

27<sup>th</sup> April 2017  
Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh  
6<sup>th</sup> floor meeting room, Chrystal Macmillan Building

### **Workshop: 'Social Media in Africa: Beyond the hashtag'**

The huge uptake of affordable smartphones across Africa and improved network access has led to more social media subscribers on the continent than ever before. For many Africans social media has now become a part of everyday life, helping to maintain social ties and to forge new connections. Social media has become the primary source of news from both mainstream media and emerging citizen journalists. The technology is a new space to showcase creativity on the continent, in which artists, musicians and poets are reaching wider audiences. Likewise, activists have also found in social media a venue for domestic and international support. Social media has become a place of political mobilization and debate for both government and opposition.

Behind most hashtags or trending topics can lie a complex series of relationships rooted in a historical context. While social media is frequently celebrated for its positive impacts, there are growing concerns that it can be an uncomfortable and even dangerous space. These difficult-to-regulate platforms have at times been used to perpetuate hate speech and, in extreme cases, to incite violence. Government clampdowns on social media have been at the forefront of debates concerning freedom of expression, and have sometimes led to arrests and imprisonment of citizens using this new means of communication.

The study of social media in Africa must acknowledge that its use – while growing – is predominantly situated in urban centres and more developed parts of the continent. Much like earlier concerns about mobile phones and the digital divide, there are issues of access relating to factors such as age, gender and education. There are also critical debates over whether social media is widening or bridging the gap in access to information within and between countries.

Social media is also seen as a novel way for external engagement with the continent. International businesses are increasingly using social media to reach a massive market of new customers, while NGOs also recognise the potential of the technology to influence and implement developmental goals. Researchers both in Africa and outside are tapping into social media as a new form of data collection.

This workshop calls for papers that address the diverse uses and affects of social media in Africa. We encourage papers that present original empirical research of both a qualitative or quantitative nature. The call is open to researchers of all disciplines and interdisciplinary approaches. We also welcome papers that critically examine the methodological and ethical considerations of social media for data collection and analysis in Africa. This workshop aims to stimulate debates and to create new networks of researchers on social media in Africa. The organisers plan to submit a peer-reviewed journal special issue on the topic.

Interested presenters on topics that address any of the above should submit an abstract of no more than 350 words to [M.Dwyer@ed.ac.uk](mailto:M.Dwyer@ed.ac.uk) and [Thomas.Molony@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Thomas.Molony@ed.ac.uk). The deadline for submission is 27<sup>th</sup> January 2017. There is no participation fee, and we are able to offer presenters accommodation in Edinburgh on 26<sup>th</sup> April. We regret that we do not have funding to cover travel costs.