

Building the next generation of African media brands



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Tomiwa Aladekomo, CEO of Big Cabal Media, which publishes tech and youth publications, *TechCabal* and *Zikoko*, is setting the precedence for building the next generation of African media brands and creating some of the most compelling original content from Africa.



Tomiwa Aladekomo, CEO of Big Cabal Media

With extensive experience across media and marketing roles in Nigeria and North America, Aladekomo has taken Big Cabal Media through a transformation that's made it one of the most exciting new media companies on the continent, telling Africa's stories in-depth and in innovative and fresh ways.

■ ***Tell us about the evolution of digital media in Africa?***

Digital media in Africa has grown rapidly over the last decade, primarily driven by a meteoric increase in the availability and use of cheap mobile phones with internet access. Africa currently has over 960 million mobile subscribers, representing about an 80% penetration rate among the continent's population. Although internet penetration still has some catching up to do, these two factors generally set the stage for what has been the coming of age of digital media in Africa.

To give some context, one of our publications, *Zikoko*, records more than 90% of audience visits from mobile and you would find similar trends across a wide range of publications.

The availability of large audiences with access to the internet via mobile devices has driven both publishers and solo creators to provide a wide range of content for those audiences.

These movements have come in waves, from an early onslaught by blogs to a wave of traditional media publishers moving online, then digital native media companies like ours building content in new niches and with original approaches and most recently, a wave of solo creators creating content for audience consumption across social media.



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Sofia Christensen 22 Mar 2022



We have an active digital media ecosystem across Africa but it's perhaps not seen the kind of sustained investment in digital native media companies that other parts of the world have seen. We think there is a lot of economic value being left on the table and one of our aims as a business certainly is to invest and create content in those unexplored spaces, and build a robust and valuable business where perhaps others aren't paying attention.

■ ***Why has the African media landscape been undervalued for so long?***

It's a combination of a number of things. Media is a hard business globally, and it has perhaps not been the sexiest investment area over the last few decades. Combine that with Africa's general macroeconomic challenges, and you'll find that most investors have been keener on investing in safer spaces, that they also know better.

One more important factor is the lack of experienced operators in the space. While we've made a ton of progress in media sub-sectors like music and movies, spaces like digital publishing have not seen enough experimentation and investment to build a large pool of experienced operators. There's a bit of a chicken and egg challenge there.

One of our goals at Big Cabal is to show that we can build huge, influential media brands and that the business itself can be both profitable and scalable, hence exciting to a new crop of investors.

■ ***Should investors be taking more interest in investing in the African media landscape and content creators?***

Most definitely! It has been refreshing to see investors taking a lot more interest in the African startup ecosystem (fintech, edtech, healthtech etc) and I expect that with time, we will see this growing interest widen across a broader segment to then include African media.

Earlier this year, we closed a seed series fundraising round at \$2.3m, which is a testament to both the good work we do at Big Cabal Media and also the growing criticality and potential of the African media landscape.

Although we are one of the few media/tech organisations to achieve this feat usually reserved for African fintechs and the likes, we believe the media industry needs a lot more investment to help boost value creation, amplify awareness, improve the existing systems and more - all geared towards making the African media landscape a more powerful force to be reckoned with.

We'd like to see more investors pay attention to this market since there's a lot of impact to be had and some very great businesses to be built. The sheer size of Africa and the rise in digital literacy and media consumption open up a significant market opportunity for investors to tap into.

■ ***Can African media companies gain the same credibility as many international titles?***

Absolutely! We aim to do global standard work in everything we do as a company, and there are many other companies on the continent working to similar standards and levels of ambition. We can and must compete with the best media platforms globally.



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A key point on credibility though is to ensure that you're judging credibility through the right eyes. Because media is such a powerful tool of accountability and the projection of views and perspectives, the evaluation of the value and credibility of a media platform is rarely ever a neutral exercise. Media platforms that consistently provide value and credible content, news, etc will find that rewarded with audience growth, awards etc. We're on the road with all of this.

■ ***Which African media companies are building global standard publications for global audiences and why is Big Cabal leading that charge?***

There are quite a number of African media companies building global standard publications and some I quite honestly admire. We are however one of the few businesses on the continent that is consistently leveraging technology to boost the experience, churning out agenda-setting content and building a sustainable model to ensure we are able to attain a dynasty status.

At Big Cabal, we want to shape how African stories are told and continue to lead the most engaging conversations around innovation, entrepreneurship and culture as we have always done via our platforms, *Zikoko* and *TechCabal*.

■ ***How is the role of journalists evolving in the new media ecosystem?***

Today's media ecosystem and information environment is such that everyone now has a voice and it is becoming increasingly difficult to sieve through the noise to find credible, vetted information.

Great reporting however takes time and care, and a standard of due diligence and professionalism is often unavailable to the casual commentator. The role of journalists, and credible media platforms is to do the work that the casual commentator cannot do; conducting in-depth research, building networks of contacts and sources, providing context to news reports and giving the public authoritative information they might not get otherwise.

■ ***What is the impact of technology on the African media landscape?***

Technology has had a huge impact on the African media landscape. The first and most important, which we've already discussed, is how it's given audiences all over the continent access to the internet and content from around the globe. That has in turn created many more avenues for media companies all over the continent to create relevant content for this ever-growing audience.



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Technology is also reducing the cost of creating content, finding new audiences, collaborating with partners on and off the continent, and measuring impact. All of these elements have been critical in allowing more people and businesses to create content and connect with audiences, reaching global audiences more easily than ever before.

Whether through websites, social media platforms or streaming platforms like Netflix and Showmax, it has never been easier to create content that attains global reach, and that opens increased monetisation and influence building opportunities as well, all of which is good for African media businesses.

At Big Cabal, we're excited about these opportunities. *Zikoko's* rise as one of the most important outlets for youth culture and concerns happened in the context of today's tech landscape. *TechCabal* has long tracked Africa's development in technology from a business and human impact standpoint, and we are buoyed by many of the same trends the businesses we cover are affected by. We're enormously optimistic about the future of tech and media on the continent, and proud to help forge that future.

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