

This PDF includes a chapter from the following book:

Digital Entrepreneurship in Africa

How a Continent Is Escaping Silicon Valley's Long Shadow

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Notes

1 Hopes and Potentials

1. We are aware of criticism that the discursive and administrative division of Africa in North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa can be understood as a postcolonial and racist social construct (Gikandi 2001; Mbembe 2001; and Zeleza 2009). Throughout the book, we refer to *Africa* because we do not want to perpetuate and invoke this problematic division and because we are confident that many of our findings apply to the entire continent (see appendix A). Here, we exceptionally use the term *sub-Saharan Africa*, and only in a strictly geographical sense, referring to nations that are situated south of the Sahara Desert, as this world region has been connected last to the global fiber-optic system.

2. *Imaginaries* represent sets of values, expectations, symbols, and materials that are used to produce visions of societies and social groups.

3. We define *digital entrepreneurship* as the novel creation of market- and opportunity-driven initiatives that is enabled or deeply impacted by digital technologies (Nambisan 2017), including the internet, mobile applications, social media, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence.

4. *Incubators* typically offer a clearly defined set of hands-on support services (e.g., work space, mentorship, networking), while *innovation hubs* provide only light-weight support and mostly help entrepreneurs form communities (see Friederici 2017a).

5. The GSMA Innovation Fund also illustrates how the agendas—and funds—of development organizations and technology corporations are comingled in the support of African digital entrepreneurship: the fund is administered by GSMA but financially supported by UK Aid and Australian Aid, which contributed undisclosed amounts.

6. Strictly speaking, affordances are not objective properties of technologies that predetermine organizational or individual action—instead, affordances are

actualized by actors in a partially indeterminate strategic process (Tan, Tan, and Pan 2016; Volkoff and Strong 2013). For simplicity, we use the more commonplace and intuitive notion of the term.

7. Admittedly, this limits the generalizability of our findings to this scope. Although we are confident that our findings apply in significant parts also to North Africa, as well as other low- and middle-income countries (see Quinones, Heeks, and Nicholson 2017; Ravishankar 2018; and Wentrup, Ström, and Nakamura 2016), any such translation has to be conducted with care. We opt for using the term *Africa* throughout the book because we do not want to perpetuate what may be construed as a racist and postcolonial division of North and sub-Saharan Africa (see previous note). We find that this approach balances requirements of sensitive language use and analytical precision, and results in only a negligible overgeneralization of our findings.

8. We should note that our perception is biased heavily toward the English-speaking world. However, our cursory review of francophone African technology media and interactions with multilateral development organizations and scholars of Latin America and Asia make us confident that there is a rather coherent popular macro discourse at global scale.

2 Taking Stock

1. Indeed, many participants felt that our main role as academic researchers was to document their firsthand experiences and collate relevant market information.

2. Academics based in high-income countries can of course suffer from similar biases, but groups with more direct (e.g., financial or activist) influence are emphasized here.

3. Participants in Addis Ababa explained that mobile broadband became widely available later there than in most African countries, meaning that Ethiopian users had not yet been locked into WhatsApp when Telegram emerged as a messaging service that offered superior functionalities. Indeed, we noticed that participants without an international contact network rarely had a WhatsApp account. Ethiopia is thus a good illustration for the importance of national-level network effects and timing in determining digital product adoption.

3 Bounded Opportunities

1. The mobile phone is an example of a device that has been integrated into societies around the world in distinct ways.

4 Viable Strategies

1. A *unicorn* is a private company with a market valuation of \$1 billion or more.

6 Transitioning Identities

1. Investors preferring Westerner-run enterprises and startups' strategic response of "white fronting" also has a racial and postcolonial dimension. We will return to this issue in more depth in chapter 7.
2. Since the interview quoted here, Uganda has gone on to legislate measures to curb access to social media. In African cities, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter are often bundled in deals offered by mobile operators in which these services are exempt from data charges. The move to charge users for access was seen as a method of reducing agitations against the end of the tenure of long-serving President Yoweri Museveni.
3. The former German-held colony of Cameroon was divided between the British and French after World War II. The result is francophone and anglophone Cameroon, the strained relationship of which is reflected in the development of a separatist movement in the western, anglophone region of Cameroon.

7 Silicon Tensions

1. See "List of Technology Centers" (2019), Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_technology_centers#Places_with_%22Silicon%22_names.
2. Both in media reports and research interviews, South African cities are often ignored in such implicit ranked comparisons. Participants often told us that Johannesburg and Cape Town are considered outliers, more comparable to cities in high-income countries but not to other cities in Africa.
3. This is in contrast to the larger economy, in which, depending on which country one is in, South Asian, Chinese, Lebanese, and other communities have become part of the mosaic.
4. Names have been changed.
5. In Maputo, the Cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation between Finland and Mozambique (STIFIMO), established by the Finnish Embassy in 2010, was fundamental to the establishment of the local ecosystem (see chapter 5). The World Bank was identified as a significant actor in both Maputo and Nairobi.

8 Ways Forward

1. And, indeed, it is likely that excitement that got most readers to pick up this book.

