

Editorial

Media and Communication between the Local and the Global

Jessica Gustafsson ^{1,*} and Kinga Polynczuk-Alenius ²

¹ School of Culture and Education, Södertörn University, 141 89 Stockholm, Sweden; E-Mail: jessica.gustafsson@sh.se

² Media and Communication Studies, University of Helsinki, 00014 Helsinki, Finland; E-Mail: kinga.polynczuk@helsinki.fi

* Corresponding author

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Abstract

This editorial introduces the thematic issue of “Media and Communication between the Local and the Global”. It does so first by presenting the origin of this thematic issue: the *Media, Globalization and Social Change* division at the NordMedia 2017 conference. The thematic issue is then anchored theoretically through discussion of the widely conceived notion of mediation as a technological, symbolic and ethical process—highlighting the interest in how media actors and communication technologies, practices and artefacts mediate between global phenomena and local contexts, which is what unites the contributions to this thematic issue. Last, the final section of this editorial introduces the articles, which coalesce around three broad themes: migration, marginalised communities, and consumption.

Keywords

communication; consumption; global; local; marginalised communities; media; mediation; migration

Issue

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1. Background

This thematic issue is an outcome of the *Media, Globalization and Social Change* division at the biennial NordMedia conference held in August 2017 and hosted by the Faculty of Communication Sciences at the University of Tampere, Finland. The conference, which has been organised since 1973, brings together media and communication scholars from—and also increasingly outside of—the Nordic countries of Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Iceland. The general theme for the 2017 conference, “Mediated Realities—Global Challenges”, encouraged researchers to ponder the role of the media and communications in contemporary life-worlds, cultures and societies. In particular, it invited scholars to think across the scales of “global” and “local”, as well as how global challenges such as financial crisis, climate change and forced migration, were mediated in the Nordic region, and how they impacted on the Nordic welfare states.

The contributions to the *Media, Globalization and Social Change* division embraced this theme, but also expanded upon it. The division covers a wide range of theoretical approaches and empirical areas of study that investigate communication, media cultures, media institutions, ideologies, texts and media consumers from an international, transnational or global perspective. Following these interests, the articles brought together in this thematic issue elaborate upon how global phenomena such as migration, marginalisation and consumption, play out in various local contexts—sometimes confined to and sometimes reaching beyond national borders.

2. Media and Communication between the Local and Global

The claim that media and communication are amongst the critical forces driving the contemporary processes of globalization has become somewhat of a cliché (e.g., Rantanen, 2004; Thompson, 1995; Tomlinson, 1999). As

technologies, media and communication connect their users and recipients to the world and its peoples, both known and unknown (e.g., Silverstone, 1999, 2004). They can also become tools by which individuals, communities and societies may impact upon their lived realities. They may, for example, help the disenfranchised individuals and groups to articulate, reflect on, and find solutions to their experience of marginalisation and exclusion (Gumucio-Dagron, 2005; Jallo, 2012). In the process, they may empower the marginalised subjects and groups to gain more control of decisions concerning their own lives (Mefalopoulos, 2005). As practices, discourses and artefacts, media and communication serve to highlight and explicate the link between global processes such as migration, as well as structures such as economic inequalities, and the local realities and everyday lives of the audiences (e.g., Berglez, 2013; Chouliaraki, 2006, 2008a, 2008b). Theoretically, it is possible to discuss all these aspects of media and communication using the concept of mediation.

A globalised world is a world mediated: we get to know distant people and places through media representations more than through direct experience (Chouliaraki, 2006; Silverstone, 1999). Furthermore, direct human contact is increasingly complemented and extended by media and communication technologies (Thompson, 1995). Mediation therefore describes the use of various modes and technologies of communication to transcend time and space (Livingstone, 2009; Silverstone, 1999; Tomlinson, 1999). As such, it is a technical process enabled by the capacity of communication technologies to transmit content across physical distances (Silverstone, 2008).

Mediation however, need not always involve media technologies. It can also be approached as a symbolic process whereby communication provides a terrain for (re)constructing, (re)circulating and (re)consuming meanings and forms within and among societies (McCurdy, 2013). As such, mediation involves an important ethical element: to mediate is to create through communication a sense of immediacy, understood as both proximity and urgency; it is to bridge geographical, social, cultural and moral distance in a bid to create meaningful connections among people, close and distant (Livingstone, 2009; Silverstone, 1999; Tomlinson, 1999).

3. Contributions

While the articles presented in this thematic issue may not explicitly engage with the theory of mediation, they all explore different mediation practices by critically examining the relationship between media and communication on one hand, and phenomena such as migration, development, social change, gender and consumption, on the other. They individually invoke a range of theoretical and methodological approaches, but what unites them is the attention to the mediated interplay between the local and the global, the home and the world, the

self, in-group and humanity at large. By investigating this interplay, they tackle the following questions:

- How do global media and communication technologies mediate the lived realities of locally situated individuals?
- How can media and communication help migrants and their close ones to mediate between their current location and the “home” from which they have been physically dislocated?
- How do journalists mediate between global phenomena—particularly forced migration—and local audiences?
- How are the global connections mediated through the discourses and artefacts of consumption?

With those questions in mind, the contributors to this thematic issue consider this interplay within three broad themes: migration, marginalised groups and consumption. Although migration has a history as long as humankind, in recent years we have witnessed an increased level of forced migration. For that reason, four of the contributions to this issue approach the phenomenon of migration from varied perspectives.

Heike Graf’s (2018) article “Media Practices and Forced Migration: Trust Online and Offline” examines the use of mobile phones among the recent migrants in Sweden and Germany through the notion of trust derived from the systems theory of Niklas Luhmann. The article suggests that the online sphere, accessible through the phone, helps the migrants connect to and stay in contact with their familiar world from which they are physically removed. However, the smartphone can also function as a substitute for human beings and human contact; using GPS services on one’s own smartphone, there is no need to ask a stranger in the host country for directions, thereby avoiding the risks of being met with hostility. The familiar device offers security in an unfamiliar setting, yet it can also impede the establishment of trust in the host society.

In the article titled “Female Bodies Adrift: Violation of the Female Bodies in Becoming a Subject in the Western Media”, Tuija Parikka (2018) looks closer at the media representation of the mass harassment of women during the New Year’s celebrations in Europe in 2016. She then juxtaposes the interpretation offered by journalists in their news reporting with how the events were perceived and understood by migrants. In doing so, she explores whether and how the body can function as the socially constructed medium for politicizing culturally specific possibilities of becoming a subject.

Markus Ojala and Reeta Pöyhtäri (2018) also approach migration from a journalistic perspective. Their contribution “Watchdogs, Advocates and Adversaries: Journalists’ Relational Role Conceptions in Asylum Reporting” examines how journalists in Finland perceive their role in the context of reporting the ‘migration crisis’. In line with the social-interactionist approach, the ar-

ticle argues that journalists' role conceptions in this specific case are influenced by the current political context and journalists' interactions with officials, asylum seekers and anti-immigrant publics. Thus, Ojala and Pöyhtäri emphasise that the role conceptions develop in relation to different reference groups.

Elham Atashi (2018) approaches the theme of migration by turning the focus on the Iranian diaspora community. Her contribution, "Iranian Diaspora, Reality Television and Connecting to Homeland", analyses the reality TV show *Befarmaeed Sham*, which is the Iranian diaspora's version of the UK format *Come Dine with Me* that has become popular among the diaspora audience as well as the Iranians living in Iran. The article illustrates how the local adaptation of global reality format can help create a space for the Iranian diaspora to connect to home, engage in national debates and introduce topics previously taboo. The article concludes that the show can potentially influence civic engagement and the identity formation of Iranians back home.

Departing from the thematic of migration and aligning with the theme of marginalised groups, Jessica Gustafsson's (2018) article "Domestic Connectivity: Media, Gender and the Domestic Sphere in Kenya" explores how increased access and use of media technologies has changed Kenyan women's everyday life in the domestic sphere. It argues that media technologies have helped transform the domestic sphere from a secluded place to a connected space where women can get input and interact with the world beyond their immediate surrounding, whilst concurrently fulfilling their domestic duties. Media technologies enable enhanced communication and offer new ideas and perspectives. Yet in order to understand women's ability to implement these in their lives, an intersectionality perspective is needed as factors such as education, income, and rural/urban location not only influence women's access to media, but also how they use media.

The final two articles explore the theme of consumption from different perspectives. Kinga Polynczuk-Alenius' (2018) contribution "The Dialectics of Care: Communicating Ethical Trade in Poland" examines how care is communicatively constructed by Polish ethical trade organizations. Adopting the concept of the dialectics of care, the article argues that the organizations take the "local moral horizons" and personal experiences of their situated audiences into consideration when trying to promote ethical trade. Polynczuk-Alenius identifies two distinct tactics adopted by the organizations when advocating the care for distant producers while simultaneously catering for the interest of the Polish public: linking it to the discourse of product quality, and connecting it to care for oneself, one's family and society. By using these two strategies the organization manage to communicate and raise awareness of global interconnectedness.

Trine Kvidal-Røvik's (2018) article "The Meaning of the Feminist T-Shirt: Social Media, Postmodern Aesthetics, and the Potential for Sociopolitical Change" examines

consumer culture as a potential avenue for political or social change. This contribution suggests that it is critical to recognize resistance through consumption as it reaches places that traditional politics rarely managed to reach. Additionally, sociopolitical messages in consumer culture can express counter-hegemonic standpoints, despite operating within neo-liberal (i.e., hegemonic) structures. Social media presents new ways of circulating and spreading these sociopolitical messages and new opportunities for consumers to express their views and opinions about consumer culture.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors



Jessica Gustafsson is a senior lecturer in Media Studies at Södertörn University, Sweden. She recently finished her post doc fellowship within the Nordic-Kenyan research project *Critical Perspective on the Appropriation of New Media and Processes of Social Change in the Global South* at Aarhus University, Denmark. She holds a PhD in Media studies from Department of Media Studies, Stockholm University, Sweden.



Kinga Polynczuk-Alenius is a researcher in media and communication at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki. She has recently defended her doctoral dissertation titled *Ethical trade communication as moral education*. Her articles have been published in academic journals such as *Globalizations* and the *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. Kinga is currently launching a new project on everyday mediations of racism and nationalism in Poland.