

Mary Negri
Unity College
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How the Development of Social Media and Technology Aids Sub-Saharan Africa in Globalization and the Fight for Human Rights

One of the most prominent misconceptions for Africa is that its people are technologically behind. The continent is saturated with the presence of electronics, all of which provide individual countries the power to advance in education, human rights efforts and their interconnectedness with the rest their continent and the rest of the world. It seems that nearly everyone in Africa is contributing to the modern advancement. From university professors to local farmers, the range of technology is incredible. Everyday the continent continues to grow, as people are taking advantage of their cell phones, their computers, their apps and social media. The people of sub-Saharan Africa have come to realize that they will not move forward in the manner they want, unless they take responsibility into their own hands. Progress will come internally, with outside aid being limited to the desires of the African people. Everyday countries in Africa are becoming increasingly interconnected with one another, and with other countries across the globe. This advancement in globalization is benefiting businesses, economies, governments, universities and even local farmers. “If you don't understand globalization, if you don't engage with globalization and if you don't take advantage of the opportunities of globalization you are not going to be able to achieve prosperity...What is globalization? The process of increasing interconnectedness...it’s driven largely by technology” (Kingsley Chiedu Moghalu 2016). Through advancements in modern technology, to the increase of cell phone use and communication, the African people are opening themselves up to the opportunities that the

rest of the world has to offer for them. Progress in new media is allowing for local organizations as well as political groups to spread their messages to the rest of their countries, as well as the rest of Africa. Social media is also opening up individual people to the benefits of communication. Citizens can take pictures with their phones, and send messages through social media to the rest of the world about what is going on in their country, increasing awareness about the human rights issues in Africa today. Not only does this allow for outsiders to see what is happening in present day sub-Saharan Africa, but it allows for the people themselves to show the rest of the world Africa from their perspective, rather than the perspective of foreign media. Advancements in technology and social media are helping the African people reach those outside of their own countries, with little interference from their government. Even so, governments themselves are beginning to see the benefit that modern technology can have within their own countries. Increasing developments in technology and social media among the sub-Saharan African nations will aid the continent in globalization and the fight for human rights.

The cover of the 2016 Camden Conference booklet revealed a picture of an African farmer using his phone. This photo is a strong representation of how the people of Africa are moving forward with the rest of the world by taking advantage of what technology has to offer them. Cell phones are a key player. “Everybody in Africa, every woman and her aunt, every man and his uncle, has a mobile phone. Africa has the greatest mobile phone penetration on Earth. There are about 600 million cell phones on the continent, on a continent with about 1.1 billion people.” (Kingsley Chiedu Moghalu 2016). Having a phone opens up many opportunities for the people of sub-Saharan African to communicate with one another. They help citizens begin to take responsibilities into their own hands, by working towards globalization and broadening their range of information. In her speech at the Camden Conference, Ofeibea Quist-Arcton, a West

African NPR correspondent, describes a story on MTN Nigeria, a giant South African based cell phone provider that was sued for failing to disconnect about 5 million unregistered SIM cards. Though this was a major safety concern due to the possibility of terrorism, it revealed a strong message:

“Just consider that figure of 5 million sim cards, that's phenomenal. It shows the deep penetration of cell phone usage in Nigeria, which is replicated to a lesser degree with smaller populations, of course, in other parts of Africa leapfrogging fixed line technology and powering ahead. And that for me is one of the most viable advances and evidence of progress in Africa that shows the continent is taking and making huge strides” (Ofeibea Quist-Arcton 2016).

The spread of cell phone usage is primarily dependent on the people themselves. As Ofeibea revealed in her speech, what is so amazing about these numbers is how the people themselves are taking responsibility into their own hands. They see how having a cell phone can aid them in their everyday lives, so they make the investment in one. After getting a phone and seeing how much it has benefited their life, they recommend it to their family and communities, therefore other people prosper. Later in her speech Ofeibea describes one Senegalese farmer she had met who was practically glued to her cell phone. This woman had become so attached to the benefits of her device, that she could not part ways with it. It had become another tool of her trade, equivalent to a shovel or horse in value. The farmer used her phone to check the weather conditions and see when heavy rains were predicted to come. Additionally, the woman could receive text messages, alerting her to a drop in fertilizer prices that could save her money. This progress in communication has allowed the individual people of Africa to improve their own lives. No longer do they have to depend on the middlemen to get them the information they need.

The people of Africa can work to improve their own human rights simply by checking the weather on their phone. “It may be incremental, but embracing technological innovation however basic is an indication that Africa is moving forward” (Ofeibea Quist-Arcton 2016). Phones and other electronics are improving communication and broadening the presence of social media in Africa, causing a shift in the way African citizens are sharing information with the rest of the world.

Following close behind the introduction of cell phones came the initiation of social media in sub-Saharan Africa. People quickly began to realize that this was a whole new outlet with which they could express their ideas and opinions with anyone else who shares the same form of media. All over the continent, individuals and organizations began to take advantage of the opportunities that were brought about with the introduction of sites such as Facebook and Instagram. As Ofeibea Quist-Arcton expressed in her speech at the Camden Conference, there were several organizations that took advantage of social media and managed to make great changes within their communities and their countries. Take for example the group of college students from South Africa that managed to reduce their tuition fees by bringing the problem to social media.

“The next time I need a quick and lasting solution to any problem, I will first check if university students cannot solve it all with a single hashtag. Otherwise, how did the students of the University of Pretoria manage to bring the Freedom Charter to life and solve so many socioeconomic problems? Not only did they get their wish on fees, they secured a minimum wage of R10 000 for the workers by 2018 and free university education for the workers and for their children.” (Kgomoeswana 2016).

These young people used their new resources to take control of their situation, exemplifying what it means to be developing and progressing with the rest of the world. By doing so, the people of sub-Saharan Africa, as represented by these college students, are showing the rest of the world that they are advancing and will be able to globalize further as time goes on.

Considering that sixty percent of the population in Africa is under the age of twenty-five years old (Kah Walla 2016), it is possible that more young people will turn to social media to help create change in their country. With the presence of so many cell phones on the continent, and the rising numbers of computers and other devices, the African people have a wonderful opportunity to establish change in their everyday lives. “The technology map is the best kept secret in sub-Saharan Africa, the exciting terrain where explosive rates of internet use and cell phone penetration are creating an entirely new foundation for service delivery, information dissemination and economic growth” (Dayo Olopade 2014). Everyday modern technology in sub-Saharan Africa is growing. More people are buying cell phones while others are creating accounts on Facebook and Instagram. Advancements are being made everyday throughout the continent, both individually and united. “It may be incremental, but embracing technological innovation however basic is an indication that Africa is moving forward...technology is revolutionizing the continent and you see evidence of this everyday” (Ofeibea Quist-Arcton 2016). As long as people continue to work towards improving their forms of communication, and increasing the technology around them, they will be able to connect to other people around the world, and improve upon the well being of people in all African nations.

Nearly every citizen in every country in Africa is aware of the issues their people face and what needs to be done. There are so many issues facing the people it is hard to even put into words. For a long time there was not much an individual could do without interference from

another person, whether it was buying food from someone else at the market or obeying the laws put in place by the leader of the country. However with the influence of modern technology in sub-Saharan Africa, there are more opportunities for individuals to control their own lives. From the new potentials of online shopping, to the possibilities of sending money to relatives far away, the people of Africa are constantly working to better themselves and their communities. Yes, there are numerous conflicts going on across the continent, but the increase of cell phones and the internet is increasing opportunities for people.

“ While the majority of the Western world realizes and embraces the benefits of advanced technology, sub-Saharan Africa is still working to provide for the most basic needs, such as adequate health care, food, and sanitation. Although sub-Saharan African nations strive to provide these basic needs, they cannot do so without simultaneously developing and recognizing their technological needs” (Myers 1998).

It will not be possible for the African nations to continue helping their own people, unless they also continue to develop technologically. By improving upon their range of current devices and connections to the internet, nations as a whole will be able to become more connected to other resources. Creating relationships with other nations will help individual countries globalize and strengthen themselves economically, socially and politically. With this in mind, leaders are beginning to understand how beneficial technology and the connections it creates can be. “Our leaders finally seem to be getting the point. They’re beginning to understand the importance of technology, of communication, within their own countries and across their borders with other African countries and how this can propel a country or a continent forward” (Ofeibe Quist-

Arcton 2016). The primary force behind this is the people. Without the drive and dedication of the people, the leaders themselves would not recognize how beneficial these modern resources can be. “People are innovating, and people are doing new things. They are not waiting for the government to propel them forward or to take them backwards, which often the case. They are thinking up, they are delivering and they are making the continent tick.”(Ofeibea Quist-Arcton 2016). No longer do the people of the sub-Saharan have to rely on the government or outside resources to help them. With the aid of technology such as cell phones, computers and internet programs, there is ample opportunity for countries to promote globalization and for individuals to make a difference in their own lives without requiring assistance from outside sources.

The development of technology and social media has encouraged globalization and the progression of personal rights to continue in almost every nation in sub-Saharan Africa. People are standing up and taking control of their lives by making use of the resources they have. “Technology can now provide crucial interconnection among countries by utilizing various electronic means, such as computer networks. More specifically these advances allow private citizens, governments and businesses to obtain information from around the world almost instantaneously” (Myers 1998). The people of Africa are using their devices to obtain information about their countries and the rest of the world. By doing so, individuals are becoming more educated, and are beginning to make the connection between the technology they have and the changes they can make. Everyday people of all ages are standing up for themselves, their families and their money by taking control. Mobile banking has allowed people to send money without having a bank account, just as online shopping has allowed individuals to buy products without having a store. People are beginning to control their lives and their countries by their own specification. However, the future of Africa will not shine any brighter if

the rest of the world does not respect the diversity of the people. In order for the continent to grow, the people need to set their own rules. “Is Africa Rising? I say not really. Not really because Africa is not engaging the world on its own terms. Africa is engaging the world on everybody else’s terms except its own”(Kingsley Chiedu Moghalu 2016). As technology and social media continue to take hold, the nations of Africa will continue strengthen themselves, showing the world that Africa will soon rise above.

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