Chapter 1

Image on the Street Is . . .
Folk Depictions of the Global South in Social Imagery and Social Video at Mass Scale

Shalin Hai-Jew
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8863-0175
Kansas State University, USA

ABSTRACT

To capture what some of the “Global South”-tagged social messages are in early 2019, an image set of 1000+ images was scraped from Flickr and another 500+ images from Google Images and dozens of fairly recent (past few years) videos were identified on YouTube (with their available closed captioning transcripts captured). These mostly decontextualized digital visual contents (still and motion) were coded with bottom-up coding, based on grounded theory, and some initial insights were created about the multi-dimensional messaging. These contents were generated by conference organizers, alternate and foreign news sites, university lecturers, and the mass public, so the messaging is comprised of both formal and informal messaging, information from news channels, and responses to news channels. This work discusses some of the manual and computation-based coding techniques and some initial findings.

INTRODUCTION

The story of the twentieth century is the creation of a ubiquitous visual culture where image and reality, appearance and authenticity, are often experienced as one and where events are comprehended through pictures while pictures simultaneously constitute events. -- Louis P. Masur (March 1998, p. 1422)

In this country, if you find a cool place with shade, there is a very good chance something deadly has found it first. -- Marc Cameron in Tom Clancy Oath of Office (2018)

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-9821-3.ch001
In the popular imagination, cultivated from fiction, art, movies, and social media, the Global South is a place of survival, with the predatorial powerful victimizing the weak, with licit and illicit means of making livelihoods, with everyday hardships and grinding privation and creative ways of making-do, with crowds of people in compressed spaces, with diseases no longer common in the Global North, and other common depictions. For many, the piecemeal fictionalized and dramatized depictions are the reality; they are the shorthand for understanding the “other” by which the Global North understands itself on a mass and collective scale. Theirs is a role defined by contrast. Further, given the polysemic and multidimensional nature of media messaging, different messages are received by those consuming media, with much of the intake shaped by people’s individual confirmation biases and personalities, and with much of the messaging understood on conscious, subconscious, and even unconscious levels. There is different messaging from the academic research literature, the mass media, and social media as well.

Some definitions. Over the years, a number of terms have been used to refer to poor or low-income countries. In the 1950s to 1960s, the “Third World” was in common use. In the mid-1950s, “non-aligned newly independent countries” was a term of art. In the 1960s, the G77 was a common reference (as compared to the G8 to indicate the core countries with economic might and influence). During the Cold War, there was the first world (industrialized nations), the second world (the communist bloc countries), and then the “third world” as the rest. Then, there was the construct of developing countries in the 1970s and onwards, with references like “less developed countries” or “least developed countries.” In the present day, the “Global South” is used as a counter-point to the more developed “Global North”; the “Global South” refers to a swath of countries on land masses including South America, Africa, and Asia. A history-based definition of the “global south” reads:

The global south is a complex and dynamic concept that straddles multiple social science and humanist disciplines. Emerging around 2000, it reflects the agenda of two ascending forces in those years: the antiglobalist (alterglobalist/global justice) movement and the World Social Forum, on the one hand, and an alliance of Southern states within the World Trade Organization on the other. Generally seen as an inheritor of the emancipatory thought behind the notion of the ‘third world,’ in the social sciences the idea of the ‘global south’ is also entangled with more classical academic themes such as modernity development, and (post) colonialism. (Kalb & Steur, 2015, p. 186)

Another approach is to divide the world into advanced economies (Global North) and emerging and developing economies (Global South). Common advanced countries, in alphabetical order, include the following: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and United States (Davis & Van Wincoop, 2018, p. 85). The others are in the emerging category. A simple visualization of the “Global South” follows in Figure 1, which was created over the International Monetary Fund’s DataMapper’s Real GDP Growth Map. This shows a generalization of the Global North in the Northern Hemisphere, and the Global South generally in the Southern Hemisphere. This is usable under the IMF’s “fair use” guidelines, with citation. (“Real GDP growth, annual percentage change” map, 2018). The overlays are the author’s. Another spatial-based way to conceptualize the “Global South” is to think of the “Global North” at the center (in this Western-centric view) and the countries of the “Global South” at the periphery; the closer countries are to the center, the closer they are to power, wealth, resources, and knowhow, and the farther away from the center (in the periphery), the more distant the nation-states are from power / wealth / resources / knowhow.