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ACTIVIST-ENTREPRENEURS: RETHINKING DIGITAL ACTIVISM THROUGH THE LENS OF DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN NIGERIA

AKINTAYO AKINRINSOLA (PhD)*
UK Management College, UK
&
OLATOKUNBO SHOYEMI (PhD)
Elizabeth School of London, UK

***Corresponding Author: yeniakin@gmail.com**

Abstract

Digital activism has become a prominent feature of political life in the Global South, yet much of the existing scholarship continues to treat activists as primarily civic actors rather than as individuals navigating the commercial and algorithmic logics of digital platforms. This paper develops the idea of activist entrepreneurship to explain how activists build, sustain, and protect influence within platform-mediated environments. Drawing on research in digital activism, digital entrepreneurship, social capital theory, and digital labour studies, the paper argues that activists increasingly rely on practices associated with entrepreneurial work, including opportunity recognition, audience cultivation, network mobilisation, and the continuous labour required to remain visible and credible online. The Activist Entrepreneurship Framework integrates these strands to conceptualise activists as hybrid actors who operate at the intersection of civic purpose and platform economics. Building on this framework, the paper proposes a typology of activist entrepreneurial pathways and advances a set of theoretical propositions that explain variation in influence, sustainability, and vulnerability. The analysis shows that activist trajectories in Nigeria are shaped by the interaction of platform governance, network structures, and labour capacities, offering a more grounded account of how digital activism unfolds in low-trust political environments. The paper contributes to debates on African digital politics by reframing activism as a form of strategic, relational, and labour-intensive practice shaped by the political economy of platforms.

Keywords: digital activism, digital entrepreneurship, social capital, digital labour, platform governance.

Introduction

Digital activism has become a central feature of political participation in the Global South, yet scholarship continues to treat activists primarily as civic actors rather than as strategic agents navigating the political economy of digital platforms. Existing research has shown that social media enables new forms of mobilisation, visibility, and collective action (Tufekci 2017; Mutsvairo & Harris 2021), but there remains limited conceptual work on how activists operate as entrepreneurial actors who build influence, mobilise networks, and sustain labour within platformised environments. This gap is significant because digital activism increasingly resembles entrepreneurial practice, involving branding, audience cultivation, resource mobilisation, and strategic content production (Duffy 2017; Khamis, Ang & Welling 2017).

Without a clearer conceptualisation of this entrepreneurial dimension, analyses of digital activism risk overlooking the structural forces that shape influence, sustainability, and precarity.

Digital activism in Nigeria provides a compelling context for this inquiry. Nigeria's socio political environment is characterised by institutional fragility, youth demographic pressure, and widespread distrust in formal governance structures (Iwilade 2022; Olorunnisola & Martin 2013). These conditions have contributed to the rise of digital actors who fill accountability gaps, mobilise publics, and shape political discourse through platform mediated practices. Research on African digital activism has highlighted the role of social media in protest movements such as #EndSARS (Ojebode et al. 2021; Aririguzoh & Nwammuo 2022), yet there is limited theorisation of activists as entrepreneurial agents whose influence is shaped by platform affordances, social capital, and digital labour.

Three bodies of literature provide useful but incomplete insights. First, digital entrepreneurship research explains how individuals leverage platforms to build visibility, audiences, and economic or symbolic value (Nambisan 2017; Sussan & Acs 2017). Second, social capital theory illuminates how networks function as resources that enable mobilisation, legitimacy, and collective action (Bourdieu 1986; Putnam 2000; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2007). Third, digital labour scholarship highlights the emotional, cognitive, and reputational work required to sustain online presence and influence (Scholz 2013; Jarrett 2016; Abidin 2021). While each of these literatures offers valuable insights, they have rarely been integrated to explain the entrepreneurial dynamics of digital activism, particularly in African contexts.

This paper addresses this gap by developing a conceptual model of activist entrepreneurship, defined as the strategic use of digital platforms, networks, and labour practices by activists to build and sustain influence. The central research question guiding this paper is: *How can digital activism be conceptualised as a form of digital entrepreneurship shaped by platform affordances, social capital, and digital labour?* The paper adopts a conceptual approach, drawing on interdisciplinary literature to propose an integrated framework that explains the entrepreneurial pathways through which activists operate.

The significance of this work is threefold. First, it reframes digital activism as entrepreneurial practice, offering a more accurate account of how activists navigate platform economies. Second, it contributes to African digital politics scholarship by explaining why certain activist figures gain traction and sustain influence in low trust environments. Third, it provides a foundation for future empirical research on activist labour, network mobilisation, and platform governance in the Global South.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. The next section reviews the relevant literature on digital activism, digital entrepreneurship, social capital, and digital labour. This is followed by the development of the activist entrepreneurship framework and a typology of activist entrepreneurial pathways. The paper then presents theoretical propositions derived from the framework. The conclusion summarises the contribution and outlines directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

Scholarship on digital activism, digital entrepreneurship, social capital, and digital labour provides important foundations for understanding how activists operate within platformised environments. However, these bodies of work have developed largely in isolation, leaving conceptual gaps that this paper seeks to address.

2.1 Digital Activism Scholarship

Research on digital activism has documented how social media platforms facilitate mobilisation, visibility, and political resistance across diverse contexts. In Nigeria, movements such as #EndSARS and #BringBackOurGirls illustrate how hashtags evolve into infrastructures for collective action and global attention (Fadugba 2023; Ojebode et al. 2021). Scholars argue that digital tools lower participation costs, enable decentralised coordination, and challenge state-controlled narratives (Akpojivi 2023; Tufekci 2017). African digital activism research further highlights the role of youth networks and digital publics in shaping political engagement (Mutsvairo & Harris 2021; Iwilade 2022).

Despite these contributions, much of the literature remains anchored in social movement theory, which prioritises collective identity, grievances, and protest cycles. This focus often masks the individual agency and strategic behaviour of activists who must navigate platform economies. Although some scholars have begun to examine the role of digitally skilled actors or "techno enthusiasts" who mobilise passive audiences (Uwalaka 2020), the field lacks a framework for understanding activists as strategic agents who deploy entrepreneurial logics to build influence. Sandoval (2020) notes that activism increasingly intersects with digital capitalism, yet conceptual work on activists as entrepreneurial actors remains limited.

2.2 Digital Entrepreneurship and Platformised Influence

The literature on digital entrepreneurship offers valuable insights into how individuals leverage digital platforms to create value, build audiences, and pursue economic or symbolic goals. Scholars describe digital entrepreneurship as a process shaped by platform affordances, opportunity recognition, and continuous adaptation to algorithmic environments (Nambisan 2017; Sussan & Acs 2017). Research on influencers and creators highlights how personal branding, visibility, and audience engagement function as entrepreneurial assets (Duffy, Pruchniewska & Scolere 2017; Khamis, Ang & Welling 2017).

However, these insights are rarely applied to activism. Existing studies focus primarily on commercial creators, leaving a gap in understanding how activists employ similar strategies to build political legitimacy or mobilise publics. Bainotti (2025) and Sayani (2026) show how creators manage platform volatility and cultivate "star capital", yet there is limited theorisation of how activists convert visibility into civic influence. This omission is significant because activists increasingly operate within the same platformised conditions as digital entrepreneurs, but with different goals and risks.

2.3 Social Capital and Networked Mobilisation

Social capital theory provides a critical lens for understanding how activists mobilise networks as productive assets. Bourdieu (1986) conceptualises social capital as the resources embedded within durable networks, while Putnam (2000) emphasises its role in enabling

collective action. In digital contexts, Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) demonstrate how online networks generate bonding and bridging capital that can support mobilisation.

In African digital activism, social capital is shaped by youth communities, cultural networks, and transnational advocacy groups (Iwilade 2022; Mutsvairo & Harris 2021). Scholars argue that digital networks function as repositories of legitimacy and mobilisation power that activists can strategically cultivate (Schafft & Brown 2003; Chan 2022). Yet traditional social movement literature rarely examines how activists invest in and convert social capital into long term influence. Alaa (2026) notes that the mechanisms through which activists sustain their social capital in volatile digital environments remain under theorised.

2.4 Digital Labour and the Costs of Visibility

The concept of digital labour captures the often-invisible work required to maintain digital presence and influence. Scholars have examined emotional, cognitive, and reputational labour in digital contexts (Jarrett 2016; Abidin 2021). Research on platform labour shows that visibility is produced through continuous content creation, audience engagement, and algorithmic optimisation (Scholz 2013; Woodcock & Graham 2020).

Activists perform similar forms of labour, including documentation of injustice, emotional engagement with audiences, and management of online harassment. Bainotti (2025) describes this as "aspirational labour", driven by the hope of future influence or social change. Influencer studies highlight an "intimacy triple bind" where workers must manage emotional exposure, audience expectations, and reputational risk (Abidin 2023). Activists face comparable pressures, often intensified by state surveillance, trolling, and delegitimisation campaigns. Yet digital labour theory has rarely been applied to activism, leaving a gap in understanding the precarity and sustainability of activist labour in the Global South.

2.5 Synthesis: Bridging the Divide

Across these literatures, three conceptual gaps remain. First, digital activism scholarship does not fully account for the entrepreneurial strategies activists use to build and sustain influence. Second, digital entrepreneurship research rarely considers civic actors or political contexts. Third, social capital and digital labour theories have not been integrated to explain how activists mobilise networks and perform labour within platform economies.

This paper bridges these gaps by theorising the activist entrepreneur as a hybrid actor who applies entrepreneurial logic to the pursuit of social and political change. By integrating insights from digital entrepreneurship, social capital theory, and digital labour scholarship, the paper develops a conceptual model that explains how activists navigate platform affordances to build sustainable influence in the Nigerian digital landscape.

This synthesis provides the foundation for the next section, which outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the activist entrepreneurship model.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Digital Entrepreneurship Theory: Strategy and Opportunity

Digital entrepreneurship theory provides a foundation for understanding how activists operate strategically within digital environments. Scholars argue that digital

entrepreneurship involves the creation of value through the exploitation of digital affordances, audience engagement, and continuous adaptation to platform dynamics (Nambisan 2017; Sussan & Acs 2017). Research on creators and influencers shows that visibility, personal branding, and content production function as entrepreneurial assets that can be converted into economic or symbolic value (Khamis, Ang & Welling 2017; Duffy, Pruchniewska & Scolere 2017).

Although this literature focuses primarily on commercial actors, its insights are relevant for activists who similarly rely on visibility, narrative framing, and audience cultivation. Activists must identify opportunities, craft compelling messages, and maintain a recognisable digital persona to mobilise publics. These practices align with entrepreneurial logics of opportunity recognition and strategic positioning. Yet, as Sandoval (2020) notes, the entrepreneurial dimensions of activism remain under theorised, particularly in contexts where activists operate outside formal civil society structures.

Digital entrepreneurship theory therefore explains the strategic behaviours activists employ to build influence. It provides the first pillar of the Activist Entrepreneurship Framework by conceptualising activists as actors who use entrepreneurial strategies to pursue civic goals.

3.2 Social Capital Theory: Networks and Mobilisation

Social capital theory offers a second analytical lens by explaining how activists mobilise networks as resources. Bourdieu (1986) conceptualises social capital as the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to durable networks, while Putnam (2000) highlights its role in enabling collective action. In digital contexts, Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) show how online networks generate bonding and bridging capital that can support mobilisation and legitimacy.

For activists, social capital is not merely a by-product of online engagement but a strategic asset that can be cultivated, expanded, and deployed. Digital networks provide access to audiences, legitimacy, and amplification, enabling activists to scale their influence beyond traditional organisational structures. In African contexts, social capital is shaped by youth communities, cultural networks, and transnational advocacy groups (Iwilade 2022; Mutsvairo & Harris 2021). These networks function as mobilisation infrastructures that support rapid dissemination of information and collective action.

However, as Alaa (2026) argues, the mechanisms through which activists invest in and convert social capital into long term influence remain under theorised. Social capital theory therefore provides the second pillar of the Activist Entrepreneurship Framework by explaining how activists mobilise networks to sustain visibility and legitimacy.

3.3 Digital Labour Theory: Work, Precarity, and Sustainability

Digital labour theory provides the third pillar of the framework by explaining the work activists perform to maintain influence. Scholars argue that digital labour encompasses emotional, cognitive, and reputational work that is often invisible yet essential for sustaining online presence (Jarrett 2016; Abidin 2021). Research on platform labour highlights the precarity of workers who must continuously produce content, engage audiences, and adapt to algorithmic changes (Scholz 2013; Woodcock & Graham 2020).

Activists perform similar forms of labour, including documenting injustice, responding to followers, managing harassment, and maintaining credibility in hostile environments. Bainotti (2025) describes this as "aspirational labour", driven by the hope of future influence or social change. Influencer studies highlight an "intimacy triple bind" where workers must manage emotional exposure, audience expectations, and reputational risk (Abidin 2023). Activists face comparable pressures, often intensified by state surveillance and political hostility.

Digital labour theory therefore explains the costs and sustainability challenges of activist influence. It highlights the precarity of activist work in contexts where visibility is both an asset and a vulnerability. This forms the third pillar of the Activist Entrepreneurship Framework.

3.4 Integrating the Three Theories: The Activist Entrepreneurship Framework

The integration of these three theories provides a holistic understanding of how activists operate within digital environments. Each theory explains a distinct dimension of activist practice:

- **Digital entrepreneurship** explains *strategy*
- **Social capital** explains *mobilisation*
- **Digital labour** explains *sustainability and precarity*

Together, they conceptualise activists as activist entrepreneurs who build influence through the strategic use of platforms, networks, and labour. This integrated framework addresses the gaps identified in the literature by offering a model that captures the entrepreneurial, relational, and labour-intensive nature of digital activism in Nigeria.

4. Typology of Activist Entrepreneurial Pathways

Building on the Activist Entrepreneurship Framework, this section develops a typology of activist entrepreneurial pathways that captures the diverse strategies through which activists build and sustain influence in Nigeria's digital environment. Typologies are valuable conceptual tools because they help classify complex social phenomena into analytically distinct categories that illuminate underlying patterns (Collier, LaPorte & Seawright 2012). The typology proposed here identifies three pathways: *populist accountability entrepreneurship, cultural ideological entrepreneurship, and professionalised advocacy entrepreneurship*. These pathways are not mutually exclusive, but they represent dominant logics that shape how activists mobilise networks, perform digital labour, and navigate platform affordances.

4.1 Populist Accountability Entrepreneurs

Populist accountability entrepreneurs are activists who mobilise grassroots publics by framing their interventions around corruption, injustice, and elite failure. Their influence is built on direct, emotionally charged communication that resonates with widespread public frustration. Research on digital populism shows that such actors often rely on authenticity, moral outrage, and anti-establishment rhetoric to cultivate trust and visibility (Maly 2018; Gerbaudo 2018). In Nigeria, this pathway aligns with digital actors who use platforms to expose wrongdoing, challenge public officials, and mobilise followers around accountability narratives.

From a digital entrepreneurship perspective, populist accountability entrepreneurs leverage platform affordances to maximise reach, often producing high volume content that capitalises on algorithmic amplification (Khamis, Ang & Welling 2017). Their social capital is rooted in grassroots networks that reward perceived authenticity and directness (Chan 2022). However, this pathway involves significant emotional and reputational labour, as activists must continuously respond to controversies, manage backlash, and sustain audience engagement in volatile digital environments (Abidin 2021; Woodcock & Graham 2020).

4.2 Cultural Ideological Entrepreneurs

Cultural ideological entrepreneurs draw on symbolic capital, cultural heritage, and ideological narratives to frame their activism. This pathway aligns with scholarship on cultural resistance, where artists and cultural figures use their platforms to articulate political critique and mobilise publics (Eyerman & Jamison 1998; Ndlovu 2020). In the Nigerian context, musicians, cultural commentators, and legacy figures often occupy this space, using their cultural authority to shape political discourse.

Digital entrepreneurship theory helps explain how these actors convert cultural capital into digital influence by cultivating a recognisable persona and producing content that blends cultural expression with political commentary (Duffy, Pruchniewska & Scolere 2017). Their social capital is anchored in cultural communities and transnational networks that provide legitimacy and continuity (Iwilade 2022). The labour involved in this pathway is ideological and narrative driven, requiring consistency, credibility, and long term engagement with political issues (Jarrett 2016).

4.3 Professionalised Advocacy Entrepreneurs

Professionalised advocacy entrepreneurs represent activists who build structured, institution facing forms of influence. Their work aligns with research on digital advocacy, where activists combine online visibility with organisational building, policy engagement, and transnational collaboration (Karpf 2012; Tufekci 2017). In Nigeria, this pathway is exemplified by youth activists who emerged from protest movements and transitioned into formal advocacy roles. From a digital entrepreneurship perspective, these activists strategically manage their digital presence to maintain credibility with both grassroots supporters and institutional actors (Nambisan 2017). Their social capital includes bridging ties to NGOs, international organisations, and policy networks (Mutsvairo & Harris 2021). The labour involved is coordination intensive, encompassing documentation, coalition building, and the management of online harassment and reputational risk (Abidin 2023; Scholz 2013).

4.4 Comparing the Three Pathways

Although these pathways differ in their sources of capital, labour demands, and strategic orientations, they share several common features. All three rely on platform affordances to build visibility, mobilise publics, and sustain influence. All require continuous digital labour to maintain relevance in fast moving online environments. All depend on social capital, though the type and structure of that capital vary. These similarities underscore the value of conceptualising activists as **activist entrepreneurs** who operate within a hybrid civic commercial ecosystem.

At the same time, the differences between pathways highlight the importance of context, identity, and strategic orientation. Populist accountability entrepreneurs rely on emotional resonance and grassroots legitimacy. Cultural ideological entrepreneurs draw on symbolic authority and narrative depth. Professionalised advocacy entrepreneurs depend on institutional credibility and organisational capacity. These distinctions provide a foundation for theorising how activists navigate different opportunity structures within Nigeria's digital landscape.

The following typology categorises activist-entrepreneurs based on their strategic approach, labour focus, and use of platform affordances.

Table 1. Categorisation of Activist-Entrepreneurs

Type	**Strategic Logic**	**Primary Affordance Utilised**	**Labour Focus**	**Example / Context**
Populist	Positions the actor as the "charismatic voice" of the people against a corrupt elite. Relies on individualized authority (Gustafsson & Weinryb 2020).	Virality and Algorithmic Amplification	Emotional and Affective Labour	Rapid-response hashtag movements; high-energy live streams.
Cultural-Ideological	Focuses on long-term narrative shifts and community identity. Acts as a "thought leader" or moral entrepreneur.	Community Building and Storytelling	Cognitive and Intellectual Labour	Feminist or LGBTQ+ advocacy groups building niche digital enclaves.
Professionalised	Mimics corporate or NGO structures for institutional legitimacy. Focuses on sustainability and resource acquisition.	Networking and Resource Mobilisation	Reputational and Administrative Labour	Policy-focused advocacy groups with formal digital branding and fundraising.

4.5 Contribution of the Typology

This typology contributes to the literature by offering a structured way to understand the diversity of activist strategies in digital contexts. It moves beyond binary distinctions between "influencers" and "activists" and instead conceptualises activism as a field shaped by entrepreneurial logics, networked publics, and digital labour. By identifying distinct pathways, the typology provides a basis for developing theoretical propositions about the conditions under which different forms of activist entrepreneurship emerge and succeed.

The next section builds on this typology to develop a set of theoretical propositions that articulate the mechanisms linking digital entrepreneurship, social capital, and digital labour in activist practice.

5. Theoretical Propositions

Drawing on the Activist Entrepreneurship Framework and the typology of activist entrepreneurial pathways, this section develops a set of theoretical propositions that articulate the mechanisms linking digital entrepreneurship, social capital, and digital labour in activist practice. Conceptual propositions are essential for clarifying causal assumptions, guiding empirical inquiry, and advancing theoretical debates (Jaakkola 2020). The propositions below synthesise insights from the literature and the typology to explain how activists build, mobilise, and sustain influence within Nigeria's platformised political environment.

Proposition 1: Digital activists behave as entrepreneurial actors who strategically leverage platform affordances to build influence

Digital platforms create opportunity structures that reward visibility, personal branding, and strategic content production (Nambisan 2017; Khamis, Ang & Welling 2017). Activists who operate within these environments must therefore adopt entrepreneurial behaviours, including opportunity recognition, audience cultivation, and narrative framing. Research on digital mobilisation shows that activists increasingly rely on platform logics to shape their communication strategies and influence trajectories (Tufekci 2017; Sandoval 2020). This suggests that activism is not only a civic practice but also an entrepreneurial one.

Proposition 2: The scale and durability of activist influence depend on the type and structure of social capital they mobilise

Social capital provides activists with access to audiences, legitimacy, and mobilisation power (Bourdieu 1986; Putnam 2000). In digital contexts, the ability to cultivate bridging and bonding capital shapes the reach and sustainability of activist influence (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2007). Populist accountability entrepreneurs rely on grassroots networks, cultural ideological entrepreneurs draw on symbolic and cultural capital, and professionalised advocacy entrepreneurs mobilise institutional and transnational networks. These variations align with research showing that different forms of social capital produce different mobilisation outcomes (Chan 2022; Iwilade 2022).

Proposition 3: Activist influence is sustained through continuous emotional, cognitive, and reputational labour

Digital labour scholarship highlights the intensive work required to maintain visibility and credibility in online environments (Jarrett 2016; Abidin 2021). Activists must produce content, engage audiences, manage harassment, and maintain reputational integrity, often under conditions of political hostility. This labour is aspirational and precarious, driven by the hope of future influence or social change (Bainotti 2025). The sustainability of activist influence therefore depends on the capacity to perform ongoing digital labour, which varies across activist pathways.

Proposition 4: Platform governance structures shape activist entrepreneurial trajectories by rewarding specific behaviours and communication styles

Algorithms, content moderation systems, and platform policies influence which activist messages gain visibility and which are suppressed (Gillespie 2018; Gorwa 2019). Research on digital populism shows that emotionally charged content is more likely to be amplified (Maly 2018; Gerbaudo 2018), while studies on digital advocacy highlight the importance of documentation and credibility for institutional engagement (Karpf 2012). These dynamics suggest that platform governance structures shape the strategic choices activists make and the pathways they follow.

Proposition 5: Activist entrepreneurial pathways emerge from the interaction between platform affordances, social capital resources, and labour capacities

The typology demonstrates that activist pathways are shaped by the interplay of strategic orientation, network structures, and labour demands. Populist accountability entrepreneurs thrive in environments where emotional resonance and high volume content are rewarded. Cultural ideological entrepreneurs rely on symbolic capital and narrative depth. Professionalised advocacy entrepreneurs depend on institutional credibility and coordination labour. These patterns align with research showing that digital actors' trajectories are shaped by the interaction of platform affordances, social resources, and labour capacities (Duffy 2017; Woodcock & Graham 2020).

This proposition integrates the three theoretical pillars of the Activist Entrepreneurship Framework and provides a basis for future empirical testing.

Proposition 6: Activist entrepreneurship is most sustainable when activists can convert digital visibility into durable social or institutional capital

Visibility alone is insufficient for long term influence. Research on digital mobilisation shows that movements and actors with strong organisational or networked foundations are more likely to sustain impact (Tufekci 2017; Karpf 2012). Activists who convert digital visibility into durable forms of capital, such as institutional partnerships, cultural authority, or grassroots loyalty, are better positioned to maintain influence in volatile digital environments. This proposition highlights the importance of capital conversion as a mechanism of activist sustainability.

Contribution of the Propositions

Together, these propositions articulate a coherent set of theoretical claims that explain how activists operate as entrepreneurial actors within Nigeria's digital landscape. They extend existing scholarship by integrating insights from digital entrepreneurship, social capital theory, and digital labour, and by grounding these insights in the specific dynamics of African digital activism. These propositions also provide a foundation for empirical research that can test, refine, or challenge the conceptual model.

The next section develops the analytical discussion, drawing together the framework, typology, and propositions to explain the broader implications of activist entrepreneurship for digital politics in Nigeria.

6. Analytical Discussion

This section analyses how the Activist Entrepreneurship Framework explains the dynamics of digital activism in Nigeria. It brings together the three theoretical pillars, the typology of activist entrepreneurial pathways, and the propositions developed earlier to show how activists strategically navigate Platformised environments. The discussion highlights the interplay between entrepreneurial strategy, social capital mobilisation, and digital labour, and examines how these dynamics shape influence, sustainability, and precarity.

6.1 Entrepreneurial Logics in Digital Activism

The analysis demonstrates that activists increasingly operate with entrepreneurial logics that mirror those observed in the creator economy. Digital platforms reward visibility, consistency, and strategic content production, which aligns with the behaviours described in digital entrepreneurship research (Nambisan 2017; Duffy, Pruchniewska & Scolere 2017). Activists who recognise these dynamics are better positioned to build influence, as they can tailor their communication strategies to platform affordances.

Populist accountability entrepreneurs exemplify this logic by producing high volume, emotionally resonant content that aligns with algorithmic incentives. Cultural ideological entrepreneurs leverage symbolic capital to differentiate their digital persona, while professionalised advocacy entrepreneurs adopt strategic communication practices that appeal to both grassroots audiences and institutional actors. These patterns support **Proposition 1** by showing that activists behave as entrepreneurial actors who strategically engage with digital platforms.

6.2 Social Capital as a Differentiating Resource

The typology reveals that social capital is a critical differentiator across activist pathways. Populist accountability entrepreneurs rely on grassroots networks that reward authenticity and directness. Cultural ideological entrepreneurs draw on cultural and symbolic capital that provides legitimacy and narrative authority. Professionalised advocacy entrepreneurs mobilise bridging capital that connects them to NGOs, international organisations, and policy networks.

These variations align with social capital theory, which emphasises the role of network structures in shaping mobilisation outcomes (Bourdieu 1986; Putnam 2000). They also support **Proposition 2** by demonstrating that the scale and durability of activist influence depend on the type and structure of social capital available to them. The analysis suggests that activists who can convert digital visibility into durable social capital are more likely to sustain influence in volatile political environments.

6.3 The Centrality of Digital Labour

The discussion highlights the central role of digital labour in sustaining activist influence. Activists must continuously produce content, engage audiences, and manage reputational risks, often under conditions of political hostility. This labour is emotionally and cognitively demanding, aligning with research on digital labour precarity (Jarrett 2016; Abidin 2021). Populist accountability entrepreneurs face intense emotional labour due to the confrontational nature of their content. Cultural ideological entrepreneurs perform narrative labour that requires ideological consistency. Professionalised advocacy entrepreneurs engage in

coordination labour that involves documentation, coalition building, and institutional engagement.

These dynamics support **Proposition 3** by showing that activist influence is sustained through continuous emotional, cognitive, and reputational labour. They also highlight the vulnerability of activists to burnout, harassment, and algorithmic volatility, which raises questions about the long-term sustainability of activist entrepreneurship.

6.4 Platform Governance and Strategic Adaptation

The analysis shows that platform governance structures significantly shape activist strategies. Algorithms reward emotionally charged content, which benefits populist accountability entrepreneurs but may disadvantage activists who rely on more nuanced or policy-oriented messaging. Content moderation practices can suppress activist messages, particularly in contexts where state actors pressure platforms or exploit reporting mechanisms (Gillespie 2018; Gorwa 2019). These dynamics support **Proposition 4** by demonstrating that platform governance influences activist trajectories.

Activists therefore engage in strategic adaptation, adjusting their content, tone, and engagement practices to align with platform incentives. This adaptation is a form of entrepreneurial behaviour that underscores the hybrid civic commercial nature of digital activism.

6.5 Interactions Between Strategy, Capital, and Labour

The typology illustrates that activist pathways emerge from the interaction between entrepreneurial strategy, social capital resources, and labour capacities. Populist accountability entrepreneurs thrive when emotional resonance aligns with algorithmic incentives and when grassroots networks amplify their content. Cultural ideological entrepreneurs succeed when symbolic capital provides narrative authority that resonates across cultural communities. Professionalised advocacy entrepreneurs gain traction when institutional networks reward credibility and coordination labour.

These patterns support **Proposition 5** by showing that activist entrepreneurial pathways are shaped by the interplay of platform affordances, social capital, and labour capacities. They also highlight the importance of capital conversion, as activists who can transform digital visibility into durable social or institutional capital are better positioned to sustain influence, supporting **Proposition 6**.

6.6 Implications for Digital Politics in Nigeria

The analysis has broader implications for understanding digital politics in Nigeria. First, it suggests that digital activism is increasingly shaped by entrepreneurial logics that blur the boundaries between civic engagement and digital enterprise. Second, it highlights the uneven distribution of social capital, which influences who becomes visible, credible, and sustainable within digital activism. Third, it underscores the precarity of activist labour, particularly in contexts where state repression, platform volatility, and public scrutiny intersect.

These insights contribute to debates on digital democracy, youth political engagement, and the political economy of platforms in the Global South. They also raise important questions about the future of activism in environments where visibility is both a resource and a risk.

6.7 Summary of Analytical Insights

The analytical discussion demonstrates that the Activist Entrepreneurship Framework provides a robust lens for understanding the strategic, relational, and labour-intensive nature of digital activism in Nigeria. By integrating digital entrepreneurship, social capital theory, and digital labour, the framework captures the complexity of activist practice in Platformised environments. The next section builds on these insights to outline the broader implications of activist entrepreneurship for theory, policy, and future research.

7. Implications

The Activist Entrepreneurship Framework has several implications for theory, practice, and future research. These implications extend beyond the Nigerian context and contribute to broader debates on digital politics, platform governance, and the evolving nature of civic engagement in the Global South.

7.1 Theoretical Implications

The analysis demonstrates that digital activism cannot be fully understood through traditional social movement theory alone. The entrepreneurial logics identified in this study suggest that activists operate within a hybrid field shaped by civic motivations and platformised economic structures. This support calls for more integrated approaches that bridge digital activism research with scholarship on digital entrepreneurship and platform labour (Sandoval 2020; Duffy, Pruchniewska & Scolere 2017).

The typology of activist entrepreneurial pathways provides a conceptual tool for distinguishing between different forms of activist practice. It highlights how variations in social capital, labour capacity, and strategic orientation shape influence trajectories. This contributes to theoretical debates on networked publics (boyd 2010), platform governance (Gillespie 2018), and the political economy of visibility (Abidin 2021).

The framework also advances social capital theory by showing how activists convert digital visibility into durable forms of capital. This aligns with emerging research on "social media capital" as a resource that can be strategically cultivated and deployed (Chan 2022). The integration of digital labour theory further enriches understandings of activist sustainability and precarity.

7.2 Practical and Policy Implications

The findings have practical implications for activists, civil society organisations, and policymakers. For activists, the framework highlights the importance of strategic communication, network cultivation, and labour management. Understanding platform incentives can help activists navigate visibility dynamics more effectively, while awareness of labour demands can support more sustainable practices.

For civil society organisations, the typology offers insights into how different activist profiles can complement formal advocacy efforts. Professionalised advocacy entrepreneurs, for

example, may serve as bridges between grassroots mobilisation and institutional engagement. Cultural ideological entrepreneurs can amplify narratives that resonate across cultural communities, while populist accountability entrepreneurs can catalyse public attention around governance failures.

For policymakers and platform regulators, the analysis underscores the need to consider how platform governance structures shape political participation. Content moderation practices, algorithmic amplification, and data governance policies can either support or undermine civic actors (Gorwa 2019). Ensuring transparency and accountability in platform governance is therefore essential for protecting digital civic space.

7.3 Implications for Digital Politics in the Global South

The framework has broader implications for understanding digital politics in the Global South. First, it highlights the entrepreneurial nature of activism in contexts where formal institutions are weak or distrusted. Activists often fill accountability gaps by leveraging digital platforms to expose wrongdoing and mobilise publics (Iwilade 2022). Second, it shows how digital activism is shaped by uneven access to social capital, which influences who becomes visible and credible within digital publics. Third, it underscores the precarity of activist labour in environments where state repression, platform volatility, and public scrutiny intersect.

These insights contribute to debates on youth political engagement, digital democracy, and the role of platforms in shaping civic participation. They also highlight the need for context specific theories that account for the unique political, cultural, and technological dynamics of African societies.

7.4 Implications for Future Research

The propositions developed in this paper provide a foundation for empirical research that can test, refine, or challenge the Activist Entrepreneurship Framework. Future studies could examine how activists navigate platform incentives in real time, how social capital is accumulated and converted across different activist pathways, or how digital labour practices vary across gender, class, or regional lines.

Comparative research across African countries could also illuminate how political context shapes activist entrepreneurship. Longitudinal studies could explore how activist trajectories evolve over time, particularly in response to platform governance changes or political shifts.

7.5 Summary of Implications

Overall, the implications of this study highlight the value of conceptualising activists as activist entrepreneurs who operate within a hybrid civic commercial ecosystem. The framework provides a nuanced understanding of the strategic, relational, and labour-intensive nature of digital activism and offers a foundation for future theoretical and empirical work.

The next section concludes the paper by summarising the key contributions and outlining directions for further inquiry.

8. Conclusion

This paper has developed the Activist Entrepreneurship Framework to conceptualise digital activism in Nigeria as a hybrid civic and entrepreneurial practice shaped by platform affordances, social capital resources, and digital labour demands. By integrating insights from digital entrepreneurship (Nambisan 2017; Duffy, Pruchniewska & Scolere 2017), social capital theory (Bourdieu 1986; Putnam 2000), and digital labour scholarship (Jarrett 2016; Abidin 2021), the paper advances a more holistic understanding of how activists build, mobilise, and sustain influence within platformised political environments.

The typology of activist entrepreneurial pathways demonstrates that activists pursue influence through distinct but overlapping logics: populist accountability, cultural ideological expression, and professionalised advocacy. These pathways illuminate how variations in network structures, labour capacities, and strategic orientations shape activist trajectories. The theoretical propositions developed in the paper articulate the mechanisms linking entrepreneurial strategy, social capital mobilisation, and digital labour, offering a foundation for empirical research that can test and refine the framework.

The analysis underscores that digital activism in Nigeria is deeply embedded in the political economy of platforms. Activists must navigate algorithmic incentives, content moderation systems, and volatile digital publics, all of which shape their visibility and vulnerability (Gillespie 2018; Gorwa 2019). The framework therefore contributes to broader debates on digital democracy, youth political engagement, and the governance of online civic spaces in the Global South.

The implications of this study extend beyond Nigeria. As digital activism becomes increasingly intertwined with entrepreneurial logics worldwide, scholars and practitioners must consider how platform dynamics, labour precarity, and unequal access to social capital shape who becomes influential and whose voices are marginalised. The Activist Entrepreneurship Framework provides a conceptual foundation for such inquiry and highlights the need for context specific analyses that account for the unique political and cultural dynamics of African societies.

Future research should examine how activist entrepreneurs navigate platform incentives in real time, how social capital is accumulated and converted across different pathways, and how digital labour practices vary across gender, class, and regional lines. Comparative and longitudinal studies would further illuminate how activist trajectories evolve in response to political and technological change.

In sum, this paper argues that understanding activists as entrepreneurial actors offers a more accurate and analytically productive lens for examining digital politics in Nigeria. This conceptualisation provides a pathway for richer theoretical development and more grounded empirical research on the evolving nature of activism in platform mediated environments.

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