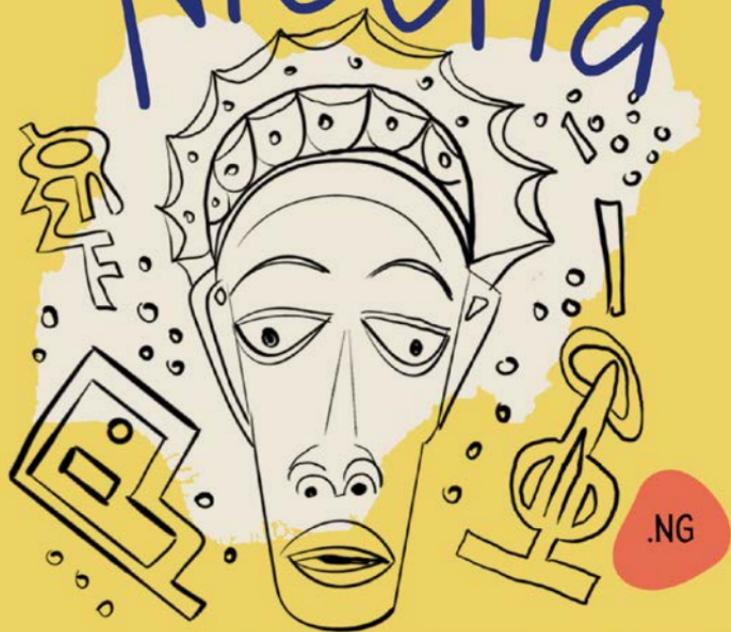




Nigeria



START-UP ECONOMY, DYNAMIC EVOLUTION,
DIGITAL POLICIES NEED TO BE MORE OF AN
EQUALIZER

STARTUP ECONOMY, DYNAMIC EVOLUTION, DIGITAL POLICIES NEED TO BE MORE OF AN EQUALISER

Nigeria's digital landscape thrives with social impact ventures supported by mobile tech and fintech innovations. While recent shifts see growth in internet access and smartphone use, challenges like cybersecurity persist. The internet enhances democracy but also poses risks like misinformation and fake news. Policy focus on inclusivity and infrastructure is essential.

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How would you describe the digital trends in Nigeria, especially regarding digital social impact ventures?

Nigeria's digital landscape is playing a pivotal role in its economic transformation, with social entrepreneurship and technology-based solutions addressing social challenges at the forefront.

Key highlights of Nigeria's digital trends in social impact ventures include:

- *Mobile technology penetration:* With over 200 million mobile subscribers, Nigeria features Africa's most vibrant mobile market. A 44.5 per cent broadband penetration rate (as reported by the Nigeria Communications Commission in July 2022) is fuelling digital content creation and enabling widespread access to digital social impact solutions.
- *Social media influence:* Platforms like Facebook, X, WhatsApp, and Instagram are widely used for networking, community mobilisation, and promoting social causes, showcasing social media's power in driving social change.
- *Fintech and financial inclusion:* The Fintech sector, particularly digital payments, is booming, leading the startup scene with significant activity and funding. This growth is enhancing financial inclusion (Grown to 74 per cent - Central Bank of Nigeria) and supporting poverty eradication efforts.
- *Tech ecosystem support:* The surge of tech hubs, incubators, and innovation centres (about 90, making it the highest in Africa), especially in Lagos and Abuja, underscores a thriving support system for digital innovation and social impact ventures. The National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) champions digital innovation by establishing innovation hubs and technology

parks, recognising ICT as crucial for sectors like education, healthcare, and agriculture, and offering incentives for startups, fostering growth and success.

- *Government support and policies:* The Nigerian government's backing is evident through policies and initiatives such as the Nigeria Startup Act 2022 and the creation of a USD 618 million fund for the tech and creative sectors. These efforts aim to foster a conducive environment for technology-driven solutions and startup success.
- *Funding:* Nigerian startups benefit from diverse funding sources, including Development Finance Institutions (DFI), government grants, angel investors and venture capital. Nigerian Startups raised about USD 400 million in 2023 of the USD 3.19 billion in Africa.
- *Regulatory frameworks:* The Startup Act 2022 introduces a legal framework for startups, including the formation of the National Council for Digital Innovation and Entrepreneurship to oversee digital innovation, the Nigerian Copyright Commission and the Trademark, Patent and Design Registry. This comprehensive support system underscores technology's increasing role in enabling social change in Nigeria, presenting opportunities for innovative solutions to societal issues.

How would you describe recent digital shifts in Nigeria?

Nigeria has one of the longest-established startup ecosystems on the African continent, with pioneers such as Interswitch (formed in 2002) and numerous firms active since the 2000s. However, the majority of today's startups were founded after 2011, with 2019 being the top year for launch activity.

The digital landscape in Nigeria has undergone significant changes over the past two decades, particularly from 2002 to 2012 and from 2013 to 2023. Here's a comprehensive overview

of the digital shifts during these periods:

2002-2012: During this period, Nigeria experienced the following digital shifts:

- *Internet penetration:* The early 2000s saw a gradual increase in internet penetration in Nigeria. As more internet service providers entered the market, access to online resources and communication platforms improved for the population.
- *Mobile technology:* The introduction of mobile technology played a pivotal role in connecting Nigerians to the digital world. The widespread adoption of mobile phones enabled access to basic Internet services, including SMS and basic web browsing.
- *Social media emergence:* The latter part of this period witnessed the emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in Nigeria. These platforms quickly gained popularity, transforming how Nigerians communicated and shared information.
- *E-commerce development:* Towards the end of this period, there was a notable rise in e-commerce platforms and online marketplaces in Nigeria. This facilitated online transactions and the buying and selling of goods and services over the internet.

2013-2023: The digital landscape in Nigeria underwent further transformation during this period:

- *Smartphone revolution:* The widespread adoption of smartphones revolutionised the digital experience for Nigerians. Access to advanced mobile technology facilitated improved Internet connectivity, app usage, and access to a wide range of digital services.
- *Fintech innovation:* Nigeria witnessed a surge in financial technology (Fintech) innovations, including the

development of mobile payment solutions and digital banking services. This digital shift significantly transformed the way people in Nigeria manage their finances and conduct transactions.

- *Rise of startups and tech hubs:* The tech ecosystem in Nigeria experienced significant growth with the rise of numerous startups and tech hubs. This contributed to the development of innovative solutions across various sectors, including healthcare, agriculture, and education.
- *Digital inclusion efforts:* Efforts to bridge the digital divide and improve digital literacy led to initiatives aimed at enhancing Internet access in underserved areas and expanding digital skills training programs.
- *Cybersecurity challenges:* With the increased digitalisation, Nigeria also faced cybersecurity challenges, including cyber threats, online fraud, and data privacy concerns. This necessitated ongoing efforts to strengthen cybersecurity measures and awareness.

Overall, the digital shifts in Nigeria from 2002 to 2012 and from 2013 to 2023 reflect a dynamic evolution characterised by increased Internet penetration, technological advancements, and the growing impact of digital innovations across various aspects of Nigerian society.

Describe and provide insight into Nigeria being democratic or the internet breaking democracy in Nigerian politics?

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, has a volatile political history characterised by periods of military dictatorship punctuated with brief democratic interludes. Since its transition to civilian administration in 1999, Nigeria has made progress in developing democratic institutions and conducting regular elections. Nonetheless, obstacles remain, including charges of vote fraud, corruption, and the role of money in politics.

In Nigerian politics, the internet has become a potent instrument that allows people to organise movements, participate in political discourse, and hold authorities accountable. Social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, and X have been crucial in increasing voting turnout, bringing political concerns to the public's attention, and offering a substitute for traditional news and information sources. However, there are also worries about the manipulation of social media by political actors to spread propaganda and sway public opinion. The internet has also been linked to the spread of hate speech, fake news, and misinformation, which can worsen ethnic and religious tensions and threaten democracy.

Diverse opinions regarding the internet's influence on Nigerian politics have been voiced by opinion leaders in Nigeria. Some contend that citizens can now more easily obtain information and engage in politics on a more active basis; thanks to the internet. Others issue warnings about the perils of manipulation on the internet and the necessity of laws to stop the spread of hate speech and fake news.

For instance, Nigerian social critic and human rights advocate Chidi Odinkalu has emphasised how the internet may improve accountability and openness in government. In his view, social media platforms have given people the ability to get around conventional gatekeepers and make public officials responsible for their deeds. On the other side, Nigerian political analyst and democracy advocate Jibrin Ibrahim has warned about the negative impact of social media on Nigerian politics. He cautions that the growth of fake news and hate speech online has the potential to incite violence and damage electoral credibility.

In conclusion, Nigeria's experience with democracy and the internet is complicated and multidimensional. While the internet has the potential to promote democratic government by enhancing openness and citizen engagement, it also

presents issues that must be addressed in order to maintain the integrity of the political process. Efforts to encourage digital literacy, counteract misinformation, and regulate online political activity are critical to realising the internet's beneficial potential while reducing its detrimental impact on Nigerian democracy.

Digital Tools are considered to be empowering. Can you describe which sector in your country has been most helped by digital?

In Nigeria, digital tools have significantly impacted various sectors and empowered them in different ways.

Empowering Aspects of the Banking and Financial Services, Corporate Sector:

- ***Financial inclusion:*** Digital tools like mobile banking and fintech platforms have greatly improved financial inclusion, allowing individuals and small businesses to access banking services easily.
- ***Efficiency and convenience:*** Online banking, mobile payment apps, and digital wallets have made financial transactions faster, easier, and more convenient. Examples:
 - Interswitch: One of Nigeria's leading fintech companies, providing payment solutions and infrastructure.
 - Flutterwave: A digital payments platform enabling businesses to accept payments globally.

Empowering Aspects in the E-commerce and Retail Sectors:

- ***Market access:*** Online marketplaces have provided a platform for small businesses to reach a wider customer base, both locally and internationally.
- ***Consumer convenience:*** E-commerce platforms offer

consumers the convenience of shopping anywhere, anytime. Examples:

- Jumia: Nigeria's largest e-commerce platform, offering a wide range of products to consumers.
- Konga: Another major e-commerce player in Nigeria, known for its diverse product offerings.

Empowering Aspects of Nigerian Government Services:

- *Transparency and accountability*: Digital platforms for government services can increase transparency in processes such as procurement and public finance management.
- *Ease of access*: Online portals for services like tax payment, vehicle registration, and passport application make it easier for citizens to interact with government agencies.

Examples:

- Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) e-Tax Portal: Allows taxpayers to file returns and make payments online.
- Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) Passport Portal: Enables citizens to apply for passports and schedule appointments online.

Empowering Aspects of Education for the General Population:

- *Access to learning resources*: Online courses, e-books, and educational platforms provide access to a wealth of learning materials.
- *Distance learning*: Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, digital tools have enabled remote learning and virtual classrooms. Examples:
 - NOUN e-Courseware: The National Open University of Nigeria provides e-courseware for its students.

- EduTech Platforms: Platforms like uLesson and PrepClass offer online tutoring and exam preparation.

What are the biggest challenges in Nigeria in terms of digital transformation?

In Nigeria, like in many countries, several challenges hinder the full realisation of the benefits of digital transformation. These challenges range from infrastructure limitations to socio-economic factors. Here are some of the most significant challenges Nigeria faces in terms of digital transformation:

Digital infrastructure

- **Limited Internet Connectivity:** Access to reliable and high-speed internet remains a challenge, especially in rural and underserved areas.
- **Inadequate Network Coverage:** Many remote areas lack basic telecommunications infrastructure, making it difficult to access digital services.
- **Power Supply:** Erratic power supply affects the consistent use of digital tools, particularly in areas without stable electricity.

Low digital literacy rates

- **A large segment of the population lacks the necessary skills to effectively use digital tools and platforms.**
- **Limited Technical Skills:** There is a shortage of professionals with specialised skills in areas such as cybersecurity, data analytics, and software development.
- **Education System Challenges:** The educational curriculum often lags behind in integrating digital skills training, leaving students unprepared for the digital workforce.

Digital divides

- **Capacity Building:** Building a workforce skilled in digital content creation and software development is essential for a thriving digital economy.
- **Urban-Rural Disparities:** Rural areas face significant challenges in accessing digital infrastructure and services compared to urban centres.
- **Socio-economic Disparities:** Affordability of devices and Internet services is a barrier for lower-income populations.

Gender divide

- Women and girls often have less access to digital tools and education, leading to a gender gap in digital literacy and participation.

Cybersecurity and data privacy

- **Cyber Threats:** The rise in cybercrime poses risks to individuals, businesses, and government institutions.

Availability of local content and services

- **Content Localisation:** A significant portion of online content is not tailored to local languages and cultures, limiting its relevance to Nigerian users.
- **Infrastructure and Content Development, investment Needs:** Adequate funding for developing digital infrastructure and creating locally relevant content is crucial.

Data

- **Incomplete Data Collection:** There is poor quality assurance and control, wrong investigation methods and insufficient financing for collection.

- **Quality:** Limited resources for training data collectors, inadequate supervision during the data collection process, and inconsistencies in data reporting standards.
- **Weak enforcement** of data protection regulations and inadequate cybersecurity measures.

Does Nigeria consume digital content more than it produces, or vice versa?

Nigeria primarily consumes more digital content than it produces. Here's a breakdown:

- **Media dependence:** For news, Nigerians rely heavily on international media sources (BBC, CNN) and local outlets with limited original content.
- **Social media:** Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram dominate, offering mostly foreign content.
- **Public media:** Public broadcasters have a limited online presence compared to private platforms. Uneven content reflecting the country's linguistic diversity.
- **Content creation:** While a growing number of Nigerians are creating online content, the volume is significantly lower compared to consumption. Focus on entertainment and personal expression, with limited investigative journalism or in-depth analysis.
- **Public information:** Government websites often lack consistent updates and user-friendly interfaces. There is a limited proactive online publication of public data and legal documents.

Can you make recommendations on how your country should make digital policies an equaliser?

In Nigeria, as in many countries, digital policies have the potential to be a powerful equaliser, bridging gaps and fostering

inclusivity across various sectors of society. Here are some recommendations on how Nigeria can make digital policies an equaliser:

Access to digital infrastructure

Recommendation: Ensure equitable access to high-speed internet and digital infrastructure, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Action steps

- Invest in expanding broadband coverage, especially in remote regions.
- Partner with private sector entities to deploy affordable Internet solutions.
- Provide subsidies or incentives for the adoption of digital technologies in marginalised communities.

Digital literacy and skills development

Recommendation: Prioritise digital literacy programs to empower all citizens with the necessary skills for the digital age.

Action steps

- Integrate digital literacy into the national education curriculum from primary to tertiary levels.
- Establish vocational training centres and online learning platforms for skill development.
- Collaborate with tech companies and NGOs to offer free or low-cost digital skills training programs.

Promotion of local content and languages

Recommendation: Encourage the creation and dissemination of digital content in local languages and cultural contexts.

Action steps

- Support local content creators through grants, funding, and mentorship programs.
- Require public media outlets to allocate a percentage of airtime and online space to local content.
- Develop online platforms that showcase and promote Nigerian arts, culture, and heritage.

Economic empowerment and entrepreneurship

Recommendation: Create opportunities for economic empowerment and entrepreneurship through digital platforms.

Action steps

- Establish digital hubs and innovation centres in key cities to incubate startups and SMEs.
- Provide access to funding, grants, and venture capital for digital entrepreneurs.
- Offer tax incentives and business support services for tech startups and digital businesses.

Transparency and E-government services

Recommendation: Improve transparency and accessibility of government services through digital platforms.

Action steps

- Enhance online portals for easy access to public information, services, and documents.
- Implement e-governance solutions for efficient and accountable service delivery.
- Conduct awareness campaigns to educate citizens on their rights and how to access online government services.

Cybersecurity and data privacy

Recommendation: Strengthen cybersecurity measures to protect citizens' data and privacy online.

Action Steps:

- Enforce robust data protection laws and regulations to safeguard personal information.
- Provide cybersecurity training for government agencies, businesses, and individuals.
- Establish a national cybersecurity centre for monitoring, response, and coordination of cyber threats.

Collaboration and stakeholder engagement

Recommendation: Foster collaboration among government, private sector, civil society, and academia for holistic digital policy development.

Action steps:

- Convene multi-stakeholder forums and advisory groups to shape digital policies.
- Engage with local experts, researchers, and practitioners to understand specific needs and challenges.
- Create a digital policy task force or council with diverse representation to drive implementation and monitor progress.

Personal Aspirations and Considerations

As a member of the World Summit Awards (WSA) Board of Directors and of the Grand Jury panel, I would advocate for digital solutions that prioritise social impact and inclusivity.

I would endeavour to nominate and support initiatives that empower marginalised communities, promote cultural

diversity, and address pressing social challenges through digital innovation.

Collaboration with national experts, organisations, and policymakers would be essential to ensure that digital policies are not only equitable but also responsive to the needs of all Nigerians. Advocacy for gender equality in the digital space and promoting women's participation in tech entrepreneurship and leadership roles would also be a priority. Building upon the existing National Digital Inclusion Strategy, which outlines specific goals, targets, and timelines for achieving digital equity, further efforts are crucial. This includes conducting regular assessments and evaluations of digital policies, investing in research on marginalised communities, and fostering a collaborative policy-making environment.

Yemi Keri, WSA Board of Directors Member, WSA24 Grand Juror; CEO and Founder, Heckerbella; Co-Founder, Rising Tide Africa, Lagos

Yemi Keri is a Nigerian technology leader, investor, and entrepreneur who is making a significant impact on Africa's tech and investment space. She is the co-founder and CEO of Rising Tide Africa, a women-led angel investing platform that supports early-stage technology startups in Africa. She is also the Chief Executive Officer of Heckerbella Limited, a Digital Transformation company. Yemi has over 22 years of experience in the IT industry, operating at the CEO and C-suite level across the public and private sectors. She has held senior leadership positions at SAP Africa, the Edo State Directorate of Information Communications & Technology Agency, and First City Monument Bank Limited. Yemi is a passionate advocate for women in technology and entrepreneurship. She is a mentor to several startups and serves on the boards of several organisations, including the Lagos Angel Network and the Enterprise Development Centre of the Pan-Atlantic University. Yemi has won numerous awards for her work in technology, including the Centenary Award for the Most Outstanding Public Sector CIO in Nigeria in 2014. She is a recognised thought leader on digital transformation and has spoken at several conferences and events around the world.