societies.

The evolving events – war against the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the quick military defeat of Saddam Hussein’s army followed by the long insurgent conflict in Iraq – were followed with great interest. The reporting of the horrific events and the world’s response were reminders of how much we have become a global society. Not just in trade and economic affairs but in social and political ways, we are increasingly coming together. But continuing acts of terrorism also were grim reminders that deep divisions between rich and poor countries remain. Democratic societies, with their open borders and individual freedoms, were vulnerable to stealth attacks. Radical terrorism was termed the dark underside of globalization.

As the first decade of the twenty-first century ended and 2011 political eruptions began, the world was still an unstable and dangerous place as war
ground on in Afghanistan and terrorism threats emerged in the failing states of Somalia and Yemen. As nations slowly emerged from a global recession, people everywhere sought news to plot their futures and to comprehend the import of the multiple Arab uprisings.

Yet another less apparent series of technological changes in news communication has both facilitated and disrupted the traditional news media and the many publics or audiences for serious news and commentary throughout the world. The digital media – the Internet, personal computer, email, cell phones, bloggers and social web sites, Twitter, Facebook, and so on – have encroached on and reduced the journalism practiced by the great newspapers and journals, news services, and television and radio services that have historically reported the world to itself. News printed on paper or broadcast on television screens and radio receivers has been sharply diminished. The audiences have been diminished as well.

In this revised edition, we will show how the news media have responded to great crises as well as to technological changes. Journalists from everywhere flocked to the Middle East even as armed forces mobilized. But within months, media coverage and public interest in Iraq had diminished.

Only subsequent events and history will determine how significant the events will become in modern history. But there is no doubt that the year 1989 was historic. Then, the world watched on television in dazzled amazement as communist regimes were toppled in Poland, East Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania. Two years later, the Soviet Union itself, after a right-wing coup failed, went through a convulsive revolution of its own, outlawing the Communist Party and its media as well as dismantling the Soviet Union itself. These historic events also heralded the end of the Cold War, and the demise of the propaganda or “information wars” that had enlivened international communication for forty-five years. However, new propaganda wars, now focused on terrorism and the relations of Muslim nations with the West, have gained momentum in recent years.

The post Cold War world of the 1990s proved to be a harsh and forbidding place. The forces of intense nationalism and unleashed ethnic animosities have led to civil wars, genocide, terrorism, political instability, and economic and social chaos starkly evident in the prolonged and agonizing strife engaging the Bosnian and Kosovo Muslims, Croatians, and Serbs of the former Yugoslavia. Elsewhere, various experiments in democracy and market economies sputtered and foundered.
The decade of the 1990s was also one of great global economic expansion. In China and throughout East and South Asia, economies grew at spectacular rates and world trade expanded as a new phenomenon, globalization, was recognized and elaborated. Globalization is an inexact expression for a wide array of worldwide changes in politics, communications, business and trade, life styles, and culture. Even before the quake Japan’s economy has had severe problems. In our new post-Cold War world with its increasingly globalized economy, economic concerns have sometimes taken precedence over political concerns.

Elsewhere, over 120,000 innocent civilians died in an irrational six-year civil war in Algeria, a half dozen nations have fought a nasty and prolonged regional war over the Congo, genocide flared up again in Rwanda and Burundi, and in Israel bitter violence continued with the Palestinians; and North Korea’s erratic and starving Communist regime, with its potential nuclear threat, has worried the West. Other global concerns: India and Pakistan have both tested nuclear devices but may have moved somewhat toward reconciliation. In the horrendous earthquake in Pakistan in October 2005, Indian soldiers joined Pakistani troops in relief efforts after 86,000 died. Peace and stability were tantalizingly near, but not fully realized, in Northern Ireland. The recent disastrous earthquakes in Haiti and Chile brought forth an unprecedented surge of relief funds and manpower to alleviate the great suffering that still continues.

Recently, as the world has worried over potential nuclear bomb threats in Iran and North Korea at the same time genocide has appeared in Sudan and has challenged the United Nations to intervene in the Darfur conflict, which has claimed over 180,000 lives and made 2 million people homeless refugees.

International communication in general has been affected by world events as it has continued to expand its reach. International broadcasting has become less propagandistic and more informative and entertainment-minded. In most countries, journalists have enjoyed greater access to news. New independent and outspoken publications and broadcast outlets have sprouted like mushrooms in spring. Communication satellites transmitting news and pop culture have proliferated, and media audiences have greatly expanded, especially in China and India.

Personalized digital media have proved to be a many headed hydra that has greatly increased the ability of people everywhere (and we mean everywhere) to receive news and comment AND to communicate it onward. But the old model of global communication based on a few great news organizations has been undermined and diminished. The downsizing of
print and broadcast media have significance for global news communication. But the future of media is unclear – just as it was when Gutenberg’s printing press shook up the middle ages.

Further, personalized media – videos, VCRs and DVDs, audiocassettes, personal computers, cell phones, and fax machines – have continued their rapid global penetration, as did cablevision and the Internet. Western Europe has been going through its own regional communication revolution, with transnational competition between commercial cable and satellite systems, as it moves haltingly toward economic integration.

The ongoing rush of technological innovations in foreign reporting has accelerated. Direct broadcasting from portable transmitters to satellites and then back to dish antennas – bypassing complicated, expensive ground installations – has become commonplace. Small portable earth terminals, for example, have enabled broadcast journalists reporting remote news events to send their video reports directly to satellites and thus to the whole world. The cell phone and the videophone have played unexpected roles in news dissemination. A news report in Afghanistan or, for that matter, in almost any faraway troubled area, can instantly become a global news event. In just a few years, the Internet has become a player of great and ominous potential in international communication for both journalism and as a device that lets people share ideas freely on a global network. Bloggers and even hackers have joined the fray as controversial conveyors of news and comment that critique and challenge traditional news media.

In this age of information, communications systems are at the leading edge of social, economic, and political change. With the unprecedented growth in global telecommunications, an informed global community has developed a more immediate concern with both world news and the symbiotic relationship between events and those who report them. For this eighth edition, the text has been thoroughly revised, with new material added to every chapter. More attention has been given to significant media developments in developing nations, particularly those in the Arab world – some of which have been producing many more media users who respond in different ways to the world news prism. The chapters on China and the Middle East provide in-depth analyses in the ways that digital media are changing traditional societies.

– W.A.H. and J.F.S.
Introduction

After years of global fretfulness about the brute effectiveness of modern armaments, it turned out during one of the most pervasively revolutionary years of the twentieth century, if not of all recorded history, that the most potent single weapon in nearly every conflict was the video camera. In nation after nation, vastly superior military forces were stood off and frequently compelled to retreat before the symbolic and testimonial power of televised images.

– William A. Henry III

As the tragic and war-stained twentieth century (and the old millennium) came to an end, we were reminded both of the changes as well as continuities that have marked journalism and international communications in our times. In 1900, all the elements were in place in Western nations – great metropolitan newspapers, rotary presses and linotypes, the typewriter, the telegraph and the undersea cable, the Associated Press, Reuters, and other cooperative news gatherers – as building blocks for the changes to come. News was recognized as a valued and useful commodity in itself and as an essential means of comprehending and coping with a strange and distant world. At the same time, sensationalism and trivia had long been standard fare in the press and entertainment media.

But no one could have foreseen the political and social changes to come in our tumultuous times as a result, in part, of the greatly enhanced speed, volume, and reach of international news and public knowledge. Journalists and broadcasters jetting about the globe with videocameras, Comsat phones, and laptop computers reported great events instantly via satellite
and Internet networks and, in so doing, often became participants and catalysts in global news stories. Sometimes they became celebrities themselves.

For over a century, the press has reported news from abroad, but it has been only in the past three decades that we have seen how great events abroad vividly illustrate the technotronic age, the melding of technology and electronics, that planet Earth has entered. It is a new era of information whose potential we but dimly perceive; whose complicated gadgetry only few of us totally grasp; whose social, political, and economic consequences are accelerating change and cleavages among the nations of the world.

For the world we live in today is changing rapidly, in no small part because worldwide television, communication satellites, high-speed transmission of news and data, and other computer and electronic hardware and software (including the Internet) have transformed the ways that nations and peoples communicate with one another. The fact that a news event can be transmitted almost instantaneously to newsrooms and onto television and computer screens (and into cell phones) around the world can be as important as the event itself. Long-distance mass communication has become a rudimentary central nervous system for our fragile, shrinking, and increasingly interdependent, yet fractious, world.

Journalism has been undergoing rapid changes. In what journalist and biographer Walter Isaacson has called a “glorious disruption” the traditional journalism of print on paper is rapidly giving way to journalism by digital technology. As a result, newspapers, news services, broadcast stations and networks, and news and commentary magazines have been sustaining great losses in circulations, audiences, and advertising revenues. These financial setbacks make it difficult to fully report global news and commentary. Basically, there is more information and news than ever before circulating the globe but there are fewer serious professional journalists reporting and verifying it. The Internet with its proliferating blogs, emails, web sites, and so on, spew out vast amounts of information and data but much of it is unverified, inaccurate, biased, propagandistic, opinionated or just downright wrong.

People everywhere have more access to much more information than ever and also have an enhanced ability to communicate themselves through the Internet, cell phones, and others devices like Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, and so on. But what the public is not getting is sufficient hard news that is verified, confirmed, and reliable.
The Western press, found mainly in North America and Europe, is struggling to find a new business model that will enable the “old media” to survive economically. The future of global news depends on it. And there are other disconcerting side effects.

The accelerating speed and efficiency of news media transmission has often created severe strains on the standards and ethics of responsible journalism. The same system can and does report much trivia, sensation, and misinformation. The news eruptions that followed the death of Michael Jackson and the travails of golfer Tiger Woods illustrated how news now breaks twenty-four hours a day, around the clock, instead of at the more leisurely pace that prevailed before the rise of twenty-four-hour cable television news and interactive news on the Internet. As fierce competitors such as MSNBC, the Fox Channel, and CNN with their talk and opinion shows have proliferated on cable as well as blogs online, some news organizations have relaxed their rules on checking and verifying sources. There is a growing sense that getting it first is more important than getting it right. One result is journalism that is sometimes shaky, inaccurate, or worse, and with it has come a serious loss of public trust in news media. The rapid reporting of all aspects of the already mentioned Tiger Woods scandal in 2009 illustrated how the Internet enflamed and accelerated widespread coverage of salacious news of little serious importance and soon the story had spread to all news media.

High among the various factors contributing to the collapse of communist regimes (and their press) was certainly the global impact of Western communications in all their diversity and seductive appeal. For throughout the 1980s, two great groundswells rolled through the seas of international communication. On an incoming tide, the methods of organizing and distributing news and mass culture developed in Western democracies had washed inexorably over the globe, driven by innovations in media technology and expanding audiences, along with a resurgence of market economies on a global scale.

Some have suggested that increasingly the US-Anglo model of journalistic values and news-making practices have, for better or worse, become a universal standard for the rest of the world. (More will be said about this later.)

On an outgoing tide, the theory and practices of communist or Marxist/Leninist public communication have become widely discredited by the many millions living under communist regimes, as well as their own journalists and rulers. The resounding rejection was directly related, of
course, to the worldwide failures of socialist political economies and, particularly, the rejection of communist political rule in Eastern Europe. The crowds that protested communist regimes in Warsaw, Beijing, East Berlin, Prague, Budapest, Sofia, and Moscow in 1989 were also calling for more open and free media systems – the kind they knew about from images and sounds from the West. Expanding waves from these astonishing events radiated to the former Third World. Even African countries felt pressures for multiparty democracy.

Chronic crises and instability in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and Iraq have unsettled the strategic Middle East and Western media coverage is often slipshod and inadequate to inform the outside world.

Africa – beset by economic stagnation; drought and famine; political unrest and corruption; and brutal civil wars in Sudan, Somalia, Congo, and Rwanda – has in fact retrogressed. Hopes for meaningful democracy in Kenya, Zimbabwe, Ivory Coast, and Congo have all been dashed recently. It is no coincidence that, with the exception of South Africa, these troubled nations have inadequate media systems and cannot participate fully in a globalized world.

Today’s uni-polar world, with the United States as its uncertain and often unpopular leader, is challenged not only by terrorism but other related problems, such as resurgent nationalism, poverty, racism, and religious fundamentalism. To these can be added the ups and downs of a sometimes faltering global economy.

This book analyzes the changing role of transnational news media in our evolving globalization and its impact on rapidly changing news events. In the ongoing concern about terrorism, global news media have played a major role both in informing the world and in organizing and facilitating responses to terrorism. (The media are also an unwilling accomplice of terrorism by publicizing the atrocities and carrying the email messages of terrorists.) Throughout this book, the emphasis is often on the role of US news organizations, yet we acknowledge that news media of many other nations – East and West – contribute to this cooperative activity of reporting the world to itself. And as the world modernizes, journalists of more and more nations are contributing to the flow of international news and popular culture.

News has increasingly become a powerful political and diplomatic force. For example, when US television shows stark pictures of starving Somali mothers and children, American public opinion becomes concerned, and the White House watches, hesitates, and then sends in the military to help
feed the starving and keep the peace. A few months later, a dozen American soldiers are killed in an ambush in Somalia, and the US public is outraged at seeing on television the body of an American soldier dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. Soon, the White House announces that troops will be withdrawn.

News, instantaneous and vivid, speeds up history as it directly influences diplomacy and government policies. At the same time, in this age of satellites, the Internet, and shortwave radio, tyrants find it impossible to keep unflattering news about their regimes from reaching their own people. (Yet terrorists use the Internet to inform their followers and coordinate acts of terror.) On the one hand are the technological and operational changes taking place in the international news media, with their enhanced capability for global communication that is reshaping “spaceship Earth.” Wider communication often seems to exacerbate political and cultural conflicts between the West and Islam, between rich and poor nations. Also, there are the frictions and the problems these changes have wrought, including conflicts over transnational news gathering and the impact of television programming, motion pictures, videos, radio broadcasting, and other aspects of mass culture, most of it coming out of the United States and Europe.

Another area of concern is that, when no crisis intrudes, serious international news seems often to be shunted aside for more profitable content. “Infotainment” – scandal, sensation, celebrities – has become more and more the staple of news media in many countries.

Before 9/11, network television news programs, from which most people get their news, had sharply cut back on the amount of foreign news on the major networks. Similar trends were seen among the news magazines. This reflects (or explains) why Americans and others have been showing a declining interest in news from abroad. The terrorism crisis of 2001 reversed this trend, but only for a few months.

This book deals with various facets of the changing media and their impact on transnational journalism and mass communication. It is intended to provide some insights into how and why international news communication is evolving. Few of us can appreciate, much less fully understand, the meaning of the global information revolution we are living through. The major components of this quiet revolution are the computer, the Internet and telecommunications, principally the communication satellite plus other sophisticated electronic devices that have become as much a part of our lives as the electric light.
We may not be aware of how our perceptions of the world are being changed by the transformed news system, but we quickly learn to take that system for granted. If there is another terror attack on a major city or another major earthquake in Haiti or Chile, we expect to see live television reports the same day or on a twenty-four-hour news channel, such as BBC World or CNN, within the hour via satellite. We are fascinated but not surprised to see detailed, computer-refined pictures of the exploration of planet Mars or the dramatic saga of the space shuttle as well as the grim daily war stories from the Middle East.

In a broader context, the fact that information of all kinds, including urgent news, can now be communicated almost instantly to almost anywhere has profound implications for international organization and interaction. News of Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, for example, had an almost immediate impact on the price of gas at the pump and initiated an international diplomatic reaction resulting in mass deployment of US military forces. And the world’s subsequent perceptions of the crisis and war were certainly shaped and, at times, distorted by the flickering images on television screens. Instant information is often not the whole truth or a complete picture and, on occasion, does sharply distort images that people receive.

Still, global news has many uses. The global financial media’s day-to-day reporting of financial crises in Asian stock markets and currencies, and their effects on the financial markets and economies of Asia, Europe, and America, illustrates how many millions around the world, including small stockholders, rely on fast, accurate information in their daily lives. The global economy simply could not function without the flow of fast and reliable information provided by the growing global business media – both print and electronic.

A new global society of sorts is emerging rapidly and inexorably, though experts disagree about its extent and nature. (Many nations, especially in the Middle East and Africa, do not feel a part of it.) The media of mass communication, along with global telecommunications, air transportation, and growing interdependence of national economies, are providing the essential linkages that make interaction and cooperation – and stealth terrorist attacks – possible.

Full understanding of the nature of this new society requires that today’s students of international communication be conversant with world politics and economics, including recent history, and be quick to recognize significant trends as they occur. Further, they must understand national and
cultural differences and keep up with technological innovations in communication media, such as the Internet and social media, and with changing journalistic practices.

Communication satellites are just one example of the truly revolutionary impact that communication technology has had on the modern world. The earlier role of transistor radios in the Third World was another; today the small hand-held video camcorder is having news effects undreamed of. As we will see, the Internet is beginning to be perceived as yet another technological marvel that may dramatically alter international communication. FM radio, cell phones, and cable television are each having unexpected impacts in developing nations.

The interplay of these elements makes the study of international communication fascinating and important. The major emphasis throughout this book is on the journalistic aspects of international communication—the new challenges and perils of reporting the news, the important but imperfect and controversial ways that journalists and mass communicators keep the world informed. Further, the cultural and entertainment facets of media are often significant as well.

Several chapters concern the changing media—the ways that international journalism is adapting to altered global conditions, changing concepts of news, and utilizing the new hardware of our information age.

Currently, for the first time in history, all nations, however remote, have stepped onto the stage of the modern world. What happens in Rwanda or Indonesia, or Afghanistan, can have global significance and often sends repercussions around the world, in part because events happening there are reported. More importantly, a much greater degree of interdependence among all peoples and nations has developed.

The world has been evolving an international news system that moves information and mass culture ever faster and in greater volume to any place on Earth where an antenna can be put on a shortwave radio receiver, where dish antennas can receive television programs from a communication satellite, or, increasingly, where there is a personal computer with a modem hooked onto the Internet. The cell phone with connections to the Internet is becoming a potent player in global communication. Although politics, economic disparities, cultural and linguistic differences, and ideology keep us apart on many issues, the international news system has on occasion made us one community, if only briefly—as when Neil Armstrong took that “one giant leap for mankind” in 1969. An estimated 600 million people throughout the world watched that first walk on the moon, and they sat
before their television sets not as Chinese, French, Africans, or Japanese, but as earthlings watching in awe as one of their kind first stepped onto another planet.

Actually, the reporting of Armstrong’s moon walk has further relevance for this book because the new information age is partly an outgrowth of the exploration of space. The communication satellite, high-speed data transmission, and miniaturized computer technology are by-products of space technology, and all are playing integral roles in the transformation of international communication and transnational journalism.

The modern practices of globally collecting and distributing news are only about 100 years old and were initiated by the news agencies of Britain, the United States, and France. Today, the world agencies – the Associated Press (United States), Reuters (Britain), and Agence France-Presse (France) – are still an important but far from only, conduit of transnational news, although they and other media have been transformed by digital technology. Change has been coming so quickly that it is often difficult to stay up-to-date with the ways in which news is being moved. And to understand the future potential of say, the Internet, is like trying to perceive in 1905 what the absurd horseless carriage or the telephone would do in time to the cities and life styles of the twentieth century.

Furthermore, technology and global reach are modifying some of the institutions of transnational communication. Subtly and almost imperceptibly, various media, including the news agencies, are evolving from national to increasingly international, or better, to supranational institutions of mass communication. Concomitantly, English is clearly the world’s leading media language.

The international news media, furthermore, are unevenly distributed among nations, creating serious frictions between the haves and have-nots in mass communication. The explosion of communication technology has coincided with the post World War II decolonization of the Third World, and the penetration of Western news and mass culture into the newly independent nations, as well as into the former communist bloc. This has been perceived by some as a new attempt to reassert the domination of the former colonial powers. Certainly, the Western media – and the nations behind them – are much resented in many of what are now referred to as “failed nations.”

Part of this book focuses on the differences that frustrate and at times inhibit the flow of international news and divide journalists and mass communicators: political and ideological differences, economic disparities,
geographic and ethnic divisions. The media of all nations, it can be argued, reveal biases imposed by the constraints of nationalism and parochialism. When US soldiers are engaged in a military clash in Afghanistan, the subsequent news report on NBC television will differ from that carried on Al Jazeera, the Arabic broadcaster. There is no “true” news report of any event, only a variety of conflicting views out of which hopefully a consensus of sorts can be reached about what exactly happened.

The conflicts and frictions in international communication arise in part from divergent concepts of mass communication. In the concept of the press that has evolved in Western democratic nations, journalists are relatively independent of government, free to report directly to the public that uses the information to understand the world and to assess its governors. This view is unacceptable to authoritarian nations, which control and manipulate their media to serve better the goals of the state and their often unelected leaders. In numerous, mostly impoverished nations, a similar theory – the developmental concept – has emerged, which holds that mass media must be mobilized to serve the goals of nation building and economic development.

The deep differences between the media-rich and media-poor nations reflect closely other differences between rich and poor nations. Despite the impressive gains in the technical ability to communicate more widely and quickly, the disturbing evidence is that in some ways the world may be growing further apart rather than closer together. Most of the benefits of the communication and information revolution have accrued to the industrialized nations of the West, and to Japan and the Pacific Rim nations. For an individual to benefit fully from the news media, he or she ideally should be literate, educated, and affluent enough to have access to a variety of news sources. Unfortunately, in our unfair world, the largest share of such individuals are found, for now, in the few industrialized democracies. Yet the world’s two most populous nations, China and India, have greatly increased the audiences and readership of their media.

The world’s system of distributing news can be likened to a crystal prism. What in one place is considered the straight white light of truth travels through the prism and is refracted and bent into a variety of colors and shades. One person’s truth becomes, to another, biased reporting or propaganda – depending on where the light strikes the prism and where it emerges. As we understand the optics of a prism for measuring the spectrum of light, so must we understand and accept the transecting planes of different cultural and political traditions that refract divergent
perceptions of our world. Obviously, Islamic terrorists have a radically
different view of the world than most Europeans have.

We must acknowledge how the light refracts for us. In considering the
problems of international communication, we have tried to be sympathetic
to the views and frustrations of people in non-Western nations and the
enormous difficulties they face. Journalism is a highly subjective pursuit,
tempered and shaped by the political conditions and cultural traditions of
the particular society where it is practiced; the news and the world do look
different from Shanghai, Lagos, or Baghdad than they do from Chicago.

As products of the Western press tradition, we believe journalists in their
pursuit of the news should be suspicious of, and disagree at times with, other
political leaders and other journalists as well as the owners of the media. For
the essence of journalism is diversity of ideas and the freedom to express
them. We agree with Albert Camus, who wrote:

A free press can of course be good or bad, but certainly without freedom, it
will never be anything but bad... Freedom is nothing else but a chance to
be better, whereas enslavement is a certainty of the worst.

And in the dangerous, strife-ridden world of the twenty-first century, we
believe that the billions of people inhabiting this planet deserve to know
more about the events and trends that affect their lives and well-being. Only
journalists who are free and independent of authoritarian controls and
other constraints can begin the difficult task of gathering and reporting the
news and information we all have a right and need to know.
Globalization is not simply a trend or a fad but is, rather, an international system. It is the system that has now replaced the old Cold War system, and like that Cold War system, globalization has its own rules and logic that today directly or indirectly influence the politics, environment, geopolitics and economics of virtually every country in the world.

– Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*

The rapid integration of the world’s economy, loosely called globalization, has been facilitated by an information revolution driven by communication technologies that provide a nervous system for our world today. Globalization is a broad and inexact term for a wide array of worldwide changes in politics, economics, trade, finance, life styles, and cultures. To its critics, globalization is trendy and controversial; they see the world becoming a consumer colony of the United States, led by Coke, McDonald’s, Nike, and the vast pop-culture output of Hollywood. How people feel about globalization often depends a lot on where they live and what they do.

With just a visit to a mall, one is struck by the plethora of products and services from many distant lands. In the past thirty years, much of the world’s economy has become increasingly integrated; direct foreign investment has grown three times as fast as total domestic investment. But globalization is more than buying and selling; some see it as a
profound interchange of cultures – a communication revolution that is dissolving our sense of boundaries, our national identities, and how we perceive the world.

Deregulation of telecommunications systems and computerization have been called the parents of globalization. Three technologies in particular – computers, satellites, and digitalization – have converged to produce a global communications network that covers the Earth as completely as the atmosphere. Today’s era of globalization is characterized by falling telecommunications costs, thanks to microchips, satellites, fiber optics, and the Internet.

For example, some 400 million viewers world wide watched together on television as Spain defeated Holland in the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. The popular culture of the West – movies, television shows, music CDs, video- and audiocassettes, books, magazines, newspapers – has been flowing increasingly about the world. It can be argued that the world is beginning to share a popular culture, based only in part on that of the West. Critics differ about what happens when cultures meet.

Rather than fight, cultures often blend. Frederick Tipson noted, “More like a thin but sticky coating than a powerful acid, this cosmopolitan culture of communication networks and the information media seems to overlay rather than supplant the cultures it interacts with.”¹ When cultures receive outside influences, it is said, they ignore some and adopt others, and soon begin to transform them. An example can be something called *bhangra pop* in India – music that sounds like Jamaican reggae but is played on Indian instruments and then amplified.

Critics of this global media market castigate globalization for several reasons: the centralization of media power; and heavy commercialism, which is linked to declines in public broadcasting and public service standards for media performance. Media are seen as a threat to democracy because of lessened public participation and concern with public affairs. Press critics have other concerns about these corporate giants. The news media, they argue, risk becoming submerged and neglected inside vast entertainment conglomerates that are primarily concerned with entertainment profits.

Most of these criticisms are leveled at Western media, and these critics neglect to consider how globalization has spurred the growth of media and their audiences in the developing non-Western nations.

Others see globalization in more positive terms. It is argued that many millions more people than ever before now have access to news and
information, especially in such countries as China and India and much of Southeast Asia. Globalization means that multitudes now have many newfound choices: how they will spend their leisure time; what they will watch or read; what to buy with newly acquired personal income from rapidly rising standards of living. Anthropologist James Watson wrote, “The lives of Chinese villagers I know are infinitely better off now than they were 30 years ago. China has become more open because of the demands of ordinary people. They want to become part of the world – I would say that globalism is the major force for democracy in China. People want refrigerators, stereos, CD players.”

Journalist Thomas Friedman wrote that globalization is essentially about change, which is a reality and not a choice: “Thanks to the combination of computers and cheap telecommunications, people can now offer and trade services globally – from medical advice to software writing to data processing – services that could never be traded before. And why not? A three-minute call (in 1996 dollars) between New York and London cost $300 in 1930. Today it is almost free through the Internet.”

The primacy of the issue of globalization reminds us of the extent to which most of us now think and act globally – as a matter of course. In his book, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the 21st Century*, Friedman expands his earlier views and sees dramatic changes in the forces for global leveling from the fall of the Berlin Wall, which eliminated the ideological divide in the world, to the rise of the Internet and technological changes that have led to new economic models of production and collaboration, including outsourcing and offshore manufacturing. Now nations such as China and India, as well as others in South Asia, have prospered in dramatic ways. The integration of some 3 billion people into the global economy is of major importance. Just one facet of this global flattening is that the media of communications have become increasingly pervasive in these rapidly modernizing places. Literally many millions are now, through the Internet, cell phones, satellite television, and publications, are “in touch” with the greater world. But while the new technologies are closing gaps between parts of India and China and the advanced industrial nations, the gaps between those countries and Africa have been widened. The world’s nations may not have a level playing field, but the world is changing in critical ways. And for many millions in those nations considered to be “developing,” their standards of living have improved rapidly.