

THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL NEWS NETWORKS IN CONSTRUCTING GLOBAL SOUTH IDENTITIES

SHAH S¹, PARVEEN N^{2*}, DURRANI AN²

¹Department of International Relations, University of Peshawar, Pakistan

²Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Peshawar, Pakistan

*Correspondence Author Email Address: nasirap@gmail.com

(Received, 5th September 2024 Accepted 24th October 2025, Published 7th November 2025)

Abstract International news networks are central actors in the contemporary production, circulation, and contestation of identities across the global order. This manuscript synthesizes theory and empirical scholarship on how transnational news organisations, primarily those headquartered in the Global North but also emergent southern networks, frame, represent, and thereby help construct collective and individual identities in the Global South. Drawing on scholarship on news values and framing, media imperialism, and contra-flow mediated construction of reality and Global South scholarship, the paper argues that international news networks perform three interrelated functions in identity construction: Agenda-setting and framing that privilege particular problem definitions and storylines. Symbolic positioning that links southern places and peoples to preexisting stereotypes. Provision of arenas for contestation where southern media, publics, and political actors accept, negotiate, or resist external frames. The analysis highlights structural asymmetries in news flows and resources that sustain enduring North-South influence, but also documents contra-flows and southern-origin broadcasters that diversify available narratives. The result is hybrid, contested identity formations in the Global South, shaped by interaction between external mediated imagery and local meaning-making. Implications for research, policy, and media practice include the need for pluralised news infrastructures and audience-centred empirical studies to map how mediated representations translate into lived identity.

[Citation: Shah, S., Parveen, N., Durrani, A.N. (2025). The role of international news networks in constructing global south identities. J. Life Soc. Sci, 4: 44. <https://doi.org/10.64013/bbasrlifess.v2025i1.44>].

Keywords: International news networks; contemporary production; circulation; Global North; southern-origin broadcasters

Introduction

The term “Global South” denotes a widely used political, geographical, and discursive category that groups regions historically marginalised in economic and informational hierarchies (Galtung et al., 1965; Entman et al., 1993; Schiller et al., 1976). As these regions occupy increasingly prominent roles in geopolitics, trade, and culture, how they are represented in international media matters. Representations circulate meaning about what the Global South is, what problems it has, and what possibilities it contains. International news networks, wire agencies, 24-hour satellite channels, and cross-border digital outlets are primary producers of those representations, supplying images and narratives that travel across national borders and penetrate local public spheres (Thussu et al., 2006; Hachten et al., 2015; Seib et al., 2008; Iqani et al., 2019). This manuscript examines how international news networks (INNs) contribute to constructing Global South identities, combining insights from classic

research on news values and media imperialism with contemporary studies of contra flows and southern media emergence.

Theoretical foundations

Two sets of theoretical perspectives anchor the analysis. First, scholarship on news values, framing, and agenda-setting explains the mechanisms by which media shape meaning. Foundational work on foreign news selection emphasises structural news criteria that make some events more “newsworthy” than others and influence representations across networks (Galtung et al., 1965; Wasserman et al., 2018). Framing theory shows how lexical choices, sources, and visual composition guide audiences’ interpretations of people and events (Entman et al., 1993). Second, critical political-economy and postcolonial perspectives on media imperialism, cultural domination, and world systems approaches to identify structural asymmetries in ownership, production capacity, and normative power that situate

INNs within unequal flows of influence ([Schiller et al., 1976](#); [Boyd 1980](#); [UNESCO 1980](#); [Nordenstreng et al., 1974](#)). These perspectives foreground both the micro mechanisms and macro-structures that shape mediated identity production.

International news networks and asymmetrical flows

Historical and empirical studies document persistent asymmetry in global news flows. Early UNESCO and academic reports demonstrated one-way traffic of television and program material from industrialised centres to peripheral regions, thus creating uneven exposure to particular narratives and cultural products ([Couldry et al., 2016](#); [Hall, et al 1997](#); [Curran, et al 2002](#)). Major wire services and network broadcasters located in the North (Reuters, CNN, BBC) continue to exercise disproportionate influence over what counts as international news and how it is framed ([Boyd 1980](#); [Mowlana, et al 1985](#)). This structural concentration influences the representation. Limited source diversity means newsrooms in the North often rely on the same pool of official, foreign-service sources when covering Southern events, resulting in homogenised narratives. Resource advantages enable Northern outlets to set agendas during major crises, rapid reportage, dramatic visuals, and sustained round-the-clock coverage that foregrounds particular problem definitions and sidelines contextualised narratives ([Thussu et al., 2012](#); [Couldry et al., 2016](#)). These dynamics reproduce long-standing tropes in which Global South societies are pictured primarily as sites of crisis, lack or political instability. Such framing not only informs external audiences' perceptions but also filters back into local imaginaries through local elites' adoption of international narratives, foreign policy formulations calibrated to global attention, and aspirational cultural identification with global visibility. The interplay of representation and reception thereby mediates identity work at multiple levels ([Schiller et al., 1976](#); [Rantanen et al., 2005](#)).

Framing Southern identities: recurring patterns

Content analyses and critical readings reveal recurrent frames deployed by INNs when covering the Global South. Three dominant framing patterns appear:

1. **Crisis and victimhood:** Many stories emphasize conflict, humanitarian emergency, and institutional failure, creating durable associations between geographic regions and insecurity ([Hachten et al., 2012](#)). Such frames can reduce complex social and political configurations to singular problem narratives.
2. **Poverty and development deficit:** Economic stories often stress dependency, aid-receiving status, or developmental shortfalls, reinforcing a North-South relational schema that positions the South as an object of intervention rather than agency ([Couldry et al., 2016](#)).
3. **Exoticism and cultural othering:** Cultural coverage sometimes presents the South as exotic,

traditional, or backward relative to Northern modernity, an orientalist impulse that essentialises identities ([Hall et al., 1997](#); [Sreberny, 1991](#)).

These frames are not universal or unchanging. International networks also produce counter frames portrayals of entrepreneurship, rising middle classes, electoral agency, and regional leadership, which reflect changing global economics and the editorial strategies of some outlets seeking novel audiences ([Segev et al., 2019](#)).

Contra-flows, southern broadcasters, and the diversification of narratives

From the late 20th century onward, contra-flows media content and networks originating in the South that travel outward have challenged the North-centric information order. Southern-origin broadcasters and platforms claim different editorial priorities and sourcing practices and thus offer alternative representations that foreground historical perspective, regional agency, and postcolonial critiques.^[6,20] Scholarship on the “Al Jazeera effect” illustrates how a well-resourced southern broadcaster can alter media ecology by providing different story selection and by creating transnational publics receptive to non-Western frames ([Seib et al., 2008](#)).

Contra flows face structural limits: regulatory pressures, language barriers, and competition from entrenched Northern brands. Southern networks sometimes reproduce geopolitical alignments or state interests and complicating their role as purely emancipatory voice(s) ([Acheampong, 2020](#)). Thus, the media environment remains hybrid: northern INNs retain reach and prestige while southern actors incrementally reconfigure available narratives.

Identity work in the Global South: reception, negotiation, and hybridization

Identity construction is not simply top-down. Audiences in the Global South actively interpret, contest, and appropriate mediated images ([Wasserman et al., 2015](#)). Academic work on mediatization and representation shows that people situate media images within existing social practices and discourses: they might internalize, resist, or remix external framings to serve local ends ([Couldry et al., 2010](#)). For example, crisis imagery circulated by international networks can be deployed by local activists to mobilize aid and reform, but can also be contested by community leaders seeking dignity and context. Celebratory images of economic success may be selectively embraced by urban middle-classes while rural populations remain invisible in global narratives.

This interaction produces hybrid identities where global cultures intersect with local languages, histories, and social relations. The mediated construction of reality thesis emphasises that media both create symbolic resources and shape the environment in which identity narratives are produced, but they do not determine identity mechanically ([Couldry et al., 2017](#)).

Empirical illustrations

Three empirical vignettes illustrate these dynamics:

1. **Conflict coverage and Africa:** Multiple studies show that Western networks disproportionately emphasise conflict and disease in African coverage, which reinforces narratives of victimhood and emergency that obscure innovation, governance reform, and cultural life (Hachten., et al 2017). Such representation affects tourism and aid policy, and diasporic pride.
2. **Al Jazeera and Arab public spheres:** Al Jazeera's rise reconfigured how Arab publics receive international news, offering coverage that combined regional sourcing with global reach; its editorial emphasis on regional agency reoriented some identity narratives away from purely Western frames (Seib., et al 2008).
3. **BRICS and South-South media interaction:** Increased media cooperation among rising Southern powers and the expansion of southern commercial broadcasters have created new channels of representation, films, TV formats, and news partnerships contributing to a multi-faceted Global South identity that includes economic dynamism and geopolitical assertiveness (Wasserman., et al 2018).

Discussion: consequences and tensions

The influence of INNs on identity construction is ambivalent. Concentrations of production and persistent North-South flows tend to reproduce asymmetries that limit the range of available symbolic resources for southern self-narration. This has consequences for political voice, cultural esteem, and policy framing. On the other hand, the proliferation of southern media actors, diaspora media, and global digital platforms increases narrative pluralism and empowers alternative articulations of identity. The tension between structural domination and emergent pluralism is central: identities in the Global South are simultaneously shaped by external frames and by endogenous cultural and political projects that resist, appropriate, or revise those frames (Schiller., et al 1976; Couldry., et al 2016; Acheampong 2020). Policy implications follow. Supporting independent southern journalism and diversified news infrastructures can mitigate monolithic representation. Capacity-building helps local producers participate in global agenda-setting. Research should move beyond content analysis to audience ethnographies that trace how mediated images become meaningful in everyday identity formation.

Conclusion

International news networks play a consequential, however neither deterministic nor singular role in constructing Global South identities. Through agenda setting, framing, and symbolic positioning, INNs shape widely circulating narratives about the South. Yet the rising plurality of southern origin networks and active audience practices produce contested and

hybrid identity formations. A just and pluralistic global media ecology will require policy interventions, investment in southern media capacity, and scholarly attention to audience reception and production practices that together expand the repertoire of identities available to people across the Global South.

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Declaration

Authors' Contributions

Sundas Shah was involved in conceiving and designing the study. The corresponding author (Nasira Parveen) was involved in the collection and analysis of the data, and Asma Noreen Durrani was involved in drafting the manuscript. Sundas Shah, Nasira Parveen, and Asma Noreen Durrani have been involved in critically revising the manuscript for important intellectual content. All authors approved the final version of the draft.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable

Acknowledgment

Not applicable

Availability of data and materials

All the generated data in this article.

Funding

No funding was given to support this study



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