

# Symposium on Cultures of Platformisation in Africa

13 MARCH 2026

11:00AM-6:00PM

University of Leeds and Boston University

Organising committee:

[Leah Komen](#) (Daystar University)

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Africa's digital landscape is expanding and rapidly changing. In this moment, digital platforms—and the products, services, communication, and networking they offer—significantly shape everyday economic, social, and political life on the continent. This digital landscape is underpinned by a combination of economic/financial, political and cultural logics and practices, both global and local.

Platforms promise business success, consumer satisfaction, entrepreneurial opportunities, innovations, and social transformation, including new forms of collective connection and action. Platforms are also linked to scams, debt, data misuse, violence, worker exploitation, censorship, and mental ill-health. The merits and harms of platforms are contested across the continent. For example, platforms have been celebrated as accelerators of local and regional innovation and as vehicles of sovereignty projects. They have also been critiqued as replicators of colonial circuits of wealth and power that reinforce historical, and perhaps racialised, inequities.

As platforms—and platform-based firms and entrepreneurs—further extend their business models into the social fabric of those living on the continent, states deliberate the appropriate policy environment that will drive platforms to better balance innovation and security, and citizen, corporate, and state interests. Meanwhile, individuals enact digital practices that blend modernity and tradition in ways that can both reproduce and resist the asymmetries of platform capitalism. Against this background, we take stock of accelerating and expansive platformisation in Africa.

## Programme

11:00am-11:10am	<b>Welcome</b>		Chris Paterson, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, & Jörg Wiegratz
11:10am-12:20pm	<b>Panel 1: Labour &amp; Entrepreneurship</b>  Panel Chair: Jörg Wiegratz	<p>“The Platformization of Urban Spaces: Algorithmic Visibility and Virtual Gentrification in Nairobi during IShowSpeed’s Africa Tour”</p> <p>“The Platformization of African Urban Mobility: Yango, Informal Transport Networks, and the Geopolitics of Digital Infrastructure in Cameroon”</p> <p>“Against Inevitability: On Kampala’s De-automated Moto-taxis”</p> <p>“Delivering Food, Making Life: Migrant Riders On and Off the Roads of Cape Town”</p>	<p>James Asande &amp; Merci Gakii (Daystar University)</p> <p>Ewa Majczak (University College London/ HUMA, University of Cape Town) &amp; Gannty Ouangmotching (Catholic University of Central Africa)</p> <p>Rich Mallett</p> <p>Sophia Rabie (University of Oxford)</p>
12:20pm-1:25pm	<b>Keynotes &amp; Q&amp;A</b>  Chair: Chris Paterson	<p>“Researching Digital Colonialism in Africa: About, Against, Beyond”</p> <p>“Platform Resistance for Non-extractive Digital Futures”</p>	<p>Toussaint Nothias (New York University)</p> <p>Lusike Mukhongo (Western Michigan University)</p>
1:25pm-1:45pm	Lunch  Chair: Winston Mano	Lunchtime talk: “Emerging Issues in Platform Cultures in Africa”	Guest speaker: Chenayi Mutambasere
1:45pm-2:55pm	<b>Panel 2: Gender &amp; Resilience</b>  Panel Chair: Winston Mano	<p>“Sanity in the Creative Chaos: An Exploration of Mental Health Threats Facing Digital Content Creators in Zimbabwe”</p> <p>“Gambling Platforms Communication: Youth Perceptions of Mandatory Wording in Online Betting Advertising across Various Media Platforms”</p> <p>“Beyond the Violence Narrative: Digital Platforms as Sites of Self-Representation for Young Women in South Africa’s Cape Flats Ganglands”</p> <p>“Platform Features and the Architecture of Influence in Nigerian Audience Responses to Influencer-led Feminist Politics and Ideas”</p>	<p>Emmanuel Tembo (University of Cape Town)</p> <p>Seriane Morapeli &amp; Tumelo Mokoena (University of Johannesburg)</p> <p>Scheherazade Safla-Gaffoor (Northwestern University in Qatar)</p> <p>Chiadikaobi Ihuoma (Keele University)</p>

2:55pm-3:55pm	<p><b>Panel 3: Social Media</b></p> <p>Panel Chair: Leah Komen</p>	<p>“Japa’ Migration Aspirations, Social Media Content Creators and Idealized Lifestyles Abroad”</p> <p>“Beyond the Screen: How Zimbabweans Trade through Facebook Marketplace”</p> <p>“Platformisation, Power and Participation: Digital Hustle Narrative and Everyday Communication on Kenyan Social Media”</p> <p>“‘With Tech We Can Be More Like Dangote’: Financial Influencing and the Making of New Investor Subjects in Nigeria”</p>	<p>Samuel Uwen Umoh (Czech Academy of Science)</p> <p>Victoria Mtomba</p> <p>Rosemary Nyaole-Kowuor (Daystar University)</p> <p>Simedele Dosekun (London School of Economics)</p>
3:55pm-4:15pm	Break		
4:15pm-5:25pm	<p><b>Panel 4: Policy &amp; Resistance</b></p> <p>Panel Chair: Daivi Rodima-Taylor</p>	<p>“Cultures of AI Platformisation: Skill Formation, Labour Subjectivities, and Agency in Sub-Saharan Africa’s AI Work Ecosystem”</p> <p>“Kenya vs Big Tech: Platform Accountability across Borders”</p> <p>“Digital Media Literacies and Platform Usage in Uganda’s Public Sector during Covid-19 Pandemic Lockdown”</p> <p>“Charitable TikTok Entrepreneurs and the Hypervisual Commodification of Black Bodies”</p> <p>“Why Mobile Money Took Off in Some African Countries and Not Others: The Political Economy of Platforms”</p>	<p>Philip Mong’are Achoki (University of Essex)</p> <p>Toussaint Nothias (New York University)</p> <p>Rhona Nabutto &amp; Fred Kakooza (Makerere University)</p> <p>Suzanne Temwa Gondwe Harris (London School of Economics)</p> <p>Jonathan Greenacre (Boston University)</p>
5:25pm-6:00pm	<p><b>Roundtable: Reflections</b></p> <p>Chair: Chris Paterson</p>		<p>Leah Komen, Winston Mano, Lusike Mukhongo, Toussaint Nothias, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, Jörg Wiegratz</p>

Thank you to LAHRI (Leeds Arts & Humanities Research Institute); LUCAS (Leeds University Centre for African Studies), and the University of Leeds Schools of Media & Communication and Political and International Studies for their funding and support of the symposium.

# Abstracts



## Panel 1: Labour & Entrepreneurship

### **Platformization of Urban Spaces: Algorithmic Visibility and Virtual Gentrification of Nairobi during IShowSpeed's Africa Tour**

James Asande & Mercy Gakii

This proposed research seeks to critically study the profound socio-spatial and communicative transformations brought about by the increasing popularity of "In-Real-Life" (IRL) streaming phenomena, focused on global streamer IShowSpeed during his 2026 visit to Nairobi, Kenya.

As digital platforms increasingly impose the philosophy of physical movement and social interaction, the "Platformization of Urban Space" has emerged as the overriding force in shaping how global audiences experience countries in the Global South. IShowSpeed experienced various Kenyan sub-cultures and landscapes ranging from the dynamic "Nganya" (public transport bus) culture, Government-funded affordable housing estates and the high cityscapes of the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC), the newly built Talanta Stadium, and the contemporary modernism of the Nairobi Expressway. The study will explain convergence of algorithmic philosophy and digital spectacle initiating the so-called virtual gentrification. This involves symbolic and actual "upgrading" of environments, to match up to requirements of global digital platforms (e.g. YouTube, TikTok), to visually and interactively capture and maintain users' attention and, in the process, give authentic portrayals of urban spaces.

The city is actively reconfigured to capture and sustain the global "attention economy." This study moves beyond traditional media representation theories to explore how the city itself becomes a "platform-ready" stage. By prioritizing "viral-ready" aesthetics, the platformisation process risks creating a digital enclosure where the Kenyan urban identity's lived reality is subordinated to the performative chaos demanded by international viewers.

The following objectives, designed to find out the intersection of digital platform logic and physical urban reality, will guide the study.

First, to analyse the role of platform algorithms in framing Nairobi's physical geography, specifically investigating how the prioritization of high-intensity, "viral" local spaces influenced the streamer's physical movement and the subsequent global perception of the city's spatial layout.

Second, it will examine the communicative tension between global spectacle and local identity by exploring the inherent friction between the performative chaos demanded by international digital audiences and the nuanced, lived reality of Kenyan urban identity.

Thirdly, it will evaluate the impact of "stream-sniping" and real-time digital crowdsourcing on the physical accessibility and digital enclosure of public spaces; Finally, assess the implications for Kenya's digital diplomacy and national branding, analysing the strategic ways the state actors and official narratives interacted with unscripted, platform-mediated events to project a modern, "digital-ready" image of the nation to a global audience.

Theoretical grounding for this inquiry is the Theory of Mediatized Space. It posits that social spaces are fundamentally restructured by media logic. In the context of Nairobi, this suggests a "socio-spatial regime of dependence," where the visibility—and perceived value—of an urban space is predicated on its ability to generate "clicks," "likes," and "shares." This mediatization creates a paradox: it grants Nairobi unprecedented global visibility but flattens the city's complex social fabric into a series of simplified, high-grade clips, tailored for algorithmic amplification. The theory will reconcile the gap between digital platform mechanics and physical urban sociology.

To address these complexities, the study will employ a mixed-methods approach designed to triangulate findings through both qualitative and quantitative lenses. The qualitative component utilizes digital ethnography and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Digital ethnography will involve observation within the livestream's digital ecosystem, including live chat logs and the real-time social dynamics between the streamer and the Kenyan youth. CDA will be applied to the resulting media artifacts, such as YouTube Video On Demand (VODs), TikTok "edits," and official government press releases, to reveal how the "chaos" of the stream is semiotically packaged for global consumption. The quantitative component involves analysis of platform metrics, including viewership heatmaps and engagement spikes correlated with specific geographic locations. By combining these methods, the study aims to capture the "felt experience" of the event alongside structural data of platform performance.

The study anticipates that IShowSpeed's tour was a powerful agent of virtual gentrification, where local traditions were repackaged as hyper-kinetic aesthetic products for a global market. The phenomenon of "stream-sniping" likely created temporary digital enclosures in Nairobi, where public accessibility was dictated by the streamer's movements, effectively privatizing public space during the broadcast. This suggests that platformisation can physically and socially rearrange the city.

The research will ultimately contribute to a deeper understanding of how platform capitalism and algorithmic governance are redefining urban geography in the Global South. It also highlights the friction between a Government's desire for a "polished" national brand versus the "performative chaos" that platform algorithms reward. By uncovering the mechanisms of virtual gentrification, the study provides a critical lens to view the future of urban life in an era where boundaries between the physical city and the digital platform continue to dissolve.

## **The Platformization of African Urban Mobility: Yango, Informal Transport Networks, and the Geopolitics of Digital Infrastructure in Cameroon**

Ewa Majczek & Ganntu Ouangmotching

The contemporary landscape of urban mobility in Cameroon, specifically within the metropolitan corridors of Yaoundé and Douala, represents a complex intersection of state failure, resilient informal labor, and the nascent incursion of global digital platforms. Our research project examines how the contemporary landscape of urban mobility in Yaoundé and Douala is transforming through digitally mediated transport system, specifically the 2021 entry of Yango, a ride-hailing subsidiary of the Russian technology conglomerate Yandex, also operating across West Francophone Africa.

Following structural adjustment programmes and the post–Cold War economic crisis, the Cameroonian state's incapacity to provide formal public transport led to the collapse of parastatal bus companies and the subsequent rise of informal transport systems. In the absence of a state-managed transport system, the "yellow taxi" (taxi jaune) became the primary mode of urban mobility in Yaoundé and Douala. These vehicles, often second-hand cars patched with tape and lacking formal maintenance, operate on a shared basis along fixed axes. The "mobility culture" of the yellow taxi is defined by collective occupancy, that gave rise to specific forms of transport sociality, where a car designed for five people frequently carries six, and passengers are picked up and dropped off dynamically along the route. Governance of this system is informal, with fares negotiated based on distance (i.e. client proposes a price based on destination), time of day (e.g. l'heure de pointe), and the perceived value of the passenger (e.g. wealthy looking client would be charged more). Yellow taxis are unionised, require a license from the state authority as well as regular maintenance to renew the license, which given the kleptocratic Cameroonian state, can be walked around e.g. through a police bribe, or manufactured renewal.

Simultaneously, the economic crisis of early 1990s with currency devaluation gave rise to youth unemployment and emergence the "bendskin"—motorcycle taxis that initially served peripheral, unpaved roads but eventually came to dominate and to a degree compete with yellow taxi with the city's major arteries. The bendskineurs represent a specific demographic: predominantly young men (81% aged 15-35), often migrants from the rural north and/or the Bamiléké regions, who view the motorcycle not just as a tool of labor but as a site of social rebellion and "débrouillardise". These motobike drivers are organized into tight-knit groups (informal associations) that offer a safety net and a social network in a fractured polity where state power is often exercised to their detriment.

In 2021, Yango—a Russian ride-hailing platform—introduced app-based intermediation into Cameroon's transport market. Functioning as a digital intermediary, Yango deploys algorithmic management, digital mapping and smart order distribution systems to optimize revenue extraction within a labor market where an estimated 81% of workers operate in the informal

sector (Kumase, 2010). While Yango claims to have created over 6,000 direct and indirect jobs and services 150,000 monthly active users, its entry sparked intense conflict. In February 2023, the Minister of Transport suspended Yango's operations following strike threats from national taxi unions, who accused the platform of "unfair competition" and operating without a transport license. This resistance underscores informal taxi workers hold organizational power to leverage the state against digital disruption. Geopolitically, Yango is a vector for Russia's "return to Africa". Russian domestic legislation—specifically a 2023 law granting the FSB 24/7 access to Yandex databases, raises significant data privacy concerns for African users. While Yango has sought to distance itself from these claims, the potential for Russian surveillance through mobility data remains a critical point of postcolonial friction.

This paper examines how Yango is reshaping transport governance and labor relations by situating platform intermediation alongside entrenched informal systems. Our analysis is organized around three themes: (a) shifting forms and mechanisms of governance in urban transport markets; (b) the reconfiguration of power, organization, and solidarity among transport workers; and (c) what the turn toward digital intermediation reveals about emerging cultures of platformization and their interaction with established social norms of mobility. As this project is in its early stages, the paper outlines our overarching conceptual framework and methodology, followed by preliminary insights from a first round of informal driver interviews.

While digital platforms have been widely critiqued for reproducing colonial circuits of wealth and reinforcing racialized inequalities, we interrogate the geopolitical and postcolonial implications of a Russian platform entering—and extracting value from—the public transport informal economy of Cameroon, a former French colony, and how this complicates prevailing understandings of racialized platform capitalism and postcolonial political economy. Ultimately, the study shows how the turn toward digital intermediation reveals emerging cultures of platformization that must interact with—and often end up struggling against—established social norms of urban mobility.

### **Against inevitability: insights from Kampala's de-automated moto-taxis**

Rich Mallett

When digital ride-hail platforms first hit the streets of Kampala in the mid-2010s, there were high hopes that the Ugandan capital's vast workforce of informal moto-taxi operators, known locally as *boda boda* riders, would finally get the reforms they and the city needed. To what extent has this particular 'platform fix' materialised in the years since? Drawing on mixed-method case study data gathered at various points between November 2020 and February 2022, in this presentation I set out to make three key points about Kampala's recent experiences with digital ride-hailing.

The first is about the particular conditions under which ride-hailing came to be in Kampala, and specifically the role of the Ugandan state in helping to expand platformisation through the city's *boda boda* sector. I show here that, having long been considered impervious to formal state regulation, with the arrival of the platform economy came the promise not just of safer and better

working conditions for *boda* riders but of stronger, more effective governance over the sector as a whole. This was not about displacing or competing with the state but about working alongside it, with a newly formed government '*boda boda* committee' enlisting the 'big three' ride-hail companies at the time (SafeBoda, Taxify, UberBODA) to assist in registering riders, amassing data on their backgrounds and movements, and bringing them into the official tax net. As one (ex-)platform executive put it to me, these early collaborative moves were about 'formalising [the workforce] under a ride-hailing umbrella', reflecting a wider policy narrative – still somewhat dubiously in circulation – that digital labour platforms operating across the global South are fundamentally helping to counteract economic informality. Recent contributions to platform scholarship suggest that platformisation processes are ultimately always local, grounded and varied; the case of Kampala's platformed moto-taxis helps illustrate this.

The second point is about ride-hail trajectories and realities. Despite creating what we might think of as a compelling 'aesthetics of formality' at the surface, the platformisation of Kampala's moto-taxi industry has in fact been less about making the city's riders politically legible to state authorities and more about rendering them economically legible (and usable) to corporate partners, capital investors and alternative lenders seeking new revenue streams at the bottom of the pyramid. Linked to this are a range of techniques / technologies of extraction which, over time and from a labouring perspective, culminate in a kind of 'platform decay' that in turn generates evolving conditions of adverse (digital) incorporation. Following promising and rewarding beginnings, the city's platformed *boda* riders have found themselves increasingly confronted with the removal of once-lucrative bonus schemes, the introduction of escalating commission fees that are captured automatically via slick new cashless technology, and low and declining platform pay – all further compounded by their loss of control over key elements of the labour process and limited voice to renegotiate the terms of their digital inclusion from the inside. The dynamic and unstable nature of platformisation on display here highlights the need for caution when evaluating the impacts of specific platform economies on informal labour, particularly during early phases of arrival and expansion when the allure – and the returns – for workers are often at their strongest.

The third and final point is about informal labour agency. Rather than remaining passive in the face of platform decay and unresponsive management, Kampala's *boda bodas* have taken matters into their hands by enacting a series of 'app-ropriations from below'. Riders bounce back and forth between competing apps, pursue 'hybrid work' arrangements that favour selective app use over full digital immersion, refuse cashless trip requests, adorn themselves in ride-hail company attire even whilst logged-out and – perhaps most consequentially of all – pull the plug on digital *boda* work for good. In exiting back into the more autonomous, if still precarious, world of 'analogue' moto-taxi operation, large and increasing numbers of Ugandan *boda* riders are showing us just one version of what an emerging politics of de-automation might look like; and in the process, raising wider, fundamental questions about the presumed inevitability of digital futures of Southern work.

Taken together, these three points offer new insight into the nature – and indeed the limits – of contemporary processes of ‘actually existing platformisation’ in Africa’s urban informal economies.

## **Delivering Food, Making Life: Migrant Riders On and Off the Roads of Cape Town**

Sophia Rabie

This research project is an ethnographic study about the lived experiences of food delivery work in Cape Town, South Africa for the African migrants who conduct it. Over the last four years, riders have become ubiquitous across the city. Checkers Sixty60, Pick-n-Pay ASAP!, and Woolies Dash workers dot the streets, pavements and parking lots, distinguished by their brightly coloured uniforms and top-boxes promising speedy delivery. Increased demand for these services has shifted from ‘necessity’ during COVID-19 lockdowns into a household staple. In Cape Town, these labour platforms have opened avenues of earning for African migrants from diverse socioeconomic and national backgrounds, confronted by few options in the country’s sparse employment landscape. However, widespread criticism across the region and the world spotlights the vulnerability workers face through the evasion of labour regulations by platforms, the dangers of the city, and the regional context marked by hostility towards people from elsewhere on the continent.

This project interrogates the tension between food delivery work as ‘opportunity’ or compounded vulnerability through focusing on the diverse relationships between migrants and their labour. It questions how workers construct meaningful lives across an uncertain terrain shaped both by the contours of food delivery and the dynamics of being foreign in an Afrophobic city. In tracing the different roles that this work takes in the lives of the displaced, my research is an attempt to rethink food delivery labour in terms of the accounts and aspirations that emerge within, through and around participation as riders.

Building on the work of scholarship interrogating the empirical realities of platform labour that claims to uplift those who conduct it, my research adds another perspective. I aim to work away from tendencies to foreclose platform work as a mechanism which compounds workers’ vulnerabilities, or the framing of workers and their agency through a singular lens – that of exacerbated precarity and correlative resistant strategies – towards a more broadened understanding informed by ethnographers who pull holistic complexity to the fore. Close attention to the nuances of platform architecture, the implications in the lives of workers and the complex ways they respond attempts to produce a grounded account of the diverse range of experiences that riders have of food delivery.

I use two fields of literature to thicken understandings of the role of this work in the lives of workers and strengthen the scholarly contributions the project yields. Regional migration debates which have foregrounded an attention towards how migrants strategise to shape their lives through navigating socio-economic and political exclusions in South Africa establishes different questions for riders.

Careful attention to experiences of life-making by the displaced helps sharpen understandings of the role work plays for workers – making sense of food delivery labour as set within the regional context that shapes the agency of workers as foreign. Further attending to the relationships riders have with the city of Cape Town by nature of the spatiotemporal contours of their work – riders zipping across city roads and resting in public spaces – and their sociopolitical positions as African migrants with distinct urban existences helps to ground their experiences of labour and life in place. Taken together, the project leans on and advances regional scholarship about the socio-economic strategies of immigrants in South Africa, global scholarship focused on the nexus of migration and platform work, those about the urban negotiations of food delivery, and the particularities of this work along the landscape of Cape Town. These are used to redefine how we think about food delivery labour.

Building this nuanced understanding of food delivery work and corresponding scholarly contributions will be facilitated through 12-month ethnographic fieldwork with a small group of food delivery riders from a range of non-national backgrounds. This involves close and sustained attention to informants' everyday experiences across the workplace and beyond. I will spend time in congregation spots where riders await requests from restaurants and grocery stores; accompanying informants along their daily routines to gain an understanding of life beyond work; participating in this labour as a rider myself; and using informant-directed footage captured by a GoPro attached to their helmets and in-hand during resting times. Alongside this immersion within a patchwork of everyday experiences are a focus on the life histories, future aspirations and self-understandings of informants narrated through regular interviews – a sensitivity to the accounts of riders, their perceptions and their aspirations will complement participant observation. Pulling together discussions and observations across time and place, will allow insights to emerge from different facets of life, deepening understandings about food delivery work around the axis of the lived realities for migrant riders in Cape Town.



## **Panel 2: Gender & Resilience**

### ***Sanity in the Creative Chaos: An Exploration of Mental Health Threats Facing Digital Content Creators in Zimbabwe***

Emmanuel Tembo

#### **Introduction**

Mental health among digital content creators has become a topical issue in the past few years as influencer culture and the digital gig economy driven by content creators grows to become a big industry (Kozinets, Gretzel & Gambetti, 2023). Like any other occupation, content creation

carries with it occupation mental health challenges which, however are nuanced as they arise from the unique characteristics of the digital content creation industry.

### **Literature Review**

Literature on mental health of content creators is sparse, and the corpus is thin as it is a recently developing field of study. Studies in the last 10 years have explored such areas as the dynamics of platform technology and content creator visibility (Cotter, 2019), the economics and labor dimensions of the digital content creator industry (Stoldt et al, 2019; Van Driel & Dumitrica, 2021; ) and minimal studies specifically focusing on mental health issues around influencer and digital content creators exists with a few studies on, threats that content creators face (Schöllhammer & Gretzel, 2024), burnout and the work habits of content creators (Lorenz, 2021). This study addresses the mental health threats that arise from within the environment, and nature of digital content creation work within the contexts of Zimbabwean Facebook, which few if any past research addresses. There are several studies have addressed the mental health issues associated with use of social media, with several of them addressing the phenomenon among Zimbabwean youth (Musekiwa, 2025; Bhiri & Mapfunde, 2025) offering insights on how social media addiction contributes to anxiety and depression.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is framed around the ubuntu concept of African relational humanity and interaction as a theoretical framework to analyze and survey the continuum of reality and content in the lives of content creators, and how the African socio-moral economy of both the content creators and the audience informs the mental health dilemmas that content creators face, and are exposed to.

Ubuntu is an African ontology that is anchored on a shared or relational being, summarized by the maxim, “I am because we are”. This concept positions the individual as an extension, and inseparable part of the whole, which is their community (Ikpeh & Awi, 2025). The moral standards that govern and inform their identity is molded from the community frame, such that deviations from this frame are considered alien and unacceptable.

Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Theory (1979) posits that every individual exists within an intricate locale of interconnected systems that collectively contribute to their being, development and ultimate general outcomes as a human. Graphically, a person is located within concentric circles of factors that have influence over their being and behavior, which include the individual level, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and the macrosystem. The spectrum of influences over one's development stretch from the very personal aspects such as spiritual beliefs and personal experiences to broaders more communal concepts such as cultural values and national policies (Bhiri & Mapfunde, 2025). When situated within the African ontology of Ubuntu, social ecology becomes doubly relevant in the exploration of mental health issues among content creators in Zimbabwe as their concept of self is tied to the idea of the person who is because they are part of a larger, their community as defined by its values norms and expectations.

The study of content creation processes and practices of Zimbabwean digital content creators and how they affect the mental health of the creators benefits of a concept that recognizes the strain, precarity, balance and symbiosis that exists between these creators' personal and social lives and their produced content. For most, only a thin line exists between these two domains, resulting in a content-reality conflux that bears on their mental health in general. When the life realities of an individual's existence are exposed to incessant scrutiny, critic, judgement and attack, when they are portrayed as content themes and threads upon which the creator constructs their content, then creators suffer from some of the common challenges of treating reactions to content they have shared as personal attacks.

### **Methodology**

The investigation employs a qualitative approach that involves a netnographic study of the digital presence, and content of a purposively sampled group of 10 Facebook digital content creators in Zimbabwe; *Madam Boss, Nyathi Fam, Greatman Music, Mama Vee, Ritzmcleash Strawbae, Allenskits, Tytie, Mai Tt, Ethias*. The content creators were chosen for their popularity and significantly high followership on Facebook. Their popularity and huge following provide ample range of analysis of the existing, perceived and potential mental health challenges as they contend with extremely diverse views from audiences, celebrity popularity status and digital economic dynamics associated with monetized accounts.

Netnography allows the researcher to deeply explore the data under study within its contextual frames and nuances, thus allowing for precise and detailed understanding of the phenomena (Gambetti & Kozinets, 2022) of mental health issues among Facebook content creators. Mental health, being a deeply socio-psychological issue, demands that each case for study be observed and studied through careful systematic and empathic observation, which netnography allows for.

### **Findings**

The study finds that the mental health challenges that Facebook digital content creators face can be identified to emanate from three broad source categories, which are all influenced by the African relational understanding of identity and being. These categories are, the social category, relating to the societal norms, expectations and moral standards that creators have to balance with their work vis-a-vi struggles for visibility and metrics; the economic category, relating to the financial rewards and sustainability of the content creators' labor efforts, as well as the technological/platform based category, which encompasses the precarity and apprehension brought about by platform features, functions, changes and limitations. The three categories are not stand alone and are intricately interwoven such that they inform each other and bear present a nuanced and complex potential and perceived threat, as well as real adverse effects on the mental health of creators. Creators have to balance a quest for visibility, growth of followership and engagement against the need to stay within acceptable moral boundaries of their community of audiences. Some themes and forms of content that have the potential to generate increased engagement, such as sexual and subversive gender themes and assertions face critical backlash and insults from audiences. Content creators suffer extensive trolling from followers, some of whom exhume past histories of the content creators and constantly discuss

them in the creators' comment sections even under content that is not related to that history in any way. Content creators in Zimbabwe deploy controversy, appearance of conflict and quarrels as a way of generating engagement. This, however, sometimes inadvertently evolves into real feuds and quarrels that result in insults and mudslinging between the content creators. As the involved creators exchange insults, this impacts on their mental health as derogatory name-calling, vulgar insults and abusive language is used against each other.

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## **Gambling Platforms Communication: Youth Perceptions of Mandatory Wording in Online Betting Advertising Across Various Media Platforms**

Tumelo Mokoena and Seriane Morapeli

With the rapid emergence of newer gambling formats, the rise of online betting is increasingly linked to its advertising through various media platforms in South Africa. The high popularity of online betting is attributed to pervasive advertising across various media channels. The frequent dissemination of different messages, content and platforms shape consumers’ perceptions and behaviour about gambling (Hing, 2014; Hing et al., 2014). Problematic gambling has been associated with excessive advertising on traditional and digital media platforms (Derevensky, Sklar, Gupta, and Messerlian (2009). Young people are especially at risk; Simelane (2024) reveals that youth in South Africa have been reported to gamble online or bet on sports on average 11 times each month, and 39% of them use their winnings to gamble again after winning.

Despite studies investigating the potential effect of the surge in online betting advertising on vulnerable groups, such as young people, highlighting the public health concerns. Few studies have focused on investigating South African youth, specifically, the South African youth’s perceptions of the mandatory wording in online betting advertising across various media platforms. A phenomenon this study will explore. Focusing on how design elements and their presentation influence participants’ understanding of gambling-related risks and message interpretation, a qualitative research approach was employed, involving in-depth semi-structured interviews with twelve (12) participants across all SA provinces. The self-proclaimed punters aged 18-35 years who bet online were sampled through purposive and snowball sampling to answer the research objectives. Data was systematically organised into transcripts, analysed, and coded into themes through thematic analysis, with findings presented alongside verbatim quotes of participants’ perceptions and interpretations. The findings of this study show that, despite the regulatory requirements, the mandatory wording is often poorly displayed, which reduces its visibility, noticeability, and readability; in essence, it is positioned in a way that minimises its impact. The findings also reveal that font size, colour contrast, placement, delivery speed, tonality, and emotional appeal influence message salience and impede message effectiveness recall. The mandatory wording is interpreted as complex, unclear, and containing a counterproductive tagline that promotes gambling. The results of this study can be used to guide regulations on responsible gambling, public health communication and promotion, platform policy and ethical online betting advertising.

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### **Beyond the Violence Narrative: Platformised Storytelling, Podcasting, and Ethical Self-Representation by Young Women in South Africa's Cape Flats**

Scheherazade Safla

### **Platform Features and the Architecture of Influence in Nigerian Audience Responses to Influencer-led Feminist Politics and Ideas**

Chiadikaobi Ihuoma

This research examines audience responses to feminist influencers' representations on social media and the role these responses play in shaping feminist discourse in Nigeria. Using findings from FGDs and cyberethnographic data, it foregrounds the concept of platform affordances to demonstrate how social media architectures condition not only how feminist ideas are articulated by influencers but also how they are interpreted, evaluated, and contested by audiences. Rather than approaching platforms as neutral channels, the study conceptualises X, Instagram, and Facebook as socio-technical infrastructures embedded with distinct technical, economic, and cultural logics that structure visibility, engagement, and legitimacy.

#### *1. X: The economy of brevity and virality*

Participants consistently described X as the strongest platform for feminist activism in Nigeria, mainly due to its virality and potential for public debate. The 280-character limit rewards hot

takes, punchy, inflammatory, or emotive statements. This practice, however, has huge challenges as pointed out by some of the FGD participants. Also, the pressure to be concise and urgent as pointed out by the participants often results in oversimplification, the use of emotive and inflammatory statements or misrepresentation of complex feminist arguments by influencers on the X platform. I observed just as some participants pointed out that algorithmic amplification on X also matters. Content that provokes extreme emotional response, either agreement or disagreement is most likely to be read (and trend). This shapes influencer strategy, affects the tone of the conversation and influences narratives among X users.

This dynamic establishes a tension between a nuanced approach and virality as influencers must balance the desire to produce responses that will garner them visibility, while that visibility puts them at an open risk of misinterpretation or reputational harm. Participants' reflection suggests that while X promotes visibility and engagement, it continues to encourage performative urgency, causing fragmented or polarising feminist narratives. This can be understood through Papacharissi's (2015) argument that social media platforms organise collective engagement through affect rather than reasoned deliberation.

This reveals that in Nigeria, feminist activism on X is shaped not only by content but by platform logics including brevity, emotional intensity, and algorithmic amplification. Feminist influence, therefore, is co-constructed by the technical structure of the platform, the affective strategies of influencers, and the interpretive practices of audiences, making virality both a tool and a constraint in shaping public discourse on gender justice.

#### ii. Instagram: The aesthetics of visual feminism

Instagram emerged in the conversation as a platform where visuality is central to feminist expression and influences how messages are created and received. Participants raised what seems to be a pervasive issue with perceived feminist influencers on Instagram who combine personal branding and activism, which often include curated photographs, infographics, and aestheticised self-representation to engage their followers. This fits with what Banet-Weiser (2018) describes about popular feminism often being refracted through these logics of visibility and commodification. Building on Gill's (2007) notion of postfeminist sensibility, the FGD participants suggested that Instagram privileges a "visual feminism" that appeals particularly to young, urban, and aspirational users. This form of feminism is highly palatable, performable, and "shareable," but potentially shallow. However, participants also noted that this strength could be a weakness.

My observation corroborates that Instagram favours aesthetically pleasing content, often at the expense of unadulterated/raw and less curated content. This performance of branded feminism (Dosekun, 2020) shapes not only what gets attention and goes viral, but also who gets to be seen and heard. Consequently, Instagram's platform logic and modes of engagement, in my observations, appeared to limit feminist discursive practices to aestheticised fragments and elevate neoliberal ways of self-representation, meanwhile marginalising feminist perspectives that resist visual consumption. During this period of observation, feminist content that gained visibility was typically packaged through visually polished, individualised narratives, whereas

more structurally oriented or non-visual feminist critiques attracted limited engagement or circulation.

### lii. Facebook: depth and community-building, with limitations

The FGD participants mostly viewed Facebook as a platform more supportive of extended discussion or engagement and community-building. Facebook's potential for accepting long posts and group discussions in private groups offers feminist activists the possibility of having detailed discussions, organising for specific causes, and maintaining community connections. However, Facebook's user demographic profile serves both as a weakness and a strength. On the other hand, the platform's association with older, less trend-conscious users have resulted in a perception that it is not trendy among young populations.

In another development, some participants revealed the way in which Facebook groups have been central to feminist organising, especially for offline issues. This was illustrated with an example of a Facebook group that helped women who were in abusive marriages, not only offering advice but tangible aid.

Participant's comment further illustrates how participants engage in authenticity policing, distinguishing between what they see as performative and what they view as substantive feminist activism. By complimenting a Facebook group for providing tangible assistance to women in abusive marriages, Grace reinforces the idea that "real" feminism involves materiality, not merely online expression. This reinforces what Banet-Weiser (2018) and Gill (2007) identify as tension in popular feminist cultures, in which activism is evaluated based on assumed sincerity, embodiment, and visible sacrifice. Such evaluations establish internally recognised hierarchies within feminist discourse -where offline, care-oriented actions are privileged over symbolic or hashtag-driven actions or engagement.



## **Panel 3: Social Media**

### **'Japa' Migration Aspirations, Social Media Content Creators and Idealized Lifestyles Abroad**

Samuel Uwem Umoh

Social media has become a significant factor in global migration decisions and the aspirations and trajectories of intending migrant in recent years. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok have developed into major hubs for the creating, sharing, and consumption of migration-related ideas. Nigeria is not exempt from this trend. Within this digital ecosystem, migration-niche content creators and influencers who focus on studying, working, or living abroad have emerged as powerful actors. They operate as "migration ambassadors,"

influencing how aspiring Nigerians perceive and romanticize life abroad, offering information on visas, and occasionally encouraging risky, illegal route. The prominence of influencers is increasing because of 'japa' migration, a Yoruba slang which implies "to flee" or "to escape" has evolved into a potent cultural shorthand for modern Nigerian emigration and the wave of young Nigerians moving abroad. This alludes to the quest of better opportunities, hopes for life outside, which are frequently motivated by social, educational, or economic concerns.

With this background, the paper discusses how migration-niche social content creators also referred to as 'influencers' influences migration decisions and choices of aspiring migrants. It unpacks how the portrayal of life abroad by social media influencers contributes to the "Japa Syndrome among aspiring migrants. The paper draws from mixed-method approach, including surveys, interviews, and netnography to study online communities, social media interactions (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok). Netnography is suitable for the study as an adapted ethnographic research method which facilitates the study of digital interactions online cultures, communities, and consumer behavior (Kozinet, 2015). It entails immersion in online environments (social media, forums) in order to gather and analyze textual, visual, and audio data. It is a quick, economical, and adaptable method of comprehending social dynamics and digital trends. Collectively, these methods allow for a nuanced understanding of how digital narratives around migration shape decision-making, influence perceptions, and contribute to the formation of aspirational frameworks among young Nigerians.

The paper found that influencers serves as a significant source of information for aspiring Nigerian migrants while also perpetuating aspirational narratives and unrealistic expectations. Content media creators and influencers often portray idealized lifestyles abroad, framing migration as a pathway to success, which can create unrealistic expectations. Influencers and creators in the migration niche frequently produce a complicated mix of positive and negative effects, but their unregulated, sensationalist, and misinformation has more negative effects than positive ones, especially when it comes to accuracy.

Influencers are important information sources for aspiring immigrants. They provide practical matters like visa processes, international university applications, job permits, and relocation plans.

Additionally, content producers create online communities where prospective immigrants can exchange stories, pose inquiries, and look for guidance, building a networked support system that goes beyond institutional or official government channels.

However, the influence of influencers are ambivalent. A lot of content is framed in extremely aspirational terms, stressing money, lifestyle, social mobility, and opportunity, even while some strive to educate and offer trustworthy advice. Followers develop irrational expectations as a result of these idealistic depictions, which frequently downplay the hazards, social adaptation problems, and structural difficulties related to migration. This aspirational framing is essential to the Japa Syndrome phenomena because it perpetuates the idea that migrating is the best—or only—way to succeed and encourages hasty, perhaps misguided migration decisions.

The frequency of sensationalism and false information is rampant because influencers seeking engagement and virality frequently exaggerate prospects overseas, highlight only positive results, and leave out bad encounters. Audiences may be misled by this unregulated content regarding the reality of migration, such as social integration, employment opportunities, and legal requirements. Such false information sometimes promotes the use of unofficial or illegal routes, putting migrants at danger for exploitation, incarceration, or expulsion. Because digital platforms lack control and responsibility, social media content creators exacerbate potential harms while simultaneously facilitating access to information and community support. Nigerians' aspirations to migrate are shaped by social media influencers who offer information, emotional support, and role models. While enabling well-informed choices, they can magnify romanticized accounts of living overseas, perpetuating "Japa Syndrome" and impacting attitudes, expectations, and decisions within preexisting socioeconomic limitations. Social media feeds serve as a benchmark for what life "elsewhere" looks like, frequently highlighting advantages while downplaying difficulties. This can have a significant impact on people's decisions to migrate.

Understanding the role of influencers in migration processes provide insights on digital influence in contemporary Nigeria and broader questions of transnational mobility, youth aspirations, and the interplay between media, perception, and decision-making. As migration continues to be shaped by digital narratives, researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders must pay attention to both the empowering and potentially hazardous effects of social media on migration culture and practice. Influencers on social media serve as aspirational role models whose lives, tales, and depictions of living overseas affect how prospective migrants view immigration prospects.

### **Beyond the screen: How Zimbabweans trade through Facebook marketplace?**

Victoria Mtomba

#### **Background**

In Zimbabwe the use of digital platforms has led to the use of Facebook Marketplace by approximately 90,000 users, with at least 90 posts uploaded daily by different entrepreneurs offering a wide range of services and products, that include hair products, cars, food, household furniture, and livestock. The platform is used primarily by entrepreneurs to advertise, signal legitimacy and reach audiences. However, transactions are not completed online; instead, they are concluded offline with buyers and sellers connecting through WhatsApp or direct calls to finalise transactions face to face. The platform doesn't offer a built-in payment system in many regions, including Zimbabwe, hence cash is the preferred mode of payment. This paper demonstrates how entrepreneurs in the country are using Facebook Marketplace as a socio-technical infrastructure that connects buyers and sellers, while payments remain offline and cash-based. By focusing on everyday practices, the paper contributes to debates on the culture of platformisation in Africa and highlights how each user of a social media platform adapts it to meet their specific needs.

## 1. Context & Problem

This paper examines how Zimbabwean entrepreneurs use Facebook Marketplace as a platform for economic activity in a context where the main challenge is limited trust in online transactions, unstable digital payments and a cash dependence syndrome. Zimbabwe adopted a multi-currency system in 2009 after experiencing a hyper-inflation environment in 2008. The use of multi-currency brought in the dependence on cash in the economy. Statistics from the central bank show that the value of electronic transactions processed through the national payment systems infrastructure increased by 23.09% to ZIG 655,60 billion for the second quarter of 2025. This shows that the electronic transactions are still below half as most people prefer cash transactions. This has to a large extent influenced how Zimbabweans engage with digital platforms for trade. On the Facebook Market place, it's common that one shares a product and shares a WhatsApp link that goes directly to the seller's phone for further interactions.

## 2. Platform Use

Facebook Marketplace has approximately 90 000 users and 90 posts are uploaded daily. The different entrepreneurs offer a wide range of services and products, including hair products, cars, food, household furniture, and livestock. The platform is primarily used to attract customers, persuade them to buy, signal legitimacy through reviews and comments and expand reach rather than to complete the transactions online. Online–Offline Link (“Beyond the Screen”) This study shows how Facebook Marketplace operates as a hybrid trading place where transactions begin online and are completed offline. Buyers and sellers connect through WhatsApp, phone calls and comments while payments and exchanges take place physically and shows that economic activities are embedded in everyday life. Some entrepreneurs add a physical location on the WhatsApp link so that the buyers can visit them physically.

## 3. Trust and Credibility

It is difficult to safeguard the seller and the buyer in a social platform but the users rely on social signals to assess credibility (Madziwa & Sibanda 2022). These include reviews, comments, seller responsiveness, profile history and act as an informal trust building mechanism that assist the buyer to proceed with the offline transaction. In some instances, some reviews show that the person might be a fraud and that will be a warning to prospective customers to stay away. These visible interactions function as trust-building mechanisms in a context where formal digital payment systems are limited, and they help users assess the reliability and legitimacy of sellers before moving transactions offline. This paper contributes to debates on ‘Culture of platformisation in Africa’ and challenges the idea that digital platforms operate in the same way across contexts, showing instead how users customised the platforms to local realities that work effectively for them. In some countries such as South Africa, United Kingdom transactions are online and the goods are delivered at the customer's doorstep.

## 4. Local Adaptation

Zimbabwean users for the Facebook Market Place reshaped the platform to fit its cash-based economy and trust sensitive economy. The platform has become a socio-technical infrastructure that supports livelihoods while remaining grounded in offline relationships. Generally, Zimbabweans prefer cash-based transactions that are usually physical and face to face as

compared to online transactions. According to a Finscope Survey 70% of Zimbabweans rely on cash for daily transactions. Customers withdraw cash and use it outside the banking ecosystem. Musona (2025) states that in China contactless and mobile payments dominate payments, in the United Kingdom 93% of their payments are digital and South Africa digital payments are 91% with some retailers resorting to digital payments only.

## 5. Significance

This study shows that digital platforms in Africa are not taken as they are but they are customised to meet the socially embedded systems shaped by economic conditions cultural, norms and everyday practices. It highlights that platformisation is a locally negotiated process, rather than a uniform global one.

## Conclusion

Facebook Marketplace shows that consumers do not consume digital products outside their context, but they embed the digital platforms with local realities and customise the platforms to meet their needs.

## **Platformisation, Power, and Participation: Digital Hustle Narratives and Everyday Communication on Kenyan Social Media**

Rosemary Nyaole-Kowuor

Digital platforms have become central to everyday economic and communicative life in Kenya, where social media increasingly functions not only as a space for interaction, entertainment, and visibility, but also as an infrastructure of livelihood. In recent years, platform-mediated micro-entrepreneurship has emerged as a prominent feature of Kenya's digital landscape, giving rise to what is commonly referred to in online discourse as "digital hustle" culture. Across platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram, users document and instruct others on ways to make money online through content creation, affiliate marketing, freelancing, digital services, and platform monetisation schemes. Hashtags such as #MakeMoneyOnlineKE and #DigitalHustleKE signal a growing communicative ecosystem in which users share strategies, narrate personal success and failure, and collectively interpret the opportunities and risks associated with platform participation.

This paper examines these digital hustle narratives as a key site through which platformisation is communicated, justified, and normalised in everyday life. Rather than framing platforms solely as technological infrastructures or economic intermediaries, the study conceptualises platformisation as a cultural-communicative process. From this perspective, platforms shape not only markets and modes of labour, but also communicative norms, moral expectations, and ideas of success. Digital hustle content provides a particularly productive lens through which to understand how global platform logics become embedded in local contexts, as users translate algorithmic imperatives and monetisation structures into everyday advice, motivational discourse, and moral narratives about work and self-improvement.

The paper asks: how do digital hustle narratives circulating on Kenyan social media construct opportunity, responsibility, and success within platform economies? What communicative genres emerge around platform participation, and how do these genres reflect broader tensions between promise and precarity? By focusing on the everyday discourse through which users explain and interpret platform participation, the study shifts attention away from platform firms themselves toward the cultural practices through which platform power becomes socially meaningful.

The analysis draws on qualitative content analysis of publicly available online data collected between January and June 2025 from high-engagement Kenyan accounts on TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram. These platforms were selected because of their prominence in influencer culture, digital entrepreneurship, and short-form educational or motivational content. Using purposive sampling, the dataset includes short-form videos, captions, hashtags, and associated comment threads explicitly focused on income generation, audience growth, algorithm optimisation, and monetisation strategies. Selection criteria prioritised thematic relevance, repetition of discursive tropes, and high levels of audience interaction, allowing for comparison across platforms while maintaining a clear focus on communicative practices.

Methodologically, the study employs thematic qualitative content analysis, treating online content as performative communication shaped by platform affordances and algorithmic incentives. Coding focused on recurring narrative frames and affective registers that structure participation in digital hustle cultures. Four dominant frames emerged from the analysis. First, narratives of promised opportunity coexist alongside experiences of lived precarity, revealing tensions between aspirational storytelling and the instability of platform-based income. Second, users frequently circulate advice presenting algorithmic success as learnable and controllable, even as comment threads reveal frustration and uncertainty concerning algorithmic opacity. Third, consistency, discipline, and self-improvement are framed as moral obligations, suggesting that platform success is frequently moralised through discourses of personal responsibility and perseverance. Finally, digital hustle narratives emphasise individual strategies and entrepreneurial self-reliance, often positioning personal adaptability as a substitute for collective forms of protection, regulation, or labour organisation.

Attention is also paid to affective registers circulating within digital hustle content. Expressions of optimism and motivation coexist with anxiety, urgency, and fear of missing out, indicating that participation in platform economies is sustained not only through economic incentives but also through emotional and aspirational narratives. These affective dynamics highlight how platformisation operates through communicative culture: users are encouraged to continuously perform productivity, positivity, and strategic self-branding in order to remain visible and relevant within algorithmically driven environments.

Empirically, the paper demonstrates that platformisation in Kenya is enacted and legitimised through everyday communicative practices rather than solely through technological design or corporate policy. Digital hustle narratives function as informal pedagogies through which users learn platform norms, interpret success, and negotiate uncertainty. At the same time, these

narratives reproduce broader tensions of platform capitalism, including the individualisation of risk and the moral framing of labour and self-worth.

Conceptually, the study contributes to debates on cultures of platformisation by foregrounding communication as a central mechanism through which platform logics become culturally embedded. It also extends scholarship on digital labour in African contexts by showing how entrepreneurial discourse, aspiration, and everyday storytelling mediate engagement with global platform economies. Methodologically, the paper demonstrates the value of qualitative content analysis for studying platform participation in contexts where access to proprietary platform data and corporate infrastructures remains limited.

Ultimately, the paper argues that digital hustle cultures reveal platformisation not simply as an economic transformation, but as a communicative reorganisation of everyday life - one in which ideas of work, success, and responsibility are continuously negotiated through social media discourse. By grounding analysis in Kenyan digital practices, the study contributes to broader discussions on platform power, digital labour, and the cultural politics of platform participation across Africa.

### **‘With Tech We Can Be More Like Dangote’: Financial Influencing and the Making of New Investor Subjects in Nigeria**

Simidele Dosekun



## **Panel 4: Policy & Resistance**

### **Cultures of AI Platformisation: Skill Formation, Labour Subjectivities, and Agency in Sub-Saharan Africa’s AI Work Ecosystem**

Philip Mong’are Achoki

Digital platforms are increasingly central to economic, social, and political life across Sub-Saharan Africa. While much scholarship has examined ride-hailing, mobile money, and e-commerce platforms (e.g. Graham *et al.*, 2017; Carmody and Fortuin, 2019), less attention has been paid to how artificial intelligence (AI) platforms are reshaping cultures of skill formation and labour across the continent. AI platformisation extends beyond service provision and reorganises training, certification, evaluation, and work allocation through digital infrastructures embedded within global value chains. This paper examines how AI skills development platforms shape labour subjectivities and forms of agency in Sub-Saharan Africa, drawing empirically on Kenya as a strategic case study.

Platformisation refers to the expansion of digital infrastructures that intermediate transactions, data flows, and social interaction (Srnicek, 2017; van Dijck *et al.*, 2018). In African contexts,

platformisation has been analysed as both enabling and extractive. Platforms can generate new opportunities while reinforcing dependency and external value capture (Graham *et al.*, 2017). Emerging research on AI value chains highlights how data annotation and training work are geographically dispersed, often outsourced to workers in the Global South under conditions of precarity (Muldoon *et al.*, 2024; Attard-Frost and Widder, 2025). Yet existing debates often focus primarily on labour conditions, overlooking how skills platforms themselves operate as cultural and political infrastructures.

This paper argues that AI skills development constitutes a central mechanism of platformisation in Sub-Saharan Africa. Global technology firms increasingly provide cloud-based certifications, machine learning training pathways, and proprietary learning ecosystems. These platforms frame skill acquisition as a pathway to inclusion in the “AI economy,” aligning with development discourses that promote entrepreneurship, innovation, and digital transformation. However, such initiatives also embed specific hierarchies of knowledge and authority, reflecting what scholars describe as the coloniality of digital technologies (Couldry and Mejias, 2019; Muldoon and Wu, 2023). African workers are positioned primarily as trainees, implementers, or data labourers within global AI production systems, while higher-value activities remain concentrated in corporate headquarters elsewhere.

Empirically, the paper draws on qualitative research conducted in Kenya between January and August 2025. I employed three qualitative methods: (1) critical discourse analysis of national digital policy documents, corporate AI training materials, and media narratives from 12 select countries in Sub-Saharan Africa; (2) semi-structured interviews with AI data workers, digital skills trainers, and community/union organisers; and (3) digital ethnography within three AI learning communities in Nairobi. Kenya serves as an illustrative case of broader Sub-Saharan African dynamics as it hosts a dense ecosystem of global cloud providers, donor-backed skilling initiatives, and grassroots innovation hubs, and is frequently branded as a leading African digital hub.

The findings suggest that AI skills platforms operate as infrastructures of labour governance. First, they individualise responsibility for employability. Workers are encouraged to engage in continuous self-upskilling, often at personal cost and without guaranteed employment outcomes. This resonates with scholarship on entrepreneurial subjectivity and self-optimisation within neoliberal labour regimes (Foucault, 2008; Gill and Pratt, 2008). Second, platformised skill formation is modular and proprietary as learning is structured around corporate ecosystems, embedding workers within specific technological stacks and reinforcing dependency on global platforms. Third, aspirational narratives of transformation and “future readiness” cultivate affective attachments to AI work, even under conditions of precarity.

At the same time, workers actively negotiate and reinterpret these conditions. Interview data reveal peer-led study groups, informal mentoring networks, and collaborative learning practices that operate alongside formal platform pathways. These spaces challenge purely individualistic logics and reflect what Bayat (2013) terms “quiet encroachment”, and incremental, everyday practices that reshape structures from within. Rather than rejecting platforms outright, workers selectively appropriate global tools while building locally grounded forms of expertise and solidarity.

Conceptually, the paper advances the notion of an AI skills regime to capture how platforms, policies, and cultural narratives jointly organise expertise, identity, and labour value in Sub-Saharan Africa. The AI skills regime highlights how governance occurs not only through formal

regulation but also through aspirational discourses, certification architectures, and self-disciplining practices. It also foregrounds the relational nature of agency, where workers' actions are neither fully autonomous nor entirely determined but negotiated within historically structured asymmetries of power.

By centring culture and subjectivity, this paper contributes to debates on platformisation in Africa in three ways. First, it extends analyses of digital labour by examining how skill formation itself becomes platformised. Second, it situates AI platformisation within postcolonial political economy, showing how contemporary digital infrastructures echo longer histories of uneven development and knowledge hierarchy. Third, it challenges binary framings of empowerment versus exploitation by demonstrating the coexistence of precarity, aspiration, and collective agency.

Understanding the cultures of AI platformisation is crucial as Sub-Saharan African states and institutions deliberate regulatory and developmental strategies for the AI era. Rather than treating skills platforms as neutral instruments of inclusion, policymakers must recognise their embedded power relations and support worker-led, locally rooted alternatives that foster more equitable participation in the global AI economy.

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## **Kenya v. Big Tech: Platform Accountability across Borders**

Toussaint Nothias

For years, digital rights activists across the Global South have highlighted numerous harms linked to data-centric technologies and their role in reproducing racialized inequalities within the global political economy of digital platforms. Today, several of these actors are taking Big Tech to court as a form of anti-colonial resistance to platform power. This chapter reviews ongoing cases in Kenya against Meta Inc. to shed light on the evolution of movements seeking global tech accountability.

Drawing on a review of court filings, news coverage, and reports from scholars and civil society groups, the chapter details the core grievances at the heart of these lawsuits and provides historical contexts for their emergence. In addition, the chapter maps out the transnational network of actors in these cases, including platform users, journalists, content moderators, tech companies, sub-contractors, and human rights and digital rights advocacy groups.

Overall, the chapter makes three contributions. Conceptually, it proposes an upstream/downstream framework to understand data harms in the context of content moderation within a racialized and unequal global political economy. At an empirical level, I argue that the uptake for tech accountability in Kenya is the dividend of 15 years of investment in media development and human rights advocacy in the country - now increasingly articulated as resistance to digital colonialism. Finally, the chapter calls for the consolidation of an interdisciplinary subfield focused on technology advocacy, attentive to its political-economic foundations, anchor institutions, blind spots, and evolving role in contesting global platform power.

## **Digital Media Literacies and Platform Usage in Uganda's Public Sector During the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown**

Rhona Nabutto & Fred Kakooza

This study aimed to investigate the use of digital media literacies to improve internal communication in public organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The study focused on the Uganda National Planning Authority (NPA) in Uganda to interrogate the sudden transition from face-to-face work practices to remote work practices that required digital competencies. Based on the national digital transformation initiatives through the Third National Development Plan (NDPIII), the research questioned whether the communication practices based on digital platforms had affected the internal coordination, preservation of organisational survival, and preservation of work relations during the crisis.

The study is based on the organisational communication theory and the knowledge gap theory. In the study, Organisational Communication Theory conceptualises communication not only as an instrument in organisations but also as a constitutive part of organisational realities. This view allowed the examining of how digital technologies, including email, WhatsApp, Zoom, and cloud-based collaborative tools, became incorporated into hierarchical communication processes of NPA and distorted the patterns of interaction, while preserving the chains of command. The Knowledge Gap Theory offered a complementary approach to the interpretation of differences in digital literacy and platform competence among staff. The theory was used to explain how unequal acquisition of digital competencies affected participation in internal communication and decision-making processes during the lockdown by foregrounding the difference in access, prior knowledge, communication skills, and digital exposure.

The study adopted a four-dimensional digital media literacy framework, namely, digital access, digital awareness, content creation, and content evaluation. These dimensions informed the evaluation of the way employees manoeuvred communication platforms to maintain information exchange, policy alignment, and administrative continuity in a work-at-home setting. By this, the study positioned the use of platforms in the context of wider questions of corporate culture – the collective routines, norms, and communication practices that organise organisational life.

A Mixed Methods Sequential Explanatory design that employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches was employed in the study. During the quantitative stage, 90 staff members were sampled using stratified random sampling and administered with structured questionnaires. The data was analysed to determine patterns of digital access, platform use, and competency differences. The qualitative phase involved five key informants who were purposely chosen to participate in in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data to give a contextual interpretation of the statistical data.

A high level of variation in platform use and digital media literacy by age, department, and gender was shown by the results. The young and technology-oriented employees had higher expertise in using video conferencing systems, document systems, and electronic content creation tools. The non-technical and older staff found it more challenging to navigate and adjust. The smartphones were the most common communication tool due to their portability and easy accessibility, whereas email and WhatsApp were the most common communication tools in the hierarchical organisational structure.

The use of platforms was a key factor in maintaining the corporate culture throughout the lockdown. Virtual meetings, document sharing, and messaging 24/7 became feasible via digital platforms and therefore helped to coordinate and to create a sense of continuity of the organisation. Informal peer-support networks were created when staff supported peers in using digital tools, which provided adaptive cultural practices in departments. Simultaneously, platformisation did not break down existing hierarchies. Top-down communication channels remained the source of official information initiated by senior management and relayed downwards through institutionalised and semi-formal communication channels, displaying perpetuation of institutional authority lines.

Nevertheless, the advantages of the digital transformation were mediated by structural constraints. Communication was disrupted by poor internet connectivity, lack of devices, unequal provision by the institutions, inadequate technical support, and digital exhaustion. The support staff was not fully involved in platform-based communication. These infrastructural and competency inequalities recreated internal communication inequalities in line with the Knowledge Gap Theory. Therefore, despite the fact that the platforms allowed for collaboration and guarantees for continuation, they also reaffirmed already existing organisational stratifications.

The findings show that platformisation is dual in the public sector. Digital platforms were the enablers of collaboration, organisational sustainability, and existence in times of crisis, but also revealed and, in some cases, increased institutional differences within the corporate culture. Platform-based communication is not inherently transformative, but its impact is mediated by the condition of institutional organisations, the actions of their leaders, and the level of digital literacy of employees.

To ensure equal access to platforms and sustainable digital practices, the study recommends department-based ICT literacy education, holistic ICT policy frameworks, and more supportive organisational systems. In a wider view, the study identifies the effect of platformisation on corporate culture, corporate governance, and institutional resilience of governments experiencing consequences of digital transformation due to a crisis. It contributes to the global debate on platforms and corporate culture by providing empirical evidence from a public institution in Uganda.

## **Charitable TikTok Entrepreneurs and the Hypervisual Commodification of Black Bodies**

Suzanne Temwa Gondwe Harris

### **Background**

Platformisation and the rise of short-video platforms like TikTok have created new business opportunities for NGOs, charitable foundations, and individuals seeking to solicit funds for some of the world's most vulnerable children. Due to official development assistance continuing to decline, NGOs, charitable organisations and individuals are increasingly turning to social media content creation as a primary strategy for generating revenue. This shift has given rise to "digital humanitarians" (Shringarpure, 2020; Meier, 2015) or "Charitable Influencers" (TikTok, 2026), who in short, mobilise online to support the activities of humanitarian organisations or crises. Focusing specifically on African-based NGOs, charitable foundations, and individual creators who are increasingly adopting these platform-driven and entrepreneurial media practices, this paper interrogates how these practices and techno-optimist perspectives reproduce racialised humanitarian aesthetics within digital economies that reward colonial tropes, visual forms of emotional intensity and reductive narratives of suffering. Logics which centre on the hypervisual commodification of Black bodies, especially children, whose images circulate as emotionally charged spectacles engineered to maximise algorithmic visibility and philanthropic engagement.

While there is an abundance of scholarly attention on the social, cultural and economic affordances provided by platforms (Bucher and Helmond, 2018; Halpern and Gibbs, 2013) and an increased awareness of global poverty, atrocities and inequalities (Divon and Eriksson Krutrök, 2025; Richey, 2018), rarely have these two worlds collided. Given the relatively limited focus on the growing popularity of social media platforms as economic business models for NGOs, this paper locates this phenomenon within the racist marketplace logics, anti-Black and colonial legacies of social media (Sobande, 2021) which incentivise the deployment of colonial and reductive visual narratives of Africa(ns). By following the digital discursive footprints of six African-based NGOs, charitable foundations, and individuals, the paper reveals how they seek to enhance their circulation and visibility by tailoring their content which aligns with the algorithmic preferences and the platforms embedded biases in order to gain material likes.

## **Theory**

Drawing on critical race theory, postcolonial studies, and digital platform scholarship, the paper situates TikTok-based charitable content within longer histories of racial capitalism and colonial visibility. Critical race theory provides a framework for understanding how racial hierarchies are reproduced through representational practices which have been used for the White Spectator Gaze (see Fanon, 1967; Boltanski, 1999; Yancy, 2008). The use of postcolonial scholarship further illuminates how these visual narratives echo colonial tropes of the “needy” African subject, reinscribing paternalistic relations between Western donors and the racialised “Other”; and by utilising bell hooks’ conceptualisation of “eating the other,” the paper argues that the affordances of platformisation intensifies the consumption of racialised differences by transforming Black suffering into a consumable aesthetic commodity.

Insights from digital platform studies, particularly scholarship on algorithmic amplification, creator monetisation, and the political economy of attention, add to this theoretical framework, as TikTok’s recommendation system privileges content that elicits strong emotional reactions and encourages creators to produce increasingly sensationalised depictions of suffering. This dynamic intersects with racialised visual economies in which Black bodies have historically been rendered hypervisible sites of pain and need.

## **Methods**

The study is currently employing critical race discourse analysis (CRDA) on over 65 TikTok videos produced by six African NGOs, charitable organisations and individuals alongside their followers’ comments. CRDA provides a means of examining how racial meanings are constructed, circulated, and contested within digital spaces. The analysis focuses on three interconnected layers of discourse. First, the visual discourse of the videos themselves: the framing of Black and Brown children, the deployment of emotive music voiceovers, and the narrative structures that foreground suffering to give context to the content and the discursive relationships to algorithmic preferences and biases. Second, the textual discourse embedded in

captions and hashtags, which often rely on simplified narratives of deprivation and salvation, and more worryingly the simplification of solutions (i.e. “5 likes equals feeding one child”). Third, the racialised discourse of user comments, where audiences express both compassion, moral outrage, and paternalistic fantasies of salvation, which reinforce not only the racialised power dynamics embedded in the content but the saliences of colonial ideologies. By triangulating these layers, the methodology reveals how these Charitable TikTok Entrepreneurs are strategically crafting content to maximise algorithmic reach while simultaneously shaping audience perceptions of Blackness as a site of deprivation and need.

### **By way of conclusion**

Ultimately, the paper contends that while TikTok and similar platforms offer new avenues for financial autonomy and decentralised fundraising strategies amidst the global decline in official development assistance, they simultaneously reproduce and intensify the coloniality of development assistance. Rather than dismantling extractive humanitarian aesthetics, this form of platform entrepreneurship relocates them within algorithmic markets that reward the commodification of Black bodies. Through the lens of bell hooks’ “eating the other,” the paper demonstrates how digital humanitarianism transforms racialised suffering into a consumable product, reinforcing global hierarchies of race, power, and value. The preliminary findings call for a critical re-evaluation of platform-based charitable practices and highlight the need for ethical frameworks that resist the algorithmic pressures driving the hypervisual commodification of Blackness.

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## **Why Mobile Money Took Off in Some African Countries and Not Others: The Political Economy of Platforms**

Jonathan Greenacre

Mobile money has become one of the most consequential platform phenomena of the twenty-first century. More than two billion accounts have been registered globally, with the highest concentration in Africa and South Asia. Across much of the continent, mobile money has reshaped everyday economic life, enabling remittances, bill payments, merchant transactions, savings, and government transfers through digital channels. Yet its diffusion across Africa has been strikingly uneven. Kenya experienced rapid and sustained platform dominance, with more than 31 million active users, and Tanzania and Ghana also achieved substantial scale. In contrast, other countries with comparable technologies, telecom operators, and unmet demand for financial services—most notably Nigeria—experienced stagnation, fragmentation, or delayed takeoff. This uneven geography raises a central political-economy question: why did mobile money scale dramatically in some African countries but not others?

Conventional explanations emphasize technological innovation, first-mover advantage, competitive strategy, or latent consumer demand for financial inclusion. While these factors matter, they cannot explain why nearly identical technologies and corporate approaches generated sharply different outcomes across national contexts. Nor do they account for why explosive growth occurred in some countries during periods of regulatory ambiguity, while in others similar initiatives remained constrained despite clear demand. If technology and need were sufficient, diffusion would have been far more uniform. The variation instead suggests that platform scale cannot be understood solely through market dynamics or entrepreneurial capacity. It requires attention to how states interpreted, classified, and governed emerging digital financial infrastructures at critical moments of uncertainty.

Using Kenya as the core case, this paper examines how early regulatory judgments shaped the trajectory of mobile money. When Safaricom’s M-Pesa was launched in 2007, policymakers confronted significant ambiguity regarding its legal classification and supervisory treatment.

Applying full banking regulation risked stifling experimentation; ignoring prudential concerns risked consumer harm and systemic instability. Rather than immediately imposing conventional banking rules or prohibiting telecom-led expansion, Kenyan regulators adopted a pragmatic and adaptive stance. Mobile money was treated primarily as payments infrastructure rather than as deposit-taking banking. Customer funds were required to be held in trust accounts within regulated banks, while telecom operators were permitted to expand extensive agent networks nationwide under supervisory oversight.

This interpretive choice proved consequential. It lowered entry barriers for distribution while preserving safeguards around customer funds. As adoption accelerated, mobile money became embedded in everyday transactions across urban and rural areas alike. The platform's growing economic footprint meant millions of users, thousands of agents, and significant transaction volumes increased the attractiveness of the platform. Formal regulatory frameworks evolved alongside this expansion.

Comparative cases illustrate how alternative regulatory interpretations produced divergent outcomes. In Tanzania and Ghana, regulators permitted telecom-led models under varying supervisory arrangements, but differed in their approaches to interoperability, competition, and institutional sequencing. These differences shaped the speed and structure of expansion, influencing market concentration and cross-network integration. In Nigeria, by contrast, a more restrictive bank-led framework limited telecom participation from the outset. Licensing requirements and institutional boundaries reflected a more conservative assessment of risk and authority. Despite Nigeria's large population, substantial remittance flows, and relatively sophisticated banking sector, mobile money struggled for years to reach comparable scale. These contrasts cannot be attributed to technological incapacity or cultural resistance. Rather, they reflect divergent political judgments about risk management, sectoral jurisdiction, and the acceptable boundaries of institutional experimentation.

By situating mobile money within broader debates on platformization and institutional development, this paper contributes to scholarship on digital infrastructure in emerging markets. It challenges accounts that treat platform growth as an automatic consequence of network economics and instead emphasizes the formative role of governance in shaping digital ecosystems. Kenya's experience shows that platforms scale not simply because they are efficient or demanded, but because regulatory actors create and sustain conditions that make expansion credible, legitimate, and durable over time.