

DIGITAL COLONIALISM AND THE REPRODUCTION OF HEGEMONY IN AFRICA: A POSTCOLONIAL APPROACH

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Abstract

This article presents a critical analysis of contemporary manifestations of digital colonialism in Africa, focusing on how global technology powers reproduce traditional patterns of domination through modern digital infrastructures and platforms. Drawing on a postcolonial analytical framework, the authors examine how data extraction, technological dependency, and regulatory asymmetries reinforce new forms of digital hegemony across the continent. The study argues that Africa's digital vulnerability stems from structural inequalities and external control over data, networks, and governance models. Through an analysis of various national and pan-African initiatives, the article explores both the successes and limitations of current efforts to achieve digital sovereignty. Finally, it proposes a comprehensive set of counter-strategies—including technological innovation, policy harmonization, and epistemic decolonization—that could enable African nations to reclaim their agency and build an autonomous digital future. This research contributes to the critical discourse on power, technology, and postcoloniality in the digital age within the African context.

Keywords: *digital colonialism, hegemony, digital sovereignty, resistance strategies, postcolonialism, Africa, digital vulnerability, submarine cables.*

Introduction

In the late 19th century, Africa witnessed a geographical division during the Berlin Conference (1884-1885) between European colonial powers. Today, Africa faces a new form of reshaping, represented by the delineation of its digital space by major tech companies, particularly from the United States, Europe, and China. However, unlike

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traditional tools of control, this modern form of domination occurs through the control of critical digital infrastructure, such as undersea internet cables, operating systems, social media platforms, and artificial intelligence applications, thus reproducing forms of colonial influence in a contemporary technological format, which is referred to as digital colonialism.

In the stage of the rapidly accelerating digital revolution worldwide, Africa has emerged as a theater for a new conflict that goes beyond the traditional borders of colonialism, entering the era of digital colonialism, which reproduces domination through digital tools and technologies. Digital colonialism extends beyond economic dependency to encompass epistemic and technological domination, whereby African data, knowledge, and digital behaviors are appropriated to reinforce global hierarchies of power and control. Despite the growing global debate on digital transformation, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to examining how global technological infrastructures reproduce colonial asymmetries under the discourse of connectivity and innovation. This research therefore aims to bridge the gap by examining the mechanisms through which digital technologies perpetuate existing structures of dependency and marginalization within African contexts.

This reality raises crucial questions about the nature of digital colonialism, which reproduces old patterns of exploitation through modern technological means—posing a renewed threat to Africa's autonomy and allowing major corporations to control the continent's digital future much like traditional colonial powers once controlled its territories. It also raises questions about how digital vulnerability reinforces this control and limits Africa's capacity for technological self-determination.

To address this issue, the analysis adopts a postcolonial approach to deconstruct the colonial dynamics inherent in the spread of information and communication technologies, revealing how these technologies reproduce historical hierarchies of power and domination on the continent. This approach allows for a multidimensional analysis of digital colonialism that highlights the intersection between technology, sovereignty, and knowledge production.

Thus, the paper seeks a critical examination of the implications of digital transformation in Africa, questioning the manifestations of digital colonialism where foreign companies exploit Africa's digital resources. It also aims to analyse this phenomenon from a postcolonial perspective, reviewing the manifestations of digital colonialism and presenting strategies for digital resistance and liberation that enhance the continent's digital sovereignty. Finally, the paper explores the complex dynamics of digital communication in Africa, shedding light on issues of power, control and sovereignty in the digital age. To reach these objectives, the study adopts a qualitative methodological framework that combines both descriptive and analytical methods. The descriptive method provides a detailed account of the various manifestations of digital colonialism and Africa's structural digital vulnerabilities, while the analytical method critically examines the underlying power relations, external dependencies, and epistemic hierarchies that sustain these dynamics. Through this dual method, the study seeks to deconstruct the mechanisms of digital domination and explore the strategies through which African states can strengthen their digital sovereignty and technological autonomy.

Accordingly, the paper is structured into three main sections: the first explores Africa's transition from classical to digital colonialism; the second examines digital vulnerability and the manifestations of digital domination in Africa; and the final section discusses strategies of resistance aimed at deconstructing digital colonialism.

Africa: from Classical to Digital Colonialism

This section explores the historical background of colonialism and the role companies played in it. The aim is to compare traditional colonialism in the 19th century with digital colonialism in the 21st century. It also defines the concept of digital colonialism, explains why data is regarded as a valuable resource comparable to natural resources, and analyses how big tech companies and their affiliated governments exploit it to advance their strategic interests.

Historical Background of Colonialism in Africa

During the 19th century, African countries were subjected to intense imperial aggression from European powers, manifested through military invasions, the appropriation of land, systematic economic exploitation, acts of genocide, and the forcible extraction of natural resources. This wave of colonialism emerged after the transatlantic slave trade ended and was formally structured during the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), where colonial powers agreed to divide Africa among themselves. In this period, arbitrary colonial borders were drawn, often based on racist ideologies that viewed Africans as backward and in need of European guardianship until they could supposedly govern themselves - an idea captured in Edward Said's concept of Orientalism (Onyango Ouma 2025).

By the year 1900, nearly 90% of African territories had been colonized by European powers including France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Portugal, and Spain. This period came to be known as "The Scramble for Africa." As capitalist economies developed, a belief grew that the economic - and even political- future of industrial nations depended on exclusive access to markets and raw materials. Even the infrastructure built in the colonies was mainly designed to extract and export natural resources.

Companies played a pivotal role in this colonial expansion. They helped achieve imperial economic goals and acted as tools for generating extra profits through exploitation. Over time, these companies became increasingly involved in the governance of the colonies, evolving into powerful entities that played a central role in plundering Africa's mineral and agricultural resources for global economic gain. (Dahiya 2023)

Thus, European colonialism was largely driven by a deep desire to serve the industrial capitalist system -through the exploitation of African people and the theft of their lands and wealth. This laid the groundwork for what later became neo-mercantilism, where colonial powers, directly or through privileged commercial companies, took over African territories and resources to serve their own economic interests (Coleman 2019, 419-421).

Digital Colonialism

Just as Africa was subjected in the past to traditional colonialism, where its territories were divided among imperial powers and its natural resources and raw materials exploited, accompanied by the construction of infrastructure such as railways to facilitate the export of wealth (Kwet,2019), the continent today faces a new form of colonialism that reproduces dominance through more modern tools. This new form, known as digital colonialism, relies on using technological advances and the Fourth Industrial Revolution to build digital infrastructures, including social media platforms and communication networks, with the explicit aim of collecting and exploiting data for commercial profit or various other purposes. (Coleman 2019, 423)

Digital colonialism is defined as the decentralized extraction and control of citizens' data -whether with their informed consent or not- through communication networks developed and owned by Western tech corporations. It is also referred to as "the use of digital technology to achieve political, economic, and social dominance over another nation or territory" (Kwet 2021). In this sense, the key players in digital colonialism include: (Hendricks, Vestergaard and Marker 2018):

1. Western tech companies: These companies develop and provide the technologies and infrastructures that enable data extraction, targeted advertising, and dissemination.
2. Advertising and consulting firms: These actors use the technologies provided by tech companies to micro-target specific groups with tailored ads and messages for commercial gain.
3. Local corporations, political parties, and organizations: These groups pay advertising and consulting firms to advance their agendas domestically, relying on infrastructures and data collected by Western tech companies.
4. Citizens: Individuals, knowingly or unknowingly, serve as sources of data for tech companies and become targets of personalized advertising and agendas promoted by local actors.

In his 2019 article "*Digital Colonialism: U.S. Empire and the New Imperialism in the Global South*", Michael Kwet explains:

"Within the framework of digital colonialism, foreign powers-led by the United States-install infrastructure in the Global South designed primarily to serve their own interests. This enables them to impose economic and cultural dominance, along with private forms of governance. To fulfill this agenda, major corporations design digital technologies that ensure their control over the essential functions of the digital ecosystem. This allows them to extract profit through rent (in the form of intellectual property or access to infrastructure) and surveillance (in the form of big data), while maintaining control over the flow of information (such as news distribution and streaming services) and social activities (like social networking and cultural exchange), in addition to various political, social, economic, and military functions mediated through their technologies" (Kwet 2019, 7-8).

Thus, digital colonialism refers to a contemporary phenomenon in which powerful Western tech companies exploit and control individuals' data, particularly in the Global South, through the infrastructure and technology they provide. This concept draws parallels with historical colonialism in its classical sense, where empires extracted

natural resources and exploited local labor for their own economic gains. In the context of digital colonialism, Western tech companies create communication networks and platforms, such as social media, to collect vast amounts of user data. This data is then used for various purposes, including targeted advertising and predictive analytics

Data as a New Resource for Colonialism

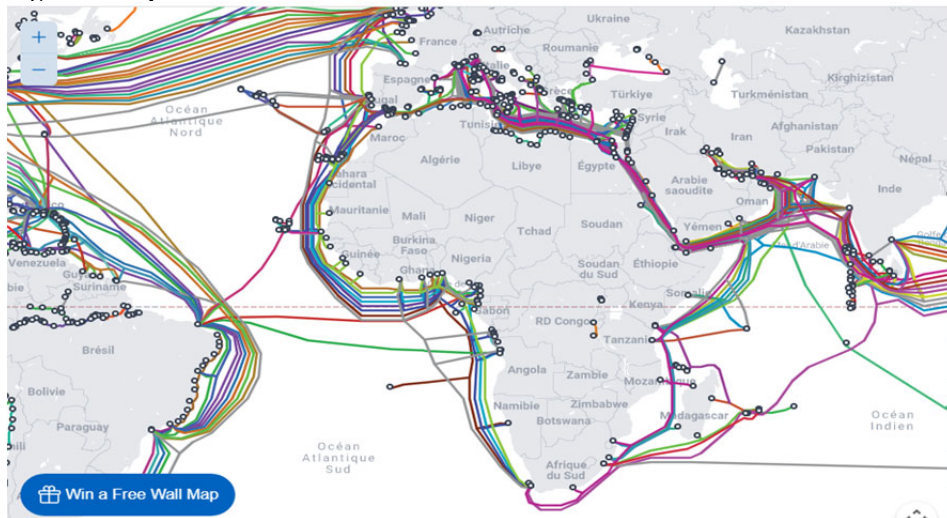
Today, data has become a global currency. Access to data is now the most valuable commodity for both states and corporations -surpassing natural resources, wealth, and even advanced weaponry. Data can be extracted and sold as a product to companies and political organizations whose profits rely on targeting specific audiences, whether to promote political agendas or sell customized consumer products. For example, the CEO of Cambridge Analytica revealed that personal data from around 50 million Americans was used to help Donald Trump win the 2016 U.S. presidential election. (Dahiya 2023).

In the 19th and 20th centuries, colonial powers built critical infrastructure like **railways** to extract and trade natural resources from their colonies. Today, tech giants such as Facebook and Alphabet (Google's parent company) are building digital infrastructure - not to uplift societies or ensure long-term economic prosperity, but to benefit from increased use of their digital services. (Dahiya 2023)

The creation of vital communication infrastructure by Western tech companies, aimed at harvesting and controlling untapped data, marks the front line of a new form of cultural and economic dominance. In many African countries, where infrastructure is underdeveloped, data protection laws are weak, and competition is limited - combined with longstanding political, social, and economic imbalances, as well as decades of resource exploitation - this dominance becomes even more pronounced (Kwet, 2019, 7-8) Africa's market of over 1.25 billion people represents a goldmine of untapped data, offering tech companies enormous opportunities to dominate the digital space, increase profits, and leverage this control economically, culturally, and even politically (Coleman 2019, 424).

Projects such as "Google's Equiano cable" and "Meta's 2Africa network" are emblematic of this transformation. While marketed as initiatives to "connect the unconnected," they effectively extend the reach of Western corporations into African digital space, consolidating their control over connectivity, data routing, and cloud services. Similarly, China's "Digital Silk Road" initiatives and Huawei's partnerships across Africa create parallel systems of dependency-offering infrastructure but embedding surveillance and political influence.

This situation echoes the ideas of "Eduardo Galeano" in his book *"Open Veins, of Latin America"* (1973), where he describes the economic exploitation of Latin America by global colonial powers. Today, we can speak of "digital veins"-as shown in Map 1- stretching across oceans, connecting a global tech ecosystem owned and controlled by a handful of corporations, most of them based in the United States, but still driven by the same old motive: the exploitation of newly colonized digital populations (Dahiya 2023).

Figure 1. Map of 2024 Submarine Cables in Africa

Source: TeleGeography 2025

The map of submarine cables reveals that more than 80% of Africa's connectivity infrastructure is owned or managed by Western or Chinese companies, causing the majority of African data to flow through control centers located outside the continent. This control over digital arteries reproduces the logic of classical colonialism in a new digital form, where natural resources are replaced by "data" as the primary source of economic and epistemic domination. Accordingly, Africa's "digital veins"-the submarine cables and data routes linking the continent to the rest of the world -no longer carry minerals or raw materials but information, which is extracted and monetized elsewhere. In this sense, submarine cables operate not as neutral technological infrastructures but as instruments of digital colonialism that perpetuate dependency and undermine Africa's ability to exercise full technological and epistemic sovereignty (Mwema and Birhane 2024).

From this perspective, a postcolonial approach provides a comprehensive framework for understanding digital colonialism as both a technological and political phenomenon, highlighting its implications for sovereignty, governance, and resistance in shaping Africa's digital future (Masters 2021; Ayodele 2021).

Digital vulnerability and the Manifestations of Digital Domination in Africa

In the context of digital vulnerability and the limited capacity of African states to achieve digital sovereignty, these countries have become increasingly vulnerable to digital colonialism. This form of domination manifests in several ways and has been further reinforced by a combination of political and technological factors. In this section, we will explore the main features of digital colonialism in Africa, while also examining the underlying reasons that have contributed to its entrenchment and the reproduction of historical power relations in new, digital forms.

The Manifestations of Digital Colonialism in Africa

This section explores the manifestations of digital colonialism in Africa, highlighting the multiple ways in which the colonial legacy continues to shape the continent's digital reality. It analyses both the explicit and implicit forms of digital colonialism, aiming to reveal the complex obstacles that restrict Africa's full participation in global digital development.

Control over Digital Infrastructure

One of the clearest manifestations of digital colonialism in Africa is the control and ownership of critical digital infrastructure by foreign powers (Coleman 2019, 417). This control results in unequal data flows and power dynamics that echo the structures of traditional colonialism. Current submarine cable projects and internet infrastructure, largely owned, controlled, and managed by major Western tech companies, are often presented under the guise of “bridging the digital divide” and offering technological assistance (Atintande et al. 2020, 42). However, such arrangements can have long-term implications for the continent's economic, political, and financial stability. While digital infrastructure is crucial for developing Africa's digital landscape, its domination by external actors leaves it vulnerable to exploitation and turns it into a tool for what some have described as “imperial control over the structure of the digital ecosystem” (Kwet 2019, 8).

A striking example of the risks associated with Western and Chinese infrastructure projects is the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, built and financed by Chinese banks and companies. It was later discovered that its electronic systems had been compromised for the first five years of operation. If China was able to monitor the continent's most important regional organization, it raises serious concerns about the possibility of similar surveillance activities being carried out in other African countries (Atintande et al. 2020, 44).

China, which is now the primary supplier of both undersea and terrestrial fiber-optic cables across Africa, facilitates large-scale data transfers via the internet. For instance, *China Mobile* is helping develop “2Africa,” a 45,000-kilometer-long submarine cable that became operational in 2024 (Mwema and Birhane 2024, 5) (see Figure 2A). It aims to directly connect Africa to the Middle East and support the rollout of 5G and high-speed internet services. However, this close integration of African telecom and data centers with China has raised concerns about data exploitation and surveillance.

On the other hand, American companies are also vying for influence over Africa's digital infrastructure. *Google*, for example, launched the “Equiano” undersea cable, a 15,000-kilometer project that went live in February 2023 (see Figure 2B). *Meta* is planning to build a cable that will encircle the entire African continent to improve internet access and promote the free flow of information. While such initiatives align with the U.S. value of ensuring free information exchange, it is well known that American intelligence agencies may have access to this data, raising questions about Africa's digital sovereignty (Venske 2024).

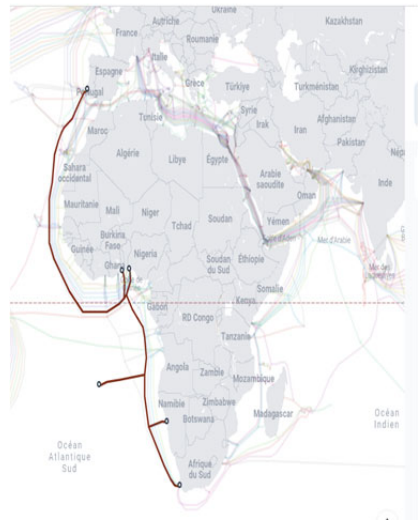
What can be said is that these projects -along with other undersea cable initiatives (see Map 1)-reproduce colonial logic. They create a new cost structure that keeps

African countries in a cycle of dependency and debt, while functioning as data extraction infrastructures that deliver minimal benefit to the Global South (Mwema and Birhane 2024, 4). This infrastructural dependency transforms connectivity into a geopolitical instrument, allowing powerful actors to influence domestic policy and information flows under the pretext of technological assistance (Menon 2023).

Figure 2A. Submarine cable 2Africa



Figure 2B. Map of Equiano cable



Source: TeleGeography 2025

Data Exploitation

The dominance of foreign tech companies over Africa's digital infrastructure raises serious concerns about data sovereignty. These companies often store data in their home countries, making it subject to foreign laws and regulations. This limits the ability of African states to control and protect their national data. Such dependence on external data storage and processing is steadily eroding the continent's digital sovereignty and allowing African data to be harnessed in support of foreign economies - with little to no tangible benefit for local communities (Kwet 2019).

The *Cambridge Analytica* scandal, in which Facebook user data was harvested to build political profiles and target voters, clearly illustrates how personal data can be exploited for political and economic gain - often at the expense of both individuals and nations (Coleman 2019).

Digital Discrimination and Cultural Domination

The shift from cultural imperialism to digital imperialism highlights Africa's ongoing struggle to achieve independence in both the cultural and informational realms. Despite technological advancements, the continent remains primarily a consumer -not a

producer -of digital content. This dynamic entrenches informational dominance and perpetuates digital imperialism.

Western tech companies exert significant cultural influence, leading to the erosion of Africa's cultural and linguistic identity. Local languages and traditions are increasingly marginalized in favor of globally dominant-often Western-content (Menon 2023, 383). This cultural erosion reduces the visibility and representation of African voices in the digital space, contributing to digital discrimination against African users and undermining the continent's digital sovereignty and unique cultural character. (Atintande et al. 2020).

According to "postcolonial theory", colonialism is not limited to physical domination; it also encompasses control over discourse and knowledge production (Ilori 2024). Within this context, African internet users are often shaped as mere "digital consumers" rather than "digital citizens," guided toward consuming digital content and services without meaningful participation in their creation or governance. For example, Facebook's *Free Basics* program*, which offers free internet access, allows for the collection of vast amounts of metadata related to users and their online behavior. At the same time, users are exposed predominantly to Western-oriented content, reinforcing the dominance of a Western cultural model. Critics argue that such initiatives can contribute to a form of "digital colonialism" by controlling users' experiences and directing them toward specific content, thereby limiting the diversity of available digital options and entrenching cultural and informational dependency (Daceus and Bryant 2025)

Digital colonialism in African education also manifests through the dominance of Western tech giants such as Microsoft and Google. These companies exploit the needs of educational systems to expand their influence, providing devices and software and forming partnerships with educational institutions. This often results in the imposition of their platforms and programs on local curricula, potentially undermining local autonomy and the unique needs of African communities. As a result, the educational process is often steered to align with corporate interests rather than the actual priorities of African learners (Menon 2023, 383).

Exploitation of labor

Digital colonialism is also manifested in the extraction of cheap digital labor and raw materials necessary for global technology production. The Democratic Republic of Congo's cobalt mines supply over 70% of the world's cobalt, a key mineral for batteries used in digital devices (Gravett 2020). This reflects a continuity between colonial labor exploitation and contemporary digital capitalism.

Currently, 14 families in the Democratic Republic of Congo are suing companies such as Tesla, Apple, Alphabet, Dell, and Microsoft, accusing them of benefiting from child labor in the cobalt mining industry. The mining process itself often has a

* The "Free Basics" initiative, launched by Facebook, is part of the Internet.org project and aims to provide free access to a limited range of services and websites in developing countries, including several African nations. These services include information on news, health, jobs, and weather, as well as access to the Facebook platform itself.

detrimental impact on the health of workers and the surrounding environment (Kwet 2021).

Economic Dependence

Reliance on foreign technology creates economic dependence, as African countries become reliant on external companies to provide essential digital services and innovations. This dependency can hinder local entrepreneurship and innovation, making it difficult for local tech industries to grow and compete in the market. This leads to:

- **Data Migration:** African data is stored on servers owned by Western and Chinese companies, allowing them to economically exploit it without significant local returns.
- **Digital Extraction:** Just as African natural resources were exploited during the colonial era, today, data and artificial intelligence based on African user behavior patterns are being exploited.
- **Unequal Economy:** Most digital economy applications, such as Uber and Vodafone, exploit local labor while the parent companies retain massive profits outside the continent, as mentioned in the previous point (Kwet 2021).

The resulting economic dependency sustains what can be described as a "digital rentierism", where African economies provide data, labor, and resources, while profit accumulation remains concentrated in the Global North (Venske 2024).

The Impact of External Governance Models

Beyond economic dependence in Africa, digital colonialism also manifests through the transfer and diffusion of "foreign governance models" that reshape how states manage and regulate their digital spaces. The increasing reliance of African countries on "Western technologies and governance frameworks" has profound implications for their digital sovereignty and local specificities (Gravett 2020, 127).

Within this dynamic, both Western and Chinese models compete for normative influence: while Western regimes promote data protection standards that often privilege corporate interests, China's model of internet sovereignty -characterized by strict control and surveillance over digital infrastructures -is being actively exported to the African continent. This diffusion of external governance frameworks risks replacing Africa's emerging regulatory sovereignty with imported systems that prioritize control and surveillance over inclusivity, innovation, and context-specific governance (Salami 2024, 4).

The expanding presence of Chinese technology companies across Africa further underscores the urgency of safeguarding African regulatory autonomy, as the failure of local governments to assert their own interests and values may lead to the gradual adoption of external digital governance models that do not adequately reflect the continent's socio-cultural realities.

Ultimately, the risks of digital recolonization extend beyond technical dependence to include control over infrastructure, data exploitation, cultural dominance, and economic subordination. Strengthening Africa's digital sovereignty is therefore

imperative to mitigate these vulnerabilities and ensure a more independent, equitable, and sustainable digital future.

In sum, digital vulnerability in Africa is not merely a technological challenge but a structural condition rooted in historical inequalities. The manifestations of digital domination -ranging from infrastructural dependence to algorithmic bias -constitute an updated architecture of control. Recognizing and addressing these vulnerabilities is essential for building a sustainable and sovereign digital future (Kwet 2019).

Structural and Systemic Factors Reproducing Digital Colonialism in Africa

Digital colonialism in Africa is not the outcome of isolated technological dependencies; it is sustained by an interlocking set of structural and systemic conditions that perpetuate historical asymmetries in power and knowledge. These factors include technological dependency, fragmented regulatory systems, economic disparities, epistemic subordination, and geostrategic competition. Together, they reproduce the structural hierarchies that define Africa's place in the global digital order.

Technological Dependence

The continent continues to face a profound technological dependence rooted in its limited digital infrastructure. Studies indicate that Africa's technological development remains at an early stage compared with other regions, compelling most countries to heavily depend on foreign technologies, platforms, and expertise to build and maintain their digital networks. This reliance exposes African states to external influence and restricts their capacity to define an independent digital strategy. As Kwet (2019) notes, "the technology, equipment, and systems that connect African people and communities to their data, products, and services" are mainly controlled by Western corporations. Consequently, these external actors exercise disproportionate control over digital platforms and data flows, creating a fertile ground for manipulation, exploitation, and digital subjugation.

Regulatory Gaps

The absence of comprehensive and coordinated regulatory frameworks exacerbates this dependency. The lack of effective national and regional legislation enables foreign actors to exploit loopholes and shape local digital policies. As of 2024, only 36 of the 54 African countries have enacted data protection laws, and merely 26 of them operate independent regulatory agencies (Bouke et al. 2023, 6). The regulatory gap not only weakens data protection but also hinders the development of regional digital governance, leaving the continent dependent on imported legal norms such as the EU's GDPR (Salami 2024).

Moreover, the lack of coordination in digital policies among African nations weakens their ability to enforce digital sovereignty. For example, the African Union Cybersecurity and Personal Data Protection Agreement (AUDPC) faces implementation challenges due to the diversity of legal systems and the absence of comprehensive data protection laws in many member states. This lack of coordination

makes it difficult for African countries to present a united stance in global discussions on digital governance. (Bouke et al. 2023, 14)

Economic Disparities

Deep-rooted economic disparities and skill shortages reinforce Africa's structural vulnerability. Limited investment in digital education and innovation ecosystems reduces the continent's capacity to produce its own digital technologies and applications (Bouke et al. 2023). This deficit sustains a one-way flow of data, capital, and expertise from Africa to global centers of power, reproducing what Venske (2024) calls "digital rentierism"-a condition in which African economies provide raw data and labor while value and profit are extracted elsewhere.

Epistemic Dependency

These economic and regulatory dependencies intersect with epistemic asymmetries-the dominance of Western paradigms of knowledge, language, and digital governance. African digital systems are often designed and operated according to external cognitive frameworks that marginalize local knowledge systems and values (Menon 2023). This epistemic dependency ensures that Africa remains a consumer rather than a producer of digital innovation.

Geostrategic Competition and the 'Digital Scramble for Africa'

Beyond technological and economic dependency, Africa has become the focal point of a new geostrategic rivalry among global powers seeking to dominate the continent's digital future. This dynamic, often described as a "Digital Scramble for Africa", mirrors the colonial "Scramble for Africa" of the nineteenth century-yet it now unfolds in cyberspace rather than on territorial land (Gravett 2020).

The United States and the European Union promote liberal digital governance models focused on market openness and data protection, while China advances a state-centric and surveillance-based digital sovereignty model through its Digital Silk Road initiative. Both paradigms aim to integrate African states into their respective digital ecosystems, resulting in a form of strategic dependence rather than partnership (Salami 2024).

Through the construction of undersea cables, 5G networks, satellite systems, and cloud infrastructures, these external actors seek not only economic influence but also strategic control over data flows, cybersecurity standards, and digital norms. Africa's digital space has thus become an arena for soft power projection and geopolitical competition, where technological aid and connectivity projects often mask deeper agendas of surveillance, dependency, and influence-building (Kwet 2019).

This geostrategic contest reinforces the continent's digital vulnerability and limits its ability to pursue autonomous digital pathways. Unless African regional organizations consolidate a unified digital strategy, the continent risks being further fragmented into spheres of influence governed by foreign digital powers. The "Digital Scramble for Africa" therefore represents not merely an economic rivalry but a new

phase in the global reconfiguration of power-where control over data, infrastructure, and algorithms defines the contours of twenty-first-century sovereignty (Timcke 2024).

In sum, the reproduction of digital colonialism in Africa arises not from technological backwardness alone but from systemic interdependencies that bind the continent to external centers of power. Addressing these structural conditions requires a holistic approach that combines technological investment, regional legal harmonization, epistemic decolonization and geostrategic competition, in order to strengthen Africa's digital sovereignty and ensure its equitable participation in the global digital economy.

Towards Deconstructing Digital Colonialism: Strategies of Resistance

This section highlights key initiatives and measures undertaken by African countries to strengthen digital sovereignty and examines critical strategies that facilitate the achievement of this goal. As part of the broader movement toward digital sovereignty in Africa, a number of countries have recognized the importance of taking control of their digital future. Here are a few notable examples:

- **Nigeria: The Digital Economy Strategy:** Nigeria has made significant progress by launching a national digital economy strategy. This initiative aims to diversify the economy, by harnessing digital technologies, focusing on developing digital skills, boosting e-commerce, and creating a supportive regulatory environment (Timcke 2024, 4).
- **Kenya: The Huduma Digital Platform:** Kenya has established a new standard with its “Huduma” platform, which helps reduce bureaucratic barriers, increases the efficiency of public services, and gives citizens easier access to government services (Kwet 2019, 4).
- **South Africa: Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA):** South Africa adopted the POPIA law to protect citizens' privacy and ensure that personal data is handled securely and responsibly (Folorunso et al. 2024, 129).
- **Rwanda: Promoting Innovation and Technology:** Rwanda has shown strong commitment to building a digital future by launching projects like the Kigali Innovation City and the Rwanda Coding Academy. These initiatives are helping create a skilled tech workforce and driving the growth of the digital economy (Salami 2024, 5).
- **The African Union:** The African Union has launched its Digital Transformation Strategy (2020-2030), aiming to connect governments, businesses, and individuals across the continent by 2030. The strategy emphasizes the need for high-level political commitment, coordinated policies, increased investment, and proper resource allocation. It also highlights the importance of harmonizing legal and regulatory frameworks to build a unified digital market. The African Union Convention on Cybersecurity and Personal Data Protection (AUDPC) (Bouke et al. 2023, 13) is one step in that direction. Additionally, the strategy promotes the digital economy in alignment with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) (Venske 2024).

These African initiatives reflect a growing effort to transform the digital future of the continent. However, despite these promising steps, many African countries still lack the necessary digital policies. Even where strategies do exist, they are often poorly implemented or insufficient to achieve true digital sovereignty. As a result, the threat of digital colonialism remains a real challenge. This calls for resistance strategies that tackle the issue from multiple dimensions, which will be explored in the next section.

Resistance Strategies and Digital Liberation

Drawing on postcolonial theory, this section moves beyond merely identifying the challenges of digital colonization to propose meaningful, context-specific strategies for resistance. Here are some of the key strategies that African countries can adopt to resist digital neocolonialism:

- **Protecting Digital Sovereignty :** African countries must protect their digital sovereignty to prevent unjustified foreign influence. This includes enacting policies and regulations that protect sensitive data, ensure that digital infrastructure projects align with national interests, and promote data localization. (Bouke et al. 2023, 13) To achieve this, it's crucial to harmonize data governance frameworks at both the regional and continental levels to promote cooperation and consistency. For example, data protection laws in Nigeria and South Africa serve as strong models of how countries can protect their digital sovereignty, by enforcing strict data privacy rules and requiring companies to store data locally (Dahiya 2023).
- **Promoting Local Technology and Innovation:** Fostering homegrown innovation is essential for achieving African digital independence. As mentioned earlier, heavy reliance on foreign technology can limit local creativity and entrepreneurship. (Fritzsche and Spoiala 2022) To overcome this, African countries should prioritize the development of local tech innovation and support African startups. A good example is Rwanda's "Made in Rwanda" initiative, which involves active government support for the local production of tech products, such as smartphones. This effort reduces dependence on foreign imports, strengthens technological self-sufficiency, and boosts exports (Salami 2024).
- **Bridging the Digital Divide:** To address the digital divide that excessively affects marginalized communities, African governments should increase internet access and promote digital literacy across the continent. This is not only an economic necessity but also a critical step toward social justice (Salami 2024). For instance, Kenya's National Broadband Strategy intends to provide reasonably priced internet access to underprivileged areas, thereby narrowing the digital gap and fostering digital inclusion. Ultimately, bridging this divide is vital to ensuring that digital inclusion becomes a genuine driver of social inclusion and equitable development (Dahiya 2023).
- **Strengthening Local Digital Infrastructure:** Investing in local digital infrastructure-such as data centers, undersea internet cables, and telecommunications networks-is critical for reducing reliance on foreign-owned services. Additionally, partnerships with external partners should be transparent,

fair, and aligned with national interests (Atintande et al. 2020). The decision Ethiopia to liberalize its telecom sector, while maintaining a significant stake in Ethio Telecom, is an adequate strategic. It attracts foreign investment while keeping national interests at the forefront and improving domestic infrastructure. (Salami 2024).

- **Advancing Education and Knowledge Empowerment:** For long-term digital resilience, African countries must invest in education and scientific research. This includes developing school curricula focused on fostering digital competencies, providing support to research institutions, and promoting a culture of innovation and problem-solving skills.

Ultimately, digital resistance in Africa is not merely about policy reform but about reclaiming agency in knowledge production, data governance, and technological design - the core domains through which digital colonialism reproduces itself (Menon 2023).

Furthermore, many scholars argue that liberation from digital hegemony does not entail rejecting technology but rather reclaiming and re-appropriating it epistemically and culturally. In this sense, digital liberation is not achieved through isolation from global technologies but through their contextualization within African knowledge systems and cultural frameworks. This approach transforms resistance into a creative process of technological ownership and self-definition, aligning digital innovation with local values and social realities. (Birhane 2023, 248-249; Choi 2026)

Taken together, these strategies demonstrate that Africa's digital future hinges on reclaiming both technological and epistemic autonomy. In this context, digital sovereignty depends not only on infrastructural investment but also on decolonizing the very frameworks through which technology and knowledge are produced. If strengthened by coherent regional governance and grounded in local epistemologies, the continent's ongoing initiatives can transform digital resistance into a long-term architecture of empowerment and self-determination (Botha, Kornprobst and Wielenga 2026).

Conclusion and discussion

An analysis of digital colonialism in Africa through a postcolonial lens reveals that technology is far from neutral; it has become a powerful instrument for reproducing economic, cultural, and political domination over the continent. Africa now stands at a decisive juncture. While foreign investments in digital infrastructure and transformation are essential for modernization, they simultaneously pose profound risks- manifesting through infrastructural exploitation, data extraction, limited oversight over information flows, surveillance, and other forms of digital control.

These challenges are exacerbated by structural vulnerabilities such as weak local infrastructures, fragmented or absent legal frameworks, a widening digital divide, and pervasive digital illiteracy. All of these conditions entrench external domination and reinforce technological dependency. Hence, deconstructing digital colonialism requires intentional, context-specific strategies aimed at strengthening digital sovereignty and fostering technological self-determination-ensuring that Africa can define and govern its digital destiny according to its own values and priorities.

Confronting digital colonialism effectively demands a renewed focus on national autonomy and data sovereignty while nurturing local technological ecosystems. This involves promoting innovation within the continent, enhancing digital literacy, empowering communities, and enacting robust data protection laws. In addition, stronger collaboration between African governments and indigenous tech enterprises is vital to developing infrastructure aligned with the continent's genuine needs.

Encouraging the adoption of open-source technologies and fostering intra-African cooperation can further reduce reliance on dominant global tech firms. Importantly, digital liberation does not imply rejecting technology, but rather reclaiming and re-appropriating it epistemically and culturally -transforming it into a vehicle for empowerment instead of dependency.

Ultimately, Africa's digital future must rest upon indigenous foundations that prioritize sovereignty, inclusion, and self-determination. Only through such an approach can the continent pursue a path toward equitable and sustainable development -one that liberates it from the structural constraints of Western technocapitalism and affirms its rightful agency in shaping the digital age.

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Ethics Statement

The authors affirm that this research was conducted in accordance with the Journal's Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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