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Data Colonialism: The Ubuntu Philosophy as an African Regulation of Digital Data and Infrastructure

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Abstract: Africa's digital transformation process currently operates under data colonialism because international powers extract user behavior data while they maintain control over essential internet facilities, which include submarine cables and data centers. The study demonstrates how Western regulatory systems, which support individual rights and require individual consent, fail to work with African community-based social systems, while they disregard social damage which occurs between relationships. The study investigates Ubuntu philosophy, which serves as a strong African-based system for governing digital data and infrastructure. The research uses doctrinal methodology based on the PRISMA framework to examine legal resources from different fields and philosophical literature. Ubuntu provides a transformative framework which enables "relational accountability" and "communal flourishing" by transforming data into a shared public resource that exists outside of commercial value. The study concludes that digital sovereignty belongs to African institutions, which must establish digital control through the integration of traditional values into their technical and policy frameworks. The establishment of Community Ethics Review Councils will help ensure that digital infrastructures meet common welfare needs while protecting people's control over their own lives.

Keywords: Data Colonialism, Ubuntu, Philosophy, Digital Data, Africa

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1. INTRODUCTION

The invisible digital infrastructure of modern nations establishes the fundamental operational rhythms which control 21st century power relationships by replacing conventional oil and steel resources with digital algorithms and artificial intelligence systems[1]. The African continent relies on infrastructure which combines submarine cables with satellite networks and data centers to establish its basic internet connectivity system, while users generate extensive amounts of behavioral data[2]. The existing systems create a situation of total dependance

[1] Dolapo Faith Sule, "Towards Responsible Artificial Intelligence Adoption: *Emerging and Existing Ethical Issues in Africa*," Sci 8, no. 3 (2026): 60.

[2] Patrick Mwania, "Educating for Agency: African Philosophies of Personhood and the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence in Education," *African Journal of Advanced Arts and Humanities* 3, no. 1 (2025).

because all components of the system belong to companies which operate from the Global North. The foreign control of internet traffic between African nations creates neocolonial pathways which enable external parties to monitor data and extract information from African networks[3]. The process of algorithmic colonization converts African people into data sources, which enables foreign companies to use their personal information as a product without making any investment in the local economy. The digital revolution brings the danger to repeat past exploitation patterns which extract resources from Africa while establishing a new form of technological dependency for the continent[4].

The Ubuntu philosophy expresses its fundamental belief through the saying "Umuntungumuntungabantu" which states that a person becomes a person through their relationships with other people. The framework establishes personhood as a moral and social accomplishment that people achieve through their community ties. Ubuntu defines digital data in a way that shows information cannot exist as a neutral transactional value, which people control through their own permission. Data functions as a moral extension which connects to both the individual and their surrounding social environment. Ubuntu shifts its ethical basis from individual rights to social responsibility, which helps to combat the dehumanizing effects of data capitalism[5]. The digital system requires evaluation of its moral authority based on its ability to promote social peace while safeguarding at-risk individuals and sustaining community welfare. Ubuntu establishes itself as a strong opposing force against the prevailing neoliberal frameworks which North American nations use by reclaiming digital territory as a place for people to connect and grow together[6].

Ubuntu requires African countries to treat digital data infrastructure as a shared resource which people must operate for the benefit of their entire community. The regulatory framework requires organizations to show their algorithms through transparent systems which establish social responsibility standards[7]. Organizations need to choose technologies which establish connections between people while creating mutual understanding because these technologies help people learn about each other. African nations can achieve their human development goals through educational systems by using 4IR tools which incorporate this philosophy into their design and execution[8]. The framework establishes a "pedagogy of solidarity" which defends community unity against the disruptions caused by data-based ranking systems. An Ubuntu framework enables communities to achieve restorative justice for algorithmic damages through organized discussions which bring together developers and affected communities to establish ethical balance[9]. Ubuntu provides a philosophical foundation for digital sovereignty because it states that technology should support human connections while society exercises moral control over technological systems instead of corporations.

Regulatory activities across Africa today show a dual pattern of official governmental work and existing street-level unrest because the African Union Data Policy Framework from

[3] Edward Musole, "Embedding Ubuntu and Indigenous Business Insights in Zambia: Advancing a Neuro-Responsible Governance Framework for the Global South," *International Journal of Advanced Business Studies* 5, no. 1 (2026): 62–78.

[4] M. Iqbal, Permata Sari Ajeng, Fernandho, Pamuji, and Paul Atagamen Aidonojie, "Maqashid Sharia Approaches in Pension Fund Programs: Bank Muamalat Indonesia and Taspen Comparison," *Asy-Syari'ah* 27, no. 2 (2025): 211–36.

[5] Sharifah Sekalala and Tatenda Chatikobo, "Digital Health for Shared Value: A Critique of Legal Infrastructures in a Post-Colonial Context," *International Journal of Law in Context* (2026): 1–14.

[6] Sharifah Sekalala and Tatenda Chatikobo, "Colonialism in the New Digital Health Agenda," *BMJ Global Health* 9, no. 2 (2024).

[7] Ibid

[8] Ibid

[9] Mukhlis Mukhlis, Raphael D. Jackson-Ortiz, Muwaffiq Jufri, Evis Garunja, and Paul Atagamen Aidonojie, "Rejection of Former Shia Community in Sampang Perspective on Human Rights Law: Discourse of Religious Rights and Freedom in Indonesia," *Lex Scientia Law Review* 7, no. 2 (2023): 959–94.

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2022 and Malabo Convention both fail to establish unified standards for their implementation[10]. The main issue exists because these policy instruments depend on "ontological foreignness" which causes them to choose Eurocentric legal systems that prioritize individual property rights and procedural compliance above communal values. The system shows "structural tokenism" because it uses Ubuntu as a symbolic element while applying foreign General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) regulations without understanding the unique ethical challenges found in African settings.The creation of algorithmic systems that control governance in African countries leads to a situation where citizens experience both powerlessness and lack of control because they do not comprehend the systems which they did not contribute to developing[11]. The lack of a complete local moral framework causes these "modernizing" regulations to operate as a digital neo-colonialism mechanism which grants outside organizations control over systems that do not match the actual experiences of the people who are governed[12]. The current situation needs a complete return to political processes in order to assess ethical issues through the lens of legal and policy decisions which should reflect shared community values instead of solely measuring operational effectiveness.

The study aims to investigate how Ubuntu African philosophy functions as the primary basis for developing digital data and infrastructure regulations that meet African needs and requirements. The study aims to understand how Africans today use technology based on their historical experience with foreign-controlled systems and exclusion from knowledge. The study identifies Ubuntu as a system of ethical principles which includes relational personhood and collective responsibility to demonstrate its differences from mainstream global systems that value individual autonomy above all. The study investigates methods to apply these principles through the development of policy tools which include "Community Ethics Review Councils" and Afrocentric data protection systems. The research proposes a "Double Enlightenment" framework which combines African progressive knowledge with international scientific advancements to achieve knowledge liberation. The project aims to develop universities and regulatory bodies into active creators of their own digital pathways instead of remaining as digital consumers.

2. METHOD

The research adopts a doctrinal study method and adopt an analytical analysis to assess the value-based structure of digital infrastructure. The researchers conducted systematic source identification through the PRISMA Guide, which required them to search five primary databases including JSTOR and Scopus and Web of Science and ERIC and Google Scholar to find literature published between 1990 and 2026. The primary doctrinal material consists of continental policy instruments that include the African Union Continental Strategy for AI and the Malabo Convention whereas secondary materials comprise peer-reviewed articles and scholarly monographs that examine Ubuntu and digital colonialism and algorithmic ethics. The research team established an extensive inclusion and exclusion procedure which assessed the relevance and conceptual understanding and policy importance of African studies materials.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. African Digital and Infrastructure Colonialism

The digital systems which African nations currently use show how their present-day systems which began during colonial times have changed from their previous industrial methods which relied on resource extraction to their current digital systems which use technology for

[10] Elolo Emmanuel Agbenonwossi, "Decolonizing Artificial Intelligence Ethics: Ubuntu as a Philosophical Paradigm for AI Governance in Africa" (University of Malta, 2026).
[11] Ibid
[12] Muwaffiq Jufri, Paul Atagamen Aidonojie, Erma Rusdiana, Godswill Owoche, and Eregbuonye Obieshi Antai, "The Legal Issues Concerning Nigerian's Student Education Loan Act: A Lesson from Uganda Perspective," *Jurnal Hukum Novelty* 16, no. 1 (2025): 101–16.

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operational control[13]. The theoretical framework of data colonialism explains how Global South countries experience resource extraction which permits foreign powers to obtain their private and public data without proper payment. Digital systems for "algorithmic colonization" spread control over human thought and understanding by using code and data movement to create new systems of digital imperialism which operate without military force[14]. The existing system functions as a value-based system because it transmits the designer's values through its functions, which create difficulties for African users who must adopt European-centric work methods. Digital democratization fails because Global North corporations control digital systems which result in new forms of knowledge and technology oppression.

1The African internet infrastructure demonstrates its complete dependency on physical systems through its actual operational conditions which show various specifications and measurements[15]. A UNCTAD report which has gained international recognition shows that 80% of internet traffic within Africa between different countries travels through European servers which causes both high delivery costs and security vulnerabilities that enable unauthorized access to data. The continent contains the most rapidly developing digital population, yet Africa has only 1% of global computing power which exists mainly in South Africa. African countries need international cloud platforms and submarine cable systems because their limited resources force them to rely on the private assets which technology companies like Google and Meta transform from public infrastructure[16]. The present structural inequality enables foreign control over digital economy infrastructure which functions as the main support system for the economy similar to how colonial railways operated to transport resources out of the country. African digital sovereignty stays at an artificial level because the continent lacks control over essential infrastructure components.

The primary theoretical basis of data colonialism exists through epistemic injustice because AI system training data fails to include African realities. People experience a knowledge gap because GPT-4 achieves only 10-20% accuracy for major African languages which includes Hausa according to its global performance recognition. Foreign systems establish "epistemicide" through their implementation of frameworks which completely erase indigenous knowledge systems[17]. Voice recognition technology fails to understand various African accents while facial recognition systems show increased errors when identifying individuals with darker skin. The knowledge hierarchy establishes Africans as technology users who lack power to influence the development of products based on their own assumptions[18]. The research community recommends cognitive justice which requires all cultural systems to gain validation and African professionals to evolve from digital users into ethical creators of their own online standards.

The economic unfairness which digital colonialism creates results in ongoing capital drains from the continent. The Global South users produce extensive behavioral surplus yet foreign entities generate revenue from it without contributing to local communities[19]. Silicon Valley shareholders benefit from digital advertising revenues which flow through markets in Lagos and Nairobi and Jakarta while local businesses fail to obtain their proper share through taxation. The "core-periphery" system forces Africa to operate as a supplier of unprocessed

[13] Thomas Anning-Dorson, "Digital Platform Sovereignty through Ubuntu: Re-Imagining AI-Enabled Work Future in Africa," *Electronic Markets* 36, no. 1 (2026): article 2.
[14] Marcus Vinicius de Freitas, "Digital Sovereignty and Data Colonialism: Shaping a Just Digital Order for the Global South," Research Papers & Policy Papers on Economic Trends and Policies (2025).
[15] Ibid
[16] Ibid
[17] Muwaffiq Jufri, Agung Ali Fahmi, Paul Atagamen Aidonojie, Lin Asyiqoh, and Oluwaseye Oluwayomi Ikubanni, "Standardisation of the Legislation as a Follow-Up to the Constitutional Court's Decision on Judicial Review of Omnibus Law," *Jurnal Konstitusi* 21, no. 3 (2024): 366–91.
[18] Nazira Hoosen et al., "Decolonising AI: A Pan-African Collaboration," *African Perspectives of Research in Teaching and Learning* 9, no. 5 (2025): 504–18.
[19] Emmanuel Ilo, "Technology and Moral Responsibility: An African Critique of Algorithmic Ethics," Sober Search: *A Journal of Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2025): 42–55.

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behavioral information while it depends on costly complete digital solutions[20]. This system enables surveillance capitalism to thrive because it allows corporations to transform all aspects of human life into marketable products. African countries have tried to fight this problem by implementing digital service taxes however their unregulated environment allows multinational companies to use "regulatory arbitrage" against them[21]. The shift from profit-centric operations to community-centered development becomes essential for organizations that want to create responsible AI systems which follow Ubuntu philosophy principles.

The "Triadic Model of Sovereignty" displays the path towards reclaiming independence through its three fundamental elements which display their complete dependency on each other[22]. The model establishes its ethical foundation through Moral Sovereignty which derives its principles from Ubuntu while Epistemic Sovereignty enables intellectual independence through locally developed curricula and theories and Infrastructural Sovereignty delivers operational capacity through African-owned data centers and fiber.The "Ubuntu Ethics Ripple" presents a visual representation of how ethical evaluation should shift from focusing on the "Individual" which serves as the Western standard model to assessing the "Immediate Community"[23]. The digital sovereignty concept represents a solution that enables African nations to maintain their independence while building international relationships through "strategic autonomy". The success of Kenya's M-Pesa and the Masakhane NLP collective proves that developing innovations based on local contexts leads to effective solutions[24]. A "Digital Bandung" will create international standards which safeguard digital justice rights by enabling the Global South to become digital co-authors instead of remaining digital consumers.

3.2. Legal Framework

The Ubuntu philosophy establishes an ethical base which African digital data and infrastructure regulations use to express their belief that "a person is a person through other persons." The Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy establishes Ubuntu as a value which prioritizes community values above personal rights. The philosophical foundation leads to a "people-centered" digital transformation method which guarantees technology will benefit both collective prosperity and cultural renewal throughout the continent. The African Union (AU) establishes a digital development framework which creates accessible technology that serves all people instead of Western systems that focus on protecting individual privacy rights[25]. The solution requires the African spirit of enterprise to be used for developing local solutions which will solve problems in healthcare and food security. The main obstacle to establishing legal regulations from this communal value system remains yet to be solved. The strategy wants to create a society which understands both benefits and dangers while current regulations fail to meet ethical standards and technical needs of international data markets. The Ubuntu method requires organizations to handle data as public resources which people can share without competition thus creating a social agreement which will distribute digital resources among all social classes[26].

The African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo Convention) serves as the primary legal framework for this vision. Every State Party must create laws to safeguard physical data while imposing penalties for any privacy rights

[20] Ibid
[21] Ibid
[22] Jan Hendrik Kroeze, "Digital Coloniality: An Ubuntu Perspective," *Scandinavian Journal of Information Systems* 36, no. 2 (2024): 6.
[23] Gede Edi et al., "The Future of Bali's Kerauhan Tradition," 125.
[24] Praditha Dewa Gede Edi, Rahayu Mella Ismelia Farma, I Ketut Sukewati Lanang Putra Perbawa, Paul Atagamen Aidonojie, and Adelowo Stephen Asonibare, "The Future of Bali's Kerauhan Tradition: Legal Pluralism, Reforms, and Conflict Adjudication Challenges," *Journal of Sustainable Development and Regulatory Issues* 4, no. 1 (2026): 118–37.
[25] Ibid
[26] Mario Mariniello, "Colonialism 4.0 and Coloniality 4.0," *AI & Society* (2025): 1–15.

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breaches according to Article 8. The Convention requires each country to establish independent National Data Protection Authorities which will oversee data processing activities according to Article 11. The analysis shows a major failure because the Convention which was adopted in 2014 only became operational in June 2023. The ten-year delay created a legal void which enabled different countries to establish their own national laws which they enforced through different methods. Many member states cannot meet their operational requirements because they lack the necessary resources which Article 11.8 requires for "human, technical and financial resources"[27]. The Convention relies on "amicable settlement" as its main method for resolving state disputes which it conducts through Article 34 but this approach fails to handle major international data breach incidents. The Convention needs universal ratification plus strong enforcement mechanisms to achieve its communal protections which currently exist as unrealistic goals that leave African citizens exposed to "datafication" processes which track and monetize their daily activities without proper protection measures.

The African digital regulation system suffers from its fundamental error because it maintains an institutional framework which violates the Ubuntu principle that everyone should have equal access. Over 300 million people in Africa live beyond 50 kilometers from any fiber or cable broadband connection which excludes them from participating in the data economy. The Digital Transformation Strategy (DTS) identifies "weak coordination" between continental institutions as the main project obstacle that will bring about project failure. The Ubuntu philosophy promotes group development but high internet access costs create a widening divide between people who have internet access and people who do not[28]. Digital terrestrial broadcasting migration has become a failed project because only 16 member states completed their migrations by the latest required deadlines which now prevents the distribution of "digital dividend" spectrum that would improve mobile broadband service. The infrastructure shortfall creates "data deserts" which exclude millions from the datasets that train AI and guide policy decisions thereby rendering them "invisible" to the digital state[29]. The AU advises member states to establish "meaningful connectivity" and affordable internet as essential requirements for successful domestic data policy implementation which will enable marginalized groups to join the digital social contract.

The AU Data Policy Framework presents "Data Justice" which serves as a method to implement Ubuntu in the management of digital systems. Data justice seeks to ensure that the increasing reliance on automated decision-making does not perpetuate "historical injustices and structural inequalities". The system investigates fairness through its evaluation of how individuals appear in digital datasets and how they face discriminatory treatment[30]. An analysis through critical assessment shows that most African data protection systems base their regulations on personal privacy rights which fails to address public harm. For example, approximately 542 million people in Africa lack a foundational identification, meaning they cannot assert their rights or access digital services. The absence of legal identity prevents people from attaining the Ubuntu-driven objective of "legal identity for all," which serves as a fundamental requirement for gender equality and financial inclusion. The framework established that data ecosystem trust needs technical security measures together with public acceptance which should be obtained through shared decision-making and protection of second-generation social and economic rights[31]. The implementation of "top-down" policies by

[27] Hoosen et al., "Decolonising AI," 510.
[28] Beatrice Okyere-Manu, "The Place of the African Relational and Moral Theory of Ubuntu in the Global Artificial Intelligence and Big Data Discussion: Critical Reflections," in Elgar Companion to Regulating AI and Big Data in Emerging Economies (2023), 99–114.
[29] Ilo, "Technology and Moral Responsibility," 47.
[30] Mariniello, "Colonialism 4.0 and Coloniality 4.0," 8.
[31] Budiyanto Budiyanto, Ahmad Masum, Paul Atagamen Aidonojie, and Jamal Aslan, "Problems of Legal Implementation of the Criminal Offense of Spreading Fake News and Hate Speech in Papua," *Law Reform* 20, no. 2 (2024): 278–300.

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governments results in program failures because they need complete public participation, which creates "data protectionism" that obstructs authentic community-based data management activities.

The Data Sovereignty and Localization issue creates a conflict between national authority and the Ubuntu belief that regional solidarity should prevail. The doctrine of data sovereignty asserts that states must control their domestic data because they need this power to protect national security and maintain information accuracy[32]. The African Union advises its member states to use a Local First approach for solving their African problems with solutions developed by African countries. The requirement that all data must remain in national territory for data localization creates two opposing effects. The African nations try to stop foreign actors from conducting "unfair exploitation" but their technological abilities because of their location requirements exceed their existing data center resources. Startups in the local area face financial burden because they need to create multiple data copies which stops their ability to develop new products[33]. The establishment of artificial barriers through these localization regulations disrupts the essential data movement between African countries that supports the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The AU promotes Ubuntu through its request for politically neutral partnerships and its establishment of a cross-border data flow system which unifies the continent into one digital market instead of 55 separate digital markets.

The Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy integrates Ubuntu by its requirement for ethical AI development which protects communal cultural traditions. The study requires African-led research to examine how artificial intelligence affects native African traditions and employment in their markets. The sources showed a critical weakness which proved the AI divide because the continent did not have sufficient high-quality and diverse datasets. Artificial intelligence systems today create greater bias problems because their training data comes from developed nations which do not match African situations. The strategy requires organizations to use Ethics by Design because African languages and indigenous knowledge systems must become part of all AI model development[34]. The African continent produces only 1.1 percent of worldwide scientific knowledge while it controls 0.1 percent of global patent rights. The lack of research and development R&D prevents African countries from using AI applications because they do not meet their needs and they risk damaging cultural heritage. The strategy suggests that AU Member States should designate artificial intelligence as national priority and dedicate 1 percent of their GDP to research and development in order to position their continent as an originator of artificial intelligence technology instead of an AI consumer.

The AU vision of an "integrated digital society" faces major challenges because of existing regulatory fragmentation. Digitalization together with "datafication" creates challenges which most African nations cannot handle because they lack unified policies. The sources demonstrate that regional and continental actors exhibit "low cohesion, cooperation, coordination and harmonization" between themselves. The digital services taxes which African countries implemented through their recent digital services taxes have resulted in "slower digital access and inclusion" because the taxes made consumers pay higher prices which goes against the Ubuntu principle of universal access. The taxes create negative effects for supply-side operations because they restrict necessary funding which businesses need to develop infrastructure in areas with limited resources. African countries face an "incongruence" which exists between the sites where global platforms make their profits and the locations which they designate for tax obligations because they do not possess the "required nexus" to impose taxes on global digital giants. The AU Data Policy Framework requires a transversal digital policy

[32] Yamikani Ndasauka, African Mind, Culture, and Technology: Philosophical Perspectives (Springer Nature, 2024).
[33] Adekemi Omotubora and Subhajit Basu, "Decoding and Reimagining AI Governance beyond Colonial Shadows," in Handbook on Public Policy and Artificial Intelligence (2024), 220–34.
[34] Ibid

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which will connect competition and trade together with taxation regulations[35]. The absence of this system will permit "winner-takes-all" results to continue dominating international data markets which will restrict the ability of African domestic data systems to compete.

The legal framework will succeed only when the AfCFTA and Digital Single Market operations work effectively. Standardized rules on cross-border data flows are a "prerequisite" for realizing the benefits of greater economic cooperation. The legal system requires "rebalancing" because existing intellectual property protections obstruct data sharing and control of personal data by individuals. African nations have followed the pattern of "standard takers" instead of creating their own standards at international governance meetings. The AU supports an international negotiation approach which unites African countries to protect their sovereignty and secure fair access to the digital economy[36]. The Ubuntu philosophy demands a shift from "negative compliance regulation" to "positive enabling regulation" that redresses inequities. The strategy aims to achieve 99.9% digital legal identity for all Africans by 2030 while all member states will implement complete legislation for e-transactions and consumer protection. The African Union must create "locally developed digital solutions" from existing strategies to achieve their goal of having a "prosperous and integrated Africa".

Notably, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a 15-member regional organization created on 28 May, 1975 seeks to promote economic integration, peace, and security in West Africa. The integrated economic activities envisioned border on industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary, and financial among others.[37] On 6 February, 2010, ECOWAS adopted the Supplementary Act A/SA.1/01/10 on Personal Data Protection within ECOWAS. The law was West Africa's legally binding framework for personal data protection until 2026 when it was revised to capture digital advancements of recent times. The Revised Supplementary Act was adopted on 19 July, 2026 in Lungi, Sierra Leone. Data portability, regional network of data protection authorities, broader right of erasure and 72-hour personal data breach notification requirement are some of the key issues addressed in the new law. Member states are required to establish domestic data protection legal and institutional frameworks.

ECOWAS was set up to foster the ideal of collective self-sufficiency for its member states,[38] a goal reminiscent of the Ubuntu Philosophy. Though not expressly mentioned as a guiding principle in ECOWAS' old and new data protection laws, Ubuntu's emphasis on human dignity, interdependence, communal responsibility, and solidarity amongst Africans, can enhance people-centered regulation of data. Although, data protection laws (like that of ECOWAS) generally canvass for individual data-subject rights, its execution can be complemented by the Ubuntu philosophy. An Ubuntu-based approach would aid protect individual data rights as way to prevent collective harm. With data colonialism thriving in African countries,[39] a concerted effort at redressing this issue would go a long way in mitigating data colonialism in Africa.

3.3. The Ubuntu Philosophy in Control and Regulation of African Digital Infrastructure and Data

The Ubuntu philosophy demonstrates complete opposition to Western individualistic systems which govern digital infrastructure through its principle that "Umuntungumuntungabantu" (a person is a person through other persons). According to

[35] Urbano Reviglio and Rogers Alunge, "'I Am Datafied Because We Are Datafied': An Ubuntu Perspective on (Relational) Privacy," *Philosophy & Technology* 33, no. 4 (2020): 595–612.

[36] Muhammad Sadi Adamu, "No More 'Solutionism' or 'Saviourism' in Futuring African HCI: A Manyfesto," *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction* 30, no. 2 (2023): 1–42.

[37] ECOWAS, "Basic Information" ECOWAS, October 8 2026, https://www.ecowas.int/basic-information/ .

[38] Ibid.

[39] Michael Clemens, *"Data sovereignty and Data Colonialism):Shaping a Just Digital Order for the South "*Policy Paper (Rabat: Policy Center for the New South, 2025), 1-20.

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current data colonialism practices, African users become nothing more than data subjects whose organizations exploit their behavioral patterns to create valuable resources. The Ubuntu framework asserts that digital data serves as a moral representation of both personal identity and community connections which people use to govern their digital information. The African digital space system requires regulations which support community development while maintaining public peace instead of focusing on operational efficiency or revenue growth. The Ubuntu system uses collective values to show how data capitalism from neoliberalism treats African people as mere data points which Western algorithms need for development purposes. The continent's existing digital infrastructure brings about digital dependency through its equipment distribution which creates unequal access to digital resources. The African continent relies on European servers to handle approximately 80% of its online traffic which leads to increased network delays and operational expenses while exposing African users to foreign monitoring risks. African countries demonstrate structural dependence on international cloud providers and data centers because they can only access 1 percent of global computing power which exists in their region despite having vast user populations[40]. Technological self-determination according to Ubuntu philosophy requires communities to possess and manage their digital systems because this control protects their data from external access.

The digital economy faces both epistemic injustice and linguistic discrimination which Ubuntu-based regulations aim to address[41]. AI training data currently includes only a small fraction of the more than 2000 indigenous languages spoken in Africa. Advanced language models such as GPT-4 demonstrate only 10-20 percent accuracy for major African languages including Hausa which results in exclusion of millions from online public spaces. Ubuntu requires culturally appropriate design because it needs to incorporate native languages and traditional African knowledge systems into the core structure of algorithms. Digital tools must function as African heritage preservation systems which protect the diverse African cultural identity and world view of African communities[42]. The economic dimension of data colonialism remains a stark reality because African digital activity generates wealth that mainly benefits shareholders located in the Global North. The African workforce depends on informal economies for 81 percent of its jobs because digital platforms fail to create employment solutions that meet local needs which results in systems that support resource extraction. The Ubuntu philosophy promotes reciprocity and shared prosperity, suggesting that those who share data should receive fair value from their contributions[43]. The African countries need to establish collective data sovereignty because their data rights should move beyond individual rights in order to achieve unified negotiation power against global technology companies that will determine equitable local business development standards.

The legal framework of African countries is undergoing a transformation because their existing regulations are starting to embrace communal principles. As of mid-2024, 38 out of 55 African Union (AU) member states have enacted formal data protection regulations. The 2024 AU Continental Strategy for AI explicitly aligns with Ubuntu principles, which serve as its main principles through their commitment to inclusion and sustainability and data ownership rights[44]. The strategy establishes a new approach which goes beyond following foreign regulations by developing international standards to create a digital environment that connects with the world while maintaining local cultural roots. Ubuntu functions as a moral guide because it directs legal systems to choose human dignity and restorative justice as their predominant objectives instead

[40] Tegan Bristow, "Post African Futures: Positioning the Globalized Digital within Contemporary African Cultural and Decolonizing Practices," *Critical African Studies* 9, no. 3 (2017): 281–301.
[41]Kroeze, "Digital Coloniality," 6.
[42] Okyere-Manu, "The Place of the African Relational and Moral Theory of Ubuntu," 105.
[43] Omotubora and Basu, "Decoding and Reimagining AI Governance," 225.
[44] Paul Atagamen Aidonojie, Alade Adeniyi Oyebade, and Oluwaseye Oluwayomi Ikubanni, "Legality of EndSARS Protest: A Quest for Democracy in Nigeria," *Journal of Human Rights, Culture and Legal System* 2, no. 3 (2022): 209–24.

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of viewing compliance through retributive or basic procedural methods. The Ubuntu philosophy demands that governing systems must establish open processes which enable all people to participate in decision-making because this method protects African communities from secret algorithm systems which would control their societies[45]. The framework attains legitimacy through community consensus which demands all parties to acknowledge each other. The process requires the creation of Community Ethics Review Councils and "regulatory sandboxes" which will evaluate technologies based on their effects on social trust and community relationships. African societies can reclaim their digital existence by establishing their own ethical standards which will help them protect their culture from digital neo-colonialism while using technology to achieve complete human development.

3.4. Issues and Challenges

The structural tokenism and epistemic bias which exist in global AI governance forums make it one of the most enduring problems. African voices are frequently "invited to the table only after the menu has been set," which leads to the shallow use of Ubuntu as a cultural element instead of an essential system component.Experts warn that without concrete policy instruments and technical investment[46], Ubuntu risks becoming an "empty signifier" or a mere rhetorical ornament in documents that otherwise reproduce Eurocentric assumptions. Western legal systems impose their requirements on African concepts which creates epistemic violence that stops Africans from developing their own knowledge systems.

The main problem arises because African relational ethics conflicts with existing individual-based data rights systems which people follow as standard practice[47]. The GDPR framework gives primary importance to individual privacy rights and consent requirements whereas in African societies data collection practices to identify people create links to entire social groups which include multiple family members. The existing individual consent process models do not recognize that communities own both traditional knowledge and their land because these models permit extractive industries to operate if they receive consent from one individual without their knowledge about the upcoming environmental damage which will affect the entire community. Digital justice requires a legal transformation which establishes stewardship and communal obligations as core principles that need to guide its implementation[48]. The continent faces a major challenge because its existing infrastructure and insufficient resources create barriers against applying Ubuntu ethical principles. The development of homegrown technologies faces obstacles because the country experiences both unreliable electricity supply and expensive broadband services and skilled workers leave to work in other countries. African governments depend on Global North technical support which helps them create 60 percent of their AI policy documents but this practice leads to unintentional adoption of foreign models that disregard indigenous oral history and diverse cultural practices in Africa[49]. The dependency on foreign knowledge creates a situation where states lose their ability to govern themselves because their regulations come from outside sources which have distinct ethical standards.

African leaders use the concept of "unity" and "sovereignty" to establish internal control which allows them to silence any opposing voices. Some governments use digital sovereignty as a pretext to conduct unauthorized internet shutdowns and implement extensive surveillance

[45] Eutychus Ngotho Gichuru and Archangel Byaruhanga Rukooko, "From Coloniality to Cognitive Justice: Hegelian Synthesis of Ubuntu-Centred Academic Promotion Criteria in African Higher Education," *Education Innovations: Systems and Future Learning* 1, no. 1 (2026): 77–95.

[46] Wilfred Lunga, Mkhokheli Sithole, Charles Musarurwa, Eugene Nawanti Kombaté, and Tendayi Marovah, "Integrating Ubuntu: Embedding African Philosophy into Disaster Risk Reduction and Management," *Frontiers in Sociology* 10 (2025): article 1637051.

[47] Reviglio and Alunge, "'I Am Datafied Because We Are Datafied,'" 602.

[48] Gichuru and Rukooko, "From Coloniality to Cognitive Justice," 85.

[49] Fulufhelo Oscar Makananise and Shumani Eric Madima, Decolonising Digital Media and Indigenisation of Participatory Epistemologies (Routledge, 2025).

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operations which they claim serve national security purposes while using technology obtained from other repressive states. Digital platforms create two different legal standards which allow private health and finance entities to control social benefits yet diminish the state responsibility to provide fair access[50]. The protection of Ubuntu requires defense against those who seek to exploit its communal language as a means to hide their systems of societal control. The deployment of AI systems which depend on biased African data has created AI systems which support cognitive imperialism. The use of foreign training data for algorithms results in worse structural inequalities because it leads to dark-skinned people being misidentified in facial recognition systems and it prevents credit scoring systems from understanding informal economic activities[51]. The global data economy leads to digital erasure which happens because it does not recognize the distinct needs of indigenous populations and rural communities. The solution to this challenge requires two elements which include technical solutions and the establishment of narrative sovereignty that allows African communities to determine their own dangers and ethical boundaries.

4. CONCLUSION

The research findings show that Ubuntu philosophy functions as more than a local indigenous custom because it creates a new framework which helps people restore their digital independence during times when data colonialism dominates. African nations receive power from Ubuntu because it defines data as a relational asset which enables them to oppose global tech companies who extract resources from their territories while demanding control over their technology. The process needs to establish permanent African values through legal systems and essential infrastructure because their existing ceremonial use needs to change. Africa has to stop being a digital rules receiver from outside sources and start creating international standards that represent its traditional community values to counteract the colonial infrastructure which still exists. The African institutions need to create systems which protect human dignity while maintaining social unity to establish a multipolar digital future for all citizens.

African governments should establish national AI ethics commissions which will include traditional knowledge holders and philosophers for their technical oversight needs. The current system requires a shift in investment toward creating regional data centers and cloud facilities to decrease our dangerous reliance on European exchange points. African digital philosophies need to be incorporated into educational curricula development which should include STEM training to produce future leaders who will develop AI technologies according to community value systems. South-South partnerships together with the Digital Bandung meeting will establish the necessary political power for developing equitable data-sharing agreements with multinational companies. Africa can create a new digital model through its commitment to restoring algorithmic damage and its support for language rights which combines technological advancement with fair knowledge systems.

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