Leveraging on E-Commerce to Enhance Youth Entrepreneurship Success

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.101100121

Received: 09 November 2026; Accepted: 14 November 2026; Published: 21 November 2026

ABSTRACT

The success of youth entrepreneurship has become an increasingly important topic in recent years, as young people are seen as key drivers of innovation and economic growth. In the contemporary digital era, E-commerce has transformed traditional business models, offering unprecedented opportunities for youth entrepreneurship. This paper explored the extent to which e-commerce contributes to entrepreneurial success among young people. Five major enabling strands of e-commerce including market access, brand visibility, customer engagement, sales growth and innovation, were studied to ascertain their impacts on youth entrepreneurial success. Quantitative research method approach was employed, combining survey data from 200 young entrepreneurs along Poly Road, Nekede, Owerri, Imo state Nigeria. An in-depth interview was conducted from successful youth-led businesses. A random sampling method was employed to select the entrepreneurs. Data collection was done using a structured questionnaire administered physically. Also, semi-structured interviews via Zoom were conducted with the successful youth entrepreneurs. The result showed that 45% of youths use e-commerce platform, 55% of youths do not use e-commerce platform, out of the 45% using e-commerce platforms for their businesses 90% reported high impact on market reach, 90% reported high brand visibility online, 80% reported high influence on customer engagement, high sales growth (70%), digital literacy (55%) and innovation adoption (50%). The study highlights the importance of e-commerce in youth entrepreneurship projecting its positive impact on average sales growth rate, with e-commerce users having 60% average sales growth rate and non-users 40%. It also highlights challenges faced by young entrepreneurs which include standing out amidst competitors, managing customer reviews, skill gaps, and cybersecurity risks. The findings of this study provide insights for policymakers, educators, and industry stakeholders seeking to support youths' entrepreneurship development in the digital age.

Keywords: E-commerce, Digital literacy, Digital marketing, Entrepreneurship success, Youth entrepreneurship.

INTRODUCTION

In this digital age, youth entrepreneurship has emerged as a key driver of economic growth, innovation, and social transformation. Also, the adoption of digital technologies has made information and resources more accessible to everyone and has also provided aspiring young entrepreneurs with unprecedented opportunities to connect with potential customers, build brand awareness, perform business transactions and drive business growth. The paradigm shifts in entrepreneurial landscapes witnessed in the 21st century globally, is largely due to the proliferation of digital technologies. The rapidly growing intersection of e-commerce and youth entrepreneurship has catalyzed a profound transformation in the contemporary business landscape, transforming how young people envision, initiate, and grow their businesses. The utilization of e-commerce has emerged as a crucial catalyst for the advancement of youth entrepreneurial enterprises in the constantly evolving digital era (Ausat & Suherlan, 2022). For young entrepreneurs, who are typically more tech-savvy and adaptable, e-commerce offers numerous advantages which include global accessibility, operational efficiency, expansive marketing opportunities, and the capacity to promptly adapt to market fluctuations (Gao et al., 2023).

Background

The rise of e-commerce has radically altered the landscape of entrepreneurship. E-commerce refers to the electronic exchange of goods and services over the internet. It encompasses the buying and selling of products and services through digital means (Jain et al., 2021). The global digital ecosystem empowers youth by offering real-time interactions, fostering innovative marketing techniques, and allowing for the creation of global microbrands (Kumar et al., 2020). Youth entrepreneurship refers to the entrepreneurial activities undertaken by individuals aged between 18 and 35. It is essential not only for the economic empowerment of young people but also for enhancing social stability and encouraging innovation. The utilization of e-commerce offers several advantages to youth enterprises (Harahap, Ausat, & Suherlan, 2023). Primarily, through the utilization of e-commerce, business owners can expand their market reach to a broader geographical area. E-commerce platforms enable individuals and businesses to access the global market, thereby eliminating geographical limitations at local and national levels (Ausat & Peirisal, 2021). Additionally, e - commerce platforms such as Shopify and Etsy enable young people to sell their products globally without the need for a physical storefront.

Problem Statement

Despite the growing importance of e-commerce in entrepreneurship, there is limited understanding of their impacts on youth entrepreneurship success. Many young entrepreneurs struggle to leverage e-commerce effectively, hindering their ability to reach customers, build brand awareness, and drive sales. This study aims to investigate the influence of e-commerce on youth entrepreneurship success, exploring the opportunities and challenges faced by young entrepreneurs in the digital age.

Objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of e-commerce on the success of youth entrepreneurship. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the extent to which e-commerce usage impacts the market reach of youth entrepreneurs.
2. Assess the role of e-commerce in enhancing brand visibility for young entrepreneurs and influencing customer engagement and retention among youth-led businesses.
3. Examine the extent to which e-commerce enhances sales growth among youth entrepreneurs.
4. To investigate the relationship between digital literacy, innovation and use of e-commerce platforms in youth entrepreneurship development.
5. To explore challenges faced by youth in using e-commerce platforms for entrepreneurial activities.

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative research method was adopted in collecting numerical data for the study. A survey data was collected from 200 young entrepreneurs (ages 18-35) who use e-commerce platform for their businesses along Poly Road, Nekede, Owerri, Imo state Nigeria. The businesses are stationeries, cybercafe and business centres, clothings, repair and sale of assorted electronic devices such as phones (and its accessories), computers and other electronic devices. Some of these young entrepreneurs use e-commerce platforms, which has enhanced their entrepreneurship success over the years. A random sampling method was employed to select the entrepreneurs. Data collection was done using a structured questionnaire administered physically. Also, semi-structured interviews via Zoom were conducted with successful youth entrepreneurs. Secondary data from peer-reviewed journals, reports, and e-commerce analytics platforms were used to validate the obtained data. The qualitative data were thematically analyzed to capture nuanced insights (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The sample frame comprises just those youth entrepreneurs who meet all the following criteria:

- Owns a physical shop.

- Is present at the shop as at those days the questionnaire were distributed, Monday through Friday.
- Is not a youth entrepreneur who refuses to take part in the questionnaire.

The sample frame has some limitations. For example, it under-represents groups that do not own a shop (e.g., the hawkers and those that have only online shops), were not at the shop at the time of administering the questionnaires, or do not want to engage in answering questionnaires (e.g., more busy and active people).

RESULTS

Table 1.1: E-commerce Usage by age subgroups (18-25 vs. 26-35) and gender.

indicator	Age subgroups/Sex (18 – 25) Female	Age subgroups/Sex (18 – 25) Male	Age subgroups/Sex (26 – 35) Female	Age subgroups/Sex (26 – 35) Female	frequency	percentage
E-commerce usage	10	10	30	40	90	45%
Non-e-commerceusage	10	20	35	45	110	55%

Based on the data presented in Table 1.1, the results are as follows: e-commerce usage by youths is 45%, while non-e-commerce usage by youths is 55%.

Overall, the table provides insights into the reluctance of youths in using e-commerce although majority mentioned that they use social media platforms like whatsapp, Instagram etc. (representing digitally connected individuals) but social media platforms are not really e-commerce platforms.

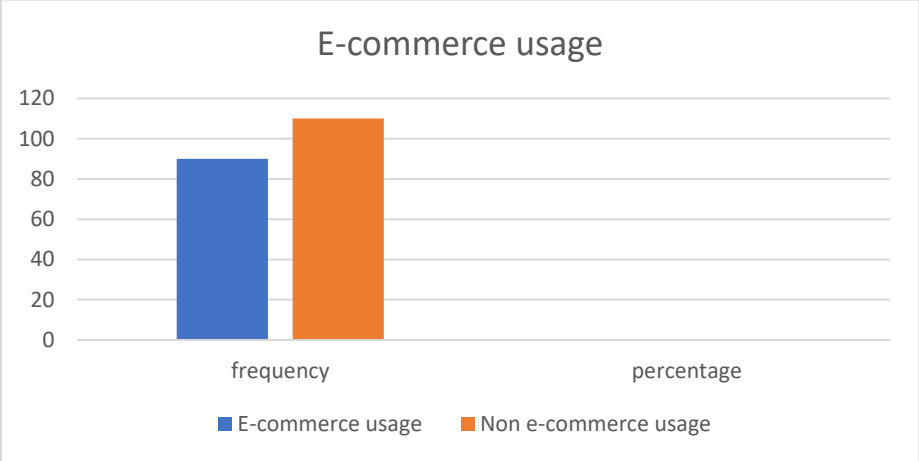


Fig 1.1: Sample size of 90 youths, E-commerce Usage

Table 1.2: E-commerce Usage by business type and platform used.

Business type	E-commerce platform	Frequency
Stationeries	-	-
Business centres & Cybercafe	Shopify, WooCommerce	15

Repair and Sale of assorted electronic devices, such as phones (and its accessories),	Shopify WooCommerce	30
Computers and other electronic devices	BigCommerce Shopify	31
Clothings	Square Online	4
Food vendors	shopify WooCommerce	5
Provision stores	Shopify,	5
TOTAL		90

Based on the data presented in Table 1.2, the results are as follows:

The platform used includes. Shopify, WooCommerce, BigCommerce, Square Online

Overall, the table provides insights into the small-scale businesses operated by the youths and they include: Business Centres & Cybercafe, Repair and Sale of assorted electronic devices, such as phones (and its accessories), Computers and other electronic devices, Clothings, Food vendors, Provision stores etc.

Table 1.3: E-commerce Usage and Impact (For 90 youths)

indicator	frequency	Percentage
High impact on market reach	81	90%
Less impact on market reach	9	10%

Based on the data presented in Table 1.3, the results are as follows:

For e-commerce usage by youths - its impact on market reach is high, 90%.

Overall, the table provides insights into the usefulness of e-commerce in reaching out to the market.

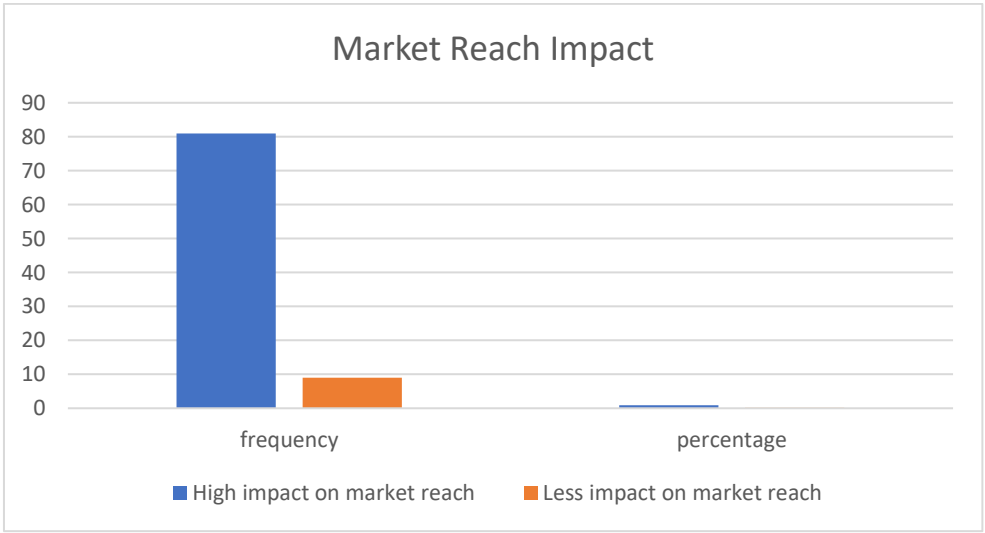


Fig 1.3: Sample size of 90 youths, Market Reach Impact

Table 2: Brand Visibility and Customer Engagement

indicator	frequency	percentage
High impact on brand visibility	81	90%
High influence on customer engagement	72	80%
High influence on customer retention	54	60%

Table 2 shows that:

- 81 youths (90%) out of 90 have their brands visible online on e-commerce platforms.
- 72 youths (80%) had high influence on customer engagement.
- While 54 youths (60%) had high influence on customer retention.

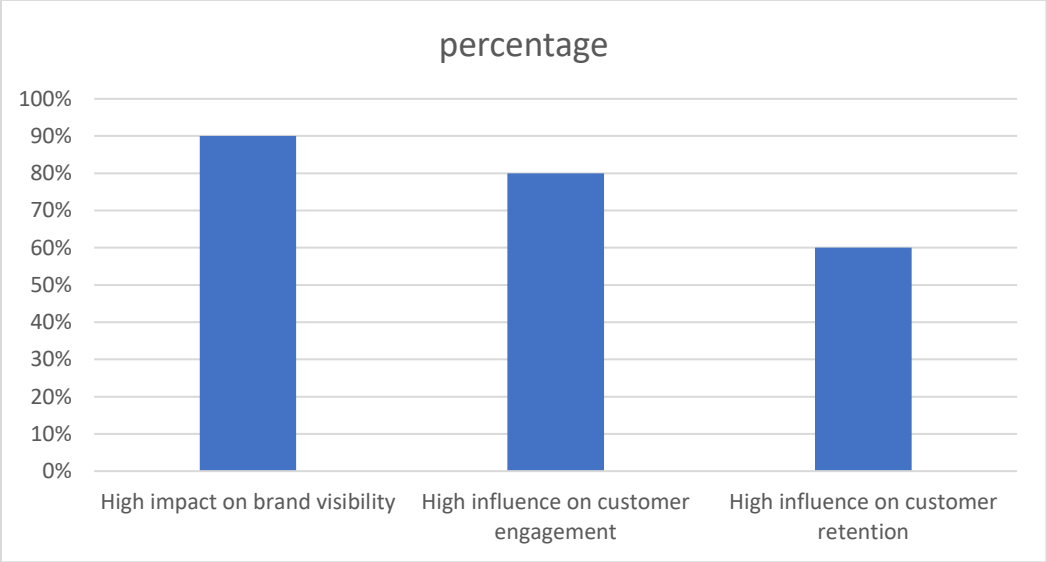


Fig 2: Brand Visibility and Customer Engagement

Table 3: Sales Growth and Digital Literacy

Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
High Sales Growth	63	70%
High Digital Literacy	50	55%
High Innovation Adoption	45	50%

Based on the data presented in Table 3, the results are as follows:

70% of participants reported high sales growth attributable to e-commerce usage.

55%, reported high levels of digital literacy, as digital literacy strongly correlates with effective utilization of online platforms for business growth and 50% demonstrated high levels of innovation adoption in enhancing entrepreneurial activities.

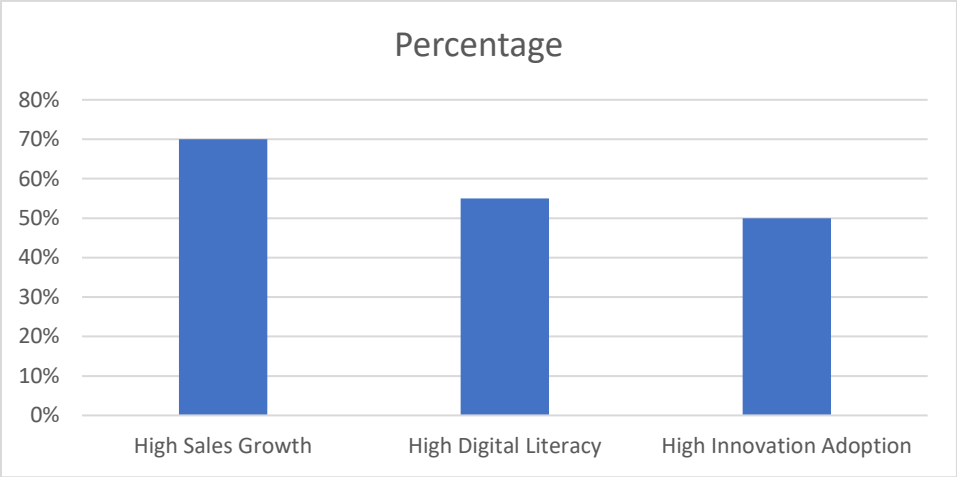


Fig 3: Sales Growth, Digital Literacy and Innovation Adoption

Table 4: Relationship between E-commerce Usage and Sales growth

indicator	frequency	percentage	Average Sales growth rate
E-commerce usage	90	45%	60%
Non-e-commerce usage	110	55%	40%

From data presented in Table 4, the results are as follows:

E-commerce Usage: 45% of respondents use e-commerce platform, while 55% do not.

Sales Growth Rate: E-commerce Users have 60% average sales growth rate, while Non-e-commerce Users have 40% average sales growth rate.

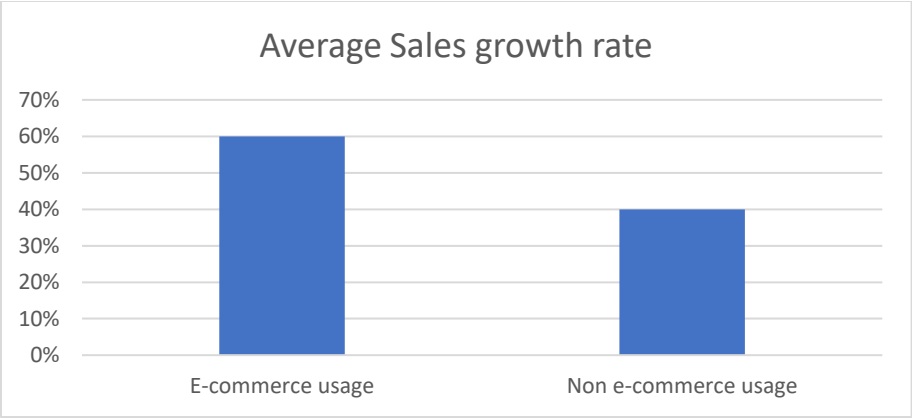


Fig 4: Relationship between E-commerce Usage and Sales growth

Table 5: Challenges Faced by Youth Entrepreneurs in using e-commerce Platforms

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
High Competition	54	60%
Skill Gaps	50	50%
Cybersecurity Risks	36	40%

Table 5 highlights the challenges faced by youth in using e-commerce platforms for entrepreneurial activities. The top challenges include:

1. High Competition (60%)
2. Skill gaps (50%)
3. Cybersecurity Risks (40%)

These challenges hinder youths in using e-commerce platforms for entrepreneurial activities.

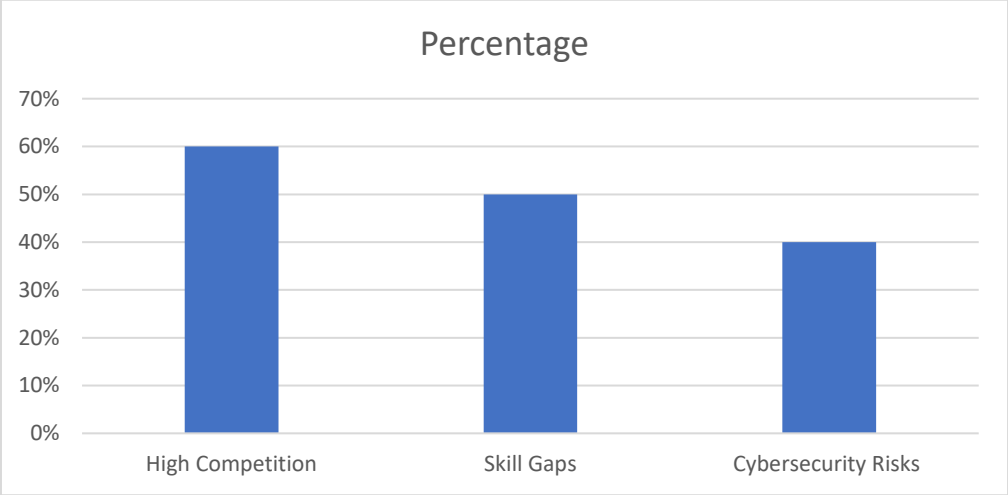


Fig 5: Challenges Faced by Youth Entrepreneurs in using E-commerce Platforms

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Extent of E-commerce Usage and Market Reach Impact: Findings from the study reveals that 45% of respondents use e-commerce platforms, indicating a low penetration rate among youth entrepreneurs. This finding highlights the report that notwithstanding the potential advantages proffered by e-commerce, there remain numerous young entrepreneurs who have not yet fully capitalized on its potential (Afiat & Rijal 2023).

From the study, 55% of youth do not use e-commerce despite reported benefits. This is as a result of lack of understanding of e-commerce operations by these young entrepreneurs, leading to hesitance in adopting online shopping. Another reason is poor electricity supply and unreliable internet connectivity and then a common distrust in online transaction by some young entrepreneurs (Bao et al., 2025). Majority of these young entrepreneurs are into small or niche markets, presenting unique challenges in the use of e-commerce.

Notably, 90% of those that use e-commerce reported a high impact of e-commerce on market reach, suggesting that e-commerce have become critical avenues for expanding business visibility beyond immediate geographic boundaries (Yusuf et al., 2022). Youths who were not using the e-commerce mentioned that they use social media platforms to showcase their businesses.

Role of E-commerce in Enhancing Brand Visibility: Findings from the study reveals that 90% of respondents perceive e-commerce to have a high impact on brand visibility. This aligns with global trends indicating that young entrepreneurs can expand their reach, establish a uniform brand identity and enhance online traffic by maintaining a robust presence across various channels (Azzaakiyyah, 2023).

Influence of E-commerce on Customer Engagement and Retention: From the analysis, 80% of respondents noted a high influence of e-commerce on customer engagement, and about 60% on customer retention. This highlights the effectiveness of tailored campaigns and interactive content in building loyal customer bases. E-commerce integrated with digital marketing enables direct two-way communication, allowing entrepreneurs to respond to inquiries, feedback, and complaints promptly, thus enhancing customer satisfaction and retention

(Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch, 2017). However, while engagement rates are commendable, the slightly lower figures for retention suggest that while digital platforms attract attention, maintaining customer loyalty requires sustained effort and value delivery (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Impact on Sales Growth: Findings from the study indicated 45% of participants who use e-commerce for their businesses reporting high sales growth (with 60% average sales growth rate) attributable to e-commerce usage while 55% of participants who are non-users reporting low sales growth rate (with 40% average sales growth rate). This aligns with global trends indicating that notwithstanding initial cost of establishing e-commerce platform the investment has the potential to yield favourable return in the long run (Afiat & Rijal 2023).

Relationship between Digital Literacy, Innovation, and E-commerce Use: A significant portion of the respondents; 55%, reported high levels of digital literacy, and 50% demonstrated high levels of innovation adoption. This finding is crucial, as digital literacy strongly correlates with effective utilization of online platforms for business growth (Kaur et al., 2021). Youth entrepreneurs who are digitally literate are better positioned to leverage advanced tools such as analytics, targeted advertising, and SEO optimization to enhance their reach and performance (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

Challenges Faced by Youths in using E-commerce Platforms: Despite the optimistic data, challenges persist. The top challenges reported were standing out amidst competitors, managing customer reviews, skill gaps, and cybersecurity risks. The e-commerce market is characterized by intense competition, necessitating entrepreneurial firms to establish a unique value proposition that sets them apart from their rivals (Hacklin et al., 2018). Furthermore, the safeguarding of online transactions is a significant issue. It is imperative for young entrepreneurs to prioritize the safeguarding of consumer data and the provision of secure and reliable e-commerce transactional channels. Studies highlighted challenges such as trust and security as critical concerns (Bao et al., 2025), (Vidhya et al., 2026).

Comparing the findings of this study to similar studies in Sub-Saharan African contexts:

The e-commerce readiness analysis, supported by a scoring model, showed significant disparities among African countries. High-scoring nations like Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa demonstrated the impact of robust digital infrastructure, mobile money options, and economic growth on providing e-commerce ecosystems. Conversely, lower-scoring countries such as Chad and the Central African Republic underscored persistent challenges posed by inadequate infrastructure, limited financial inclusion, and low internet access. Also, e-commerce has reshaped economies at both urban and rural areas. In cities like Lagos, Nairobi, Johannesburg, and Cape Town, e-commerce has boosted small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), increased employment opportunities, and enhanced operational efficiencies. These urban areas benefit from relatively advanced digital infrastructure and higher levels of digital literacy, facilitating smoother adoption of e-commerce platforms. Meanwhile, rural regions such as Kano, Kaduna, and the Rift Valley revealed the challenges of limited internet access, low digital literacy, and inadequate infrastructure, which hinder e-commerce's full potential despite localized successes like mobile money systems and agricultural platforms (Liang et al., 2024).

Similar study also show that the majority of young entrepreneurs use social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp, and digital marketing channels, such as content marketing, video marketing, email marketing, and influencer marketing, to promote their businesses and establish global contacts (Jidere et al., 2025). While minority use e-commerce platforms based on this present study.

CONCLUSION

E-commerce platforms have become indispensable tools for youth entrepreneurs aiming for business success. These platforms offer opportunities for enhanced brand visibility, customer engagement, and revenue growth. The study reveals that e-commerce is associated with higher sales growth rates. However, the rapidly changing digital landscape necessitates continuous upskilling in digital literacy and adaptive marketing strategies. Although there exist some challenges like standing out amidst competitors, managing customer reviews, skill gaps, and cybersecurity risks, the benefits far outweigh the limitations, positioning e-commerce as a catalyst for entrepreneurial empowerment among youth led businesses globally.

Arising from the findings of the study, the study recommends that:

1. Governments and NGOs should invest in up-skilling programs tailored for young entrepreneurs.
2. Entrepreneurs should adopt data-driven content strategies to maximize engagement and conversion rates.
3. Entrepreneurs must stay updated with evolving digital trends to remain competitive.
4. Policymakers should create supportive digital ecosystems, including access to affordable data and digital tools.

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