


THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE UN INFORMATION DISSEMINATION MECHANISM TO THE AWARENESS OF GLOBAL ISSUES



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ABSTRACT

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The United Nations (UN) is a representative, authoritative and legal organization, which plays a dominant role in spreading the information of global issues. With its organizational properties, an ideal mechanism for the dissemination of information on global issues has been established. From the perspective of communication, by adhering to the ideas of objectivity, fairness and balance, the UN has almost implemented global communication, the core feature of which is to transcend national and ethical frame of reference. From the perspective of global politics, the UN information dissemination mechanism has helped establish regulations for world players, remedying viewpoint and ideological conflicts between countries.

Contribution/ Originality: The paper's primary contribution is finding that As the world's largest international organization, UN's complicated structure and function diversity, bear the link around the world all countries, regions and organizations, to the global various related information and receive the function of information around the world. Since the operation of the UN in more than half a century, its information has spread to all corners of the world, and the organization's work has been well organized, which is related to its advanced and efficient information dissemination mechanism.

Currently, mankind faces more and more problems that transcend national boundaries, including the gap between rich and poor, frequent occurrence of terrorist attacks, outbreaks of refugee crises, deterioration of the environment, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. None of these issues can be addressed by one country alone. Global issues cannot be solved without collaborative action and collaborative action is impossible without consensus. In this context, global governance was proposed as a major approach to global issues. As the world's most representative, legal and international organization, the UN is regarded as one of the most popular multilateral authority for global governance. It is also considered as the best platform for coordinating various players. To these ends, the UN has developed a set of complicated and systematic mechanisms for information dissemination, taking on the dissemination of information on global issues and the development of global awareness

as its mission. The academia, however, is divided on the contribution of this mechanism. This paper focuses on analyzing the mechanism from the perspectives of constructivism and global communication.

1. UN AND GLOBAL ISSUES: ORGANIZATIONAL PROPERTY-BASED ANALYSIS

1.1. Organization Advantages of UN as Distributor of Information

At present, there are five powers that operate in the world to disseminate information and develop awareness on global issues: global organizations or groups that have influence on the world, regional organizations or groups that have influence on the world, sovereign countries and governments, non-government organizations and the civil society. Compared with other global organizations and groups, the UN has unique organizational advantages. First, its function is universal. It is involved in every issue that affects the world: security, human rights, society, politics, culture and economy. Second, it is inclusive. UN mainly consists of sovereign nations, but it also establishes partnership with other players in the world. Finally, it is most representative. UN strives to represent various cultures, religions and countries. This clearly distinguishes it from other global organizations with religious or ethical backgrounds.

1.2. Function and Structure of UN Information Dissemination Agencies

The Department of Public Information is the largest body of UN responsible for information dissemination. Its mission is to develop the public's global awareness and improve the public's understanding of the UN. This is accomplished through various media tools (e.g., radio, television, print, the Internet, video-conferencing). It has three subordinate divisions: Strategic Communications, News & Media and Outreach. The Spokesperson for the Secretary-General is responsible for the Secretary-General's media-related activities and for explaining policies and work. According to the division of work, he/she serves as a bridge for communication and coordination. In order to ensure smooth dissemination of information, the UN has developed a series of mechanisms regarding the Spokesperson, as well as for cooperative coordination, participation and training of non-dissemination personnel, supervision, multi-language communication, and the foreign media.

It can be seen that the UN is universally representative, authoritative, inclusive and global. In the five powers that promote information dissemination of global issues, UN plays a dominant role. Its information dissemination institution is characterized by perfect functional setting, complete organizational structure, clear division of labor, appropriate structure of manpower, and a series of mechanisms which facilitates information dissemination. All of these properties make UN an ideal platform for information dissemination of global issues.

2. CONTRIBUTION OF UN INFORMATION DISSEMINATION MECHANISM TO GLOBAL COMMUNICATION OF GLOBAL ISSUES: AN ANALYSIS BASED ON COMMUNICATION ELEMENTS

Communication elements refer to those that are directly involved in the complete dissemination of any information. The dynamic evolution and interaction of these elements form the dissemination process. According to the Lasswell theory of 5W, dissemination of any information consists of five elements, i.e., distributor (source), information, recipient (sink), media, and effect. In the context of globalization and reform in communication techniques, information can be easily disseminated worldwide, transcending ethnic and national boundaries. Unlike "international communication" where the race-nation is the basic unit of communication, "global communication" has the following features: the distributors are diverse; the contents are neutral; the recipients are broad in the efforts to transcend national boundaries and follow common concerns of the world; it strives for optimal dissemination where cause and value are shared by different communities and ethnic groups. Whether or not the UN information dissemination mechanism has or approximates these features has direct impact on its contribution

to information dissemination of global issues. Hence, it is necessary to analyze and evaluate the performance of the UN information dissemination mechanism from the perspective of these five elements.

2.1. Analysis of Source

There are two major sources of news officially published by the UN. The first source is the functional agency of the UN, including the UN General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Trusteeship Council (TC), International Court of Justice, and the Secretariat. The second source is the partners of UN information dissemination organizations, such as the media, academia, private agencies and departments. It fully mirrors the principle of “Many Voices, One World” strictly adhered to by the UN. Diverse, exhaustive and abundant sources lay the foundation for global communication of global issues.

2.2. Analysis of Content

Analysis of random news samples collected from the UN official websites reveals that the global issues account for the largest proportion, followed by bilateral or multilateral issues, with the issues involving one country alone being the bottom. These issues cover all countries and regions in the world, relating to a broad variety of topics such as the economy, politics, culture, environment and health. The news can be positive (applaud, welcome), neutral (concerned), and negative (condemn, warn, appeal, urge). In detail, the negative reports account for the largest proportion, followed by neutral reports, and then the positive reports. This reflects an anxious but ambitious and confident UN. The disseminated content also indicates that the UN basically takes an objective, fair and balanced approach to information dissemination.

2.3. Analysis of Channels

The UN channels for information dissemination are either internal or external. The traditional examples of internal channels include the official website, radio, television, yearbook, library, General Assembly, regional and national conferences. Nowadays, the UN has kept pace with the times, creating the UN microblog and UN WeChat public account, and developed the UN news app. Through the use of the dense network of information dissemination channels, the UN makes the information available to the audience in all walks of life across the globe. According to latest statistics, 300 million people in the world have access to the UN radio program; there are over 50 million independent visits to the UN websites; and over 8 million fans follow the UN microblog. As for the external channels, the UN publicizes information of global issues through its own information dissemination agencies and the partners of its Information Center. The UN Information Center establishes cooperation with local media organizations, over 1600 private organizations, many private departments and the UN information dissemination teams in over 80 countries. Based on this, the UN disseminates information to, and establishes links with, the target audience and launches activities on specific issues. With the public resources of these organizations, the UN Information Center fosters links with new recipients and especially those in remote regions by arranging special activities and publishing contents in local languages.

2.4. Analysis of Recipients

Through the use of its dissemination channels around the world, the UN manages to spread the information to its member nations, governmental and non-governmental organizations, enterprises, opinion leaders, media, academic institutions, and stakeholders. The audience is so broad that it transcends national and government viewpoints, facilitating the attraction of more attention to global issues.

2.5. Analysis of Effect

Based on the tenets and principles of UN Charter, the UN Millennium Declaration passed by the General Assembly in 2000 explicitly incorporated seven indispensable and fundamental values into the 21st century international relations: freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for all human rights, respect for nature, and shared responsibility. This achievement stems from the efforts that the UN has taken since the end of the 20th century to establish a common value for the world. Currently, this value has been widely acknowledged by most member nations and no other organization in the world has accomplished this.

In general, the source of UN disseminated information is diverse enough to represent different voices of the world. The general cause and fundamental value of the disseminated information are recognized and shared. It can be said that UN has implemented global communication, the core feature of which is to transcend national and ethical frames of reference.

3. UN INFORMATION DISSEMINATION MECHANISM AND GLOBAL ISSUES: ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL POLITICS

The UN information dissemination mechanism differs from the ordinary media agencies. In addition to analysis based on communication elements, in-depth analysis of its unique value and role should be performed from the perspective of global politics.

3.1. Internalization of Super national Issues

The issues submitted by sovereign nations to the UN cannot be solved by one sovereign nation alone. They are thus called super national issues. The UN internalization of super national issues is a social construction process. In other words, it alters the players' idea by spreading knowledge, values, rules and regulations, thereby forming new consensus and facilitating new collective actions.

This influence can be seen in the Global Compact, which was officially issued by the UN in July 2000. It appealed to the business community to assume greater social responsibilities and to follow 10 fundamental principles regarding human rights, labor, environment and anti-corruption. The Global Compact was not welcomed at first, but it has evolved into the world's greatest and largest sustainable development organization. It is influential across the world, consisting of over 8,000 enterprises and stakeholders from more than 130 countries. Its success is impossible without the UN information dissemination mechanism. Since January 2009, the Secretary-General has mentioned Global Compact 30 times in various formal occasions including the World Economic Forum. The UN news website has over 300 reports on the Global Compact (Li, 2015). Other news agencies and media quoted the UN reports on Global Compact, resulting in exponential proliferation. In addition, the UN has specifically developed a Global Compact website (Li, 2006) which has attracted tens of millions of visits. The UN promotes the formulation and dissemination of international regulations via the Global Compact issue. Under its guidance, more and more enterprises around the world are adapting their behaviors to globally acknowledged values and principles.

3.2. Centralization of Marginal Issues

Marginal issues refer to the global issues that involve underdeveloped regions or disadvantaged groups, which are often ignored by the media. For example, by announcing the top 10 disregarded human crises in 2017 (Cai, 2007) the UN publicized economic stagnancy and worsening inequality in the most underdeveloped nations. Annual reports on children and armed conflicts were also issued, drawing international attention to these marginal issues. From the way the UN treats the marginal issues, it is clear that it pays equal attention to underdeveloped regions and disadvantaged groups. For countries or groups too weak to voice their concerns, the UN can appeal for attention and justice on their behalf. The marginal issues are centralized through information dissemination to

supervise the government as a moral witness and, at the same time, arouse sympathy and offer appropriate protection to the weak.

3.3. De-Politicization of Controversial Issues

Controversial issues refer to the global issues which have not been solved due to conflicts in ideology and national viewpoints. The way the UN processes controversial issues can be seen from the way it handles the Palestinian issue.

The Palestinian issue is one of the longest and most controversial issues on the agenda of UN. The U.S. and Israel strongly opposes the founding of a Palestinian nation. Other members of NATO mostly have a prudent view, proposing to found a nation after the conflict is addressed. Other countries approve in principle, while the Arabian nations support it ardently. In the context of enormous conflict as well as economic and political pressure, the UN strategy can be deduced from Secretary-General Guterres's speech on November 30, 2017 during the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People (Wang, 2007). He expressed the steady position of the UN to support the founding of an independent Palestine that can live peacefully and safely with the adjacent nation of Israel. In his speech, Guterres first declared UN's stand by quoting international laws and official resolutions of the UN. Then, he switched to emotional expression with strong words like "deeply believe", "encourage" and "willing", appealing to both sides to solve the conflict through negotiation. Finally, he left some room for all stakeholders to engage in logical debate on the controversial issue.

This case fully demonstrates the attempt of the UN to de-politicize controversial issues and remain neutral. In these issues, the UN strives to find a balance between ideological conflicts and remedy standpoint conflicts between different nations.

3.4. Normalization of Short-Term Issues

Short-term issues refer to the global issues which occur abruptly and receive massive press coverage only within a short period of time. Global issues cannot be addressed in the short term. Developing global public awareness is impossible without long-term steady efforts. Compared with the pursuit of new issues in the ordinary media agencies, the UN is nostalgic and deliberately lengthens coverage of the issues to ensure that they can receive attention on a long-term basis. To this end, the UN makes it a norm to hold various celebrations on specific issues on certain days, weeks, years, first or tenth anniversaries. These regular activities arouse the public's interest in global issues, draw new attention to the issues that have sunk into oblivion, and inject life to old issues, fostering public awareness and call-to-action.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Analysis shows that the UN has established an ideal platform for information dissemination of global issues. Using this platform, it implements global dissemination, the core feature of which is to transcend national and ethical frames of reference. In this process, attention is paid to disadvantaged groups. Rules and regulations for international players have been established. Conflicts in national viewpoints and ideologies are remedied. Therefore, the UN plays a decisive and dominant role in disseminating information of global issues. Certainly, the UN confronts various problems in this process. For example, the issues are too diverse and too many, with varying priorities. As a result, the urgent or priority issues receive inadequate attention. The issues of UN itself are often disregarded. As the world's largest international organization, how to develop and reform the UN is also one of the global issues. These problems need to be addressed, but it does not undermine the decisive and dominant role of the UN in spreading the information of global issues. How to address these problems and to fully exploit its advantages needs to be further studied in the future.

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