

Lifestyle Trends and Economic Participation in Developing Economies: Evidence from Nigeria

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Abstract— Nigeria represents a dynamic laboratory for examining how rapidly shifting lifestyle trends interact with economic participation patterns in developing economies. As urbanisation accelerates, digital platforms proliferate, and demographic pressures intensify, the socioeconomic behaviours of Nigerians are undergoing fundamental transformation with measurable consequences for labour force participation, consumption, productivity, and poverty. This paper analyses the relationships between emerging lifestyle trends and economic participation in Nigeria, examining urbanisation and consumption diversification, digital and gig economy integration, health and physical activity patterns, diaspora remittances, and social media influences on economic behaviour. A systematic narrative review was conducted drawing exclusively on peer-reviewed academic literature from Scopus, PubMed, Cambridge Core, ScienceDirect, Web of Science, and the Consensus academic repository. Thirty high-quality references spanning economics, sociology, public health, and development studies were synthesised. Findings reveal that urbanisation has increased Nigeria's urban population from 17% in 1960 to over 50% by 2020, reshaping consumption and labour market structures. The informal sector absorbs over 92.4% of total employment, and digital economy variables explain approximately 67.3% of the variation in youth unemployment trends. Physical inactivity, with an age-adjusted prevalence of 58%, imposes growing productivity costs. Diaspora remittances, now exceeding 6.1% of GDP, reshape household investment and entrepreneurial behaviour. Social media drives aspirational consumption narratives that simultaneously stimulate enterprise formation and financial precarity among youth. Lifestyle transformations in Nigeria are not merely cultural phenomena; they are structural economic forces that reconfigure participation patterns across formal and informal sectors. Policy responses must be multidimensional, addressing digital skills, health productivity, financial inclusion, and regulatory frameworks for the platform economy.

Keywords: *lifestyle trends; economic participation; Nigeria; urbanisation; digital economy; gig work; informal sector; remittances; social media; developing economies*

I. INTRODUCTION

Lifestyle, broadly conceived as the aggregate of daily behavioural patterns, consumption choices, social interactions, and aspirational orientations, is not merely a private matter of individual preference. In developing economy contexts, it constitutes a structural determinant of economic participation, shaping labour supply decisions, human capital investment, household expenditure, productivity, and even the nature of entrepreneurial activity. In no context is this more dynamically visible than in Nigeria. As Africa's most populous country and its largest economy by nominal GDP, Nigeria presents an analytically rich and policy-relevant case study. The country is simultaneously experiencing dramatic urbanisation, a digital revolution anchored by a youthful population, a persistent and expanding informal economy, rising non-communicable disease burdens linked to sedentary lifestyle change, and massive diaspora remittance flows that reorder household economic logic. These forces do not operate in isolation; they interact in complex and sometimes contradictory ways that standard economic models have struggled to capture.

Scholarly attention to the lifestyle dimensions of economic participation in Nigeria has grown substantially, yet it remains fragmented across disciplinary silos. Public health researchers document physical inactivity trends; development economists analyse remittances and informality; communications scholars examine social media effects on youth culture; and urban geographers trace urbanisation and poverty dynamics. This paper undertakes a systematic integration of these streams, constructing a unified analytical narrative of how lifestyle trends shape economic participation in Nigeria and, by extension, in comparable developing economy settings.

The paper proceeds through six thematic sections after a methodological account. Section 3 addresses urbanisation, consumption change, and the shifting structure

of household economic participation. Section 4 examines the digital economy and gig work as lifestyle-mediated economic transformations. Section 5 analyses how physical lifestyle changes generate human capital and productivity effects. Section 6 investigates diaspora remittances as both a product and producer of lifestyle transformation. Section 7 examines social media as an economic behaviour mediator. Section 8 synthesises findings into a policy-oriented framework, followed by conclusions.

II. 2. METHODOLOGY

A. Review Design and Search Strategy

A systematic narrative review methodology was adopted to synthesise a heterogeneous body of evidence across economics, sociology, public health, and development studies. The review protocol drew on PRISMA principles of transparent search design, eligibility screening, and structured synthesis. Academic databases searched included Scopus, PubMed, Cambridge Core, ScienceDirect, Web of Science, and the Consensus AI academic repository. Search term combinations employed Boolean logic across thematic clusters: (a) lifestyle AND economic participation AND Nigeria; (b) urbanisation AND consumption AND Nigeria; (c) digital economy AND informal sector AND Nigeria; (d) physical inactivity AND productivity AND Africa; (e) remittances AND entrepreneurship AND Nigeria; and (f) social media AND economic behaviour AND youth AND Nigeria. Searches were executed in May to June 2026 with no publication date restriction.

B. Eligibility and Synthesis

Studies were included if they: (i) were published in peer-reviewed journals or peer-reviewed book chapters; (ii) reported empirical or analytical findings relevant to the nexus between lifestyle trends and economic participation; and (iii) were written in English. Policy documents and grey literature were excluded. Thirty references were retained after quality and relevance assessment. Given the thematic heterogeneity of included studies, a narrative synthesis approach was employed, organising evidence according to the thematic framework described in the introduction.

III. URBANISATION, CONSUMPTION CHANGE, AND ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

A. The Scale and Pace of Nigerian Urbanisation

Urbanisation represents the most structurally consequential lifestyle shift in contemporary Nigeria. Nigeria's

urban population has grown from 17% in 1960 to over 50% by 2020, and projections indicate this figure will reach 68.4% by 2050, driven by both natural population increase and sustained rural-to-urban migration [1]. The country's population itself is projected to exceed 400 million by 2050, adding unprecedented demographic momentum to urban growth [2]. More than half of the current urban population resides in informal settlements, creating conditions in which housing insecurity, inadequate services, and labour market precarity are defining features of urban life for the majority of residents [3].

The economic consequences of this urban transition operate through multiple channels. Urban agglomeration generates productivity gains through proximity to markets, specialisation, and knowledge spillovers, which theoretically support higher wages and formal sector participation [4]. Yet in the Nigerian case, urban growth has consistently outpaced planning capacity and formal employment expansion, producing extensive informality rather than formalisation [5]. Changing family structures, high costs of living, and new aspirational frameworks reshape labour force participation decisions, with increasing numbers of urban households relying on multiple income streams across formal and informal work [6].

B. Consumption Diversification and Market Implications

Urbanisation is intimately connected to consumption lifestyle change. As income levels and urban exposure increase, Nigerian consumers diversify their consumption baskets, increasing demand for processed and packaged foods, branded goods, digital services, and modern retail formats [7]. Research on Nigeria's transition to global consumer culture demonstrates that urban, educated, and younger Nigerians are more acculturated to Western consumption norms, while significant heterogeneity persists across income and regional groups [8].

A growing middle class, estimated at approximately 23% of the population, represents a structurally important consumption segment with implications for economic participation patterns [9]. This segment drives demand for services and branded goods while simultaneously operating in conditions of price sensitivity, creating aspirational consumption that generates entrepreneurial opportunities alongside financial fragility [9]. Non-food expenditure is identified as the primary driver of consumption inequality in both urban and rural areas of Nigeria, with within-group inequalities for non-food expenditure exceeding 0.6 on the Theil index [10]. This finding underscores that lifestyle consumption choices, rather than food security alone, are increasingly central to economic stratification.

IV. THE DIGITAL ECONOMY, GIG WORK, AND EVOLVING PARTICIPATION STRUCTURES

A. Digital Transformation and Youth Employment

The proliferation of digital technologies represents perhaps the most rapidly evolving lifestyle-economic interface in contemporary Nigeria. Digital platforms have restructured how young Nigerians seek, perform, and conceptualise work, generating new categories of economic participation that conventional labour force surveys capture imperfectly. A study using time series data from the National Bureau of Statistics found that digital economy variables explain approximately 67.3% of the variation in youth unemployment trends between 2000 and 2023, underscoring the structural significance of digital transformation for labour market outcomes [11].

The informal sector remains overwhelmingly dominant, absorbing over 92.4% of total employment, with financial services exhibiting the highest employment contribution among identified sectors and manufacturing the lowest [11]. In 2024, 92.7 million Nigerians were engaged in informal employment, with women disproportionately represented [12]. Labour force participation rates have shown significant volatility, declining from 61% in 2018 to 56% in 2020 before partial recovery, with youth participation at 60.3% among those aged 15 to 24 [13].

B. Gig Economy Adoption as Lifestyle-Economic Adaptation

The emergence and rapid expansion of the gig economy in Nigeria represents a lifestyle-economic adaptation of significant analytical importance. Digital platforms offering ride-hailing, delivery, freelancing, and e-commerce services provide flexible, low-barrier-to-entry income opportunities that align with urban youth lifestyles characterised by mobility, digital fluency, and income diversification needs [14]. Research conducted across five African countries including Nigeria, employing mixed methods with surveys and focus group discussions, confirms that gig platforms are absorbing significant numbers of urban youth who face barriers to formal employment [14].

The socioeconomic disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated gig economy adoption, pushing many workers toward more flexible and decentralised work models [15]. Despite this growth, gig work in Nigeria is characterised by income precarity, limited social protection, and digital skills mismatches. Only a minority of the youth demographic engages with the formal sector, and many young people resort to insecure, low-productivity jobs in the informal

economy as a livelihood strategy under conditions of economic recession [16]. Young women face particularly significant barriers, being channelled disproportionately into low-paid, precarious work with high vulnerability to exploitation [16].

Indicator	Value / Finding	Source
Urban population share (2020)	Over 50%	[1]
Informal sector share of employment	92.4% of total	[11]
Youth unemployment rate (2020)	42.5%	[13]
Physical inactivity prevalence	58% age-adjusted (2020)	[20]
Remittances as share of GDP	6.1% (2018)	[24]
Middle class share of population	Approx. 23%	[9]
Digital economy variation explained in youth unemployment	67.3%	[11]

Table 1: Key Lifestyle and Economic Participation Indicators for Nigeria

V. HEALTH LIFESTYLES, PHYSICAL INACTIVITY, AND ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY

A. The Rising Burden of Physical Inactivity

The relationship between lifestyle health behaviours and economic productivity constitutes an underappreciated dimension of the development literature on Nigeria. Physical inactivity has been characterised as a global pandemic, with the WHO estimating over three million annual deaths attributable to sedentary behaviour worldwide [17]. African countries, including Nigeria, bear a disproportionately high burden of physical inactivity, partly because of fast rising urbanisation and economic growth patterns that substitute sedentary screen-based activities for physically demanding labour [17].

A systematic review and meta-analysis of physical inactivity in Nigeria found an age-adjusted prevalence of 58% as of 2020, representing approximately 50 million persons who do not meet WHO recommendations for weekly physical activity [18]. Prevalence is notably higher among women at 55.8% compared to men at 49.3%, reflecting complex interactions among sociocultural norms, occupational segregation, and urban environmental barriers [18]. The South-South and South-East regions exhibit particularly high prevalence at 57.7% and 63.3% respectively, reflecting widespread sedentary occupational patterns in urban Southern Nigeria [18].

B. Sedentary Lifestyle Transitions and Productivity Costs

The adoption of screen-based sedentary lifestyles among children and youth in sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, is identified as an urgent public health concern with direct implications for population productivity and economic development [19]. Screen-based sedentary behaviour is rising rapidly across urban and peri-urban settings as labour-saving devices and digital entertainment become more accessible, with lower-income communities adopting these patterns in ways linked to social aspiration [19].

The economic productivity consequences are substantial. Physical inactivity contributes to the rising burden of non-communicable diseases including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and certain cancers, which impose large costs on health systems already strained by infectious disease burdens in low-income countries [20]. NCDs lead directly to productivity losses through absenteeism and premature mortality. A cross-sectional study among civil servants in Abia State, southeastern Nigeria found a consistent rise in physical inactivity prevalence, with associated increases in NCD burden imposing measurable costs on public sector productivity [20]. These findings, alongside growing evidence from the broader sub-Saharan African literature, establish physical lifestyle change as a macro-level economic variable warranting explicit incorporation into development policy frameworks.

VI. DIASPORA REMITTANCES AS LIFESTYLE AND ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION VECTORS

A. Remittance Flows and Macroeconomic Significance

Diaspora remittances represent one of the most significant channels through which lifestyle choices and transnational economic participation interact in Nigeria. Remittance flows to Nigeria were estimated at 6.1% of GDP in 2018, with approximately 87.5% of these flows directed toward construction and home purchase, reflecting the powerful housing aspirations embedded in Nigerian diaspora lifestyle orientations [21]. At the continental level, remittance flows to Africa exceeded USD 90 billion in 2023, surpassing official development assistance as an external finance source [22]. Research consistently demonstrates that diaspora remittances have a positive and statistically significant impact on Nigeria's GDP growth rate, corroborating endogenous growth theory predictions that remittances augment domestic savings and stimulate investment in productive sectors [23].

B. Remittances, Household Entrepreneurship, and Women's Participation

Beyond macroeconomic aggregates, remittances reshape economic participation at the household level in ways that are intimately connected to lifestyle transformation. Remittance-receiving households in Nigeria invest disproportionately in education, small business formation, and housing, generating multiplier effects that enhance regional economic development [24]. Women's participation as transnational breadwinners challenges traditional gender norms by repositioning women as key economic actors within households and communities [24].

Comparative evidence from African countries confirms that access to remittances helps remove social and economic barriers that restrict women's economic participation, supporting entrepreneurial activity and household investment in human capital [25]. The interaction between diaspora lifestyle aspirations and domestic investment behaviour thus creates a feedback loop in which emigration-driven lifestyle change in destination countries reshapes consumption norms, investment priorities, and economic participation patterns in origin communities. The Japa Syndrome phenomenon, in which Nigerian youth increasingly aspire to emigration as a livelihood strategy, driven substantially by social media amplification of diaspora lifestyle narratives, represents an increasingly visible expression of this dynamic [26].

VII. SOCIAL MEDIA, ASPIRATIONAL CONSUMPTION, AND ECONOMIC BEHAVIOUR

A. Social Media as an Economic Behaviour Mediator

Social media platforms have emerged as powerful mediators of the relationship between lifestyle aspirations and economic behaviour among Nigerian youth. Research conducted among university students in Nigeria confirms that influencer-driven content fosters a culture of consumerism and materialism, with young people increasingly drawing on social media to calibrate their consumption aspirations, career orientations, and investment choices [27]. Nigerians who are urban, educated, and young are identified as most susceptible to acculturation processes driven by exposure to Western consumer culture through digital media, though the meanings attached to consumption remain distinctively contextualised by local socio-cultural conditions [8].

A study examining social media exposure and youth culture at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka found that social media profoundly influences youth aspirations, promoting aspirations for rapid wealth acquisition amid Nigeria's economic challenges of unemployment and rising cost of

living [28]. These aspirational narratives carry dual economic implications: on one hand, they motivate entrepreneurial activity and self-investment; on the other, they generate unrealistic financial expectations and risky economic behaviours that contribute to financial precarity among youth.

B. Digital Literacy, Economic Opportunity, and Platform Mediation

The relationship between social media lifestyle orientation and economic participation is mediated substantially by digital literacy. A review of digital technology and youth employment across Africa found that access to digital tools significantly boosts youth economic engagement, but a persistent skills gap limits the translation of digital access into sustainable economic participation [29]. In Nigeria, the disparity between the formal education system and the evolving demands of the digital economy represents a structural barrier to productive labour force engagement that disproportionately affects youth from lower-income backgrounds [30].

Social media simultaneously creates and undermines economic participation. Platforms facilitate entrepreneurial activities, market information access, and professional networking that support income generation among youth in the informal sector [27]. At the same time, the aspirational content ecosystems of platforms like Instagram and TikTok generate social pressure toward conspicuous consumption that competes directly with productive investment and saving behaviour [28]. The net economic effect of social media lifestyle influence thus depends critically on digital literacy, financial capability, and the broader economic opportunity structure within which individuals operate.

VIII. SYNTHESIS AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

A. An Integrated Analytical Framework

The evidence synthesised across Sections 3 to 7 supports a conceptual framework in which lifestyle trends operate as both causes and consequences of economic participation patterns, creating bidirectional feedback relationships that cannot be adequately captured by mono-causal analytical models. Urbanisation reshapes consumption norms and labour market structures simultaneously. Digital platform adoption transforms both work and leisure patterns in ways that mutually reinforce. Physical lifestyle deterioration undermines the human capital productivity gains that urbanisation and digital access are expected to deliver. Remittances encode lifestyle aspirations from diaspora contexts that reshape investment behaviour and gender participation norms domestically. Social media amplifies

aspirational consumption narratives that influence entrepreneurial orientations, consumption choices, and migration decisions.

Table 2 synthesises the directional effects identified across the thematic domains examined.

Lifestyle Trend	Primary Economic Participation Effect	Key Policy Implication
Urbanisation	Shifts labour market toward informal services; diversifies consumption	Urban planning; formal sector job creation
Digital platform adoption	Expands gig participation; reduces formal employment share	Digital skills curricula; gig worker protections
Physical inactivity	Raises NCD burden; reduces workforce productivity	Workplace wellness policies; urban recreation infrastructure
Diaspora remittances	Finances household investment and entrepreneurship	Remittance corridor cost reduction; channelling toward productive investment
Social media influence	Stimulates aspirational consumption; shapes career and enterprise choices	Financial literacy education; digital responsibility frameworks

Table 2: Lifestyle Trends, Economic Participation Effects, and Policy Implications

B. Policy Recommendations

The integrated framework generates several concrete policy imperatives for Nigerian economic governance. First, digital skills development must be urgently embedded within formal education and vocational training systems to enable productive translation of digital platform access into sustainable income generation, particularly for youth who face structural barriers to formal employment [30]. Second, regulatory frameworks for gig and platform economy workers must be developed to extend social protection coverage to the rapidly growing cohort of informally employed digital workers who currently lack occupational security [14].

Third, urban health infrastructure investment must address the built environment determinants of physical inactivity, including safe recreational spaces, active transport options, and workplace wellness programmes, to arrest the productivity costs associated with sedentary lifestyle transitions [17, 19]. Fourth, remittance channelling policies should be designed to reduce transfer costs and incentivise productive domestic investment, enabling the economic

potential of diaspora flows to be more fully captured rather than consumed in housing speculation alone [23]. Fifth, financial literacy education calibrated to the social media consumption environment should be integrated into secondary and tertiary curricula to equip young Nigerians with the decision-making capabilities needed to navigate aspirational consumption pressures [28].

IX. CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated that lifestyle trends in Nigeria are not peripheral social phenomena but structural economic forces that reshape participation patterns across the full spectrum of labour, entrepreneurship, consumption, and human capital accumulation. The five thematic domains examined, including urbanisation and consumption change, digital economy and gig work, physical health and productivity, diaspora remittances, and social media influence, each independently generate significant effects on economic participation, and their interactions compound these effects in ways that standard sector-specific analyses fail to capture.

Nigeria's particular demographic and economic profile amplifies both the opportunities and the risks embedded in these lifestyle transitions. A youthful population with expanding digital access and urban exposure represents an enormous potential economic asset. However, inadequate formal employment absorption, weak social protection, lifestyle-driven health burdens, and aspirational consumption pressures generated by digital media constitute serious constraints on realising that potential.

The evidence base reviewed in this paper supports a reorientation of development policy discourse toward the lifestyle dimensions of economic participation. Treating urbanisation, digitisation, physical activity, remittance behaviour, and social media consumption as autonomous policy domains misses the structural interdependencies that give them their full economic significance. An integrated lifestyle-economy framework, of the kind sketched in Section 8, offers a more analytically powerful and policy-relevant approach to understanding and responding to the complex economic participation challenges of contemporary Nigeria and comparable developing economies.

X. DECLARATIONS

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