



Challenges Facing Youth in Leveraging Social Media Platforms for Economic Transformation: Evidence from Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania

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Abstract

The emergence of social media has transformed how youth communicate, interact, and participate in socio-economic activities. Beyond serving as a tool for social interaction, social media presents immense potential for youth empowerment and economic transformation, particularly in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 and 8, which focus on eradicating poverty and promoting decent employment. This study assessed the challenges facing youth in leveraging social media platforms for economic transformation in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania. A mixed-methods approach employing a descriptive survey design was adopted. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews from 196 respondents. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS software, while qualitative data were thematically analysed. The findings revealed four key challenges constraining youth from fully exploiting social media for economic gains. Unstable internet connectivity emerged as the most critical barrier (32%), followed by the high cost of internet services (17%), lack of knowledge and skills in using social media for economic purposes (20%), and difficulty in owning essential digital devices such as smartphones and computers (31%). These limitations collectively hinder the capacity of youth to engage productively in the digital economy. The study concludes that while social media holds substantial potential for fostering youth economic empowerment, its effective utilisation is constrained by infrastructural, financial, and knowledge-based challenges. It recommends that the government and stakeholders strengthen digital infrastructure, introduce subsidised data packages, enhance digital literacy through targeted training programmes, and facilitate access to affordable devices. Additionally, integrating social media entrepreneurship education into formal curricula and establishing mentorship networks could significantly enhance youth participation in the digital economy and contribute to Tanzania's inclusive socio-economic transformation.

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Introduction

In the contemporary digital age, social media has emerged as a powerful force shaping the lives of individuals worldwide, particularly the youth (Manyerere, 2021). Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have created virtual spaces that offer unprecedented opportunities for communication, self-expression, connectivity, and economic



participation (Sumadevi, 2023; Agbawe, 2018). Globally, social media usage continues to grow rapidly, with 4.80 billion users worldwide, including 150 million new users in the past 12 months, and an average daily usage of 2 hours 24 minutes. Notably, approximately 60% of these users are youth (Brough et al., 2020), highlighting the critical role of social media in shaping youth experiences and potential economic engagement.

Social media platforms have demonstrated considerable potential in contributing to youth economic transformation by facilitating entrepreneurship, job creation, and global networking opportunities (Andreassen et al., 2017). For instance, in the United States, young entrepreneurs leverage Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to launch businesses, promote products, and build personal brands with minimal startup costs, exemplified by Kylie Jenner's success with Kylie Cosmetics (McClure, 2018). In Europe, platforms like LinkedIn and Fiverr have enabled young professionals to offer freelance services globally, overcoming geographical barriers and fostering financial independence (Van Roy et al., 2018). Moreover, social media campaigns in countries such as Germany have encouraged youth engagement in sustainable entrepreneurship, aligning with global sustainability goals (Van Roy et al., 2018).

In the African context, social media has similarly become a vital tool for youth economic transformation. In Nigeria, platforms like Instagram and Facebook have enabled young entrepreneurs to establish online businesses, exemplified by Tara Fela-Durotoye's House of Tara, a leading cosmetics brand that effectively utilised social media for marketing and customer engagement (Akanle et al., 2021; Mramba & Rumanyika, 2020). In Kenya, YouTube has allowed young content creators such as Wabosha Maxine to monetise talents through brand partnerships and advertisements (Solomon & van Klyton, 2020). Likewise, in South Africa, social media has facilitated the growth of the informal economy, allowing youth to expand their market reach and conduct business efficiently through platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook Marketplace (Chiguvu et al., 2023).

In Tanzania, the rapid expansion of social media usage has been driven by improvements in internet infrastructure and the proliferation of smartphones (Mbura, 2020). By 2016, the country had seven mobile service providers, including Airtel, Tigo, and Vodacom, serving over 32 million subscribers, with mobile phone usage projected to increase twentyfold by 2019 (TCRA, 2021; Churk, 2020). These providers have promoted social media adoption through competitive data packages and affordable smartphones. Concurrently, government initiatives, such as the Youth Development Fund (YDF) established in 1994, aim to combat youth unemployment by providing soft loans to support entrepreneurial activities in the informal sector (Ojeleye et al., 2018). Legal frameworks such as the Media Services Act (2016) and the Cybercrime Act (2015) further regulate the media and communication sectors, ensuring ethical standards and security (TCRA, 2021). Despite these efforts, the extent to which social media contributes to youth economic transformation in Tanzania, particularly in Morogoro Municipality, remains underexplored.

Although prior studies suggest that social media can enhance economic, political, and social empowerment for youth (Ojeleye et al., 2018; Abubakar & Dasuki, 2018), the impact in developing economies remains uncertain. Concerns about technology-driven job displacement (McClure, 2018) and the potential for youth empowerment through effective adoption of digital tools (Ramadan & Johnee, 2019) underscore the need for further research. With Tanzania's population being predominantly young—approximately 60% under 35 years old (Churk & Volkmer, 2021)—and increasingly connected to the internet (Churk, 2023), understanding how youth leverage social media for economic transformation in Morogoro Municipality is both timely and critical. This study, therefore, seeks to assess the contribution of social media platforms to youth economic transformation by determining the extent and manner in which these platforms are used in Morogoro Municipality.



Theoretical Perspective

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), developed by Blumler and Katz, posits that media users actively select media content based on their personal needs and objectives (Katz et al., 2023). Unlike traditional approaches that view audiences as passive recipients of media messages, UGT emphasises user agency, highlighting that individuals choose media that best satisfy their psychological and social needs (Ruggiero, 2022). Media consumption, according to the theory, is motivated by a variety of needs, including personal interactions, identity formation, information seeking, entertainment, escapism, and tension relief (Severin & Tankard, 2021). In the context of social media, platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube provide users with unique opportunities to connect with others, express themselves, seek validation, and access information rapidly (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2022). These platforms allow users to post updates, share content, interact with peers, and participate in online communities, fulfilling diverse needs that were previously limited in traditional media (Amita, 2016; Asongu & Odhiambo, 2021). The theory thus offers a framework for understanding the dynamic interaction between social media platforms and their users, particularly in how these platforms satisfy varied cognitive, affective, and social gratifications. For this study, UGT is pivotal in exploring how youth in Morogoro Municipality leverage social media for economic transformation. By focusing on how social media facilitates communication, networking, and information exchange among young entrepreneurs engaged in income-generating activities (IGAs), the theory helps explain the role of digital media in economic empowerment. The application of UGT highlights that social media usage is not merely for entertainment or social purposes but can be strategically employed to enhance business opportunities, reach wider markets, and develop entrepreneurial skills. Consequently, UGT provides a robust theoretical lens to examine the motivations behind youth engagement with social media and its potential to drive economic outcomes.

Methods

Research Design and Approach

A descriptive survey design was adopted to collect data directly from youth in their natural environments. This design is particularly effective for generating detailed, contextual information on participants' behaviours, perceptions, and experiences (Kothari, 2009). The descriptive survey method enables researchers to quantify trends and patterns in social media usage while simultaneously capturing qualitative insights into the motivations, challenges, and opportunities faced by youth in leveraging these platforms for economic purposes (Creswell, 2014). This study employed a mixed-methods research approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive analysis of the role of social media in youth economic transformation. Mixed-methods research allows for the triangulation of data, combining numerical evidence with contextual insights, which enhances the reliability and validity of the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Study Area

The study was conducted in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania, selected for its substantial youth population of approximately 4,000 individuals, representing 75% of the municipal youth demographic (URT, 2022). Morogoro is a vibrant urban centre with growing internet penetration and widespread use of mobile technologies, which facilitates youth access to social media (Mburu, 2020). The municipality hosts diverse economic activities, including small businesses, informal trading, and entrepreneurial ventures, providing an appropriate context to assess how social media platforms contribute to youth income-generating activities and economic empowerment. The combination of a large youth population, active engagement with digital technologies, and varied economic



opportunities makes Morogoro Municipality both relevant and suitable for examining the challenges and opportunities associated with youth leveraging social media for economic transformation.

Target Population and Sampling

The target population for this study comprised 4,000 youths residing in Morogoro Municipality, representing approximately 75% of the municipality's total youth population (URT, 2022). To determine an appropriate and statistically reliable sample size, Yamane's (1967) formula for sample size determination was applied. Based on this approach, a sample size of 196 respondents was obtained and considered suitable for the study. This sample size was deemed both statistically adequate and practically feasible, providing sufficient representation of the target population while ensuring that data collection remained manageable within the available time and resources. The selected sample enabled meaningful analysis of patterns, behaviours, and variations in the use of social media among youth for economic transformation in Morogoro Municipality. Furthermore, to ensure representativeness, the study employed a simple random sampling technique, which provided each youth in the target population with an equal chance of being selected. This approach was chosen to minimise selection bias and enhance the generalisability of the findings. The sampling frame was obtained from youth records provided by the Morogoro Municipality, from which participants were randomly selected.

Data Type and Collection Methods

We utilised primary data to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in youth economic transformation in Morogoro Municipality. Primary data were collected directly from youth between April and June 2024, a period during which social media engagement was stable and representative of typical usage patterns using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires were designed to capture quantitative information on demographic characteristics, frequency and patterns of social media use, types of economic activities undertaken, and perceived challenges and opportunities in leveraging social media for income generation (Kothari, 2009). To ensure validity, the instruments were pre-tested with 15 youth outside the study area to verify clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the items. Reliability was ensured through careful questionnaire design, consistent wording, and standardised administration procedures, which minimised measurement errors and enhanced the consistency of responses. In addition, semi-structured interviews complemented the questionnaires by providing qualitative insights into the experiences, motivations, and perspectives of youth regarding the use of social media for economic purposes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This combination allowed the study to quantify trends while exploring deeper contextual explanations.

Data Analysis

The collected data were systematically coded, cleaned, and analysed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques, aligning with the study's mixed-methods design. This approach enabled triangulation of findings, thereby enhancing the credibility and depth of the analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were edited for accuracy and completeness, then coded and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 for analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were used to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics and identify key challenges youth face in leveraging social media platforms for economic transformation. The results were presented in tables and figures to enhance clarity and comparability. Qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews were analysed thematically to complement the quantitative results. The thematic analysis followed the six-step framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved familiarisation with the data, coding, identification of recurring patterns, generation of themes, review for coherence, and



definition of final themes. All qualitative data were analysed manually to ensure a deep, interpretive understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical standards to ensure integrity, transparency, and respect for participants. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained research clearance from the relevant Mzumbe University and municipal authorities in Morogoro Municipality. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after providing them with a clear explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no form of coercion or undue influence was applied. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, respondents' identities were not disclosed in any part of the report, and data were securely stored with restricted access limited to the researcher. Furthermore, ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence were upheld by ensuring that participants were not exposed to any psychological or social harm during interviews or questionnaire administration. The data collected were used solely for academic purposes and presented in aggregate form to prevent individual identification.

Result and Discussion

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including sex, level of education, age, and employment status. These variables were included because they are critical in understanding the capacity of youth to access, adopt, and effectively utilise social media platforms for economic transformation. Gender influences access to technology and participation in digital entrepreneurship, often shaped by social, cultural, and economic factors (Manyerere, 2021). Educational level determines the knowledge, digital literacy, and skills required to leverage social media for income-generating activities, while age reflects generational differences in technology adoption, online engagement, and entrepreneurial behaviour (Agrawal, 2020). Finally, employment status provides insight into the economic motivations for social media usage, as unemployed or self-employed youth are more likely to rely on digital platforms for creating income opportunities and economic empowerment (Chiguvu et al., 2023).

Table 1: Demographics features of the Respondents (n=196)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	20	10.2
	Male	176	89.8
Level of Education	Primary education	30	15.3
	Secondary education	70	35.7
	College education	41	21
	University	55	28
Age	18 - 24	112	57
	24 - 30	56	29
	31 - 35	28	14
Employment status	Self-employed	52	26.5
	Employed	43	22
	Unemployed	101	51.5

Source: Researcher Data, 2024



The results show that gender disparity, with 89.8% of respondents being male and only 10.2% female. This suggests that male youth may currently have greater access to digital tools and platforms, potentially leading to higher participation in social media-driven economic activities. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that social, cultural, and economic barriers often limit female participation in digital entrepreneurship in developing countries (Manyerere, 2021; Agbawe, 2018). It highlights the need for targeted interventions to bridge the digital gender divide and ensure equitable economic opportunities for female youth.

Regarding educational attainment, most respondents have secondary education (35.7%) or university education (28%), while 21% have college education and 15.3% primary education. Higher education levels are associated with better digital literacy, critical thinking, and entrepreneurial skills, which enhance the ability to leverage social media for economic purposes (Temu, 2019; Chiguvu et al., 2023). This suggests that the role of social media in promoting economic transformation is likely more pronounced among youth with higher educational qualifications, as they are better positioned to exploit digital tools for business and income-generating activities.

The age distribution indicates that 57% of respondents are between 18 and 24 years old, the group most active on social media and more likely to adopt digital economic opportunities (Agrawal, 2020). This finding supports the Uses and Gratification Theory (Severin & Tankard, 2021), which posits that individuals use media to satisfy specific needs, such as economic engagement, information, and social interaction. Younger youth are therefore more inclined to seek economic benefits through social media platforms.

In terms of employment status, 51.5% of respondents are unemployed, 26.5% are self-employed, and 22% are employed. The high proportion of unemployed youth underscores the potential of social media platforms as alternative sources of income and opportunities for entrepreneurship. Self-employed and employed youth may also use social media to expand their businesses or supplement their income, indicating that these platforms can play a crucial role in job creation, business promotion, and economic empowerment among youth in Morogoro Municipality (Mramba & Rumanyika, 2020; Chiguvu et al., 2023).

Challenges facing youth in using of Social media platforms for economic transformation

This section presents the challenges that youth face in leveraging social media platforms for economic transformation in Morogoro Municipality. Understanding these challenges is critical for informing policymakers, development practitioners, and the government on interventions that can enhance youth participation in digital economic activities. Guided by the research question, "*What are the challenges facing youth in using social media platforms for economic transformation?*" the study categorised these challenges into human/behavioural and technical challenges. Data were collected using both questionnaires and interviews to ensure comprehensive insights. Table 2 summarises the responses:

Table 4.2 Responses on the Challenges Facing youth in using of Social media platform for economic transformation (n = 196)

S/No	Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
1	Unstable internet network connection	63	32
2	Cost and expense of internet	33	17
3	Lack of knowledge on social media for economic gains	39	20
4	Difficulty in owning gadgets or social media facilities	61	31
	Total	196	100

Source: Field Data, 2024

Unstable internet network connection



The most frequently reported challenge was unstable internet connectivity, affecting 32% of respondents. Unreliable internet significantly limits youth engagement with social media, making online business operations, content creation, and digital networking inefficient. Several respondents reported delays in uploading content or accessing online services due to poor connectivity, which constrains their economic activities:

... social media holds great potential for youth, especially those in urban areas, to address unemployment issues. However, in Tanzania, poor internet connectivity severely hampers this potential. Frequent outages and slow speeds often make it difficult to access and effectively use social media, with tasks like uploading a short video taking 10 to 15 minutes. (RS 02)

Another respondent reveals the same situation by asserting that:

...As a content creator relying on endorsements from various regions, I struggle with unstable internet connectivity in Tanzania. Despite switching from Tigo to Vodacom, the issue persisted due to a national optical cable collapse, causing significant delays and preventing me from fulfilling endorsements. The problem remained unresolved for nearly three days. (RS 06)

This finding aligns with prior research by Fab-Ukozor et al. (2023) and Manyerere (2021), highlighting that slow and unreliable internet reduces productivity, obstructs information sharing, and discourages digital entrepreneurship. From a Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) perspective, youth use social media to satisfy needs such as information, social interaction, entertainment, and economic gain (Severin & Tankard, 2021). When internet connectivity is unstable, these needs remain unmet, reducing motivation and the ability to exploit social media for economic purposes. Therefore, improving internet infrastructure is essential to enable youth to derive tangible economic benefits from social media platforms.

Cost and expense of internet

High internet costs were identified as a significant barrier by 17% of respondents. Many youths, especially those in lower income brackets, reported difficulties in regularly accessing social media due to the financial burden of data and devices:

...For some time, I fail to take advantage of the opportunities found on social media because I am jobless, and it requires me to have at least ten thousand shillings, possibly for advertising on social media. Not to mention the cost of paying the person who is going to create the content before it is placed on the digital platform. (RS 01)

These findings corroborate earlier studies by Temu (2019), Amita (2016), and Brough et al. (2020), which observed that high costs of internet and devices limit youth participation in digital economic activities. According to UGT, social media use is driven by the pursuit of gratification, including economic and informational needs (Agrawal, 2020). When access is cost-prohibitive, youth are unable to achieve these gratifications, thereby limiting their economic engagement and reinforcing inequality in digital entrepreneurship. Policies that subsidise data costs or provide affordable internet packages for youth could mitigate this barrier.

Lack of knowledge on social media for economic gains

About 20% of respondents reported insufficient knowledge on how to use social media effectively for income-generating activities. While youth are generally familiar with social media, many lack the skills to transform online presence into sustainable economic opportunities:



...most of the time, we tend to collect whatever we find on social media because we lack sufficient knowledge on how to use social media information properly. (RS 04)

This supports findings by Mramba and Rumanyika (2020), who noted that youth require digital literacy and entrepreneurial skills to exploit social media for business purposes. From the UGT lens, the ability to satisfy personal and economic needs through media depends on active and knowledgeable engagement (Katz et al., 2023). When youth lack digital literacy, they cannot fully achieve these gratifications, which hinders economic transformation. This underscores the importance of targeted training programmes to enhance digital entrepreneurship skills.

Difficulty in owning gadgets or social media facilities

A substantial proportion of respondents (31%) reported challenges in accessing essential gadgets like smartphones, tablets, or computers. Lack of devices prevents youth from actively engaging in online economic activities:

...as a youth, it is incredibly difficult to own gadgets or social media facilities like smartphones, tablets, or computers, which are essential for using social media platforms effectively. The high cost of these devices often means that many of us are unable to afford them, limiting our ability to engage with social media and take advantage of its opportunities.

This finding is consistent with Temu (2019), Amita (2016), and Brough et al. (2020), which highlight that financial barriers limit access to digital tools in developing countries. Using UGT, the lack of access to devices impedes youth from satisfying their informational, social, and economic needs through social media (Severin & Tankard, 2021). This emphasises that digital infrastructure is not only about internet connectivity but also about the accessibility of the necessary devices for effective participation in online economic activities.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by youth in using social media for economic transformation, several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the study was confined to Morogoro Municipality, which, although representative of an urban setting with significant youth engagement in digital technologies, may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across rural or peri-urban areas. Therefore, the findings should be generalised to similar urban contexts with caution.

Second, the study relied primarily on self-reported data from questionnaires and interviews. Such data are subject to potential response bias, as some respondents may have provided socially desirable answers or underreported their challenges in social media usage.

Third, the study employed a cross-sectional design, capturing information at a single point in time. Consequently, it cannot establish causal relationships between social media use and economic outcomes but rather highlights associations and perceptions. Longitudinal studies would be required to observe changes in youth engagement and economic outcomes over time.

Lastly, the study focused primarily on individual-level challenges such as connectivity, knowledge, and device ownership, with less emphasis on institutional and policy-level barriers (e.g., regulation, taxation, and market structure). Future studies could adopt a multi-level analytical framework to explore how institutional support systems and national digital policies shape youth participation in the digital economy.



Conclusion

This study examined the use of social media platforms among youth in Morogoro Municipal Council, Tanzania, with a focus on their potential for fostering economic transformation. The findings reveal that although the youth in Morogoro exhibit high levels of awareness and active participation in various social media platforms, their engagement is largely confined to entertainment, celebrity news, and social interactions rather than productive or income-generating activities. This pattern of use aligns with the Uses and Gratification Theory, which suggests that individuals use media based on their personal needs, motivations, and the gratifications they seek to achieve. The study further established that while social media has the potential to promote youth economic empowerment through innovation, marketing, and entrepreneurship, a number of challenges limit its effective utilisation for economic purposes. These challenges include poor internet connectivity, the high cost of internet services, inadequate knowledge of social media for business use, limited awareness of legal aspects such as copyright, and the inability of many youth to afford digital devices. Together, these barriers constrain the ability of young people to exploit the economic opportunities that social media platforms offer. Therefore, despite the increasing digitalisation of economies, many youth in Morogoro remain on the periphery of the digital economy, with social media serving primarily as a source of leisure rather than as a tool for economic transformation.

Based on the findings of this study, several specific and practical recommendations are proposed to enhance the productive use of social media platforms for economic transformation among youth in Morogoro Municipality.

First, strengthening digital literacy and capacity-building initiatives. The government, through the Ministry of Information, Communication and Information Technology in collaboration with the Morogoro Municipal Council, should introduce community-based digital skills training centres targeting youth. These centres can offer short courses and workshops on digital marketing, online business management, e-commerce, and social media monetisation. Training could be delivered through partnerships with higher learning institutions such as Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA), Mzumbe University, and Jordan University College (JUCo). Furthermore, youth development programmes such as the Youth Development Fund (YDF) should integrate digital entrepreneurship modules to build the competence required for using social media as a business tool.

Second, improving internet connectivity and reducing data costs. To address the challenge of poor and costly internet access, the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) should collaborate with telecommunication companies such as Vodacom, Airtel, and Tigo to expand the national broadband infrastructure and strengthen optical fibre connections across Morogoro. The government should also explore introducing subsidised youth data packages or zero-rated access for business-related social media applications like Facebook Marketplace, WhatsApp Business, and Instagram Shopping. Additionally, installing public Wi-Fi hotspots in strategic locations such as youth centres, municipal libraries, and vocational colleges could provide affordable and consistent internet access.

Finally, promoting awareness of legal and ethical use of social media. The Ministry of Information and the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) should collaborate to incorporate modules on digital ethics, online copyright, and data protection into secondary and tertiary education curricula. Awareness campaigns using radio, television, and social media itself could also educate youth about responsible online conduct, intellectual property rights, and the risks associated with misinformation and digital fraud. Strengthening the enforcement of the Cybercrimes Act (2015) alongside digital literacy education would ensure that youth use social media responsibly and legally.



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