

Western Media Narratives on the Rise of the Global South: A Comparative Study of China's 5G and India's UPI

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Abstract. The accelerated growth of countries in the Global South, as well as the dramatic change of the global technological and power balance, has also brought up a very interesting research question about how it is reported and interpreted by the western mainstream media outlets. This research uses the framework theory of international communication, takes China's 5G and India's digital public infrastructure (such as the UPI payment system) for example, and analyzes the relevant reporting of two big western media houses, BBC/NPR and their news interpretation perspective (long-term). This research adopts a rigorous qualitative content analysis approach to make their main news interpretation perspective. The study will establish a codebook which contains the following types: "development opportunity Interpretation", "security threats", "technological nationalism". This study aims to challenge the dominant Western-centred story in international communication, and to offer a critical communication studies lens for interpreting the new power play in an age of "technological geopolitics".

Keywords: Western mainstream media, Global South, framing analysis, international communication

1. Introduction

The Western mainstream media have, for a long time, used their advantage in world communications to covertly manipulate foreign public opinion and shape people's understanding of other nations with targeted news-making frames. With the development of digital geopolitics, the emergence and growing prevalence of unequal power dynamics as a dimension of global communication.

China and other countries of the "Global South" are likewise advancing technology more quickly in recent years, and making major advances in core technologies like 5G and digital payments: from learning how to use technology from the West, working with the West, to being world leaders in some areas. The growth of Global South countries has challenged the long-standing technological hegemony of the West, creating opportunities for diversified development in the international public sphere.

The focus of this study is the interpretation of the "Global South" development achievements by Western mainstream media: whether they see it as an opportunity for common development or define it as a potential security threat. The research will also attempt to analyze the narrative

differences among various Western media outlets and explore the influence of geopolitical factors on their reporting positions.

This study takes China's 5G and India's digital payment as case studies for systematic comparative analysis. The core purpose is to reveal the logic of Western-centric narratives, provide a critical perspective for understanding the new power games in the digital era, and promote the construction of a more equitable and pluralistic international communication order.

2. Literature review

2.1. Framework theory and its application in news communication

Originating from sociology and psychology, framework theory was later introduced into communication studies. Goffman used it to analyze media reality construction. In 1999, Zang Guoren proposed a three-level news framework theory. This theory includes high, medium, and low levels. Senior management focuses on macro themes and their significance, middle management emphasizes elements like the 5W framework, while junior staff concentrate on rhetoric and metaphor [1].

The framing theory has been widely applied in comparative studies of media reports from China and the West, such as Meng Yuxi et al.'s analysis of bias in BBC and CNN's coverage of the "Essex Lorry Incident", Hao Hemin's judgment on the neutral stance of Western business media in coverage of China, and Zhang Shisheng's comparative analysis of the frameworks used by Chinese and German media in diplomatic events [2-4].

2.2. Research expansion in international communication and digital geopolitics

In the field of international communication, the rise of digital geopolitics has reshaped the global power dynamics. Hong Yu and Chen Shuai analyzed from the perspective of geopolitical discourse, arguing that in the context of the digital Cold War, the narrative construction of the Internet media has become the focal point of strategic competition among major powers, and Western media maintain their discourse hegemony through the framework of security [5]. These studies have revealed how digital geopolitics has exacerbated the imbalance of power in international communication, and have provided theoretical support for analyzing the narratives of Western media regarding the "Global South".

2.3. Limitations and innovations in comparative media framework studies

Currently, most domestic research focuses on the comparative analysis of a single event between China and the West, or on case studies of China's 5G [6,7]. Lack of systematic comparison of different foreign media and multiple issues. Comparative analyses of the international framework mostly focus on sensitive issues such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Taiwan question, and AI technology, while there is relatively insufficient case comparison research on the narrative of Western media in the context of the rise of the "Global South" [8-10].

In conclusion, the existing research has accumulated experience in the empirical application of the framework theory, but it still falls short in the comparison between Western media and in the narrative research on Western media's coverage of the Global South.

3. Research design

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, integrating discourse analysis and text analysis methods, and selects two influential Western media outlets, BBC and NPR (as shown in Table 1), for in-depth interpretation of their relevant reports from 2016 to 2025. By conducting a comprehensive search of the official websites of two media outlets, 26 texts were selected. The sample time span covered the period from India's demonetization policy in 2016 to key events such as digital fraud in 2025, fully presenting the different stages of technological development. It encompasses China's 5G geopolitics and India's digital payment social transformation, activating all analytical frameworks of security, development, and governance, and can fully support the research on the narrative construction model of the "Global South", meeting the systematicity and typicality of the sample in terms of time span, issue depth, and media coverage. Then, the 26 reports were analyzed. By constructing an analysis dictionary including dimensions such as "development opportunities", "security threats", "competitors", and "partners", the samples were systematically coded and interpreted. Based on the framework coding, the researchers also manually judged the emotional tendency (positive/negative/neutral) of each paragraph, using emotional words and the overall context as the basis.

Table 1. The reasons for comparing and analyzing BBC and NPR

Comparison dimension	BBC	NPR	Comparative Analysis
Nature and Status of the Media	The UK's public broadcasting organization, bound by a Royal Charter, is primarily funded by television license fees	Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), a nonprofit member organization in the United States, is primarily funded through public appropriations, corporate sponsorships, and audience donations	Both are among the most credible and influential public media outlets in their respective countries and indeed the English-speaking world. Their reporting represents a "establishment" voice that strives for depth and objectivity
Global Influence	Approximately 308 million weekly (2024 data) BBC, with over 140 million monthly unique users in the UK Domestic UK: 61% of adults hold a positive view of the BBC	Reaches approximately 42 million Americans weekly via radio (2023 data) Podcasts exceed 500 million total downloads annually Ranked by audiences as the most trusted news brand	The BBC has a global reach, while NPR wields significant influence within the United States and among its elite circles
Comparative Research Value	Representing the "British perspective" and the "global perspective," its reporting often examines issues from historical, geopolitical, and global governance angles	Representing the "American perspective" and the "domestic policy perspective," its narrative is more closely tied to U.S. national security, economic competition, and democratic values	As Western public media, do they share a similar framework of conflicting "security threats" and "development opportunities"? How do they exhibit differences in reporting bias, source selection, and framing priorities based on their respective countries' geostrategic interests

4. Data analysis results

After an initial review of all 26 reports and completion of comprehensive coding, the study further extracted 81 paragraphs containing explicit emotional vocabulary, direct quotations with clear stances, or strong value judgments, where contextual evidence supported a single orientation. These

'value judgment paragraphs' underwent detailed framework coding and statistical distribution analysis. The study reached the following conclusions.

NPR and BBC employ markedly different combinations of framing devices when reporting on China and India. Among these 81 value-laden paragraphs, coverage of China predominantly employed the frameworks of “security threat” (52%) and “competitor” (48%). This indicates that Western media primarily interpret China's technological rise within a geopolitical and security context, emphasizing the contest for technological dominance and systemic risks. In UPI's related coverage, development effectiveness (46%) and development opportunities (32%) dominate, followed by other frameworks such as governance/corruption. The security framework accounts for only 9%. India's digital payments are framed as market opportunities and development narratives rather than security threats. China is constructed in Western media narratives as a “technological security threat” and “strategic competitor,” while India is portrayed as a “digital development success story” and “potential market partner.” (Figure 1)

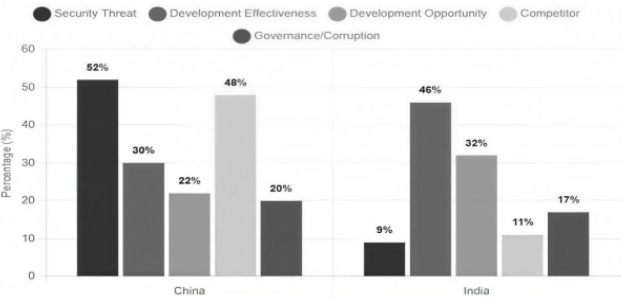


Figure 1. Comparison of reporting frameworks related to 5G in China and UPI in India

In terms of narrative differences among media, NPR tends to report from a technical and market perspective, providing more objective descriptions of China's technological leadership (development effectiveness 35%), while still maintaining a relatively high security framework (45%). Its coverage of India is more balanced, focusing on the social impact of technological applications. The BBC's reporting has a more political tendency, with the security framework accounting for as high as 58% in its coverage of China, and its coverage of India pays more attention to governance issues (governing corruption 20%). (Figure 2)

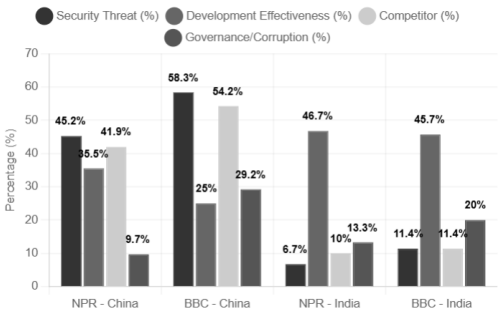


Figure 2. Differences in narrative strategies between NPR and BBC

The analysis reveals two main points. There are significant differences in the narrative frameworks used by Western media when reporting on China's 5G and India's UPI. The emotional tendencies also show a clear divergence. China's 5G is portrayed as a "security threat" and a "competitor", while India's UPI employs more frameworks such as "development opportunity" and

"development effectiveness". In the encoded sections of the value judgment paragraphs, the reports on China's 5G mainly conveyed negative sentiments, focusing on the security risks; while the reports on India's UPI were mostly in positive or neutral tones, highlighting the development potential and institutional innovation. Secondly, there are subtle differences among the media. The BBC provides more in-depth coverage of social issues related to India's technological development, focusing on issues of corruption governance and humanitarian care; while NPR places more emphasis on the technical aspects of the description, but the overall narrative tendency is consistent.

5. Discussion

Western public media like BBC and NPR have built distinct narrative logics. They report on the technological rise of the Global South with these differences. Such disparity appears in how they depict various countries. It also ties closely to the media's own stances and traditions. At its core, it reflects deep projections of geopolitical and ideological structures.

China and India are key representatives of the Global South. Yet the two Western public media in this study tell nearly opposite stories. This distinction is not random. It comes from the West's view of different emerging forces. China, seen as an existing order challenger, has its tech progress labeled a potential threat. India, regarded as a potential partner, has its tech gains integrated into Western-led development narratives. These narratives uphold the rationality of the West's own model.

The selected Western media share a basic narrative direction. But their specific expression strategies differ. For example, NPR's reports focus on technology itself and market logic. They retain more factual descriptions and commercial perspectives. The BBC emphasizes political and value dimensions more. It frequently cites security experts or government officials. This intensifies the ideological tone of its reports. The difference stems from the media's distinct positioning. American public broadcasting and British public media have unique traditions. It also reflects the cognitive preferences of their respective audiences. These differences do not weaken their common basic narrative structure. Both agree closely on China's tech "threat" and India's development "opportunity."

In the current international landscape, the West sees China as a major strategic competitor. This political judgment has shaped media's "security-oriented" tech discourse. Reports on Huawei's 5G are rarely just technical discussions. They often extend geopolitical games. Technical parameters carry political connotations. Business decisions are interpreted as national strategies. This "security-oriented" narrative serves policy needs. It also shapes public perception in turn. It forms a discourse loop from policy to media to the public. Meanwhile, India's digital payment and similar cases are framed as proof of democratic vitality. Their success lies in commercial innovation. It also holds ideological symbolic meaning. It illustrates the superiority of Western values.

6. Conclusion

Differentiated narratives reflect the West's view of the Global South's tech rise. Technology is not fully neutral. It gets reinterpreted as a symbol in existing ideological-geopolitical structures. Chinese tech breakthroughs spark security concerns beyond the technology itself. They stem from a nation labeled a strategic competitor. India's digital payment boom ties to its commercial value. It also comes from a democratic state seen as balancing China regionally.

Such narrative differences serve the West's broader strategy. They contain tech forces viewed as challengers. They attract potential partners in technological advancement.

Western media act as more than information disseminators. They construct reality. They report events and help shape public perceptions. By selectively presenting tech stories from various countries, they reinforce existing geopolitical divides. This also solidifies the global tech power hierarchy. Global South nations need to grasp this narrative politics' workings. They must recognize the geopolitical logic in tech discourse. This helps them engage more effectively in global tech governance. It also secures a fairer narrative space for themselves.

This study offers cognitive guidance to Global South nations. It uncovers the differentiated logic of Western tech narratives and exposes their geopolitical core. This helps these nations escape discourse dominance. They can then actively shape their own tech images.

Academically, the research compares China's 5G and India's UPI under a unified analytical framework. It uncovers narrative "double standards." It offers new perspectives on tech discourse and power politics, along with empirical references for related studies.

Sample size limitations affect this study. It does not include a broader range of Western media, leaving room for expanding the conclusions. Future studies could build a larger media corpus. They might combine computational text analysis methods and include more direct voices from the Global South. Focus could shift to the full news production and audience reception chain. This would deepen understanding of narrative communication dynamics.

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