

A connected digital society is critical for Africa to thrive

 By [Lee Naik](#)

10 Mar 2017

Technology developments have had a profound effect on emerging economies in Africa. The widespread adoption of mobile phones in particular has seen a proliferation of new and innovative ways for businesses to reach and engage their customers, and for governments to provide services to their citizens.



In other parts of the world, we talk about technology with reference to disruption – the disruption of communication methods, business models, even entire industries. Given the dramatic changes we’re seeing closer to home, it’s perhaps more accurate to frame the conversation in terms of transformation.

Technology has allowed us to leapfrog some of the challenges we have in places where limited infrastructure has, in the past, prevented a vast number of people from having access to economic opportunities.

Today, the extensive use of mobile phones that can connect to the internet has fundamentally changed everything we do, from making social connections to transacting on channels that weren’t even available a few years ago. Government services are available online and there’s greater transparency on the status of service delivery. People can buy airtime and electricity, transfer money and shop online from their mobile phones. Entrepreneurs are finding ways to reach and engage with prospects; businesses are constantly developing and refining applications to make it even easier for more people to buy their products and use their services.

This seismic shift in communication has changed the way the people engage with businesses, brands and government. Now, we not only have access to products and services, we also have a powerful say in how these are delivered. This is the age of dynamic customer expectations, where customers, not governments or businesses, define their experience. They expect service delivery to be consistent across all channels. They are not afraid to let you know what they think and are equally prepared to move to other businesses if their needs are not met. Businesses and governments need to be constantly aware of and responsive to these needs. More than that, they need to genuinely place the customer at the heart of every business and government strategy.

To remain relevant in an economy that's increasingly digital, it's not enough to simply do the same thing that much better, cheaper or faster. Government and business leaders need to be aware of the ever-changing technology landscape and how this affects customer expectations. They need to be flexible enough to adapt their strategies and transform their operations so they can respond to changing customer needs and new methods of consumption.

In my presentation at the upcoming [IAB Digital Summit](#), I will focus on the key trends that we see driving this transformation in Africa. Increased connectivity and digital innovation across the continent will have significant implications for organisations seeking to explore technologies such as the Internet of Things and artificial intelligence, and develop so-called phygital business strategies (a combination of physical consumer activities, such as visiting branches or stores, with digital activities such as online shopping) to deliver new customer experiences.

Africa is entering a time of rapid, empowered digital transformation. As consumers, better access to information and improved service delivery will give us the resources we need to live better lives. We will have a more participatory economy in which the unemployed find new job opportunities through microtasks and crowd sourced jobs, and entrepreneurs find new platforms to take their amazing ideas to commercialisation and challenge established businesses. As citizens, we will have access to education in new and diverse ways, allowing our future leaders to obtain the information they need to flourish.

A connected digital society in Africa presents massive opportunities for positive transformation. It is vital that we have the knowledge and ability to take advantage of these opportunities as we enter the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

ABOUT LEE NAIK

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