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The African Digital Transnational Ties Project

Invitation to Participate

I am a university researcher trying to understand the role of mobile phones and the Internet in helping Ghanaians to connect to those in diaspora, and vice-versa.

I or my research assistants would like to interview you about these and other issues related to technology. I may use an audio or video recorder, but you may ask that I simply write down answers.

About me and this project:

I am a professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison in the U.S.A. I study the internet in Africa. This research project is called 'African Transnational Digital Ties'. The research in this project will contribute to a book I am writing about the Internet in Ghana. I will also likely write shorter articles on this for special audiences within academia, as well as some news publications or blogs. I

With your permission, this research data can help me and my audience of academic researchers, tech developers in Ghana, and perhaps public officials to systematically understand homeland-diaspora relations, the digital tools that make that possible.

Benefits to you as participants

There is no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. It is hoped that the knowledge generated by this project may eventually yield indirect benefits such as new technologies, better policies, and better services targeted to Ghanaians living at home and those abroad.

Risks

This study presents minimal risk to you. As with all research projects, there is a small chance that the confidentiality of the information collected could be compromised, but we will take care to prevent this from happening. All interview data is stored on password protected hard

Privacy

Participants will be informed that confidentiality is an important concern on any research topic. Participants will be offered the option to keep their identities public or to anonymize their personally identifying information. All personally identifying information of non-administrative tech users, especially customers will be anonymized for their protection. Audio and video recordings will be kept on encrypted hard drives in locked offices. Interview transcripts will be de-identified and stored on password protected computers in locked offices. Recordings will be used for analysis only, unless otherwise noted. Only research project staff will analyze interview data. Names will be changed in the audio transcriptions, which will be used for academic purposes only.

Rights

Participants will be advised that they may decline to respond to any question related to that topic during the interviews. Interviews will be given the option for varying levels of confidentiality, including complete anonymity. Interviews may also take place in private in order to ensure that personal details of conversations will not be overheard. Researchers will not record third party



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reporting and/or sensitive information which may be revealed. Any of this information that is recorded will be deleted.

Informed Consent

In order to conduct research that is ethical and respects the rights, privileges and privacy of its participants and interviewees, my institution requires that 'informed consent' be provided. Informed consent means the following:

- 1) I have explained who I am as a researcher, the purpose of my study, and what I intend to do with the results and data.
- 2) I have explained to you as a research participant, that you have the right to request anonymity, meaning your name or any personally identifying information will be not be made public in this research project, unless with your permission. This is to ensure your privacy, safety, and confidence in the ethical nature of this study.

If you agree to participate, please provide verbal consent to the researcher by stating 'I give my consent' or by signing below. You can keep the other copy of this form for your own records.

I have read this consent form and agree to take part in this research.

Name & Signature

Date

For any further questions, or to clarify the terms of consent, please reach us by using the contact information at the top of this page.



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NOTE TO IRB PERSONNEL

Note on Informed Consent alternatives: The African Transnational Digital Ties project will use both written and oral consent in obtaining consent from research participants. This research consists of both participant observation and interviews with a variety of individuals including tech professionals, NGO workers, NGO clients and mobile and computer retail customers.

Our preference will be to get individuals to sign consent forms, but the consent process for formal and informal interviews in these contexts will often consist of oral consent. Many Ghanaians, especially those living in diaspora as migrants, are often suspicious of academic researchers. The common stated belief is that all researchers may be tied to foreign surveillance agencies such as the C.I.A. This is the result of common rumor, but also the documented history of Westerns governments using researchers such as anthropologists in political influence campaigns, and regime change in places like Ghana.¹

While we will do our best to reassure potential participants that this is not the nature of this project, I have found in my research in Ghana and in other sites with African research informants, that oral consent allays many of their concerns.

For individuals whose migration status may also be in question, the lack of documented paper trail also allays concerns about being surveilled. Most research interviewees I have worked with in this context are happy to provide verbal or oral consent, which I can document via tape or video recording. If they do not wish to be recorded as giving consent electronically I will note that interview subject provided oral consent in my notes.

Oral consent is preferable by many of research subjects as the act of writing is often seen as a legal procedure, one that may be traced to policies of surveillance. It is our relationship with these research subjects and the trust engendered during the interview process that provides the basis for informed consent.

¹ Felix Moos, Richard Fardon, and Hugh Gusterson, 2005. "Anthropologists as spies: a response to 'CIA seeks anthropologists'." *Anthropology Today*, 21(3): 25-26; David H. Price, 2016. *Cold War Anthropology: The CIA, the Pentagon, and the Growth of Dual Use Anthropology*. Duke University Press; Jaganth Pathy, 1981. "Imperialism, anthropology and the Third World." *Economic and Political Weekly*: 623-627; David Rooney, 1988. *Kwame Nkrumah: The Political Kingdom in the Third World*. London, UK: IB Tauris.