

Seeking Support for New Sub-Saharan African Caucus

Communication scholars representing and studying the Sub-Saharan African region are organizing an effort to create a Sub-Saharan African Caucus at the National Communication Association (NCA). This caucus will serve as a dedicated space to share and promote the Sub-Saharan African scholarship covering a range of communication subfields. This will be the first Sub-Saharan African Caucus at a major communication association, including NCA, the International Communication Association (ICA) and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC).

Following the procedures laid out by NCA to consider caucus proposals, the organizing committee is seeking support from the NCA membership. If you are an NCA member and are willing, please indicate your support at the link below. We also ask to please distribute the link and its purpose widely.

Petition link: <https://forms.gle/gf9Nf5dt9p3u7Efg8>

Thank you for your consideration and support!

Prisca S. Ngondo, Texas State University (psngondo@txstate.edu)
Anna Klyueva, University of Houston-Clear Lake (klyueva@uhcl.edu)
Dane Kiambi, University of Nebraska-Lincoln (dane.kiambi@unl.edu)

The text of the proposal is included below.

We propose the creation of the Sub-Saharan African Caucus (SSAC) at NCA as a dedicated space for sharing and promoting communication scholarship related to the Sub-Saharan African (SSA) region. SSA is one of the most diverse and complex regions in the world, with a mixed and entangled indigenous population and a legacy of colonial influences from Europe, Asia, and the Arab world (Mersham et al., 2011). SSA consists of 46 African countries that are geographically located, fully or partially, south of the Sahara Desert (excluding Sudan). It contrasts with North Africa, considered a part of the Arab world. Somalia, Djibouti, Comoros, and Mauritania are geographically part of SSA but also part of the Arab world (World Bank, 2015). Over the last ten years, the region has experienced appreciable economic growth due to its plentiful mineral and energy resources (Adedoyin et al., 2021), prompting rapid development of the communication industry in SSA nations.

Presently, the National Communication Association is home to 49 divisions, 7 sections and 9 caucuses. Caucuses represent the interests of a specific segment of the NCA membership and consist of historically underrepresented demographic groups in terms of origin, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability. The nine NCA caucuses are:

- Asian/Pacific American Caucus
- Black Caucus
- Caucus on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Concerns

- Caribbean Communication Caucus
- Disability Issues Caucus
- Indigenous Caucus
- La Raza Caucus
- Women's Caucus
- South West Asian/North African, Middle East Caucus

We recognize that NCA has the African American Communication and Culture Division, the Black Caucus, and the South West Asian/North African, Middle East Caucus (SWANA) and appreciate their efforts to provide scholars of Sub-Saharan Africa space to share their work. We also recognize that these units' focus is not exclusive to bringing attention to the SSA region.

Therefore, the goal of the SSAC is to attract attention to the research and practice of communication on the African continent. The caucus's mission is to showcase, celebrate, and honor matters of the African people, to advocate for African communicative practices, and to support research stemming from diverse SSA environments by providing a platform for scholars.

African communication scholarship is underrepresented and needs more visibility. Cruz (2020) argued that African theoretical space has "historically been equated with absence, disorder and chaos under Western epistemological worldviews", breeding the notion of Africa as a "theoretical vacuum" with nothing to contribute to communication scholarship (p. 101). The NCA community would benefit from a dedicated caucus that can serve as a space which stands to expose U.S. scholars to African communication philosophies, theories and practices.

The available research on international and global communication offers a rather scant view of how communication is theorized and practiced on the African continent. Very little is known about the views and perspectives of communication practitioners and scholars focusing on SSA. The nations on the African continent vary significantly, and it is important to consider how communication practices and uses may differ based on a country or a sub-region to help build a scholarly agenda for future inquiries. The social, political, cultural, and economic diversity found in Africa impacts widely the way communication may be researched and practiced on the continent. Often, communication phenomena on the continent are studied using Western philosophical traditions, which do not reflect Africa's socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts. Further, most African work is scattered across disciplines and NCA units, such as the International and Intercultural Division, Public Relations Division, and Health Communication, highlighting the fragmentation of ideas and the need to build a community of peers. For example, at the 2021 NCA annual convention in Seattle, work focusing on the SSA region was presented through 10 NCA divisions and caucuses, and at the 2022 NCA annual convention, such work was spread among 12 NCA divisions and caucuses.

Despite an increasing number of scholars in the discipline who identify from the SSA region of the world, and a growing interest in scholarship from and about that region, there is not a formal space within NCA, or anywhere in the discipline's many professional associations, devoted to related scholarship, "As Wole Soyinka reminds us, Africa has always been a part of the intellectual world. Irrespective of its consistent marginality, Africa has always been a part of scholarly discourse, both symbolically and materially. And yet, in the discipline of

communication studies, the vast continent and its knowledge systems barely hold a presence” (Asante & Hanchey, 2021). The SSAC aims to attract attention to the communication scholarship on the African continent by bringing together scholars from different SSA nations.

In general, SSAC will provide an organizational structure for scholar outreach and knowledge exchange to do the following:

1. Community. Building community among SSAC scholars in a space that both recognizes the region’s multiculturalism and reflects Africa's socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts.
2. Advocacy. Advocacy for African communication practices. The caucus will generate key takeaways and suggest pathways Africa can crystallize its presence and inform theory in the global communication industry
3. Access. Direct access to region-specific scholarship. Provide a platform to share and promote the Sub-Saharan African scholarship.
4. Mentorship. To create a space to foster mentor-mentee relationships. Provide opportunities to match mentors and mentees. Identify mentors for interested scholars from Africa to assist in the development and dissemination of this scholarship and to obtain broad learning for oneself.
5. Training. Demystifying the research and publication process for African graduate students and early-career scholars by helping them navigate the publishing space, including reviewer training. We hope this will increase journal publishing from African scholars, contributing to inclusivity and involvement and adding to the African voice in answering global issues.

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