



ROLE OF DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

¹Andrew Chiahalam Apeh, ²Chikamso Christian Apeh, ³Fomati Usman Tikon and
⁴Anthony NwaJesus Onyekuru

¹Department of Mass Communication,
Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu, Nigeria

²Department of Agricultural Economics,
University of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, Umuagwo, Imo State, Nigeria

³Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension,
Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria

⁴Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

Corresponding Author's E-mail: apehchikamso@yahoo.com **Tel.:** 08068481106

ABSTRACT

The study explored the role of digital entrepreneurship in youth empowerment in Enugu State, Nigeria. A multistage sampling procedure was employed to select 900 respondents studied; 300 from the markets and 600 from the tertiary institutions. Data were collected through questionnaire and analysed using means and percentages. Results indicated that while digital entrepreneurship represents new ways that entrepreneurs adopt in making their business digital, it positively contributed to youth empowerment and national growth through job creation ($M=3.35$) and improved tax remittances (100%). Youths were engaged in the use of two major platforms; collaboration (WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom) (100%) and social platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest) (100%). For income generation through content creation (29%) web creation (20%), digital marketing (15%) crypto trading (12%), and app development (11%). These activities empower them by making them self-employed ($M = 4.04$), wealthy ($M = 3.74$), have more business networks ($M = 3.44$), access to markets ($M = 3.82$) and knowledge enhancement ($M = 3.02$). However, factors militating against their engagement in digital entrepreneurship were lack of capital ($M = 4.26$), interest ($M = 4.03$), information ($M = 3.95$) and electricity ($M = 3.84$). Therefore, the positive use of digital platforms by the youths can help empower them by developing their career, skills and well-being.

Keywords: Digital entrepreneurship, Youth empowerment, Digital platforms, Digital Space, Digital marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Youths make up over 400 million of the African population (African Union [AU], 2021). Their empowerment is central to good governance, quality leadership and the actualization of national development. Their activities play a key role in entrenching and consolidating peace, stability and integration of our societies. But due to the seeming dearth of adequate entrepreneurial skills among them, their business potentials seem to be losing value daily. In recent times, more and more youths are engaged in the digital space as a vehicle for effective business engagement (Akhter *et al.*, 2022). Around the world, youths continue to play critical roles in inventing new business ideas and opportunities. In Nigeria, many youths have throughout history participated in and catalysed important changes in the business environment. When empowered and given a platform like the digital space to put their skills into practice, Nigerian youths are highly enterprising (Leong *et al.*, 2022).



Digital entrepreneurship is a new business phenomenon which involves the creation of an internet business-enabled service delivery (Zainol *et al.*, 2022). It gives businesses online exposure that was not available to them before. Also, it has helped businesses enhance their strategic partnerships, increase worthiness and enhance their interactions with their customers and providers. Digital entrepreneurship levels the business playing field creating opportunities for young entrepreneurs to bring a new digital product or service to the market and transform the existing business activities to be digitally enabled businesses, creating opportunities for entrepreneurs to work from inaccessible areas, at different periods, on the go or from home. The digital space serves as a marketing and communication tool substantially growing businesses in the current online-driven competitive markets (Lou, 2022). It plays a crucial role in promoting youth, social and economic inclusion, and gender equality, stimulating local content development, and promoting sustainable development, specifically when new technologies are combined with available open and public data. For example, crops, weather, road traffic or climate conditions data are employed to develop digital services such as apps that can solve such problems to promote emergency/relief response, improve road safety by reducing traffic congestion and parking difficulties; and optimise agricultural production (Paul *et al.*, 2023). The market price data of commodities can equally improve economic opportunities for local dealers, and technologies bring together and match demand and supply for goods, labour and services to improve income opportunities, economic efficiency and productivity.

Marketing is an important aspect of businesses and digital marketing is a new strategy aimed at reaching those often-accessing digital platforms. Businesses need communication because its content affects the audience's behaviours (Onyekuru *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial for business or marketing managers to continuously find a solution to appeal to customers and keep their patronization (Fauzi *et al.*, 2020). Digital space is an ideal business communication platform that perfectly applies to online marketing. It helps to explore the various forms of online identity formation, communications, expressions and social interaction, likewise options on how to sustain them with the available online resources (Fernández-Ardèvol *et al.*, 2022).

Through digital entrepreneurship, the youths can create an online personality and express their unexplored business aspects. It is a space that helps people to freely express their opinion, agree or disagree, criticize, create product awareness, promote businesses, build business networks, generate income and ponder on real-life experiences (Fauzi *et al.*, 2020; Fernández-Ardèvol *et al.*, 2022; Tariq *et al.*, 2022). For the youths, it opens the door to opportunities for them to explore. Creating new business communication potentials in which partakers are not bound by physical interactions or face-to-face bargaining but can broaden their business arena by delivering services to others, located anywhere in the world. Business opportunities in digital space are quite different from offline activities, as it has a life of their own, different from the real-life activities of the participating individuals. However, the happenings in digital space are deeply modulated by the business culture offline, the political scenarios playing out and imaginaries that take place are what is shown or conveyed in the digital space. It is an articulate business space that exists entirely within a society and in which ways of being and new rules can emerge (Fernández-Ardèvol *et al.*, 2022; Rabia *et al.*, 2020). Now business owners can comfortably interact with consumers to foster the exchange of goods and services without meeting face-to-face. People can be geographically separated with different time zones in different locations but share identical interests while operating virtually sharing and having a common sense of belonging within a digital platform. Being in a platform does not detach an individual from the realities of their location but can free one from the



barriers associated with their environment such as culture, offline personalities, political inclination, social roles and religion (Paul *et al.*, 2023).

The digital entrepreneurship emergence in Nigeria has a huge potential for the youths who engage in lawful online business activities such as social media influencers, advertisements, blogging, app development, web developing, online store etc. Its negative use occurs when the youths start engaging in unethical activities such as sharing false content and posting nude or violent pictures that are injurious to others (Tariq *et al.*, 2022). Generally, digital entrepreneurship is rooted in the larger cultural, economic, societal, imaginary and subjective constructions of our experiences and the systems we operate. It is a great economic tool for youth empowerment and engagement with larger societies. Its engagement is believed to have an economically significant impact on its users, especially the youth (Rabia *et al.*, 2020). However, research on the nature of this influence is ongoing. It is essential for the youth's empowerment as it helps them earn income through advertisements, content development and sharing. This study, therefore, aims to contribute to the literature by accessing the impact of digital entrepreneurship on youth empowerment in Nigeria. The explicit aims of the study are as follows; to determine the youths use rate of digital platforms, their engagement in digital income-generating activities, the role of digital entrepreneurship in youth empowerment and factors affecting youth engagement in digital entrepreneurship. This is crucial for effective youth development policy formulation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Study Area

Enugu State is the area for this study. It lies amid longitudes 7° 32' 47.0004" E and latitudes 6° 27' 30.1176" N (Ndulue *et al.*, 2021; Apeh *et al.*, 2022) and has an estimated population of 4,411,119 persons (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2016). Particularly, the study was conducted in the Enugu metropolis with a cumulative population of 717,291 persons, comprising 198,032, 242,140 and 198,032 for Enugu East, Enugu North and Enugu South Local Government Areas respectively (National Population Commission [NPC], 2006).

Sampling Procedure

A multistage sampling technique was used in selecting the respondents for this study (Table 1). Firstly, in each of the three local governments, we purposively selected one market (East-Abakpa, South – Mayor and North – Ogbete) because they are the major electronic markets in the metropolis, and three tertiary institutions (Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), Enugu Campus) were conveniently chosen for the study. Secondly, 100 digital entrepreneurs (phone and computer repairers, sellers and buyers) were randomly selected at convenience from each of the three markets selected making a total of 300 respondents, and 200 students were equally randomly selected at convenience from each of the three tertiary institutions thereby making a total of 600 respondents. In all, as presented in Table 1, a total sum of 900 respondents (300 digital entrepreneurs and 600 students) was studied.



Table 1: Summary of sampling selection procedure

LGAs	Markets	Respondents
Enugu East	Abakpa	100
Enugu North	Ogbete	100
Enugu South	Mayor	100
Sub-total		300
Tertiary Institutions		
Institute of Management and Technology (IMT)		200
Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT)		200
the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) Enugu Campus		200
Sub-total		600
Ground total = 300 + 600		900

Method of Data Collection

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means and percentages were used to analyse variables with observable facts and the 5-point Likert-type scale was used for measuring the respondent's perceptions on the role of digital entrepreneurship in youth empowerment and factors militating against the use of digital platforms by the youths. The rating of their responses was graded as follows; 5 for totally agree, 4 for agree 3 for neutral, 2 for disagree and 1 for totally disagree. Therefore, accept if the mean score ≥ 3 and reject if the mean score < 3 . The decision point was gotten by adding the grades and dividing them by their number and as:

$$\frac{5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1}{5} = 3$$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Use of Digital Platforms

The result of the respondents' use of digital platforms shown in Table 2 specifies that all the respondents surveyed 749(100%) use digital platforms. The two major platforms used are collaboration (WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom) and social platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest) 749(100%).

Table 2: Use of digital platforms

Variables	% Yes
Use of Digital Platforms	100.00
Types of Digital Platforms Used:	
Media Platforms: Spotify, Netflix, YouTube	59.95
Collaboration platforms: WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom	100
Search engine platforms: Bing, Google	97.06
Social platforms: Pinterest, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook	100
E-commerce platforms: Etsy, eBay, Amazon, Shopify	04.81
Online marketplaces: Google Play, Apple Store, Amazon marketplace	85.05
Service exchange platforms: Airbnb, Taxify bolt, Uber, Lyft,	11.35
Others	01.87

Source: Survey, 2022

As resented in Table 2, other types of digital platforms include search engines (Google, Bing) 727(97%), online marketplaces (Amazon marketplace, Apple Store, Google Play) 637(85%), and media platforms (Spotify, Netflix, YouTube) 449($\approx 60\%$). The high percentage of digital platforms acceptance by the youths makes it an integral part of their lives,



transforming the ways they learn and network in the wider society. It is an important space for youth empowerment, socialization, and learning (Akhter *et al.*, 2022; Butkowski, 2022; Leong *et al.*, 2022; Senshaw, 2022).

Digital Income-Generating Activities

In Table 3, the result shows that the digital income-generating activities youths are engaged in are content creation (29%) web creation (20%), digital marketing (15%) crypto trading (12%), and app development (11%). This shows that the youths are using the digital space to create empowerment opportunities for themselves mainly through content creation like comedy, skit performance; creating web domains for sale or business promotion, online sales, and app development like WhatsApp, U lesson app, Facebook app, games app etc. This means that the youths are drawing from the potentials of digital technologies including cloud computing, the internet, smartphones and social media in creating and promoting economic growth, education, and healthiness (Hansen, 2019). This finding is in line with Aligishiev & Gravesteijn (2020) who found that 83% of enterprises in South and South-East Asia acknowledged digital technology as a business driver, without which, their businesses would suffer expansion constraints.

Table 3: Digital income-generating activities involved

Variables	Percentage (n = 749)
App development	10.55
Coding	04.55
Content Creation	28.56
Digital Marketing	14.55
Crypto trading	11.56
Forex trading	08.56
Web creation	20.11
Others	01.56

Source: Survey, 2022

Digital Entrepreneurs Need for a Physical Structure

In Table 4, the majority 423(56%) of the respondents indicated that they do not need a physical structure (shops, stores, warehouse) to start a digital business. According to them, there's no need to spend extra money renting shops, unlike the traditional entrepreneurs who rent shops, warehouses, etc. to store their goods. This finding supports the argument that digital ventures require fewer resources (Butkowski, 2022; Zainol *et al.*, 2022).

Table 4: Need for a physical structure to start a digital business

Physical Structure	Percentage (n = 749)
Yes	25.89
No	56.44
Maybe	17.67

Source: Survey, 2022

Role of Digital Entrepreneurship in Youth Empowerment

Results of Table 5 indicate that self-employment (M = 4.04), income generation and sustainable well-being (M = 3.74), the enhancement of business networks (M = 3.44), improved access to markets (M = 3.82), job creation (M = 3.35) and knowledge enhancement (M = 3.02) were perceived by the respondents as the important ways the digital



entrepreneurship contributes youth empowerment. Access to Digital technologies helps in creating wide economic participation for the youth by reducing unemployment (Akhter *et al.*, 2022; Lou, 2022; Senshaw, 2022).

Table 5: Respondents perceived the role of digital entrepreneurship in empowering youths

Factors	Mean (Max = 5)	SD
Self-employment	4.04*	1.961
Income generation and sustainable wellbeing	3.74*	1.412
Enhance business networks	3.44*	1.098
Improved access to markets	3.82*	1.837
Job creation	3.35*	1.517
Enhances knowledge	3.02*	0.891

Source: Survey, 2022

Factors Affecting Youth Engagement in Digital Entrepreneurship

In Table 6, lack of capital ($M = 4.26$), poor internet access ($M = 3.06$), poor interest ($M = 4.03$), poor electricity access ($M = 3.84$), poor technical skills ($M = 3.02$), and lack of information ($M = 3.95$) were accepted by the respondents as factors militating against youth engagement in digital entrepreneurship. This finding is in line with Masenya (2021) who found barriers affecting digital entrepreneurship such as poor funding, poor technical skills, lack of digital entrepreneurship opportunities awareness, and the unavailability of tutors in South Africa. This implies that youth entrepreneurship programs should focus more on youth financial inclusion as it would help improve their interest and engagement in digital entrepreneurship. Equally, access to electricity, the internet, and information and the youths' technical skills on the use of digital platforms should be improved to enhance youth well-being through the income generation activities of digital platforms. Enhanced participation of the youths in digital platforms would help their innovative ideas based on the market needs peculiar to their environment.

Table 6: Factors militating against youth engagement in digital entrepreneurship

Factors	Mean (Max. = 5)	SD
Lack of capital	4.26*	1.604
Poor availability of internet	3.06*	1.101
Lack of interest	4.03*	1.849
Poor access to electricity	3.84*	1.837
Lack of technical skills	3.02*	1.046
Lack of information	3.95*	1.110

Source: Survey, 2022

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Youths engage in the use of various digital platforms for income generation through content creation, web creation, digital marketing, crypto trading, and app development. These activities help empower the youths by making them self-employed, increasing their income, enhancing their business networks, and access to markets and knowledge. It also contributes meaningfully to gross national development through tax remittances and employment. However, factors such as lack of capital, poor internet access, lack of interest, poor electricity access, lack of technical skills, and lack of information militate against youth engagement in digital entrepreneurship. Therefore, the positive use of digital platforms by the youths can help



develop their career, skills and well-being. There should more awareness among the youth regarding the positive use of digital platforms and the opportunities they present.

REFERENCES

- African Union [AU] (2021). Youth Development. <https://au.int/en/youth-development>
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2z6qdpw.9>
- Akhter, A., Karim, Md. M., & Islam, K. M. A. (2022). The Impact of Creativity and Innovativeness on Digital Entrepreneurship: Empirical Evidence from Bangladesh. *The Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, 9(3), 77–82.
<https://doi.org/10.13106/JAFEB.2022.VOL9.NO3.0077>
- Aligishiev, Z., & Gravestijn, R. (2020) Youth Entrepreneurs Engaging in the Digital Economy: The Next Generation. *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Australian Government and the Citi Foundation*. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/UNDP-RBAP-Youth-Entrepreneurs-Engaging-in-Digital-Economy-2020.pdf>
- Apeh, A. C., Anigbo, G. C., & Apeh, C. C. (2022). Sustainable Mechanisms for Plastic Waste Disposal in Enugu Metropolis: The Role of Media Campaign. *Language, Literature and Communication Journal*, 4(1), 18–26. Retrieved from <https://www.cirdjournal.com/index.php/llcj/article/view/736>.
- Butkowski, C. P. (2022). “If you didn’t take a selfie, did you even vote?”: Embodied mass communication and citizenship models in “I voted” selfies. *New Media & Society*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211068937>
- Fauzi, T. H., Harits, B., Danial, D. M., & Komariah, K. (2020). Adaptive Strategies of External Environmental Effects in Digital Entrepreneurship in the Strategic Management Perspective. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 9(3), 38. <https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2020-0040>
- Fernández-Ardèvol, M., Belotti, F., Ieracitano, F., Mulargia, S., Rosales, A., & Comunello, F. (2022). “I do it my way”: Idioms of practice and digital media ideologies of adolescents and older adults. *New Media & Society*, 24(1), 31–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820959298>
- Hansen, S. L. (2019) Using Reflection to Promote Career-Based Learning in Student Employment. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 2019(162), 61-73. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ysd.20334>
- Leong, C., Tan, F. T. C., Tan, B., & Faisal, F. (2022). The emancipatory potential of digital entrepreneurship: A study of financial technology-driven inclusive growth. *Information & Management*, 59(3). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2020.103384>
- Lou, C. (2022). Social Media Influencers and Followers: Theorization of a Trans-Parasocial Relation and Explication of Its Implications for Influencer Advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 51(1), 4–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2021.1880345>
- Masanya, T. M. (2021) Promotion of Digital Entrepreneurship for Youth Employability in the Post Covid-19 Era: In N. Baporikar (Ed.), *Advances in Business Strategy and Competitive Advantage*, 122-142. IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-6632-9.ch007>
- National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] (2016). National Population Estimates. The National Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nigeriastat.gov.ng/download/474>
- National Population Commission [NPC] (2006). Population by State and Sex. National Population Commission. Retrieved from



<http://web.archive.org/web/20110519235026/http://www.population.gov.ng/files/nationalfinal.pdf>

- Ndulue, D. C., Ayadiuno, R. U., Mozie, A. T., & Ogbu, C. I. (2021). Spatial Variation in the Level of Awareness and Application of Climate Change Policies and Laws in Enugu State South East, Nigeria. *Psychology and Education*, 58(2), 6460–6471. <https://doi.org/10.17762/pae.v58i2.3177>
- Onyekuru, B. O., Onyekuru, A. N., Ihemezie, E. J., Nwokorie, U. M., and Ukonu, M. (2021). Effectiveness of the Use of Movies in Climate Change Communication: Empirical Evidence from York, United Kingdom, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video, Queen's Quarterly*. 119, 3, p. 452. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2020.1778424>
- Paul, J., Alhassan, I., Binsaif, N., & Singh, P. (2023). Digital entrepreneurship research: A systematic review. *Journal of Business Research*, 156. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.113507>
- Rabia, M., Adnan, S., Misbah, N., Nawaz, H., Gillani, M., & Arshad, A. (2020) Influence of social media on youngsters: A Case Study in GC Women University Sialkot, Pakistan. *Creative Education*, 11(03), 285-296. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2020.113022>
- Senshaw, D. (2022). Leveraging Government Digital Platforms in Resource-Constrained Countries: Micro-foundations of Woredas in Ethiopia. In Y. Zheng, P. Abbott, & J. A. Robles-Flores (Eds.), *Freedom and Social Inclusion in a Connected World* 657, 3–23. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-19429-0_1
- Tariq, A., Muñoz Sáez, D., & Khan, S. R. (2022). Social media use and family connectedness: A systematic review of quantitative literature. *New Media & Society*, 24(3), 815–832. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211016885>
- Zainol, N., Mohd Esa, M., Muhamad, N., & Mohamad, S. S. (2022). Factors Affecting the Success of Digital Entrepreneurship among Suburban Women: Malacca. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(12), 154-163. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i12/15426>