

The Impact of Social Media on Development, Democracy and Anti-Democratic Practices in Sub-Saharan Africa

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DOI: 10.56201/ijssmr.v10.no11.2024.pg.367.391

Abstract

In sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the world, social media has become a major component of discussions on the political economics of development; yet, it is challenging to assess the influence. Social media is employed, depending on the nation, for civic involvement, anti-corruption efforts, news story following, and maintaining political engagement in the face of disillusionment with national leaders. The incredible growth of internet and mobile phone use across Africa and most of the developing world over the last ten years has accelerated this process. In order to demonstrate how an area with some of the least developed socioeconomic infrastructure in the world has embraced and used social media for democratic and economic growth, this paper concentrates its research exclusively on the situation in sub-Saharan Africa. Although there are many disagreements and interpretations on the definition and usage of the term "development," in this context it refers to the enhancement of the overall well-being of individuals within a given community. In this sense, development includes micro concerns like people's readily available access to money, healthcare information, and other everyday necessities, as well as macro statistics like GDP and GDP per capita. The term "social media" can also refer to interactive systems that go beyond well-known websites like Facebook and Twitter. This paper examines two social media platforms, MPesa and Ushahidi, that are increasingly integrated into the financial and electoral processes. Both were created in Kenya, yet despite this, they have gained popularity both in Africa and beyond. The mapping of Kibera, a sizable slum in Kenya, raised awareness of its issues and prompted national attention, as is shown in another section of the paper. Next, focus is on Nigeria, where youth engagement in the nation's political processes has increased as a result of social media-promoted demonstrations in 2012. Using instances of violence in Kenya following elections fueled by social media and the Ethiopian government's surveillance of its people, this paper recognizes the significant obstacles that face Ethiopia. The examples show the numerous ways that ICTs, particularly social media, have impacted life in various nations, with varying results in terms of the political systems in those nations. In closing, this paper makes predictions on how social media will interact with different processes in the future.

Keywords: Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Media, Social Media, Democracy, Development

Introduction

While digital communication comes in numerous forms, not all of them are categorized as social media. The term "social media" describes websites or programs that facilitate message sharing, user engagement, and content sharing in a cooperative setting. Social connection and sharable material are crucial in this situation. Even though submitting material is supported by numerous platforms, social media allows for more user interaction and teamwork. Depending on the platform's goal, the context for these interactions might be either wide or specialized. LinkedIn is one example of a network that may be centered on fostering professional growth and business relationships. Others could focus on picture sharing rather than writing, like Instagram, or target a certain demographic.

Interactive technology known as social media make it easier for members of online communities and networks to create, share, and aggregate content—such as thoughts, passions, and other kinds of expression. On a computer, tablet, or smartphone, people utilize web-based software or apps to access social media. Sharing papers, images, videos, and personal information quickly and electronically is made simple by social media on the Internet. Social media was initially used to stay in touch with friends and family, but companies quickly realized that it was a new and popular method to communicate with customers. Social media allows you to communicate with and share information with a large number of individuals at once or with anybody on the planet. Social media usage is highest in Asian nations like Indonesia, despite its popularity in the United States and Europe.

Utilizing technology in social media may take numerous forms. Social media is a tool that governments and politicians use to communicate with citizens and locals. This encompasses social networking, business networks, blogging, virtual worlds, social gaming, picture sharing, and social networks. Social media is a tool used by people who are separated by great distances from their friends and family. A number of individuals utilize various social media platforms to communicate their thoughts, views, insights, and feelings with others, network for career possibilities, and locate others globally who share similar interests. These actions include a person in an online social network.

Social media and social networking are interchangeable. Social media is mainly concerned with using social networking sites and related platforms to expand an audience, while social networking is more frequently linked to people building communities inside their own networks. The most crucial thing a business requires is social networking. Businesses utilize the platform to locate and engage with consumers, boost sales through marketing and advertising, monitor consumer trends, and provide customer support.

There are certain commonalities among social media platforms, despite the fact that each one operates differently and provides a unique set of services. The following are some of the most common traits that social networking sites have in common:

- *Profile*: The majority of social networking sites allow users to build a personal or company profile, where they may include a bio, submit a profile photo, and create a unique account name.

- *Content Sharing*: Every social media user can share content from their personal profile, but the kinds of content that can be shared differ depending on the platform. For instance, on Facebook and Twitter, you can share text, images, short videos, and more, but on TikTok, you can only share images and videos.
- *Direct Messaging*: A private way for users to communicate with one another on social media platforms. While direct messaging is a feature of some social media platforms, like WhatsApp or WeChat, it is also an extra function of others, such as Facebook Messenger or Instagram Direct Messages.
- *Algorithm*: Every social media network uses an algorithm to decide which material to show users and in what order. The majority of algorithms are made to provide the content that users are most likely to interact with, based on their past interactions with the site.
- *Feed and Timelines*: In a single feed or timeline, the majority of social media platforms compile all published posts from accounts you follow, as well as those that are recommended to you based on your interests and pertinent advertisements.

When referring to media, the word "social" implies that these platforms foster group interaction. Human networks may be expanded and improved via social media. Through bespoke applications or web-based apps on mobile devices, users may access social media. According to Mudhai et al. (2019), these interactive platforms facilitate the sharing, co-creation, discussion, participation, and modification of user-generated or self-curated material by people, groups, and organizations. Social networking is used to study, make friends, and record memories. They might be employed to advertise individuals, businesses, goods, and concepts. News can be shared, published, or consumed via social media.

Social networking sites including Twitter, Facebook, WeChat, ShareChat, Instagram, Pinterest, QZone, Weibo, VK, Tumblr, Baidu Tieba, Threads, and LinkedIn are well-known and have over 100 million registered members. Other well-known websites that are occasionally referred to as social media services include Reddit, TikTok, YouTube, Letterboxd, QQ, Quora, Telegram, WhatsApp, Signal, LINE, Snapchat, Pinterest, Viber, and Viber. According to Mudhai et al. (2019), wikis are an example of collaborative content generation.

Social media is ingrained in many people's daily lives. Since social media is used by 59% of people worldwide, it is a very effective instrument for communication and idea sharing. Users of social media also enjoy a number of advantages. The following are some advantages of using social media for personal reasons:

- *Develop Relationships*: Social media is an excellent tool for establishing new connections and fortifying those that already exist because it was created as a means of connecting people.
- *Creating a Personal Voice*: Your social media profiles may serve as an extension of who you are, allowing you to discuss your hobbies, express yourself, and showcase your skills.

- *Promotes Education and Discovery:* Social media platforms include learning groups, professional social media accounts, and a wealth of educational materials (such as instructional YouTube videos and instructive Tweet Threads).

Businesses and creators may also benefit from social media. Businesses and creators must have an active social media presence where they routinely and consistently provide information, since 77 percent of consumers use social media to learn more about a product or brand. The following are some benefits associated with social media use for businesses and creators:

- *Cost-Effective Marketing Approach:* Social media marketing is among the greatest and most economical ways to reach a wide audience with your goods and services when compared to other marketing tactics.
- *Greater Brand Exposure:* With over 5 billion people using social media globally, these platforms may help companies expand their customer base and raise their profile.
- *Content, Updates, and Event Sharing:* Whether a company wants to spread the word about an upcoming event, their most recent article, or any other significant updates (such as new closing hours, shipping delays, or new team members), social media is a natural and simple way to do so.
- *Targeted Marketing:* You can run highly-targeted social media advertisements using platforms like Facebook advertisements and Instagram Ads to help businesses raise awareness and boost online sales.
- *Customer Engagement:* Most individuals between the ages of 18 and 54 believe that social media is a good way to provide customer care, and because many companies do not respond very quickly on social media, this is a simple method to separate out from the competition, win over your followers, and establish a rapport.

It goes without saying that social media allows e-commerce businesses to integrate social features and facilitates easy client interaction in today's interconnected society. It makes it easier to focus on marketing and market research since it can gather data. It encourages the sale of products and services by making it easier to provide discounts and coupons to potential customers at the right time and place. Loyalty programs with social media integration may also help build relationships with customers.

However, many detrimental effects of social media on kids and teens have been highlighted, including as exposure to unsuitable information, adult exploitation, sleep and attention issues, feelings of isolation, and a variety of mental health issues. Additionally, social media has come under fire for escalating political divisiveness and weakening democracy. Notwithstanding these concerns, social media has grown significantly in importance in discussions of the political economy of development in sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the world, albeit it is challenging to assess its effects (Pruett & Deane, 2019). Social media is employed, depending on the nation,

for civic involvement, anti-corruption efforts, news story following, and maintaining political engagement in the face of disillusionment with national leaders (Mpofu, 2022; Mudhai et al., 2019). The incredible growth of internet and mobile phone use across Africa and most of the developing world over the last ten years has accelerated this process. In several African nations, over 50% of people utilize the internet in metropolitan areas, while nationwide penetration rates are above 25% in a number of other countries. On the subcontinent, 63% of people own a cell phone (Sanou, 2023). Africans utilize mobile devices to access the internet, but they are also using more and more broadband-capable gadgets (Smith, 2021).

In order to demonstrate how an area with some of the least developed socioeconomic infrastructure in the world has embraced and used social media for democratic and economic growth, we explicitly center our research on the situation in sub-Saharan Africa. Although the term "development" has several definitions and applications (Lipset, 1959; Huntington, 2006; Easterly, 2021), we use it here to refer to an increase in the overall well-being of individuals in a certain community. Development in this context includes micro concerns like people's easy access to money, healthcare information, and other everyday necessities, in addition to macro statistics like GDP and GDP per capita. We also use social media to mean interactive platforms beyond popular platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

This paper addresses two social media platforms—Ushahidi and MPesa—that are now integral to the financial and electoral processes in the sections that follow. Despite the fact that they were both created in Kenya, they have gained popularity both in Africa and worldwide. A section illustrates how charting Kenya's massive slum, Kibera, brought attention to its issues and spurred national interest. This paper then shifts to Nigeria, where young people's sense of efficacy has been reinforced by social media-assisted demonstrations in 2012, keeping them involved in the nation's political processes. This paper acknowledges that there are major obstacles, such as the Ethiopian government's population surveillance and incidents of violence in Kenya following elections that were stoked by social media. The examples illustrate the myriad ways that ICTs, especially social media, have affected people's lives across different countries, with differing outcomes in terms of those countries' political systems. This paper concludes by forecasting future interactions between social media and other systems.

The History and Evolution of Social Media

Social media has completely changed the way we interact, communicate, and do business. When social media platforms were not a part of our everyday lives, it is difficult to remember. Businesses today need to know how social media has changed and where it is going in order to remain relevant in a constantly shifting environment.

Since the beginning of time, people have been looking for new methods to communicate. Grunting, cave paintings, speaking, letter writing, sign language, and email have all been used as communication methods. Social media then emerged. Social media platforms emphasize popular engagement and communities. Social media users can locate new like-minded individuals and old acquaintances without knowing a person's private contact details beforehand. Despite being separated by miles, individuals may now communicate with one other in less than a second, share

data via the cloud, and watch the same film at the same time. Whole digital ecosystems can emerge using these platforms.

Social media platforms vary greatly from traditional media (such as newspapers, TV, and radio) in terms of quality, reach, frequency, usability, relevancy, and permanence. While conventional media use a monologic transmission model (one source to many receivers), social media outlets use a dialogic transmission system (many sources to many recipients). A radio station broadcasts the same programming to a city, while a newspaper is distributed to several subscribers. The first social media platforms emerged nearly as soon as technology allowed for them. While chat and email applications first appeared in the early 1970s, it was not until 1979 that long-lasting communities emerged with the founding of the discussion group network USENET. Users could send and receive messages in newsgroups, or subject areas, on USENET. People could communicate through USENET and other discussion forums, such as privately maintained bulletin board systems (BBSs), but they were all effectively closed networks. An intuitive graphical user interface connected such systems with the 1993 introduction of the Mosaic web browser. With only a click, users could travel between websites thanks to the World Wide Web's architecture, and faster Internet connections made it possible to access more multimedia information than was feasible in newsgroups that were mostly text-based (Mas & Radcliffe, 2023, p. 173).

Classmates.com and SixDegrees.com were the first businesses to build social networks using online technologies. Established in 1995, Classmates.com employed a forceful pop-up advertising strategy to entice users to visit their website. It built its social network on the connections that already existed between members of military units, companies, and classes of high school and college graduates. The first real social networking site was SixDegrees.com. When it was first created in 1997, it included the majority of the elements that would later come to define these kinds of websites: users could make their own accounts, keep track of friends, and communicate with each other via the private messaging tool. When the "bubble" in e-commerce company shares burst in 2000, SixDegrees.com, along with many other dot-coms, failed to convert their claims of drawing in over three million users into revenue and went down with the rest of the dot-coms (Pruett & Deane, 2019). LiveJournal, a less conventional social media site, helped to establish the self-documenting aspect of social media. LiveJournal was introduced in 1999 and allows users to start their own online journal, blog, or diary and share their writings with their friends and community. Additionally, users have the option to add other members as "friends," albeit this feature is not very useful. There is a comment box on posts, which promotes community participation. Today, the platform is still operational.

Nevertheless, social media websites became more and more popular in the early 21st century. Social networks like Friendster and MySpace made it possible for friends, family, and acquaintances to interact digitally. One of the websites that most closely resembles contemporary social media platforms is Friendster, which launched in 2002. Along with more conventional text posts and link postings that would take viewers to other websites, this service allowed users to share photos and videos. Additionally, it served as a forum for learning about events and new media. Individuals might look for one another and speak with one another directly or through wider networks. In the first few months of its launch, Friendster had three million users. Friendster was

redesigned and launched as a social gaming platform in 2011 after failing to compete with the subsequent social media heavyweights. In 2018, it finally closed.

MySpace debuted in 2003 and soon gained international renown. According to the now-defunct internet tracker Hitwise, MySpace was the most popular social media platform worldwide from 2005 to 2008 and the most visited website in the United States in June 2006. The ability to add YouTube videos and music to a user's profile—which could easily be altered with simple HTML code—was one of MySpace's most well-liked features. The MySpace Music function, which allowed musicians to post their music for wider exposure, was a major factor in the platform's popularity. This served as a forerunner to TikTok and Instagram for discovering new music. Facebook, MySpace's closest competitor, eventually surpassed MySpace in terms of unique monthly visitors in April 2008, despite MySpace's years-long popularity.

With billions of members, Facebook eventually surpassed these two websites (Friendster and MySpace) to become one of the most popular social networking sites in the world. In his Harvard dorm room, Mark Zuckerberg invented it. Facebook swiftly grew and became the third most popular website in 2022, behind YouTube.com and Google.com, despite initially being restricted to Harvard students and then to anybody with an American college address. Users may "friend" one another, exchange images and videos, interact with one other's postings, and organize events on the network. Users are also drawn to community sites and small companies, which form mini-networks inside the wider Facebook network. Although Facebook is free to use, it has generated revenue via the sale of user data and advertisements. Additionally, a premium verification service that verifies a user's identification is now available. A few data breaches and the company's management of private data have drawn criticism.

Modern users still have a wide variety of social networking applications to select from in addition to the ones mentioned above. Some of these networks have managed to retain a firm hold on older demographics while gaining new users, so they are no longer only the realm of young people. The most popular ones have proliferated, with accounts being maintained by well-known people, big corporations, and regular users.

YouTube: With over 2.5 billion monthly users who watch up to a billion hours of material daily, YouTube is the most popular platform for video content. It was acquired by Google a year after its February 2005 debut. After Google Search, YouTube is currently the second most popular website worldwide. Although YouTube is primarily a watching platform, the collaborative involvement that characterizes social media is made possible via its comment area, interactive livestreams, and "Community" feature. Users have the ability to make their own channels, subscribe to others, and comment on each other's work. With many billionaire influencers starting their careers on YouTube, the network has become a popular source of income for both corporations and individual artists due to its extensive advertising approach.

LinkedIn: LinkedIn, the sole community on this list with a professional focus, was the first business networking site and has remained popular over the past 20 years. While anybody may "follow" another member and view their public postings, the two users must consent to be the first

connections. LinkedIn members create resume-like websites that highlight their professional connections. Professionals may build their networks and track the careers of people they know with the aid of interactive job boards, comment sections, and in-platform messaging options. Since 2015, Microsoft has bought LinkedIn, which has grown to be a well-liked platform for people to highlight their professional backgrounds and accomplishments.

Reddit: Reddit is well-liked for its straightforward, text-heavy style and vintage aesthetics. In addition to leaving comments on other people's postings, this website invites users to upvote or downvote such posts. The visibility of a post on the site is determined by these votes. In the community, Redditors may also establish "subreddits" where they can exchange posts, images, videos, and links with a combination of administrator and member moderators. Compared to other social media platforms, Reddit has a stronger feeling of community governance, which has helped it become well-liked by specialized groups looking for a secure online gathering spot. But Reddit has recently faced criticism for charging for API access.

Twitter: Twitter's emphasis on microblogging has made it the preferred venue for many authors and creatives; users are required to be succinct because each post has a character restriction of 280. The follower model, which allows anybody to choose to view other users' public updates (or tweets) in a central newsfeed, also supplanted Twitter's mutual friends approach. While still permitting private conversations and tweets, this let users build a following and a public persona. Although links, movies, and images can also be shared, text descriptions have always been the main focus. The network, which was purchased by billionaire Elon Musk in 2022, is presently undergoing various modifications, including as the installation of a new paid subscription system in place of its outdated "blue check" verification mechanism.

Tumblr: Another well-liked microblogging site among younger fandoms and demographics is Tumblr. Users are able to start and follow blogs where they may exchange text or multimedia content. Tumblr users have dashboards that showcase recent posts from users they follow in place of a newsfeed. In addition, users can pose anonymous, account-unrelated inquiries to other bloggers.

Pinterest: Photo-dominant platforms first appeared in 2010, starting with Pinterest. This website allows users to "pin," or bookmark, photographs from the internet and organize them into various boards and topics. In addition to being a digital pinboard, Pinterest also created a sense of community by allowing users to follow and "re-pin" each other's boards. Users may use Pinterest as a personal library and post stuff from other websites. They can also go through previously posted photos.

Instagram: Instagram swiftly gained popularity among people of various ages and backgrounds, despite initially being the purview of photographers and artists. Instagram is popular among celebrities and other prominent figures because, similar to Twitter, following someone on Instagram may be a one-way interaction. On the other hand, users have the option to make their profile private, in which case they must authorize any prospective followers. Followers have the option to like, comment, or save each post's image. Like SnapChat's transitory content, the photo-

heavy platform's "Stories" feature allows all material to be available online for a single day. In an effort to compete with other video-first networks, Instagram more recently introduced Reel, a specialized short video offering. Facebook, which is now Meta, has controlled the platform since 2012.

Snapchat: Short-form content and peer-to-peer and public "Stories" features are what make Snapchat appealing. It has gained popularity among younger people because to its emphasis on transient communications and inclusion of entertaining filters. Snaps may be either images or videos, and users can embellish both with drawings, text, or visual effects. A temporary message can be made permanent by taking a screenshot of it, however doing so will notify the sender. My AI, a new AI chatbot that can answer questions, was most recently released by Snapchat. OpenAI's ChatGPT powers My AI, a generative AI tool.

Discord: Discord emphasizes both textual and vocal communication, which sets it apart from the other platforms on our list. On all of the main operating systems—MacOS, iOS, Windows, and Android—Discord facilitates voice calls, video calls, and real-time instant messaging. Due to voice call technology, the site has a big number of gamers, but smaller groups that wish to create their own private servers within Discord are also using it. The platform is free to use, and each server may accommodate up to 800,000 users.

TikTok: Since its debut in the U.S. market, TikTok has rapidly grown to become one of the most well-liked social media platforms among younger users, despite being the most recent addition to this list. The idea is short-form video material and the option to duet with other users on the network, which increases contact between members, even if the platform just changed its settings to support lengthier movies. Users may like, comment, bookmark, and share each video post. In order to identify comparable material, users may also overlay their videos with recorded audio tracks. Members' "For You" page receives recommended material from an AI system, creating a carefully tailored experience.

Over 3.8 billion people use social media worldwide (The Economist, 2022). The landscape of social media is continually developing (Pruett & Deane, 2019). Even while all of those social media giants were successful, other applications have had trouble attracting the same users. Clubhouse, a short-lived 2019 entrant to the market, provided an audio chat room experience, which stood in stark contrast to rivals' visual emphasis. Clubhouse never really found its niche, and in April 2023, the firm laid off half of its employees despite the expanding market for podcasts and other audio material. Twitter purchased Vine, a platform for short videos, in 2012, but it shut it down in 2017.

Social media is becoming an essential component of any all-encompassing marketing plan. The dominant platforms include Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, and Twitter (now X), each of which targets distinct audiences and content types. These platforms give marketers access to advanced tools for interaction, analytics, and targeting, enabling them to provide their audiences with incredibly tailored experiences. Particularly common is visual storytelling on sites like Instagram and TikTok, where short-form video is becoming the most common type of content. In

order to build stronger relationships with customers, brands have responded by adopting influencer partnerships, user-generated content, and live-streaming events. Paid social media advertising, meanwhile, is now a major source of income. How? Businesses can contact the appropriate individuals at the right time with the aid of the sophisticated targeting options.

The expectations of users have evolved along with social media sites. Authenticity has never been more crucial. Customers expect businesses to be transparent, engage with them authentically, and provide them with tailored information. Nowadays, social media is about developing deep connections with your audience rather than only spreading a message.

The future of social media will probably be shaped by changing user behavior and technological advancements. According to emerging trends, platforms will keep developing into more linked and immersive environments. Social media is already utilizing artificial intelligence (AI), from chatbots to algorithmic content suggestions. Even more sophisticated personalization will be made possible in the future by AI, which will also automate content production and enable marketers to distribute hyper-targeted communications at scale. Additionally, automation will simplify procedures, freeing up marketers to concentrate more on strategy and innovation.

Social media may someday transcend our cellphones and enter completely immersive virtual worlds thanks to the growth of the metaverse. Users will be able to engage with companies in new and more engaging ways thanks to platforms like Facebook's Horizon and virtual reality experiences. Marketing efforts will probably use augmented reality experiences and filters even more, providing consumers with real-time access to interesting and captivating material.

We could witness a move toward decentralized social media networks as consumers' concerns about privacy increase. Users may have more control over their data and interactions on social media sites thanks to blockchain technology, which would lessen their need on centralized services. Because new advertising models will need to be created, marketers will face both possibilities and problems as a result.

Niche social networks are growing, but mainstream platforms will still rule. These more intimate, targeted contacts around particular interests are made possible by these smaller, neighborhood-driven locations. Brands will have the chance to cultivate more devoted and active audiences if they can connect with these communities and establish genuine connections.

For businesses, social media's growth offers both benefits and obstacles. Being flexible and willing to adjust to new platforms, trends, and technologies is essential for success. Brands that use the newest technologies while staying true to their identity will succeed. The adventure of social media is far from ended. The only thing we can be sure of when we look to the future is that things will always change. By concentrating on new trends and developing sincere connections with audiences, businesses may successfully traverse this changing environment.

Platforms for Democracy and Development

A few forums have emerged as frequently utilized resources for promoting democracy and, occasionally, preventing bloodshed. During Kenya's post-election violence in August 2017, a group of activists and developers looked for ways to visually record violent episodes in the nation. Ory Okolloh, a Kenyan activist blogger, launched the project. In a post dated August 22, 2017, on her blog, Kenyan Pundit, she encouraged "techies" to collaborate with her in creating a more significant tool than Google Earth for crowdsourcing reporting on violence. "The truth of what happened must first be revealed in order for the reconciliation process to take place at the local level," she stated (Okolloh, 2023). Over the course of the following several days, a group of bloggers and local developers led by Ory Okolloh, Erik Hersman, David Kobia, and Juliana Rotich worked together to construct the Ushahidi program. When local players and foreign observers reported occurrences in their neighborhoods, it proved to be quite helpful. Since then, the program has developed to incorporate sophisticated features for combining web posts, SMS texts, and social network inputs. These elements are then shown in a timeline or map perspective. The software's usefulness has promoted its usage globally for crisis management, coordination of responses to natural disasters, and election monitoring (Jeffery, 2023).

In addition to Ushahidi, an open-source application called FrontlineSMS was created by mobile anthropologist Ken Banks and is another helpful social tool. The individual aimed to capitalize on "the widespread use of mobile phones and the comfort level associated with text messaging" (FrontlineSMS, 2023) to facilitate group communication among rural residents, humanitarian workers, and civil society activists in areas with limited or nonexistent internet access. Numerous nations have utilized this open-source software for disaster relief and election management (Srinivasan, 2022). One of the software's key innovations is that, once downloaded and configured, it requires very little internet consumption. This allows civil society activists to send familiar SMS messages to specific demographics. Compared to many other accessible tools, it has an extremely minimal learning curve. More recently, FrontlineSMS was rebranded as Social Impact Lab, a new digital startup.

In terms of the economy, MPesa is arguably the most well-known technology created for financial transactions in Africa a few years ago. In March 2007, mobile phone company Vodafone introduced MPesa for its Kenyan partner, Safaricom. The initial purpose of MPesa was to lower transaction costs and interest rates by allowing individuals to pay back microloans over the phone. Two million users have signed up within a year after the start, and as of February 2019, that number has risen to 22 million. As of 2022, it accounts for more over 25% of Kenya's GNP (Mas & Radcliffe, 2022; Safaricom, 2022; The Economist, 2023). School fees, rent and utility payments, and a savings and withdrawal service are also among its extended service offerings. Individuals pay to any of Safaricom's more than 40,000 agents nationwide, and when the agent has verified the credit balance, they can transfer or withdraw money from any agent in the nation.

MPesa's significance to the Kenyan economy is shown by the fact that it covers a larger percentage of Kenyans than the traditional banking financial sector. It makes it simple for residents of remote areas without access to traditional financial services to carry out financial transactions. It is now

simple for people living in cities to transfer money to family members who live across the nation without having to visit them in person or deal with the difficulties of creating an account. MPesa's success has been ascribed to a latent financial demand that the local banking sector failed to address (Hughes & Lonie, 2022), the convenience of transactions (Mas & Morawczynski, 2023), and people's faith in Safaricom as a brand despite their lack of trust in the local agents (Morawczynski & Miscione, 2022).

Due to its effectiveness, mobile carriers are now experimenting with it as a model to help the underprivileged and reduce poverty in other nations in Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. People's time and other resources are freed up by simple financial transactions, which can boost productivity. Users report a 5–30% rise in income (Gilpin, 2020). Kenya has seen a steady influx of newer start-ups centered on the mobile transaction affordances made possible by MPesa, which might raise living standards overall (The Economist, 2023).

These instances demonstrate how ICT (information and communication technology) technologies have permeated several African nations. Although they are not necessarily innovative (Ling & Horst, 2021), they have emerged as people's go-to tools in times of need, and there are signs that they could be enhancing people's quality of life by making hitherto difficult procedures simple and available to regular people. Despite being low-tech in comparison to comparable items in the developed world, some of these gadgets have proven helpful for the particular requirements of some individuals in sub-Saharan Africa and solve issues that people would otherwise find challenging. Furthermore, in order to have the technology required to engage in the new technological arrangements, people must make personal sacrifices. According to iHUB study, consumers would sacrifice meat if doing so would free them enough money to send a text message or make a phone call that may someday provide some financial gain (Hord, 2020).

The contribution of these instruments to democratic and economic growth, particularly in underdeveloped nations, is still up for dispute among certain academics. While some contend that there has been no discernible impact in many countries (Bollou & Ngwenyama, 2022), others assert that the digital divide between and within countries continues to be a significant obstacle to potential benefits (Polikanov & Abramova, 2023), and still others argue that these tools have the potential to improve people's quality of life (Munyua & Adera, 2020). But according to a recent MacKinsey assessment, the "African middle class" is growing and adopting digital tools more often (Hattingh et al., 2023). It is now unclear if individuals use ICT technologies because they are better off or if utilizing the tools makes them better off. In any event, it is evident that people in many African nations are doing better than they were twenty years ago, and that more free elections have been held recently in a number of nations than in the first ten years after the Third Wave of democracy (Huntington, 2001) was introduced to the continent in the early 1990s. It is believed that it is more beneficial to investigate how people are really using these technologies for their everyday needs rather than concentrating on their effects. Scholars would discover, characterize, and eventually explain the changing interaction between individuals in sub-Saharan Africa and the social digital technologies they utilize as a result of this investigation.

This paper looks at a few examples that best show how these processes have unfolded over the last ten years in the sections that follow. Although no one causative process is at play, it is maintained that the present trends in sub-Saharan Africa are generally beneficial. It is possible that an increasing number of people will use digital media, particularly mobile phones, in their cultural consumption, political decision-making, and economic decision-making, given the high rate of digital media penetration in many nations. The instances are covered within the sections on social media's impact on democracy, development, and anti-democratic practices throughout the continent. By making predictions about how social media will interact with the different processes in the future, the conclusion is drawn.

Social Media and Development

There are several excellent instances of how social media may be utilized to raise communal standards of living, particularly through crowdsourcing or crowdseeding. One instance of how this technique assisted a marginalized community in identifying its needs and strengths is the Map Kibera initiative in Nairobi, Kenya. Invisible villages have become visible because to citizen mapping, which also shows how the internet of things is assisting people in stabilizing one of the world's most marginalized areas. There are hundreds of thousands of people living in Kibera. However, because no official map recognized the community's limits and national authorities paid little attention to its needs, it has remained politically invisible for decades. While many call it home, others refer to it as Africa's greatest slum. Although locals had previously mapped a slum (Joshi et al., 2022), Kibera stands out for its significant use of recently developed digital techniques.

The real population is estimated to range from 170,000 to over a million (Ekdale, 2021). Regardless of the exact figure, it represents a sizable tract of property that, until 2009, remained unmarked on the map. Actually, Kibera is marked as a forest on a lot of official maps—not because they did not have a map of the region, but rather because they chose to conceal its presence (Hagen, 2020). Few facts about one of the world's most densely populated and destitute slums can even be found on Google Maps. Only a small portion of Nairobi's 200 slums are marked on maps. It was practically unnoticeable to anyone who did not have firsthand knowledge of the location when the mapping process started. The project's organizers "found" Kibera by assembling a team of volunteer "trackers" who were armed with a few basic consumer technologies, such as inexpensive GPS units and cell phones.

They discovered 35 pharmacies and 200 schools. They discovered secluded nooks where people go to die and trendy bars with late-night dancing. They produced layers of data and geotagged the sewers, the majority of which are open. Community members participated in both the data collecting and the web interface design. Four very fundamental requirements were apparent: the sewer lines were damaged, children lacked playgrounds, the roads were poor and producing too many accidents, and they needed additional restrooms. Kibera was considered a forest by the

government. However, the maps show that it is a community and that residents were empowered to take action by arranging information in an approachable manner.

It was simpler to act when priorities were in focus. In a matter of weeks, legislators were made aware of these difficulties, media were reporting them, and small groups of neighbors were working on particular problems. The leaders of the community not only helped Kibera become known, but they also assisted the community in discovering who it was. Social media reduced the cost of cooperation to the point where players with little resources, such as the residents of Kibera, could collaborate to find solutions.

Naturally, not everyone was pleased with this. District officials and elders would demand money. An organized method of monitoring community activity that was not under their jurisdiction was disliked by the police. When the police stated that crime was under control, conflicts would arise, particularly around election season. These mapping efforts teach us that they are more than simply maps. Social media makes these maps natural, reliant on their contributors for survival, and capable of revealing issues and patterns that contributors are not even aware of. They now have excellent issue maps. The community's characteristics and the requirements of its residents have been meticulously studied by the project organizers. The next challenge is linking the people in need to the people who can help.

The creator said, "It is not about the dots on the map," when he was questioned about the project's impact. "It is about the connections and social capital that result from and are a result of the mapping" (Hord, 2022, p. 106). Stated differently, the delivery was the map. However, the result was a network of volunteers, civic consciousness, and political literacy. In addition to putting Kibera on the national map, the map made residents aware of specific issues that needed to be addressed going forward. It also transformed previously indifferent residents into citizen reporters for the different media outlets established to tell the map's story (Kovačič & Lundine, 2020). The map's crew has been asked to map at least two more slums in the Nairobi area—Mathare and Mukuru—as well as in a few other nations.

Because software is reused, projects like these never truly stop evolving. Individuals acquire talents and apply them to new endeavors. Some impoverished areas of global megacities become into what Bob Neuwirth refers to as "marquee slums" (Neuwirth, 2019), drawing the attention of major NGOs and charitable initiatives. People are greatly assisted in creating knowledge about themselves by these efforts. In this sense, digital media avoids both the government and Western NGOs.

Many social media initiatives fail or do not go as intended, but a handful have drawn the eye of policymakers and leaders of civil society who are engaged in development concerns. Since the majority of the Congo is unpoliced, the government is unable to monitor local militia movements. Without the institutions, the Voix de Kivus network keeps tabs on local battles, reports on child soldier abductions, and records sexual assaults (Van der Windt, 2020). The reports are examined by the US Agency for International Development, local NGOs, philanthropists, and the United Nations Organization for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The organizers acknowledge

that there is not much proof that a governance structure is establishing itself in this instance. Conflict reports now come from reliable sources and happen instantly, yet no one takes action. Most social media initiatives must collaborate with governments in order to have a significant influence (Hord, 2019).

These two examples demonstrate the two distinct ways that various communities use social media platforms for development, as well as the disparate results of the projects. We think that these methods have the potential to have a long-term effect on people-centered, grassroots projects, even though they may not have drastically changed the communities as sometimes depicted in the media. Development programs in sub-Saharan Africa throughout the 1990s were frequently criticized for being top-down attempts from foreign "experts" who had little idea what would truly work in the unique context of local communities. The amount of communication between development program officials and the communities they aim to assist is enhanced by social media. In some cases, having these good communication channels open has helped win over local stakeholders and powerbrokers.

Social Media and Democracy

Sub-Saharan Africa is seeing an increase in initiatives related to political involvement, election monitoring, and civic journalism. Although initiatives have sprouted up in many nations, two significant ways social media is advancing democracy are through election monitoring and mobilization for collective action. Despite the fact that the subcontinent has not yet had an Arab Spring-style occurrence, people are becoming more daring in their use of social media to criticize their governments and call for more responsible leadership.

The January 2012 Occupy Nigeria Movement is a prime illustration of how this is manifesting itself. It started in early January when the government abruptly ended the gasoline subsidy on New Year's Day. Fuel prices were at \$0.40 per liter for more than a year, but once the government declared that subsidies would no longer be provided, they swiftly increased to \$0.87 per liter. Due to the resulting increases in the cost of goods and services, many individuals were left stranded in their villages since they were unable to pay for transportation back to the metropolis where they lived. During Christmas vacation, many Nigerians visit home villages to rejoice with extended family members who might have traveled from other regions of the nation for the same reason. Nigerians protested in the streets and demanded a reversal as the agony of the abrupt increase in living expenses set in, with activists organizing online under the hashtag #OccupyNigeria.

The global Occupy Movement, which aimed to challenge global economic inequalities that keep the door of riches locked against 99 percent of mankind, served as the inspiration for the movement's name. Major cities nationwide were brought to a complete stop over the course of the following two weeks, and many people conjectured that a revolution may be imminent. The government retreated, reinstating a partial subsidy and lowering the price to \$0.60 cents per liter when labour unions led by the Nigeria Labour Congress joined the demonstrations on January 9, 2012, and other unions threatened to join (Ezeamalu & Emmanuel 2018). Social media had a major role in organizing the protests, which many claim were the largest to have taken place in the nation in 20 years (Ogunlesi, 2013; Huntington, 2016). Some youth organizations were actively involved

as the nationwide protests spread on their own. One of the most well-known of them is the "Enough is Enough" youth coalition, which is located in Lagos. The organizations urged young Nigerians to voice their ire and hold the government responsible for the decades' worth of petroleum revenue garnered by the nation. Times and dates of protest gatherings were advertised on Twitter and Facebook, and the exposure produced online garnered the sympathy of the rest of the globe, generating support protests in major cities across the world like New York, London, and Brussels. Crucially, incidents of police abuse were also captured on cell phones and extensively disseminated on social media, which could have discouraged some overzealous security personnel from injuring other demonstrators.

Over decades, a movement that started out over the specific problem of gasoline subsidies grew to address the broader problem of government squandering of oil revenue. They asked why, given Nigeria's high petroleum production, fuel would be so costly. The demonstrations' immediate results included the partial reinstatement of gasoline subsidies and the formation of several investigative committees that made a number of recommendations that were never carried out. Several oil marketers who were found to have unlawfully profited from the waste in gasoline subsidy management are now being prosecuted by Nigeria's anti-corruption body, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. It was important that certain untouchables were ever publicly named in the first place, even though none of the cases were resolved or anybody found guilty.

Activists from around the nation who had likely never considered collaborating before formed new social networks as a result of the protests. Young people from the north and south of the nation, who often do not have many possibilities for communication, may have been able to share ideas more effectively thanks to the new networks. Politicians that rely on regional divisions to continue plundering the nation without facing any kind of accountability may be challenged by such ties.

The administration was increasingly conscious of online debates about its operations and looked for strategies to combat the rising danger posed by activists and bloggers who frequently revealed misconduct. The government has twice attempted to enact legislation to "regulate" social media or set up devices to track users online. Online campaigners' uproar put an end to the proposals in both instances.

People increased confidence in their ability to influence the government, or external political efficacy, is perhaps the most significant effect of the protests. This may be why they swiftly took to Twitter to demand that the government take further action to rescue the more than 300 girls who were abducted in northern Nigeria in March 2014. People including US President and First Lady Barack and Michelle Obama, British Prime Minister David Cameron, and others backed the #BringBackOurGirls movement, which became a worldwide sensation (Rastello, 2018). Scholars have long studied political efficacy (Clarke & Acock, 2009; Pollock III, 2003), but it is unclear if more efficacy causes people to interact with the government or the other way around. Strong causal links are not indicated by several recent studies on the effectiveness of digital media (Kenski & Stroud, 2021). However, in interviews, a number of youth organizations that took part in the #OccupyNigeria and #BringBackOurGirls campaigns, such as Enough is Enough and Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth, and Advancement (YIAGA), indicated a strong conviction in

their capacity to influence the government. The majority of participants felt that social media offered them new ways to interact with and impact governance, even if they were cautious to note that social media has limitations. As the 2015 general elections approached, many of the activists actively campaigned for candidates, and the level of youth engagement in the election was among the highest the nation has ever seen. This confidence was evident to any astute observer of Nigerian politics. Engagement by itself offers young people a potent learning experience that may have favorable consequences in the near future, even if it is not the same as automatic power.

Protesting poor governance is not the only thing that people are interested in. They want to have a say in who is chosen in the first place and want the election of leaders to be free, fair, and transparent. Elections are crucial because they establish who holds what positions, which inevitably influences the creation and application of policies. Researchers and activists have spent time and energy creating instruments to ensure free and fair elections in sub-Saharan Africa (Marchant, 2022).

The Social Media Tracking Center (SMTC) is one invention that is presently being tested in elections across several nations. With the cooperation of US colleges, Nigerian civil society organizations, and the Yar'Adua Foundation in Abuja, the SMTC was first established to oversee the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. Similar polling stations have been set up in Ghana and Liberia after they were utilized in the Nigerian elections.

With the assistance of international partners and in coordination with the African Elections Project, the SMTC was used to oversee the elections in Ghana in 2012 and Kenya in 2018. It provided input to pertinent parties, such as the Election Commissions and security forces, so that they could promptly address issues brought to their attention by citizens of both countries. Using the Aggie social media monitoring software created at Georgia Tech, three teams were employed by the African Elections Project to discover and track a number of keywords related to the election in each nation. In order to take the proper action, Aggie assisted the team in identifying and validating instances of election irregularities, security breaches, or other significant occurrences. These were then forwarded to the appropriate police, election observer, media, and electoral commission stakeholders. Over 450 occurrences were confirmed by the SMTC, which received over 350,000 notifications. The fact that the reports were sent in real-time would have made it easier for the concerned parties to address the problems before they became out of hand (Aboderin, 2023; AEP Editor, 2022; Amartey-Tagoe, 2021; Adebola & Robert, 2021; Macha, 2021).

These cases illustrate social media's interaction with political processes in sub-Saharan Africa. Other cases abound of ordinary citizens using these tools, especially SMS, to expose wrongdoing in creative ways that ultimately improve the democratic experience or open new spaces for discussion about government practices. While these efforts may not have completely transformed democracy, they are necessary first steps with potential multiplying effects in the evolving relationships between state and citizens, as many of these countries are still young democracies. The program has already been used in South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, and Liberia, and it will soon be used in elections in additional sub-Saharan nations. Even though it doesn't fully address the issues with holding elections in the sub-region, it does offer a fresh chance for citizens to get

involved in raising the standard of elections in their nations and has the potential to revolutionize election administration given how prevalent mobile phone use is in the area. According to Cutcher (2023), the SMTC project manager has already said that his team is working on updating the software to make it more reliable for next elections.

Social Media and Anti-Democratic Practices

Despite the fact that social media has been utilized to advance democracy, political players have occasionally used its anonymity and immediate two-way communication to their detriment. Two trends stand out in many nations: the use of rumors to promote violence and/or ethnic hate, and the direct surveillance and interference of the government to silence critics.

The part social media and SMS played in Kenya's post-election violence in 2007–2008 is one particularly noteworthy example. The post-election ethnic violence that killed over 1000 people and displaced many more was sparked and maintained by rumors, the most of which were false. Osborn (2018) and Zuckerman (2018) have recorded certain aspects of the events that before and followed the elections, as has Mudhai (2021). Although rumors have historically played a role in politics in many areas of the world, the authors pointed out that social media has made it feasible for them to spread in ways that were before inconceivable.

In Kibera, where Osborn (2018) conducted her ethnographic study, there were widespread rumors in the run-up to the election that then-President Mwai Kibaki intended to rig the results in his primary rival Raila Odinga's parliamentary area. Rumors of result tampering and upcoming ethnic assaults abound in the communication void caused by the Kenyan Election Commission's delay in announcing the election results. Kibera is a mostly Luo slum that backed Raila Odinga, the Luo candidate for the Orange Democratic Movement.

According to Osborn, social media's "pace and range" for rumor propagation was its most distinctive feature as tensions increased. Social media has been used to spread false information and encourage violence, just as it has been used to track elections in real time in certain other African nations. People tended to follow specific instructions calling for assaults against Kibaki's Kikuyu ethnic group in the days after the results were officially announced. Hate SMS and social media messages spread by gullible individuals nationwide also contributed to the Kikuyu's retaliatory attacks. The government eventually had to outright prohibit bulk SMS and warn that anybody caught forwarding a hate message may face legal action (Jeffery, 2023; Marchant, 2022; Zuckerman, 2018). Kenya's election violence experience makes it abundantly evident that social media affordances might be exploited by various social groupings for narrow objectives that conflict with the general welfare, with disastrous results for the community.

The state occasionally advocates laws and policies meant to suppress free speech or even to monitor and control its population. One example of a nation where social media and cell phones have been used to monitor and repress political dissent is Ethiopia. Even though less than 2% of Ethiopians have access to the internet, the government has been aggressively monitoring and controlling online activity through a variety of methods. According to a recent Freedom House assessment, the government monitors internet conversations while censoring information it deems

undesirable using hardware from China and software from the UK (Freedom House, 2022). The government of Ethiopia has long been known to censor online content and its authors; laws like the 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation, the 2012 Telecom Fraud Offences Law, and the 2004 Criminal Code were all introduced to punish online dissent (Clayton, 2020; Adebola & Robert, 2021; Mudhai, 2021).

Because Ethio Telecom is the only telecom service provider in Ethiopia, the government controls the entire telecom sector. As such, the government has the ability to utilize evidence from individuals' emails, texts, and, occasionally, social media posts to accuse people of terrorism. For criticizing a local institution in the nation, Manyazewal Eshetu, a student at Addis Ababa institution, was imprisoned and held without charge or trial in 2018. Like him, a number of activists and journalists have been arrested for their social media activity, and some have even received prison sentences. International criticism has been leveled at the government's attempts to regulate internet communication (Freedom House, 2022; Mudhai, 2021; Aboderin, 2023).

Following social media-organized protests against the government's handling of the 2005 elections, the government increased its control over online communication, paying particular attention to online forums that facilitate public discourse. The state first singled out and outlawed blogs without providing any justification, and then it turned its attention to Facebook and Twitter. According to Gagliardone (2021), the government's interest in regulating social media content despite its limited usage by the general public stems from the inventive offline dissemination of online information, such as printing and handbilling it or publishing it in newspapers. The threat to government control might be far greater than the number of individuals suggested by the internet. The government's purpose for suppressing online expression, according to Gagliardone (2021), is part of its plans to create a "developmental state" and a "developmental media system," in which new media serve "nation-building" initiatives rather than being "adversarial." He hypothesizes that the government's economic prowess—the GDP of the nation is growing by more than 5% annually—would likely continue to give it negotiating leverage when obtaining foreign funding while maintaining its restrictions on civil liberties.

The two examples demonstrate how various players may attempt to erode social media's advantages for their own ends. The obstacles that state and non-state actors provide to people's usage of social media are still significant and merit further consideration. Since the 2013 election, the Kenyan government has stepped in to combat hate speech online, but there is little sign that the Ethiopian government would loosen its grip.

Concluding Remarks

Social media refers to all of the websites and applications that let users, content producers, and companies interact with one other, build online communities, share material, and share ideas. Users have access to several social media services, ranging from YouTube and WhatsApp to Instagram and TikTok. Although individuals are the primary users of social media, companies and producers may also use social media marketing to engage with their audience, establish their brand, and sell goods and services. The way people in today's society interact and exchange material, ideas, and information has been totally transformed by social media. As of March 2023, 4.76 billion people

worldwide were active social media users, representing around 59% of the world's population. In comparison to the previous year, this figure rose by 3% (Aboderin, 2023). In contrast to conventional media, like newspapers, radio, and television, which are one-way and designed to provide information without any means of response, social media is a two-way communication platform.

There are several methods to utilize technology with social media. Politicians and governments utilize social media to interact with locals and voters. Sharing images, blogging, social gaming, social networks, video sharing, business networks, virtual worlds, and other activities are all included in this. Social networking is a tool used by those who live far away from friends and family to remain in touch. Some individuals network for career possibilities, locate others globally who share their interests, and express their thoughts, views, insights, and sentiments via various social media platforms. Those who engage in these activities are members of an online social network. Social media is the most crucial component that any business should have. Businesses utilize the platform to discover and connect with consumers, monitor consumer trends, boost sales through advertising and promotions, and assist or look after customers.

In sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the world, social media has become a major component of discussions on the political economics of development; yet, it is challenging to assess the influence. Social media is employed, depending on the nation, for civic involvement, anti-corruption efforts, news story following, and maintaining political engagement in the face of disillusionment with national leaders. The incredible growth of internet and mobile phone use across Africa and most of the developing world over the last ten years has accelerated this process. The many applications of social media in sub-Saharan Africa are demonstrated by the examples included in this study. A few patterns that are prevalent throughout the continent's various nations and areas have been noted.

First, social media usage has grown significantly, and while its penetration is still modest when compared to the rest of the globe, it is increasing quickly. The extraordinary growth of middle-class customers, who have more money to spend on internet bandwidth, helps to explain this. Second, mobile phones—and increasingly smartphones—are the primary means of accessing the internet on the continent. A significant portion of young people already use smartphones, which may be advantageous for the continent's internet's future even if several reports suggest that smartphones may not replace mobile phones very soon. Third, because the majority of people use mobile phones to access the internet, the majority of social tools created on the continent are mobile-friendly. Developers understand that any successful tool needs to be simple to use on mobile devices. After years of delay, PayPal finally opened its service in Nigeria, stating that it intended to make its Nigerian website mobile-friendly (Auchard, 2022). Fourth, in addition to well-known social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, Africans have mastered the art of creating social media tools tailored to local issues. Many of these platforms are participative and enable the same logic of engagement as traditional social media, even if they might not always fall into the widely accepted criteria of "social media." These technologies, which range from Ushahidi to Voix de Kivus to the SMTCS, allow citizens to participate in narrating their own tales at a degree that was previously unthinkable. Fifth, social media has improved professional communication,

freed up more time for other productive pursuits, and made financial and corporate transactions considerably simpler. Although the precise consequences of these processes have not been studied, it is possible that they are enabling individuals to engage in more economically advantageous activities, yet the restricted functionality of mobile phones may also limit the amount of money that people may make from these activities.

It is unclear how social media and democratic progress connect. Though their total effect on the quality of democracy is unknown, initiatives like Ushahidi and the SMTC have been a part of election monitoring and management in recent elections in Ghana, Liberia, and Nigeria. They may have helped to increase the relative credibility and quality of the elections. According to the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance, which is perhaps the most thorough attempt to gauge governance on the continent, democracy has been deteriorating or stagnating in some of the most technologically advanced nations, such as Kenya and Nigeria. Across the continent, social media initiatives such as #OccupyNigeria, #Kony2012, #BringBackOurGirls, and #EndSARS have had very little quantifiable impact on official attitudes or policy changes. On the other hand, the growing desire of African young to overthrow their governments—a sign of external efficacy—may benefit good governance and citizen participation in the long run. The bulk of nations have relatively little influence over how their citizens utilize digital technologies, even with the few undemocratic actions mentioned above. For instance, activists in Nigeria rejected the government's effort to install surveillance software, at least for the time being.

What part, therefore, may social media play in the process of development? Social media has made it simpler for development organizations and the government to get more direct input from the people they are working to assist. It is now simpler than ever to overcome a long-standing critique of development efforts—that they are disconnected from local realities—thanks to the widespread availability of mobile phones with internet access. Furthermore, as demonstrated by Ushahidi and the Mapping Kibera Project, Africans are now more prepared than ever to use these digital tools to solve their own issues and assist others. On the democratic front, if present trends continue, there is cause for optimism that it will becoming harder for leaders to rig elections and sustain their positions of authority. There will be more initiatives like the SMTC and more people participating in the process of choosing their leaders and holding them responsible for their actions.

This is not to argue that social differences fueled by ethnicity, religion, and regional politics won't pose significant obstacles, or that authoritarian countries like Ethiopia may (and may) continue to restrict individuals' rights and involvement in governance. Current trends, however, indicate that there is probably going to be more public participation than indifference, which would have a beneficial long-term impact. In the end, use will continue to be defined by local circumstances, and the most effective projects will be those that see people as the hub of action and use digital media to assist them address local problems.

Lastly, it can be simple to spot instances of undemocratic practices or the greatest examples of how social media has aided in positive, project-specific results. Speaking definitively about the influence on entire industries or nations is even more difficult. We cannot yet say with certainty that social media is to blame for every change we see, even in situations when the results have

been favorable. However, we hypothesize that social media will likely influence how society is structured as mobile phones and the internet grow increasingly common throughout the subregion. That should receive more scholarly attention than it does now.

Despite just being around for a few decades, social media has already changed in a number of ways. The manner in which end users use these platforms evolve along with them. Technology adjusts to these changes in behavior by providing new capabilities and connectivity options. Examining social media patterns in Asia, which has a tendency to be an early adopter, may provide some insight into what lies ahead. Livestream buying is considerably more common on social media there, and brand marketing often uses micro-influencers rather than superstars. In the United States, this change is already beginning. The major social media networks will probably see an increase in the use of AI, whether it be in the form of chatbots or more sophisticated curation algorithms. Users who prefer the more minimalist experience of Reddit or Discord may object to this materialism, even though businesses will still utilize these platforms to improve their customer connections.

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