

Harnessing Digital Entrepreneurship for Youth Empowerment: Advancing Sustainable Economic Growth in Southeast Nigeria

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ABSTRACT.

Harnessing digital entrepreneurship for youth empowerment is not just a response to unemployment; it is a long-term investment in economic sustainability. By bridging the digital skills gap, Nigeria can harness the full potential of its youth to drive inclusive growth and global competitiveness. This study focused on harnessing digital entrepreneurship skills for youth empowerment to advance sustainable economic growth in Southeast Nigeria. The specific objectives were to determine how digital entrepreneurship among the youths enhances economic sustainability, the government and private initiatives and interventions that can effectively empower youths in the digital space, and the challenges facing youths in leveraging digital entrepreneurship to enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria. Cross-sectional survey design was adopted. While the exact figures for the population of South-East Nigerian youths are difficult to pinpoint without specific demographic data, a sample of 514 (271 male youths and 243 female youths) was random selection for the study. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions while t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 significance level and the aid of SPSS version 23. The study revealed how digital entrepreneurship skills among the youths enhance economic sustainability to include enabling youth to work from home and possibly increase their earnings, creating self-employment opportunities, and boost local content development in the region. Further findings revealed introducing programmes that provide subsidized devices and internet access, establishing community tech hubs and innovation centres, and integrating digital skills classes into the school curriculums as government and private initiatives that can effectively empower youths in the digital space. The study concludes that empowering Nigerian youths with digital skills goes beyond mere technological proficiency, it represents a strategic economic initiative, and as a means to unlocking economic potential of a vibrant population in an increasingly digital world.

Keywords: Harnessing, Digital Entrepreneurship, Youths Empowerment, Sustainable Economic Growth

INTRODUCTION

Digital entrepreneurship is the process of developing, establishing, and expanding a business that utilizes digital platforms and technologies. It involves creating innovative business models and opportunities in the digital space. This includes activities like online marketing, e-commerce, app development, and using social media to reach a wider customer base. It allows for scalability, global reach, and the potential for rapid growth. Digital entrepreneurship skills involve leveraging online platforms and technologies to create and run a business, encompassing activities like e-commerce, digital marketing, and online learning, requiring adaptability and proficiency in data analysis and communication. Digital entrepreneurship skills are the abilities needed to create, manage, and grow business online, encompassing areas like digital marketing, e-commerce, data analysis, and technology proficiency (Chukwuka & Abude, 2024).

Economic sustainability refers to the establishment of lasting economic success while taking into account the environmental, social, and cultural dimensions of a community or nation, ensuring that economic activities do not exhaust resources or jeopardize the welfare of future generations. It focuses on planning and decision-making that reflects on the long-term impacts of economic actions. The objective is to achieve economic advancement without compromising environmental integrity, social fairness, or cultural principles (Mensah, 2019). Economic sustainability aims to guarantee that the advantages of economic activity are equitably shared

among all individuals in society, rather than just a privileged few. It entails fostering resilience within economies to endure shocks and changes, such as economic recessions or climate-related challenges.

Youths make up over 400 million of the African population (African Union, 2021). Their empowerment is central to good governance, quality leadership and the actualization of long-term economic growth. Their activities play a key role in entrenching and consolidating peace, stability and integration of our societies, which are vital for economic sustainability of any country. 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, Karim & Islam, 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, Tan, Tan & Faisal, 2022).

Digital entrepreneurship is a new business phenomenon which involves the creation of an internet business-enabled service delivery. 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 delivery (Zainol, Mohd Esa, Muhamad & Mohamad, 2022).

Digital entrepreneurship 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 optimize agricultural production (Paul, Alhassan, Binsaif & Singh, 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.

In today's rapidly evolving world, digital skills have become paramount for increased income for individuals and nations alike. Research from Amazon Web Services (AWS) disclosed that investing in digital skills benefits individuals and could raise the gross domestic product (GDP) of nations. For Nigeria, a country with vast potential and a large youth population, empowering these young people with relevant digital skills will not only enable them to participate in the digital economy and earn in foreign currency but will also provide a vital pathway to boosting dollar generation in the country thereby driving economic growth.

Research Problem

It is recognized that the Nigerian economy is sensitive to changes in the foreign exchange market, resulting in volatility in the value of the Naira. The Naira has been experiencing a significant decline against the dollar in the exchange market. This situation persists despite the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) making efforts to stabilize the foreign exchange (FX) market. The depreciation of the Naira has resulted in extensive consequences for the nation, including increased inflation, diminished purchasing power, and heightened economic uncertainty. Consequently, the CBN has implemented various measures to alleviate the forex crisis, such as establishing a singular foreign currency (FCY) gateway bank. This initiative aims to centralize all correspondent banking operations and improve international trade and economic activities.

Also, the apex bank has announced a plan to streamline the number of Bureau De Change (BDC) operators in Nigeria to improve the inflow of forex and stabilize the naira. The prevailing forex backlog, coupled with external challenges amidst global economic uncertainties, no doubt casts a shadow of uncertainty over

Nigeria's economic horizon. With all these, it is clear that relying solely on Naira-denominated income exposes a lot of Nigerians to currency risk and economic uncertainties. Therefore, diversifying income streams to include dollar-oriented sources will not only provide stability and resilience against domestic economic downturns but will also safeguard financial well-being in the long run.

Apart from buying and eating made in Nigeria to reduce pressure on the currency, the biggest avenue to raise the dollar is for Nigeria to embrace digital skills development for the youths. Imagine if Nigeria trains 5 million youths in the next three years and they receive only \$1000 per month, multiplied by a year, this will not only improve their income but will also spur economic growth. 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.

While there is a growing body of literature on youth empowerment and digital entrepreneurship globally, much of the research tends to focus on broader concepts like technology adoption or general entrepreneurship. However, there is limited empirical data specifically examining how digital entrepreneurship skills among the youths can be a pathway to enhancing economic sustainability in Nigeria, the challenges Nigeria youths face, and the specific intervention that effectively empower them in the digital space. There is a need for more case studies and quantitative data on digital entrepreneurship skills empowerment among the youths in Nigeria, especially in diverse regions (urban vs. rural) and sectors (e-commerce, digital marketing, content creation, etc.). The present study on Harnessing Digital Entrepreneurship Skills for Youth Empowerment: Advancing Sustainable Economic Growth in Southeast Nigeria, aim to address these gaps by exploring how digital entrepreneurship skills among the youths enhance economic sustainability in Nigeria, the challenges Nigeria youths face in digital space, and the effectiveness of government and private initiatives and interventions that can effectively empower youths in the digital space.

Research Objectives

The general objective of the paper is to explore how harnessing digital entrepreneurship skills for youth empowerment to advance sustainable economic growth in Southeast Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

1. How digital entrepreneurship skills among the youths advance sustainable economic growth in South-East Nigeria.
2. The government and private initiatives and interventions that can effectively empower youths in the digital space in South-East Nigeria.
3. The challenges facing the youths in leveraging digital entrepreneurship skills to advance sustainable economic growth in South-East Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. How have digital entrepreneurship skills among the youths advance sustainable economic growth in South-East Nigeria?
2. What are the government and private initiatives and interventions that can effectively empower youths in the digital space in South-East Nigeria?
3. What are the challenges facing the youths in leveraging digital entrepreneurship skills to advance sustainable economic growth in South-East Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female youths on how digital entrepreneurship skills among the youths enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria.

2. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female youths on the government and private initiatives and interventions that can effectively empower youths in the digital space in South-East Nigeria.
3. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female youths on the challenges facing the youths in leveraging digital entrepreneurship skills to enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Review

Digital entrepreneurship has emerged as a pivotal avenue for youth empowerment, particularly in regions like Southeast Nigeria, where traditional employment opportunities are limited. This literature review synthesizes recent scholarly works to explore how digital entrepreneurship fosters sustainable economic growth in this context.

Digital Entrepreneurship

Digital Entrepreneurship involves utilizing digital technologies to start, innovate, and oversee business initiatives. It includes activities like e-commerce, digital marketing, content creation, and software development. Digital entrepreneurship signifies the application of digital tools, platforms, and technologies to establish, develop, and manage business projects. It is marked by a significant dependence on internet technologies, digital marketing, e-commerce, and solutions driven by innovation to meet market demands. Digital entrepreneurs take advantage of the internet and digital devices to streamline product distribution, engage with customers, and conduct financial transactions. The primary features of digital entrepreneurship are innovation and digital platforms. Entrepreneurs in the digital space often rely on platforms like social media, e-commerce websites (e.g., Jumia, Konga), and digital payment systems (e.g., PayPal, Flutterwave) to promote and manage their businesses (Eze & Nwachukwu, 2022). These platforms enable businesses to reach broader, global markets with minimal upfront investment. Digital entrepreneurship requires the ability to adapt to new technologies and solve consumer problems through innovative digital solutions. This creativity is essential to staying competitive in the ever-evolving digital landscape (Karanja & Mugendi, 2021). Skills Development and Capacity Building: Digital entrepreneurs need specialized skills in areas like web development, online marketing, data analysis, and financial technology (FinTech). Training and continuous learning are critical for ensuring that entrepreneurs remain competitive in an increasingly digitalized world (Ogunyemi, 2021). Access to New Markets: The internet allows digital entrepreneurs to expand beyond local markets to tap into global consumers, thereby scaling their businesses more quickly than traditional business models (Alhassan & Alhassan, 2023).

Youth Empowerment:

Youth empowerment refers to enabling young individuals to gain control over their lives through access to resources, education, and opportunities that enhance their economic and social well-being. Youth empowerment is the processes and activities that enable young people to gain control over their lives and make positive contributions to their communities. This concept involves providing youths with the tools, resources, and opportunities necessary to become self-reliant and active members of society. In the context of digital entrepreneurship, youth empowerment is largely about providing young individuals with the necessary tools and platforms to establish income-generating ventures. Digital entrepreneurship directly facilitates economic empowerment by allowing youths to access online job opportunities, start businesses, and gain financial independence (Imhabekhai, Ugochukwu & Orji, 2020).

Studies show that digital entrepreneurship has enabled many young people to escape poverty by utilizing their skills to provide services in the digital marketplace (Munyua & Mukulu, 2021). Beyond economic benefits, youth empowerment can also have social and political implications. Young people empowered through entrepreneurship are more likely to contribute to societal changes, including advocating for better policies,

social justice, and community welfare. This empowerment is often linked with the digital space, where social media and online forums provide youth with a platform to voice their opinions and advocate for societal change (Adeyemi, Ogunyemi & Ayodele, 2022). For empowerment to be sustainable, young entrepreneurs require consistent access to training programs, mentorship, and educational resources. Capacity-building initiatives that focus on entrepreneurship education are essential for nurturing the next generation of business leaders (Ugwuanyi, Aligbe & Okoro, 2020).

Sustainable Economic Growth

Economic development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, often characterized by inclusive growth, job creation, and environmental sustainability. Sustainable economic growth refers to a form of economic development that aims to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves the efficient use of resources, environmental protection, and social equity (Odebiyi & Ajayi, 2021).

Relationship between Digital Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Economic Growth

Digital entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a driver of sustainable economic growth. It contributes to diversification of the economy by fostering innovation in sectors such as e-commerce, FinTech, and online services. In Southeast Nigeria, where agriculture and oil remain dominant, digital entrepreneurship presents an opportunity to diversify the economic base and reduce dependency on traditional industries (Oluwagbemiga & Olaseni, 2022).

Digital entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in job creation, which is vital for driving sustainable growth in a region with high youth unemployment. By empowering youth with the skills to run digital businesses, the economy sees growth in the form of new startups, new employment opportunities, and innovative solutions to local problems (Odebiyi & Ajayi, 2021).

Digital entrepreneurship can also contribute to sustainability by promoting eco-friendly business models. For instance, businesses that operate digitally may have lower carbon footprints compared to traditional brick-and-mortar establishments. Furthermore, the digital economy facilitates more efficient use of resources through technologies like cloud computing and digital logistics (Folawewo, Akintoye, & Ogunyemi, 2023).

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Onuegbu, Agbamu, Anyakoha & Anunike (2025) assessed the communication, awareness, and acceptance of digital banking among residents of Southeast and South-South Nigeria during a cash crunch. The findings revealed that while awareness levels were moderate, acceptance and usage of digital banking improved significantly post-crisis. The study highlighted the crucial role of communication in enhancing the adoption of digital financial services.

Solarin (2024) in November 26th 2024, Meta hosted its first Youth Summit in Lagos, Nigeria, bringing together over 200 young professionals, students, recent graduates, creatives, tech enthusiasts, and aspiring entrepreneurs. The summit aimed to empower youth through technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship, providing them with the skills, insights, and networks needed to thrive in today's tech-driven world.

Omoju, Ikhide, Olanrele, Abeng, Petreski, Adebayo, Odigie & Muhammed (2023) examined various youth-employment policies in Nigeria, identifying challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of institutional capacity, and limited political inclusivity. The study emphasized the need for comprehensive governance frameworks and long-term development plans to enhance the effectiveness of youth employment programs.

Paul, Alhassan, Binsaif & Singh (2023) carried a systematic literature review was conducted to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon. Web of Science and Scopus were employed to identify, extract, select, and review related articles using search keywords. Finally, articles from 25 SSCI-indexed journals were selected for this study. This systematic literature review identifies current research paths on digital entrepreneurship

categorizing the key findings into themes, contexts, and methodologies using the TCM framework. Finally, we propose a conceptual model that presents how a traditional enterprise can transform into a digital enterprise. The study contributes to the understanding of the conceptualization of Digital Entrepreneurship by laying the groundwork for further research development encouraging researchers to investigate this phenomenon.

Zainol, Mohd-Esa, Muhamad & Mohamad (2022) examined the Factors affecting the success of digital entrepreneurship among suburban women in Malacca. Using an online survey, the study collects data in Suburban, Malacca from 310 respondents among residents in Melaka. The used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to test the correlation between dependent variables and independent variables. The results analyzed by multiple linear regression analysis show that only two out of three factors which are digital entrepreneurship and digital marketing have significant effect on the success of women entrepreneurs, while government support has no significant effect.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three theories that collectively explain the relationship between digital entrepreneurship skills and youth empowerment for sustainable economic growth: Human Capital Theory, Empowerment Theory, and Innovation Diffusion Theory.

Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964)

Human Capital Theory posits that investment in education and skills enhances individual productivity, which leads to economic growth. In the context of this study, equipping youths with digital entrepreneurship skills increases their economic value and employability. These skills, ranging from social media marketing to e-commerce and digital content creation, enable youths in Enugu State to create or access income-generating opportunities, thereby reducing unemployment and poverty. The theory supports the idea that training programmes in digital entrepreneurship represent an investment in youth, transforming them into economic assets capable of contributing to regional and national development.

Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 1995)

Empowerment Theory emphasizes the process through which individuals gain control over their lives, access resources, and critically understand their socio-economic environment. Empowering youths through digital entrepreneurship provides them with the confidence, tools, and opportunities to become self-reliant and proactive economic participants. The theory aligns with the study's goal of not merely providing skills, but also fostering agency and decision-making power among youths in South-east Nigeria. As they become digitally literate entrepreneurs, their capacity to influence their socio-economic outcomes is strengthened.

Innovation Diffusion Theory (Rogers, 1962)

This theory explains how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technology spread through cultures. Digital entrepreneurship thrives on technological innovation, and the adoption of these innovations is crucial for youth engagement in modern markets. This theory helps explain the factors influencing the adoption of digital tools by youths in Enugu. Variables such as perceived usefulness ease of use, peer influence, and access to digital infrastructure will affect the uptake of digital entrepreneurial practices.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design for population and data management. A cross-sectional survey design is a research approach where data is collected from a population or sample at a single point in time. It's essentially a "snapshot" of the population, offering a view of various characteristics or behaviors at that specific moment. This design is often used to describe the prevalence of certain traits or to assess the relationship between different variables within a population (Wang & Cheng, 2020). The study was carried out

in South-East Region of Nigeria comprises five administrative states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states).

Due to the nature of the population under study, the study focused on the age characterization and access to ICT and relevant facilitating gadgets among the population. The exact figures for the population of South-East Nigerian youths are difficult to pinpoint without specific demographic data. As such, a sample of 514 (271 male and 243 female) young entrepreneurs, digital skill trainees, and relevant stakeholders (e.g., government agencies, NGOs) were selected for the study comprising the high school students, youths in the various institutions of higher learning as well as graduate youths and school dropouts at different levels. In view of the interest of the study, which is on the youths in southeast Nigeria, coupled with the fact that these youths are located across the communities in the rural areas and outlets in the urban communities, the study based the random selection of the sampling units on the states, senatorial zones, local councils, communities in the rural areas and streets/outlets in the urban communities. This was done, with the aid of multistage sampling technique for a more comprehensive representative of the targeted population.

Structured questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. The instrument was faced validated by three experts and reliability coefficient of 0.83 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha reliability method. The questionnaires were shared among the communities, streets/outlets chosen for the study between January and March 2025. The study applied quantitative method of data analysis. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 23) was used to key in data collected for the study into the computer. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation; decisions were made using the real limits of the scale values 1 to 4 on a four-point scale, while regression analysis was used to test the null hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study were presented according to research questions and hypotheses that guided the study

Research Questions One

How have digital entrepreneurship skills among the youths enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean ratings and standard deviation of male and female youths on how digital entrepreneurship skills among the youths enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria

S/N	How digital entrepreneurship skills among the youths enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria are:	Male Youths N=271		Female Youths N = 243		Overall		Decision
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	\bar{X}_G	SD _G	
1	allowing young people to work remotely and potentially earn more than traditional jobs	3.85	0.36	3.92	0.40	3.88	0.37	Accepted
2	creating self-employment opportunities for the youths	3.88	0.33	3.72	0.46	3.82	0.39	Accepted
3	promoting sustainable development through the innovative use of digital technologies	3.71	0.46	3.56	0.58	3.66	0.51	Accepted
4	boosting local content development in the region	3.28	0.46	3.36	0.49	3.32	0.47	Accepted
5	enabling young people to leverage digital platforms for various business	3.73	0.45	3.80	0.41	3.75	0.43	Accepted

	endeavors							
6	provision of foreign exchange through export earnings	3.67	0.52	3.56	0.65	3.63	0.57	Accepted
	Cluster Mean/SD	3.69	0.46	3.65	0.52	3.68	0.48	Accepted

The analysis of data presented in Table 1 above shows that overall mean rating ranging from 3.32 to 3.88 showing accepted. This means that the respondents strongly agree to the items as how digital entrepreneurship skills among the youths enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria. The overall cluster mean of 3.68 further indicates that the items are how digital entrepreneurship skills among the youths enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria. The low standard deviation of 0.48 indicates that the respondents have similar opinion to the items.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female youths on how digital entrepreneurship skills among the youths enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria.

Table 2: t-test analysis of mean rating of male and female youths on how digital entrepreneurship skills among the youths enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria

Variables	N	X	df	T	Mean Difference	Sig (2- tailed)	Decision
Male Youths	271	3.33	137	0.547	1.3491	0.483	Not Significance
Female Youths	243	3.28					

Table 2 above shows that the t-value at 0.05 level of significant and 137 degree of freedom for the six items is 0.547 with significant value of 0.483. Since the significant value of 0.483 is more than the 0.05 level of significant the null hypothesis is not significant. This invariably depicts that there is no significant difference on the mean rating of male and female youths on how digital entrepreneurship skills among the youths enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria.

Research Question Two

What are the government and private initiatives and interventions that can effectively empower youths in the digital space in South-East Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean ratings and standard deviation of male and female youths on the government and private initiatives and interventions that can effectively empower youths in the digital space in South-East Nigeria

S/N	Government and private initiatives and interventions that can effectively empower youths in the digital space in South-East Nigeria are:	Male Youths N=271		Female Youths N = 243		Overall		Decision
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	
7	introduce programmes that provide subsidised devices and internet access for the youths.	3.58	0.61	3.76	0.44	3.64	0.56	Accepted

8	establishing community tech hubs and innovation centres in each local government area	3.54	0.50	3.72	0.46	3.60	0.49	Accepted
9	integrating computer science and digital skills classes into the school curriculums from primary through secondary levels	3.71	0.46	3.64	0.57	3.68	0.50	Accepted
10	creating startup incubators focused on sustainable digital solutions	3.69	0.47	3.56	0.65	3.64	0.54	Accepted
11	Expanding digital Infrastructure through partnerships with telecom companies to install fibre optic networks and mobile towers in underserved areas	3.67	0.52	3.60	0.58	3.64	0.54	Accepted
12	building mentorship networks will bridge the gap between communities, allowing digital knowledge and resources to flow freely	3.48	0.62	3.28	0.74	3.41	0.66	Accepted
	Cluster Mean/SD	3.62	0.52	3.58	0.58	3.60	0.54	Accepted

The data presented in Table 3 indicates that all the items recorded overall mean rating ranges from 3.41 to 3.68 showing accepted. This shows that the items are government and private initiatives and interventions that can effectively empower youths in the digital space in South-East Nigeria. The overall cluster mean rating of 3.60 indicates accepted. This implies that the items are government and private initiatives and interventions that can effectively empower youths in the digital space in South-East Nigeria. The low standard deviation of 0.54 shows that the respondents' opinions do not differ remarkably on the items presented.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female youths on the government and private initiatives and interventions that can effectively empower youths in the digital space in South-East Nigeria.

Table 4: t-test analysis of mean rating of male and female youths on the government and private initiatives and interventions that can effectively empower youths in the digital space in South-East Nigeria

Variables	N	X	df	T	Mean Difference	Sig (2- tailed)	Decision
Male Youths	271	3.30	137	0.371	2.9027	0.429	Not Significance
Female Youths	243	3.31					

The result of data analysis in table 4 shows that the t-value at 0.05 level of significant and 137 degree of freedom for the six items is 0.371 with significant value of 0.429. Since the significant value of 0.429 is more than 0.05 level of significant, the null hypothesis is not significant. The implication is that there is no

significant different in the mean rating of male and female youths on the government and private initiatives and interventions that can effectively empower youths in the digital space in South-East Nigeria.

Research Question Three

What are the challenges facing Nigeria youths in leveraging digital entrepreneurship skills to enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria?

Table 5: Mean responses and standard deviation of the male and female youths on the challenges facing Nigeria youths in leveraging digital entrepreneurship skills to enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria

S/N	Challenges facing Nigeria youths in leveraging digital entrepreneurship skills to enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria are:	workers N=41		beneficiaries N= 271		Overall		Decision
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	\bar{X}_G	SD _G	
13	poor infrastructure, including unreliable internet and electricity access	3.29	0.46	3.56	0.51	3.38	0.49	Accepted
14	lack of proficiency in digital knowledge to effectively utilize technology for business purposes	3.25	0.44	3.44	0.51	3.31	0.47	Accepted
15	lack of adequate mentorship and training programmes to support youths in developing the needed digital skills	3.35	0.48	3.64	0.49	3.45	0.50	Accepted
16	lack of adequate business incubation centers to support young entrepreneurs in building successful digital businesses	3.44	0.50	3.60	0.50	3.49	0.50	Accepted
17	challenges competing with larger, more established businesses that have better digital resources and networks	3.73	0.45	3.72	0.46	3.73	0.45	Accepted
18	demanding need to constantly adapt to new technologies and changing market conditions	3.67	0.48	3.68	0.48	3.67	0.47	Accepted
	Cluster mean/SD	3.62	0.49	3.41	0.52	3.52	0.51	Accepted

The data presented in Table 5 above shows that the overall mean ratings for the items ranges from 3.31 to 3.73 indicating accepted. This shows that respondents agree to the items as the challenges facing Nigeria youths in leveraging digital entrepreneurship skills to enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria. The overall cluster mean of 3.52 further reveals that the respondents agree to the items as the challenges facing Nigeria youths in leveraging digital entrepreneurship skills to enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria. The low standard deviation of 0.51 shows that the respondents do not differ remarkably on their opinions to the items presented.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female youths on the challenges facing Nigeria youths in leveraging digital entrepreneurship skills to enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria.

Table 6: t-test analysis of mean rating of male and female youths on the challenges facing Nigeria youths in leveraging digital entrepreneurship skills to enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria

Variables	N	X	Df	T	Mean Difference	Sig (2- tailed)	Decision
Male Youths	271	3.32	137	0.423	1.2172	0.442	Not Significance
Female Youths	243	3.29					

Table 6 above shows that the t-value at 0.05 level of significant and 137 degree of freedom for the nine items is 0.423 with significant value of 0.483. Since the significant value of 0.442 is more than the 0.05 level of significant the null hypothesis is not significant. This invariably shows that there is no significant difference on the mean rating of male and female youths on the challenges facing Nigeria youths in leveraging digital entrepreneurship skills to enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study was specifically set out to determine how empowering youths through digital entrepreneurship skills can enhance economic sustainability, to determine government and private sector initiatives and interventions that can effectively empower youths; and to determine the challenges facing the youths in leveraging digital entrepreneurship skills to enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria.

The study in the first objective revealed that digital entrepreneurship skills have emerged as a significant driver of economic sustainability among youths in the South-East Nigeria. this is by allowing young people to work remotely, creating self-employment opportunities for the youths, boosting local content development in the region, leveraging digital platforms for various business endeavours, and provision of foreign exchange through export earnings. This finding of the study is strongly aligned with existing literature that emphasizes the transformative potential of digital entrepreneurship skills in driving youth economic empowerment. Prior studies such as those by Waud, Nwanyanwu & Allobari (2024) Popoola, Adeyinka, Oyetunde & Olanikanmi (2024), have established that digital skills and technologies create new pathways for income generation, particularly in developing regions. This study affirms those conclusions within the South-Southeast Nigerian context, showing that youths equipped with digital competencies are increasingly able to establish viable enterprises and contribute to economic sustainability.

The finding of the study in second objective found that government and private sector initiatives such as subsidized devices and internet access, stablishing community tech hubs and innovation centres, integrating computer science and digital skills classes into the school curriculums, creating startup incubators focused on sustainable digital solutions, expanding digital infrastructure through partnerships with telecom companies, building mentorship networks to bridge the gap between communities, and allowing digital knowledge and resources to flow freely have played an essential role in training and orienting youths toward digital opportunities. This finding echoes findings by Popoola, Adeyinka, Oyetunde & Olanikanmi (2024) who their research highlights the urgent need for skilling, upskilling, and reskilling the Nigerian workforce, integrating formal, non-formal, and informal educational pathways to equip them for digital economy jobs. It also suggests enhancing microeconomic sectors and fostering innovation and technology adoption as pivotal strategies.

Further finding of the study is on the third objective that concern with determining the challenges facing the youths in leveraging digital entrepreneurship skills to enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria.

Despite the growing interest and participation of youths in digital entrepreneurship, the study identified several persistent challenges impeding their success. These include poor infrastructure, unreliable internet and electricity access, lack of proficiency in digital knowledge to effectively utilize technology for business purposes, and lack of adequate mentorship and training programmes to support youths in developing the needed digital skills among others. The finding resonates concerns highlighted by Nkwo & Eneiga (2025) regarding higher regulatory barriers and inadequate business incubation centers to support young entrepreneurs in building successful digital businesses are associated with reduced growth and success of digital entrepreneurship ventures, highlighting the need for streamlined regulatory frameworks.

These findings are not only validated by the existing literature but also provide contextual insight into how these dynamics play out locally, offering practical implications for policy and programme design aimed at youth empowerment through digital entrepreneurship in South-East Nigeria and Africa in general.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study determined how digital entrepreneurship skills among the youths enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria. It determined the government and private initiatives and interventions that can effectively empower youths in the digital space in South-East Nigeria. The study further identified challenges facing Nigeria youths in leveraging digital entrepreneurship skills to enhance economic sustainability in South-East Nigeria. The identified challenges suggest that investments in enhancing digital infrastructure could significantly bolster entrepreneurial ecosystem, fostering economic growth and innovation in the region.

In conclusion, equipping the youth of South-East Nigeria with digital skills transcends mere technological know-how; it is a strategic economic move and a pathway to unleashing the economic capabilities of a dynamic and expanding population in a world that is becoming more digitalized. Importantly, by achieving digital literacy, these young individuals can tackle the difficulties posed by a weakening Naira and excel in a global economy that is increasingly interconnected and competitive.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were offered.

1. To improve youth empowerment through digital entrepreneurship skills and enhance economic sustainability in the South-East, stakeholders should focus on providing targeted training, bridging the digital divide, and fostering a supportive ecosystem for young entrepreneurs. This includes investing in digital literacy programs, particularly for women and rural youth, offering access to affordable devices and internet, and creating platforms for mentorship and funding.
2. Digital literacy serves as the foundation for empowering youth in the digital realm; consequently, incorporating computer science and digital skills education into school curricula from primary to secondary levels will ensure that every student possesses the necessary knowledge to succeed in the digital era.
3. Furthermore, providing free online courses focused on emerging technologies can bolster these initiatives.
4. Partnering with technology companies to offer apprenticeship programmes will provide students with practical experience, equipping them for future careers in the digital industry.
5. The study highlights the challenges youths encounter in utilizing digital entrepreneurship skills to promote economic sustainability in the South-East. To foster the development of digital businesses, it is essential to enhance digital infrastructure to close the digital gap. This may involve increasing broadband connectivity in more rural regions, setting up community technology hubs and innovation centers in every local government area, and deploying fiber optic networks and mobile towers in areas that lack adequate service.

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