



# Dismantling Cultural Borders Through Social Media and Digital Communications

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How Networked Communities  
Compromise Identity

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*Edited by*  
Emmanuel K Ngwainmbi

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## Dismantling Cultural Borders Through Social Media and Digital Communications

“Prof Ngwainmbi has given us another jewel of a work! This brilliantly edited volume lives up to its title, *Dismantling Cultural Borders through Social Media and Digital Communications: How Networked Communities Compromise Identity*. The inclusion of authors from Brazil, China, Vietnam, Nigeria, Cameroon, the United States, Afghanistan, the United Kingdom, and other countries makes the book valuable for domestic and international audiences. Skilfully organized, and masterfully written by outstanding authors, including the editor, the book will make a strong contribution to contemporary and future understanding of identities in the digital era.”

—Molefi Kete Asante, author *Revolutionary Pedagogy*

“This beautifully curated volume dismantles cultural barriers in its exploration of Southern perspectives on digital communities, by drawing on Southern voices—either directly (Afghanistan, Brazil, Chile, China, Nigeria, South Africa, Vietnam) or through émigrés in the Global North (UK and US)—in equal measure. Discussion of identity negotiation, in contemporary international network society, offers an ideational feast for professionals and researchers in multiple fields with an interest in social media and identity, ethnicity, diversity.”

—Professor Naren Chitty AM, Inaugural Director, *Soft Power Analysis & Resource Centre, Macquarie University*

“*Dismantling Cultural Borders Through Social Media* is a compelling text that challenges us to interrogate the unique juxtaposition between networked communities and compromised identities. Nowhere else have I seen such an impressive and imaginative commentary on how social media may be devastatingly harmful to our collective sense of self.”

—Ronald L. Jackson II, Author of *Encyclopedia of Identity* & Past President of the National Communication Association

“Emmanuel Ngwainmbi has put together the contributions of a group of international scholars who convincingly argue that individual and group identities have been compromised ontologically by the social media using the digital media pro-

cesses. The contributors show convincingly how new social and cultural practices are constructed by media and information flows in all global communities. *Dismantling Cultural Borders through Social Media* will contribute significantly to the growing literature in trans-global media flows and popular culture. I feel a book such as this is badly needed in a fast-changing global media landscape and how it is resulting in erasures and compromises of the identities of vulnerable individuals and communities.”

—Srinivas Melkote, Emeritus Professor in Media and Communication, *Bowling Green State University, USA*

“*Dismantling Cultural Borders Through Social Media and Digital Communications: How Networked Communities Compromise Identity*, a refreshing collection of diverse global contributions, departs intelligently from traditional warnings about social media tribalism to embrace long-undervalued optimism about the capacity of social media to shape new networked communities and to engage populations constructively, especially during health pandemics. This book is an innovative must-read for all those open to reaching beyond familiar experiences rooted in one or two countries to explore a wide range of civic engagement and communication opportunities that media can invigorate throughout the world.”

—John C. Pollock, Ph.D., Professor, *Departments of Communication Studies and Public Health, The College of New Jersey*, co-editor, “COVID-19 in International Media: Global Pandemic Perspectives” (2021)

Emmanuel K. Ngwainmbi  
Editor

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## ABOUT THIS BOOK

In *Dismantling Cultural Borders Through Social Media*, we, the group of scholars, are equally convinced that social media and its networked communities have literarily compromised individual and ethnic group identities.

We apply the universal definition of culture—the collective manifestation of human intellectual achievement or activity; the customs, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social groups within a country—to show how digital media processes reconstruct the identities of such groups in contemporary time and space. We do not define national borders as tangible boundaries prescribed in legal documents; instead, we focus on new social and cultural practices constructed by information flows and digital media activities in suburban and urban communities in the Northern and Southern hemispheres. We examine a broad spectrum of social media role in shaping new communities—how global media representations in the Global North mitigate hate speech; how the Global South can use digital media to create business opportunities; how ethnic diversity is a resource for the development of human capital in the Digital Age; how health crises, migrants' presence in cosmopolitan centers, or social networking advance ethnolinguistic definitions and interpretations of our identity.

This book also offers insights for media, company executives involved in the training, and those managing social media flows. It also addresses social network directors, strategic knowledge management and marketing teams, and target message design departments in different business communities and environments. Finally, it also addresses how specific

platforms change the political landscape in some fragile states in Africa, Central and South America, India, China, and other emerging nations.

This book provides relevant theoretical frameworks and recent empirical research findings on various networked communities. This book focuses on social media participation in rural and urban communities across the seven continents. It includes analyses of social media experiences in indigenous and urban communities worldwide and describes cultural borders through social media.

This book also offers insights for media, company executives involved in the training and management of social media product marketing and service delivery teams, social network directors, strategic knowledge management and marketing teams, and target message design departments in different types of business communities and environments.

Contributors are researchers, scholars, professors, and practitioners from higher-level organizations and institutions in Afghanistan, Africa, India, the US, China, Brazil, and other countries.

## STRUCTURE

This book is broken into six sections. Section I contains sociological definitions of ethnicity. In this section, the issue of ethnicity, media politics, and compromised identity is raised. Discussion includes perceptions and theories of ethnicity and ethnic identities written by sociologists, social and cultural anthropologists grounded in the study of individuals and groups of people, and intercultural communication scholars. We examine the stigmatization and reconstruction of the image of online public figures and how it affects the Chinese Celebrity Economy. We also analyze challenges and vulnerabilities in marginalized communities' income developing countries and what it might take to bridge the social divide.

Section II is an overview of digital media and its role in setting the social agenda. Here, scholars in international media studies and the Castells, Lerner, and McLuhan school of thought communication studies review and analyze texts on social media's role in mitigating ethnic identities. Arguments shall include the role social media platforms have been playing in negotiating national identities.

It also addresses how specific platforms change the political landscape in some fragile states in Africa, Central and South America, India, China, and other emerging nations.

Section III has case studies. Researchers from different regions shall use quantitative research tools (online, mail, surveys, etc.) to support their arguments and demonstrate the extent to which social media is transforming or has compromised individual and ethnic identity in the agrarian (“underdeveloped”) communities around the world as well as in urban communities.

Section IV offers predictions of ethnic and national identities. Here, one or two chapters are expected from “big names.”

Section V describes the media’s role in negotiating national identities and cosmopolitan space.

Section VI provides the geopolitics and cyber-mediated communication initiatives as tools of ethnicity and diversity. Here, we review ways in which companies foster the branding of their products in other countries. In addition, we look at ethnic group experiences with social media among Cherokee and Native Americans Facebook groups to determine how identities have been compromised.

After Chap. 14, there are short contributor biographies, including awards, significant publications, research interests, and an index.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapters are based on empirical studies and critical analyses of media and small group communication experiences in selected indigenous and urban communities worldwide. The authors use quantitative analyses including original figures and raw data. Contributors are university professors and researchers.

Chapter 1 deals with the destigmatization and identity refactoring of online celebrities and their implication on the Chinese celebrity economy. It focuses on the phasic development and changes characteristics of online celebrity image after the rise of the Internet. Here, the destigmatization of online celebrities means that they have become an economic phenomenon and commercial product, not just a cultural symbol.

Chapter 2 examines how environmental civil society organizations in China construct their accountabilities through social media use. Through case studies of three civil society organizations in Beijing, China, this research explores the impact and potential of social media to change the conceptualization of accountability and finds that information technology has been an instrument for organizations to demonstrate their accountability and transparency funders and donors. However, social media have



not promoted their stakeholder engagement and solicit, lacking the attention and direct input from the public and the community. Also, the current issue of underutilization of social media by civil society organizations mainly focuses on resource-based accountability.

Chapter 3 examines mediated hate messaging as an agent for the re-emergence of Caucasian Nationalism in the Global North. It describes how the identities of ethnic groups are compromised through media activities and validated by our knowledge of stereotypes about ethnocultural groups, stressing how news and information flow create cultural xenophobia and sustain our perceptions of those groups.

Chapter 4 analyzes how television coverage and social media networked groups mystify and demystify information about COVID-19. It departs from the premise that the media frames how people consume and use news and shows how policymakers should tackle newsflows on COVID-19, how consumers should screen information, and how journalists should report COVID-19 ethically.

Chapter 5 discusses how the media has shaped public opinion and intercultural relations in a multicultural neighborhood in Santiago, Chile, drawing on both ethnographic fieldwork and qualitative content analysis of two news media pieces. It argues that the state discourse and its migration policies have transpired into urban life by the news media and how local events, framed by the media, have reinforced negative representations of racialized migrants who are considered “undesired.” It suggests that colonial racial hierarchies are still present in the media framing of news stories and police initiatives involving migrants from Haiti and Colombia in Chile, that news stories reinforce anti-immigrant sentiment and perpetuate racism against LAC migrants, and that political discourse and media framing have, to some extent, impacted not only people’s imaginaries but also the attitudes toward certain migratory groups, often negatively racialized.

Chapter 6 examines the role of social media in a cultural context. It looks into Afghanistan as a case study to understand if social media have dismantled or challenged culturally sensitive and socially dominant norms—taboos. Acknowledging that social media have been used for voicing concerns and challenging the status quo, this chapter addresses the extent of the use of this platform and questionnaires distributed to Afghan female online bloggers in dismantling the status quo.

Chapter 7 of this book, anchored on social responsibility and development media theories, examines the implications of ethnicity, cultural,

linguistic, religious, and political diversity on HCD in Nigeria. Also, it explores how the media have professionally operated within the complex plural-ethnic configuration arrangement without taking sides with any of the groups or contravening the law. Using secondary data, government statistics gleaned from the Central Bank, media, and other agencies; the study reveals that two prominent ethnic groups (Hausa and Yoruba) have been in control of the central government; hence, the lopsided application of affirmative action policies like the Quota System, Catchment Area, and Federal Character principles. In conclusion, the study establishes that the Nigerian media find reporting affirmative action policies and inter-ethnic conflicts problematic as a result of ethnic connections, ownership influence, as well as political and religious affiliations each time they attempt to differentiate between genuine concerns about the deficiencies in national policy implementation and self-serving ethnic agendas.

Chapter 8 examines the ethnic diversity and human capital development in the cyber mediated era in Nigeria.

Chapter 9 examines the complex causes and consequences of the misinformation that characterized the Coronavirus pandemic in Africa. Through qualitative research techniques, including the review of secondary data, analysis of media stories, key informants' interviews, and participant's observation, this chapter advances the notion that the Coronavirus information crisis in Africa should best be understood within the extant global "disinformation order," characterized distorted information flow, fake news, the emergence of an army of uniformed pundits, and the dysfunction of social media. Other causes of the information crisis included mixed messaging from opinion leaders and influencers and data misuse.

Chapter 10 focuses on the motivations behind the usage of image-macro memes in intragroup communication on social media and explores how young Vietnamese people construct and perform their cultural identity through using memes in online group chats. Using interviews conducted in four university-age Vietnamese on their practice of meme sharing and their meanings/intentions behind this practice and thematic content analysis of the interview data and semiotic analysis of the memes to identify how Vietnamese cultural identity is produced, transformed, maintained, and compromised, this chapter concludes that besides the banality of everyday humor, memes help express participants' common personal issues, facilitate their political and civic engagement, and enable Vietnamese youth to appropriate global cultural resources to negotiate and perform their cultural identity creatively.

Chapter 11 examines the role of social media in building cosmopolitan dispositions of individuals living across borders by comparing the experiences of migrants' communities in London and São Paulo. It investigates tendencies to create cosmopolitanism in London and São Paulo, examines the lives of individuals of different migrants' communities in these cities, discusses the process of social practices in the production and negotiation of identities, and analyzes how migrant communities in these cities use the social media Facebook for the development of local networks in support of migrants, as well as for digital training skills, and for producing visibility of their identities.

Chapter 12 presents case studies to examine how American companies consolidate their foothold in China through brand building among the younger generation through a combination of business and cultural approaches, including deployment of mobile marketing strategies, digital reward programs, as well as popular culture appeals such as influencer power, digital reward programs, and promotion campaigns highlighting authentic, unique experiences. It illustrates their varied marketing approaches to build brand loyalty among smartphone-guided young consumers seeking to cultivate their identities and follow new trends simultaneously. It utilizes document analysis and critical cultural studies to highlight how global trends of consumer culture and consumption practices are mediated by emerging social media communities and national political and socioeconomic circumstances, including demographic changes and perceived possibilities for mobile and transient lifestyles.

Chapter 13 probes the way Cherokee and Native American ethnic identities have been compromised through social media networking, providing another dimension to ethnic ties in a digital world. It delves into indigenous identities through the different network exchanges about ethnic relations that have enhanced their belonging to a community of Native Americans, historically considered the first settlers in the New World long before the arrival of the white men. Finally, it seeks to throw some light on indigenous groups in a changing world through a close examination of All About the Cherokee and Native Americans Facebook public group.

Chapter 14 is a recap of the book. It reviews the ubiquity of cyber-mediated communities and how information and communication technologies have transformed cultures and the identities of individuals. It also looks at the geopolitical landscape and empowered people.

Each chapter includes a list of works cited and research questions to guide discussions on the chapter.

## AUDIENCE

The target audience of this book includes professionals and researchers in the field of public communication for development, ICT, and knowledge management in various disciplines, for example, libraries, BBA and MBA students, undergraduate studies in media and communication, social media company managers, international diplomacy, education, adult education, sociology, and information technology. This book offers insights for media, company executives involved in the training and management of social media product marketing and service delivery teams, social network directors, strategic knowledge management and marketing teams, and target message design departments in different types of business communities and environments. It is written for scholars and researchers interested in improving their understanding of how ethnic and national identities have been compromised through social media networking and network groups.

Study questions, learning resources, additional materials for further reading, and references appear at the end of the chapter.

E.K. N.

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SECTION I

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Social Networking, Ethnolinguistic  
Connotations and Interpretations  
of Identity



## CHAPTER 1

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# A Bird's Eye View of Networked Communities and Human Identity

*Emmanuel K. Ngwainmbi*

When I walk into a food store, gym, church, classroom, local conference hall, or regional airport, I meet people who speak a foreign language, dressed in exotic attire; they look different but feel at ease. They are one, two, three, and even four generations apart; they are American Indian, African American, Black, Asian, or Alaska Native, Caucasian, Hispanic, Latino, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or other ethnicities. If you're thinking that more people are taking their customs to other countries and communities and settling there, then you're right. But human mobility across national borders is not the only reason for the rampant spread of cultures; people no longer have to travel to experience new cultures. We have networked communities everywhere, and old and new customs are being created and shared daily. In addition, social media has penetrated every corner of the world, challenging the authenticity of indigenous values—questioning whether hybrid ones will survive. If we know that 65%

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of 2.5 billion social media users trust the source of information they get on that platform, then we must be very concerned about the future of our identities as a people or a nation, irrespective of our gender, age, ethnic composition, or social standing.

Intercultural communication scholars, sociologists, ethnographers, and political scientists have raised concerns over the psychological distance created by cyber-communities, while parents and counselors still swear that excessive social media use has caused emotional distress in their children. For example, children barely talk to their peers or parents because they're deeply engaged with their smartphones. Also, clinicians and researchers working in youth mental health have found that excessive smartphone- and social media use affects young people's social and psychological health, including long-term damages to interpersonal relationships. Other harmful effects include a sense of worthlessness, insomnia, poor academic performance, aggressive behavior, and suicidal thoughts. Feelings of loneliness, isolation, depression, and other mental issues from brain scans impacted by the lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic are new social problems caused by the hybridized pop culture. Equally challenging for pedagogical leaders, cultural historians, and social scientists is the usefulness of hyper-mediated cultures promulgated by the massive of Facebook, Twitter uses in advancing the well-being of users, particularly the younger generation (Ngwainmbi, 2022/forthcoming).<sup>1</sup>

Take the case of developing regions where political problems, institutional corruption, and pandemics prevail, compounded by misinformation flowing among the leadership, the media, and the community. In fact, India, Brazil, and Africa have been hit the hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic bypassing the United States and Europe. Although COVID-19 misinformation is a global phenomenon, many countries have tilted their focus to saving their economy and re-opening their borders to allow the movement of goods and services and other business endeavors. Health experts and government officials have been changing the narrative about how the disease spreads to encourage businesses to open their doors. In public spaces and localities, people continue to share conspiracy theories, wild stories, phantom imaginations about the origin of the pandemic, and treatment options. Hence, there is a pandemic worldwide.

<sup>1</sup> My book, under consideration with Routledge and expected to be published in 2022, tentatively titled *Social Media Use and World Youth Well-being* will explore those themes in detail.

Indeed, our social, economic, cultural, political, and educational experiences define our ethnic identity. From a sociocultural perspective, *ethnicity* and *nationality* are mutually exclusive in that *ethnicity* describes heritage and ancestry. At the same time, *citizenship* is the legal identity conferred to an individual born in a country. Both terms share a collective 'identity'—defined space. Whether individuals accept or reject their nationality or take up a different legal identity, they still belong to an ethnic group with heritage and ancestry.

Similarly, people identify themselves by (1) ethnolinguistic connotations such as French, Irish, American, German, Italian, Arab, Bantu, and Turkish; (2) geopolitical features such as Middle Easterners and Westerners; or (3) geo-politico-diplomatic semantics such as the Global North which represents economically developed societies of Europe, North America, Australia, Israel, and South Africa, among others or the Global South which represents, often wrongly, the economically backward countries of Africa, India, Brazil, and Mexico, among others. In that sense, the Global North is considered too strong and the Global South too weak; people located in the Global North operate in an environment that is more economically viable than those in the Global South. Thus, inhabitants of the Global North—mostly in high-income, industrialized countries, technologically equipped regions—are widely considered more productive than Global southerners. Further, the modern concept of ethnicity and nationality culls from the recognition, however obscure or limited, that the lives of groups having the means to control economies and financial markets are better than those without it. But that problem has not stopped corporations, companies, and foreign organizations from installing structures and businesses in low-income countries, usually for iniquitous reasons.

Organizations establishing their structures in new landscapes, major sporting events like football and the Olympics, diversity-oriented visa programs providing citizenship status to other nationals, and the spread of IT-based learning and electronic communication products and services are among the works in progress to place indigenous and exogenous communities in the global marketplace and create new identities in hitherto 'sacred' environments.

The media plays multiple roles in the identity transformation process. Take, for instance, coverage of the now-infamous news coverage of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the United States that is profusely

broadcast worldwide. Coverage of that ‘big story’ continues to highlight the demise of media flows, globalization, and localization—media houses in communities where Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Christianity, Taoism, and Judaism are practiced reported based on how they see the human person, in general not the ethnic groups.

The increase in cell phone distribution and Internet access has given us more ways to look at governments and their relations with partners. We address issues we do not like, mobilize people to take action against public policies we don’t want.

### THE NWICO AND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE AS BUSINESS

In this twenty-first century, the debate over the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), a movement launched in the 1970s to tackle global economic- and media flow inequality, particularly against countries in the southern hemisphere, has reached essential landmarks. The crux of the NWICO and the MacBride Commission, the UNESCO panel chaired by the inimitable Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Sean MacBride that offered recommendations to make world media representation more equitable in terms of people having equal access to information flow and content-sharing, has been thwarted by a lack of political will to address information and communication structures concretely. Since the MacBride Commission issued its report, Western and Eastern European superpowers, including Japan, the United States, China, continue to redirect capital flows and control global information volume, creating imbalances in wealth distribution and placing cultures in small communities and villages on a dangerous path. Interestingly, a report published by Yahoo! Finance states that the United States, the United Kingdom, China, Germany, and India are the largest countries in the global FinTech market.<sup>2</sup> Some observers may cite India’s remarkable progress in intelligent automation and its revenue in the information technology and business process management industry in the last decade, reaching \$200 billion. However, high-income Western countries maintain control of global digitization, data economy, and data flows.

<sup>2</sup>The report is titled Insights on the FinTech Global Market to 2026—Growing Adoption of Non-Bank Option to Manage Money is Driving Growth, published at <https://finance.yahoo.com/>