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The Creator Economy: Social Media Content Creation as a New Frontier for Youth Entrepreneurship

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Abstract

The rapid growth of social media has created new opportunities for young people to participate in entrepreneurship through content creation, personal branding, audience development and digital monetisation. This article examines the creator economy as an emerging frontier for youth entrepreneurship, focusing on the opportunities, capabilities, challenges and institutional conditions that influence sustainable creator enterprise. Anchored in Digital Entrepreneurship Theory, the article argues that digital technologies enable young people to identify entrepreneurial opportunities, create value and develop new forms of enterprise through social media platforms. However, content creation does not automatically constitute sustainable entrepreneurship. Successful creator enterprises require digital competence, entrepreneurial knowledge, financial literacy, audience engagement and diversified revenue models. The article further identifies platform dependence, income instability, market saturation and digital inequality as significant challenges, particularly in developing economies. A conceptual framework linking digital capability, content creation, audience development, monetisation and sustainable youth enterprise is proposed within the broader digital entrepreneurial ecosystem. The article concludes that governments, educational institutions and entrepreneurship-support organisations should incorporate creator entrepreneurship into youth employment and enterprise-development strategies. With appropriate skills, infrastructure, finance and mentorship, the creator economy can contribute to youth self-employment, creative enterprise development and participation in the digital economy.

Keywords: *Creator economy, social media, content creation, youth entrepreneurship, digital entrepreneurship, Digital Entrepreneurship Theory, digital skills, economic empowerment.*

Introduction

The expansion of digital technologies has fundamentally altered the ways in which individuals create value, engage markets and pursue entrepreneurial opportunities. Social media platforms are no longer used solely for communication and social interaction; they have increasingly become commercial environments through which individuals produce digital content, cultivate audiences, develop personal brands and generate income. This development has contributed to the emergence of the creator economy, a growing ecosystem involving content creators, audiences, brands, platforms and other commercial actors. Recent scholarship identifies the creator economy as an important area of economic activity while noting that its entrepreneurial dimensions remain insufficiently conceptualised (Peres et al., 2024; Edeling & Wies, 2024).

The significance of this transformation lies in the changing nature of entrepreneurship itself. Traditional entrepreneurship has generally been associated with the creation of firms, products and services and the mobilisation of financial and physical resources. The creator economy introduces a different configuration in which creativity, digital skills, personal identity, audience relationships and online visibility can become productive and commercial assets. Creators may monetise their activities through advertising, sponsorships, subscriptions, affiliate marketing, merchandise, digital products and professional services. Edeling and Wies (2024) consequently argue for understanding content creators as a distinct category of entrepreneurs, or “creatrepreneurs,” whose activities involve both content production and venture creation.

Social media platforms are central to this transformation because they provide the infrastructure through which creators produce, distribute and monetise content. Platforms connect creators with audiences, facilitate content management and provide mechanisms through which commercial value can be generated. Bleier et al. (2024) emphasise that platforms occupy a central position within the creator economy because they connect its major actors while supporting content creation, audience development and monetisation. The entrepreneurial significance of social media therefore extends beyond communication: platforms increasingly function as marketplaces, distribution channels and entrepreneurial infrastructures.

This development presents particular opportunities for young people. Youth entrepreneurship is increasingly important in economies where formal employment opportunities are insufficient to absorb growing numbers of young people entering the labour market. Digital technologies can provide alternative routes into entrepreneurship by reducing some barriers associated with geographical reach, marketing and customer acquisition. Evidence from Ghana, for example, indicates that social media and e-commerce adoption can contribute to entrepreneurial activity among graduates, demonstrating the growing relationship between digital participation and youth entrepreneurship in African economies (Shi et al., 2024).

The African context is especially significant because the continent combines a large youth population with rapidly expanding digital participation. Social media can enable young Africans to commercialise creative skills, reach domestic and international audiences, and establish businesses around areas such as entertainment, education, fashion, technology, food, tourism and lifestyle. Recent African research similarly suggests that social media is becoming increasingly relevant to innovation and entrepreneurial activity, although the benefits of digitalisation remain dependent on broader economic and infrastructural conditions.

Nigeria provides an especially relevant context for examining this phenomenon. The country's large youth population, expanding digital culture and vibrant entertainment and creative industries have created a substantial environment for social media-based content production. Nigerian creators increasingly produce videos and other forms of digital content for both domestic and diaspora audiences. Recent research identifies the Nigerian social media video industry as an emerging source of economic opportunity while simultaneously drawing attention to the precarious labour conditions experienced by creators operating within highly competitive platforms (Simon & Nieborg, 2024).

However, the entrepreneurial promise of content creation should not be confused with guaranteed economic success. The creator economy operates within platform structures that creators do not control. Algorithmic changes, monetisation rules, content policies and competition for visibility can significantly influence creators' ability to attract audiences and generate income. Research on Nigerian creators indicates that visibility is particularly difficult in a saturated social media environment, while platform monetisation can produce uncertain and precarious working conditions (Simon & Nieborg, 2024; Nieborg & Simon, 2025).

This tension reveals an important distinction between content creation and creator entrepreneurship. Having followers, producing viral content or maintaining an active social media account does not necessarily constitute entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial activity requires the deliberate creation, capture and management of economic value. A creator must therefore be able to identify opportunities, develop valuable content, cultivate audiences, establish sustainable revenue models, manage resources and respond strategically to changing market and platform conditions. The emerging literature on “creatrepreneurs” reinforces the need to examine creators not merely as media producers but as actors engaged in entrepreneurial venture development (Edeling & Wies, 2024).

Existing scholarship has made important contributions to understanding digital entrepreneurship, social media use, platformisation and creative labour. Nevertheless, these strands of literature remain somewhat fragmented. Research on digital entrepreneurship tends to emphasise technology-enabled opportunity creation, while research on creators frequently focuses on platform labour, influencer culture, audience relationships or monetisation. Recent scholarship has explicitly called for further research capable of integrating these dimensions within a coherent understanding of the creator economy (Peres et al., 2024; Bleier et al., 2024).

This gap is particularly relevant in African contexts, where research on social media entrepreneurship is growing but the specific transition from content creation to sustainable youth enterprise remains insufficiently developed. Nigerian evidence demonstrates both the entrepreneurial possibilities and the precarious conditions associated with creator work, yet there remains a need for a more integrated framework explaining how digital capabilities, creative production, audience development and monetisation can combine to produce sustainable entrepreneurial outcomes.

Against this background, this article examines social media content creation as a new frontier for youth entrepreneurship. It explores the opportunities created by the creator economy, the capabilities required by young creators, the challenges associated with platform dependence and income uncertainty, and the institutional conditions necessary for sustainable creator entrepreneurship. The article proposes that social media content creation should be understood neither simply as entertainment nor as an automatic solution to youth unemployment, but as an emerging form of digital entrepreneurship whose economic potential depends on the interaction of digital capability, creative value, audience development, monetisation and an enabling entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The Creator Economy and Digital Entrepreneurship

The creator economy represents an emerging form of digital entrepreneurship in which individuals transform content, creativity, knowledge and online audiences into economic value. Unlike conventional entrepreneurship, creators can combine content production, personal branding, audience engagement and commercial activities within a single digital enterprise. Edeling and Wies (2024) describe this emerging group as “creatrepreneurs,” highlighting the entrepreneurial character of contemporary content creation.

Social media platforms are central to this development because they provide creators with access to audiences, content-distribution systems and monetisation opportunities. Platforms therefore function not only as communication channels but also as entrepreneurial infrastructures (Bleier et al., 2024). Digital technologies further enable entrepreneurs to identify opportunities, interact directly with consumers and develop new business models (Nambisan, 2017).

For young people, this development creates alternative pathways into entrepreneurship. Young creators can use their skills in areas such as entertainment, education, fashion, technology, music and lifestyle to develop audiences and generate income. Evidence from African contexts indicates that social media can support youth entrepreneurial activity, although digital skills, infrastructure and access to resources remain important constraints (Shi et al., 2024).

However, content creation does not automatically constitute sustainable entrepreneurship. Followers, views and online popularity must be converted into viable revenue streams and sustainable business activities. Creators therefore require entrepreneurial, financial and digital capabilities to manage audiences, diversify income and respond to changing platform conditions. The creator economy should consequently be understood as an emerging entrepreneurial opportunity that combines creativity, digital capability, audience development and commercial value creation.

Theoretical Framework

Digital Entrepreneurship Theory

This study is primarily anchored in Digital Entrepreneurship Theory, which explains how digital technologies transform entrepreneurial opportunities, processes and outcomes. Nambisan (2017) argues that digital technologies reshape entrepreneurship by changing how opportunities are identified, resources are mobilised, products and services are developed, and markets are accessed. Unlike traditional entrepreneurship, digital entrepreneurship allows individuals to utilise digital platforms and technologies to create and capture value with fewer geographical and infrastructural limitations.

Digital Entrepreneurship Theory provides an appropriate foundation for understanding the creator economy because social media platforms have become important spaces for entrepreneurial activity. Young people can use these platforms to identify market opportunities, produce and distribute content, develop audiences and establish revenue-generating activities. Content, therefore, becomes more than a form of communication or entertainment; it can function as an entrepreneurial resource when it is deliberately used to create and capture economic value.

The theory also explains why digital capability is important to creator entrepreneurship. Access to social media does not automatically produce entrepreneurial success. Young creators require the ability to recognise opportunities, understand audiences, develop valuable content, manage digital relationships and convert attention into sustainable revenue. From this perspective, the entrepreneurial potential of social media depends on the interaction between technological access and the capabilities of the individual entrepreneur.

The theory further supports the argument that creator entrepreneurship is influenced by its broader digital entrepreneurial ecosystem. Platforms, internet infrastructure, financial resources, education, regulations and entrepreneurial networks can either enable or constrain digital enterprise development (Sussan & Acs, 2017). Consequently, the success of young creators cannot be explained solely by individual creativity; it must also be understood within the technological and institutional environment in which their entrepreneurial activities occur.

In the context of this article, Digital Entrepreneurship Theory therefore provides the theoretical basis for proposing that digital capability enables content creation, content creates opportunities for audience development, audiences provide potential commercial value, and effective monetisation can transform that value into sustainable youth enterprise. The theory consequently positions social media content creation as an emerging form of entrepreneurship rather than simply an online social activity.

Opportunities Of the Creator Economy for Youth Entrepreneurship

The creator economy offers young people new opportunities to enter entrepreneurship with relatively limited physical infrastructure. Social media enables creators to reach local and international audiences, promote products and services, and develop businesses around their skills and interests (Nambisan, 2017). This accessibility can be particularly valuable for young people facing limited access to conventional employment and business opportunities.

A major opportunity is market access. Platforms allow young entrepreneurs to identify niche audiences and communicate directly with potential customers. Creators can also develop personal brands around areas such as fashion, entertainment, education, technology, food and lifestyle. These activities can generate income through sponsorships, advertising, affiliate marketing, subscriptions, digital products and direct sales (Edeling & Wies, 2024).

The creator economy also supports creative entrepreneurship. Young people can transform talents such as photography, music, comedy, writing, design and video production into commercial activities. Audience engagement can further provide valuable market feedback, allowing creators to refine their products and content according to consumer interests (Bleier et al., 2024).

Importantly, successful creators can generate employment beyond themselves by engaging editors, designers, marketers, photographers and other digital professionals. The creator economy can therefore contribute to both self-employment and wider youth employment.

However, these opportunities depend on digital skills, reliable infrastructure, entrepreneurial knowledge and sustainable monetisation strategies. Content creation should therefore be approached not simply as social media participation but as a potential business activity requiring planning, innovation and continuous value creation.

Digital Skills and Entrepreneurial Capabilities

The sustainability of youth entrepreneurship within the creator economy depends significantly on the skills available to young creators. Access to social media alone is insufficient; creators require digital literacy, content-development skills, marketing knowledge and the ability to understand audience behaviour. Digital technologies can expand entrepreneurial opportunities, but entrepreneurs must possess the capabilities to recognise and exploit those opportunities effectively (Nambisan, 2017).

Personal branding and storytelling are particularly important because creators often become closely associated with the products, services and ideas they promote. A distinctive identity can strengthen audience trust and create opportunities for commercial partnerships (Cunningham & Craig, 2019). Similarly, knowledge of digital analytics can help creators understand audience preferences and improve their content strategies.

Financial and business skills are equally necessary. Young creators need to understand pricing, budgeting, contracts, taxation and revenue diversification if content creation is to develop into a sustainable enterprise. Dependence on a single platform or income source can increase vulnerability to algorithmic and market changes (Duffy et al., 2021).

Entrepreneurial education should therefore combine digital competence with business capability. Training in content creation, digital marketing, financial literacy, intellectual property and business management can help young people move from simply producing content to building sustainable creator enterprises.

Challenges Of the Creator Economy

Despite its opportunities, the creator economy presents significant challenges for young entrepreneurs. One major concern is income uncertainty. Creator earnings may fluctuate depending on audience engagement, advertising demand, sponsorships and platform policies, making long-term financial planning difficult (Duffy et al., 2021).

Platform dependence is another challenge. Creators rely heavily on platforms whose algorithms, monetisation systems and content policies they do not control. Changes in these systems can affect visibility and income with little warning (Nieborg & Poell, 2018).

Young creators also face market saturation and digital inequality. Increasing numbers of creators compete for audience attention, while limited access to reliable internet, appropriate devices, digital skills and finance can exclude disadvantaged young people from meaningful participation (Nambisan, 2017).

In addition, creators may experience pressure to produce content continuously, alongside risks involving copyright, privacy, online harassment and reputational damage. These challenges demonstrate that the creator economy is not an automatic solution to youth unemployment. Its entrepreneurial potential depends on appropriate skills, infrastructure, institutional support and the ability to develop sustainable and diversified business models.

Policy And Institutional Support for Youth Creator Entrepreneurship

The sustainability of the creator economy requires an enabling environment that goes beyond individual creativity. Governments, educational institutions, technology companies and entrepreneurship-support organisations can strengthen youth participation through digital infrastructure, entrepreneurship education, access to finance and mentorship (Nambisan, 2017; Sussan & Acs, 2017).

Educational institutions should integrate digital entrepreneurship, content development, financial literacy, personal branding and intellectual property into youth enterprise programmes. Such training can help young creators transform social media participation into structured business activity.

Access to affordable internet, appropriate digital devices and reliable electricity is equally important, particularly in developing economies. Without these resources, digital entrepreneurship may remain concentrated among young people with greater economic advantages. Support programmes should therefore address both digital skills and digital access.

Technology platforms also have a responsibility to improve transparency around monetisation, algorithms, content policies and creator rights. Since creators depend heavily on these platforms, clearer and fairer systems can reduce some of the uncertainty associated with platform-based entrepreneurship (Nieborg & Poell, 2018).

Ultimately, an effective youth creator economy requires collaboration among government, education, industry and young entrepreneurs. Such collaboration can help ensure that social media content creation develops beyond temporary online popularity into sustainable enterprises capable of contributing to employment, innovation and economic development.

Conceptual Framework for Youth Creator Entrepreneurship

The creator economy can be understood through a framework linking digital capability, content creation, audience development, monetisation and enterprise sustainability. Digital capability provides the foundation, while creative content enables young entrepreneurs to attract and engage specific audiences (Nambisan, 2017).

Audience engagement can then create commercial opportunities through sponsorships, advertising, subscriptions, affiliate marketing, digital products and direct sales. However, monetisation alone does not guarantee sustainability. Creators require financial management, business planning, innovation and the ability to diversify revenue sources and respond to changing platform conditions (Edeling & Wies, 2024; Duffy et al., 2021).

The framework can therefore be represented as:

Digital Capability → Content Creation → Audience Development → Monetisation → Sustainable Youth Enterprise

The entire process is supported by an enabling digital entrepreneurial ecosystem, including infrastructure, education, finance, mentorship and supportive policies (Sussan & Acs, 2017).

The framework suggests that social media provides the opportunity, while entrepreneurial capability determines whether that opportunity can be transformed into sustainable economic value. This distinction positions content creation as a legitimate emerging pathway for youth entrepreneurship rather than merely a form of online entertainment.

Youth Employment and Economic Empowerment

The creator economy offers an alternative pathway for young people to participate in economic activity through self-employment, freelancing and digital enterprise. By transforming creative skills, knowledge and online audiences into commercial opportunities, young creators can develop income-generating activities outside traditional employment structures (Nambisan, 2017).

The employment impact can extend beyond individual creators. Successful creator businesses may require editors, graphic designers, photographers, marketers, writers and other digital professionals, thereby creating additional opportunities for young people. This makes the creator economy relevant not only to self-employment but also to wider digital job creation.

The model can also promote economic empowerment by allowing young entrepreneurs to build personal brands, develop direct relationships with consumers and diversify their sources of income. However, platform dependence and unstable monetisation can limit this potential (Duffy et al., 2021). Consequently, creator entrepreneurship should be supported by appropriate digital skills, financial literacy, infrastructure and business development services.

For developing economies, particularly African countries with large youth populations, strengthening these capabilities could enable more young people to participate in emerging digital markets. The creator economy should therefore be considered as one component of a broader youth employment and entrepreneurship strategy, rather than a substitute for conventional employment and enterprise-development policies.

Strategies For Sustainable Youth Creator Entrepreneurship

Building a sustainable creator economy requires young people to move beyond content production towards structured and commercially viable enterprises. This requires a combination of digital competence, entrepreneurial education, financial literacy and business planning (Nambisan, 2017).

First, young creators should diversify their revenue sources rather than depend exclusively on one platform or monetisation model. Sponsorships, digital products, subscriptions, affiliate marketing and professional services can provide alternative income streams and reduce vulnerability to changes in platform policies (Edeling & Wies, 2024).

Second, education and mentorship should be strengthened. Training institutions and entrepreneurship organisations can provide practical knowledge in content strategy, digital marketing, personal branding, intellectual property, financial management and audience analytics. Such support can help young people convert digital creativity into sustainable enterprises.

Third, creators should develop assets that they control independently of social media platforms, including websites, digital products, mailing lists, customer relationships and intellectual property. This can reduce excessive dependence on platform algorithms and strengthen long-term business resilience (Nieborg & Poell, 2018).

Finally, governments and private-sector organisations should improve access to affordable internet, digital equipment, finance and business-support services. A supportive ecosystem can enable more young people, particularly those from disadvantaged communities, to participate meaningfully in the creator economy.

Therefore, the future of youth creator entrepreneurship depends on combining creativity with business capability, digital access and institutional support. This approach can transform social media content creation from temporary online activity into sustainable economic enterprise.

Conclusion

The creator economy is emerging as an important frontier for youth entrepreneurship by enabling young people to transform creativity, knowledge and digital skills into economic opportunities. Social media platforms provide relatively accessible channels for audience development, marketing, networking and income generation, although participation does not automatically result in sustainable entrepreneurship.

The analysis demonstrates that successful creator entrepreneurship depends on the interaction of digital capability, valuable content, audience engagement, monetisation and business management. At the same time, income instability, platform dependence, digital inequality and intense competition remain significant challenges (Duffy et al., 2021; Nieborg & Poell, 2018).

The creator economy should therefore be incorporated into broader youth entrepreneurship and employment strategies. Investment in digital infrastructure, entrepreneurial education, financial literacy, mentorship and supportive policies can strengthen young people's ability to convert social media activity into sustainable enterprises. Ultimately, the creator economy offers significant potential for youth economic empowerment, but its success depends on moving from online visibility to sustainable value creation.

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