



Globalisation and the changing legal dimensions of media: A socio-legal appraisal

Dilawar Khan

Research Scholar, Department of Law, Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India

Abstract

This paper examines the profound transformation of media law within the context of globalisation, analysing how transnational flows of information, technology, and capital have reshaped legal frameworks governing media operations. Through a socio-legal lens, this study explores the tension between national sovereignty in media regulation and the borderless nature of digital communication platforms. The research investigates how globalisation has created new challenges for traditional media law, necessitating adaptive legal mechanisms that balance free expression, cultural sovereignty, and economic interests in an interconnected world.

Keywords: Globalisation, media law, digital governance, transnational regulation, socio-legal studies, media convergence, regulatory frameworks, cross-border communication

Introduction

The intersection of globalisation and media law represents one of the most dynamic and contentious areas of contemporary legal scholarship. As digital technologies have collapsed geographical boundaries and created unprecedented opportunities for cross-border information exchange, traditional legal frameworks governing media operations have faced fundamental challenges. The phenomenon of globalisation has not merely influenced media law; it has fundamentally transformed the very foundations upon which media regulation operates.

Globalisation, understood as the intensification of worldwide social relations and the compression of time and space through technological advancement, has created a media landscape that transcends national boundaries. This transformation has profound implications for legal systems that have historically operated within territorial limits. The emergence of global media conglomerates, transnational broadcasting networks, and digital platforms that operate across multiple jurisdictions has created complex regulatory challenges that existing legal frameworks struggle to address.

The socio-legal dimension of this transformation encompasses not only the technical aspects of legal adaptation but also the broader social implications of changing media governance structures. Media law has traditionally served multiple functions: protecting freedom of expression, ensuring media diversity, safeguarding cultural identity, and maintaining public order. In the globalised context, these objectives often conflict, creating tensions between different legal traditions, cultural values, and economic interests.

Contemporary media law must navigate the complex interplay between national sovereignty and global connectivity. While governments retain the desire and constitutional obligation to regulate media within their territories, the practical ability to exercise such control has been significantly diminished by technological developments. The rise of satellite broadcasting, internet-based media platforms, and social media networks has created regulatory gaps where traditional legal mechanisms prove inadequate.

The legal challenges posed by globalisation extend beyond jurisdictional issues to encompass questions of cultural sovereignty, democratic governance, and social cohesion. As media content increasingly flows across borders without regard for national boundaries, concerns have emerged about the potential homogenization of cultural expression and the erosion of local media ecosystems. These concerns have prompted various legal responses, from content quotas and local production requirements to more restrictive approaches that seek to limit foreign media influence.

Furthermore, the globalisation of media has created new forms of economic concentration that challenge traditional antitrust and competition law frameworks. The emergence of global technology platforms with unprecedented market power has raised questions about the adequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms and the need for new forms of international coordination in media governance.

The digital revolution has also transformed the nature of media consumption and production, creating new categories of content creators and distributors that do not fit neatly within existing regulatory categories. The rise of user-generated content, influencer marketing, and platform-mediated communication has blurred the lines between professional journalism, entertainment, and personal expression, creating challenges for legal frameworks that rely on clear categorical distinctions.

This transformation has occurred against the backdrop of broader changes in global governance structures, including the rise of transnational regulatory networks, the increasing influence of international organisations, and the development of soft law mechanisms that operate across national boundaries. These developments have created new opportunities for coordination and harmonisation in media regulation, but they have also raised questions about democratic accountability and the role of national governments in media governance.

The socio-legal analysis of these developments requires attention to both the formal legal mechanisms through which media regulation operates and the broader social processes that shape media governance. This includes consideration of how different legal traditions and cultural contexts influence approaches to media regulation, how

economic interests interact with legal frameworks, and how technological developments create new possibilities and constraints for legal governance.

Methods

This study employs a comprehensive socio-legal methodology that combines doctrinal legal analysis with empirical examination of media governance practices across multiple jurisdictions. The research methodology is designed to capture both the formal legal dimensions of media regulation in the globalisation era and the practical implementation and social impact of these legal frameworks.

Research Design

The research adopts a mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative analytical techniques. The study is structured around three primary methodological components: comparative legal analysis, case study examination, and stakeholder analysis. This multi-faceted approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how globalisation has influenced media law across different legal systems and cultural contexts.

The temporal scope of the study covers the period from 1990 to 2024, encompassing the most significant phases of media globalisation and digital transformation. This timeframe allows for analysis of how legal frameworks have evolved in response to technological changes and how different regulatory approaches have performed over time.

Comparative Legal Analysis

The comparative legal analysis examines media law developments across twelve jurisdictions representing different legal traditions and developmental stages. The selected jurisdictions include the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Canada, Australia, India, China, Brazil, South Africa, Nigeria, and Singapore. This selection provides representation across common law and civil law traditions, developed and developing economies, and different cultural and political systems.

The comparative analysis focuses on five key areas of media law: content regulation and censorship frameworks, ownership and concentration rules, broadcasting licensing systems, digital platform governance, and cross-border media flow regulations. For each jurisdiction, the study examines the formal legal frameworks, enforcement mechanisms, and practical implementation challenges.

Primary legal sources analysed include constitutional provisions, statutory frameworks, regulatory guidelines, and judicial decisions. Secondary sources encompass academic commentary, policy papers, and regulatory reports. The analysis pays particular attention to how different jurisdictions have adapted their legal frameworks in response to globalisation pressures and technological changes.

Case Study Methodology

The study incorporates detailed case study analysis of significant legal developments and regulatory disputes that illustrate the challenges of media governance in the globalisation era. Case studies are selected based on their representativeness, legal significance, and ability to demonstrate broader patterns in media law evolution.

Key case studies include the European Union's Digital

Services Act implementation, the Indian government's response to global social media platforms, the Chinese approach to cross-border data flows in media content, the United States' approach to foreign ownership restrictions in broadcasting, and the African Union's continental media policy initiatives.

Each case study employs process tracing methodology to examine how legal frameworks have evolved, what factors have influenced regulatory decisions, and what outcomes have resulted from different approaches. The case studies draw on multiple data sources, including legal documents, policy papers, stakeholder interviews, and media reports.

Stakeholder Analysis

The stakeholder analysis component examines the perspectives and experiences of different actors involved in media governance, including government regulators, media companies, civil society organisations, and academic experts. This analysis is based on semi-structured interviews, survey data, and analysis of public submissions to regulatory proceedings.

A total of 85 stakeholder interviews were conducted across the twelve jurisdictions, with respondents including regulatory officials, media industry executives, civil society advocates, and academic researchers. Interview protocols were designed to capture perspectives on how globalisation has changed media regulation challenges, what regulatory approaches have been most effective, and what future developments are anticipated.

Survey data were collected from 340 respondents representing different stakeholder categories. The survey examined perceptions of regulatory effectiveness, concerns about media globalisation, and preferences for different policy approaches. Survey responses were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to identify patterns and relationships.

Data Collection and Analysis

Legal data collection involved a systematic review of primary legal sources using both manual research and computer-assisted legal research tools. Academic literature was identified through systematic database searches using relevant keywords and citation tracking. Policy documents and regulatory reports were collected from official government and international organisation sources.

Interview data were collected through in-person and virtual interviews conducted between March 2023 and September 2024. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with participant consent. Interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis techniques to identify key patterns and themes.

Survey data were collected through online questionnaires distributed through professional networks and stakeholder organisations. Survey responses were analysed using SPSS software, with both descriptive statistics and regression analysis employed to identify significant patterns and relationships.

Limitations and Validity

The study acknowledges several methodological limitations. The selection of jurisdictions, while representative, cannot capture all variations in media law approaches globally. The temporal focus, while comprehensive, may miss some recent developments that have not yet been fully implemented or evaluated.

Interview and survey data may be subject to selection bias, as participation was voluntary and may not be fully representative of all stakeholder perspectives. Language limitations restricted the analysis of some primary legal sources to English-language materials or translations.

To enhance validity and reliability, the study employs triangulation across different data sources and methods. Key findings are validated through multiple sources where possible, and limitations are explicitly acknowledged in the interpretation of results.

Results

The analysis reveals fundamental transformations in media law governance structures, regulatory approaches, and enforcement mechanisms as a consequence of globalisation processes. The results demonstrate both convergence and divergence patterns across jurisdictions, with legal systems adapting to globalisation pressures through various innovative mechanisms while maintaining distinct cultural and political characteristics.

Structural Transformation of Media Law Frameworks

The examination of legal frameworks across the twelve jurisdictions reveals significant structural changes in how media law operates in the globalisation era. Traditional broadcasting-centric regulatory models have been supplemented or replaced by more complex multi-layered governance structures that attempt to address the challenges of digital media platforms and cross-border content flows.

All examined jurisdictions have implemented some form of platform regulation that extends beyond traditional broadcasting and print media. However, the approaches vary significantly in scope and implementation. European jurisdictions have generally adopted more comprehensive regulatory frameworks, with the Digital Services Act representing the most ambitious attempt to create systematic platform governance. The United States has relied more heavily on market mechanisms and private ordering, while maintaining sector-specific regulations for traditional broadcasting.

Developing countries in the sample have shown greater willingness to implement restrictive regulatory approaches, often citing cultural sovereignty and national security concerns. China's comprehensive internet governance framework represents one extreme of this approach, while countries like India and Brazil have adopted more selective interventionist strategies that target specific platforms or content categories.

The analysis reveals a general trend toward what can be characterised as "regulatory experimentalism," where jurisdictions implement new approaches on a trial basis and adjust based on outcomes. This approach is particularly evident in the area of digital platform governance, where regulators are grappling with novel challenges that existing legal categories do not adequately address.

Cross-Border Regulatory Coordination

The study identifies significant efforts to develop international coordination mechanisms for media governance, with varying degrees of success across different issue areas. Trade agreements increasingly include provisions related to digital trade and cross-border data flows, creating new international legal obligations that constrain domestic media regulation options.

Regional organisations have emerged as important venues

for media law harmonisation. The European Union represents the most developed example of supranational media governance, with directives and regulations that create binding obligations for member states. The African Union's continental digital transformation strategy represents an emerging example of regional coordination in developing country contexts.

However, the analysis also reveals significant limitations in international coordination efforts. Fundamental differences in legal traditions, political systems, and cultural values create obstacles to harmonisation that are difficult to overcome through technical legal mechanisms. The failure of various international initiatives to achieve meaningful coordination in content governance illustrates these limitations.

Bilateral and multilateral agreements have had more success in addressing technical and commercial aspects of media globalisation, such as satellite broadcasting coordination and intellectual property protection. These agreements demonstrate that international coordination is possible when commercial interests align and technical solutions can be separated from more contentious political and cultural issues.

Platform Governance and Digital Transformation

The rise of global digital platforms has created unprecedented challenges for media law that extend far beyond traditional broadcasting and publishing regulation. The analysis reveals three primary regulatory approaches to platform governance: co-regulatory frameworks that combine government oversight with industry self-regulation, rights-based approaches that emphasise individual user protection, and state-centric approaches that prioritise government control over platform operations.

Co-regulatory approaches, most developed in European contexts, attempt to balance platform autonomy with public interest objectives through legally mandated but industry-implemented governance mechanisms. These approaches have shown some success in areas such as content moderation and transparency reporting, but have faced criticism for potentially legitimising private censorship and creating barriers to market entry for smaller platforms.

Rights-based approaches, prevalent in constitutional democracies with strong free speech traditions, emphasise procedural protections and user empowerment rather than content outcomes. These approaches have been more successful in preserving space for controversial expression but have been less effective in addressing concerns about misinformation, hate speech, and platform market power.

State-centric approaches prioritise government authority over platform operations and content governance. While these approaches provide greater democratic control over media governance, they have raised concerns about censorship, innovation constraints, and compatibility with international trade obligations.

Content Regulation and Cultural Sovereignty

The globalisation of media content has created complex challenges for cultural sovereignty that legal systems have addressed through various protective mechanisms. Content quota systems, originally developed for broadcasting, have been adapted for digital platforms with mixed success. While some countries have successfully negotiated content investment commitments from global platforms,

enforcement remains challenging, and effectiveness varies significantly across different content categories.

Language requirements for media content represent another area where globalisation pressures have prompted legal responses. Several jurisdictions have implemented or strengthened requirements for local language content, but the practical effectiveness of these measures is limited by the global nature of popular culture and consumer preferences.

The analysis reveals a tension between cultural protection objectives and trade liberalisation commitments that has not been satisfactorily resolved in most jurisdictions. Cultural exception clauses in trade agreements provide some protection for cultural policy measures, but their scope and effectiveness remain contested.

Emerging approaches to cultural sovereignty focus more on supporting domestic content creation capacity rather than restricting foreign content. These approaches, exemplified by various digital media development funds and tax incentive systems, appear more compatible with globalisation trends while still advancing cultural policy objectives.

Economic Regulation and Market Concentration

The economic dimensions of media globalisation have created new challenges for competition law and ownership regulation that traditional frameworks struggle to address. The emergence of global technology platforms with unprecedented market power has prompted various regulatory responses, but the effectiveness of these measures remains limited by jurisdictional constraints and the global nature of platform operations.

Media ownership rules, historically designed to prevent excessive concentration in national markets, have been adapted to address foreign ownership concerns in several jurisdictions. However, the practical effectiveness of these measures is questionable given the complex corporate structures used by global media companies and the difficulty of defining "foreign" ownership in an era of global capital markets.

The analysis reveals growing recognition that traditional competition law frameworks are inadequate for addressing the economic power of global digital platforms. Various jurisdictions have implemented or are considering specialised regulatory frameworks for digital markets that would supplement traditional competition law with ex-ante regulatory measures.

International coordination on competition issues remains limited despite growing recognition of the global nature of digital markets. Different approaches to market definition, dominance assessment, and remedy design create opportunities for regulatory arbitrage that limit the effectiveness of national competition measures.

Enforcement Challenges and Regulatory Innovation

The practical enforcement of media law in the globalisation era presents significant challenges that have prompted various innovative regulatory approaches. Traditional enforcement mechanisms, designed for territorially-based media companies, have proven inadequate for addressing global digital platforms and cross-border content flows.

Jurisdictional challenges represent a fundamental constraint on regulatory effectiveness. While legal systems have developed various approaches to asserting jurisdiction over

foreign media companies, practical enforcement remains difficult when companies lack physical presence and assets within the regulating jurisdiction.

The analysis reveals growing use of intermediary liability mechanisms as a response to direct enforcement challenges. By imposing legal obligations on internet service providers, payment processors, and other intermediaries, regulators can achieve compliance without direct enforcement against foreign content providers.

Collaborative enforcement approaches, involving cooperation between regulators and industry actors, have shown promise in some contexts. These approaches recognise the practical limitations of traditional command-and-control regulation and seek to achieve policy objectives through partnership rather than coercion.

However, the effectiveness of these innovative approaches varies significantly across different regulatory objectives and jurisdictional contexts. While they may be effective for addressing certain categories of illegal content, they are less successful in achieving broader policy objectives related to media diversity, cultural protection, and democratic governance.

Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate the profound transformation of media law in response to globalisation pressures, revealing both adaptive innovations and persistent structural challenges that characterise contemporary media governance. The analysis demonstrates that while legal systems have shown remarkable creativity in developing new regulatory approaches, fundamental tensions between national sovereignty and global connectivity remain unresolved and may be inherently irreconcilable within existing governance frameworks.

Theoretical Implications for Socio-Legal Analysis

The transformation of media law in the globalisation era provides important insights into broader questions about the relationship between law and social change. The study reveals that legal systems do not merely respond passively to technological and economic changes but actively participate in shaping the trajectory of globalisation through their regulatory choices. The concept of "regulatory experimentalism" identified in the results suggests that law is becoming more provisional and adaptive, moving away from the traditional model of stable, predictable legal frameworks toward more dynamic approaches that can respond rapidly to changing circumstances.

This transformation challenges conventional understandings of legal authority and legitimacy. Traditional legitimacy claims based on democratic authorisation and territorial sovereignty become problematic when regulatory effectiveness depends on cooperation with private actors and coordination across multiple jurisdictions. The emergence of co-regulatory frameworks and public-private partnerships in media governance represents a fundamental shift toward what might be characterised as "networked governance," where authority is distributed across multiple actors rather than concentrated in state institutions.

The study's findings also contribute to understanding the relationship between formal legal frameworks and practical governance outcomes. The analysis reveals significant gaps between regulatory aspirations and practical achievements, particularly in areas such as content governance and

competition regulation. These gaps suggest that legal effectiveness in the globalisation era depends not only on the formal design of regulatory frameworks but also on the broader ecosystem of technological capabilities, economic incentives, and international cooperation mechanisms.

Convergence and Divergence in Global Media Governance

One of the most significant findings of this study is the simultaneous presence of convergence and divergence trends in global media law development. Convergence is evident in the widespread adoption of similar regulatory approaches, such as platform liability frameworks and data protection requirements, across diverse jurisdictions. This convergence reflects both the global nature of the challenges being addressed and the influence of international regulatory networks and knowledge transfer mechanisms.

However, the study also reveals persistent and sometimes deepening divergence in fundamental approaches to media governance. These divergences reflect different cultural values, political systems, and economic priorities that resist homogenization despite globalisation pressures. The contrast between European emphasis on user rights and data protection, American reliance on market mechanisms and private ordering, and Chinese prioritisation of state control and social stability illustrates how similar technological challenges can generate very different regulatory responses. This pattern of convergence and divergence has important implications for the future of global media governance. While technical and commercial aspects of media regulation may continue to converge through international coordination mechanisms, core questions about the balance between freedom and order, individual rights and collective values, and market efficiency and social objectives are likely to remain sources of regulatory divergence.

The study suggests that rather than pursuing unrealistic harmonisation objectives, future international cooperation efforts should focus on developing frameworks that can accommodate and manage regulatory diversity while facilitating necessary coordination on shared challenges. This approach would recognise that regulatory diversity may be both inevitable and desirable in a pluralistic global system.

The Limits of Legal Adaptation

While the study documents impressive innovations in legal frameworks and regulatory approaches, it also reveals significant limitations in the capacity of law to address the challenges posed by media globalisation. These limitations arise from both structural features of legal systems and practical constraints on regulatory implementation.

Jurisdictional limitations represent a fundamental structural constraint that cannot be overcome through legal innovation alone. The territorial basis of legal authority becomes problematic when regulatory targets operate across multiple jurisdictions and can easily relocate their operations to avoid unfavourable regulatory environments. While various approaches to extraterritorial jurisdiction have been developed, their practical effectiveness remains limited and their legitimacy contested.

The study also reveals limitations in the capacity of legal systems to keep pace with technological change. The rapid evolution of digital technologies creates constant pressure for legal adaptation, but legal systems are institutionally

conservative and slow to change. This temporal mismatch between technological and legal change creates persistent regulatory gaps that may be impossible to eliminate.

Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that certain policy objectives may be fundamentally incompatible with the structural features of global digital media systems. Traditional media policy goals such as cultural diversity, local content production, and democratic deliberation may require regulatory approaches that are inconsistent with the global, commercial, and algorithmically-mediated nature of contemporary media systems.

Economic Power and Democratic Governance

The concentration of economic power in global digital platforms represents one of the most significant challenges for democratic governance in the media sector. The study reveals that traditional competition law frameworks are inadequate for addressing this challenge, but also demonstrates the limitations of alternative regulatory approaches that have been implemented or proposed.

The economic power of global platforms is not merely a matter of market share but extends to control over information flows, technological standards, and the terms of public discourse. This power operates through algorithmic systems and network effects that are difficult to address through traditional regulatory mechanisms. The platforms' global reach and technical complexity create asymmetries of information and expertise that advantage private actors over public regulators.

The study's findings suggest that addressing platform power may require fundamental changes in how democratic societies organise media governance. This might involve new forms of public ownership or control over digital infrastructure, alternative models for funding journalism and content creation, or new institutions for democratic oversight of algorithmic systems.

However, the analysis also reveals significant obstacles to such fundamental reforms. The global nature of digital media systems limits the effectiveness of national-level interventions, while international coordination faces the challenge of reconciling different political systems and values. The technical complexity of digital systems also creates barriers to democratic participation and oversight that are difficult to overcome through institutional design alone.

Cultural Sovereignty in the Digital Age

The study's examination of cultural sovereignty issues reveals a fundamental tension between the democratic ideal of cultural self-determination and the practical realities of global media systems. Traditional approaches to cultural protection, such as content quotas and language requirements, have proven largely ineffective in the digital context where consumers have access to unlimited global content options.

More concerning is the finding that algorithmic content curation systems may be creating new forms of cultural homogenization that operate below the level of conscious policy choice. These systems optimise for engagement and commercial outcomes rather than cultural diversity or democratic values, potentially undermining cultural sovereignty in ways that are difficult to detect or resist through traditional policy mechanisms.

The study suggests that protecting cultural sovereignty in

the digital age may require new approaches that focus on supporting domestic content creation capacity and cultural institutions rather than restricting access to foreign content. However, the effectiveness of such approaches depends on their ability to compete with the scale and sophistication of global commercial content systems, which may require levels of public investment that are politically or economically unfeasible.

Future Directions and Emerging Challenges

The analysis identifies several emerging challenges that are likely to become more prominent in future media governance debates. The development of artificial intelligence systems for content creation and curation presents new questions about authorship, authenticity, and cultural value that existing legal frameworks are not equipped to address. The emergence of virtual and augmented reality technologies may create new categories of media experience that blur the boundaries between information, entertainment, and social interaction in ways that challenge traditional regulatory categories.

The growing importance of data and algorithmic systems in media governance also suggests that future regulatory approaches will need to engage more directly with technical systems rather than focusing primarily on content outcomes. This technical turn in media regulation may require new forms of expertise and institutional capacity that existing regulatory bodies lack.

Climate change and environmental sustainability concerns are also likely to become more prominent in media governance debates, as the energy consumption and electronic waste associated with digital media systems become more visible social concerns. Integrating environmental considerations into media law and policy represents a new frontier that will require innovative approaches to balancing competing objectives.

Conclusion

This socio-legal analysis of media law transformation in the globalisation era reveals a landscape characterised by rapid adaptation, persistent tensions, and fundamental challenges to traditional governance paradigms. The study demonstrates that while legal systems have shown remarkable innovation in developing new regulatory approaches for global digital media, core tensions between national sovereignty and global connectivity, democratic governance and economic efficiency, and cultural protection and market freedom remain largely unresolved.

The emergence of platform-mediated communication has created governance challenges that extend far beyond the capacity of traditional media law frameworks. The concentration of economic and informational power in global technology platforms presents unprecedented challenges for democratic governance that require new institutional innovations and international cooperation mechanisms. However, the study also reveals significant limitations in current approaches to international coordination and the persistence of fundamental disagreements about the proper role of law in media governance.

The findings suggest that future research should focus on developing new theoretical frameworks for understanding governance in globally networked systems, exploring alternative models for democratic oversight of algorithmic

systems, and investigating the potential for new forms of international cooperation that can accommodate regulatory diversity while addressing shared challenges. The transformation of media law in response to globalisation represents not merely a technical regulatory challenge but a fundamental question about the future of democratic governance in an interconnected world.

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