

How can Africa's digital revolution be transformational?

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With more than 250 million smartphones currently in Africa, the African media landscape is rapidly shifting from traditional radio, TV and print, to new media which is primarily digital.



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The revolution is being felt in all sectors including politics – with government internet shutdowns being the modern-day teargas used to silence dissent, mobile sports betting on the rise on the continent and the proliferation of fake news in social media channels.

It's easy to wonder if the continent was overoptimistic in believing that the mobile revolution could be harnessed for good given all the damning headlines recently. There is however evidence that we can leverage mobile penetration to address some of the region's major issues – including the information gap in sexual reproductive health (SRH) issues among youth.

The confluence of Africa's increased connectivity, mobile phone penetration and the demographic dividend (it is estimated that there will be 750 million Africans aged 10 to 24 years old in 2060), provide an interesting opportunity for new media to positively contribute to uplifting the continent's youth.

To positively shape the role of this demographic, and fuel economic growth, a great opportunity lies in African media providing information services. A pertinent case is that of the information gap for sexual reproductive health (SRH). Africa

is hardest hit by HIV/AIDS. This is where youth represent 20% of the total population, but represent 42% of new HIV cases, demonstrating significant room for improvement in prevention efforts among youth, and a need for awareness campaigns to be youth-centric.

This shift in media and technology from traditional to new media, that is primarily digital, offers a unique opportunity to develop novel approaches to solve some of the continent's pressing issues using information services. Smartphone ubiquity is the major driver of digital growth on the continent, as an estimated 525 million smartphones are expected in Africa by 2020.

Addressing key issues, such as youth engagement in HIV prevention and treatment efforts, is an opportunity to tap into this smartphone ubiquity. Recent research by Dalberg Advisors explored the ways media and mobile penetration can be leveraged to increase audience engagement and provide information services for the continent's youth, who are a 220 million strong population.

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