

The big trend? Africa is on trend

 By Oresti Patricios

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The world is going gaga over culture, design and art from Africa, but back here on the continent we're innovating exciting solutions to uniquely African challenges. Which is making everyone outside the continent think: "Will the next Google come from Africa?" Here are my thoughts on the four biggest trends related to Africa:

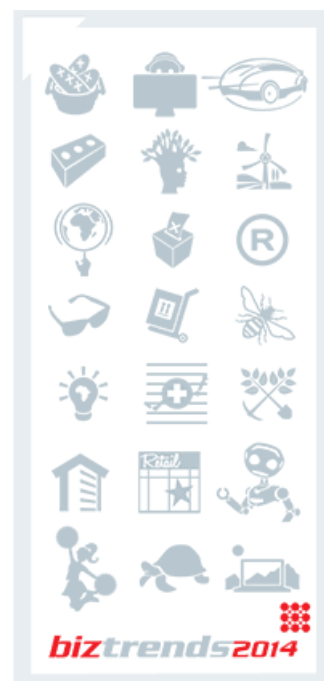
1. Hello online retail

The last time I was in Lagos, Nigeria, I was gridlocked on the way to the airport to catch my flight out of the city. Small motorbikes buzzed between the stationary cars and it was only by hopping on one of these, and abandoning my taxi, that I made my flight.

Sitting in SA one underestimates the impact of easy access on consumer behaviour. In Nigeria's capital, shopping has become a nightmare because the traffic's so insane. Say hello to Jumia (found online at Jumia.com), which calls itself 'the biggest online shopping mall in Africa'.

Jumia started in Nigeria mid-2012 with little more than a warehouse in Lagos. Today it has 500 staff and 150 delivery bikes (they cut through traffic, remember). Jumia promises to deliver nationwide, guarantees products, and has a smart delivery system, which is probably why the service has grown rapidly and is now also available in Ghana, Egypt, Morocco, Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire.

Nigeria has a population of some 170 million and its GDP has been rising steadily - it is Africa's third richest country behind SA and Egypt. As the desire for quality products and retail services grow in Nigeria, and other wealthier African territories, online shopping brands that fulfil this need will too.



2. Art, culture & design - The future is African

It was once a factory producing parts for the mining industry. Then the building and surrounding area in Johannesburg fell into disrepair. But if you go to 281 Commissioner Street today you'll find the continent's first [Museum of African Design](#) (or MoAD), which stands as a symbol of the continent's coming of age from a cultural and design perspective. As The New York Times says in an article this November in its Art & Design section, [The Future Is African](#). The piece in question announces 'The Shadows Took Shape' - a contemporary art exhibition of aesthetic Afrofuturists that's taken New York by storm.

Back on the continent, a strong force for championing art in Africa to the world is the Kenyan born Jepchumba, a cultural curator and digital content creator with a large global following.

Jepchumba is the founder and creative director of [African Digital Art](#), a collective and creative space where digital artists, enthusiasts and professionals seek inspiration, showcase their artistry and connect with emerging artists. Singled out as one of the 20 Youngest Power Women in Africa by Forbes and hailed as one of the Guardian Africa's Top 25 Women Achievers, Jepchumba tours the world speaking about how technology affects culture.

African movies have also made a massive breakthrough globally, thanks to IrokoTV which is often referred to as the

NetFlix of Africa.

The diaspora sees millions of Africans placed around the world, and IrokoTV is feeding their hunger for Nigerian and Ghanaian movies, and in the process has resurrected the movie industries in those countries.

IrokoTV opened its Johannesburg office in November 2013. The streaming online movie service was launched in 2011 and has grown at lightning pace - today IrokoTV has more than six million users in close on 180 countries across the world, and the platform delivers well over 200 million minutes of content monthly.

Wherever you look there's ample proof that design, art and culture from Africa is hot. Whether it's Will & Jada Smith's championing of [Trevor Noah to Fox](#) for Noah's own talk show; or the rise and rise of UK designer of Ghanaian descent, [Ozwald Boateng OBE](#), when it comes to culture, art and design, all eyes are on Africa. And cultural natives from Africa who are taking their talent to the rest of the world, are owning it.

3. African technology that solves African problems

One of the big issues that farmers in Africa face is scale - this continent is so vast that at times a lack of connectivity means knowledge isn't always a click away.

But for small-scale dairy farmers an innovative new app was created a couple of years ago by Su Kahumbu, a Kenyan farmer. Called iCow, the solution offers valuable information and support to dairy farmers. It advises about the latest prices, and keeps records for farmers of gestation periods or livestock lineage (to avoid inbreeding).

iCow is one of a host of inventive new technologies which shows how people in Africa are plugging the gaps, and creating solutions to social challenges using technology.

In Africa some of the biggest technology trends are apps, software and other innovations that help people. Other great examples of this are: the Cardiopad, which was created by a twenty-something engineer from Cameroon called Arthur Zang; MPesa, the payment solution everyone's talking about; and Inye, a tablet that's connected to the internet via a dongle that retails for a mere \$340. And then there's mPedigree, the innovative solution that's literally saving lives. A mobile and web platform, mPedigree enables people, regardless of their educational background, income or status, to instantly verify the efficacy (and safety) of medicines they purchase.

4. Africa's smartphone surge

Once upon a time Africa was considered the continent for 'dumb' phones, and smartphones were the mobile devices that proliferated in the US and Europe. As Jimmy Wales, the founder of Wikipedia found out when he came to the continent recently, that's a fallacy. "What I always thought about mobile in Africa... is this [smartphone adoption] is coming in the future - in the future someday," Wales told [TechCrunch](#). "Well the someday's happening faster than I ever realised."

The big disruptor in this market is the affordable smartphone. Chinese mobile manufacturer Huawei recently brought out an Android-powered 3G smartphone which retails on the streets of Kenya for \$50. Needless to say, Wales now has one of these in his pocket. And so do well over 300,000 Kenyans who've invested in the mobile handsets.

"If you go and you take a look at the numbers [of smartphone adoption in Africa]... the upward trend - obviously it's still a very small penetration - but that upward trend is there really strongly. If you look at the total bandwidth into Nigeria, for example, it's skyrocketing," Wales told TechCrunch.

What this means is the growth of a new generation of users who will become tech makers and creators - not just users. Watch out for Africa's app explosion, and possibly the global 'next big thing'.

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