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How global media rules

Written by [arif Academia](#), [Media Analysis](#) Mar 21, 2012

Farooq Sulehria, The News 21-03-12

When we talk about the global media, what comes to mind is not a daily, a radio station, or a TV channel from Ghana, Guatemala, China, Indonesia or Egypt. Think of the global media and American, British, French, German, or Japanese links come to mind.

Of late, Al Jazeera, Globo, Bollywood, and RT have registered their presence. However, they are no match for Western media conglomerates. Progressive American media scholar Toby Miller, in his book Television Studies

offers a devastating picture: CNN broadcasts to over 130 nations in the principal languages of the world, with globally-generated as well as regionally-specific content, which is a key to its prominence. In the area of news and current affairs, the US continues to be the major source around the world, while Britain has about a fifth of global exports.

This power is exerted via CNN and the BBC on the one hand and news agencies-Associated Press Television News and Reuters Television-on the other. Germany has two major networks across Asia, received by over a thousand satellite systems, with three-quarters of programming in German and a quarter in English. The US bombards Iran with satellite TV in Farsi (25 networks as of 2005, many of which focus on politics), generated by Iranian expatriates in southern California who say they are against the Islamic Republic. And MTV? By 2008 it was in 162 countries in 33 languages, with revenue not only from the sale of shows but from massive merchandising.

According to Miller, the US children's channel Nickelodeon is available in well over 150 countries. "Young people across Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa are familiar with SpongeBob, and 80 percent of programming for children outside the white-settler colonies and China comes from the US." Similarly, the Disney-owned sports cable channel, ESPN, has 31 networks outside of the US. Its texts are on sale in 194 countries and territories in 15 language groups. It has 13 customised stations in Asia and is screened throughout the Middle East on satellite.

Robert McChesney, another progressive US media scholar, delineates the picture poignantly. The global media system, he says, is the province of fewer than one hundred firms that provide the vast majority of the world's media fare. There are two distinct tiers to global media hierarchy. "The first tier is composed of less than ten trans-national media conglomerates that all collect between \$10 billion and \$35 billion per year in annual media-related revenues. The remaining eighty or ninety firms are smaller, and tend to concentrate more upon one or two media sectors, and they are more likely to be national or regional powerhouse. A great chasm separates the first-tier media firms and those near the bottom of the second tier. AOL, Time Warner or Viacom, for example, have annual sales some fifty times greater than the fiftieth-largest media firm in the world," he reports.

However, all leading global media giants either have US roots or large US operations: AOL Time Warner, Disney, Viacom, Bertelsmann (Germany), News Corporation (Australia), Sony (Japan), and Vivendi Universal (French). Understandably, 68 percent of global media exports originate from the US. The UK is a distant runner-up (9 percent), but British export is still three times as much as its nearest rivals France and Australia. Among other things, English, as the biggest language of imperialism, helps level the global media field for the US and the UK. It is, therefore, the US and the UK which have been most enthusiastically seeking fewer barriers to the international circulation of their cultural artefacts as the international activities of their cultural/copy rights industries since they make an increasingly important contribution to their GDPs: some \$110 billion to the US and £11.6 billion for the UK.

Should we bother in Pakistan? Or any other Third World country, for that matter? As concerned citizens we should. In the first place, the global media aggressively cultivates consumerist practices. Tissue papers, shampoos, soaps, tea brands, cold drinks, mobile phones are no longer rarities on the countryside of either India, Pakistan or elsewhere in the colonial world. Also, global media are growing at the cost of the indigenous press. In the writer's ancestral village, meanwhile, the fibrous herbal stick miswak, whose sap serves as a teeth-cleaning agent, has largely been replaced in the last few years by toothbrush and toothpaste.

For instance, the print media in both Pakistan and India have been suffering losses ever since the advent of new television systems that either have global links through ownership (in case of India) or depend upon global business for advertising (in the case of Pakistan).

We largely view the world through the media. It is our window on the world. If we see the world through the eyes of the West, we will be siding with Tarzan instead of blacks without asking: what is Tarzan, a white man, doing in African jungles?

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