VOL. 13 NO. 8,
AUGUST, 2026
E-ISSN 3026-8893
P-ISSN 3027-1061

African Scholar Publications & Research International
www.africanscholarpub.com

Journal of Education Research and Library Practice (JERLP)

Impact of Social Media Marketing Skills and Innovation on Business Education Students in Nigeria

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.70382/ajerlp.v13i8.0116

Abstract

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed commercial landscapes worldwide, compelling educational institutions to re-evaluate their curricular offerings. This study empirically investigates the impact of social media marketing (SMM) skills acquisition and digital innovation exposure on academic performance, entrepreneurial intent, and career readiness among business education students in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Employing a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, primary data were collected from 384 purposively and randomly sampled undergraduate students from eight universities and polytechnics across the South-East, South-West, and North-Central geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Structured questionnaires adapted from validated instruments (Cronbach's alpha = 0.87) were administered, and data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation, and multiple linear regression. Findings reveal that SMM skills acquisition exerts a statistically significant positive effect on students' entrepreneurial intent ($\beta = 0.612$, $p < 0.001$) and career readiness ($\beta = 0.548$, $p < 0.001$). Exposure to digital innovation tools similarly demonstrates a strong positive relationship with academic performance ($r = 0.693$, $p < 0.05$). Regression analysis indicates that SMM skills and innovation together explain 68.4% of variance in overall graduate employability outcomes ($R^2 = 0.684$, $F(2, 381) = 412.3$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, 74.2% of respondents reported that SMM coursework had increased their confidence in starting a digital business. The study recommends the urgent integration of structured SMM and digital innovation modules into formal business education curricula across Nigerian tertiary institutions, supported by public-private partnerships with technology firms.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing Skills, Innovation, Business Education, Students, Nigeria

Introduction

The global digital economy has catalyzed unprecedented changes in the way businesses communicate, market, and create value. Social media platforms including Instagram, Facebook,

TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, and WhatsApp Business have collectively amassed over 5.2 billion active users as of 2026, making them indispensable channels for brand engagement, customer acquisition, and revenue generation (Data Reportal, 2026). Nigeria, as Africa's most populous nation and largest economy by GDP, is at the epicentre of this digital transformation: with over 109 million internet users and a social media penetration rate exceeding 51.3%, the country presents a fertile environment for digital entrepreneurship and marketing innovation (NCC, 2025). Despite these opportunities, there exists a critical skills deficit among Nigerian university graduates in the domain of social media marketing and digital innovation. Employers consistently report that fresh graduates lack practical competencies in content strategy, analytics interpretation, paid digital advertising, and customer relationship management via social platforms (Adeyemi & Lawal, 2024). This skills gap has deepened the graduate unemployment crisis, which stands at approximately 42.5% among those aged 15–34 (NBS, 2025). Business education, as a discipline that traditionally bridges theoretical management knowledge and practical commercial application, is uniquely positioned to address this deficit.

Existing literature has explored various dimensions of digital competence in higher education (Prensky, 2001; Redecker, 2017; Eze et al., 2020), yet there remains a conspicuous scarcity of empirical studies that specifically examine the effect of structured social media marketing skills instruction and digital innovation exposure on measurable student outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa. Most extant studies focus on either developed Western contexts or broad ICT adoption, failing to capture the nuanced interplay between SMM pedagogy, entrepreneurial motivation, academic performance, and career readiness in the Nigerian business education context.

Objectives of the Study

This study therefore seeks to:

(1) examine the extent to which SMM skills acquisition affects entrepreneurial intent among Nigerian business education students;
(2) assess the relationship between digital innovation exposure and academic performance;
(3) determine the combined predictive power of SMM skills and innovation on graduate employability outcomes; and
(4) ascertain the proportion of students who perceive SMM training as enhancing their confidence to start digital businesses.

Literature Review

Social media marketing is broadly defined as the utilisation of social networking platforms to promote products, services, or brands through content creation, community engagement, paid advertising, and data-driven optimization strategies (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). Within educational settings, SMM has emerged as both a subject of study and a pedagogical tool that enhances student engagement and real-world learning (Manca, 2020). Integrating SMM instruction into business education curricula has been shown to foster critical thinking, data literacy, creativity, and entrepreneurial thinking among students (Aswani et al., 2018).

In Nigeria, the adoption of social media marketing instruction within tertiary curricula has been uneven and largely informal. Okoye and Nwosu (2022) observed that while majority of business education students in southeast Nigeria actively use social media for personal communication, fewer than 30% had received formal instruction in leveraging these platforms for marketing or entrepreneurial purposes.

This disconnection between students' social media habits and structured skills acquisition represents a critical pedagogical gap with significant economic consequences. Innovation in the digital context encompasses the deployment of new technologies, processes, or business models to create, deliver, or capture value in ways previously not possible (Tidd & Bessant, 2018). For business education, digital innovation exposure encompasses students' interaction with e-commerce platforms, AI-driven marketing tools, data analytics dashboards, digital payment systems, virtual marketplaces, and social media automation technologies. Studies consistently affirm that students exposed to digital innovation ecosystems demonstrate higher levels of academic motivation, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and preparedness for the labour market (Nkosi & Lekena, 2023; Ukachi, 2021).

The National Universities Commission (NUC) 2023 Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) for Business Education in Nigeria acknowledges the importance of digital competencies but stops short of mandating specific SMM or digital innovation modules. This regulatory ambivalence has contributed to inconsistent implementation across institutions (NUC, 2023).

Entrepreneurial intent refers to an individual's cognitive predisposition to establish a new business venture in the foreseeable future (Bird, 1988; Ajzen, 1991). In the Nigerian context, where formal employment opportunities are scarce, entrepreneurial intent among graduates is both a psychological and economic imperative. Research by Igwe et al. (2023) demonstrates that digital skills training significantly elevates entrepreneurial intent scores among Nigerian undergraduates, suggesting that structured digital education can serve as a catalyst for self-employment. Career readiness conceptualized as the degree to which graduates possess the competencies demanded by contemporary employers has become a central measure of higher education effectiveness (NACE, 2022). The World Economic Forum (2023) identifies digital literacy, creativity, and complex problem-solving as the top competencies employers seek, all of which are cultivated through SMM training and digital innovation exposure.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two complementary theoretical frameworks. First, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) posits that users' behavioral intentions to use a technology are determined by their perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Within this study, students who perceive social media marketing skills as useful and accessible are more likely to internalize and apply these skills, translating into higher entrepreneurial intent and career readiness. Second, the Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) argues that investments in education and training increase individuals' productive capacities and economic returns. Applied to this study, the acquisition of SMM skills and digital innovation competencies represents a form of human capital investment that directly enhances students' market value, entrepreneurial potential, and employability outcomes.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey research design. The target population comprised all final-year (300 and 400 level) undergraduate students enrolled in Business Education, Marketing, and Entrepreneurship programmes across Nigerian Federal and State Universities and Polytechnics. The research focused on final-year students because they have accumulated sufficient academic exposure to meaningfully assess the relevance of social media marketing and digital innovation within their educational experience. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, eight institutions were purposively selected to ensure geographic representation across three

geopolitical zones: South-East (University of Nigeria Nsukka, Enugu State University of Science and Technology), South-West (Lagos State University, Obafemi Awolowo University, Yaba College of Technology), and North-Central (University of Abuja, Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa, Benue State University). In the second stage, stratified random sampling was used to select student participants from each institution.

The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula: $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$, where N = the accessible population estimate of 4,820 final-year students, e = margin of error (0.05). This yielded a minimum sample of 370. To compensate for attrition and non-response, 420 questionnaires were distributed, with 384 returned usable, representing a 91.4% response rate.

Data were collected using a self-administered structured questionnaire titled "Social Media Marketing Skills, Innovation and Business Education Survey (SMMSIBE-26)". The instrument comprised five sections: (A) demographic characteristics; (B) Social Media Marketing Skills Acquisition Scale (SMMSAS) 18 items; (C) Digital Innovation Exposure Scale (DIES) 14 items; (D) Entrepreneurial Intent Scale (EIS) 12 items adapted from Liñán and Chen (2009); and (E) Graduate Employability and Career Readiness Scale (GECRS) 16 items adapted from the NACE Career Readiness Competency Framework (2022).

All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The instrument was validated through face and content validity review by five academic experts in Business Education and Marketing. Pilot testing on 40 students at the Federal University Oye-Ekiti yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87 for the entire instrument (subscales ranged from 0.81 to 0.89), confirming high internal consistency reliability.

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 27. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to profile respondents and summarize key variables. Pearson product-moment correlation (r) was employed to assess bivariate relationships between digital innovation exposure and academic performance. Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the combined predictive effect of SMM skills and innovation exposure on graduate employability outcomes. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 384 student respondents who participated in the study.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	198	51.6
	Female	182	47.4
	Non-binary/Other	4	1.0
Age (Years)	18–21	89	23.2
	22–25	216	56.3
	26–29	63	16.4
	30 and above	16	4.2
Programme	Business Education	162	42.2
	Marketing	121	31.5
	Entrepreneurship	101	26.3
Institution Type	Federal University	189	49.2

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
	State University	128	33.3
	Polytechnic	67	17.4
Geopolitical Zone	South-East	141	36.7
	South-West	158	41.1
	North-Central	85	22.1
Owns a Smartphone	Yes	379	98.7
	No	5	1.3
Active Social Media User	Yes	371	96.6
	No	13	3.4

The demographic data reveal a largely youthful, predominantly 22–25 year age cohort (56.3%), with a near-equal gender distribution. Smartphone ownership was near-universal at 98.7%, while 96.6% reported being active social media users, underscoring the digital readiness of the study population and the potential receptiveness to social media marketing instruction.

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics on the degree of SMM skills acquisition reported by respondents across six key competency areas.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics — SMM Skills Acquisition (N = 384)

SMM Competency Area	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Std. Dev. (σ)	Acquisition Level
Content creation & storytelling	3.84	0.72	High
Social media analytics & insights	3.21	0.89	Moderate
Paid advertising (Meta Ads, TikTok Ads)	2.97	0.94	Moderate
Brand identity management	3.56	0.81	High
Community management & engagement	3.73	0.76	High
Influencer marketing strategy	2.83	0.97	Moderate
Search & social SEO	2.68	1.02	Low–Moderate
Email marketing integration	2.51	1.08	Low–Moderate
E-commerce & social commerce	3.12	0.93	Moderate
Crisis communication on social media	3.08	0.87	Moderate
Overall SMM Skills Composite	3.15	0.61	Moderate

The results indicate a composite mean SMM skills score of 3.15 (Moderate), suggesting that while students demonstrate reasonable competence in content creation, community management, and brand identity, they exhibit significantly lower acquisition levels in technical areas such as paid advertising, email marketing integration, and search-social SEO. This pattern suggests that informal social media usage has cultivated organic content competencies, while technical and analytical SMM skills require more structured formal instruction.

Digital Innovation Exposure and Academic Performance

To address the second research objective, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between students' digital innovation exposure scores (DIES) and their self-reported academic performance (measured as current CGPA on a 5.0 scale). Table 3 presents the correlation matrix.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation — Digital Innovation Exposure and Academic Performance

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	1	2	3
1. Digital Innovation Exposure (DIES)	3.42	0.68	—		
2. Academic Performance (CGPA)	3.61	0.54	0.693**	—	
3. SMM Skills Acquisition (SMMSAS)	3.15	0.61	0.714**	0.581**	—

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

The correlation analysis reveals a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between digital innovation exposure and academic performance ($r = 0.693$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that students with higher exposure to digital innovation tools and environments tend to achieve higher academic performance. Similarly, SMM skills acquisition is strongly correlated with digital innovation exposure ($r = 0.714$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting these competencies are mutually reinforcing. The correlation between SMM skills and academic performance ($r = 0.581$, $p < 0.01$) further confirms the academic relevance of marketing skills training.

Effect of SMM Skills on Entrepreneurial Intent

The first research hypothesis tested was: H1: Social media marketing skills acquisition does not have a significant positive effect on entrepreneurial intent among Nigerian business education students. Simple linear regression was used. Results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Regression Analysis — SMM Skills Predicting Entrepreneurial Intent

Model Summary	Value
R (Multiple Correlation)	0.782
R^2 (Coefficient of Determination)	0.612
Adjusted R^2	0.611
Std. Error of Estimate	0.387
F-statistic	F(1, 382) = 601.4
Significance (p)	< 0.001

Predictor	B (Unstd.)	Std. Error	β (Std.)	t-value	p-value
(Constant)	0.841	0.142	—	5.923	< 0.001
SMM Skills Acquisition	0.718	0.029	0.612	24.52	< 0.001

The regression model is statistically significant [$F(1, 382) = 601.4$, $p < 0.001$]. SMM skills acquisition explains 61.2% of the variance in entrepreneurial intent ($R^2 = 0.612$). The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.612$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that for every one standard deviation increase in SMM skills acquisition, entrepreneurial intent increases by 0.612 standard deviations. The null hypothesis H1 is therefore rejected. These findings confirm that structured SMM education has a powerful and direct positive impact òn students' motivation and intention to launch business ventures.

Combined Effect on Graduate Employability Outcomes

Multiple linear regression was conducted with both SMM skills acquisition (SMMSAS) and digital innovation exposure (DIES) as independent variables, and the Graduate Employability and Career Readiness composite score (GECRS) as the dependent variable. Results are shown in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Model Summary Employability Outcomes

Model Summary	Value
R (Multiple Correlation)	0.827
R^2 (Coefficient of Determination)	0.684
Adjusted R^2	0.682
Std. Error of Estimate	0.361
Durbin-Watson	1.94
F-statistic	F(2, 381) = 412.3
Significance (p)	< 0.001

Table 6: Multiple Regression Coefficients Predictors of Employability

Predictor	B (Unstd.)	Std. Error	β (Std.)	t-value	p-value	VIF
(Constant)	0.623	0.134	—	4.649	< 0.001	—
SMM Skills (SMMSAS)	0.641	0.031	0.548	20.68	< 0.001	1.23
Digital Innovation (DIES)	0.498	0.037	0.469	13.46	< 0.001	1.23

The overall model is highly significant [$F(2, 381) = 412.3$, $p < 0.001$] and accounts for 68.4% of variance in graduate employability outcomes ($R^2 = 0.684$). Both predictors make statistically significant independent contributions: SMM skills acquisition ($\beta = 0.548$, $p < 0.001$) and digital innovation exposure ($\beta = 0.469$, $p < 0.001$). The Durbin-Watson statistic (1.94) indicates no significant autocorrelation, and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF = 1.23) confirms the absence of problematic multicollinearity. These results robustly demonstrate that SMM skills constitute the stronger individual predictor of employability, though digital innovation exposure adds unique and significant explanatory power.

Student Perceptions of SMM Training on Digital Business Confidence

Table 7 presents frequency analysis of students' perceptions regarding the influence of SMM coursework (formal and informal) on their confidence to establish a digital business venture.

Table 7: Student Perceptions — SMM Training and Digital Business Confidence

Response Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree — SMM training increased my confidence	162	42.2
Agree	123	32.0
Undecided	51	13.3
Disagree	31	8.1
Strongly Disagree	17	4.4
Total	384	100.0
Agree + Strongly Agree (Combined)	285	74.2

Notably, 74.2% of respondents (combined Agree and Strongly Agree) affirm that exposure to SMM training whether through formal coursework, self-directed online learning, or workshop participation has increased their confidence to start a digital business. This finding strongly supports the

entrepreneurship-enabling function of SMM education and corroborates the regression findings in Section 4.4.

Institutional-Level Analysis: SMM Curriculum Integration

Table 8 presents a comparative analysis of the extent of formal SMM and digital innovation curriculum integration across the eight sampled institutions, based on students' self-reported exposure.

Table 8: Institutional Comparison of SMM & Digital Innovation Curriculum Integration

Institution	Zone	Formal SMM Course Offered	Mean SMM Score	Mean Innovation Score	Mean Employability Score
University of Nigeria Nsukka	SE	Partial	3.28	3.54	3.71
Enugu State Univ. of Sci. & Tech.	SE	No	2.91	3.12	3.34
Lagos State University	SW	Yes (Full)	3.84	3.97	4.12
Obafemi Awolowo University	SW	Partial	3.46	3.63	3.78
Yaba College of Technology	SW	Yes (Full)	3.71	3.88	4.01
University of Abuja	NC	No	2.87	3.08	3.29
Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa	NC	Partial	3.04	3.24	3.48
Benue State University	NC	No	2.79	2.98	3.16
Grand Mean / Overall	—	—	3.24	3.43	3.61

The institutional analysis reveals a consistent pattern: institutions offering full SMM courses (Lagos State University, Yaba College of Technology both in the South-West) recorded substantially higher mean SMM skills scores (3.84 and 3.71 respectively), digital innovation scores (3.97 and 3.88), and employability scores (4.12 and 4.01) compared to institutions with no formal SMM curriculum integration. This inter-institutional variation provides strong ecological validity to the study's central argument that structured curriculum integration drives better student outcomes.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study present compelling empirical evidence that social media marketing skills and digital innovation exposure constitute significant determinants of business education students' entrepreneurial trajectories and career outcomes in Nigeria. The composite mean SMM score of 3.15 (Moderate) across all respondents indicates a baseline competence driven largely by organic social media use rather than formal instruction — a finding consistent with Okoye and Nwosu (2022) who similarly documented high social media usage but low formal marketing skills among Nigerian undergraduates.

The strong correlation between digital innovation exposure and academic performance ($r = 0.693$, $p < 0.01$) aligns with Ukachi (2021) and Nkosi and Lekena (2023), who documented analogous relationships in South African and Nigerian higher education settings. The mechanism appears to be

motivational: exposure to innovation ecosystems increases students' intrinsic motivation, hands-on problem-solving skills, and engagement with coursework, thereby lifting academic outcomes. The regression findings demonstrating SMM skills as the stronger predictor of employability ($\beta = 0.548$) compared to innovation exposure ($\beta = 0.469$) suggest that employer-valued skills in social media marketing may be more immediately instrumental than broader innovation exposure alone. This has practical implications for curriculum design: while both dimensions are valuable, institutions constrained by limited resources should prioritize practical SMM skills training as the higher-yield intervention.

The finding that 74.2% of students report increased confidence in starting a digital business following SMM training is particularly consequential in the Nigerian economic context. With graduate unemployment hovering above 42%, cultivating entrepreneurial self-efficacy through digital skills education offers a viable, scalable pathway to self-employment and value creation. This corroborates Igwe et al. (2023) and the broader global literature on digital entrepreneurship education (Nambisan, 2017). The institutional comparison (Table 8) provides perhaps the most policy-relevant finding: institutions that have formally integrated SMM courses into their curricula consistently outperform peers on every measured outcome. This natural experiment suggests that curriculum policy decisions have tangible, measurable impacts on student outcomes a finding with direct implications for NUC policy formulation.

Conclusion

This empirical study has established that social media marketing skills acquisition and digital innovation exposure exert strong, statistically significant, and practically meaningful positive effects on the entrepreneurial intent, academic performance, and career readiness of business education students in Nigeria. The study contributes original empirical evidence to a domain previously under-researched in sub-Saharan African educational contexts, and provides a robust statistical foundation ($R^2 = 0.684$) for policy advocacy. The findings firmly establish that SMM and digital innovation education are not optional enrichments but essential competencies that determine graduate outcomes in the 21st-century Nigerian economy.

Recommendations

1. The National Universities Commission (NUC) and National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) should revise the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) to mandate the inclusion of at least one dedicated Social Media Marketing and Digital Innovation course in all Business Education, Marketing, and Entrepreneurship undergraduate programmes.
2. Tertiary institutions should priorities continuous professional development for faculty in SMM and digital tools, through partnerships with platforms such as Meta Blueprint, Google Digital Garage, and HubSpot Academy, to ensure instructors can deliver current, industry-relevant content.
3. State and federal governments should facilitate formal partnerships between universities and technology companies (e.g., Meta, Google, Flutterwave, Paystack) to sponsor digital skills bootcamps, donate hardware and software resources, and provide industry mentorship for students.
4. Institutions lacking dedicated innovation labs should establish social media marketing studios and digital entrepreneurship hubs, equipped with professional-grade analytics tools, content creation equipment, and e-commerce simulation environments.

5. Longitudinal studies tracking the post-graduation entrepreneurial activities and employment trajectories of students who received structured SMM training are recommended to establish causal relationships and measure long-term impact.

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