Leveraging Social Media Engagement for Digital Entrepreneurship among Undergraduates

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ABSTRACT

The study considered the effect of social media engagement on digital entrepreneur intention among undergraduate students in federal tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. Opportunity recognition and exploitation are mediating variables considered in this study. The study adopted a cross-sectional design to collect data from 2,522 undergraduate students from three universities using multistage sampling techniques. The study leverages a four Likert scale validate instrument on social media engagement, opportunity recognition, opportunity exploitation, and digital entrepreneurial intention. Pearson's correlation, multiple regression and structural equation modeling (SEM) were adopted for a comprehensive analysis. The results show significant prediction of social media engagement on digital entrepreneur intention including opportunity recognition and opportunity exploitation. However, the influence on opportunity exploitation is less when compared to opportunity recognition, this is due to the established gap between opportunity awareness and opportunity execution. The SEM results confirmed that opportunity recognition and opportunity exploitation shows a reasonable mediating force between social media engagement and digital entrepreneurial intention with opportunity recognition showing the highest mediating influence. The study concludes that entrepreneurial awareness and intention are driven by social media engagement while entrepreneurial action could be affected by limited practical capacities and support. The study recommends that entrepreneurship training and access to resources should be encouraged to close the gap between opportunity recognition and opportunity exploitation in digital entrepreneurship.

Keywords: social media engagement, digital entrepreneurship, opportunity recognition and opportunity exploitation, opportunity awareness and opportunity intention

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In the modern century, digital entrepreneurship has evolved as a key pathway for economic engagement, especially for younger people who depend heavily on digital platforms to create value, make a living and access international opportunities. Without the conventional limitations of capital intensity and physical infrastructure, it provides a flexible, scalable, and innovation-driven way for people to turn ideas into successful businesses. Digital entrepreneurship offers students a special chance to apply their creativity, technological know-how, and social media engagement to take part in the growing digital economy.

Social media represents a significant among activities of youths and undergraduates who are among the most engaged users of online platforms. Nigeria has a significant amount of digital communication among the youths as demonstrated by the countries over 103 million active social media users (Cultures of West Africa, 2024). Also, research findings show that a significant percentage of youths are too active on the internet, with close to 43.2% showing increase levels of involvement and involving in content creation activities such as posting posts, videos, and images (Ann et al., 2025). Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok are often used for networking, entertainment, and exchange of ideas.

Despite this amount of engagement, social media use and actual online business outcomes still differ (Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Kietzmann et al., 2011). Empirical studies show that a significant proportion of youths actively utilize social media sites and digital marketing resources, but their engagement is so focused on connecting with others and entertainment instead of opportunity recognition or full-scale business development (Sheldon et al., 2017; Statista, 2024; Ann et al., 2025; Adeyemi et al., 2023). Additionally, regardless of being aware which online social media platforms do offer a range of tools for advertising, interaction, and information about the market, the vast majority of students in college do not think about fully utilizing them for entrepreneurial purposes for a variety of reasons (Petrescu & Suciu, 2024). Since high social media engagement does not always translate into entrepreneurial activity, there appears to be significant study and practical gaps.

The process of beginning, operating, and developing enterprises using digital platforms and tools is known as "digital entrepreneurship" (Nambisan, 2017; Okegbe, 2025). It encompasses a wide range of activities, including e-commerce, digital content creation, online service delivery, and digital marketing, all of which leverage digital technologies and internet-based infrastructure to create and deliver value (Nambisan, 2017; Chukwuka & Abude, 2024; Zhao & Collier, 2016). These activities rely on information and communication technologies to facilitate business processes such as production, marketing, distribution, and customer engagement in digital environments. From opportunity-based perspective, Elnadi & Gheith (2023) see digital entrepreneurship as seen as the process of discovering and using entrepreneurial opportunities through digital technologies, particularly internet-based tools and emerging media, to create and deliver new forms of value. It is also explained as entrepreneurial activities enabling new business models, innovation, and value creation within digital ecosystems (Antonizzi & Smuts, 2020; Gustavsen, 2021).

Digital entrepreneurship operationalized into measurable constructs that explain the entrepreneurial process in digital contexts (Li et al., 2017), and the activities involved in how individuals move from awareness to action in using digital tools and platforms for entrepreneurship (Kivuyoa et al., 2025). These include entrepreneurial intention, which reflects the willingness to engage in venture creation; opportunity recognition, which involves identifying viable business opportunities; opportunity exploitation, which refers to the transformation of identified opportunities into actual ventures; digital capability, which captures the ability to utilize digital tools and platforms effectively; and venture creation capability and performance, which assesses outcomes such as growth, profitability, and sustainability (Nambisan, 2017; Ardichvili et al., 2003; Kivuyoa et al., 2025).

Students and younger people all over the world are digitally native demographic that uses social media extensively and is accustomed to using online resources. Study shows that young people always spend a large amount of time on social media sites, creating content, connecting with others, and sharing information (Whiting & Williams, 2013; Statista, 2024). Thus, it is becoming clearer how social media use promotes digital entrepreneurship (Nambisan, 2017; Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Olanrewaju et al., 2020). These platforms have developed into economic and entrepreneurial arenas where users can spot market trends, test concepts, and advertise goods and services (Drummond et al., 2020). Active participation on social media improves access to entrepreneurial resources like social capital, market knowledge, and customer feedback, all of which are critical for the development and expansion of digital ventures, according to empirical research (Komen, 2024; Ann et al., 2025; Oyeranti and Mutanga, 2025).

Social media platforms allow for real-time customer interaction, low-cost market access, and the growth of social capital through networks and communities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Taneja & Toombs, 2014; Drummond et al., 2020). They also critical tools for branding, customer acquisition, and feedback mechanisms, thereby helping entrepreneurial experimentation and growth (Felix et al., 2017; Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Ann et al., 2025). According to Komen (20245), active involvement on social media sites increases access to information, strengthens networks, and improves market reach, thereby helping entrepreneurial activities. Ann et al. (2025) submits that social media usage and digital marketing increases young people entrepreneurship success by improving visibility, customer reach, and business performance, while Oyeranti and Mutanga (2025) are of the opinion that the increase of the creator economy shows how individuals, including undergraduates, monetize digital content and develop entrepreneurial ventures by adapting global monetization strategies to local contexts (Oyeranti & Mutanga, 2025).

To provide a robust theoretical foundation, this study is anchored two theories. First , the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which posits that behaviour is primarily determined by intention, itself influenced by attitude toward behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). This theory has been widely validated in entrepreneurship research as a robust predictor of entrepreneurial intention, particularly among undergraduates and youths (Krueger et al., 2000; Liñán & Chen, 2009). In the context of digital entrepreneurship, social media use is a vital antecedent that affects these variables. Exposure to entrepreneurial content and digital interactions improves people's attitudes toward entrepreneurship, while peer pressure and online communities reinforce subjective norms.

Furthermore, continuous digital tools usage helps to improve perceived behavioral control by boosting digital skills and self-efficacy (Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021). Because social media use facilitates the identification and seizure of opportunities, two critical stages in the development of digital ventures, it consequently indirectly influences entrepreneurial intention (Nambisan, 2017). Secondly, according to UGT, individuals who actively select and use media platforms to achieve particular needs, including self-expression, social interaction, and information acquisition (Whiting & Williams, 2013; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). This theory clarifies undergraduates' cause for using social media can go beyond entertainment to include opportunity exploration, skill development, and venture development in the context of digital entrepreneurship. High engagement does not always lead to entrepreneurial outcomes, though, as UGT additionally indicates that that outcomes rely on users' intentions, abilities, and environmental context. A deeper knowledge of the mechanisms by which engagement translates into opportunity recognition and exploitation is made possible by integrating this viewpoint with conventional models of the entrepreneurial process.

Against this background, the study investigates how social media engagement can be leveraged to promote digital entrepreneurship among undergraduate students in federal tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the relationship between social media engagement and digital entrepreneurial intention of undergraduates in federal tertiary institutions in Ogun State.
2. Investigate the influence of social media engagement on opportunity recognition among undergraduates.
3. Assess the effect of social media engagement on opportunity exploitation in digital entrepreneurship among the undergraduates.
4. Determine the mediating roles of opportunity recognition and opportunity exploitation in the relationship between social media engagement and digital entrepreneurial intention.
5. Propose scalable strategies for leveraging social media engagement to enhance digital entrepreneurial intention among undergraduates.

METHODOLOGY

With the aid of cross-sectional survey design, the study systematically investigated the influence of social media engagement culture on digital entrepreneurship among undergraduates in federal tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. This design is considered because it allows for data collection at a point in time and enhances the relationship analysis between independent variable (social media engagement), mediators (opportunity recognition and opportunity exploitation), and dependent variable (entrepreneurial intention). Undergraduates from three federal tertiary institutions in Ogun State were considered for the population, namely: Federal College of Education, Osiele, Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro and Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB). To ensure representation in the sampling process, multi-stage sampling techniques was employed using stratified for institutions and levels, followed by proportional random selection.

A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data. Items were adapted from validated scales measuring social media engagement, opportunity recognition, opportunity exploitation, and entrepreneurial intention. On a 4-point likert scale with options (1 -4) - Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree and Strongly Agree, items on Social Media Engagement (SME) were adapted from Calder et al. (2009) and Zhang & Mao (2016); input items for Opportunity Recognition (OR) were adapted from Gregoire et al. (2010) and Ozgen & Baron (2007) as well as Opportunity Exploitation (OE) adapted from Chandler & Hanks (1994); Rauch & Hulsink (2015). Digital Entrepreneurial Intention (EI) scale has options (1 - 4) – Never, Rarely, Sometime and Always, adapted from Liñán & Chen (2009) and Ajzen (1991). In the development of the questionnaire, TPB supports Entrepreneurial

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Intention by linking attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control to intention. EI items capture intention clarity and commitment; UGT emphasizes active, purposive media use; SME items focus on learner-driven engagement and purposive information seeking relevant to entrepreneurial learning; while opportunity recognition and exploitation are cognitive inputs to practical action stages. The instrument underwent expert review for content validity and pilot testing with a small sample of students to refine clarity, reliability, and comprehension. Participants provided informed consent prior to participation, with assurances of voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality.

Based on the objectives, the study postulated the following hypotheses:

H1: There is significant influence of social media engagement on digital entrepreneurial intentions of undergraduates in federal tertiary institutions in Ogun State.

H2: There is significant influence of social media engagement on opportunity recognition among undergraduates in federal tertiary institutions in Ogun State.

H3: There is a significant influence of social media on opportunity exploitation among undergraduates in federal tertiary institutions in Ogun State.

H4: Opportunity recognition mediates the relationship between social media engagement and digital entrepreneurial intention among undergraduates in federal tertiary institutions in Ogun State.

H5: Opportunity exploitation mediates the relationship between social media engagement and digital entrepreneurial intention among undergraduates in federal tertiary institutions in Ogun State.

The hypothesized relationships (Direct Effects: H1, H2 &H3) were estimated independently using OLS regression as follows:

$$DEI_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SME_i + \epsilon_i \quad \text{(H1)}$$

$$OR_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SME_i + \epsilon_i \quad \text{(H2)}$$

$$OE_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SME_i + \epsilon_i \quad \text{(H3)}$$

All relationships **(**Direct and Mediated Effects: H1–H5) were subsequently estimated simultaneously using structural equation modelling (SEM) to capture both direct and indirect effects:

$$OR = \gamma_1 SME + \zeta_1$$

$$OE = \gamma_2 SME + \zeta_2$$

$$DEI = \gamma_3 SME + \beta_1 OR + \beta_2 OE + \zeta_3$$

When mapped to the hypotheses, we have:

H1: Direct effect of SME on DEI (γ_3)

H2: Effect of SME on OR (γ_1)

H3: Effect of SME on OE (γ_2)

H4: Indirect effect via OR ($\gamma_1 \times \lambda_1$)

H5: Indirect effect via OE ($\gamma_2 \times \lambda_2$)

Data were analyzed using SPSS for descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analyses summarized participants' demographic characteristics and levels of social media engagement. Pearson's correlation and multiple regression were conducted to examine predictive relationships between social media engagement, opportunity recognition, opportunity exploitation, and digital entrepreneurial intention. To test mediation effects, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed with a 95% confidence interval ($p < 0.05$). The significance of both direct and indirect paths was assessed using bootstrapping procedures, following established SEM best practices (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Hayes, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 3,000 distributed questionnaires, 2,522 valid responses were retained for analysis (response rate ≈ 84.1%). Data screening confirmed absence of missing values beyond acceptable thresholds (<2%), and normality assumptions were satisfied (skewness and kurtosis within ±2).

Reliability and validity of constructs were established prior to hypothesis testing. Cronbach's alpha values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 - SME = 0.86, OR = 0.83, OE = 0.81 and DEI = 0.88

Composite reliability (CR) ranged from 0.82 to 0.90, while Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, with square roots of AVE exceeding inter-construct correlations. These results indicate that the measurement model is psychometrically sound for subsequent structural analysis.

Descriptive and Correlation Analysis

The sample comprised 51.8% female and 48.2% male students, with 70.2% aged 18–24 years.

Table 1: Mean scores

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
Social Media Engagement (SME)	3.21	0.52
Opportunity Recognition (OR)	3.08	0.55
Opportunity Exploitation (OE)	2.94	0.58
Entrepreneurial Intention (EI)	3.27	0.49

The results depicted in Table 1 portray a high orientation of the undergraduates towards social media engagement and entrepreneurship, with a high mean of 3.21 for social media engagement (SME) reflecting deliberate use of digital platforms for social networking, social awareness, skill learning, talent development, etc. This aligns with the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973) and suggests that social media engagement has a predictive explanatory role in fostering entrepreneurial awareness.

The mean value of 3.08 for opportunity recognition (OR = 3.08) is an indication of a strong cognitive readiness and ability to spot new business opportunities and identify business ideas. There exists a noticeable gap between the undergraduates' abilities for opportunity recognition and actually taking advantage of the identified entrepreneurial ideas as reflected in low mean value of 2.94 for opportunity exploitation. This is consistent with previous submission that opportunity exploitation is dependent on a number of factors, including access to capital, business-support environment, policy support, etc. (Neneh, 2019; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Entrepreneurial intention has the highest mean of 3.27, strengthening the significance of intention as a precursor to action as explained by the Theory of Planned Behavior. The result conforms with research findings individual entrepreneurial behaviour and inclination are connected to the intention to take entrepreneurial actions (Liñán & Chen, 2009; Krueger et al., 2000). The high intention and relatively low opportunity exploitation exhibited by the respondents is a reflection of possible intention-behaviour gap that could be linked to a number of challenging factors that inhibit entrepreneurial engagement. The relatively low standard deviations for each of the variables point to minimal central tendency bias, response clarity, and reduced variability in the response pattern.

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Table 2: Correlation Analysis

Variables	SME	OR	OE	EI
SME	1.00			
OR	0.60**	1.00		
OE	0.53**	0.62**	1.00	
EI	0.65**	0.69**	0.67**	1.00

The correlation results above depict strong positive relationships between the predictor variable (social media engagement) with both the mediating variables (opportunity recognition and exploitation) on one hand, and the outcome variable (digital entrepreneurial intention) on the other, thus lending support for the relationships depicted in the hypotheses. It is evident from the result that opportunity recognition manifests the highest correlation with digital entrepreneurial intention, thus affirming its significance in entrepreneurial efforts and activities.

Regression Analysis (Direct Effects)

H₁: There is significant influence of social media engagement on digital entrepreneurial intentions of undergraduates in federal tertiary institutions in Ogun State.

$DEI_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SME_i + \epsilon_i$

DEI = 0.821 + 0.641SME

$\beta = 0.641$, $t = 25.37$, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.411$

The result of the test of hypothesis 1 reveals a significantly positive influence of social media engagement on the undergraduates' digital entrepreneurial intention. The coefficient value of $\beta = 0.641$ at $p < 0.001$) portrays that one-unit increase in social media engagement among the undergraduates facilitates about 64% increase in their digital entrepreneurial intention, thus suggesting that those actively engaging with digital social platforms and networking are more likely to incline toward digital entrepreneurship. The R^2 value of 0.411 depicts that 41% of the total variation exhibited in the respondents' digital entrepreneurial intention is attributable to their social media engagement, other factors kept constant, which is enough to position it a single substantial predictor. However, while other factors not captured in the modelled relationship could account for the remaining 59% variation, the result underlines the importance role of social media engagement in shaping individuals' entrepreneurial exposure and as a critical sparkle of entrepreneurial motivation in a digitally evolving environment.

H₂: There is significant influence of social media engagement on opportunity recognition among undergraduates in federal tertiary institutions in Ogun State.

$OR_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SME_i + \epsilon_i$

OR = 0.702 + 0.603SME

$\beta = 0.603$, $t = 23.18$, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.364$

From the above results, it is shown that there is a strong, positive, and significant influence of social media engagement on opportunity recognition. The coefficient ($\beta = 0.603$, $p < 0.001$) proves that a unit change in the undergraduates' level of social media engagement leads to a 60.3% corresponding change in their entrepreneurial opportunity recognition. The high t-value ($t = 23.18$) strengthens the influence of the predictor, while the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.364$) shows that 36.4% of the variation observed in opportunity recognition is attributable or explained by social media engagement. With the result, Hypothesis 2 is supported that the extent of social media engagement of the undergraduates is capable of stimulating their ability to detect market trends, unmet needs, and entrepreneurial opportunities. For example, students who engage with the social media content of a particular entrepreneur or specific entrepreneurial ideas could be fascinated the acceptability and followership, particularly patronage enjoyed by such entrepreneurs, thus creating or expanding awareness on available opportunities and ideas that could be explored.

H3: There is a significant influence of social media on opportunity exploitation among undergraduates in federal tertiary institutions in Ogun State.

$$OE_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SME_i + \epsilon_i$$

$$OE=0.734+0.548SME$$

$$\beta = 0.548,\ t = 20.44,\ p < 0.001;\ R^2 = 0.301$$

The result of the regression above indicates that there is a significant positive impact of social media engagement on entrepreneurial opportunity exploitation among the undergraduates. Those who are actively engaged with social media content have a higher tendency of taking steps to pursue identified opportunities in digital entrepreneurship than their counterparts with very low or minimal engagement. The coefficient of regression ($\beta = 0.548$, $p < 0.001$), portrays that a one-unit increase in social media engagement pattern by the undergraduates will steer their probability to exploit opportunities by about 55%, suggesting that a student who uses the social media strictly for entertainment may rarely encounter entrepreneurship related content and will neither pay little or no attention to such content nor show propensity to act on it. On the contrary, a student with high and purposeful inclination towards entrepreneurship-related platforms will show higher interest in entrepreneurial pages, follow successful digital entrepreneurs, participate in business group discussions, interact with opportunity-related content, can easily discover an online opportunity and eventually turns the idea into a venture.

The strength the relationship between the variables is confirmed with the t-value of 20.44, while confirms, while the R^2 of 0.301 is an indication that 30% of the variation in opportunity exploitation could be linked to social media engagement. Although significant, this effect is weaker compared to its effect on opportunity recognition and digital entrepreneurial intention, highlighting a relative gap between awareness and exploitation. This could be due to a number of constraints that could limit the undergraduates' ability to turn the identified ideas into real ventures. For example, in addition to limited access to start-up capital, exploitation could be constrained by the bulk of academic workloads and deadlines, assignment, research, etc. that particularly take the bunch of time and dedication of the students, thus limiting their possible exploitation of identified opportunities.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM Results)

Table 3: Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Value	Threshold	Decision
χ^2/df	2.41	< 3.0	Good fit
CFI	0.957	> 0.90	Excellent fit
TLI	0.948	> 0.90	Excellent fit
RMSEA	0.041	< 0.08	Excellent fit
SRMR	0.035	< 0.08	Good fit

The obtained values which hare higher than the commonly acceptable criteria is an indication that the model fit indicates that the structural model fit the data well. This supports that the relationships among the variables being examined are adequately captured in the hypotheses, thus positioning the model as appropriate for testing the structural relationships postulated

Table 4: Table: Direct and Mediation Effects of Social Media Engagement on Digital Entrepreneurial Intention (SEM, Bootstrapping 5,000 Resampled)

	Path	Direct Effect (β)	Indirect Effect (β)	Total Effect (β)	t-value	p-value	Mediation Type	Decision
H1	SME → DEI	0.412	–	0.641	18.72	< 0.001	–	Supported
H2	SME → OR	0.603	–	–	23.18	< 0.001	–	Supported
H3	SME → OE	0.548	–	–	20.44	< 0.001	–	Supported
H4	SME → OR → DEI	–	0.229	–	18.72	< 0.001	Partial	Supported
H5	SME → OE → DEI	–	0.183	–	16.35	< 0.001	Partial	Supported

In the above table, the test of the mediation effects reveals opportunity recognition and opportunity exploitation as having significant mediating in the relationship between social media engagement and digital entrepreneurial intention. The indirect effects for opportunity recognition ($\beta = 0.229$, $p < 0.001$) and opportunity exploitation ($\beta = 0.183$, $p < 0.001$) are statistically significant, confirming H4 and H5. However, the direct effect of social media engagement on digital entrepreneurial intention remains significant in both models, indicating partial mediation. From the results, opportunity recognition exhibits a stronger mediating effect than opportunity exploitation, suggesting that cognitive processes play a more dominant role than behavioural execution in translating social media engagement into entrepreneurial intention. This reinforces the earlier evidence of a recognition–exploitation gap, where students are better at identifying opportunities than implementing them.

Table 5: Additional Path Estimates

Path	Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value
SME → OR (γ_1)	0.603	23.18	< 0.001
SME → OE (γ_2)	0.548	20.44	< 0.001
OR → DEI (λ_1)	0.380	17.12	< 0.001
OE → DEI (λ_2)	0.334	15.48	< 0.001
SME → DEI (γ_3)	0.412	18.72	< 0.001

In the Additional Path Estimates (Table 5) , H4 and H5 are not indicated as full mediation paths, they are decomposed into the constituent paths to determine the indirect effects.

H4: Opportunity recognition mediates the relationship between social media engagement and digital entrepreneurial intentions among undergraduates in federal tertiary institutions in Ogun State.

For H4, the indirect effect is calculated using the two paths - SME → OR ($\gamma_1 = 0.603$, $t = 23.18$, $p < 0.001$), which indicates that Social media engagement significantly predicts opportunity recognition; and OR → DEI ($\lambda_1 = 0.380$, $t = 17.12$, $p < 0.001$) indicating that Opportunity recognition significantly predicts digital entrepreneurial intention. The indirect effect for H4 = $\gamma_1 \times \lambda_1 = 0.603 \times 0.380 \approx 0.229$ as shown in mediation Table 4. These results suggest that students who engage with social media are more likely to recognize opportunities, which in turn increases their digital entrepreneurial intention.

H5: Opportunity exploitation mediates the relationship between social media engagement and digital entrepreneurial intentions among undergraduates in federal tertiary institutions in Ogun State.

The indirect effect of social media engagement moderated by Opportunity exploitation (OE) is calculated using calculated along 2 paths - SME → OE ($\gamma_2 = 0.548$, $t = 20.44$, $p < 0.001$), that is, Social media engagement significantly predicts opportunity exploitation; and OE → DEI ($\lambda_2 = 0.334$, $t = 15.48$, $p < 0.001$), that is, Opportunity exploitation significantly predicts digital entrepreneurial intention. The indirect effect for H5 = $\gamma_2 \times \lambda_2 = 0.548 \times 0.334 \approx 0.183$ as indicated on Table 4. This points to the position that students who have high social media engagement are more likely to act on opportunities (exploit them), which in turn increases their digital entrepreneurial intention.

Results from the regression analyses indicate that social media engagement (SME) is a robust predictor of digital entrepreneurial intention (DEI) among undergraduates, confirming Hypothesis 1. This lends empirical supports to prior findings and submissions that active engagement with digital platforms facilitates both entrepreneurial cognition and motivation (Zhang & Mao, 2016; Alalwan et al., 2017). The importance of digital engagement in igniting entrepreneurial aspiration could be seen in the high variance in digital entrepreneurship intension that is triggered by social media engagement. This finding is not only in tandem with Uses and Gratifications Theory, which alludes to the assumption that goal-directed utilisation of digital platforms satisfies cognitive and social needs (Katz et al., 1973), it also aligns with existing empirical submissions that exposure to digital entrepreneurship contents could probably lead to the intentions to actively pursue entrepreneurial ventures creation (Liñán & Chen, 2009; Krueger et al., 2000).

Strong positive effects of social media engagement were revealed on opportunity recognition (OR) and opportunity exploitation (OE), supporting the acceptance of Hypotheses 2 and 3. The magnitude of the influence social media engagement on how the undergraduate identify and recognize workable entrepreneurial opportunities is particularly higher, portraying social media platforms as being instrumental to the undergraduates for entrepreneurial information access, trend monitoring, and recognition of pattern of small business engagement, etc. which are essential for entrepreneurial awareness and exposure (Ozgen & Baron, 2007; Gregoire et al., 2010). The comparatively lower influence of social media engagement on opportunity exploitation among the undergraduates reinforces a common premise in entrepreneurship research in which translation of entrepreneurial exposure into actionable behaviours is usually frustrated by limited financial and material resources, policy support, inadequate government and institutional interventions, etc. (Davidsson, 2015; Neneh, 2019; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). This re-echoes a noticeable gap between opportunity recognition and exploitation, where interested and passionate individuals can easily identify opportunities and ideas but are constrained with challenges in translating them into entrepreneurial ventures (Chandler & Hanks, 1994; Neneh, 2019;).

The results of the mediation analyses show that both opportunity recognition and opportunity exploitation play relative mediating role in the relationship between social media engagement and digital entrepreneurial intention, thus supporting Hypotheses 4 and 5. Opportunity recognition has a stronger mediating impact, suggesting that cognitive ability of individuals in any entrepreneurial awareness processes play a significant role in translating engagement into entrepreneurial intention. This finding corroborates prior research evidence in which the ability to identify market needs and trends are presented as precursors to entrepreneurial actions (Ozgen & Baron, 2007; Gregoire et al., 2010). On the other hand, opportunity exploitation, though significant, it has a relatively lower mediating influence, indicating that the initiation of entrepreneurial behavioural is dependent not only on practical skills, but also on resource availability and access, and support (Davidsson, 2015; Neneh, 2019). From the results, social media engagement fosters undergraduates' awareness (recognition), which partially translates into entrepreneurial action (exploitation), ultimately shaping their intention. The partial mediation observed emphasizes both direct and indirect influences of social media engagement on undergraduates' digital entrepreneurship intention, confirming that engagement and digital entrepreneurship serve as both a motivational and cognitive drivers in entrepreneurial development among undergraduates.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study confirms that higher engagement of the undergraduates with social media significantly enhances their ability to identify and pursue entrepreneurial potential, thereby positively influencing their intention to engage in digital entrepreneurship. The study provides empirical evidence that social media engagement is a critical driver of digital entrepreneurial intention among undergraduates. The results further reveal partial mediating influence of opportunity recognition and exploitation on the relationship of social media engagement and digital entrepreneurship intention, suggesting that cognitive and behavioural pathway are critical for translating digital engagement translates into entrepreneurial intentions.

It is evidently clear that social media engagement fosters high entrepreneurial opportunity recognition but relatively lower exploitation of such ideas. This shows a gap between entrepreneurial awareness and execution, that is, turning business ideas in identified opportunities into actioned entrepreneurship. The results show that while undergraduates are often motivated and have cognitive disposition towards digital entrepreneurship, a number of factors are capable of limiting their entrepreneurial behaviour in converting opportunities and entrepreneurial knowledge into actual entrepreneurial activities. Such limiting factors could include lack of access to resources, poor intervention, little or no institutional support, etc...

Based on the findings, the study recommended that:

- There is the need for tertiary institutions to establish entrepreneurship mentorship programmes, digital entrepreneurship workshops with a view to stimulating the conversion of recognized opportunity recognition into exploitation.
- There should be incubation hubs to drive structured intervention programmes that are targeted at providing undergraduates with practical guidance, and information on access to startup resources.
- There should be purposeful integration of controlled social media literacy among students, and entrepreneurial problem-solving contents in the entrepreneurship curricula to further enhance undergraduates' capacity for self-regulated engagement on social media and translation of ideas into actual ventures.
- Universities should encourage strategic use of social media for entrepreneurial learning, networking, and market research, emphasizing purposive engagement rather than passive consumption.
- Government and educational policymakers should develop frameworks to strengthen undergraduates and digital entrepreneurship through start-up grants, access to digital infrastructure, institutional support, etc. with a view to helping young people translate their entrepreneurial intentions into tangible ventures.

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