

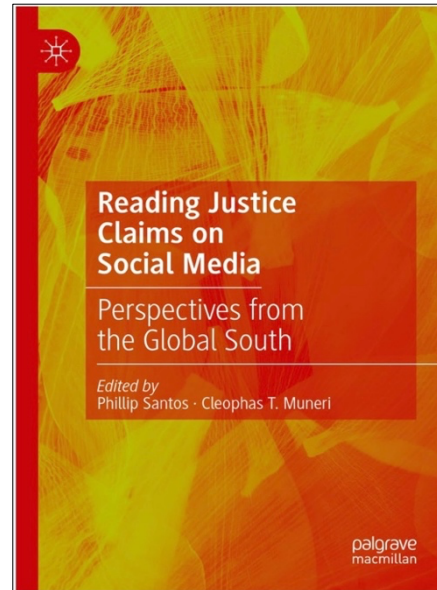
Phillip Santos and Cleophas T. Muneri (Eds.), **Reading Justice Claims on Social Media: Perspectives from the Global South**, London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, 347 pp., \$133.00 (hardcover).

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Students and scholars actively working to decolonize social media research will find both a hopeful vision and a pragmatic framework in Santos and Muneri's **Reading Justice Claims on Social Media: Perspectives from the Global South**. This edited volume fosters an open dialogue among activist-scholars surrounding the challenges of leveraging social media to advance justice and promote democracy in the Global South. Authors in areas such as Botswana, Ethiopia, Guatemala, India, Nigeria, South Africa, and Zimbabwe provide expertise from throughout the world. Despite vast locational and methodological differences between chapters, each piece contributes to the overarching argument that social media are central to modern citizen mobilization for political activism. This collection emphasizes the fraught communicative spaces where voices advocating for justice contend with the pervasive presence of hate speech and misinformation. Highlighting the hope for positive social change, authors examine how activism becomes entangled within systems dominated by political and economic power structures. While many scholars research topics in the Global South and challenge knowledge production systems of the Global North, this book fills a gap of social media research completely designed for and focused on the Global South, implemented with the explicit purpose of decolonizing this niche of academia.

Pointing to the rise and spread of populist politics, this collection underscores the growing importance of ordinary people's fights for both micro and macro social issues, particularly within digital discursive spaces available to marginalized groups. Chapters explore a range of critical topics across the Global South, such as the digital construction of divisive nationalism in India and grassroots efforts to educate Guatemalans about human rights abuses faced by indigenous Maya. Additional chapters address pressing issues like technological access to global information and economic inequalities exacerbated by global migration. Despite their thematic and geographical diversity, all authors employ a justice-centered framework to examine contentious subjects within the public sphere of social media platforms, providing a nuanced lens on how these spaces both empower and constrain marginalized voices.

Starting strong, the introduction opens with a powerful critique of neoliberalism and late-stage capitalism, emphasizing the role of historically marginalized groups in the struggle for survival through ideas propagated on social media. Muneri and Santos claim that communication technologies are now essential prisms for understanding societal developments, arguing that "the meaning of life and existence itself centers around justice and therefore . . . the quest of transforming the world so that all are a part of



it can benefit from it is rendered meaningless without justice" (p. 10). This statement sets the stage for the chapters that follow, framing social justice as a tool to analyze the contemporary world and build alternative futures. By anchoring their argument in the transformative potential of justice-centered communication, the authors establish a foundation that unites the diverse contributions of the volume.

Chapter 5 stands out as a unique model of how this justice-centered framework operates uniquely in the Global South. Khulekani Ndlovu shines a spotlight on the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement's fight against political elites, ultimately finding that the question of wealth redistribution has yet to be adequately addressed in postcolonial Zimbabwe. Ndlovu argues that "black lives should matter to ourselves" (p. 121), emphasizing the importance of self-reflection and accountability within Zimbabwean society. This positions the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement as not only a call to action against systemic oppression but also as a demand for the government to address the ongoing interracial indignities, oppression, and violence that persist in the country's postindependence era. This chapter demonstrates the volume's ability to bridge the divide between the Global North and South by situating a local movement within broader global discussions of Black liberation and justice, while underscoring the unique historical and political complexities of Zimbabwe's struggle for equity.

Another compelling example of the justice-centered framework is found in chapter 7, where the importance of moralistic sentiment is brought front and center. Zerai examines the nature of competing narratives between two ethnic camps in Ethiopia, demonstrating how Oromo cultural elites were ultimately successful in framing their side as morally superior. They accomplished this by positioning themselves as champions of social justice in online discourse until "their claims could no longer be caricatured or ignored" (p. 171). As a microcosm of the book's broader theme of communities reclaiming power through communicative tools, this chapter illustrates how historically marginalized voices were able to challenge dominant power structures through strategic use of cultural narratives. By centering on the Oromo's success in reclaiming agency and fostering solidarity within their community, Zerai underlines the power of grassroots movements in rewriting entrenched narratives. The chapter is a call to other marginalized groups striving to leverage moral capital to achieve justice reform.

Chapter 9 adds a dimension of intersectionality into the collection in consideration of gender dynamics of the Global South. Molale and Asak address gender-based violence discourse on Facebook and Twitter, illustrating how these platforms are "a catalyst for female calls for social justice to be heard and action taken against femicide" (p. 231). Focusing on two cases in South Africa and Nigeria, the authors position social media websites as hubs for social justice, connecting people who might otherwise be unable to organize. By documenting how online campaigns have successfully mobilized offline awareness and advocacy, the chapter emphasizes how platforms amplify voices that have been historically silenced, creating digital solidarity and mobilizing action in response to gender-based violence. The authors underscore the transformative potential of digital spaces in addressing systemic inequalities and fostering collective resistance within stigmatized groups in the unique context of the Global South.

The book concludes with a philosophical call from Khulekani Ndlovu and Phillip Santos, who advocate for critical realism as a methodology for engaging with questions of social justice. This lens is particularly significant in fields like journalism and media, where questions of truth are deeply entwined in

public discourse. The editors argue that “the purchase of critical realism lie in its ability to anchor journalism in the historical-material world and to correct the postmodernist tendency of conflating epistemology and its resident skepticism about the possibility of arriving at an objective truth” (p. 311). By grounding social justice inquiries in a framework that acknowledges both objective realities and the influence of subjective experiences, the authors advocate for a balanced approach to understanding and addressing systemic inequities. This conclusion challenges the relativism of postmodernism while providing a roadmap for scholars and practitioners to pursue justice-centered research with rigor and clarity. It is a fitting end to a volume that seeks to decolonize the academic discourse on social media and justice.

One consistent flaw that detracts from the powerful readings within *Reading Justice Claims on Social Media* is a lack of consensus around the definition of “platform.” Social media are collectively deemed a platform, various independent social media websites are also considered platforms, the conversations between scholars are referred to as a platform, and at one point, even the book itself is described as a platform. This overuse creates ambiguity that distracts from the otherwise nuanced discussions presented throughout the book. Minor adjustments from the editors to refine the term and reduce its overuse would provide much-needed clarity and cohesion. Similarly, nearly every chapter reiterates the overwhelming number of issues on social media compared to the limited affordances for social good. While this is a key point, the repeated emphasis becomes redundant and could be edited down to avoid detracting from the unique contributions of individual chapters. As the book progresses, some of the content begins to feel repetitive, undermining the reader’s engagement. Additionally, chapter 3 feels somewhat out of place within the context of this collection. Nguyen examines Asian American digital counterpublics and their efforts to combat anti-Asian rhetoric. While compelling, this chapter’s focus on transnational identities does not fully engage with the North-South entanglements that the book claims to foreground. For a volume centered on the Global South, this chapter’s inclusion feels slightly misaligned. Addressing these issues through more focused editorial oversight would strengthen the overall coherence of the collection and enhance its impact.

Despite these minor issues, the collection remains noteworthy in its ability to fill a gap in literature regarding how citizens in the Global South are using technological affordances to advance their fight against oppression. This book foregrounds the ways in which online battles for social good remain situated in contexts of political instability, economic precarity, and colonial legacies unique to the Global South. The editors note that “digital spaces have given the subaltern a voice to invoice the unspeakable stories” (p. 256), particularly in regions where authoritarian governments utilize encrypted platforms while communities with limited digital infrastructure innovate low-cost methods to amplify their messages. As a social media and social justice textbook, this edited volume would provide depth to higher education courses aiming to expand beyond the knowledge production confines of the Global North. By showcasing the diverse contributions from scholars spanning multiple countries and continents, the book collectively calls on media communication scholars to engage with pressing global challenges while positioning social media as a key tool for advocacy and justice.