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# Women, WhatsApp, and Work: Digital Literacy in South-Western Nigeria's Informal Economy

**Emilomo Joy Alawode**

*University of Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain*

## **Abstract**

My study shows how women in South-Western Nigeria use WhatsApp to run small businesses in ways that support the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals on poverty reduction, gender equality, decent work, and innovation. It further shows how women display products, manage purchases, and organise deliveries through WhatsApp, forming a digital labour system shaped by their level of digital literacy, cultural expectations, and economic needs. With more than 90 million users in Nigeria (Statista, 2025), WhatsApp's low cost, simple design, and wide availability make it especially useful for women who do not have access to formal work or more complex platforms (Donner, 2015). Although research on digital entrepreneurship often focuses on larger platforms such as Facebook and Instagram (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020), few studies examine WhatsApp as a business space, leaving gaps in understanding how digital literacy affects women's success (Johns et al., 2023). Guided by a sociotechnical perspective (Sawyer & Tyworth, 2006), my study draws on Platform Studies (Gillespie, 2021) and Digital Literacy Theory (Reddy et al., 2023) to explain how WhatsApp's structure and users' skills interact. Using netnography (Kozinets, 2019) and purposive sampling (Campbell et al., 2020), observations and interviews with women in WhatsApp business groups of 100-400 participants show how their digital practices support small-scale trade and reshape everyday economic activities, thereby empowering themselves. This study contributes to current knowledge by showing how everyday digital literacy practices expand women's economic agency within platform economies that remain underexamined in the African context.

**Keywords:** Culture; Empowerment; Labour; Netnography; Platform