



Social Media and Economic Development: The Role of Instagram in Developing Nations

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ABSTRACT

Instagram's impact on digital entrepreneurship in developing nations is examined in this paper, with particular attention paid to the platform's functions in marketing, communication, brand promotion, and business growth. This paper underlines the platform's cross-sectoral impact on politics, tourism, healthcare, and agriculture, as well as the growing significance of features like Instagram Live during the COVID-19 shutdown. The study demonstrates how Instagram's visual design and intuitive interface appeal to entrepreneurs using a conceptual framework focused on Zanzibari spice producers. Instagram has been able to promote innovation and lower transaction costs because of the increasing use of reasonably priced smartphones and better internet connection. Instagram has made a substantial contribution to economic empowerment by connecting users to funding platforms like Thrive Agric and providing chances for youth participation and mentoring, despite obstacles like inconsistent internet availability. In order to maximise Instagram's advantages while mitigating any potential drawbacks, the report ends with policy proposals.

Keywords: Instagram, Cross-Sectoral, Innovation, Economic Empowerment, Internet, Digital Entrepreneurship, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

The impact of Instagram became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic,

especially between March and June 2020, when the app experienced a significant surge in user activity. Individuals from various backgrounds began using Instagram Live to engage and entertain their audiences. This phenomenon highlights Instagram's significant impact on importance for business growth, entertainment, and both genuine and misleading interactions. Instagram users have successfully drawn in their audience by using captivating images and videos. We think this pattern will continue for some time, but because individuals won't have as much free time after the epidemic, the spike in Instagram Live usage is probably going to slow down. Instagram still has other features that will keep it a popular app, so this drop in Instagram Live usage does not translate to a drop in Instagram usage overall. Instagram is significantly impacting social interactions in poor countries. Dele Momodu, the editor of OVATION, has utilized Instagram to conduct interviews with prominent individuals in Nigeria, including kings, business leaders, and government officials.

On Instagram, we've seen users broadcasting different shows and having discussions about things like business development in Africa. Morayo Afolabi Brown (@morayobrown) is a prominent example. Even though COVID-19 resulted in fatalities, job losses, and financial difficulties, it also demonstrated how resilient people are and how we can adjust to challenging circumstances. Innovation in virtual interactions, remote work, distribution techniques, and inventive applications of current tools, such as Instagram Live, have all flourished during this time. Instagram Live has brought a range of advantages to developing countries, especially in Africa, by improving communication, marketing, business growth, and the sharing of ideas—even among marginalized populations (Adekunle and Kajumba). Although the region continues to face issues like limited internet access, the availability of affordable smartphones from brands such as Infinix and TECNO has greatly expanded digital connectivity in many African nations (Adekunle et al., 2020). This paper explores Instagram's impact on emerging economies by focusing on the following key areas:

1. An overview of Instagram's development and history.
2. The platform's role in encouraging entrepreneurship and supporting economic development, based on the findings of Adekunle and Kajumba (2019, 2021).
3. A conceptual model explaining why Instagram is especially effective for marketing and selling spices grown by farmers in Zanzibar.
4. Policy recommendations designed to maximize Instagram's benefits while mitigating

any potential negative effects.

Thus, this paper delves into Instagram's significance in developing countries, examining its origin and its transformative impact on entrepreneurship.

HISTORY OF INSTAGRAM

The internet has greatly transformed our daily lives, and as we continue to explore new knowledge and ideas, further changes are inevitable. This constant evolution presents difficulties in maintaining market balance, especially with the rise of disruptive innovations like social media platforms such as Instagram. In a perfectly balanced market, reduced profits can deter entrepreneurial activity. However, Instagram helps lower transaction costs for business owners and offers support to individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. The platform's rise was made possible by the launch of smartphones in 2007, improvements in wireless connectivity, and the growth of mobile apps. Introduced in 2010, Instagram began as a photo-sharing app and quickly gained widespread popularity, becoming a dynamic space for bloggers, marketers, and content creators. Influencers and brand specialists have significantly altered Instagram's original focus, broadening it to encompass video content and live streaming. The lockdowns and social distancing measures implemented in 2020 led to innovations that helped maintain social connections during periods of physical separation, resulting in a notable increase in the use of Instagram Live and other live-streaming services such as YouTube. By 2019, Instagram had reached one billion monthly active users and had become one of the most popular apps in Nigeria by April 2020. Accessible on iOS, Android, and Windows Phone, the platform allows users to view, comment on, and like posts shared by friends, celebrities, and public figures. Instagram has emerged as an essential platform for entrepreneurs of all scales, helping them grasp and address market demands (Adekunle and Kajumba 2021). It has developed into a key channel for communication, conducting business, and delivering services, including home delivery, transport, and e-commerce. Furthermore, Instagram significantly boosts product exposure and supports various marketing, advertising, and promotional efforts (Hanna et al., 2011).

IMPORTANCE OF INSTAGRAM FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Instagram serves as a valuable platform for creative individuals to foster economic and social development in their communities. With minimal startup costs, it effectively

connects users with a broad audience. Its visually engaging and organized photo-sharing features enhance its role in promoting products and ideas. In developing countries, Instagram has been leveraged for business growth, market research, advertising, and execution (Adekunle and Kajumba 2021). By collaborating with the right influencers and strategically timing posts, entrepreneurs can improve their understanding of target markets. The platform offers essential features that make it a vital tool for promoting entrepreneurship, especially in countries like Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, and Morocco. Entrepreneurship plays a critical role in driving economic development, influenced by factors such as perceived self-efficacy (Chen et al., 1998) and locus of control (Rotter, 1966), which help shape an individual's sense of agency (Harper, 2003). Research by Adekunle (2007, 2011) supports the idea that these personal agency beliefs are reliable indicators of entrepreneurial potential. To thrive, entrepreneurs need access to supportive technologies that enhance their skills and foster a strong internal locus of control—reinforcing the belief that their actions can lead to success. Instagram has emerged as a powerful platform for career growth, as demonstrated by influencers like Toke Makinwa (@tokemakinwa) with 3.6 million followers, Funke Akindele (@funkejenifaakindele) with 10.9 million followers, and Ayo Makun (@aycomedian) with 8.6 million followers. Interactive features such as "likes" and "comments" offer users meaningful data on customer behavior and demographics, aiding in more precise market segmentation (Adekunle and Kajumba, 2021). This enhanced understanding allows entrepreneurs to better meet client needs and identify underserved market segments. Instagram is rapidly becoming a favored tool for brand awareness in developing nations due to its low initial costs. A prime example is Toke Makinwa, who has effectively used her Instagram account to market her products. The platform functions as a powerful communication and marketing tool, providing an economical means to swiftly share information with distant customers and stakeholders. Compared to traditional media, Instagram ads are not only more affordable but also more effective, making it an attractive option for businesses of all sizes. The content shared on Instagram is often seen as more authentic and relatable, leading to higher consumer engagement (Lim and Chung 2014; Influencers the New 2016; Hershman 2018). However, it is crucial to use Instagram wisely, as its main purpose was originally intended for social interaction rather than commercial promotion. In South Africa, for instance, Price successfully leverages Instagram to

market its lifestyle brand while upholding its social responsibilities, engaging followers through popular hashtags like "#currentmood" and "#summerfeels." Moreover, volunteer tourists from developing nations have taken to Instagram to document their experiences and participate in worldwide discussions, thereby challenging established narratives that have traditionally been dominated by outside perspectives. This shift allows citizens of emerging economies to correct misrepresentations and opens new opportunities for bloggers to earn through storytelling and brand promotion. Instagram is an important platform for political journalism in Africa, helping to hold leaders accountable and championing freedom of expression. It serves as a space for a variety of news and information, empowering marginalized political groups and giving a voice to individuals who might otherwise remain unheard. It provides a platform for diverse news and information, empowering politically marginalized groups and offering a voice to those otherwise unheard. Instagram's impact extends to improving health communication in Africa, where high sensitization costs and poor infrastructure have long hampered effective public health outreach. During the 2014 Ebola outbreak, entities such as the CDC, WHO, and Doctors Without Borders utilized Instagram to combat misinformation and disseminate important information (Guidry et al. 2017). In a similar vein, Instagram served as a platform during the COVID-19 pandemic to promote awareness and deliver accurate information, effectively engaging users and helping to mitigate the virus's spread. This interactive strategy is particularly crucial for developing nations that have limited public health resources.

Furthermore, Instagram has adapted to changes brought by the COVID-19 lockdown, with entrepreneurs leveraging it for grocery supply and direct delivery services. Even post-pandemic, this trend of house-to-house delivery is expected to continue. Instagram also helps overcome isolation for rural farmers, providing access to essential information and services. Organizations like Twiga Foods and ThriveAgric use Instagram to support agriculture and connect with farmers. Zanzibar spice farmers have similarly embraced Instagram for marketing their products.

Lastly, Instagram has facilitated easier dating and connections, although it has also led to increased promiscuity, as people can connect with strangers and explore venturous lifestyles through direct messaging without significant costs.

INSTAGRAM'S FUNCTIONS IN DEVELOPING NATIONS

Digital entrepreneurship is defined by Gawel and Toikko (2014) as the process of transforming an idea into a business venture. This process entails transforming different elements of a conventional organization—such as production, workplace settings, marketing, and distribution—into digital formats (Hull et al. 2007; Turban et al. 2008; Hafezieh et al. 2011). According to Adekunle and Kajumba (2021), digital entrepreneurship unfolds in four main stages: initiation, market research, promotion, and implementation of the business idea. Their conceptual model outlines four key propositions that examine the connection between Instagram and digital entrepreneurship. The first proposition suggests that Instagram facilitates the launch of digital entrepreneurship by allowing for interactive communication with potential customers or followers. This engagement, which includes sharing information, receiving comments, likes, and reviews, aids entrepreneurs in grasping the interests of their followers and understanding market demand, leading to a better evaluation of the feasibility of their business idea. Proposition 2 focuses on market analysis using Instagram's follower data. Ongoing interactions through comments and reviews provide insights into market conditions. Instagram's analytical tools help entrepreneurs gather and evaluate both quantitative and qualitative data to understand market characteristics, such as demographics, and determine the need and potential market.

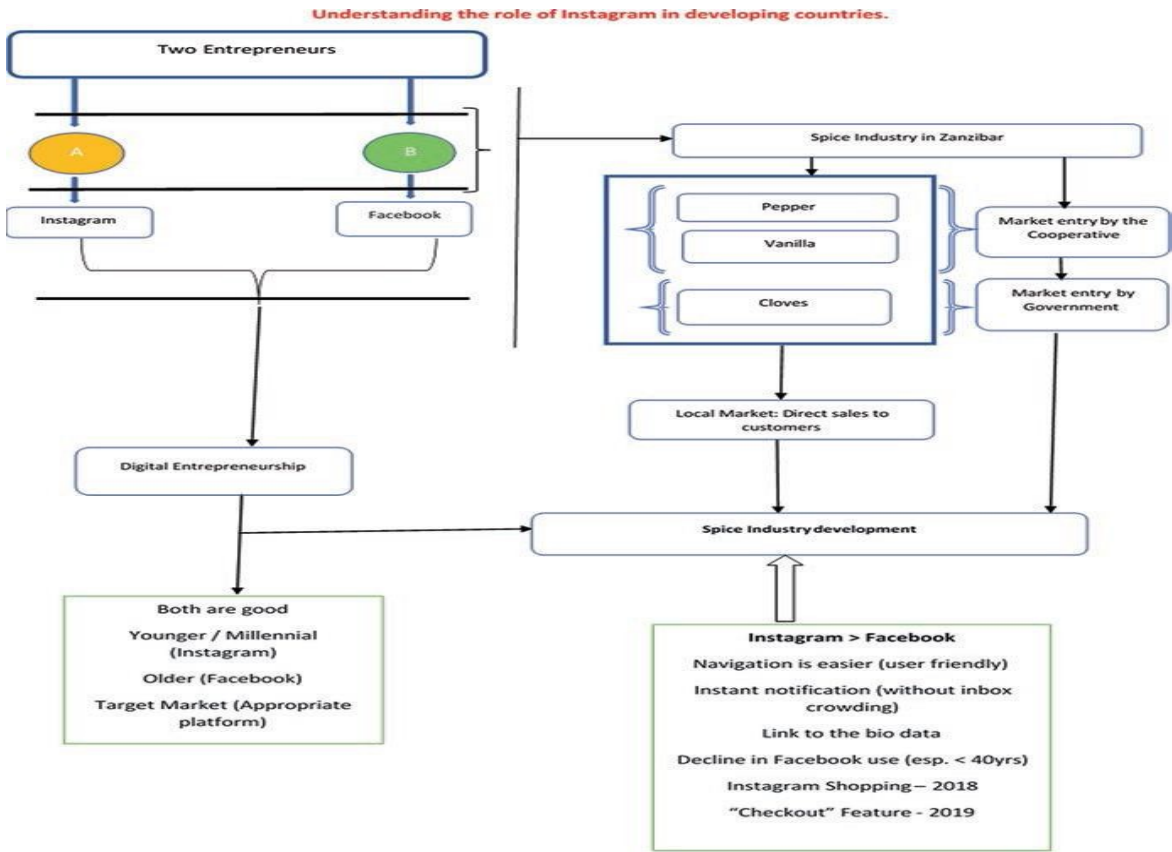
Proposition 3 addresses how Instagram is utilized for advertising, promotion, and marketing. Influencers leverage comments, likes, attractive photos, videos, and hashtags to promote brands, swaying followers toward these brands. Instagram users often trust recommendations from influencers more than traditional advertisements, viewing them as relatable peers rather than actors in ads (Wei and Lu 2013; Long-Crowell 2016; Djafarora and Rushworth 2017). Proposition 4 highlights Instagram's role in business implementation. Influencers with high engagement rates and loyal followers can effectively diffuse information and drive sales (Johansen2019). These influencers also possess significant persuasive power, shaping opinions and validating perceptions through their comments and interactions.

In Africa, the use of Instagram for business purposes has been rising significantly. Instagram released Instagram Lite, a condensed version of the program created especially to cater to the demands of users in developing nations, in an effort to

promote even greater use in these regions (Dotsquares2018). While keeping all of the capabilities of the original Instagram app, this updated version is meant to take up less space on users' phones and use less data, which makes it appropriate for areas with spotty mobile service and expensive data plans (Dotsquares 2018). The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 illustrates the perspectives of farmers regarding the impact of social media on the spice sector in Zanzibar, focusing on their use of Facebook and Instagram. Zanzibar is known for its production of spices such as cloves, peppers, and vanilla. The clove market is controlled by the state, which restricts farmers' involvement in its operations, while cooperatives manage the marketing of peppers and vanilla. To boost sales and raise awareness of these spices, producers are encouraged to leverage social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram for marketing purposes. With the availability of high-speed internet and social media applications, farmers in Zanzibar can easily create and share information, maintain connections, and establish new relationships, ultimately attracting more business opportunities. Although Instagram was introduced in 2010 and has been rapidly gaining popularity, Facebook remains widely used among established businesses, those in growth phases, and older individuals with higher income and purchasing power. In contrast, Instagram is favored by emerging spice farmers, start-ups, and many millennials (Adekunle and Kajumba 2021; Poushter et al. 2018; Endres 2013).

Instagram is thought to be more user-friendly, easier to use, and provides a cleaner, more appealing picture presentation, as the conceptual framework demonstrates. Instagram's streamlined design gives it a more polished appearance, while its notification feature simplifies the process of discovering and promoting products. Additionally, Instagram's bio-data option, which includes details such as age and gender, allows for better targeting, analysis, and engagement with specific audiences. This enhances Instagram's ability to identify the most suitable clients. In contrast, Facebook is often seen as cluttered and less effective for advertising, even though it is viewed as more personal and has lower levels of public visibility (Fischer and Reuber 2011).

Figure 1: A conceptual framework demonstrating Instagram's contribution to Zanzibar's spice production and marketing



Source: Adekunle and Kajumba (2020)

Knowing these characteristics enables Zanzibari spice growers to see how crucial it is to identify their target market when deciding which media outlet to use to advertise and spread the word about their company. For example, Agri Vanilla and Spices Company utilizes hashtags such as #coffee, #vanilla, and #spices to broaden their audience on Instagram while promoting their vanilla-related initiatives. Social media has greatly improved the direct sales of spices to consumers, and the growing emphasis on social media marketing is expected to boost growth and production in the spice industry, resulting in increased income. The launch of Instagram Checkout in 2019 and Instagram Shopping in 2018 is predicted to further accelerate this growth. As social media usage continues to grow in developing countries (Poushter et al. 2018), private entrepreneurs are generally more inclined to take advantage of this trend. However, many African countries still fall behind in utilizing social media for marketing and promotion. This is evident in Zanzibar, where the government maintains control over the clove industry, resulting in limited social media promotion for cloves. The clove market in Zanzibar has declined significantly—from an average of 16,000 tons per year in the 1970s to just 3,500 tons annually—largely due to the government monopoly, which has been criticized for negatively impacting the island's spice trade (ZACPO 2013). The decline of the Zanzibar clove industry can be linked to the government's failure to engage in social media marketing. A conceptual framework shows how farmers in Zanzibar utilize social media platforms like Instagram to improve direct sales in the local spice market and promote the growth of the spice industry. Many African entrepreneurs have embraced Instagram as part of this trend; however, they still face challenges navigating the ever-changing mobile market.

Due to its direct tax contributions, GDP generation, and employment creation, the mobile industry is vital to the economy (Dahir 2016). Smartphones, which are minicomputers with sophisticated camera systems and high-resolution touch screens, are the main stay of the mobile sector in Africa. Talking, texting, and shooting high-quality photos are all made possible by these capabilities. Smartphones with internet access are used for emailing, web surfing, navigation, and making better use of popular apps like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. In developed economies, smartphone ownership rates are at their peak, whereas in Sub-Saharan Africa, they remain relatively low. Due to the high percentage of smartphone ownership in the area, internet access is restricted, and potential entrepreneurs' use of social media is

curtailed. This restriction has impeded Africa's ability to connect, communicate, and use apps globally, which has an impact on the continent's economic progress. The high percentage of digital illiteracy and the high price of smartphones—which are highly taxed as luxury goods—are to blame for the low ownership rates. Companies such as TECNO and Infinix have ramped up the manufacturing and distribution of affordable Android smartphones in Africa to enhance the accessibility of these devices across the continent.

EFFECTIVE AND APPEALING POLICIES TO ENHANCE INSTAGRAM'S POSITIVE INFLUENCE AND MITIGATE ITS NEGATIVE EFFECTS

Despite still lagging behind the rest of the world in smartphone ownership, Africa has seen a noteworthy 65% gain over the last five years—double the average worldwide (Poushteret al., 2018).

The average cost of a smartphone decreased from \$230 in 2012 to \$160 in 2015, which has significantly contributed to the rising ownership of smartphones (GSMA Report, 2015). As smartphone usage grows, more people will gain internet access, enhancing service delivery in areas such as education, healthcare, and agriculture (Dahir, 2016). It is crucial for African governments to improve the accessibility of smartphones and other mobile devices to support this growth. This could be accomplished by offering soft loans to encourage investment in mobile device manufacturing or by providing initial funding. According to Collins (2019), the Mara Group, a Pan-African corporation, has established a manufacturing facility in Rwanda to produce Mara cellphones, the first of their kind on the continent.

Given that women play a leading role in agriculture, healthcare, and education across Africa—and with most of the population being under the age of 25—African governments need to address key microeconomic issues such as gender, age, and income disparities, as these factors influence internet accessibility and limit the use of platforms like Instagram. To attract foreign investment and strengthen ties between local entrepreneurs and global manufacturers, governments should consider implementing tax incentives. This could help increase the availability of affordable, high-quality mobile devices. Some companies have already begun forming such alliances; for example, Safaricom and Google introduced the Lipa Mdogo Mdogo program, allowing Kenyans to purchase 4G smartphones at reduced prices. To drive

digital growth and keep data costs manageable, governments must also invest in improving internet access in rural communities. Offering budget-friendly payment options could encourage greater adoption of 4G and eventually 5G services. In addition, governments should invest in education focused on website and mobile app development and support tech companies that provide software development training. An example is Andela, a tech firm backed by the Zuckerberg Chan Initiative, which specializes in building websites, mobile apps, and digital marketing strategies. Despite the growing use of the internet and social media in Sub-Saharan Africa, disparities based on age, education, income, and gender continue to widen the digital divide. Younger individuals, those with more education, and people with higher incomes are more likely to engage online (Silver, 2019). Moreover, a gender gap remains, with men using internet technologies more frequently than women (Poushter et al., 2018). However, while Silver (2019) found gender to have a minimal impact on tech usage, more recent research by Adekunle et al. (2021) shows that active usage rates between men and women are now nearly equal. African countries ought to put policies in place that shield talented but underprivileged people from exclusion and concentrate on fostering an atmosphere that supports the creation of social goods. Governments should also establish spaces that encourage creativity and innovation, supporting the development of novel concepts and cutting-edge solutions that address regional requirements, like the Instagram Lite app.

Reducing the tax burden on equipment, services, and social media users is also essential. Development should be assisted by policies, not impeded by them. In the twenty-first century, as we progress digitally, government regulations ought to be proactive and telecommunications company licensing ought to be equitable and grounded in knowledge. In order to optimise the advantages and minimize the drawbacks of social media, especially Instagram, Africa needs to meet these requirements.

CONCLUSION

This paper examines the impact of Instagram on digital entrepreneurship in developing countries. It highlights the platform's roles in communication, brand promotion, marketing, and business establishment and management. The discussion highlights features such as Instagram Live video streaming, which gained significant traction

during the COVID-19 lockdown period. It also examines the challenges and unintended outcomes associated with social media use, while emphasizing Instagram's positive impact across sectors like politics, tourism, healthcare, and agriculture. To capture the views of spice producers in Zanzibar regarding their use of social media, a conceptual framework was created. These farmers are drawn to Instagram because of its visually appealing layout, ease of use, and simple navigation.

Since smartphones are the main tool for accessing Instagram in Africa, the platform's usage has grown widely across the continent. The chapter explores how the availability of affordable smartphones and high-speed internet has enabled innovative uses of Instagram, helping to reduce transaction costs by overcoming infrastructure barriers and supporting the growth of small enterprises. Despite its popularity, challenges like limited internet access still persist.

In conclusion, Instagram has made a significant contribution to Africa's economy by connecting users to platforms such as Thrive Agric, which enables farmers to access funding through crowdfunding. It also serves as a powerful tool for business communication, brand promotion, youth empowerment, and providing training and mentorship. To fully harness the potential of Instagram, African governments should implement effective policies that encourage its positive use while minimizing its drawbacks.

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