

Digital Colonialism, Inclusion and Africa's Technological Future

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Abstract

This article focuses on digital colonialism in Africa. The article observes that the rapid deployment of technologies and digital tools from the Global North to Africa is fueling digital colonialism. It discusses how digital colonialism manifests itself in Africa. The article argues that digital colonialism in Africa is a negative phenomenon that perpetuates foreign dominance, undermines human rights, widens the digital divide and leads to the erosion of African cultural values and knowledge systems. Due to its negative impacts, the article posits that addressing digital colonialism in Africa is crucial in ensuring that the continent charts its own development agenda in the age of technology. It suggests how digital colonialism in Africa can be tackled towards ensuring inclusion in the digital age while shaping Africa's technological future.

1.0 Introduction

Digital colonialism has emerged as the world continues to witness a rapid technological transformation. It has been observed that digital colonialism mirrors the historic patterns of colonization where Western powers occupied and dominated territories in the Global South¹. However, digital colonialism operates in the virtual realm where Western software, embedded with foreign values, dominates local digital ecosystems in the Global South².

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¹ How to Break Digital Colonialism in African Software Development., Available at <https://www.ictworks.org/digital-colonialism-african-software-development/#:~:text=Defining%20Digital%20Colonialism%20in%20Software,serve%20its%20communities%20best%20interests>. (Accessed on 16/02/2026)

² Ibid

Digital colonialism therefore refers to the domination of digital ecosystems by technology companies from the Global North which often leads to the appropriation of data and deployment of digital tools to the Global South without modification to local needs and cultural contexts³. It has been observed that rapid digitalization has led to significant disparities between the Global North and the Global South a situation that triggers digital colonialism and worsens regional inequalities⁴. This situation has led to data extraction and exploitation in the Global South, increased surveillance in the Global South, dominance of digital infrastructure by technology companies from the Global North, monopolistic practices in data monetization, and algorithmic control by the Global North⁵.

It has been argued that the growth of technology, especially Artificial Intelligence (AI), has led to digital colonialism whereby powerful technology companies from the Global North are using algorithms, data and digital technologies to exert power over the Global South including through extracting data from individuals without consent⁶. Digital colonialism fuels injustices and inequalities in the Global South. Tackling digital colonialism is therefore vital for justice, inclusion, human rights and development in the age of technology.

This article focuses on digital colonialism in Africa. The article observes that the rapid deployment of technologies and digital tools from the Global North to Africa is fuelling digital colonialism. It discusses how digital colonialism manifests itself in Africa. The article argues that digital colonialism in Africa is a negative phenomenon that

³ Ibid

⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'Addressing digital colonialism: A path to equitable data governance' Available at <https://community.unesco.org/inclusivepolicylab/s/thinkpiece/addressing-digital-colonialism-a-path-to-equitable-data-governance-MCILJ2OCE56JB5ZCY2ZY4M7AZUYE> (Accessed on 16/02/2026)

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Digital colonialism': how AI companies are following the playbook of empire., Available at <https://theconversation.com/digital-colonialism-how-ai-companies-are-following-the-playbook-of-empire-269285> (Accessed on 16/02/2026)

perpetuates foreign dominance, undermines human rights, widens the digital divide and leads to the erosion of African cultural values and knowledge systems. Due to its negative impacts, the article posits that addressing digital colonialism in Africa is crucial in ensuring that the continent charts its own development agenda in the age of technology. It suggests how digital colonialism in Africa can be tackled towards ensuring inclusion in the digital age while shaping Africa's technological future.

2.0 Digital Colonialism in Africa

Digital colonialism is a widespread phenomenon in Africa. Digital colonialism has been described as the modern-day scramble for Africa where large technology companies from the Global North extract, analyze and own user data from the Global South for profit and market influence without tangible benefits to developing countries⁷. It has been observed that today, technology companies from the Global North are deciding the digital future of Africa without the continent's needs and interests being taken into account⁸. It has pointed out that data centres have been established with the purpose of extracting and transferring data generated in Africa to servers located in Silicon Valley⁹. The Silicon Valley, a region in Northern California in the United States of America, is a global centre for high technology and innovation. This area is home to many of the largest and most influential technology and innovation companies in the world including Apple, Amazon, Alphabet (Google), Meta and Intel among others¹⁰.

Digital colonialism has been described as the enforcement of Silicon Valley software values and systems on African countries and the rest of the Global South¹¹. It has been

⁷ Coleman. D., 'Digital Colonialism: The 21st Century Scramble for Africa through the Extraction and Control of User Data and the Limitations of Data Protection Laws' *Michigan Journal of Race & Law.*, Volume 24, Issue 2 (2019)

⁸ Ajeboriogbon. T., 'Digital Colonialism is the New Scramble for Africa' Available at <https://www.e-ir.info/2026/01/12/digital-colonialism-is-the-new-scramble-for-africa/> (Accessed on 16/02/2026)

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ A Tech Professional's Guide to Silicon Valley., Available at <https://www.builtinsf.com/articles/founders-entrepreneurship/silicon-valley> (Accessed on 16/02/2026)

¹¹ How to Break Digital Colonialism in African Software Development., Available at <https://www.ictworks.org/digital-colonialism-african-software->

observed that this situation imposes values that can undermine local traditions and socio-political systems in Africa¹². The rise of digital data has transformed social, economic and political circumstances globally. For example, businesses and organisations in the Global North use data to optimise processes by analyzing user behaviour and preferences for enhanced efficiency¹³. Further, it has been observed that data facilitates precise predictions about individual and collective behaviour, therefore offering a competitive edge in economic and political spheres¹⁴. Data has also played a key role in the growth of AI where extensive datasets are employed to train and enhance AI models, thus boosting productivity in the Global North¹⁵. The utilisation of data is therefore skewed towards the Global North entrenching power imbalances and contributing to the growth of digital colonialism¹⁶.

Digital colonialism in Africa occurs in various forms. For example, it has been observed that health informatics systems, educational software, and financial platforms frequently used in Africa reflect foreign norms and model of governance¹⁷. Therefore, when these platforms are applied in Africa without necessary modifications to align them with local circumstances, they can perpetuate biases, undermine indigenous knowledge systems and undermine innovation at the local scale¹⁸. In particular, health informatics systems reflect Western medical knowledge and can thus undermine indigenous healing practices in Africa¹⁹. In addition, education software and platforms reflect Western education values and can therefore sideline and marginalize indigenous knowledge systems in Africa²⁰. It has also been pointed out that the use of algorithmic decision-making in

[development/#:~:text=Defining%20Digital%20Colonialism%20in%20Software,serve%20its%20communities%20best%20interests.](#) (Accessed on 16/02/2026)

¹² Ibid

¹³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'Addressing digital colonialism: A path to equitable data governance' Op Cit

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ How to Break Digital Colonialism in African Software Development., Op Cit

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

agriculture undermines Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) which has been a valuable resource in fostering sustainability in Africa and the Global South for many centuries²¹. Further, it has been observed that when local farmers use digital platforms to search for information, this creates a data footprint where this data is extracted, transferred to servers in foreign countries and incremental knowledge obtained from it without value to the source of such data²². It has been argued that this situation mirrors the classic patterns of resource extraction where local knowledge becomes proprietary algorithms controlled by foreign entities²³. Furthermore, this ownership, where desired, comes at a cost since the same farmers have to purchase the synthesized information²⁴.

In addition, digital colonialism also manifests through coercive relinquishing of data when users are forced to accept certain information, such as cookies, before being allowed to use certain digital platforms²⁵. Further, it has been observed that the resource-intensive nature of AI development leaves a heavy environmental footprint in Africa²⁶. For instance, unsustainable extraction of rare earth minerals needed to support AI hardware is linked to environmental degradation in Africa and the Global South²⁷.

Digital colonialism in Africa is therefore an undesirable phenomenon. In addition to fuelling economic exploitation of data from Africa, digital colonialism also undermines indigenous values, practices and knowledge systems while also reinforcing biases and inequalities in the Global South²⁸. Addressing digital colonialism is therefore key towards ensuring inclusion and enabling Africa to determine its own technological future.

²¹ How Digital Colonialism Threatens Kenya's Silicon Savannah., Available at <https://www.techpolicy.press/how-digital-colonialism-threatens-kenyas-silicon-savannah/> (Accessed on 16/02/2026)

²² Ajeboriogbon. T., 'Digital Colonialism is the New Scramble for Africa' Op Cit

²³ How Digital Colonialism Threatens Kenya's Silicon Savannah., Op Cit

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Digital colonialism': how AI companies are following the playbook of empire., Op Cit

²⁶ African Digital Colonialism is the New Face of Worker Exploitation., Available at <https://www.ictworks.org/african-digital-colonialism/> (Accessed on 16/02/2026)

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ How to Break Digital Colonialism in African Software Development., Op Cit

3.0 Addressing Digital Colonialism for Inclusion and Africa's Digital Future

Digital colonialism is a prevalent phenomenon in Africa's digital space. Digital colonialism is evidenced by foreign control over Africa's digital data flows, infrastructure and platforms creating technological dependencies and exploitation that mirrors patterns of colonialism in Africa and the Global South²⁹. It has been observed that foreign companies continue to feed on African data without involving local actors fuelling digital colonialism³⁰. Further, algorithmic decision-making fuels biases and discrimination against Africa by undermining indigenous knowledge systems in key areas such as education, healthcare and agriculture³¹. Digital colonialism therefore represents a new form of control by global technology powers over the digital landscape in Africa and the Global South³². Digital colonialism in Africa has both economic and cultural implications³³. It fuels inequalities and dependencies, undermines Africa's data sovereignty, and leads to exploitation of data from Africa by foreign corporations which can be equated to resource exploitation during the colonial era³⁴.

Addressing digital colonialism is therefore key in ensuring justice, equity and inclusion by giving Africa a chance to shape its technological future. In order to achieve this goal, it is imperative to strengthen the voice of Africa and the Global South in the global digital economy³⁵. In particular, it has been observed that there is need to strengthen data governance and align data governance laws and policies in Africa with global standards

²⁹ Toure. M., 'Digital Colonialism in Africa' Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/394466350_Digital_Colonialism_in_Africa (Accessed on 16/02/2026)

³⁰ United Nations., 'Interview: AI Expert Warns of 'Digital Colonization' in Africa' Available at <https://www.un.org/pl/nairobi-unis/interview-ai-expert-warns-digital-colonization-africa> (Accessed on 16/02/2026)

³¹ How to Break Digital Colonialism in African Software Development., Op Cit

³² Centre for International Governance Innovation., 'Navigating Digital Neocolonialism in Africa' Available at https://www.cigionline.org/static/documents/DPH-paper-Stevenson_1.pdf (Accessed on 16/02/2026)

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'Addressing digital colonialism: A path to equitable data governance' Op Cit

and best practices³⁶. Empowering Africa and the Global South through international initiatives to ensure data ownership and protection and promoting North-South knowledge sharing can bolster the capacity of Africa to strengthen its data governance regime towards tackling digital colonialism³⁷.

Bridging the digital divide between the Global North and the Global South is also vital towards addressing digital colonialism. For instance, it has been suggested that fostering comprehensive digital literacy initiatives, targeting all stakeholders including local communities, that go beyond basic computer skills to include critical understanding of digital rights, online privacy, and the role of digital data in modern economies can strengthen data protection in Africa and the Global South³⁸. Further, developing adequate digital infrastructure that aligns with local needs can ensure that Africa charts its own technological future towards tackling digital colonialism³⁹. Technology companies have also been urged to comply with ethical practices with regards data harvesting and monetization in order to address digital colonialism in the Global South⁴⁰.

Through the foregoing, it is possible to uphold data sovereignty in Africa and the Global South towards tackling digital colonialism.

4.0 Conclusion

This article has examined how digital colonialism impacts the digital landscape in Africa. The article observes that digital colonialism occurs in Africa through various forms including extraction of data from Africa without involving local actors and biases in AI algorithms⁴¹. The article notes that digital colonialism is a negative phenomenon that

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ African Digital Colonialism is the New Face of Worker Exploitation., Op Cit

³⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'Addressing digital colonialism: A path to equitable data governance' Op Cit

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'Addressing digital colonialism: A path to equitable data governance' Op Cit

perpetuates inequalities, injustices and foreign dependency at the expense of Africa's development. Therefore, it is imperative to address digital colonialism including through strengthen data governance in Africa, promoting North-South capacity building and knowledge sharing, ensuring ethical extraction and monetization of data with adequate and fair compensation to providers and bridging the digital divide through investments in digital infrastructure and literacy programs⁴².

Addressing digital colonialism is a vital agenda in the era of technology towards fostering data sovereignty, inclusion and charting an appropriate and just technological future for Africa.

⁴² Ibid

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