



DIGITAL INEQUALITY AND UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS IN ONLINE ECONOMIES

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Abstract

This article examines digital inequality shaping unequal opportunity for young entrepreneurs in platform based commerce. The discussion develops a normative account of how technology access, digital literacy, and infrastructure quality create layered entry conditions that sort who can start, sustain, and expand online ventures. Limited devices and unstable connectivity disrupt responsiveness, content production, and customer trust, while uneven literacy affects compliance, dispute handling, and cyber safety. Platform governance and automated enforcement can intensify uncertainty when procedures are opaque and recovery pathways require administrative capacity that is unevenly distributed. The argument stresses that online markets are formally open yet substantively conditional, because success depends on continuous presence, reliable communication, and secure identity management. Unequal ability to learn, adapt to feature changes, and interpret performance indicators further widens separation among peers. The article concludes that digital inequality functions as a structural filter that converts social and spatial disparities into economic stratification among young entrepreneurs. It closes by outlining principles for fair opportunity centered on accessible infrastructure, robust learning pathways, and transparent accountability across public and private actors.

Keywords: digital inequality, young entrepreneurs, platform commerce, digital literacy, infrastructure quality, cyber safety, opportunity structure.

Introduction

The development of a platform-based economy has driven changes in how the younger generation defines work, independence, and opportunity. Digital entrepreneurship is often understood as a relatively open entry point because the initial capital appears lighter compared to conventional businesses. Fundamentally, the first step to starting a business indeed requires courage and a basic understanding of how the business will be operated (Darmawan & Hariani, 2020). However, social experience shows that such openness depends on often invisible prerequisites, such as decent devices, stable connections, the ability to manage accounts, and an understanding of digital service rules (Graham, 2019). When these prerequisites are uneven, opportunities become tiered, and some youths start from a point far behind. In daily life, digital access is not merely a matter of being connected, but a matter of the ability to maintain an online presence, respond to customers quickly, and preserve a reputation. Small failures, such as delayed responses or upload interruptions, can be interpreted by the market as unprofessionalism. Consequently, digital inequality easily transforms into economic opportunity inequality. This indicates that managing a business requires a neat strategy so that every decision taken can bring maximum results (Darmawan, 2019). Thus, the discussion of digital entrepreneurship needs to examine how access, skills, and infrastructure construct the boundaries that determine who can survive and thrive.

Technological advancements in information also shape new standards in business competition, including methods of promotion, transactions, shipping, and after-sales service. Young entrepreneurs operating in the digital space are required to understand application interfaces, how advertisements work, content management, and online communication ethics (Nambisan et al., 2019). In practice, the technical ability to make a business easily discoverable by potential customers on the internet becomes very decisive (Arifin et al., 2021). These standards may feel natural for youth who grew up with device support and consistent digital habituation. For youth whose access is intermittent, the same standards feel like a recurring test that drains time and cost. At this point, digital inequality appears as an experience of delay being left behind in feature updates, market trends, and the ability to read algorithmic changes. Delays are not always caused by a lack of motivation, but rather by the uncertainty of means. When business

development depends on the rhythm of a platform, the uncertainty of means becomes a constraint attached to the entire business process. Furthermore, the processing of vast amounts of information in the current era must be utilized effectively so that young entrepreneurs can take the right business steps (Ali & Darmawan, 2023). This situation confirms that technology can widen the gap between young business actors when digital access and literacy do not adequately meet.

Young entrepreneurs often rely on narratives of independence, creativity, and the courage to take risks. These narratives are important as social energy, but they can obscure the fact that digital risks are not shared equally (Srnicek, 2017). Risks that seem small, such as forgetting a password, locked accounts, or online scams, have major consequences for youth who do not have backup devices, capital reserves, or technical assistance networks. A leader in a business must also have a strong sense of responsibility and ethics so that the business remains trusted by the surrounding environment (Rojak & Darmawan, 2021). When disruptions occur, they lose production time and transaction opportunities, while more fortunate youth can recover quickly because they have technical and financial support. From such experiences, digital inequality exists as a difference in the ability to recover, not merely a difference in the ability to start. In digital entrepreneurship, sustainability is determined by the ability to maintain operational stability, account security, and continuity of communication with customers. Additionally, it is important for business actors to understand the rules of the game or written agreements to avoid future problems (Da Silva et al., 2022). Therefore, the understanding of opportunities for young entrepreneurs needs to consider the dimensions of digital recovery and resilience, as both are shaped by unequal technological access, literacy, and infrastructure quality.

The digital space also produces new forms of trust through customer ratings, transaction trails, and consistency of posts (Boukis, 2020). This trust is cumulative and often difficult to rebuild if disrupted. Young entrepreneurs with stable connections can maintain a rhythm of uploads, manage customer inquiries, and display catalogs with good visual quality. One method that remains effective for maintaining good relationships and offering products personally is through electronic mail communication (Sinambela & Darmawan, 2021). Conversely, youth facing weak

connections often experience communication breakdowns, failed uploads, and stuttering services. This condition can be read as a lack of seriousness, even though the root of the problem lies in the means. Here, infrastructure acts as a determinant of economic reputation. Moreover, digital literacy influences how business actors construct product narratives, choose distribution channels, and manage conflicts with customers. Sometimes, challenges also arise when modern marketing methods must confront existing local values in society (Mardikaningsih et al., 2021). When literacy is uneven, lagging business actors easily fall into harmful practices, including poorly targeted promotions or dependence on intermediaries who are not always trustworthy. As a result, the inequality of opportunity becomes a recurring social experience.

Digital entrepreneurship is often promoted as a solution for economic inclusion, yet inclusion requires prerequisites of equal access and capability. Network infrastructure, device availability, affordability of data packages, and the quality of logistics and payment services form the ecosystem that determines success (Heeks, 2018). This success heavily depends on how someone is able to manage existing resources professionally and measurably (Darmawan, 2019). Youth living in areas with limited services face high opportunity costs, such as having to find signal spots, share devices, or arrange work schedules around access. This situation reduces the flexibility that is actually the primary value of digital business. When transactions depend on real-time notifications, unstable access creates a risk of losing customers. When promotion depends on audiovisual content, limited devices lower the quality of presentation. When service depends on account security, a lack of security literacy increases the risk of hacking or fraud. In the business world, all forms of cooperation and commitment must be based on a clear understanding between the seller and the buyer (Da Silva et al., 2022). Thus, digital inequality can be understood as an opportunity structure that limits the ability of youth to transform creativity into income. Discussions centered on young entrepreneurs need to assess how technical and cognitive prerequisites direct the path of success unequally.

Digital inequality in youth entrepreneurship manifests through differences in access to usable technology and sustainable affordability. Slow devices, limited storage space, or fast-draining batteries affect productivity and service quality (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2019). Unstable affordability

forces business actors to choose between basic needs and digital operational needs, making economic decisions extremely narrow. Therefore, mastering digital tools to increase business visibility becomes an urgent need for beginners (Arifin et al., 2021). At the same time, platform systems change rapidly, driving application updates and content format adjustments. Youth whose devices do not support updates will be subtly marginalized from certain features, subsequently losing visibility. In the experience of business actors, this marginalization feels like a market closing its doors without notice. The issue is not about laziness, but about a mismatch between technological design and the diverse conditions of users. Especially amidst tight competition, the ability to continue learning and adapting to trends is highly necessary (Darmawan & Hariani, 2020). When access to devices and connections becomes a requirement to be seen, digital inequality forms a hierarchy of opportunity that favors those with the most ready means.

Another problem arises from the inequality of digital literacy, which encompasses operational skills, the ability to evaluate information, and an understanding of ethics and security. Digital literacy is not merely the ability to use an application, but the ability to manage a business identity, regulate privacy, and assess transaction risks (Martin & Grudziecki, 2006). It is important for entrepreneurs to continue paying attention to social responsibility and ethical values so that their business has a positive impact (Rojak & Darmawan, 2021). Youths with minimal literacy can get trapped in reactive work patterns, such as following trends without understanding the target market or engaging in promotional practices that violate service rules. Consequently, accounts can be restricted, reputations decline, or promotional capital is wasted. In the same space, youth with better literacy can organize content, measure customer responses, and maintain compliance. Even in marketing, choosing the right channels, such as using digital messages that go directly to the target, greatly assists efficiency (Sinambela & Darmawan, 2021). This gap results in differences in the ability to read market signals and differences in the ability to correct mistakes. Normatively, the issue of literacy shows that digital entrepreneurship opportunities are determined by cognitive and social abilities formed through access to education, mentoring, and consistent exposure to digital experiences from the start.

This study is important to clarify the relationship between digital inequality and economic opportunity inequality for young entrepreneurs. Digital entrepreneurship discourse often highlights success stories, while the structures that filter business actors are rarely understood systematically (Nambisan, 2017). Therefore, accurate data and good management are required to see the extent to which these opportunities can be enjoyed by all circles (Ali & Darmawan, 2023). When inequality is considered an individual problem, policies tend to place the burden of improvement on the youth, even though many prerequisites lie in the realm of infrastructure and digital ecosystem governance. Thus, the marketing approach taken must also respect local social and cultural conditions to avoid creating conflicts (Mardikaningsih et al., 2021). A sharp normative understanding is needed to assess the fairness of opportunity distribution, justice in access, and the responsibilities of public institutions and service providers. Furthermore, conceptual studies can help distinguish between access gaps, skills gaps, and utilization gaps, so that the discussion does not stop at mere connection expansion. With that foundation, readers can evaluate how technical requirements and literacy form a subtle yet decisive social selection, especially for youth who make the digital space their source of livelihood.

The purpose of this writing is to formulate a conceptual understanding of how digital inequality structures differences in digital entrepreneurship opportunities for youth and to emphasize its implications for economic justice. This writing organizes the relationship between device access, network quality, operational literacy, security literacy, and the ability to adapt to platform changes. This objective also directs the reader toward a normative assessment of the fairness of participation requirements in the digital market, including who benefits from the ecosystem design and who is gradually pushed out. Through this framework, the description is expected to serve as a basis for the formation of policy principles and capacity-building programs grounded in equal opportunity and the protection of young entrepreneurs within the digital economic space.

Method

This study employs a qualitative literature study to construct a normative argument regarding digital inequality and youth entrepreneurship opportunities. Materials were selected through a search of academic works

discussing access gaps, digital literacy, infrastructure, and the dynamics of platform-based entrepreneurship. The selection of materials emphasizes conceptual coherence, clarity of definitions, and relevance to the mechanisms of opportunity formation. Gomm (2008) emphasizes the importance of a critical attitude toward hidden assumptions within a method, allowing readers to assess how a conclusion is shaped by the choice of framework and materials. Baronov (2015) underlines the need for a clear conceptual foundation so that terms like inequality and opportunity are not used loosely. In this research, repeated readings were conducted to identify main ideas, relationships between concepts, and the normative consequences for young entrepreneurs who utilize the digital space as both a market and a workspace.

The processing of materials was carried out through thematic synthesis with the organization of themes such as technological access, digital literacy, infrastructure quality, platform governance, and the structure of online market opportunities. May and Perry (2022) position the social research process as a series of decisions that demand consistency between the research question, the way materials are read, and the form of reasoning presented. Crano et al. (2014) emphasize the need for precision in distinguishing between descriptive claims and normative claims, ensuring that arguments do not shift into opinions without a basis in reasoning. Validity is maintained through the traceability of the argumentative flow, the firmness of conceptual boundaries, and cross-checking between ideas emerging from various sources. Because this study does not present numerical data, the weight of the explanation is supported by logical consistency, conceptual depth, and the ability to link concepts to the mechanisms that explain the differences in entrepreneurial opportunities within the digital space

Result and Discussion

Digital inequality in youth entrepreneurship can be understood as a filtering structure that operates from the very earliest stage, namely when an individual attempts to enter the online market (Calderón Gómez, 2019; Gerli & Whalley, 2022). This filtering does not always appear as a prohibition, but rather as a series of requirements that, if not met, will gradually decrease opportunities. Fundamentally, running a business today

indeed requires a combination of good management, technological mastery, and a mature business understanding (Mardikaningsih et al., 2015). In the digital space, entry requirements include adequate devices, stable account identities, and the ability to perform basic configurations. Youths who do not possess decent devices will experience recurring delays, including difficulties uploading content, failure to run new features, or frequent application crashes. This experience creates a sense that the market is moving too fast, while the ability to follow the market's rhythm becomes an unwritten prerequisite. This aligns with the basic principle that effective business management must begin with strong planning and organization (Khasanah et al., 2010). At this point, inequality is not just a difference in resources, but a difference in the starting position that determines how much energy must be expended to reach the minimum standard. Because digital entrepreneurship relies on consistency, inconsistency in means transforms into inconsistency in performance, which customers then interpret as business quality.

Access to technology is an element that directly shapes the quality of digital work. Adequate devices allow business actors to organize catalogs, edit visuals, store conversation archives, and run several supporting applications simultaneously. For small entrepreneurs, the use of technology and an adequate level of education are proven to be very helpful in increasing their business income (Sinambela et al., 2021). Conversely, limited devices force business actors to sacrifice display quality, shorten product descriptions, or reduce service variety. These choices of sacrifice are not creative choices, but forced choices that reduce competitiveness. In a market that judges based on appearance and response speed, device differences are immediately translated into reputation differences. Access also relates to ownership, as borrowed or shared devices create uncertainty regarding time and privacy (Neumeyer et al., 2021). Furthermore, social media has now become a highly potential means to promote goods or services widely (Infante & Mardikaningsih, 2022). When a business actor cannot manage their own time, they lose the opportunity to respond to requests quickly. Within a normative framework, technological access forms a requirement for economic citizenship in the digital space, because access determines whether a youth can be present as a market actor considered feasible and trustworthy.

The quality of network infrastructure determines vastly different entrepreneurial experiences, even when the type of business is similar. A stable connection allows business actors to maintain the rhythm of content publication, conduct live broadcasts, and follow up on customer inquiries without pause (Bermudez et al., 2020). A smooth connection also supports changes in how people communicate and interact within today's virtual communities (Darmawan, 2021). A weak connection causes disconnections that turn interaction into a series of interruptions. In practice, these interruptions are not viewed by customers as infrastructure problems, but as service problems. When a message is late in being replied to, a customer can switch to another seller within minutes. When an upload fails, the business actor loses promotional momentum that is usually tied to a specific time. Therefore, switching to a digital marketing system becomes an important strategy so that a business can continue to survive in difficult situations (Putra et al., 2022). Thus, infrastructure regulates economic time, and economic time determines who is visible. Digital inequality arises because some youths can follow the platform's time, while others must adapt to signal availability. Normatively, this inequality raises questions about equal opportunity when the market demands real-time responses but the prerequisites for connectivity are not evenly available.

Operational digital literacy distinguishes business actors who are able to manage processes systematically from those who work through trial and error. Operational literacy includes the ability to manage store displays, organize neat catalogs, manage stock, and utilize automated messaging features (Bhattacharya, 2019). An understanding of consumer behavior in the digital world also greatly assists entrepreneurs in providing more personal offers (Fared & Darmawan, 2021). When literacy is low, work becomes repetitive and exhausting because basic tasks must be done manually every time. This exhaustion reduces the space for product innovation and strengthening customer relationships. Operational literacy also concerns the ability to understand application updates. Platforms frequently change layouts and upload rules, so business actors who are not accustomed to independent learning will lose their orientation. On the other hand, youth today are indeed required to have a better ability to read and understand digital information (Kurniawan et al., 2021). In the digital space, losing orientation is equivalent to losing visibility, as small mistakes

can decrease content reach. Normatively, operational literacy is a form of cognitive capital influenced by access to education and habituation. When this capital is uneven, a market that appears open is actually tiered.

Critical digital literacy relates to the ability to evaluate information, recognize scams, and understand digital footprints. Young entrepreneurs face an environment crowded with promotional messages, instant training offers, and partnership proposals (Counted & Arawole, 2015). An awareness of legal rights, such as copyright protection, is also essential so that an entrepreneur's work is not misappropriated by other parties (Hardyansah et al., 2021). Without the ability to evaluate, business actors are easily led into detrimental decisions, such as purchasing unclear promotional services, sharing private data, or following risky payment schemes. Losses that occur are often misinterpreted as business failure, even though the root of the problem lies in information asymmetry. Beyond technical issues, challenges in social integration within the community must also be understood so that the business remains harmonious amidst differences (Fariz, 2021). Critical literacy also encompasses the ability to read customer feedback rationally, distinguish relevant criticism from attacks, and formulate responses that preserve reputation. When this literacy is weak, minor conflicts can escalate into reputational damage that is difficult to recover. In a normative framework, critical literacy is a basic protection for business actors in a space fraught with informational risks. Inequality in critical literacy means inequality in protection, such that business opportunities cannot be considered equal.

Digital inequality also manifests through differences in the ability to utilize payment and shipping ecosystems. Digital payment systems demand an understanding of verification, security, and dispute resolution (Neumeyer et al., 2018). Business actors who understand the procedures will be more confident in accepting various payment methods. Those who are hesitant will limit payment methods, subsequently losing customers who desire convenience. In the realm of shipping, understanding tracking, packaging, and communicating delays affects customer satisfaction. Furthermore, direct ratings or reviews from buyers significantly influence how strongly a product can compete in the market (Negara et al., 2021). When literacy is low, business actors are easily blamed for problems that actually reside within the service chain. An inability to defend oneself procedurally places the business actor in

a weak position during disputes. Normatively, this inequality indicates that digital entrepreneurship demands high administrative capabilities. If these administrative capabilities can only be built through experience and access to learning, then the digital market will favor youth who are closer to sources of knowledge and support services.

Platform design forms rules of the game that are not always transparent to users. Changes in content policy, changes in paid promotion methods, and account restrictions can occur through automated processes that are difficult to understand (Sariwulan et al., 2020). Young entrepreneurs with high literacy can read the signs, adjust content formats, and avoid violations. Young entrepreneurs with limited literacy may inadvertently commit violations, subsequently losing the accounts that serve as the center of their business. Losing an account means losing customers, transaction history, and long-built credibility. In facing situations filled with such regulatory uncertainty, entrepreneurs are required to have strong management strategies to ensure the business survives (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2021). In the experience of business actors, the account recovery process often requires administrative persistence, the ability to explain the problem, and the availability of documents. Inequality in document access and inequality in procedural understanding make recovery unequal. Normatively, dependency on platforms creates a significant power relation, where entrepreneurial opportunities are influenced by fast-moving policies. When access and literacy are uneven, policy changes widen the gap in opportunities.

Digital communication skills are a part of literacy that directly influences sales. Communication includes the ability to respond politely, compose clear and concise messages, and manage customer expectations (Hapsari & Nurhajjah, 2020). These skills are often regarded as a talent, even though they can be learned through habituation and examples. Young entrepreneurs who are accustomed to online communication ethics will be better able to defuse conflicts and maintain store ratings. Young entrepreneurs lacking this habituation may respond defensively, triggering arguments that damage their reputation. In essence, the ability to continuously innovate and develop creative aspects is very important, especially in business fields such as culinary (Putra et al., 2022). Furthermore, communication also pertains to the ability to construct product stories and connect products with customer needs. In a crowded

market, a neat narrative can be a differentiator. Digital inequality arises when some youths are able to produce consistent narratives and visuals, while others are hindered by device limitations and skill constraints. Normatively, digital communication is symbolic capital that converts access into sales; thus, inequality in this capital signifies inequality in opportunity.

The ability for self-directed learning in the digital space becomes a key factor because technology is constantly changing (Hartnett et al., 2014). Feature updates, the emergence of new channels, and changes in consumer habits demand that business actors continuously adapt. Youths with stable access can follow learning sources, test features, and evaluate results. This proves that technological mastery and entrepreneurial competence provide a distinct advantage in business competition (Putra & Darmawan, 2022). Youths with limited access will rely on superficial information, causing learning to become fragmented. Fragmented learning results in business decisions based on guesswork rather than understanding. In daily experience, such business actors tend to feel left behind and give up easily because their great efforts do not yield immediate results. Normatively, the ability for self-directed learning is heavily influenced by time availability, psychological calm, and access to information. When youth must share devices or search for signals, energy is consumed by basic matters. Thus, digital inequality produces inequality in adaptability, which then manifests as inequality in business sustainability.

The socio-economic structure of the family influences the form of digital inequality experienced by young entrepreneurs (Boris et al., 2021). Youths who receive family support can have better devices, a quieter workspace, and assistance when technical problems occur. Youths who do not receive support must divide their time between other work and the digital business, thereby reducing the time to manage the online store. In reality, factors of capital, educational background, and technological support indeed play a major role in increasing business income results (Sinambela et al., 2021). These limitations make it difficult for a business to achieve the consistency required by platforms. Additionally, family support often includes psychological support, namely the belief that the business is worth trying over a sufficiently long term. Without support, youth are under pressure to produce immediate results, so business decisions tend to be short-term and risky. Normatively, digital inequality cannot be separated

from socio-economic inequality, which determines access to means, time, and support. Because digital entrepreneurship is often understood as a meritocratic space, it is important to emphasize that merit operates on an uneven foundation. This foundation filters opportunities before the competition even begins.

Geographical inequality also affects the digital business ecosystem. Regions with stable network services provide an advantage in communication speed and transaction reliability. Regions with limited services force business actors to seek specific spots to upload content or process orders (Aristi, 2018). This activity transforms digital entrepreneurship into an activity dependent on mobility, rather than mere creativity. Therefore, responsible and fair technological development is highly necessary so that its benefits can be felt by everyone (Radjawane & Mardikaningsih, 2022). Mobility adds costs and security risks, especially when youth must work at specific hours to gain access. Beyond the network, geographical conditions are often related to logistics access and shipping costs. If shipping costs are relatively high, business actors will lose out in competition despite having quality products. In a normative framework, justice of opportunity demands that location should not determine the quality of opportunity in an extreme manner. However, in practice, location affects almost every stage of a digital business. Therefore, digital inequality can be understood as spatial inequality attached to infrastructure, support services, and transaction costs.

The quality of formal and non-formal education shapes different paths of digital literacy. Some youths obtain a systematic introduction to security, ethics, and information management. Others learn randomly from friends or social media (Samara et al., 2021). Random learning can produce practical abilities, but it often leaves gaps in the understanding of risks. These gaps become apparent when business actors face fraud, customer conflicts, or changes in platform rules. Often, the success of a young entrepreneur is also determined by how courageous they are in taking opportunities and managing existing capital (Sinambela et al., 2021). When gaps emerge, youth lose time and capital to make repairs. In a business space with thin margins, small losses can accumulate into business closure. Normatively, digital literacy as an economic prerequisite demands the responsibility of educational and public institutions to ensure access to

quality learning. If quality learning is only available to certain groups, the digital market will continue to reproduce inequality. Thus, the relationship between literacy and opportunity is not an additional relationship, but a constitutive one that determines who can enter and survive.

Digital security is an area often ignored when discussing youth entrepreneurship, even though it determines sustainability. Security includes password management, authentication, device protection, and caution against harmful links (Kamoun-Chouk, 2019). Young entrepreneurs who understand security will reduce the risk of accounts being taken over or customer data being leaked. This becomes part of the effort to create a safe and ethical technological ecosystem for all its users (Radjawane & Mardikaningsih, 2022). Young entrepreneurs who lack understanding can lose account access, subsequently losing all the digital assets they have built. Recovery often demands complicated procedures and the ability to prove ownership. Inequality arises when youth who do not have supporting documents or adequate access to customer service are unable to recover their accounts. In a normative framework, digital security is part of labor protection, because for digital entrepreneurs, the account is the workplace. If security protection is uneven, then job opportunities and business opportunities are also uneven. Thus, security inequality widens opportunity inequality silently but firmly.

Digital social capital namely networks of friends, communities, and mentors in the online space also determines opportunity. Networks provide information about trends, offer feedback on content, and open collaboration opportunities (Helsper, 2020). Youth who have access to communities will obtain guidance that accelerates learning. Isolated youth will learn more slowly, often repeating the same mistakes. However, networks do not emerge on their own. They are often formed through access to educational spaces, community events, or online forums that require stable connections and free time. In many cases, a person's desire to start entrepreneurship is indeed strongly influenced by the surrounding environment and other supporting factors (Kurniawan et al., 2021). When youth must work outside of digital ventures to survive, the time to build networks shrinks. Normatively, digital social capital shows that the market is not entirely anonymous. Success is often influenced by access to relationships and information. If relationships and information flow

unevenly due to access inequality, then opportunities will also flow unevenly. Therefore, digital inequality must be understood as network inequality attached to social structures.

Digital entrepreneurship also requires the ability to read metrics and perform evaluation-based adjustments. Many platforms provide indicators regarding reach, engagement, and customer behavior (Samara et al., 2021). Youth with adequate data literacy will be able to change content, upload times, and product offerings rationally. Youth who do not understand indicators will rely on intuition alone, causing improvements to proceed slowly. This inequality is not merely a difference in intelligence, but a difference in access to learning and the opportunity to experiment. To understand indicators, business actors need time to observe and test, which demands stable connections and devices capable of running multiple applications. In a normative framework, evaluation ability is part of professional competence. If this competence can only be built by youth with certain means, then professionalism becomes a privilege. Consequently, a digital market that appears meritocratic actually prioritizes those who have access to the means of learning and experimentation. This demonstrates how digital inequality regulates opportunity through the mechanism of knowledge.

Information asymmetry also arises between small business actors and supporting service providers such as promotional agencies, design service providers, or sales intermediaries (Allen, 2018). Young business actors with low literacy easily become dependent on third parties without being able to assess the quality of the service. This dependency can reduce autonomy and divert a portion of the profits. Young business actors with high literacy can choose services selectively and negotiate reasonable terms. Within a normative framework, digital inequality produces an inequality of bargaining power in the supporting services market. When bargaining power is low, young entrepreneurs become vulnerable to subtle exploitation through hidden costs or one-sided contracts. This vulnerability reduces the opportunity for capital accumulation to expand the business. Therefore, opportunity inequality does not only arise from relationships with customers but also from relationships with the service ecosystem surrounding the platform. Digital entrepreneurship becomes an arena of complex power relations, where literacy serves as both a protector and capital.

Administrative obligations such as identity verification, tax management, and compliance with platform rules demand bureaucratic capabilities. Youths who understand the procedures can complete verification and run their businesses more securely (Parvin et al., 2019). Youths who are confused will delay, subsequently being hindered from accessing certain features. This delay lowers service quality and reduces promotional opportunities. Administrative procedures also require access to documents and an understanding of terminology. When youths come from environments with disorganized civil administration, the verification process can become complicated. Within a normative framework, procedures that appear neutral can produce inequality of outcomes if they do not consider variations in administrative capability. The digital market often regards verification as a safety standard, yet safety standards need to be accompanied by ease of access so as not to become an unfair filter. Thus, digital inequality is intertwined with administrative inequality, which affects who can fully utilize business features.

The digital work culture demands high time discipline and performance consistency (Allen, 2018). Business actors must be ready to respond to customers, organize content, and manage transactions almost every day. Youths who have a workspace and personal devices can build a stable routine. Youths who share devices, live in crowded spaces, or depend on public access will find it difficult to establish a routine. Difficulties in routine result in erratic upload schedules, slow service, and unmanaged stock. In a market that values consistency, an unstable routine means a decline in trust. Normatively, the demand for consistency cannot be separated from material requirements. When material requirements are uneven, the same demand transforms into a mechanism of exclusion. Because of this, the discussion of digital inequality needs to place routine as a social variable rather than a personal trait. Routine is shaped by living space, access to means, and economic security; thus, inequality of routine signifies inequality of opportunity.

The psychological dimension is also important because digital inequality often produces a sense of being left behind, a sense of inadequacy, and learning fatigue (Yu et al., 2018). Recurring failures due to technical disruptions can lower self-confidence, even though the root problem does not lie in ability. When youths blame themselves, they tend to withdraw

from learning spaces and community networks. This withdrawal reduces access to knowledge and support, thereby increasing the lag. Within a normative framework, the psychological burden is a part of the cost of digital inequality that is often overlooked. If policies and entrepreneurship programs only emphasize motivation, then such programs risk reinforcing stigma against youths who struggle. This discussion emphasizes that opportunity inequality occurs through the interaction between material requirements and subjective experience. When experience is shaped by recurring technical failures, youth lose the drive to attempt innovation. Consequently, digital inequality affects the creative capacity that is often praised as the strength of young entrepreneurs.

Gender relations and social norms can reinforce digital inequality among young entrepreneurs (Ughetto et al., 2020). Some youths face restrictions on device usage, mobility limitations in seeking access, or domestic workloads that consume their time. These restrictions reduce opportunities for learning and network building. In the digital space, time constraints directly impact service consistency. Furthermore, online spaces can give rise to risks of harassment or intimidation, which demand security literacy and social support. Youths who lack support will decrease their online activity or limit customer interaction, thereby causing transaction opportunities to decline. Normatively, equality of opportunity demands attention to how social norms regulate access and time. When norms require some youths to negotiate harder to be present in the digital space, the digital market cannot be considered neutral. Thus, digital inequality can become a channel for the reproduction of broader social inequalities, as technological access and the freedom to use technology are not always shared equally.

From a governance perspective, digital inequality is related to the way public institutions and service providers frame access as an individual matter (Bonney et al., 2008). If access is regarded as a personal choice, then business failure will be judged as a personal failure. In reality, infrastructure access and service quality often lie outside individual control. Within a normative framework, this framing is problematic because it shifts responsibility from the system providers to the vulnerable users. Fair governance requires recognition that digital entrepreneurship depends on public prerequisites such as networks, education, and consumer protection. When public

prerequisites are not met, the digital market produces unfair social selection. Additionally, non-transparent platform governance can magnify uncertainty. Uncertainty drives business actors to incur additional costs for promotion or third-party services, which again benefits those with capital. Thus, opportunity inequality is shaped by the relationship between public policy, platform policy, and user capacity.

Inequality in technological access, literacy, and infrastructure shapes young entrepreneurs' opportunities through a tiered filtering mechanism (Matli & Ngoepe, 2022). Filtering begins with the ability to maintain a stable presence, then evolves into the ability to build a reputation, manage transactions, maintain security, and adapt to changes. At every stage, technical and cognitive prerequisites function as gates that determine who advances and who is held back. When prerequisites are uneven, an initial gap transforms into a sustainability gap. Therefore, digital inequality is not merely a connectivity chasm but an opportunity structure attached to time, reputation, networks, and protection. Normatively, this leads to the conclusion that the digital market cannot be judged as fair simply because it is formally open. Justice of opportunity demands equality of prerequisites that allow youth to compete fairly. Without that, digital entrepreneurship will continue to produce a group that is visible and a group that is gradually marginalized.

Conclusion

Digital inequality for young entrepreneurs is formed through a combination of technological access, digital literacy, and infrastructure that structures differences in opportunity incrementally. Digital entrepreneurship demands a stable presence, rapid response, and the ability to manage security and platform procedures. When devices are inadequate, connections are unstable, and literacy is uneven, business actors experience recurring delays that lower service quality and damage opportunities to build a reputation. Such inequality does not stop at the entry stage but continues to affect the ability to survive and grow because online markets value consistency. Operational literacy, critical literacy, and security literacy function as cognitive capital that differentiates the power of recovery when account issues, transaction disputes, or changes in service rules occur. Consequently, digital entrepreneurship opportunities become tiered, with cumulative

advantages for those who possess the readiest prerequisites. Normatively, this situation shows that the openness of the digital market is conditional and can produce inequalities that are difficult to perceive.

Implications and suggestions emphasize the need for an equal opportunity framework that positions access and literacy as prerequisites for economic citizenship in the digital space. Entrepreneurship programs for youth need to be directed toward capacity building that touches upon operations, security, and information assessment, so that business actors are able to manage the risks inherent to platforms. Infrastructure policy needs to be understood as opportunity policy, as network quality determines work rhythm, service quality, and transaction reliability. Furthermore, platform governance requires principles of procedural transparency that facilitate account recovery and dispute resolution, especially for small business actors who lack technical support. The academic suggestion from this study is to clarify the categories of access inequality, literacy inequality, and utilization inequality so that the discussion does not simplify the problem as a matter of motivation. Practical suggestions point toward providing mentoring that builds safe, orderly, and consistent digital work habits, ensuring that opportunities are not determined by the privilege of means alone.

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