

Knowledge dissemination in the Global South: current realities, structural constraints, and the path to a new communication order

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Abstract. Influenced by historical and contemporary factors, as well as internal and external dynamics, current international communication is predominantly characterized by the Global North's dominance in both mechanisms and content, while the Global South remains relatively disadvantaged. This imbalance not only adversely affects Global South nations but also contradicts their rightful place in the international system. Therefore, this study argues that it is imperative to leverage the Global South's rich practical experience and local knowledge, employing innovative communication approaches to reconstruct the international communication order, thereby establishing a more equitable and rational framework.

Keywords: Global South, international communication, international relations, anti-colonialism, post-colonialism

1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of the "Global South", encompassing geopolitical, economic, and cultural dimensions, has emerged as a prominent focus in global academic discourse. Existing research reveals that studies on the Global South, both within individual countries and internationally, cluster around three core themes: the evolution of international relations and interactive strategies between the Global North and South; theoretical frameworks for knowledge production and practices of knowledge decolonization within the Global South; and practical pathways for enhancing the reach and impact of Southern knowledge. Within these areas, the struggle for international discursive power is a central concern in the production and dissemination of Southern knowledge. Building upon the current available studies, this paper analyzes the current status, influencing factors, and underlying causes shaping the international dissemination of Southern knowledge. It further proposes targeted recommendations to address structural weaknesses and strengthen the Global South's communicative capacity.

Contemporary academic research predominantly frames international communication as a struggle for discursive power. While this contest manifests superficially as a competition of communicative capacity, its deeper essence lies in the strategic rivalry over the production and dissemination of knowledge within specific geopolitical contexts [1]. As one kind of transnational flows of information, international communication

essentially represents an extension of international relations into the communicative sphere [1], with its core issue revolving around the definition of relationships among nations and states within the global order [2]. Scholars contend that those who effectively dominate international communication secure advantageous positions within global discourse and shape public opinion landscapes [3], underscoring the critical importance of its analysis. Classical communication theory delineates the communication process into five fundamental elements: communicator, content, channel, audience, and effect—a framework readily applicable to international communication [3]. To sharpen the analytical focus, this paper synthesizes these elements into three core dimensions: communication mechanisms, content, and impact.

In this study, international communication from the Global South is defined as the process through which the Global South community leverages various media to share indigenous knowledge and experiences. The goal is to foster a more equitable international order. While this area of research has gained traction and diverse indigenous knowledge systems have been discovered within the Global South, Global South continues to face significant challenges in international communication. Key issues include inadequate communication channels and limited effectiveness. This deficiency is most evident in two main areas: the dominance of Northern-controlled communication institutions—such as media outlets and academic publishing platforms—and the heavy influence of Northern discourse frameworks on the content produced. Consequently, this situation not only creates practical developmental obstacles for many Southern countries but also obscures the indigenous wisdom and experiences of the Global South, limiting the evolution of the global knowledge production system towards greater diversity and balance. Therefore, to disrupt the existing Northern-dominated discourse, it is crucial to pursue dual innovation in both communication content and mechanisms. This entails exploring new communication pathways and establishing a new communication system.

2. The current landscape of the international knowledge system

2.1. The Global North's dominance in knowledge production

Research on communication mechanisms shows that global knowledge production is largely concentrated in the North, particularly in Europe and America. Major academic publishers, journals, databases, and indexing systems are mainly based in Northern countries, allowing them to set standards for citation, publication, language use, and pricing. As a result, scholars and researchers from the Global South often have to conform to Northern academic norms, use English, and focus on topics that align with Northern interests to gain international recognition. This dynamic restricts the inclusion of Southern knowledge and experiences in mainstream discussions, creating an unequal division of labor where "the North produces theories while the South provides data."

2.1.1. Control over knowledge resources

Based on the data obtained from researches, there are many proves that the Global North controls a disproportionately large share of critical resources in international knowledge production system. For example, in publishing sector, data from 2015 shows that the top ten global publishers accounted for 54% of total revenue generated by 57 major publishing companies, up from 53% in 2013. Major industry players like Pearson (\$7.072 billion), Thomson Reuters (\$5.76 billion), Reed Elsevier (\$5.362 billion), Wolters Kluwer (\$4.455 billion), and Penguin Random House (\$4.046 billion) are all based in Northern countries. Overall, 70% of the companies in this report are headquartered in core regions like North America and Europe, highlighting a significant revenue disparity between leading firms and their competitors. Additionally,

influential academic indexing systems such as the Thomson Reuters International Science Index (ISI), Scopus, and the Medline database are also primarily developed and controlled by Northern countries [4].

This concentration of resources has led to structural imbalances in knowledge production and dissemination. By controlling research institutions, academic journals, and textbook systems, the North has secured its dominance in global knowledge production. Scholars have noted that even feminist theories, originally rooted in social movements, have become deeply integrated into the knowledge economy framework centered around American and Western European universities and publishing systems. This dominance explains why Northern theories continue to shape international discourse [5]. Ironically, even emerging fields dedicated to studying the Global South largely retain their academic centers and key discourse production hubs in the North. As scholars observe, "most Southern research centers are located in universities in Europe and America." Although initiatives and projects are beginning to emerge in Southern countries, the core hubs of knowledge production and agenda-setting power largely remain under Northern control [6].

2.1.2. Rule-setting power in global academia

The Global North not only controls international communication resources but also exerts substantial influence in shaping global academic standards.

Firstly, the North dominates in citation standards. It controls major indexing systems like Scopus and Web of Science, which serve as critical gateways for knowledge circulation. These platforms show a clear bias in paper inclusion, systematically excluding research from Southern journals from mainstream visibility. Since search engines and databases are the primary tools for accessing academic resources, unindexed papers are often viewed as lower quality or less influential, marginalizing the contributions of Southern scholars. Additionally, there is an academic culture in the North that favors "in-group" citation. Scholars often cite each other while viewing knowledge from outside their established systems with skepticism. This inward-looking citation pattern further reinforces barriers to equitable knowledge exchange and recognition [4].

Secondly, the North exerts control over academic publishing standards. Most leading international journals are based in the Global North, requiring researchers who wish to publish in them to adopt the theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and discursive norms favored by these journals. Their work is expected to align with the current intellectual priorities of Northern academia. Research that strays from these established paradigms—despite demonstrating significant local relevance and innovation—is often marginalized as "non-compliant" or failing to engage with the relevant scholarly conversation. For example, studies indicate that publication in the *American Journal of Sociology* typically demands adherence to specific research methods and standardized approaches, putting at risk any work that does not conform to these criteria, regardless of its scholarly merit [4].

Thirdly, English has become the dominant *lingua franca* of international academia. This dominance leads many scholars and institutions in the Global South to equate internationalization with publishing in English. For example, to combat perceived marginalization, the Brazilian government has heavily invested in translating English-language literature and subsidizing publications in English journals, often at the expense of supporting knowledge production and dissemination in Portuguese and addressing urgent domestic and regional issues [5]. This trend is common across the Global South, establishing "publication in English" as the primary benchmark for academic prestige and international recognition. Additionally, there is a significant translation asymmetry. The volume of scholarly work translated from English into other languages far exceeds the amount translated into English from all other languages combined [5]. This imbalance reinforces the centrality of Anglophone knowledge while filtering and limiting the global flow of ideas from other regions.

Finally, the monopolistic position of major publishing groups in the Global North enables them to set high prices in academic publishing. These exorbitant journal subscription fees put significant strain on the budgets

of libraries and research institutions in the Global South, restricting their access to essential scholarly resources and deepening the knowledge gap between regions. Ironically, the high cost is often mistaken for a sign of journal quality, further reinforcing the prestige of Northern publications and perpetuating a cycle of unchallenged monopoly [4].

2.1.3. Unequal division of labor in knowledge production

In the global division of knowledge production, the Global South is often seen as a provider of data or raw materials within a system dominated by the Global North. Meanwhile, the ability to create theories, innovate concepts, and establish academic paradigms is largely concentrated in Northern institutions. This arrangement creates a one-way flow of knowledge from the "metropole" (center) to the "periphery." As Beninese philosopher Paulin J. Hountondji points out, the current knowledge economy is characterized by a clear division of labor: theories are developed in core regions and exported to peripheral areas, while the periphery provides raw data and empirical materials that serve as essential inputs for theoretical production in the center [5]. In this framework, scholars from the Global South often encounter significant obstacles in accessing and being recognized by Northern academic systems. These challenges include "academic exile," where they must leave their home countries to join institutions in the North, and ongoing marginalization during this process. Even when Southern scholars succeed in entering Northern academia, they and their knowledge are often limited to "complementary" or niche topics [5].

Focusing on feminist studies, scholars have noted that northern universities often feature "postcolonial feminism" as a separate unit in their gender studies curricula. This unit typically references well-known scholars like Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who are recognized in the northern academic canon. However, the main curriculum that discusses the history of feminism frequently overlooks foundational thinkers from the "Global South." Important figures such as Bina Agarwal, Heleieth Saffioti, Li Xiaojiang, and earlier pioneers like Raden Adjeng Kartini, He-Yin Zhen, and Huda Sharawi are often ignored [5]. This selective inclusion and structural neglect reveal the limitations of the northern knowledge system in incorporating theoretical contributions from the South. Often, southern experiences are treated merely as case studies that support or enhance existing northern frameworks, rather than being recognized as independent sources of knowledge with universal significance. Consequently, this dynamic reinforces an unequal division of labor in global knowledge production, where the North is seen as the creator of theories, while the South is positioned as a provider of supplementary materials.

2.2. The Global South and the devaluation of its own narratives

In terms of content dissemination, the long-standing dominance of Northern narratives has cultivated a perspective that devalues the South while glorifying the North. Rooted in colonial history, this narrative portrays the non-Western world as a backward, chaotic "other" and presents the North as the pinnacle of progress, civilization, and rationality [7]. After World War II, this discourse evolved into a development and aid framework, casting the South as a region in need of rescue and transformation. Such framing justified Northern intervention in the South, while obscuring the structural roots of global inequality. Meanwhile, cultural products from the North—including Hollywood films and mainstream media—have consistently exported Northern lifestyles, values, and political systems worldwide, presenting them as universal ideals. This process further deepens Northern cultural hegemony.

2.2.1. Colonial origins of negative portrayals

The pejorative portrayal of the Global South is deeply rooted in the long-standing Western imagination of the non-Western world as the other. This tradition can be traced back to ancient Greece, where the Greeks positioned themselves as the center of civilization and viewed the East (Asia) as an object to be defined,

scrutinized, and even conquered. This self–other binary laid the initial intellectual groundwork for later colonial expansion [8]. After the Age of Discovery, as Western civilizations encountered diverse cultures around the world, this dichotomous imagination became systematically institutionalized through multiple disciplines such as anthropology, economics, philosophy, history, and literature, further providing academic justification for colonial endeavors [9].

Scholarly research indicates that since the 17th century, European Enlightenment thinkers and British utilitarians developed a cognitive framework for understanding society and institutions, establishing specific values, such as private property rights, rational progressivism, and rights systems, as guiding principles. As Europe embarked on global colonization, it constructed a discourse that divided the world into the civilized (i.e., Europeans) and the indigenous, to legitimize its control over the latter. This division rested on the assumption that indigenous peoples lacked rationality, diligence, and the capacity to judge collective interests, rendering them incapable of forming stable moral bonds with land that would be compatible with modern property rights systems. Therefore, it's the rational, civilized Europeans' duty to transform and improve so-called backward groups through scientific means, value systems, and even coercion. This ideological system was later incorporated into the construction of international law through the ideas of philosophers such as John Locke (1632–1704) and Montesquieu (1689–1755), lending legitimacy to Europe's global claims to sovereignty and its deprivation of indigenous property rights [9].

2.2.2. *Post-colonial transformations of the narrative*

After World War II, as colonies gained independence one after another, the traditional colonial political discourse appeared to have disintegrated on the surface. Yet within the global Northern narrative framework, the imagination and positioning of the South as the Other remained fundamentally unchanged. During this period, with the global expansion of the neoliberal economic order, the Northern narrative about the South underwent a structural transformation: from a discourse of direct colonial domination to one centered on development and aid. The Global South was systematically portrayed as backward and underdeveloped, thus becoming an object in urgent need of external assistance, guidance, and salvation. Through this aid narrative, the South was passively maintained as stagnant and dependent, while the North packaged its political systems, economic models, and cultural values as universal solutions to be promoted. This not only fixed the South on the periphery of the global system at the material level but also consolidated the Northern advantage in terms of knowledge and morality [10].

Specifically, after World War II, to uphold this new discourse framework, Northern countries vigorously promoted concepts such as the Third World, underdeveloped nations, and developing countries through their dominant media, academic research, and international organizations. These terms not only defined the economic and political status of the Global South but also directly shaped international aid policies and development agendas. The 1980s Brandt Report, for example, emphasized that providing aid to Southern countries was a key path to addressing global crises and resolving humanity's shared challenges. Researchers have noted a discursive shift: from Gramsci and Oglesby's framing of the Global South as a site of resistance against colonial order, to the Brandt Report's depiction of a Global South in need of aid. This transformation recast the South from opponents of the colonial order into objects requiring assistance and salvation, while elevating aid itself to a moral imperative concerning the world's self-rescue [10].

Beyond portraying the Global South as a region plagued by economic stagnation and cultural backwardness, recent scholarship has increasingly examined how the North constructs narratives about the South through visual culture and geographical imagination. In *The Tropical Landscape* [11], American historian Nancy Stepan systematically reveals this phenomenon, detailing how Westerners employed a dual strategy of scientific gaze and aesthetic romanticization to depict tropical regions as exotic, primitive spaces

inherently linked to disease and degradation. Within European self-perception, the tropics were contrasted with the North's embodiment of gentleness, moderation, diligence, and frugality. Given the geographical overlap between the Global South and tropical zones, this conceptualization of the tropics naturally shaped the North's overarching perception of the South. Through visual media—including paintings, photographs, films, and exhibitions—a persistent narrative of the South as primitive, melancholic, sinister, and terrifying has been continuously manufactured and disseminated. Scholars emphasize that this visual construct is not arbitrary but deeply rooted in colonial history [12].

The tropics of the South—paradoxically endowed with pastoral romanticism yet perceived as harbors of danger and disorder—embody the European colonizers' self-centered binary logic of civilization versus barbarism/primitivism. Specifically, the tropics/South are imbued with a complex melancholy. Viewed as a pre-modern spiritual homeland, they appear both astonishingly vibrant and primitive, yet tinged with sorrow, as they are destined to fade with the expansion of capitalist industrial civilization. Scholars note that this melancholy parallels Freud's concept of mourning, stemming from the loss of something once cherished but now vanishing [12]. Conversely, the South is often constructed as a threat in Northern narratives. This stems not only from historical fears of tropical diseases but also from post-Cold War geopolitical discourses. Western discourse justifies the superiority and irreplaceability of the capitalist system by portraying the Global South as potential challengers to existing orders—particularly free markets and democratic values—thereby legitimizing military interventions and economic control [13]. This dual narrative strategy—presenting the South as both a romantically lost homeland and a threat to be guarded against—operates within the same power structure, collectively serving to maintain the North's dominance in the global system.

3. Consequences for the Global South

Analysis of the international communication landscape reveals a pronounced pattern of "Northern dominance" within the current global communication system. This indicates that both the mechanisms and content production have long been controlled by the global North, leaving the Global South structurally disadvantaged. This unequal dynamic has produced multiple adverse effects on the Global South, which can be examined across political, economic, and cultural dimensions.

3.1. Political and economic impacts

During the colonial era, Western powers constructed and promoted a colonialist discourse system to justify their domination over colonies, inflicting profound suffering on local societies. Economically, colonial rule facilitated the primitive accumulation of capital for Western nations while fundamentally hindering the formation and development of indigenous economic systems in the colonies, resulting in prolonged stagnation and dependence on an unequal global trade framework. As Lord Frederick Lugard, the first British Governor-General of Nigeria, observed: "The partition of Africa, as we know, was primarily driven by economic considerations—requiring increased supplies of raw materials and food to meet the demands of European industrialized nations" [14]. Scholarly research indicates that systematic economic exploitation of the colonies was a crucial condition for Britain's Industrial Revolution. Between 1451 and 1870, the expansion and prosperity of the Atlantic economy were largely achieved at the expense of Africa's economic development. The African continent, with its resources and population, made significant historical contributions to Western—particularly British—industrialization, yet consequently lost opportunities for autonomous development [15]. Trapped in a passive position of occupation and fragmentation, Africa became a casualty of colonial expansion—a legacy that persists to this day.

Politically, the historical legacy of colonial rule remains a root cause of corruption and social tensions in many former colonies. Nigeria offers a telling example. Research shows that widespread corruption and distrust in its current social system are deeply rooted in the slave trade and the social structures established during colonial times. On one hand, the slave trade enabled local factions to profit from waging war and capturing slaves. Modern African weapons acquired from Europe further intensified the violence and scale of these operations, deepening ethnic and regional hostility while weakening internal cohesion. This made the country more vulnerable to external infiltration and control. On the other hand, colonial rule left behind numerous political issues. In 1914, British colonial authorities forcibly merged Northern and Southern Nigeria to facilitate governance and resource exploitation, completely disregarding the historical, cultural, and identity differences among the hundreds of local ethnic groups that make up modern Nigeria. This merger is still referred to by many Nigerians as the 1914 mistake. Additionally, Britain's indirect rule system in Nigeria—which supported and manipulated local chiefs—fueled abuse of power and tyranny. Since the legitimacy of chieftain authority derived from colonial governments, chiefs prioritized catering to colonial interests over addressing public needs. Consequently, despite rampant abuse of power and corruption, local authorities often turned a blind eye to these issues to avoid alienating their allies. This practice eroded the fairness and accountability of local governance, distorted the logic of power dynamics, and its detrimental effects persist to this day [14].

After World War II, the colonial system formally collapsed, yet the unequal political and economic structures it established persisted through the post-war international order. Former colonial powers used development aid and other means to reintegrate newly independent Southern nations into their dominant world system. Such assistance often came with political and economic conditions, forcing recipient countries to adopt political systems and development models aligned with Northern interests. In reality, this was intended to maintain colonial dependency and consolidate Northern global dominance, rather than to genuinely promote development in recipient countries. Consequently, aid frequently failed to alleviate the hardships of these nations and instead exacerbated their economic fragility and political dependence. As scholars have noted, up to two-thirds of Northern aid funds flow back to donor countries through various channels, with significant portions used to pay foreign experts' salaries and related expenses [15]. This clearly demonstrates that Northern international aid largely serves Northern interests. Not only does it fail to break the structural inequalities of the global system, but under the rhetoric of development and cooperation, it perpetuates the Southern world's dual predicament of institutional dependency and developmental stagnation.

Specifically, during the 1970s and 1980s, the global North—led by the United States—used its dominant international financial institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to bundle foreign aid with political and economic reforms, demanding that recipient countries implement so-called democratic restructuring. In Africa, this process was primarily carried out through the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) led by the World Bank and IMF. Guided by neoliberal principles, the SAP required recipient countries to privatize state-owned enterprises, cut public spending and social welfare, relax labor market regulations, and weaken labor unions. Taking Nigeria as an example, the country initiated economic reforms in the late 1970s, implementing market-oriented measures intended to revitalize the economy. However, reality proved starkly different. Due to its heavy reliance on oil exports, the sharp decline in international oil prices in the early 1980s triggered a severe economic crisis. Moreover, the negative socioeconomic impacts of structural adjustments included rising unemployment, wage declines, inflation, soaring crime rates, widening wealth gaps, and the outflow of national assets due to exploitation by foreign enterprises. As researchers have noted, "The privatization process following structural adjustments severely weakened the public sector, while the private sector failed to achieve significant growth." Foreign investors—particularly construction and oil

exploration firms—drawn by neoliberalism's experiments, are especially keen to collude with corrupt Nigerian officials to plunder the nation's wealth. They pay minimal taxes and generate scarcely any jobs. Hardly any benefits reach the poor [16].

3.2. Cultural erosion and identity dissolution

From a cultural perspective, the negative impacts are equally profound. As previously noted, colonialism extended far beyond the political and economic spheres, eroding colonial territories through cultural means. During the colonial era, colonizers constructed a binary narrative of civilization versus barbarism to justify their rule, reducing the history, culture, and people of colonies to primitive, backward, or even worthless entities. Cultural imperialism operated through multiple channels during this period, including disseminating negative knowledge about colonies through religion and education, and shaping negative images via media such as films and literature. Taking Africa as an example, colonizers produced numerous films that degraded African imagery, depicting Africans as cannibals, jungle dwellers, primitive people, prostitutes, servants, and beasts. Examples include 1930s films like *Tarzan*, *Homo*, and *The Merchant Horn*, as well as 1950s works such as *King Solomon's Treasure*, *Snows of Kilimanjaro*, *Mogambore*, and *The Hunt*. These visual narratives reinforced colonial discourse. Colonizers spread notions such as "Africans are worthless" and "African products are inferior" across the continent. They propagated fallacies including the backwardness of African history, the insufficient contributions of Africans to their own development, the supposed progress brought by colonial rule, and the inferiority of Africans compared to Westerners. This constructed a Eurocentric narrative of civilization and modernization, which continued to influence African patterns of thought [14]. As Kenyan scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o observed [17]: "The true aim of colonialism is control... Its most significant domain of domination lies in the spiritual world of the colonized, specifically through cultural means to shape how people perceive themselves and their connection to the world." Colonial power exercised control not only through military force and institutional mechanisms but also sought to mold the colonized's understanding of self, history, and the world. This deeply rooted cultural legacy remains a persistent challenge for many southern societies in the post-colonial era.

In the post-colonial era, the global North has also used aid as a key instrument for systemic cultural influence and ideological infiltration in the Global South. Beyond promoting its political and economic systems through aid, the North seeks to shape the cognitive frameworks and value orientations of Southern societies via educational and cultural exchange programs [13].

The United States, for instance, has leveraged its foreign education assistance and cultural exchange initiatives as vital tools for ideological projection. Research indicates that since 2001, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has expanded its educational programs in the Middle East and South Asia from one to thirteen, with related budgets soaring from \$99.5 million in fiscal year 2002 to approximately \$274.5 million in fiscal year 2004, covering countries including Afghanistan, Egypt, India, and Pakistan. Concurrently, U.S. investments in education and cultural exchanges with the Muslim world have increased. In 2005, the Public Diplomacy Program allocated over \$1.2 billion to enhance U.S.-Muslim world interactions, aiming to fund annual exchange activities for around 35,000 participants through personnel exchanges and project collaborations, with the goal of "sharing American policies, people, values, and social models." The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), launched in 2002, aims to promote political, economic, and educational reforms in the Middle East and revitalize national democratic foundations. James Kunder, a USAID official, has explicitly stated that the overarching goal of its educational assistance is to mitigate extreme intolerance and anti-Western ideologies [18]. This fully demonstrates that the cultural assistance of the North is not neutral cultural exchange but a strategic behavior intended to shape cognition and guide

discourse, and it serves as an important mechanism for maintaining Northern cultural influence and ideological dominance.

The dominance of Western culture in the Global South has profoundly shaped local values and life aspirations. Scholars note that in many developing countries, becoming American is seen as the sole path to success—a mindset that reflects Northern cultural infiltration into the Global South's cognitive framework, particularly evident in elite education [19]. Many Southern elites educated in the North have developed ideological systems and values heavily influenced by Northern thought. Those fluent in French often quote Gobineau and Renan, English speakers frequently cite Toynbee or Dewey, while those educated in German tend to reference Weber and Spengler. This intellectual dependency not only reinforces the authority of Northern discourse but also stifles the growth and dissemination of indigenous knowledge.

Meanwhile, sustained brain drain further weakens Southern nations' capacity for autonomous development. Statistics show that by 2007, approximately 8.8 million Africans had migrated to Northern countries, with France alone accepting over 2.3 million Black immigrants from former colonies such as Algeria and Morocco. While some migrated during the colonial or decolonization periods, a significant portion arrived in France after the 1960s. These migrant communities contain a substantial number of highly educated individuals. The sustained brain drain has made Africa the world's most severely affected region in terms of intellectual outflow, creating a paradoxical situation: "Africa, the continent with the least education and most underdeveloped population, has supplied the most highly educated workforce to the world's most developed nations" [15]. This phenomenon not only highlights structural inequalities in global educational resources but also profoundly reflects the persistent knowledge dependency and reverse flow of talent that characterize North-South relations in the post-colonial era.

4. Why the imbalance persists: external and internal factors

As previously described, the current communication system is dominated by the Global North. This predicament stems from dual internal and external constraints. Externally, the Global North's dominance over international communication resources and discourse power fundamentally undermines the effectiveness of Southern communication. Internally, the diversity of interests and cultures among Southern nations hinders the formation of a shared discourse, while shortcomings in content construction and expression methods further weaken their communication efforts. This interwoven structural dilemma ultimately leaves the Global South, despite its abundant indigenous knowledge and practical experience, in a state of voicelessness within the international public sphere.

4.1. External factors: Northern hegemony and discursive manipulation

The disadvantaged position of the Global South in international communication stems fundamentally from long-standing structural inequalities within the global communication system. This imbalance not only hinders Southern countries from accessing and utilizing effective communication resources and channels but also allows Northern countries to persistently dominate the construction of international discourse, thereby systematically marginalizing Southern perspectives and experiences.

In terms of resource allocation and discourse control, as previously noted, the Global South has neither achieved effective resource possession nor gained dominance in content production within the international communication system. This dual deficiency—in resource acquisition and content production control—constitutes the fundamental reason for the communication challenges faced by the Global South. Research

indicates that prolonged Western hegemony has marginalized Southern cultural expressions and communication practices across multiple domains, resulting in limited effectiveness [20].

Specifically, while some Southern media outlets—such as Venezuela's TV Sur, Uruguay's Global Guide, and Egypt's Al-Ahram—have persistently voiced anti-colonial and anti-dependency critiques and engaged in discourse confrontations with Western mainstream media, Southern countries' media still remain at a disadvantage in the overall communication landscape [19]. This situation stems from two primary factors. First, the Global South's communication efforts started relatively late, with shortcomings in funding, technological infrastructure, and professional talent reserves. The lagging Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure in some countries directly hinders their ability to participate in global public opinion narratives [1]. Second, the persistent and dominant cultural exports from the North have unconsciously shaped the cognitive frameworks and value orientations of many Southern media outlets, reducing them to mere echo chambers for Western media industries and thereby stifling the growth of indigenous discourse systems [19].

In terms of discourse control, the global North leverages its communication advantages to systematically denigrate and distort the cultural traditions and practical experiences of the Global South. Regarding the exploratory achievements of countries like China and Brazil in transcending the liberal development path, mainstream Northern media often adopt a stance of skepticism and criticism. For instance, some scholars argue that China's development path may be difficult for other regions to emulate—not only because it is rooted in a specific revolutionary legacy but also due to China's position as a regional hub of global capitalism, coupled with substantial support from overseas Chinese capital. These factors collectively create conditions for global capital to flow into China's development, making its successful experience hard to replicate elsewhere. Consequently, this path cannot be regarded as a successful challenge to the capitalist system nor considered an alternative development model [10].

Meanwhile, regarding China's cooperation projects in regions such as Africa, some critics claim that China's purpose in Africa is to advance its own economic goals. The Chinese government and entrepreneurs are exploiting Africa's industrial capacity, much like the Europeans before them, and repatriating most of the commercial profits. In many cases, Chinese companies also bring in workers from China, exacerbating unemployment in the host countries" [16]. Such narratives distort China's efforts to help other countries achieve independent development, framing them as resource plundering. These claims—that Chinese companies worsen local unemployment and seize profits—are clearly biased and defamatory, attempting to negate the significance of autonomous cooperation among Southern countries.

Moreover, in recent years, the global North has employed discursive manipulations to deliberately intensify geopolitical conflicts and construct threatening narratives, aiming to divide the Global South psychologically and cognitively, thereby hindering the formation of a unified stance and common discourse system. For example, Western media have propagated terms such as debt trap, ecological threat, China economic supremacy, and overcapacity, portraying China and other Southern countries as sources of threat. Such narratives not only aim to suppress the dissemination of Southern development experiences but also seek to create divisions and suspicion between China and other Southern nations, thereby weakening mutual trust and cooperation within the South and widening the psychological distance between China and the Global South. The concerns expressed by countries such as Indonesia, Turkey, and Brazil regarding certain Chinese industrial exports reflect, to some extent, the tangible impact of these narratives on the policies and public opinion of Southern countries [7].

Meanwhile, some Western scholars and policymakers have deliberately categorized China and Russia as the so-called Global East, depicting them as opposing camps to the interests of the Global South. The

fundamental purpose of such divisions is to fragment the identity of Southern countries and undermine their collective agency. Additionally, some Western countries have attempted to enhance India's influence in Southern affairs, encouraging it to compete with China, thereby further intensifying conflicts among Southern nations [13]. These measures collectively illustrate how Northern countries consolidate their dominance in the global system through discursive manipulation and geopolitical exploitation, while simultaneously weakening the ability of the Global South to form a unified discourse and engage in joint action.

4.2. Internal factors: diversity, divergence, and capacity gaps within the Global South

The communication disadvantages of the Global South cannot be attributed solely to external factors. Internally, differences in political aspirations, economic interests, and cultural traditions among Southern nations hinder the formation of a unified discourse system. At the same time, the South still lacks sufficient capacity for autonomous communication development. On one hand, its content fails to adequately reflect local experiences and people's lives, relying excessively on grand narratives while lacking concrete, story-driven expressions, resulting in limited communicative appeal and resonance. On the other hand, its communication forms are overly academic and elitist, causing many theoretical efforts aimed at speaking for the underprivileged to become disconnected from the very groups they seek to represent. This creates a closed loop in communication and undermines practical effectiveness.

4.2.1. *Political, economic, and cultural fragmentation*

Due to differences and competition in political and economic interests within the Global South, a unified discourse system has failed to emerge. Varying development aspirations and strategic priorities among countries often lead to internal divisions. For instance, India—which considers itself a leader of the Global South—hosted the Voices of the Global South summit in early 2023 during its G20 presidency, inviting 124 non-G20 countries but excluding China, signaling its intent to vie for leadership. Such internal competition undoubtedly weakens the region's overall cohesion and cooperative potential [21].

Meanwhile, many Southeast Asian and Latin American countries, hindered by domestic political instability and poor governance, lack continuity in their foreign policies. Their heavy reliance on Western technology and markets for economic development further exposes them to policy coercion and agenda-setting by the West. Similarly, most Pacific Island nations and African countries face severely constrained developmental autonomy due to weak economic foundations, outdated infrastructure, and dependence on international aid. Through conditional aid and technical assistance, Western countries continue to consolidate their influence in these regions, thereby fragmenting, to some extent, the collective stance of the Global South [7].

In this context, for most Global South countries still struggling with the basic challenges of maintaining political stability and eradicating extreme poverty, enhancing cultural influence and international discourse power often lacks both practical foundations and policy priority. This internal diversity of needs and significant developmental disparities hinder the construction of a unified identity and common discourse for the Global South [13].

Culturally, the Global South is remarkably diverse. Scholars have highlighted the multifaceted and complex socio-cultural and historical traditions across these nations. Countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Oceania differ significantly from China's cultural context, and there is limited understanding of traditional Chinese culture in these regions. Conversely, most people in the Global South lack in-depth knowledge of other Southern cultural traditions—such as Latin America's Tropical Civilization, Argentina's European immigration concept, Mexico's dualistic cultural perspective, Africa's Ubuntu philosophy, Ethiopia's Gada system, West Africa's Omolu Abibi philosophy, and Tanzania's Ujamaa concept [22]. These rich cultural resources have yet to be adequately discussed among Southern nations. Such

limitations in mutual understanding not only hinder the cultivation of a cultural community but also create opportunities for external forces to exploit cultural differences for infiltration and division.

In conclusion, although the Global South shares some commonalities in identity and interests, it has not yet become a stable, unified community, hindering the construction of a coherent collective discourse system [19].

4.2.2. Insufficient capacity for indigenous knowledge production

The Global South lacks autonomous innovation in producing and disseminating indigenous knowledge, a shortfall evident in two key aspects. First, regarding content, it struggles to transform rich local experiences into compelling narratives. Dissemination practices remain constrained by Northern discourse frameworks, overlooking content tailored to local audiences. Second, regarding form, current knowledge dissemination relies excessively on academic and specialized channels. Although these provide theoretical depth, they stay confined to specific circles and fail to reach broader social groups, thus limiting the practical impact and transformative potential of such knowledge.

As for content dissemination, some practices in the Global South reveal shortcomings in narrative strategy and content construction. In China's case, scholars note that while the country has developed a unique modernization path, its external communication of Chinese-style modernization often falls short. This is largely because current narratives rely on monotonous, grand political and economic frameworks that lack organic coherence, failing to capture the rich cultural stories and social practices embedded in the process. As scholars point out, "Chinese-style modernization is not just a story of economic takeoff, but also encompasses the stories of China's revolution and construction, the stories of Chinese farmers' immense sacrifices and contributions... the stories of ecological civilization, and the stories of cultural inheritance." Overemphasizing economic achievements may inadvertently fuel the threat from China. Thus, China's modernization narrative should integrate more concretely with local experiences and social realities, rather than remaining abstract [2].

Similar issues are observed in other Southern countries. For example, Nigeria launched two cultural projects aimed at improving its national image, but despite substantial investment, they were criticized by public opinion as cliché due to hollow content and detachment from pressing domestic and international social realities. Ultimately, these projects not only failed to enhance Nigeria's international reputation but were even labeled a mess [14]. These cases collectively demonstrate that when communication content is not grounded in reality and lacks persuasiveness, it is difficult to achieve the desired effects.

Research further indicates that China's international communication has long suffered from a misalignment in target positioning. For years, China's attention to Northern media outlets—such as the BBC, CNN, and The New York Times—has greatly surpassed its attention to media in Global South regions like Africa and Latin America. This excessive Northern focus has inadvertently reduced China's diverse global relationships to a singular China-West dynamic, distorting the selection of communication targets. Such a back-to-the-South strategy not only limits the global reach of China's discourse but also hinders deep resonance with non-Western worlds. Thus, promoting a shift toward looking east and moving south would allow China to engage broadly with Southern countries through a more equal, open historical perspective and global awareness, integrating China with the world in a more comprehensive, profound, and creative way [2].

Additionally, the academic-centered approach to knowledge production and dissemination has inherent limitations. As Spivak [23] observes, academic narratives fail to adequately represent the lived experiences of subjects, reducing their value systems to generalized or magnified frameworks that are inherently flawed from a rationalist perspective. Treating subjects as universal archetypes in anthropological descriptions comes at the cost of fragmented cognitive decoding. Thus, academic narratives often struggle to capture authentic life experiences and underlying logics, abstracting value systems into models or frameworks—a process of rationalization and generalization that obscures or distorts everyday concrete realities. Consider Subaltern

Studies: although its mission is to give voice to the common people, its actual research often relies on highly philosophical, abstract academic discourse. This inherently elitist discourse disconnects from ordinary people's daily realities and cognitive patterns, leaving them in a state of silence and being represented—thus straying from the school's original theoretical intent [23]. Such a disconnect between academic discourse and lived practice exposes the flaws of communication models based solely on theoretical deduction and textual analysis.

5. Toward a new communication order: needs and pathways

As analyzed above, the Global South urgently needs to strengthen the international dissemination of its knowledge and content. This imperative arises from both a structural critique of unequal communication patterns and the need to address real developmental challenges. With the collective rise of Southern nations in economic, political, and cultural spheres, the disparity between their rising international status and persistent discursive marginalization has become glaring. Transforming the Northern-dominated unequal communication framework is thus an historical necessity. Furthermore, this demand responds to global challenges, requiring the conversion of the South's rich indigenous knowledge, historical experience, and practical wisdom into globally shareable solutions. In short, dismantling existing unequal communication structures is both a moral ideal and an historical imperative.

This study argues that to unlock the potential of Southern knowledge and advance a more equitable international communication order, the Global South must innovate in both mechanisms and content. This means building a more consensus-driven and coherent Southern discourse system while leveraging new communication ecosystems to elevate the Southern voice and challenge existing unequal structures.

5.1. Building new communication mechanisms

At the level of communication mechanisms, the first step is to identify the most effective forms of knowledge dissemination and reception for the Global South. As Neil Postman [24] observed, every medium has its preferred content and style: "The definition of truth is at least partly determined by the nature of the medium." Media are not neutral tools; their inherent metaphors shape interpretation. The Global South has access to diverse platforms—academic resources (books, journals, databases, digital libraries, research collaborations) and mass culture (film, television, art, video games, social media). Yet which forms enhance communication effectiveness, and which weaken it or invite misinterpretation, requires further research. Media innovation also entails strategic choices in convergence: between single- and multi-media approaches, how to optimize efficiency, improve the communication ecosystem, and leverage AI are critical issues for the Global South to address.

Second, innovations in communication mechanisms require strategic optimization of cooperation approaches in the Global South. With the North retaining resource and technological advantages, proactive collaboration among Southern countries enables more effective use of existing communication channels, enhancing the visibility and persuasiveness of their narratives. Such cooperation also benefits the Global North. Scholars note that deeper dialogue between Northern and Southern research achievements not only integrates Southern perspectives into Northern academia but also helps scholars worldwide demonstrate local social dynamics, cultivate regional awareness, and reveal biases that single collaborations might overlook [25]. Thus, fostering North-South dialogue and mutual learning goes beyond resource exchange—it advances the international communication system toward greater equity, diversity, and inclusion through win-win cooperation.

5.2. Producing new communication content

In producing communication content, the Global South should first excavate and creatively transform indigenous knowledge and practical experiences. On this basis, it must consciously transcend Northern-dominated narrative frameworks and value systems. Southern countries possess rich and diverse historical legacies and cultural traditions. Their communication practices should be rooted in local contexts, fostering dynamic interplay between regional realities and global perspectives. By telling their own Southern stories in vivid, concrete, and compelling ways, they can effectively challenge existing stereotypes of the Global South.

Second, the Global South must identify shared internal issues to communicate effectively. Despite differences in history, culture, and socio-economic conditions, these countries share a collective memory of anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles, along with common challenges like poverty reduction, food and energy security, climate governance, social equity, and sustainable development [26]. This shared memory provides emotional resonance for knowledge exchange, while real-world challenges make experience-sharing essential. By focusing on and interpreting these common issues, the Global South can amplify its international voice, strengthen internal solidarity, and enhance its overall cohesion and collective action.

Third, content production in the Global South must uphold equality and diversity. As a collective, the Global South should work toward an independent, impartial international communication system at the macro level—asserting authority in global discourse through coordinated voices while serving as a defender of world peace and a promoter of shared development [21]. Scholars note that Southern action embodies a transboundary responsibility ethics. Ideologies such as Pan-Africanism, Pan-Arabism, and Pan-Asianism—rooted in broader political, cultural, and historical ties—express care for others beyond domestic narratives. The Global South pursues not a centralized universalism, but one that builds functional consensus on global issues through ongoing dialogue among diverse stakeholders [25]. In content creation, it should champion equality, advocating respect for the diversity of world civilizations, promoting common values of humanity, valuing the inheritance and innovation of civilizations, strengthening international cultural exchanges and cooperation, and opposing any form of cultural hegemony and the global promotion of single cultural models [27]. Only then can we advance a truly equitable international communication order.

Finally, the Global South must approach Northern knowledge and experience rationally. Faced with unequal communication structures, the more pragmatic path is not to abandon existing systems entirely, but to restructure and optimize them while acknowledging their reality. Southern knowledge dissemination should not exclude the North; instead, it should pursue pluralistic equality through symbiosis and dialogue, promoting fair discourse power and ensuring the Southern voice gains its rightful international space. As scholars note, engaging the Global South as a cultural issue does not simply mean resisting the West, but restoring the discourse of suppressed knowledge systems to build a more equitable knowledge landscape [28]. Thus, in sharing local experiences, the Global South need not reject Northern intellectual resources or seek difference for its own sake. Rather, it should engage constructively with the North based on its own practices, seeking shared frameworks and consensus. Through such interactions, the Global South can gradually reshape the global communication order.

6. Conclusion

The Global South has accumulated extensive indigenous knowledge and practical experience through long-term development, demonstrating significant knowledge production potential. Amid multiple global challenges and the growing limitations of the North-centered modernization paradigm, the diverse wisdom and alternative solutions of the Global South can offer crucial intellectual resources for addressing today's

dilemmas [20]. Promoting Southern knowledge and experience also helps dismantle structural inequalities in the Northern-dominated global knowledge system, fostering a more diverse and inclusive knowledge ecosystem. Yet in practice, Southern knowledge dissemination still faces limited effectiveness and inefficient pathways due to multifaceted internal and external obstacles. Thus, building a more equitable world communication order requires expanding the theoretical and practical approaches to international communication, moving beyond the Western-centric framework toward a more diverse, balanced, and inclusive direction.

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