

# Global Communication and the GVC Framework

International communication is the area of media studies devoted to cross-border media scholarship. This research argues that the sub-discipline stands at a crossroads because its concepts were fashioned when a clear line of demarcation between the local and the global prevailed. This line has blurred and the distinction is no longer extant, questioning the purposefulness of existing approaches. The solution I propose is for the discipline to shift to global value chain (GVC) analysis. Adopting such a network-oriented theoretical framework brings two benefits. It offers a holistic view and an integrated analysis of the whole system, eschewing a piecemeal approach that fails to give a full account of an industry that is shaped by all its components (e.g. lead firms as well as suppliers) and the relationships between them.

All industries present features that make them distinct, but all are grappling with issues, such as entry into the digital economy, which are cross-sectoral. The tools of GVC analysis facilitate the contextualisation of television in global capitalism and enable us to analyse its response to wider trends, such as the impact of digital platforms, the explosive growth of outsourcing, and the restructuring influence of GVCs.

This chapter explains why and how I intend to apply the GVC framework in media and communication, and how it can help us understand media globalisation. Chapter 2 applies the framework to television.

## International Communication: The Key Paradigms

Born in the aftermath of the Second World War, international communication went through a succession of paradigms. All have strengths and weaknesses, and all reflect the political times they were born in.

The first doctrine, known as free flow of communication, was formulated at UNESCO, the United Nations' (UN) organisation for education, science, and culture, in the aftermath of the Second World War. At the organisation's second

general conference in Mexico City in 1947, delegates from thirty-six member states reasoned that a free flow of communication would create a better understanding among nations and help secure peace and security. They agreed to 'remove existing obstacles to the free flow of ideas by word and image' (Valderrama, 1941: 41). As good as these intentions were, the looming Cold War would take the discipline in an altogether different direction and help shape the next two paradigms.

'Modernisation theory' arose when the Cold War's two superpowers vied for hegemony across various corners of the world. The made-in-USA theoretical framework postulated that media act as agents of change by raising aspirations and creating a positive climate for development (Lerner, 1958; Schramm, 1964). The paradigm had numerous shortcomings, not least its ethnocentrism and propensity to presume that Western civilisation was the pinnacle of development (Thussu, 2019: 42–5). Nonetheless, it is within this framework that seminal large-scale research on cross-border media flows was conducted, which produced the first data set that highlighted the inequalities of the world media system (Schramm, 1964: 90–113).

Modernisation theory was challenged by the cultural imperialism thesis that emerged in Latin America in the 1960s and that dominated the discipline for years to come. It fit in the dependency model that questioned the benefit of development imposed by the West. The theory of the 'development of underdevelopment' held that developing countries (the periphery) were made dependent on industrialised nations (the core) in trade and technology (Fejes, 1981; Salinas and Paldán, 1974). Scholars focused on the imbalance of the communication flow and argued that news and entertainment products travelled from the West to the Global South without counterflow: whilst Anglo-American agencies dominated the global news trade and Hollywood movies travelled widely, cultural products from the developing world rarely – if at all – reached the West. They further argued that the global dominance of Western media created a cultural hegemony that threatened local cultures. Media conglomerates were the missionaries of capitalism, and their content was aimed at converting developing countries into a market economy and their audiences into consumers of global brands (Dorfman and Mattelart, 1975; Herman and McChesney, 1997; Mattelart, 1979; Schiller, 1992). A group of scholars who met in Mexico in 1991 summarised the cultural imperialism position as follows: 'We deplore the cultural pollution and loss of tradition which have led to global rootlessness, leaving humans, through the intensity of mass-marketing, vulnerable to the pressures of economic and political totalitarianism' (Schiller, 1992: 38).

It is from this premise that grievances about Western hegemony in the international communication system arose in the Non-Aligned Movement of

the 1970s. Such concerns were structured into a diplomatic position that was subsequently articulated in the UN system. In 1978, UNESCO issued a declaration and the UN General Assembly adopted an official resolution calling for a 'New World Information and Communication Order' (NWICO). The commission set up by UNESCO in 1977 was chaired by Irish statesman Sean MacBride, and involved Hubert Beuve-Méry (the distinguished journalist and founding editor of France's newspaper of reference, *Le Monde*) and Columbia's Gabriel García Márquez. Its landmark report, 'Many Voices One World', made eighty-two recommendations that addressed disparities of the international communication order (MacBride, 1980; Nordenstreng, 1984; Chapter 11).

Whilst ideologically standing poles apart, modernisation theory and cultural imperialism have more in common than at first appears. Both perspectives approached international communication from a national perspective: the former sought to harness media for national development, while the latter was preoccupied with the defence of cultural sovereignty. During the Cold War, international relations were structured by an antagonism between nation states, and the prevalence of a national dimension influenced the epistemology of international communication scholarship. The discipline was suffused with methodological nationalism and all its operating concepts (e.g. national development, cultural sovereignty) were shaped by the politics of the nation state. The institutions that commissioned international communication studies, such as UNESCO, were themselves the theatre of conflicting national interests heightened by the Cold War. Governments and their rivalries shaped the terms of the debate, and it was impossible to think of international communication beyond the horizon of the nation state.

Like elsewhere in the social sciences, international communication took a postmodern turn in the late twentieth century (Susen, 2015). Mirroring other disciplines, the field eschewed a holistic and structural perspective and leant towards a relativist and interpretative path (Susen, 2015: 40–83). Focus shifted from the investigation of the economic and political structures underpinning the world media system to the study of globalisation as a cultural and subjective experience. The assumptions of the previous paradigm were dismantled one by one. The cultural imperialism thesis takes for granted the dominance of the West, argues John Tomlinson, and fails to recognise the shifting 'distribution of power' engendered by the decentring nature of globalising processes (Tomlinson, 1997: 185). The old views are too simplistic to give account of the new 'global cultural economy', which is a 'complex, overlapping [and] disjunctive order', added Arjun Appadurai (Appadurai, 1990). Néstor García Canclini set forth that the 'one-directional schema of imperialist domination' fails to provide an explanation for contemporary cultural processes provoked by phenomena such as migration

(García Canclini, 1995: 230). Sinclair, Jacka, and Cunningham concurred that the one-way flow of communication was an inaccurate depiction of reality and cultural imperialism did not take into account the emergence of geo-linguistic regions, and the growing popularity of regional content within them (Sinclair et al., 1996).

In the process, the discipline lost theoretical coherence but freed itself from the prison-house of the nation state and shed light on new trends. Where the old thesis never questioned the sanctity of national culture, the new approach focused on cultural diversity (Tomlinson, 1991: 73). Against a reified notion of culture, scholars emphasised the in-betweenness and ambivalence of cultures. Banerjee observed that a contrast had emerged between the former paradigm that emphasised cultural ‘domination and hegemony’ and the new research agenda that concentrates on ‘interconnection and diversity’ (Banerjee, 2002: 519). For Jan Nederveen Pieterse, hybridity is a common feature of cultures, and ‘hybridization as a process is as old as history’ (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001: 222). Globalisation is simply accelerating it, producing ‘fusion cultures that combine new technologies and existing social practices and cultural values’ (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001: 222).

Concepts such as adaptation, deterritorialisation, and transnationalisation helped shift attention towards the interconnection and interdependence of cultures. Fears about cultural homogenisation were ill-founded because cultural products mutate and adapt as they move between cultures (Tomlinson, 1997: 181–2). García Canclini defined deterritorialisation as ‘the loss of the “natural” relation of culture to geographical and social territories’ (García Canclini, 1995: 229). Cultural practices are no longer fixed by geography but travel and combine with other practices to create new cultural experiences in other locales. Morley and Robins defined the transnationalisation of culture as ‘a process in which the “vertical” organization of people within national communities is . . . being supplanted by their organization into “horizontal” communities – people are connected electronically rather than by geographical proximity’ (Morley and Robins, 1995: 61). The new research agenda made migrants’ cultural practices more visible, shedding further light on the diversity and complexity of contemporary cultures. Robins and Aksoy approached migrants as transnational viewers, experts at drawing from different cultural repertoires in order to create a new knowledge experience for themselves (Aksoy and Robins 2000; Robins and Aksoy, 2005).

The great merit of the new discourses of globalisation is the deconstruction of the national dimension – once the cornerstone of all preceding paradigms. In the process, the discipline has become theoretically heteroclitic and it would be vain to look for a governing paradigm. The waning of international communication as a cohesive discipline is partly explained by its postmodern turn. However, it may also reflect the evolution of cross-border media: when the local and global are closely entwined does a discipline that focuses on the international still make

sense? The discipline is at a crossroads, and the investigation of the macrostructures of the media industries necessitates a renewed epistemological and theoretical thrust.

## **A Discipline at a Crossroads: From International to Global Communication**

International communication developed as a field of study when a clear line of demarcation existed between the national and the international. Markets and broadcasters operated discreetly on a nationwide basis with no deep interaction across frontiers. The national was the prevailing dimension and the international was everything foreign. Entertainment conglomerates were expanding, but the bulk of their activities remained confined to their domestic market (Flew, 2013: 24). As the global shift progressed, the national and the international began to merge and the boundaries between the two became blurred (Chapters 1 and 2). Contemporary media trends, from TV formats to YouTube, are typically transnational. In sum, as borders become less relevant, so has international communication: its tools and concepts are rarely called upon to shed light on global media phenomena such as streaming platforms, social media entertainment, or esports (e.g. Burgess and Green, 2018; Cunningham and Craig, 2019; Lobato, 2019; Rogers, 2019).

While our understanding of contemporary cultural trends has progressed, our knowledge of the economic and political dimensions of media globalisation remains sketchy. I once fashioned the notion of a ‘cosmopolitan mode of production’, arguing that transnational TV networks contributed to the global integration of industries such as music, fashion, or finance (Chalaby, 2009: 230–1). However, my earlier approach could not explain how media globalisation works and why the TV industry operates as a global system. I came to the conclusion that advances in this field of research would necessitate a new perspective provided by the GVC framework. It forms the core of the *global communication approach*, which rests on three principles.

First, the global communication approach is interdisciplinary in scope, combining insights from various disciplines. Because of the growing interdependence of economies, most studies in media management and media economics (including research on media ownership, concentration, and financialisation) are relevant in an international context independently of the geography they focus on. When these studies factor in the industry’s transnational scope, it increases their applicability to global communication research (e.g. Aris and Bughin, 2009; Chan-Olmsted and Wirth, 2006; Doyle, 2013; Holt and Perren, 2009; Küng, 2017;

Picard and Wildman, 2015; Vogel, 2020; Winseck and Jin, 2012). A growing body of work, subsumed under the labels of production studies and creative labour studies, focuses on the tensions between agency and social conditions, asymmetric forms of power and control, and class and gender identities in the global media industries (e.g. Banks et al., 2016; Christopherson, 2012; Curtin and Sanson, 2016). This scholarship is not automatically associated with the discipline of international communication but needs to be incorporated into the global communication approach.

Second, the concepts of global communication must embody the epistemological qualities to shed light on the historicity of the processes at play. Globalisation has multiple ramifications, but its engine is economic and is driven by capitalism. Capitalism is a historical mode of production: it replaced earlier economic models, went through multiple phases since inception, and its survival has long been questioned (Braudel, 1992a; Schumpeter, 1947). Global communication scholars must comprehend globalisation as a historical process for two reasons: globalisation is part of a multisecular evolution that began with the inception of an international division of labour several centuries ago, and it is connected to a historical mode of production. It is this connection that defines the features of economic globalisation, and must therefore remain an integral part of the analysis.

Finally, global communication is a cosmopolitan approach; it avoids all forms of nation-centrism and breaks away from the prison-house of the national perspective. Ulrich Beck argued that methodological nationalism fails to grasp the complexity of globalisation, which 'not only alters the interconnectedness of nation states and national societies but the internal quality of the social' (Beck 2000: 87). He called for his own discipline, sociology, to move towards 'methodological cosmopolitanism', which is the German sociologist's attempt to 'build a frame of reference to analyse the new social conflicts, dynamics, and structures of Second Modernity' (Beck 2002: 18).

Global communication embraces this agenda. Some scholars attempt to adapt theoretical frameworks developed in national settings to the study of media globalisation and add the prefix 'global' in front of 'media industries' or 'creative industries'. By way of contrast, the GVC perspective is explicitly designed around the study of transnational production networks. Its epistemology is devoid of nation-centrism and is dedicated to the understanding of economies and industries in a global setting.

This agenda is underscored by the unit of analysis: the *global* TV industry is examined holistically as a single systemic entity. All its interconnected elements are interdependent and therefore considered part of the same system. By focusing exclusively on lead firms, the media literature ignores suppliers. Likewise, while

consolidation through various forms of integration has attracted a great amount of interest, de-verticalisation, which is as significant a phenomenon, is largely ignored. The remainder of this chapter lays out the theoretical foundations of this project.

## The GVC Framework

The conceptual lineage of the GVC theoretical framework can be traced back to Fernand Braudel, a second-generation scholar of the Annales School (Burke, 2015). Braudel's work rests on distinctive principles, many of which were shared among members of the Annales. His research was grounded on strong empirical foundations and was based on *l'observation concrète*. While the French historian acknowledged the contribution of theoretical models, only a thorough empirical analysis reveals trends and patterns previously unnoticed. He contended that after a rigorous inquiry of the economic data and statistics of pre-industrial Europe, he noticed the absence of connection between the period and the grand theories that claimed to understand it (Braudel, 1992a: 23).

His approach was holistic, both in terms of time span and geography. Following a philosophy known as *la longue durée*, he shunned *l'histoire événementielle* that focused on famed events of short duration. Rather, he followed cyclical movements that spanned decades or centuries, such as the long-term evolution of trade flows and price fluctuations (Braudel, 1958). Weaving these threads with descriptions of the everyday lives of common people, his work composed the tapestry of an epoch. Braudel constructed geographical spaces within which people travelled and commodities were exchanged, that were coherent in terms of culture, society, and economy, but which were not congruent with nation states. He fashioned the concept of the 'world-economy' to describe 'civilizations' spanning territories and centuries.<sup>1</sup> World-economies are limited in size and time, even when they momentarily span whole empires. The method was applied first in his 1949 monograph on the sixteenth-century Mediterranean,<sup>2</sup> which was approached as a singular cultural and commercial space (Braudel, 1996). It was replicated full scale in his study of the capitalist world-economy between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries (Braudel, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c).

Braudel's perspective constitutes the foundation of Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory. His magnum opus retraces the origins of capitalism and its transformation into the modern world-system (Wallerstein, 1974, 1980, 1989). Capitalism started as a European world-economy, and its geographical expansion transformed it into a world-system characterised by 'a single division of labor and multiple cultural systems' (Wallerstein, 1974: 390).

The notion of ‘commodity chain’ was introduced to support this research agenda. Establishing the world-system as the new unit of analysis, Hopkins and Wallerstein were arguing against the classic position of international trade scholars, who saw markets and trade develop locally first and then internationally. They rejected both the sequential development and the distinction between local and international, positing that ‘all . . . transactions are part of, and constrained by, something one can call a “world” market’, within which production processes are transnational (Hopkins and Wallerstein, 1977: 128). They elaborated:

Instead, we start with a radically different presumption. Let us conceive of something we shall call, for want of a better conventional term, ‘commodity chains’. What we mean by such chains is the following: take an ultimate consumable item and trace back the set of inputs that culminated in this item – the prior transformations, the raw materials, the transportation mechanisms, the labor input into each of the material processes, the food inputs into the labor. This linked set of processes we call a commodity chain. If the ultimate consumable were, say, clothing, the chain would include the manufacture of the cloth, the yarn, etc., the cultivation of the cotton, as well as the reproduction of the labor forces involved in these productive activities. (Hopkins and Wallerstein, 1977: 128)

Wallerstein subsequently mentioned commodity chains twice, underscoring their transnational nature and connection to capital accumulation (Wallerstein, [1979] 1984: 2–4; Wallerstein, 1983: 15–17, 31), before devoting a study to the subject. Aiming to demonstrate that the modern world-economy developed quickly, Hopkins and Wallerstein sought to demonstrate that capital and production networks (commodity chains) were crossing boundaries by the sixteenth century, and that a world-scale division of labour is traceable to this era (Hopkins and Wallerstein, 1986: 159).

By the early 1990s, commodity chains had become a field of inquiry and the first volume dedicated to the subject was a collection of papers presented at the 16th Annual Conference on the Political Economy of the World-System (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, 1994). The small community of scholars forged its own agenda.

The research setting shifted from historical to contemporary. While commodity chains were part of an argument about the development of the modern world-economy, the focal point became present-day capitalism. The new research agenda maintained an interest in the context within which chains operate but laid more emphasis on industries than the economy at large. This change was reflected in a streamlined definition of *global* commodity chains (GCCs), as they were now called (Bair, 2005: 155–7).



Furthermore, GCCs replaced the modern world-system as the unit of analysis. While this presents a disjuncture, GCCs inherited two key characteristics from the previous paradigm. As Hopkins and Wallerstein stated: ‘If there is one thing which distinguishes a world-system perspective from any other, it is its insistence that the unit of analysis is a *world-system* defined in terms of *economic* processes and links’ (Hopkins and Wallerstein, 1977: 137). Links and processes remained at the core of the new research agenda, GCCs now being defined as ‘sets of interorganizational networks clustered around one commodity or product, linking households, enterprises, and states to one another within the world-economy’ (Gereffi et al., 1994: 2).

The new approach remained holistic and the unit of analysis global. As noted by Bair, the ‘global’ in GCC ‘is not meant to designate the geographical scope of the commodity chain’ (Bair, 2005: 172), but is a reference to the cross-border integration of production processes within a chain. Following Wallerstein, Gary Gereffi drew a similar and crucial distinction between the international and the global: ‘While “internationalization” refers simply to the geographical spread of economic activities, “globalization” implies a degree of functional integration between these dispersed activities’ (Gereffi, 1994: 96).

GCCs were attributed four dimensions: *input–output structure* (the shape of its connecting production and distribution processes), *governance structure* (below), *territoriality* (spatial dispersion), and *institutional framework*, which refers to the impact that policy institutions and regulatory systems have on commodity chains (Bair, 2009: 9; Gereffi, 1994: 96–7; Gereffi, 1995: 113; Sturgeon, 2009: 130–1). Governance structure focused on coordination of economic activities and power relations among economic agents within chains. Producer-driven chains, according to Gereffi, included those chains in which large manufacturers remain in control of production and distribution networks and processes, while buyer-driven GCCs prevail in industries that are labour-intensive and controlled by large retailers and branded manufacturers that offshore production to networks of small and predominantly Asian suppliers, the fashion industry being a case in point (Gereffi, 1999: 41–2).

The next epistemological break occurred in the early 2000s. Scholars with decades of collective experience in the observation of manufacturing processes, industrial relations, and international production networks gathered together many times – most memorably at the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center – to expand the scope and applicability of the GCC framework. The dichotomy between producer-driven and buyer-driven chains was ditched in favour of five archetypical modes of governance that better reflected the types of chain coordination encountered across different industrial sectors. With the same objective of being more inclusive, the term ‘commodity’ was swapped for ‘value’. The new

endeavour was more interdisciplinary in character and involved social scientists from an array of disciplines (Bair, 2005, 2009; Lee, 2010; Sturgeon, 2009).<sup>3</sup>

GVCs are analysed through six dimensions. *Input–output structure* (1) refers to the structure of the production process and the successive value-added stages through which a product or service flows from inception to consumption. Segments vary from one industry to another but typically involve research and design, assembling and/or production, sales and marketing, and recycling (Gereffi and Fernandez-Stark, 2016: 8).

GVCs are transnational networks of production that involve geographically dispersed firms. The analysis of the *geographical scope* (2) aims to map the trade flows within the chain and charting the supply and demand of components among the firms and territories that are involved in GVCs. In practice, most GVCs, such as automotive, consumer electronics and, indeed, television, are dominated by a relatively small set of exporters.<sup>4</sup>

Incorporating findings from a large set of empirical studies, five types of *governance* (3) were proposed. The typology is based on a wider range of indicators than the former dichotomy, taking into account the complexity of transactions, the ability to codify them, and capabilities in the supply base. The five chain architectures reflect diverse types of transactions and connections among participating firms (Gereffi et al., 2001: 4; Gereffi et al., 2005: 89–90). In particular, lead firms yield a certain amount of influence over their suppliers, if only because their purchasing power gives them a naturally dominant position within the chain. However, the types of governance display varying degrees of power asymmetry:

- *Market* governance is based on price and prevails when transactions are simple and necessitate little cooperation between buyers and suppliers.
- *Modular* chains are based on an architecture characterised by a high level of product codification and standardisation, enhancing the chain's interoperability and simplifying transactions among firms even when trading complex or bespoke products or services. GVCs in the consumer electronics industry are a case in point as the specifications of electronic components are fully codified and standardised, enabling buyers or assemblers to easily communicate their needs, evaluate and compare components, and keep highly competent suppliers at arm's length.
- *Relational* governance occurs when knowledge and product specifications cannot be easily codified, leading to frequent interactions and possibly complex transactions between participating firms. This causes mutual dependence between lead firms and suppliers, and relationships are based on trust and reputation. Such governance is frequent in chains operating in industry clusters, as spatial proximity lowers the cost of frequent

interactions, facilitates the exchange of knowledge and the building of long-lasting relationships.

- *Captive* governance denotes a high level of power asymmetry between lead firms and their suppliers. The former operate in segments with high entry barriers and can dictate conditions to suppliers smaller in size with a lower level of competence, which operate in the chain's least profitable segments, and are tasked with a very specific role such as the supply of raw products or materials. This type of coordination is on display when Western-based multinationals operate networks of suppliers scattered in low-cost countries (a procurement strategy known as low-cost country sourcing). It is in such chains that the power asymmetry between lead firms and their suppliers is the most acute. While such chains can be beneficial for all parties, the asymmetry may generate negative social, psychological, and environmental consequences for the suppliers, their workers, and the countries in which they operate. These can be addressed through regulatory intervention and/or consumer concern.
- *Hierarchical* governance occurs when the costs of transactions and the amount of knowledge shared are such that a firm decides to develop the products or services in-house. If a firm does not have the capacity to do so, it may lead to vertical integration and the acquisition of a supplier with the necessary know-how (Gereffi et al., 2001: 3–5; Gereffi et al., 2005: 82–90; Gereffi and Fernandez-Stark, 2016: 8–11; Ponte and Sturgeon, 2014: 203–6; Sturgeon and Kawakami, 2010: 10).

*Economic upgrading* (4) is the ensemble of strategies that firms and countries deploy in order to move into higher-valued tasks in global production networks (Gereffi and Fernandez-Stark, 2016: 12). The GVC literature eventually recognised four economic upgrading strategies: product upgrading, 'namely the shift into the production of a higher value product'; process upgrading, 'improving the efficiency of production systems'; functional upgrading, 'moving into higher value stages in the chain that require additional skills'; and intersectoral upgrading, 'entry into a new value chain by leveraging the knowledge and skills acquired in the current chain' (Fernandez-Stark et al., 2014: 82; see also Lee, 2010: 2995).

As value chains are embedded in various locales, *local institutional context* (5) considers the availability and nature of their inputs into GVCs, such as infrastructure, regulatory and tax regimes, education, workforce, and gender participation. *Stakeholders analysis* (6) examines the participation and involvement in GVCs of actors such as trade associations, trade unions, regulators, governments, and international organisations (Gereffi and Fernandez-Stark, 2016: 14).

Today, GVC analysis is among the best established paradigms in the social sciences and it is a multi-disciplinary endeavour that benefits from the input of a large array of disciplines. GVC discourse is commonly practiced in official bodies: UN agencies such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), international organisations such as the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and numerous governmental agencies, have all produced or commissioned GVC reports (e.g. Foster-McGregor et al., 2015; ILO, 2016; International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2017; UNCTAD, 2013; WTO, 2013, 2016, 2017).

## GVCs and Network-Oriented Frameworks

There exist alternatives to the study of international production networks, and some have been applied to research of the media industries. This section compares them to GVC analysis and affirms the suitability of the latter for the research problem on hand and global communication studies in general.

The French *filière* approach encompasses a large body of work often dedicated to the analysis of agricultural value chains in a postcolonial setting, especially in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa. However, the approach is more an umbrella than a framework and counts schools of thought that operate with distinctive concepts and methodologies (Raikes et al., 2000: 403).

Another option is Manuel Castells' network theory. Analysing media globalisation, the sociologist observes 'the formation of global networks of interlocked multimedia businesses organized around strategic partnerships' (Castells, 2009: 72). Applying this theoretical framework, Amelia Arsenault notes that media giants collaborate as much as they compete, and they are 'connected to one another . . . through a complex set of partnerships, agreements, cross-investments, interpersonal connections, and much more' (Arsenault, 2012: 119). Network theory's strength is its multi-scalar approach and its recognition of the mutual influence of the local and the global (Castells, 2009: 87–91). It also innovates by highlighting connections among rival firms. The preoccupation of network theory, however, remains close to that of classic political economy, focusing on the reach and power of media giants, and issues such as concentration of ownership and media firm's dependence on advertising and finance. Suppliers – arguably a key part of global networks – remain unaccounted for (Arsenault, 2012; Castells, 2009: 71–99).

Media management scholars offer multiple variants of value chains across the entertainment industries (e.g. Doyle, 2013: 19–21; Hess and Matt, 2013: 38–9; Küng, 2017: 18–23; Picard, 2002: 30–43; Wirtz, 2017: 62–70). Without fail, they use the Michael Porter model, for whom a value chain is a firm's 'collection of activities that are performed to design, produce, market, deliver, and support its product' (Porter, 1985: 36). This approach is reflected in Küng, who writes that 'the value chain disaggregates the activities of a firm into sequential stages stretching from the supply side to the demand side' (Küng, 2017: 19, emphasis added), and Picard, for whom 'the concept is useful in considering those activities that are most central to the core activities of a firm and those that make the business operational' (Picard, 2002: 33, emphasis added).

The GVC approach is fashioned by multiple influences, but its conceptual roots keep it distinct from Porter's value chain. The latter's framework is *firm-centric*, in the sense that the pivotal point of the analysis is the company's behaviour and activities. Porter's method is intended to be a tool for consultants and managers to execute a firm's strategy, and help it gain a competitive edge by defining its core competencies and extracting the maximum value from its activities. By way of contrast, the GVC framework's point of reference and unit of analysis is the inter-firm *network*. It is more holistic, because it gives an overview of a whole industry and its international structure, focusing on the dynamic between segments and the *relations* among firms.

Global production network (GPN) and GVC analysis are closely related: they share origins in GCC research and an interest in spatially dispersed inter-firm production networks. While both theories are evolving in different directions, they can be used complementarily. The GVC framework is recognised as the most business-centric of the two, and most apt at profiling the DNA of a value chain and unveiling its dynamics. It best suits our purpose, which is to understand the reconfiguration of an industry that is entering the digital age.

GPN research overcomes some of the limits intrinsic to the GVC framework by theorising how production networks connect and intersect with society, geography, and various constituents. It considers a host of extra-firm actors as 'active agents' in production networks (Coe and Yeung, 2019: 782), including the state, labour, trade unions, and intermediaries such as financial firms and standards organisations (Coe and Yeung, 2015: 15, 55–7; Coe and Yeung, 2019: 782–9; Dicken, 2015: 173–225). Reflecting the framework's anchorage in economic geography, GPN scholars conceive 'geography [to] be an active space that shapes the territorial constitution and configuration of these network activities' (Coe and Yeung, 2015: 68). In addition to analysing the spatial configuration of production networks, they examine how networks shape the territories and economies in which they operate (Coe and Yeung, 2015: 67–8; Dicken, 2015: 251–3).

The concept of strategic coupling is used ‘to delimit the different way in which regional and national economies intersect with global production networks’ (Coe and Young, 2019: 780). GPN research considers production networks as being ‘embedded in the broader institutional macro-structures of the global economy’ (Dicken, 2015: 52). ‘Both history and geography matters’, writes Peter Dicken (Dicken, 2015: 52). This involves giving an account of how technological and economic change contribute to reconfigure global production networks, and vice versa. This research applies a GPN perspective to complement GVC analysis in multiple ways, devoting attention to the role of media TNCs (Chapters 3 and 4), technology, standards organisations, and infrastructure (Chapters 5 and 6).

As an academic discipline, international communication worked well when a clear line of demarcation existed between national and foreign media. Adjustments were needed to approach the media industries in an era when lines have blurred and the local and global are entwined. Global communication adopts an epistemological position that is multidisciplinary, holistic, and cosmopolitan. From a theoretical standpoint, it is using the GVC framework to think through – not about – media globalisation. Most examinations of media globalisation are teleological in scope, analysing its impact on culture, markets, firms, and workers. The aim of global communication is to look inside the black box, approach globalisation as a noumenon, and explain it in all its dimensions.