



## Digital Entrepreneurship Orientation as a Mediator of Social Media Exposure and Irregular Migration Intentions among Youths in Plateau State, Nigeria

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**Abstract.** Irregular migration among Nigerian youths has emerged as a pressing concern, with many viewing migrations as a response to socio-economic challenges. This study examines how social media exposure and digital entrepreneurship orientation influence youths' intentions to engage in irregular migration in Plateau State, Nigeria. A sample of 400 youths was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across various socio-economic groups. Data were gathered through the Social Media Exposure Scale (SMES), the Digital Entrepreneurship Orientation Scale (DEOS), and the Migration Intention Scale (MIS). Four hypotheses were tested using simple linear regression, Hayes' PROCESS model, and Pearson's correlation at a 0.05 significance level. Findings indicate that social media exposure significantly increases migration intention ( $\beta = 0.335$ ,  $t = 3.909$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Digital entrepreneurship orientation significantly mediated this relationship, suggesting that promoting local digital opportunities can reduce intentions to migrate (coeff. = 0.211,  $p < 0.05$ ). Moreover, social media exposure was positively correlated with migration intention ( $r = 0.312$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), whereas digital entrepreneurship orientation showed a significant negative correlation ( $r = -0.295$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The study concludes by recommending enhanced digital entrepreneurship education and youth-targeted programs to curb irregular migration by creating viable local opportunities.

**Keywords:** Digital Entrepreneurship Orientation, Plateau State, Irregular Migration, Social Media Exposure, Youth, Nigeria

### 1. Introduction

There is no denying the growing influence of digital connectivity on the aspirations, livelihood choices, and migration intentions of youth in developing

societies. Young people are now exposed to information about job opportunities, lifestyles, migration routes, and entrepreneurial ventures on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. In Nigeria, digital platforms play a pivotal role in shaping how young people imagine their future, both within the country and globally, with a population exceeding 107 million internet users and growing social media activity (Bello et al., 2024). This is especially relevant given that over 60% of Nigeria's population is under 25, with youth as the primary drivers of social media interactions (Fasasi & Oladipo, 2025). The platforms expose youths to migration-related content that sells the appeal of life abroad and to entrepreneurial narratives that may provide local solutions to their aspirations (Ibrahim et al., 2025).

Irregular migration, or movement outside of legal and regulated migration routes, has become a serious concern, especially for youth in developing countries. Irregular migration can expose people to a range of risks, including trafficking, exploitation and financial loss. Many young people, however, perceive migration as an opportunity to improve their life chances abroad (IOM, 2025). Migration intention, defined as the likelihood that individuals will take irregular migration routes, has been recognised as an important predictor of actual migration behaviour, particularly when shaped by social media narratives that highlight opportunities abroad and minimise the associated risks (Ajzen, 1991; Thomas et al., 2024).

The socio-economic conditions in Nigeria worsen the problem of irregular migration. Nigerian youths are often left with no choice but to find alternative ways to secure their financial futures and develop personally, which makes migration increasingly attractive, given an informal employment rate of 93% and a youth unemployment rate above 15%

(National Bureau of Statistics, 2025). This is compounded by the prevalence of online content which portrays migration as the most effective route to success, fostering a mindset that it is not only viable but essential. Odunlami et al. (2024) observed that youths exposed to migration success stories on social media are more likely to view migration as the most promising option for achieving socio-economic mobility. However, while migration is often idealised, the risks of irregular migration, such as exploitation, human trafficking and financial loss, are downplayed (Fasasi et al., 2024).

The independent variable in this study is exposure to social media, which represents the degree to which youths interact with and consume content on migration, lifestyle, and entrepreneurial opportunities. Research has shown that exposure to migration-related content can increase migration intention, especially when youths are exposed to success stories and the perceived ease of migrating to foreign countries (Adebayo et al., 2025). For example, exposure to content about successful Nigerian migrants or entrepreneurs abroad often influences youths' perceptions of their own future success, thereby making migration a more attractive alternative (Yusuf et al., 2025). However, engagement with entrepreneurial content, particularly content that emphasises local opportunities and digital entrepreneurship, can reduce intentions to migrate by providing viable alternatives for socio-economic mobility (De-Santis & Torrès-Toukoumidis, 2026).

The mediating variable of this study is digital entrepreneurship orientation, defined as the tendency of youth to identify and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities through digital platforms. This includes building skills in e-commerce, digital marketing, content creation, and online business models (Gupta et al., 2024). The digital entrepreneurship orientation has been shown to reduce migration intentions by equipping young people with the skills and mindset to establish and run local businesses, thereby reducing their dependence on migration for socio-economic advancement (Wang et al., 2025). This is consistent with studies by Kalu and Udeh (2025), which find that youths with a strong digital entrepreneurship orientation focus more on local business opportunities than on migration as a solution to economic problems.

The mediating role of digital entrepreneurship is important because it can help transform social media from a platform that promotes migration to one that supports local entrepreneurial activities. Liang et al. (2025) suggested that youths who engage with entrepreneurial content on social media are more likely to pursue local entrepreneurial opportunities,

rather than consider migration as the only viable path to success. In this regard, the impact of social media exposure depends not only on the nature of content consumed but also on the entrepreneurial mindset of youth (Wang & Li, 2025).

Plateau State provides a unique context for this study due to its diverse youth population, increasing engagement with digital media, and prevailing socio-economic challenges. Most of the existing literature on migration has been national in scope. At the same time, little attention has been paid to a specific area, such as Plateau State, where youth are exposed to migration-related content and emerging entrepreneurial opportunities. Research has shown that local contexts significantly shape youths' migration intentions and their responses to digital media, making Plateau a suitable setting for exploring how digital entrepreneurship orientation may mediate the relationship between social media exposure and migration intentions (Sulaimon et al., 2026). This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the moderating effect of digital entrepreneurship orientation on the relationship between social media exposure and migration intentions in Plateau State.

This study aims to contribute to migration studies, digital entrepreneurship, and youth empowerment in Nigeria by examining the role of digital entrepreneurship as a mediator. It underscores the necessity of policy interventions that embed digital entrepreneurship skills into youth development programmes to mitigate the appeal of irregular migration and foster locally sustainable economic opportunities (Olumide & Adepoju, 2025).

### 1.1 Hypotheses

- Social media exposure does not significantly influence youths' intention to engage in irregular migration in Plateau State, Nigeria.
- Digital entrepreneurship orientation does not significantly mediate the link between social media exposure and youths' intention toward irregular migration in Plateau State, Nigeria.
- No significant relationship exists among social media exposure, digital entrepreneurship orientation, and youths' intention to engage in irregular migration in Plateau State, Nigeria.
- Digital entrepreneurship orientation does not significantly reduce youths' intention to engage in irregular migration in Plateau State, Nigeria.

## 2. Research Methodology

### 2.1 Design, Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

This study employed a cross-sectional design to explore the relationship between social media exposure, digital entrepreneurship orientation, and irregular migration intention among youths in Plateau State, Nigeria. Data were collected at a single time point to assess patterns and associations among the variables of interest. Specifically, the study examined the impact of social media exposure on youths' intentions to engage in irregular migration and the potential mediating effect of digital entrepreneurship orientation.

The target population consisted of youths aged 18–30 years in Plateau State, selected because individuals within this age range are typically active on social media, engaged with digital opportunities, and likely to form migration-related intentions. According to the National Population Commission (2024), this group totals 1.2 million.

A sample size of 400 youths was determined using Taro Yamane's formula. Respondents were chosen through stratified random sampling to ensure equitable representation across different socioeconomic groups. Stratification was based on key characteristics such as age, gender, education level, and employment status, resulting in the following categories: students, employed youth, unemployed youth, and entrepreneurs.

Proportional selection within these strata helped minimize sampling bias and enhanced the representativeness of the sample. However, youths from institutions or regions that were inaccessible or underrepresented during data collection were excluded.

### 2.2 Instruments

The study utilized the following instruments to collect data:

#### 2.2.1 Social Media Exposure Scale (SMES)

The SMES assesses the extent to which youths interact with social media platforms and engage with

content related to migration and entrepreneurship. Developed by Nguyen et al. (2023), it comprises 12 items across three subscales: migration-related content, entrepreneurial content, and entertainment content. Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Previous studies reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87, and reliability in the current study was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83.

#### 2.2.2 Digital Entrepreneurship Orientation Scale (DEOS)

The DEOS evaluates youths' attitudes toward digital entrepreneurship. Developed by Alimohammad et al. (2024), it contains 10 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale measures aspects such as self-efficacy, innovation, opportunity recognition, and risk-taking in digital business contexts. Prior studies reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, while the present study found 0.84, confirming reliability.

#### 2.2.3 Migration Intention Scale (MIS)

The MIS, adapted from Michaels and Spector's Turnover Intention Scale (TIS-6), measures intentions to migrate via irregular routes. It contains six items rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 4 = Always), with higher scores indicating stronger migration intentions. Cronbach's alpha was previously reported as 0.79 (Wen et al., 2018) and 0.76 in this study.

The DIS was developed by the researcher to capture participants' age, gender, education level, employment status, and social media usage patterns. This contextual data helps interpret variations in social media exposure, digital entrepreneurship orientation, and migration intentions.

### 2.3 Method of Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using appropriate statistical techniques. The first hypothesis was examined with simple linear regression, while the second and third hypotheses were tested using Hayes' PROCESS software. The fourth hypothesis was evaluated through Pearson's correlation. All analyses were conducted at a 0.05 significance level.

3. Results

**Hypothesis One**

Ho1: Social media exposure does not significantly influence youths’ intention to engage in irregular migration in Plateau State, Nigeria.

**Table 1:** Coefficients of the Simple Linear Regression Analysis for the Influence of Social Media Exposure on Irregular Migration Intention

B	Std Error	$\beta$	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.455	0.432		3.374
Social Media Exposure	0.086	0.022	0.335	3.909

Dependent Variable: Irregular Migration Intention

Table 1 shows significant results with a  $\beta = 0.335$ ,  $t = 3.909$ , and  $p < 0.05$ , leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. This suggests that social media exposure significantly influences youths' intentions to engage in irregular migration in Plateau State, Nigeria. The regression equation predicting irregular migration intention (denoted by Y) from social media exposure (denoted by X) is:  
 $Y = 0.086X + 1.455$

**Hypothesis Two**

Ho2: Digital entrepreneurship orientation does not significantly mediate the relationship between social media exposure and youths’ intention to engage in irregular migration in Plateau State, Nigeria.

**Table 2:** Coefficients of the Regression Analysis for the Mediating Role of Digital Entrepreneurship Orientation in the Relationship between Social Media Exposure and Irregular Migration Intention

Model		Coeff.	Std Error	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
(Constant)		2.34	0.603	3.88	0	1.144	3.536
Digital Entrepreneurship Orientation		0.211	0.029	7.276	0	0.154	0.268
Social Media Exposure		0.057	0.012	4.75	0	0.033	0.081

Outcome Variable: Irregular Migration Intention

Table 2 reveals significant results with a coefficient. = 0.211,  $t = 7.276$ , and  $p < 0.05$ , leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and confirming that digital entrepreneurship orientation significantly mediates the relationship between social media exposure and irregular migration intention.

**Hypothesis Three**

Ho3: No significant relationship exists among social media exposure, digital entrepreneurship orientation, and youths’ intention to engage in irregular migration in Plateau State, Nigeria.

**Table 3:** Correlation Matrix for the Relationships between Social Media Exposure, Digital Entrepreneurship Orientation, and Irregular Migration Intention.

	Social Media Exposure	Digital Entrepreneurship Orientation	Irregular Migration Intention
Social Media Exposure	1.000	0.427*	0.312*
Digital Entrepreneurship Orientation		1.000	-0.295*
Irregular Migration Intention			1.000

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

Table 3 shows significant positive relationships between social media exposure and irregular migration intention ( $r = 0.312$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and a significant negative relationship between digital entrepreneurship orientation and irregular migration intention ( $r = -0.295$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). These findings indicate that both social media exposure and digital entrepreneurship orientation are significantly related to migration intention. However, social media exposure and digital entrepreneurship orientation show a moderate positive correlation ( $r = 0.427$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

**Hypothesis Four**

Ho4: Digital entrepreneurship orientation does not significantly reduce youths’ intention to engage in irregular migration in Plateau State, Nigeria.

**Table 4:** Coefficients of the Regression Analysis for the Influence of Digital Entrepreneurship Orientation on Irregular Migration Intention

Model	Coeff.	Std Error	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
(Constant)	3.229	0.567	5.688	0	2.104	4.354
Digital Entrepreneurship Orientation	-0.097	0.031	-3.143	0.002	-0.158	-0.036

**Outcome Variable: Irregular Migration Intention**

Table 4 indicates that digital entrepreneurship orientation significantly reduces irregular migration intention, as evidenced by a coefficient of -0.097,  $t = -3.143$ , and  $p < 0.05$ . Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that digital entrepreneurship orientation has a significant negative effect on youths’ intention to engage in irregular migration in Plateau State.

**4. Conclusion**

The growing concern over irregular migration among Nigerian youths, especially those influenced by social media, highlights the need to understand the factors driving this trend and the role digital entrepreneurship may play in offering alternatives. This study examined the relationship among social media exposure, digital entrepreneurship orientation, and irregular migration intentions among youths in Plateau State, Nigeria. The findings revealed significant relationships between social media exposure and migration intentions, with digital entrepreneurship orientation serving as a crucial mediator that reduces these intentions. The results showed that youths exposed to entrepreneurial content on social media were less likely to pursue irregular migration routes, as they recognised local digital opportunities and gained confidence in their entrepreneurial potential.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Government and Development Agencies: Efforts should be made to enhance youths’ engagement with digital entrepreneurship programs. This could include establishing government-funded digital entrepreneurship hubs, providing access to affordable digital tools, and partnering with tech companies to create scalable business models for youth.
- Educational Institutions: Schools, universities, and vocational training centres

should incorporate digital entrepreneurship education into their curricula. Workshops, seminars, and mentorship programs should focus on equipping young people with the skills to leverage social media platforms for business creation and innovation, offering them an alternative to migration.

- Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs): NGOs and youth-focused organisations should prioritise initiatives that educate youths on both the risks of irregular migration and the opportunities in the digital economy. These programs should highlight successful local digital entrepreneurs as role models.
- Replicating the Study: This study should be replicated in other regions of Nigeria to assess the broader applicability of these findings. By extending the research to other states, including the northern and southern parts of Nigeria, policymakers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing youths' migration intentions nationwide. This would inform a national strategy that blends migration prevention with support for local entrepreneurship.

Through these measures, the government and other stakeholders can take a more proactive approach to reducing irregular migration by providing youths with viable local opportunities and fostering a digital economy that can compete with the allure of migration.

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