

SUSTAINABLE AFRICAN SOCIETY IN DIGITAL TRAVEL NARRATIVES: A CRITICAL THEMATIC APPRAISAL

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Abstract

Africa is known by some derogatory sobriquets which include *the Black Continent* and *underdeveloped*. Such offensive epithets are intended to designate the parlous social conditions in many African countries. The unfavourable social situation has relegated the continent to the background at the global stage. Many concerned Africans have therefore been proffering solutions to the deplorable social situations. These include youth social media travel v-loggers. This study, which is qualitative in nature, is guided by John Stuart Mill's Social Progressivism theory. The v-loggers posit that the development of Africa depends on the potential of the civil society and standard social practices to complement pragmatic governance. Adoption of civil society's potential such as promotion of nativity, women's endowments, the rule of law such as tax compliance and standard social practices is dimensional to the economic recommendations of the Global North. The suggestions of the youth on harnessing civil potential are novel to the traditional conception that the development of the continent is solely in the hands of the political elite in government. However, insecurity, recent return of military regimes in some African countries, patriarchal supremacy, and professionalisation of politics are some of the impediments to these youths' social growth initiatives.

Key words: Digital travelogues, Growth initiatives, Social Media v-loggers, Sustainable Africa, African youth,

Introduction

Critical stakeholders in the African social reconstruction endeavours have been taking critical steps in proffering viable solutions to the development setback of the countries on the continent. Some of these critical stakeholders in African affairs are Social Media (YouTube) travel v-loggers. These are young individuals who take it upon themselves to travel across the African continent, record their findings for online broadcast. They make recommendations on Social Media especially YouTube for global/general access, deliberations and peer review implementation by governments on the continent. The perspectives and recommendations of the African youth Social Media travel v-loggers on the development of the continent emphasise nativity, power and potential of women, standard social practices and order to mention a few. The v-loggers claim that these suggestions are essential complements to the concentration of many African countries on the government frameworks such as adherence to the economic models of the Global North which are believed to not have taken the continent out of the mire of underdevelopment, so far. Most of the countries on the continent of Africa are underdeveloped in terms of the development advances in economy, technology, science, and political administration in the standards of Western and Eastern regions of the world. This makes Africa to be placed in the back stage at the global level. Though Kuwonu (2024:2) has expressed the optimism that:

As African economies look to the new year, countries across the continent are poised to make moderate economic gains but must navigate the maze of domestic and international challenges. According to the UN World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2024, the continent's economic growth is expected to quicken slightly, with average GDP possibly inching up to 3.5 per cent.

Yet, the situations of the economies of the countries in Africa are still abysmal. The primary focus of this study is to analyse and interrogate the reports of these youth travellers with a view to determining the feasibility of their observations and judgments in achieving the goal of the social development of the Sub-Saharan African societies and the North of the Sahara. There is also focus on the attainment of standard social practices in the countries across the continental region. This is especially so because the initiatives of these v-loggers are a departure from typical government's frameworks intended to move the continent forward, thereby serving as the citizens' dimension to the development crises and efforts in Africa.

Methodology and Theoretical Instrument

With the goal of making the conclusions and recommendations in this study to be acceptable, a number of methods, approaches and instruments were employed by the author. To begin with, peculiar considerations were observed. The YouTubers selected were young Africans. They cut across gender. They also came from the four cardinal regions of Africa for adequate representations. In addition to this, both the qualitative and quantitative research methods were used such that rational analyses are substantiated by basic data evaluations. However, the qualitative traits of the research are dominant. The study also employed John Stuart Mill's social progressivism as theoretical guide. This is because the theory holds that the society and its nuclei necessarily need to serve purposes with emphasis on their indispensability so that the survival and progress of the society would be long-lasting. These theoretical enunciations are relevant to this study because through them, the paper attains basis for its position that the travels embarked on by the v-loggers are to serve the purpose of calling attention to the areas in the social system, deserving attention for the well-being of the citizens of African countries.

Development Programmes by African Governments till date

Many African governments have come to the realisation that their individual countries and the continent as a whole are under-developed. The government in individual African countries and African Union (AU) therefore initiated development programs and policies aimed at attaining social development on the continent. The programs are however modeled in the economic frameworks of the Global North. One of such programs was the New Partnership for African Development, (NEPAD) whose goal was established for the purpose of improving governance in the member-nations, as well as creating an effective strategic development instrument for the African continent as a whole according to Morbi (2011). This purpose for which NEPAD was conceived was to be achieved through the assessment of democratic culture, political administration, as well as economic practices in these countries. Other considerations for assessment include administrative styles in management, corporate principles, and socio-economic development indices in African countries (Agbu, 2003).

As an indication of the efforts and the commitment of the African Union to achieve this laudable objective of this economic initiative, the AU specifically established a specialized agency the African Peer Review Mechanism to implement the NEPAD's set goals. This AU agency, The African Peer Review Mechanism, was mooted to serve as a means for the attainment of the development of the continent through NEPAD, and this was to set the continent on the part of development, through innovation in the economic models and strategies adopted by the countries on the continent, according to Osborne (2010) and Herbert & Gruzd (2007).

However, the NEPAD initiative, as a joint effort by the African states has been adjudged ineffective. According to Moloji (2017), it has been posited that the New Partnership for Africa's Development together with the African Union (AU) has not been successful in institutionalising democracy, good governance as well as conflict resolution on the continent. This is explicitly demonstrated in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) conducted the by Transparency International. It is also noted in lack of transparent and equitable democracies, the characteristic irregularities in elections and persistent armed disputes in regions such as the Darfur region, Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including Somalia. In addition to this, Mlambo (2022) has observed that the economies of most African countries are deplorable especially because the current deplorable economic conditions of many African countries are exposed to China's economic exploitation through loans granted to the African countries by China.

These situations are matrixes of economic deficiencies. Respective African countries are making internal efforts intended to solve the economic underdevelopment in their countries. For example, Mwia (2019) examines the Kenyan 2030 development plan and asserts that through Vision 2030, 'Kenya aims at becoming a middle income country by the year 2030' (3). Similarly, Namibia has developed the economic instrument, the Fourth National Development Plan (NDP4), as a development strategy (Nakale, 2015). Egypt has also employed Financial Inclusion as a monetary policy to boost its economy and drive development in the country, according to Hassouba (2023). In Nigeria, the government has been driving development in the country through entrepreneurship with the initiative Government enterprise and empowerment program (GEEP) according to Okolo-Obasi and Uduji (2024). These economic policies and programs are yet to achieve the desired economic productive transformation in the development objectives of Africa after all as Kalu (2018) opines, the features of underdevelopment such as infrastructural deficit, epidemics, food shortage, insecurity, voluntary migration to the West, poverty, official corruption, and to mention a few, armed conflict, are still visible on the continent of Africa. And Tella (2022) adds to the list of the matrixes of underdevelopment in Africa thus:

Purpose of Travels

A travel, as conceived for the purpose of this study is the act of embarking on a journey or the journey itself, for such reasons as a visit, migration, research or pleasure. Of all these purposes of travel, the last two consecutive purposes are, combined, relevant to this study which centers on municipal travel. This type of travel is characterised by visits to rural settlements. A municipal travel could be for research on topical issues or for pleasure of cultural fascination. This is similar to the tourist travel. The YouTube videos selected for appraisal in this study are research-oriented and pleasure is an added value which is usually as a result of the

traveler's discovery about the people and the society visited. The core research intent of the authors of the travels is to discover things about the people or society hitherto unknown. There are many reasons for these municipal travelers to visit different African cities and peoples. The first is to foster unity among Africans as the instrumentality of globalisation (internet and YouTube) has enabled the transmissions of evidence-barked information about the different African societies.

In addition to fostering unity among the peoples of African descent, these travels are research processes to discover the deficiencies in African societies in terms of under development. This is germane in the contemporary times because African tends to be lagging behind in many ramifications such as productivity, provision of amenities, health delivery, education, and to mention a few, science and technology. To this end these municipal travels serves as archival records and especially that they are digital and internet-mediated and internet does not forget (Crockett, (2016). They are also resourceful as instruments of social transformation in Africa. They are sources of education and enlightenment.

What are the elements of underdevelopment? The features of underdevelopment include low per capita income, high population growth, low literacy level, technical backwardness, capital deficiency, high cost of living or low standard of living, high level of unemployment, high dependence on extractive industry and particularly agriculture and weak institutions. Which of these is alien to Africa and Nigeria? (1)

The persistent underdevelopment in Africa has motivated many Africans to proffers solutions to the problems of the continent. Such concerned Africans in the contexts of the study are Social Media (YouTube) v-loggers who believe that their journeys across the continents of Africa can offer invaluable brainwaves through which the social problems of the continent could be solved. This is especially so because the brainwaves are generally borne out of the potential of the citizens and not government initiatives and policies. These claims are investigated in this study.

Critical Analyses of the Research Vloggs

The African travel v-loggers purposively selected for this study advance various mechanisms, as strategies and values to be emulated or addressed by countries in Africa so that the continent can advance. The experiences of these v-loggers and the hypotheses they preach for the social development of Africa are discussed at this juncture in the study. The hypotheses for development by the v-loggers include standard social practices, nativity, power and potential of women, and so on being

viable complements to the traditional government frameworks. They are thus discussed forth.

Tayo Aina's Standard Social Practice and Order Theory of Continental Growth

The first of the v-loggers to be discussed in this study is Tayo Aina with emphasis on his travel experiences in Botswana. Tayo Aina's experiences are explained in the video titled 'The most perfect country in Africa --- Botswana', available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7Rjw-ZzdA>. In the video, Tayo Aina's travel narration to the Southern Africa country goes as:

Botswana is one of the few African countries to export beef, internationally. Botswana makes sure the law treats you well. The country that thinks about its citizens in that way is good country. Your investment is secure because the banking system is secure. ... so far you are paying your tax properly. You are doing the things that government bides with. You are fine.

The crux of this travel narration is that being law-abiding is a critical tool of social development. The question of breaking the law is a major infraction on the statute in Africa. One significant act of breaking the law in Africa is tax evasion which many Africans are guilty of. Aumeerun, Jugurnath, and Soondrum (2016:70) have noted that:

The tax evasion basically is affected by various factors but it also affects many economic factors. Sub Saharan Africa being a developing region is facing the phenomenon of tax evasion in a crucial way. This study measures the impact of the tax evasion on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of Sub-Saharan Africa.

The core essence of this excerpt aligns with Tayo Aina's indicated position that compliance with the law is critical to social development in the whole of Africa. Many countries in Africa can emulate the example in Botswana. The tax compliance perspective suggests Tayo Aina's economic dimension to Africa's development. This economic preference is occasioned by the need for government to have resources to put amenities in place and institute fiscal policies such as building and managing formidable foreign reserves that will regulate inflation. Tayo Aina signifies this intention in his travel to London, the United Kingdom. Tayo Aina, in the video on this travel exploration of London, titled 'I Survived a Day in London with \$100' which is available at

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/GrABXvhh0FU> , pays attention to the provision of amenities in the city and affordability of commodities. As he narrates his travel experiences in the video:

I explored London... with just 100 USD ... I landed in London and stayed in a 42 USD hotel in Dartford... Then I took a 7 USD train and was back at London Bridge in less than 45 minutes ... I hopped on a double-decker bus for just 2USD... I grabbed a Quason and coffee for 9 USD which was so cheap and delicious. Next I visited the British Museum which was surprisingly free ... After that I took the tube for 2 USD to my next adventure Uber boat ride for 10 USD cruised past the Big Ben, the London Eye and the Tower Bridge ... Finally, to get a bird eye view of the city, I got on the London Cloud Cable Car for 10 USD which was totally worth it ... I got fish and chips and a pint of beer for 15 USD.

This narration is a testament to the infrastructural availability and economic functionality in London as a Western city. The testament is intended by Tayo Aina to be a model of the social and economic growth of Africa as being advocated. Particular emphasis is on how these signify a high quality of life of the people even Tayo Aina as a research tourist. The infrastructures include functional hotel services, train, iconic bridges, the tube, double-decker buses, British Museum, the Big Ben, the London Eye, Uber boat, and the Cloud Cable Car. The narrator indicates the affordability of commodities with the words *just* and *very cheap*, and *surprisingly free* in the excerpt.

Chris Kermis's Standard Social Practice and Order Hypothesis--the Morocco Example

Chris Kermis's concern is Standard Social Practice and Order as a means of achieving growth and development on the continent of Africa citing the Morocco social system as illustrations. He travels to Morocco and shares what he finds inconsistent for redress. He does this in the video titled 'Morocco| What not to do When Visiting| Do's, Don'ts, Advice & Travel Tips', available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0myOyg_6ks. In Kermi's actual words:

Ok, guys, in this video, I'm going to give some tips about what to expect when you come to Morocco ... Firstly, when you arrive, don't expect to go through passport control quickly. Security is pretty harsh here. There is going to be long queues ... It can really take a long time. Secondly, when you come into the country, do not bring drones. They are not allowed here. .. You are going to be tipping all the time. Tipping is expected in this country... Now, one thing I found was unusual here, I have traveled to a lot of Islamic countries, but in Morocco, here, do not assume you can go into the mosques. The mosques are closed to non-Muslims. There is one exception I know of, and that is the big mosque in Casablanca.

These comments are Kermi's lamentation of some social ills which are opposed to the principles of social standard and development. The first of the ills is official/operational inefficiency seen in long queues necessitating wasting of precious time of travelers. Also, when security is *harsh*, there are tendencies for human right violations. The second ill is information hoarding as drones are not allowed to be brought into Morocco by visitors. This may limit accuracy of information that journalists give to the global public. In the same vein, tipping which is a form of corruption is also lamented. Similarly, Kermi believes that religious intolerance is also one of the barriers to growth and success in Africa, especially as noticed in the excerpt immediate above.

Steven Ndukwu's Africa's Development Hypotheses

Steven Ndukwu is an award-winning Nigerian travel content creator on real estates. He is also a filmmaker. He was part of the class of the Black Voices Fund in 2022 according to Ijaseun (2022), He expresses some hypotheses in his YouTube videos on his East and West African travel experiences he had in Rwanda and Ivory Coast, respectively. He titles the Rwanda experience video 'This will change your mind about visiting Rwanda' which is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anmCSICgs8M&t=181s>. The Ivory Coast experience is titled 'Ivory Coast; Africa's most Developed Country you Never Knew' available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vH4YqVJnxOY&t=280s>. He narrates journey experiences thus:

I literally saw the unexpected while travelling to Rwanda. This African country is shocking the reputation of the tourists. It is the cleanest ...

Tourism is growing. It is one of the countries to do business in. Corruption index is one of the lowest in the world. National carrier Rwanda Air is becoming Africa's biggest airline. And it doesn't end there. Rwanda keeps investing in national security. Rwanda is now ranked the 6th safest place for solo travellers. The Basket Ball African League lunched its billion dollars league in Rwanda. This speaks so much about this country. But it has not always been like this. .. 26 years after the genocide, Kigali has worked so hard to reinvent itself.... 'Good leadership transformed the country. Rwanda is now the fastest growing economy in Africa'.

Furthermore, Steven Ndukwu's message in the Ivory Coast video is the same as that in the Rwanda video. It is the message of nation building through serious attitude to governance. This has brought about transformation in many climes. This is explicit in this excerpt which is an account of his travel to Ivory Coast, thus:

However, that did not stop me from exploring this beautiful West African country... not only was my mind blown away... This is an example of a functioning country... Since the end of the civil war, which displaced more than one million people, Ivory Coast has surged financially even though the country went through difficult period... The economy is booming because politics has been stable... People have been able to invest. A lot of headquarters have actually moved in here.

In this excerpt, Ndukwu believes that a serious sense of purpose as well as political stability have helped the country to overcome setbacks that the civil conflict brought about. Indications of progress which Ivory Coast has made contained in the excerpt include investment opportunities and the presence of multinational companies. These are two matrixes of a productive economy. Such could be emulated by African countries whose economies are experiencing difficulties.

The Vision and Women Potential Social Development Hypotheses of PassportHeavy for Africa from the Rwanda Example

PassportHeavy narrates his positive experiences about Rwanda from his travel to the country. Such positive narration is contained in a video titled 'Think You Know

Rwanda?' It is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeSIKfCRdmw&t=358s> . As PassportHeavy narrates:

Rwanda exceeded every expectation that I had. And it shows you when you have the right leadership in 20 years it is really possible especially when you have discipline and the vision that Rwanda has. .. Rwanda is amazing right now. It is one of the cleanest not just in Africa, but in the world. ..Also, Yvonne Makolo who is the CEO of Rwanda Air confirms that another really inspiring thing is literally 56 per cent of the CEO positions are women within Rwanda. Rwanda is the best place to be a woman, actually.

It is important to note in this excerpt that two critical standard social practices and principles are at the center stage of the concern of the v-logger. These are the right leadership and the exploration of the potential of women as resourceful approaches to all-round development in Africa. These are missing in public administration and governance in many African countries because political leadership has exhibited insensitivity to the plight of the masses as seen in institutional corruption. In the words of Hope (2000), corruption in Africa has reached cancerous proportions, and nepotism. In the same vein, the potential of women is not being utilized constructively. This is because the continent of Africa is dominantly patriarchal in both social orientation and cultural belief. It is a continent where women encounter obstacles which include a traditional patriarchal cultural practice that bars women from accomplishing personal developments and total submission to male dominance. (Jaiyeola and Adeyeye, 2021). These signify men's objectification of women, and such an objectification has resulted in the manifestation of men's disregard for women in the social scheme of things. It is a sensibility like this that motivated former president of Nigeria, Mohmmdu Buhari to state that his wife, symbolic of African women, belongs in the kitchen and the other room. BBC (2016:1) reports this nuptial expletive thus:

Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari has responded to criticism from his wife by saying she belongs in his kitchen. On a visit to Germany, he said: "I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room." Mr Buhari was standing next to Chancellor Angela Merkel, who seemed to glare at him.

It is indicated in the excerpt that the wife of the then president, as a woman, was not capable, by any consideration, to comment on public policies and programs. This perception has not made the approaches to governance and development in Africa, especially in countries such as Nigeria, to be all-inclusive and result-oriented. PassportHeavy is therefore suggesting these measures as development pathways for the entire African continent, citing the Rwanda example.

Conclusion

It has been asserted that the suggestions by the travel v-loggers relating to nativity, exploration of the potential of women, standard social practices and order, as well as tactful citizens-oriented governance, among others, as viable means through which the much-desired development in Africa can be realised. This is a revolutionary dimension to the essentially West-sourced economic development plans of most African countries seen in the prevalence of the economic principles of the Global North. However, there is the need for the policy makers in government to eliminate some impediments to the feasibility of the hypotheses of the vloggers. For example, the hurdles that militate against the nativity hypotheses, by its principles of manifestation, the nativity suggestion is countered by some social ills such as insecurity, weak and unproductive economies, return of military dictatorship to Africa, hunger, diseases prevalence, and, to mention a few, lack of enabling infrastructures such as electricity as energy and good roads, to do business and facilities for rest. All these may not encourage many of the Africans in Diaspora to wish to return to the continent as being mooted. It needs to be recalled for emphasis that many of the Africans in Diaspora are gainfully employed. In fact, many of them are employers of labour. This instance attests to the fact that government actions are precursors to the feasibility of the solution suggestions of the vloggers.

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