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**GLOBALIZATION AND STRUCTURAL DEPENDENCY IN AFRICA: REVISITING
DEVELOPMENT CONTRADICTIONS IN THE CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL
ECONOMY.**

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Abstract

Globalization continues to shape political, economic, and socio-cultural relations across the contemporary international system. While globalization is frequently associated with economic integration, technological advancement, and global interconnectedness, its developmental outcomes in Africa remain deeply contradictory. This paper critically examines how globalization reproduces structural dependency and uneven development across African states despite increasing integration into global markets. Drawing on Dependency Theory and World-Systems Theory, the study adopts a qualitative critical review approach based on secondary data from peer-reviewed literature, policy reports, and institutional publications published within the last five years. The paper argues that Africa's participation in globalization remains largely peripheral, characterized by raw material export dependency, weak industrialization, unequal trade relations, external policy conditionalities, and limited representation within global governance institutions. The study further demonstrates that globalization simultaneously promotes democratization and reinforces authoritarian resilience through digital surveillance, financial dependency, and external geopolitical influence. Socio-culturally, globalization has accelerated hybridization and digital connectivity while intensifying cultural erosion and identity tensions. The paper concludes that

globalization in Africa has largely produced “integration without transformation,” where participation in global capitalism has not translated into sustainable structural development. The study recommends strategic industrial policy, institutional strengthening, regional value-chain development, and more equitable participation in global governance frameworks.

Keywords: Globalization, Africa, Dependency, Development, Political Economy, Structural Inequality

Introduction

Globalization remains one of the most transformative yet contested processes shaping the contemporary international order. Advances in digital technology, transnational finance, global trade liberalization, and international governance structures have intensified interdependence among states and societies. However, the developmental implications of globalization remain uneven across regions, particularly in Africa, where integration into the global economy has often occurred under structurally unequal conditions (Arowosegbe, 2022).

Although globalization has expanded opportunities for technological transfer, foreign investment, and transnational cooperation, African economies continue to experience persistent poverty, weak industrialization, debt dependency, and political vulnerability despite decades of market integration (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2023). The continent remains heavily dependent on primary commodity exports while importing high-value manufactured products, reinforcing long-standing patterns of unequal exchange inherited from colonial political economy (African Development Bank [AfDB], 2024).

Recent scholarship increasingly argues that globalization has not eliminated structural inequalities but has instead reorganized them within contemporary neoliberal systems (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023). Africa’s integration into global supply chains remains concentrated in extractive industries, low-value production, and externally controlled financial systems. Consequently, globalization has produced a paradoxical condition in which African states are formally integrated into global markets yet remain marginalized in technological innovation, industrial competitiveness, and global governance influence.

Politically, globalization has facilitated democratic transitions, regional cooperation, and digital connectivity. Nevertheless, it has simultaneously intensified external policy conditionalities, weakened economic sovereignty, and enabled authoritarian resilience through digital surveillance technologies and external geopolitical alignments (Obadare & Willems, 2024). Similarly, socio-cultural globalization has expanded transnational cultural interaction while generating concerns regarding cultural homogenization, identity erosion, and the dominance of Western consumer culture.

Despite extensive debates on globalization and development, much of the existing literature examines Africa's globalization experience from isolated economic, political, or socio-cultural perspectives. Limited scholarly attention has been paid to the interconnected contradictions through which globalization simultaneously integrates and marginalizes African societies. This paper addresses this gap by critically examining how globalization reproduces structural dependency and developmental contradictions across political, economic, and socio-cultural domains in Africa.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Dependency Theory and World-Systems Theory. Dependency Theory argues that the underdevelopment of peripheral economies is structurally linked to the expansion of global capitalism and unequal exchange relations with developed economies (Amin, 2021). Rather than producing convergence, globalization reinforces asymmetrical economic relations in which developing countries remain dependent on external capital, markets, and technology.

World-Systems Theory similarly conceptualizes the global economy as a hierarchical system divided into core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral regions (Wallerstein, 2022). Within this structure, African economies largely occupy peripheral positions characterized by commodity dependence, weak industrial capacity, and vulnerability to global market fluctuations.

These theoretical perspectives provide an important analytical framework for understanding why Africa's participation in globalization has frequently generated "growth without transformation." Although African economies are increasingly integrated into global markets, structural inequalities within the global political economy continue to constrain endogenous development and industrial advancement.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative critical review methodology based on secondary data analysis. Data were obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional reports, development policy documents, and international economic databases published between 2020 and 2025. Sources included publications from the African Development Bank, World Bank, UNCTAD, International Monetary Fund, and recent scholarly literature on globalization and African political economy.

The study employed thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns relating to economic dependency, political conditionality, cultural transformation, and governance contradictions. This approach enabled a critical synthesis of contemporary debates regarding Africa's position within the global economy.

Globalization and Economic Dependency in Africa

One of the central contradictions of globalization in Africa is the persistence of economic dependency despite increased global integration. African economies continue to participate in the global economy primarily as exporters of raw materials and importers of manufactured products. According to UNCTAD (2023), primary commodities account for more than 60% of export earnings in many African states, exposing economies to global price volatility and limiting industrial diversification.

The expansion of global supply chains has also reinforced asymmetrical production structures in which multinational corporations control technology, pricing systems, and value addition processes. Resource-rich countries such as Nigeria, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of Congo remain heavily dependent on extractive industries while experiencing limited domestic industrial transformation (AfDB, 2024).

Furthermore, contemporary globalization has intensified financial dependency through sovereign debt exposure, external borrowing, and neoliberal policy conditionalities. Rising dependence on Eurobonds, multilateral lending, and foreign capital markets has constrained fiscal sovereignty across several African economies (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2024). Consequently, globalization has frequently generated economic integration without structural transformation.

Political Contradictions and Governance Challenges

Globalization has simultaneously promoted democratization and reinforced political vulnerability in Africa. Since the 1990s, global governance institutions and international donor agencies have encouraged electoral reforms, constitutionalism, and human rights frameworks across the continent. However, these democratic transitions often coexist with external policy influence and weakened economic sovereignty.

International financial institutions continue to shape domestic economic policies through loan conditionalities, austerity measures, and fiscal restructuring programmes (IMF, 2024). These interventions frequently reduce state capacity for social investment and deepen public distrust in political institutions.

In addition, the globalization of digital technologies has strengthened authoritarian resilience in several African states. Governments increasingly deploy imported surveillance technologies, internet restrictions, and digital monitoring systems to suppress dissent and regulate political opposition (Freedom House, 2024). This illustrates a central contradiction of globalization in Africa: the same global systems that promote democratic governance also facilitate new mechanisms of authoritarian control.

Socio-Cultural Globalization and Identity Tensions

Socio-cultural globalization has transformed communication, media consumption, and identity formation across African societies. Digital platforms have expanded cultural interaction, youth mobilization, and transnational social engagement. However, globalization has also intensified concerns regarding cultural homogenization and the erosion of indigenous knowledge systems.

The growing dominance of Western media, consumer culture, and digital entertainment industries has contributed to shifts in language, fashion, food systems, and social values among younger populations (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023). Although cultural hybridization reflects adaptive resilience, critics argue that globalization often privileges dominant Western epistemologies while marginalizing local cultural systems and indigenous worldviews.

These tensions highlight the broader paradox of socio-cultural globalization in Africa: increased global connectivity has expanded cultural participation while simultaneously intensifying identity insecurity and epistemic dependency.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that globalization in Africa remains deeply contradictory. Although globalization has facilitated technological advancement, digital connectivity, and international economic integration, it has simultaneously reproduced structural dependency, economic inequality, political vulnerability, and socio-cultural tensions.

Africa's participation in globalization continues to occur largely within unequal global structures that privilege core economies over peripheral regions. As a result, the continent experiences integration without substantial structural transformation. The persistence of commodity dependence, weak industrialization, external financial conditionalities, and limited influence within global governance institutions reflects the enduring relevance of dependency-oriented explanations of African underdevelopment. The study therefore argues that sustainable development in Africa requires a strategic repositioning beyond passive global integration toward industrial transformation, regional economic cooperation, technological sovereignty, and institutional strengthening. Without such structural reforms, globalization is likely to continue reproducing uneven development across the continent.

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