

# Linguistic Vitality of Igbo in Digital Business Communication



Davidson U. Mbagwu<sup>1</sup> & Ebele A. Nwafor<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*The observation that indigenous languages in Nigeria are much less functional in formal and digital domains is the key factor of this study. The Igbo language is one the major indigenous languages in Nigeria and by its status is expected to be functional in the digital space. By this consideration, this study examines how Igbo-speaking entrepreneurs in Enugu Metropolis use the Igbo language in online business communication and the issues that associate with this use. Semi-structured interviews have been used to obtain data from fifteen purposively selected Igbo-speaking digital entrepreneurs in the Holy Ghost business district of Enugu. The data are thematically analysed using the Linguistic Vitality Theory, which highlights the roles of institutional support, language status, and demographic strength in sustaining linguistic vitality. The findings indicate that the entrepreneurs use Igbo creatively to project authenticity, cultural pride, and brand identity, demonstrating strong symbolic vitality but weak functional and institutional reinforcement. Also, the language enhances customer loyalty, cultural connection, and brand differentiation; however, its broader adoption is constrained by limited digital infrastructure, declining youth proficiency, and sociolinguistic attitudes that place more prestigious English for wider market reach. The study recommends the development of inclusive digital language technologies, integration of Igbo digital literacy into entrepreneurship education, and strengthened institutional support to promote cultural sustainability and enhance the visibility of indigenous languages within Nigeria's digital economy.*

**Keywords:** Cultural Sustainability; Digital Entrepreneurship; Enugu Metropolis; Igbo Language; Indigenous Language; Linguistic Vitality Theory

\* Correspondence: (available on request)

<sup>1</sup> Department of Linguistics, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> Department of Linguistics, Foreign and Nigerian Languages, National Open University of Nigeria, Jabi, Abuja, Nigeria



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## Background

The declining use of indigenous languages in Nigeria's formal and digital spheres poses a major challenge to cultural sustainability and linguistic diversity. As digital technologies increasingly mediate social and economic life, the dominance of English in online communication has led to the marginalisation of indigenous languages such as Igbo, Yorùbá, and Hausa. In this emerging digital economy, language choice is not merely a communicative decision but a reflection of identity, accessibility, and power (Herring, 2013).

Across Nigeria, digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok have become vital tools for entrepreneurship, offering visibility and interaction with local and global audiences (Olanrewaju et al., 2023). Yet, while English dominates these platforms, indigenous languages remain underrepresented, limiting their potential to function as tools of commerce and cultural expression. The Igbo language, long associated with entrepreneurship and community-based trade networks (Nzeh, 2022), is experiencing a decline in its functional use in online business contexts. This shift reflects broader linguistic inequalities that privilege English as the language of professionalism and marketability, thereby diminishing the economic and symbolic value of Igbo in the digital marketplace.

Understanding how Igbo-speaking entrepreneurs navigate these linguistic dynamics is essential to appreciating the evolving relationship between language, identity, and digital enterprise. This study explores how the Igbo language is used in digital entrepreneurship within Enugu Metropolis, investigating its cultural and economic implications through the interpretive framework of Linguistic Vitality Theory (LVT) (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977), which identifies status, demographic strength, and institutional support as the key determinants of a language's sustainability.

Despite the rich entrepreneurial tradition of the Igbo people, the Igbo language remains marginalised in digital business communication. Many Igbo entrepreneurs prefer English for branding and marketing because it is perceived as more professional and commercially advantageous, this reinforces colonial language hierarchies that suppress indigenous linguistic expression and innovation in digital spaces. By this consideration, this study examines the use of the Igbo language in digital entrepreneurial communication within the Enugu metropolis trade landscape with a view to describing how Igbo-speaking entrepreneurs use the Igbo language in digital business communication; determining the cultural and economic implications of using the Igbo language in digital entrepreneurship; and identifying the challenges that hinder the effective use of Igbo in digital business contexts.

This study therefore offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it advances scholarship on digital multilingualism and indigenous language vitality by showing how Igbo-speaking entrepreneurs balance cultural identity with economic modernity in online spaces. Empirically, it highlights the cultural and commercial value of Igbo in digital business, demonstrating how language choice shapes customer trust, brand loyalty, and social identity. Practically, the study informs policy and technological innovation by underscoring the need to integrate indigenous languages into Nigeria's National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (NDEPS, 2020), promoting inclusive language technologies, institutional support, and youth participation for cultural sustainability and digital equity.

To situate the study in its domain, contributions to the decline of indigenous languages, growth of digital entrepreneurship, and how the dynamics of language use in commerce intersect have been attended to in the following sections. The evident views, findings and conclusions have applied to establish a conceptual foundation for examining the use of the Igbo language in the digital entrepreneurial communication practices of traders in Enugu Metropolis.

## Indigenous Language Endangerment and Digital Marginalisation

The global decline of indigenous languages has long been recognised as a major sociolinguistic concern, often linked to the hegemony of dominant world languages in key domains of power, economy, and education (Crystal, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). In Nigeria, scholars such as Bamgbose (1991) have noted that the decreasing use of indigenous languages, including Igbo, Yorùbá, and Hausa, particularly among younger generations, poses a significant threat to linguistic and cultural continuity.

Research in this area has traditionally focused on the diminishing use of indigenous languages within educational and governmental contexts (Emenanjo, 2015; Nzeh, 2022). The lack of institutional support and the perception that indigenous languages are unsuitable for modern, professional, and academic use have been identified as key drivers of this decline.

However, with the rise of digital technologies, a new dimension of language endangerment has emerged. The pervasive dominance of English across online spaces, social media platforms, search engines, and digital marketplaces, has entrenched its position as the language of global commerce and technological modernity (Herring, 2013). This dominance has given rise to what has been described as digital marginalisation, a phenomenon where indigenous languages are excluded from digital participation and innovation. As a result, the potential for languages such as Igbo to thrive as viable tools for economic and digital expression remains severely constrained. This study therefore seeks to move beyond the traditional educational focus to explore how this marginalisation manifests in digital entrepreneurial communication.

### **Digital Entrepreneurship and the Role of Language**

Digital entrepreneurship refers to the use of digital technologies to create, promote, and manage business ventures in an increasingly networked economy. In the Nigerian context, platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook have evolved into essential marketplaces, democratising access to customers and transforming traditional trading practices.

Existing studies on digital entrepreneurship in Nigeria have primarily explored technology adoption, e-commerce strategies, and the economic outcomes of online business innovation (Olanrewaju et al., 2023; Adegbite, 2020). While these studies highlight the economic potential of digital platforms, they tend to treat communication, and by extension, language choice; as a secondary concern. Yet, language plays a crucial role in defining brand identity, market access, and customer relationships.

Auer (2007) asserts that language functions not merely as a communicative instrument but also as a symbol of identity and a medium of trust-building. In digital business contexts, the linguistic choice between English and an indigenous language such as Igbo conveys specific social meanings to consumers. The use of English may project professionalism and global reach, while the use of Igbo may evoke cultural authenticity, familiarity, and local belonging. In localised digital marketplaces such as those in Enugu's Holy Ghost district, entrepreneurs who use Igbo in online communication can foster stronger emotional and cultural connections with customers. However, this practice remains underexplored within digital entrepreneurship scholarship, justifying the present study's focus on how Igbo functions in these emerging economic spaces.

### **The Igbo Language, Identity, and Commerce**

The Igbo people have long been recognised for their vibrant entrepreneurial spirit, which is deeply rooted in their cultural ethos and social organisation (Nzeh, 2022). The Igbo concept of *Aka ji ji*, signifying self-reliance and industriousness, encapsulates the cultural philosophy underpinning their business tradition. Historically, the Igbo language served as the primary medium of trade, contract negotiation, and market interaction, granting it both communicative and economic prestige within local commerce.

However, as commerce has shifted from traditional marketplaces to digital platforms, the dominance of English as the global lingua franca has exerted pressure on Igbo entrepreneurs to conform linguistically. Odo (2020) highlights how Igbo elites deliberately avoid using Igbo in professional and social contexts, reinforcing perceptions of its inadequacy for formal communication. Similarly, Atowa & Udemmadu (2023) observe that English is widely regarded as the language of modernity and global competitiveness, particularly in the era of digital entrepreneurship. In a related perspective, Edet, et al (2021) discuss how linguistic preferences in business communication reflect broader socio-economic aspirations tied to English as a marker of credibility and status.

### **Linguistic Vitality Theory (LVT)**

The principles of LVT proposed by Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) have been adopted to serve as the framework of this study. They account for understanding the factors that determine a language group's ability to maintain its existence and function within society. Particularly, it proposes that the vitality of a language depends on three interrelated factors: status, demography, and institutional support.

The status component relates to the perceived social, economic, and cultural prestige of a language within and beyond its community. In the context of digital entrepreneurship, this pertains to whether Igbo is regarded as a language capable of achieving professional and commercial success; what can be termed symbolic vitality.

The demographic factor concerns the number and distribution of speakers, as well as intergenerational language transmission. The declining proficiency among young Igbo speakers and the relatively limited Igbo-speaking digital consumer base pose significant demographic challenges to the language's vitality.

The third component, institutional support, refers to the extent to which a language is sustained by societal structures, including government policies, media representation, education, and digital infrastructure. The scarcity of Igbo-inclusive technologies, such as standardised orthography tools or localised digital interfaces (Herring, 2013), underscores a critical weakness in this dimension.

By applying LVT, this study moves beyond descriptive analysis to examine the underlying socio-economic and technological forces that either strengthen or weaken the use of Igbo in digital entrepreneurial contexts. It considers how symbolic, functional, and institutional vitality interact to determine the language's survival and adaptation within the digital marketplace. While existing research has largely applied LVT to traditional or educational domains, this study extends its application to the digital entrepreneurial landscape, thereby offering new insights into how indigenous languages can be repositioned as viable assets in the evolving digital economy.

### Methodology

As noted, this study examines how Igbo-speaking digital entrepreneurs in Enugu Metropolis use the Igbo language in digital business environments. The population of the study therefore comprises Igbo-speaking digital entrepreneurs operating within the Holy Ghost business district. A purposive sampling technique is used to select 15 entrepreneurs based on their active use of digital platforms, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, for business communication. Semi-structured interviews have been administered to the entrepreneurs. In addition, their social media advertisement fliers and posts are collected to verify their responses to the interview questions. The interview responses and social media flier and post texts serve as the data for the study. The data have been analysed thematically. Codes are drawn from recurring linguistic and communicative patterns in the interview transcripts, social media texts, and fliers. Emerging themes were interpreted by the application of the principles of LVT.

Of course, to protect the interest of the participants, their consent is obtained before the interviews and confidentiality is ensured by the use of their pseudonyms in the transcription and analysis of the data. The section below presents and analyses the data according to the thematic the targeted thematic categories.

### Demographic and Contextual Profile of Participants

The demographic characteristics of the participants are summarised to provide background information on the respondents. The data show variations in gender, age, years of business experience, business categories, and digital platform utilisation, offering a comprehensive context for understanding how Igbo-speaking entrepreneurs engage in digital business communication.

**Table 1: Demographic and Contextual Profile of Participants**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Category/Examples</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Male	7	46.7
		8	53.3
<i>Age Range (years)</i>	Female		
	26-30	4	26.7
	31-35	5	33.3
	36-40	4	26.7
	41-45	2	13.3
<i>Years in Business</i>	2-4 years	6	40.0
	5-7 years	5	33.3
	8-10 years	4	26.7

The demographic composition reveals a balanced gender distribution, with slightly more female entrepreneurs (53.3%) than male (46.7%), indicating the growing participation of women in the digital economy within Enugu Metropolis. Most participants were aged between 31 and 35 years (33.3%), followed by those within 26-30 and 36-

40 years (26.7% each), suggesting that young and mid-career adults dominate digital entrepreneurship. This age distribution aligns with the population most comfortable with technology-driven business practices.

Regarding business experience, 40% of participants had been operating for 2–4 years, 33.3% for 5–7 years, and 26.7% for 8–10 years. This reflects a mix of emerging and established entrepreneurs whose linguistic choices and digital practices provide valuable insights into the vitality of Igbo in online business communication. The overall profile suggests a young, gender-inclusive, and digitally engaged entrepreneurial community; well positioned to influence the visibility and sustainability of indigenous language use within Nigeria's expanding digital economy.

### Social Media Profile and Igbo Advert Content of the entrepreneurs

Table 2: Social Media Profile and Advert Content of the Entrepreneurs

No	Type of Entrepreneur	Business Name	Platform	Advert Text / Flier Content
1	Fashion/Beauty	Ify Fashion	Facebook, Instagram	<i>I choro ima mma? Bja n'ụlọ ahịa anyị!</i> ("Do you want to look beautiful? Come to our shop!")
2	Cultural product	Godsgiftbeads	Instagram, Facebook	<i>Omenala gị bụ maa gị!</i> ("Your culture is your beauty!")
3	Food Services	Lolo's Kitchen	WhatsApp, Instagram	<i>Rie nri Igbo dị ụtọ taa!</i> ("Enjoy delicious Igbo dishes today!")
4	Electronics	Obinna Electronics	Facebook, Tiktok	<i>Ngwa zụta ngwaọrụ gị ugbu a na ọnụ ahịa dị ọnụ ala!</i> ("Buy your gadget now at affordable prices!")
5	Event Planning	Ada Events	Instagram, Tiktok	<i>Anyị na-eme ka emume gị bụrụ ọ pụrụ iche!</i> ("We make your celebration truly special!")
6	Cultural Products	Lachy Couture	WhatsApp, Facebook	<i>Bia zụrụ akwa agbamnkwy gị, ka i bụrụ eleelbe ejeghị ọrụ!</i> ("Buy your traditional Igbo fabrics and stand out for your special occasions!")
7	Digital Content Creation	Chuka Media	YouTube, TikTok	<i>Kpọọ anyị maka vidio Igbo nke na-akuziri na na-eme ka mmadụ nwee ọchị!</i> ("Call us for Igbo videos that educate and entertain!")
8	Food Services	Amy Special Abacha	Facebook, Instagram	<i>Abacha Amy bụ ericha amicha aka!</i> ("Abach Amy is the sweetest!")
9	Educational Services	EziNaụlọ	YouTube, Facebook	<i>Mụta asụsụ Igbo n'ụzọ dị mfe kwa izu!</i> ("Learn the Igbo language easily every week!")
10	Baby/Children's Products	Somandy_Kiddes	Instagram, WhatsApp	<i>Ihe niile ụmụaka gị chọrọ dị ebe a!</i> ("Everything your children need is right here!")
11	Digital Content Creation	Eze Culture TV	YouTube, Facebook	<i>Anyị jị akụkọ omenala Igbo to tell life story!</i> ("We use Igbo culture to narrate real-life stories!")
12	Fashion/Beauty	Kamsi Makeover	Facebook, TikTok	<i>Mee ka ihu gị maa mma dịka eze nwanyị!</i> ("Make your face glow like a queen!")
13	Event Planning	Eziafakaego Events	Instagram, WhatsApp	<i>Anyị na-eme ihe ngosi tradition nke na-echeta ọdịnalala!</i> ("We organise cultural shows that preserve tradition!")
14	Educational Services	Mandy_Kiddies	Facebook, YouTube	<i>Ihe niile ụmụ gị chọrọ maka mbido akwụkwọ ha di ebe a!</i> (Everything your kids need for their school are

15	Food Services	Chisom Snacks	WhatsApp, TikTok	in our shop) <i>Achjcha di ọhụrụ ma dikwa ụtọ!</i> ("Fresh and sweet pastries!")
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Table 2 reveals that Igbo-speaking entrepreneurs creatively use the Igbo language across diverse business sectors to promote products, services, and brand identity on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube. They use short, persuasive Igbo phrases that combine cultural pride and emotional appeal. For instance, "*I choro ima mma? Bja n'ụlọ ahịa anyị!*" ("Do you want to look beautiful? Come to our shop!") promote trust and connection, while "*Omenala gị bụ mma gị!*" ("Your culture is your beauty!") highlights cultural authenticity.

Food vendors use Igbo expressions like "*Rie nri Igbo dị ụtọ taa!*" ("Enjoy delicious Igbo dishes today!") to evoke nostalgia and tradition, whereas educational and digital content creators employ Igbo to promote learning and storytelling, reinforcing language revitalisation. Similarly, event planners and children's product sellers use Igbo to convey warmth, community, and cultural continuity.

### Cultural and Economic Implications of the Use of Igbo Language in Digital Entrepreneurship

**Table 3: Thematic Summary of Cultural and Economic Implications of Using the Igbo Language in Digital Entrepreneurship**

Main Theme	Subtheme	Participant(s)	Supporting Excerpt
<b>Cultural Implications</b>	Cultural identity and pride	P2, P6, P11	"Advertising in Igbo shows customers that I value who I am and where I come from."
	Linguistic activism and preservation	P4, P9, P13	"Using Igbo on my business page is my way of fighting for our language; if we stop using it, it dies."
	Emotional and social connection	P3, P5, P14	"When I greet buyers with <i>nnoo</i> or <i>dalụ</i> , they feel respected and reply happily."
	Cultural authenticity and community belonging	P1, P7	"Customers say they trust me more because my brand sounds local and real."
	Intergenerational transmission and pride	P8, P10	"My children help me post in Igbo, and they are learning too, it keeps the language alive."
<b>Economic Implications</b>	Brand differentiation and authenticity	P6, P12, P15	"People remember my business because of its Igbo name; it makes me stand out."
	Cultural loyalty and consumer trust	P4, P5, P11	"Igbo-speaking customers prefer to buy from me because it feels like supporting their own."
	Market reach constraints	P2, P9, P14	"Some buyers skip my posts because they can't read Igbo; I lose them to English sellers."
	Code-mixing for commercial viability	P1, P7, P13	"I now mix Igbo and English so that I don't lose either local or outside customers."
	Economic empowerment and niche marketing	P8, P10, P15	"My Igbo brand attracts diaspora clients who want to connect with home through language."

Table 3 presents the thematic summary of the cultural and economic implications of using the Igbo language in digital entrepreneurship as reported by the fifteen participants. The findings reveal that the use of Igbo extends beyond mere linguistic preference to embody deeper cultural, emotional, and economic dimensions that shape entrepreneurial identity and practice in digital spaces.

Culturally, participants emphasised that incorporating Igbo into their business communication promotes cultural identity, authenticity, and pride. For many, advertising or posting in Igbo is a deliberate expression of belonging and an act of linguistic activism aimed at countering the dominance of English in Nigeria's digital economy. The use of indigenous greetings and expressions such as "*nnoo*" (welcome) and "*dalụ*" (thank you) was described as fostering emotional and social connection with customers, thereby humanising online transactions and reinforcing community ties. This sense of cultural belonging not only strengthens individual identity but also contributes to the

intergenerational transmission of language, as some participants reported that their children assist in composing Igbo posts, thereby learning the language in the process.

Economically, the findings indicate that Igbo language use enhances brand differentiation, customer loyalty, and market authenticity. Entrepreneurs reported that Igbo-based branding creates distinctiveness and trust, attracting culturally aligned consumers who value supporting local or indigenous businesses. However, participants also recognised practical limitations. The challenge of market reach constraints was frequently mentioned, with some noting that exclusive use of Igbo reduces engagement among non-Igbo speakers. Consequently, many adopt code-mixing strategies, blending Igbo and English, to maintain both cultural authenticity and broader commercial appeal. Interestingly, a few entrepreneurs noted that their use of Igbo attracted diaspora clients, highlighting the potential of indigenous language marketing to generate economic empowerment through niche markets.

### Challenges Hindering Effective Use of Igbo in Digital Contexts

**Table 4: Challenges Hindering Effective Use of Igbo in Digital Contexts**

<i>Emerging Theme</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Participant Illustrations</i>
<i>Technical Limitations</i>	Limited digital and keyboard support for Igbo orthography, including tones and diacritics.	"Phones don't support Igbo letters easily; I just write it like English." (P3) "Most apps don't recognise our tone marks, so typing becomes stressful." (P11)
<i>Reduced Youth Proficiency</i>	Younger consumers display declining fluency and interest in Igbo, viewing it as less fashionable for online business.	"Young buyers prefer English; they laugh if the post is fully in Igbo." (P7) "Many youths can't even read long Igbo texts; they scroll past." (P9)
<i>Market Reach Constraint</i>	Entrepreneurs believe using Igbo limits national and international reach, affecting sales and engagement.	"I switch to English to sell more; Igbo attracts mainly locals." (P5) "My followers reduce when I post only in Igbo." (P14)
<i>Digital Platform Bias</i>	Some social media algorithms and ad tools fail to process Igbo accurately, reducing visibility and engagement.	"My sponsored posts in Igbo don't get approved sometimes." (P10) "The system doesn't recognise Igbo words for search or hashtags." (P12)
<i>Sociolinguistic Attitudes</i>	Igbo is often perceived as informal or less professional compared to English in business communication.	"Clients think you're not serious if your page is fully in Igbo." (P2) "English still gives that sense of class or standard." (P8)
<i>Inconsistent Spelling and Literacy Levels</i>	Lack of standardised spelling online leads to inconsistency and confusion among readers	"Everyone writes Igbo their own way; there's no uniform spelling." (P6) "Sometimes customers correct my Igbo, and I feel embarrassed." (P15)

Table 4 presents the multifaceted challenges confronting the use of the Igbo language in digital entrepreneurship as identified by the fifteen participants. The findings reveal that both technological and sociolinguistic barriers hinder the consistent and effective use of Igbo in online business communication.

Technically, entrepreneurs expressed frustration over the lack of system compatibility with Igbo orthography, particularly the inability to display tones and diacritics on most mobile devices and digital platforms. This limitation reduces linguistic accuracy and discourages entrepreneurs from writing in Igbo consistently.

Socially, reduced proficiency among younger audiences was a recurring concern, with several participants noting that many young consumers neither understand nor appreciate Igbo in professional settings. This reflects the language shift observed in urban areas, where English dominates digital discourse.

Economically, participants believed that using Igbo restricts their market reach, compelling them to alternate between Igbo and English for commercial viability. This aligns with a broader linguistic economy perspective, where language choice is guided by market returns rather than cultural loyalty.

Further, algorithmic bias and sociolinguistic attitudes reinforced English as the dominant “business language,” marginalising Igbo visibility in digital spaces. The result is a tension between cultural authenticity and commercial pragmatism, suggesting that effective language revitalisation in entrepreneurship requires both technological inclusion and attitudinal change.

### Discussion of Findings

By the foregoing, it has been determined that Igbo entrepreneurs use their language strategically to project authenticity, pride, and cultural belonging. Phrases such as “*Omenala gi bu mma gi*” (“Your culture is your beauty”) illustrate how Igbo functions as a marker of cultural identity and brand differentiation. This reflects strong symbolic vitality, where the language retains emotional and identity-based significance.

However, its instrumental vitality remains limited. Many entrepreneurs revert to English for broader visibility and professionalism, suggesting that Igbo is valued culturally but not fully accepted as a language of commerce. This tension represents a diglossic relationship between Igbo and English, where Igbo conveys heritage and emotional depth, while English dominates transactional and promotional spaces in the digital economy.

Of course, the demographic data prove that most participants are young adults (26–35 years), indicating that digital entrepreneurship is an emerging domain for Igbo usage. Nevertheless, reduced fluency and negative youth attitudes, such as perceiving Igbo as unfashionable, signal weakening intergenerational transmission. This reflects declining demographic vitality, as younger users display limited proficiency and interest in the language.

Despite this, some entrepreneurs attempt revitalisation at the household level. Participants who engage their children in composing Igbo posts demonstrate small-scale efforts toward family-based language maintenance. These informal practices strengthen linguistic continuity, showing that digital entrepreneurship can serve as a platform for reinforcing Igbo use and visibility among younger generations.

Moreover, the study reveals low institutional vitality due to inadequate digital infrastructure for Igbo orthography. Participants reported difficulty typing tones and diacritics, limited recognition of Igbo by algorithms, and frequent rejection of sponsored posts written in Igbo. These issues reflect the absence of institutional investment in the digital inclusion of indigenous languages.

Entrepreneurs thus resort to code-mixing, combining Igbo and English, to overcome platform limitations and maintain communicative reach. While this strategy enhances accessibility, it also signals that Igbo remains technologically marginalised. Without structural support from social media companies and language technology developers, Igbo risks remaining symbolically visible but functionally constrained in digital communication.

The importance of societal attitudes in shaping language vitality. The study found that many entrepreneurs perceive Igbo as “less professional” or “less marketable,” with clients often associating English with prestige and competence. Such attitudes reveal an internalised language hierarchy that perpetuates the dominance of English in business contexts.

Nevertheless, some entrepreneurs consciously resist these ideologies, using Igbo intentionally as an act of linguistic activism and cultural resistance. By advertising and engaging customers in Igbo, they promote positive ethnolinguistic consciousness and reclaim digital spaces for indigenous expression. This indicates a growing movement toward cultural empowerment and revaluation of Igbo identity within online business ecosystems.

A key finding of the study is the entrepreneurs’ negotiation between maintaining cultural integrity and achieving commercial success. Here, we see the adoption of strategic code-mixing to appeal to both Igbo-speaking and non-

Igbo audiences. While this compromises linguistic purity, it enhances communicative and economic viability. Within the LVT framework, this represents a form of adaptive bilingual vitality, where linguistic flexibility sustains the language's relevance in hybrid digital environments.

Lastly and very encouraging is the attraction of diaspora clients who appreciate Igbo branding. This therefore demonstrates how digital business can generate transnational linguistic vitality. This connection between language, identity, and commerce shows that digital entrepreneurship can revitalise indigenous languages beyond their immediate geographical and cultural boundaries.

## Conclusion

In this study, the dimensions and implications of the use of Igbo by some Igbo entrepreneurs in Enugu Metropolis have been examined, applying the principles LVT, proposed by Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor (1977). There is the evidence that while the Igbo language retains significant symbolic vitality as a marker of cultural pride, authenticity, and identity, its vitality within digital commerce remains limited due to sociolinguistic, technological, and institutional constraints.

The use of Igbo by entrepreneurs reflects a strong desire to affirm cultural belonging and differentiate their brands within Nigeria's increasingly globalised digital marketplace. However, persistent challenges, such as reduced youth proficiency, negative attitudes towards indigenous language use, and inadequate digital infrastructure, undermine its wider functionality in online business contexts. These factors enforce the reality in which English continues to dominate as the language of commerce and prestige, while Igbo operates primarily as a cultural and emotional symbol. Despite these limitations, the signs of resilience and adaptation have emerged. In other words, through bilingual communication, cultural branding, and family-based language use, some entrepreneurs are fostering new domains of Igbo visibility and transmission. Such practices signify the potential of digital entrepreneurship as a platform for linguistic revitalisation and cultural sustainability.

Considering the foregoing, it has become pertinent to move for the enhancement of linguistic application in digital communication in Igbo by encouraging and training the entrepreneurs to employ the language creatively across online platforms. Workshops and digital literacy programmes focusing on culturally expressive and commercially effective Igbo communication can promote consistency, professionalism, and visibility in digital spaces, and promote entrepreneurs' ability to integrate Igbo meaningfully into branding, advertising, and customer engagement. Furthermore, there is the need to promote cultural and economic empowerment through the use of Igbo. This could best be driven by government agencies and cultural organisations. With this, Igbo would be positioned as both a cultural asset and an economic tool. However, this would be difficult to come by if the challenge of digital inclusion and institutional support is not addressed. Of course, to overcome technological and systemic barriers such as have been determined, policymakers and digital technology developers should prioritise the integration of Igbo orthography and tone marks into digital tools, including keyboards, search algorithms, and advertising systems. More importantly, bilingual marketing campaigns, Igbo-language e-commerce platforms, and diaspora collaborations must be pursued to create cultural value and economic opportunities, and reinforce cultural pride while demonstrating the profitability and market relevance of indigenous language use in entrepreneurship.

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