



*Perspective Article*

# Society and Communication in the Global South: Negotiating Identity, Power, and Meaning in Contemporary Social Life

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## Abstract

In contemporary society, communication plays a central role in shaping social relations, identities, and power structures. Beyond formal media systems, everyday communication practices ranging from interpersonal interaction to community-based discourse serve as key sites where social meanings are produced and negotiated. This perspective examines society as a communicative process, with particular attention to Global South contexts characterized by cultural plurality, historical inequality, and uneven access to communication resources. Drawing on insights from communication studies, the article argues that social life is constituted through ongoing negotiations of meaning, authority, and belonging. By foregrounding communication as a social practice, this article highlights its significance for understanding contemporary society beyond media-centric approaches.

**Keywords:** society; communication; Global South; social interaction; power.

## 1. Introduction

Society exists through communication. Social norms, shared values, and collective identities do not emerge independently of interaction; they are continuously produced, reinforced, and contested through communicative practices. In contemporary discourse, communication is frequently associated with mass media systems, digital platforms, and technological infrastructures [1][2]. While these elements are undeniably influential, an exclusive focus on media technologies risks narrowing our understanding of how society functions [3].

In Global South contexts, communication is deeply embedded in everyday social life. Historical legacies of colonialism, uneven development, and socio-economic inequality shape how communication operates within families, communities, and public spaces. Much of social meaning is generated not through formal media channels, but through interpersonal interaction, community discourse, and culturally embedded modes of expression [4]. Communication, in this sense, becomes a social practice that sustains society itself [5][6].

This article adopts a perspective approach grounded in communication studies to explore society as a communicative process. Rather than examining specific media forms or empirical cases, it focuses on the conceptual relationship between communication, social structure, and power in contemporary Global South societies.

## 2. Society as a Communicative Formation

From a communication perspective, society can be understood as a continuous flow of interactions through which meaning is negotiated. Social institutions, cultural norms, and collective identities are not static entities; they are stabilized through repetition and shared understanding in communication. Everyday conversations, rituals, symbols, and narratives all contribute to the reproduction of social order [7].

Communication does not simply reflect society it actively constitutes it. Through communicative interaction, individuals position themselves in relation to others, interpret social expectations, and negotiate their place within collective life. This process-oriented view challenges structural accounts of society that overlook the micro-level practices through which social reality is sustained [8].

In Global South societies, communicative formation often occurs within informal and hybrid spaces. Formal institutions coexist with community-based networks, oral traditions, and relational modes of interaction. These communicative arrangements play a crucial role in maintaining social cohesion, particularly in contexts where institutional trust may be fragile or unevenly distributed [9].

## 3. Communication, Identity, and Cultural Plurality

Identity is not a fixed attribute but a communicative achievement. Individuals and groups come to know who they are through interaction, recognition, and shared symbolic frameworks. Communication provides the means through which identities are articulated, affirmed, and contested [10].

In culturally plural societies, identity formation involves constant negotiation across linguistic, ethnic, religious, and social boundaries. Communication mediates these negotiations by enabling dialogue as well as conflict. Rather than producing unified or stable identities, communicative interaction often reveals identity as relational, situational, and dynamic [11].

In Global South contexts, identity negotiation is frequently shaped by historical hierarchies and social inequality. Communication becomes a space where belonging is claimed, denied, or renegotiated. Who is listened to, whose language is legitimized, and whose narratives are valued are fundamentally communicative questions that shape social inclusion and exclusion [12].

## 4. Power Relations in Social Communication

Communication is inseparable from power. Power operates through the ability to frame meaning, define norms, and control access to communicative spaces. In society, not all voices carry equal weight, and not all forms of communication are equally recognized as legitimate [13].

Global South societies often experience layered power relations shaped by colonial histories, state authority, economic inequality, and cultural dominance. These dynamics influence who can speak publicly, how dissent is expressed, and which forms of knowledge are considered valid. Communication thus becomes a site where power is both exercised and contested [14].

At the same time, communication also offers possibilities for negotiation and agency. Informal discourse, community dialogue, and alternative narratives enable social actors to navigate and sometimes challenge dominant power structures. By examining communication as a social practice, it becomes possible to see how power is enacted not only through institutions but through everyday interaction [15].

## 5. Communication, Social Change, and Collective Meaning

Social change is mediated through communication. Shifts in values, norms, and collective understanding occur as societies reinterpret their experiences and articulate new meanings. Communication provides the space where uncertainty is negotiated and future possibilities are

imagined [16].

In contemporary Global South societies, rapid social change driven by urbanization, migration, economic transformation, and digital connectivity creates tensions between continuity and transformation. Communication plays a crucial role in managing these tensions by enabling dialogue across generational, cultural, and social divides [17].

Rather than viewing communication as a neutral conduit, this perspective highlights its generative role in shaping social change. Through storytelling, discussion, and shared interpretation, societies make sense of disruption and articulate collective responses to changing conditions.

## 6. Discussion

Viewing society through the lens of communication allows for a deeper understanding of how social realities are continuously produced and transformed. The discussion presented in this article reinforces the idea that communication is not a secondary process that operates within society, but a constitutive force through which society itself takes shape. Social structures, identities, and power relations persist not merely because they are institutionalized, but because they are repeatedly enacted and negotiated through communicative practices [18].

One important implication of this perspective is the shift away from media-centric interpretations of communication. While mass media and digital platforms play an increasingly prominent role in contemporary life, they do not exhaust the communicative processes that sustain society. In many Global South contexts, everyday interpersonal communication, informal networks, and culturally embedded modes of interaction remain central to social coordination and meaning making. Recognizing these forms of communication challenges dominant theoretical models that prioritize technological mediation over lived social interaction [19].

The discussion also highlights how communication functions as a key site for negotiating identity and social belonging. Identity emerges not as a fixed category imposed by social structure, but as a dynamic outcome of interaction, recognition, and symbolic exchange. In culturally plural and unequal societies, communicative practices determine whose identities are acknowledged and whose are marginalized. This underscores the importance of communication in shaping inclusion and exclusion, not only at the institutional level but in everyday social encounters [20].

Power relations are deeply embedded in communicative processes. The ability to define meaning, control narratives, and access public or semi-public communicative spaces reflects broader social hierarchies. From a communication perspective, power is exercised not only through coercion or formal authority, but through discursive dominance and symbolic legitimacy. At the same time, communication provides opportunities for negotiation and agency. Informal discourse, alternative narratives, and collective dialogue can function as mechanisms through which social actors navigate and, at times, contest dominant power structures [21].

Another significant point of discussion concerns the role of communication in social change. Social transformation does not occur solely through structural shifts or policy interventions; it is mediated through changes in how societies communicate about themselves. New meanings, values, and aspirations emerge through dialogue, debate, and shared interpretation. In Global South societies experiencing rapid transformation, communication becomes a crucial resource for managing uncertainty and articulating collective responses to change [22].

This discussion also suggests broader implications for the field of communication studies. By foregrounding communication as a foundational social process, scholars are encouraged to move beyond instrumental or transmission-based models of communication. Instead, communication should be understood as a relational and performative practice that actively shapes social life. Such an approach aligns with interdisciplinary efforts to bridge communication studies with sociology, cultural studies, and social theory [23].

Overall, the discussion affirms that examining society as a communicative formation provides valuable insight into contemporary social life. It reveals how meaning, identity, and power are negotiated through interaction rather than imposed by structure alone. For Global South contexts in particular, this perspective offers a nuanced framework for understanding social

complexity, cultural plurality, and ongoing processes of social change.

## 7. Conclusion

This article argued that society should be understood as a communicative formation in which identity, power, and meaning are continuously negotiated. By foregrounding communication as a social practice, it becomes possible to move beyond media-centric and technologically deterministic approaches to understanding contemporary society.

In Global South contexts, where social life is shaped by inequality, cultural plurality, and historical complexity, communication plays a particularly significant role in sustaining social relations and enabling change. Recognizing communication as foundational to social life enriches the study of society and highlights its relevance for interdisciplinary research at the intersection of culture, communication, and social theory.

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