Chapter 51
New Media and Cultural Identity in the Global Society

Guo-Ming Chen
South China University of Technology, China & University of Rhode Island, USA
Kai Zhang
University of Rhode Island, USA

ABSTRACT

New media has been the main force accelerating the development of globalizing society in the last two decades. With its digital, convergent, interactive, hypertextual, and virtual nature, new media has brought human interaction and society to a highly interconnected and complex level. The rapid transformation of human society due to the impact of the convergence of new media and globalization directly influences the construction and development of cultural identity. The emergence of new media and globalization not only breaks through the limit of the traditional time and space, but also may challenge the meaning of cultural identity. The purpose of this chapter is to unravel the intricate relationships between new media, globalization, and cultural identity through the process of definition, interpretation, and critical analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of communication and transportation technologies has shrunk the size of the globe and the scope of the world, in which the interdependence between people and people, culture and culture has become a norm rather than an exception of human society. The trend of interconnecting people from every corner of the world is gradually leading people to the so-called “global village” (McLuhan & Fiore, 1968), “global community” (Holt, 2000), “cyber-communities” (Cook, 2000), “virtual communities” (McChesney, 1996), or “wired cities” (Dutton, Blumer, & Kraemer, 1987). All these transitions of human society, along with the ending of the Cold War, inevitably induce the restructure of power and changes of ideologies in the process of political interaction among nations. They also yield opportunities for scholars to explore the impact of new technology on the future development of human society. As argued in this chapter, the change of human society is especially reflected
New Media and Cultural Identity in the Global Society

in the transformation of cultural identity due to the impact of the convergence of globalization and new media.

Among these scholars, some investigated the influence of the information age formed by new media on human society from political, economic, global, and other perspectives (e.g., Berger & Huntington, 2003; O’Meara, Mehlinger, & Krain, 2000; Ye, 2003). Others attempted to examine the future direction of human interaction from the aspects of intercultural communication, international business and management, and international negotiation and problem solving (e.g., Adler, 2002; Harris, Moran, & Moran, 2007). More recently, scholars began paying attention to the relationship between cultural identity and new media in the context of globalization (e.g., Dai, 2007; Holmes, 1997; Halualani, 2008; Morley & Robins, 1995; Tan, 2005). However, very few scholars directly examine the relationship between cultural identity and new media in the context of globalization. The purpose of this paper was then to bridge this gap of research by analyzing the mutual effect between new media and globalization, and the impact of the convergence of new media and globalization on cultural identity. The following section first stipulates the concept of globalization, followed by the discussion of the relationship between new media and globalization, and finally expounds the impact of the convergence of new media and globalization on cultural identity.

GLOBALIZATION

The advent of the new century, after years of immersion in the capitalism system, may mean a gradual transformation of the old society into a new one which demands a different way of thinking and lifestyle. The globalizing society represents a state of competition and co-existence among different cultures. Although the history of contact between different societies or ethnic groups has been thousands of years (Lubbers, 1998), the impact of globalization on modern society is far beyond what people could imagine a few decades ago. In economy, for example, to succeed in global competition a modern company must possess the ability to seek for open markets around the world, to gain enough profits through effective management in global business transactions, and to meet the needs of global clients by acquiring the knowledge and understanding of local markets (Gupta & Govindarajan, 1997).

From social and cultural perspectives, globalization has a significant impact on sense of community, establishment of civic society, and cultural diversity (Chen & Starosta, 2000). Globalization has redefined the meaning of community with a new look at inclusiveness and collective sense of identity. The wall between traditional communities also collapsed due to the constant flush of globalization. This transformation, based on extension and expansion from the local to global level, provided citizens in the 21st century opportunities and challenges for learning how to harmoniously co-exist and develop an ideal future world.

Nevertheless, the coming of a global society won’t necessarily guarantee that a new sense of human community will follow. A new sense of community requires members to fully involve in the construction of the global society through a learning process. It aims to tolerate the differences of races, classes, cultures, religions, and genders, and to cultivate the capacity of solving the problems or conflicts caused by stereotypes, discrimination, and prejudices. In other words, the ideal goal of the new global community is to develop a space in which members can co-exist peacefully through communication and dialogue.

The change of the meaning of traditional community demands a redefinition of the concept of citizenship, which deals with the relationship between local community, national community, and global community. For example, could these communities be identical? If not, how do citizens