

**DIGITALIZATION INITIATIVES AND THE EXPANSION OF THE DIGITAL SPACE
FOR STARTUPS IN KENYA: A CASE OF THE NORAD-FUNDED DIGITAL
LAUNCHPAD PROJECT**


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DECLARATION

This research project report is my original work and has never been submitted for examination in any university.

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This research project report has been presented for examination with my permission as the University supervisor.

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DEDICATION

This research project report is dedicated to my boys – Javas Arwa and Vitalis Rugie Jnr, there has never been, nor will there ever be, anything quite as special as the love I feel for both of you; and to my mother, Abonyo Christina, I am because you were.

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TABLE OF CONTENT

DECLARATION	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
BBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	x
ABSTRACT	xi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.1.1 Digitalization and Digital Space	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	4
1.3 General Objective	5
1.3.1 Specific Objectives	5
1.4 Value of the Study	6
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1 Introduction.....	7
2.2 Theoretical Foundation	7
2.2.1 The Configuration View Theory of Digital Transformation	7
2.2.2 The Business Model Transformation.....	8
2.2.3 Technological Determinism.....	8
2.3 Empirical Review.....	9
2.3.1 Expansion of Digital Space.....	9
2.3.2 Google Business Profiles (GBPs) and Digital Space.....	12
2.3.3 Social Media and Digital Space.....	14
2.3.4 Websites and Digital Space	17
2.3.5 Digital Skills Training and Digital Space	19
2.3.6 The NORAD-Funded Digital Launchpad Project.....	22
2.4 Summary of Literature Review.....	23
2.5 Conceptual Framework.....	27
2.6 Hypotheses	28

3.1 Introduction.....	29
3.2 Research Design and Methodology	29
3.3 Target Population.....	30
3.4 Sample Size.....	30
3.5 Research Instrument.....	31
3.6 Data Collection and Analysis.....	31
3.7 Operationalization of Variables	34
3.8 Diagnostic Tests.....	36
3.8.1 Normality Test	36
3.8.2 Multicollinearity Test.....	37
3.8.3 Heteroskedasticity Test: White	37
3.8.4 Reliability of the Instrument	38
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION, AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....	39
4.1 Introduction.....	39
4.2 Questionnaire Return Rate.....	39
4.4 Digital Space Expansion for Startups	39
4.5 Objective 1: To Establish the Descriptive Statistics of GBPs and Digital Space Expansion .	42
4.5.1 Correlational Analysis for GBPs Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion Startups	45
4.5.2 Regression Model Summary.....	46
4.5.3 Regression Analysis for GBPs and Expansion of Digital Space	47
4.6 Objective 2: To Establish the Relationship between Social Media Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion Startups.....	50
4.6.1 Correlational Analysis for Social Media Initiatives and Digital space expansion Start-up Projects in Kenya	53
4.6.2. Multiple Regression Analysis for Social Media Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion for Startup SMEs in Kenya.....	54
4.7 Objective 3: To Establish the Relationship between Digital Skills Training Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion for Startups	57
4.7.1 Correlational Analysis for Digital Skills Training Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion Startup SMEs in Kenya.....	59
4.7.2. Multiple Regression for Digital Skills Training Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion for Startup SMEs in Kenya.....	60

4.8 Objective 4: To Establish the Relationship between Websites Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion for Startups	63
4.8.1 Correlational Analysis for Websites Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion for Startups	65
4.8.2 Multiple Regression for Websites and Digital Space Expansion for Startup SMEs in Kenya	66
4.9 Summary of Hypotheses	68
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	70
5.1 Introduction.....	70
5.2 Summary of Findings.....	70
5.3 Conclusion	71
5.4 Recommendations.....	72
5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies	73
REFERENCES	74
APPENDICES	78
Appendix II: Questionnaire for Participants	79
Appendix III: NACOSTI Permit.....	83

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1: Research gap analysis	24
Table 3.1: Distribution of sample across SME stakeholders	31
Table 3.2: Operationalization of variables.....	34
Table 3.3: Normality test results	36
Table 3.4: Variance inflation factors for the independent variables	37
Table 3.5: Heteroskedasticity.....	38
Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics of Digital Space Expansion	40
Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics of GBP and Digital Space Expansion	43
Table 4.3: Relationship between GBP initiatives and expansion of digital space for startups.....	45
Table 4.4: Model summary	46
Table 4.5: Analysis of variance for the study's variables	47
Table 4.6: magnitude of impact of Google business profiles on expansion of digital space for startup SMEs in Kenya	48
Table 4.7: Descriptive Statistics of Social Media Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion.....	51
Table 4.8: Relationship of social media initiatives with digital space expansion for startups	53
Table 4.9: Magnitude of impact of changes in social media initiatives on digital space expansion startups	54
Table 4.10: Descriptive Statistics of Digital Skill Training Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion	57
Table 4.11: Relationship between digital skills training initiatives and digital space expansion for startup SMEs in Kenya	59
Table 4.12: Magnitude of impact of changes in digital skills training initiatives on digital space expansion startup SMEs.....	60
Table 4.13: Descriptive Statistics of Websites Initiative and Digital Space Expansion.....	63
Table 4.14: Relationship between websites initiatives and digital space expansion for startups .	65
Table 4.15: Degree of impact of changes in websites initiatives on digital space expansion for startups	66
Table 4.16: Summary for the hypotheses testing.....	69

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The conceptual framework.....	27
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BBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CEOs:	Chief Executive Officers
COVID19:	Corona Virus Disease 2019
GBPs:	Google Business Profiles
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
IT:	Information Technology
NORAD:	Norwegian Agency for Development
MSME:	Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
UN:	United Nations

ABSTRACT

As businesses and operations get more digitalized across sectors, industries and markets, enterprises are increasingly recognizing the need to use and expand their reach in the digital realm. Consequently, enterprises seek to identify and apply a range of strategies or tactics to exploit the opportunities the internet and digitization presents. SMEs face particular barriers in the digital journey, ostensibly because of their financial incapacity and other challenges. Nonetheless, agency and individual stakeholders have designed and implemented projects and programs to stir the digitization journey in the sector. The present researcher studied the influence of digitalization initiatives on the expansion of the digital space for startups in the Kenya. The variables of the study were the various digitalization initiatives that startups under the NORAD-funded project use, namely Google Business Profiles (GBPs), social media, digital skills training and websites. The research targeted startup SMEs currently implementing these initiatives under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project. The dependent variable of the study was the expansion of the digital space for the startup SMEs in the Kenya. The study used the descriptive correlational survey design to establish the relationship between the selected digitalization initiatives and digital space of startups in Kenya. This choice was backed by the appropriateness of the design for studies seeking to establish the direction and magnitude of the relationship between an independent and a dependent variable. The target population for the study were the stakeholders in the 100 startup SMES under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project in Kenya. The researcher used structured questionnaire to collect primary data from the purposively sampled respondents, including investors, managers, employees and users or consumers of the various digitalization projects by the target startups. The data was analyzed using correlational and regression analysis to determine the direction and magnitude of the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The study established positive and statistically significant relationship between GBPs initiatives, social media initiatives, website initiatives and digital skills training initiatives with the expansion of digital space for the startup SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project in Kenya. Thus, it is recommended, startup SMEs across sectors, industries and economies should consider and implement a range of digitalization initiatives to maximally utilize the opportunities in the digital space. In fact, further and future research should target the effect or importance of other potential digitalization initiatives or strategies on the expansion and effectiveness of enterprises' digital space. Finally, research of this nature should spread to other segments of the economy or different types of enterprises to help in them embrace and integrate with the present and future trends in digitization and digital shifts.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Digital transformation, digitization and digitalization are closely linked concepts encountered in the current business and organizational management discourse. While digitization is the process of changing analog information (paper records) into digital format, digitalization refers to the use of digitized data and information to transform traditional business operations, processes, transactions and interactions simpler and more efficient. Through digitalization, businesses do not change how they do things but make them carrying on in a faster and better ways using easily accessible data and information. In essence, businesses use digitalization to streamline their workflow (Heder, 2021).

1.1.1 Digitalization and Digital Space

Across professions, disciplines, industries and countries, businesses are fast redesigning in the digital era, embracing the concepts of digitization, digitalization and digital transformation. New and modified processes for business operations and customer service or experiences characterize the digital trends in businesses. These changes manifest and are realized using digital technologies. Through these technologies, businesses across the world have thought planned and developed digitally and have become more agile and versatile. Subsequently, digitally advanced businesses have enhanced capacity or ability to adapt to changes in the marketplace. Understanding the extent to which businesses use and benefit from digital models and tools requires inquisition into the influence of digitalization initiatives on businesses' digital spaces. In particular, the influence of digitalization initiatives on start-ups in emerging economies in Africa should be of huge interest to scholars and practitioners.

Current trends have also shown businesses increasingly prefer digital data to analog data. However, across the globe, some for-profit- and non-profit organizations seem to hold onto analog practices and tools in their corporate procedures (Owolabi, 2021). Cognizant of the need to undertake and use digital transformation, businesses of all sizes and across national and regional boundaries are assessing their operations, strategies, processes and interactions to hasten their digital journey and footprint.

According to [statista.com](https://www.statista.com) (2022), the global spending on digital transformation is likely to hit US\$ 2.4 trillion with the United States being the most digitally competitive country. Similarly, according to www.financeonline.com (2022), the global digital transformation market is likely to hit US\$1,009.8 billion in 2025 from US\$467.8 billion in 2020. In fact, digitally transformed organizations are expected to contribute about 50% of the global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2023, corresponding to US\$ 53.3 trillion (www.financeonline.com, 2022). This value is based on the projection that 65% of the global GDP will be digitized by 2022 with 70% of organizations having developed or working on digital transformation strategy. It is also worth noting that industrial enterprises currently lead the digital transformation drive and may eventually benefit most from digitalization and digitization initiatives or projects.

Similarly, positive trends and projections are observed for startups. For instance, according to www.financeonline.com (2022), 55% of startups in 2018 adopted digital transformation strategies with 38% of hitherto traditional businesses adopting digital strategy in 2018. Moreover, 89% of businesses yet to digitalize were planning to adopt digital business strategy.

During the COVID-29 pandemic, notes www.statista.com (2022), there has been a heightened need for businesses to increase operational efficiency, create better customer experience and bridge the skill gaps between digital team-traditional teams. However, about 62% of companies'

report stalled or failed digital transformation initiatives. These companies fail to reap or benefit from the advantages of digitalization or adoption of digital models in their operations.

According to www.statista.com (2022), 52%, 49% and 46% of companies use digitalization to enable and improve worker productivity, improve management and meet customer experience expectations respectively. Similarly, the main benefits of digitalization and digital transformation across sectors of the economy are improved operational efficiency (40%), meeting changes in customer expectations (35%), improved product quality (26%), increase design reuse (25%) and reduced cost of production (24%).

Other low-score benefits of digitalization are new revenue streams (21%) reduced cost of substandard products (14%) and increased first pass yield (5%). Despite the efforts and trends that promote digitalization and digital transformation, forces that act to prevent or reduce the impact of digital transformation abound. In most cases, CEO or board of directors (37%) and their senior teams (32%), departmental heads (26%), middle managers (18%) and line employees (10%) hold back organizations' digital transformation initiatives (www.statista.com, 2022).

Digitalization and digitization are key drivers of digital space expansion and transformation for businesses processes and functions in the 21st century. According to Hess, Christian and Benlian (2015), marketing is among the functions or departments that have immensely benefitted from digitalization. For instance, through digitalization and digitization, digital materials, email campaigns, social media advertising, website or e-commerce and mobile App have replaced traditional marketing activities or channels such as print materials, print mail campaigns, print billboards and loyalty club cards. These digital marketing techniques or channels have helped businesses use data better in fostering the understanding of their customers and markets.

Similarly, digitalization has helped businesses share data and information throughout their departments and operations and to improve marketing, sales and services.

At the core of success in digitalization, digitization and digital transformation is the ability of an organization to identify and quantify the signs that it needs digital transformation. Owolabi (2021) lists the indicators of the need for digital transformation as drop in referrals, reduced repeat businesses, reduced leads from tried-and true promotions and lack of cross-departmental exchange of data and information.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Failed digital transformation initiatives and projects is a common occurrence across businesses and sectors in Kenya. The need to increase productivity and profitability drives startup businesses to undertake digitalization and digital transformation projects and initiatives that require huge investment and imply comprehensive changes. These projects and initiatives include, but are not limited to automation of tasks, system updates and adoption of new technologies. According to Boston Consulting Group (2021), about 70% of digitalization projects fail to achieve their goals. This assertion is especially true for Kenya where significantly higher percentages of startups fail at digitalization or digital transformation because of several reasons, circumstances or factors.

As Hess, Christian and Benlian (2015) accurately observe, many startups in Sub-Saharan Africa struggle with digitalization because of poor or ineffective on-boarding processes, lack the requisite purpose-built systems to onboard, and implement digitalization projects and initiatives. These digitalization challenges have the impact of reduced digital space for many startups in Sub-Saharan Africa. This situation exists despite the myriad digitalization initiatives and projects that target startups in the region. The reduced digital space for startups in the Sub-Saharan Africa thus implies inability or reduced capacity or inability to use digital transformational initiatives

or technology to create new and modify organizational culture, systems, processes, and customer experiences (Ziegler, 2021; Butt & Petri, 2021).

Whereas Kenya is among the countries expected to exploit digital initiatives, thus digital space to leapfrog the traditional business challenges, startups in the region have underperformed in the uptake, utilization and expansion of their digital space. Factors such as low electrification, high cost of electricity explain this situation. Subsequent to inability to develop and grow their digital space, through appropriate digitalization initiatives and projects, many startups in Kenya have failed to meet or align with changes in and the complexity of market and business requirements. Thus, the study may help establish the correlation between the various digitalization initiatives and the digital space for startups in Sub-Saharan African countries such as Kenya. From such findings, nations, regions and global agencies such as the UN may propose and implement digital, business and economic policies that would harness the impact of digitalization initiatives. In the case of Kenya, such findings may be included in long-term policies and goals such as the Vision 2030. The study therefore sought to answer the overall question on how does digitalization initiatives on the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya, using the case of the NORAD-funded digital Launchpad project?

1.3 General Objective

The general objective was to establish the influence of digitalization initiatives on the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya, using the case of the NORAD-funded digital Launchpad project

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

This sub-theme outlines the objectives the researcher had set to achieve.

- i. To establish the influence of Google Business Profiles (GBPs) on the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya using the case of the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project
- ii. To establish the influence of social media on the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya using the case of the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project
- iii. To determine the influence of websites on the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya using the case of the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project
- iv. To determine the influence of digital skills training on the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya using the case of the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project

1.4 Value of the Study

The study is anticipated will be of great value because of the potential application of its findings and recommendations by governmental agencies, especially in the formulation and enforcement of technology and digital technology policies. Through this study, the government of Kenya may gain insights into the right digital policies, strategies, principles and practices that could support startups across sectors of the economy. Second, the study may help the academia by shaping current and future research in the integration and implementation of digital programmes, projects, initiatives and strategies. Hence, the study may help management and technology researchers and innovators to enhance the uptake of digital technology initiatives that would lead to the expansion of the digital space for startups in the Kenya and the region. Individual startup owners and employees, digital project owners and donors and digital marketers are the other stakeholders or sectors to which this study may be of immense use are.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is organized into several sections, namely theoretical framework, and the empirical and theoretical review of literature relevant to the variables of the study.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation

The study was anchored on the configuration view theory of digital transformation, the theory of business model transformation and theory of technological determinism.

2.2.1 The Configuration View Theory of Digital Transformation

Norbert Elias developed the configuration view theory in the 1970s. The theory likens human relations and behaviours to configurations. Different disciplines and professions have developed and improved this theory into approaches that fit and explain their studies or interests. As Nadkarni and Prugl (2021) report, the configuration view theory postulates that organizations, including startups and SMEs, must recognize the interconnectedness of their structures, processes and practices. Hence, emphasizes the theory, mutual dependence of business practices necessitates the holistic view, acquisition, design and use and view of operations, systems and processes.

Several facts explain the theory's relevance to the current study. First, the theory is appropriate for the study because it asserts that the purpose of implementing digital transformation such as digitalization projects is to enhance operations and improve organizational outcome. Second, the configuration view theory emphasizes the need for businesses to embed new digital ways and digitally connect systems, partners and third parties in their daily activities, operations and processes. In this sense therefore, the configuration theory would help explain to startups in the

Kenya to design, have and use digital platforms that can be configured and adjusted to fit or align with changes workflow, user and customer needs and administrator controls.

2.2.2 The Business Model Transformation

The business model theory was developed by many scholars over a long period, including Henry Chesbrough and Alex Osterwalder. This theory of or approach to value creation and profitability focuses on the need for businesses to change or improve the ways in which they offer and deliver value to customers and other partners (Ulezko, Reimer & Ulezko, 2018). In the context of the current study, a startup in the Kenya can switch from mailing products such as DVDs or movies to streaming them online. Thus, as the theory of business model transformation postulates, through digitalization, startups in Kenya may effectively transit as digitalization and digital transformation sweeps through the regions. Accordingly, by anchoring on this theory, the study may convince Kenyan startup SMEs to digitalize their hardware, storage capacity, marketing and applications.

2.2.3 Technological Determinism

Thorsten Veblen founded the term technological determinism in early 20th Century to explain the technological evolution of the period. Future scholars such as Marshall McLuhan supported and developed the theory further. According to this theory, technology and digitalization play an increasingly integral and significant role in shaping societal and cultural trends and direction (Heder, 2021). Unlike the traditional perception, that holds that society and culture dictates the direction of technology, the technological determinism theory holds the view that researchers and professionals should focus more on the impact of newly released technologies.

As shown by historical observations, technologies and technological initiatives or projects have transformed society in quite different and significant ways (Heder, 2021). This theory is relevant to the current study because it may help explain the extent to which digital technology and digitalization initiatives may transform the digital space for startups in Kenya. However, the proponents of technological determinism emphasize that society or organizations must properly shape digital technology and their risks for technology to help society, culture, private businesses and governments. The theory of technological determinism is also relevant to the current study through its various postulates, which include the central role of technological advances in social and economic change and that the design and development of technology dictate users' behavior.

2.3 Empirical Review

This section reviews existing literature on the title of the study. The review is based on themes that emerge from the study's dependent variable, independent variables, constructs, keywords and key phrases.

2.3.1 Expansion of Digital Space

The concept of digital space has received significantly more academic attention in the recent past, ostensibly because of the impact of the COVID19 pandemic on people's social lives. In the business arena, the COVID19 pandemic heralded a period in which entrepreneurs set to cultivate meaningful digital space (Sodiq, 2022). Evidently, the study and literary coverage of the concept of digital space and its implications or effects have intensified in the past three years. However, notes Asghari and Gideon (2010), most of the coverage has focused on the extent to which enterprises have used and benefitted from digital technologies, especially in marketing, sales and revenue generation. Insignificant attention has been directed to the effectiveness of digitalization initiatives on individuals and organizational digital space.

Essentially, digital space is the totality of information, data, images or videos contained and displayed on the screen of digital devices, including computers, mobile phones, tablets, and laptops (Sachdeva, 2022). According to Mureithi (2021), 21st century business operations and social activities hinge on the seamless sharing of information. Digital space has been at the core of this transformation of social, political and economic settings, implying more agility and adaptability for digitally oriented enterprises. Consequently, digitally oriented businesses have adapted better to the changes in market diversity, digitalization, globalization and complexity (Mureithi, 2021).

Recognizing the role and the impact of digital space in transforming the way business is conducted in the 21st century, Benedict (2022) recommend that entrepreneurs, managers and business CEOs make digital transformation central to their operations and plans. In this suggestion, Benedict (2022) emphasizes the role of fast-moving and technology-driven trends in pushing digital transformation. Research, sales and marketing are some key aspects of business operations and plans that have transformed digitally in recent times. In the opinion of Sachdeva (2021), digital adoption is integral to the move to digital space.

In an article, Benedict (2022) compares the level of the digitalization in Europe and the United States, noting that the former is getting closer to the former in digital adoption. In Europe, observes Benedict (2022), 79% of businesses with more than 250 employees have fully digitalized. Notably, the digitalized firms report higher labour productivity compared to those yet to fully digitalize. Ostensibly, the higher labour productivity is attributed to higher value-added and innovation activities (Ukpere, Ukpere & Slabbert, 2014). Through digitalization, enterprises in Europe and the US have leveraged on data in strategic planning and decision-making. In such companies, digital platforms such as social media, cloud and analytical

technologies and mobile or smartphones are the technological base of operations. In using these digital space tools, enterprises collect, analyze and monitor data, information and knowledge for purposes of strategy formulation (Ukpere, Ukpere & Slabbert, 2014). Summarily, asserts Benedict (2022), seamless sharing of data and information is perhaps most outstanding avenue by which digital space has helped transform and boost businesses' digital orientation.

In a rather unique study, McShane and Middha explored the idea of digitalization in public spaces, having observed the changes that were taking place in the urban settings. In the study, McShane and Middha (2017) analyzed the expectations and experiences of digital spaces utilized by the public, exploring the extent to which local urban communities engaged with urban planners in shaping the digital public spaces. Unlike most studies and literature, which cover or research digitalization with reference to businesses, McShane and Middha (2017) set to establish democratic and administrative capacities and benefits of digital spaces or the digital sphere. Thus, assert Ukpere, Ukpere and Slabbert (2014). Sodiq (2022) adds that digital space is equally integral to and part of physical and virtual public spaces and events.

In the study targeting local communities in Melbourne, Australia, McShane and Middha (2017), recognized the influence of the significant growth pressures the city faces. Like studies on digitalization by enterprises, McShane and Middha (2017) observed that local community's experiences in digital platforms do not meet customers' and officials' expectations. In the case of users or the public, digital platform expectations are negatively affected by digital mistrust and digital exclusion concerns. On the other hand, public officials' digital expectations are affected by the need for application of new skills and time required for developing digitalization projects and products.

McShane and Middha (2017) suggest that digital spaces are quite diverse and complex in interrelationships and practices. Consequent to these multiplicity and complexity challenges, in the public digital spaces, authorities should be strategic and contextual in their integration of online and offline engagement with the public. Subsequently, there is likely to be inclusive and democratic stakeholder or user engagement in the digital sphere.

In an exploratory study, Van Horne, Dutot and Zhang (2016) researched the gap between digital space and entrepreneurship. The study focused on digital entrepreneurship intention. Using semi-structured interviews among digital entrepreneurs in the United Arab Emirates, Van Horne, Dutot and Zhang (2016) established that the Emirati entrepreneurs extensively use the digital landscape in many aspects and processes of their businesses.

2.3.2 Google Business Profiles (GBPs) and Digital Space

The literary coverage of GBPs in Africa, just like other Google initiatives, is in its broader context. For an illustration, in an article, Paul (2020) takes a closer look at the potential impact of Google's various projects and initiatives in Africa. In recent times, observes Paul (2020), Google had launched and implemented several initiatives designed to help businesses, learning institutions and individual professionals improve their performance. More recently, businesses, institutions and professionals have used Google's initiatives and projects to recover from the economic effects of the COVID19 pandemic. At the core of Google's initiatives is the need to get small- and medium-sized and youth-owned businesses to get online. Other segments that Google's digital initiatives target include businesses owned by vulnerable populations and nonprofits.

Google Business Profiles (GBPs) is an example of the Google initiatives designed and used to deepen digital presence for businesses in Africa (Paul, 2020). Besides, Google has used

initiatives to train and impart digital skills in entrepreneurs. Similarly, the company has instituted programs that target startups in Africa, including the Launchpad Accelerator program.

Google Business Profiles (GBPs), originally known as Google My Business, is a digital concept and strategic that businesses have embraced in recent time. Whereas the concept of GBPs is extensively covered in electronic literature, little research and academic reports have been conducted to establish the importance of GBPs. Moreover, studies on the impact of GBPs on businesses' electronic marketing and digital space as a whole are rather few. In the electronic forms, literature on GBPs and its impact is mainly in the form of blogs and official websites of companies such as Google and other digital or technology agencies.

The review revealed that most relevant literature on GBPs tends to focus on relevance of GBPs to users' courses. For instance, an article on www.digitalscholar.com, address the concern of whether GBPs really help small businesses or not. Generally, the article reveals that GBPs actually help build small enterprises. Summarily, GBPs help small businesses meet or address their digital needs, including digital marketing, emails, maps and meetings. In concurrence, Sodiq (2022) mentions the use of GBPs in providing businesses with a consolidated platform to achieve online presence for their brand and products. GBPs also help boost the credibility of small-scale businesses, especially through local marketing (Bergeron, Raymond & Rivard, 2001).

In an article on the current and future status and role of GBPs, Rahal (2021) observes that GBPs will be more important to businesses in the future than it is in the current environment. Even in the current scenario, GBPs is not optional because they are integral to enterprises' online presences. In fact, concurs Nloga(2021), the fact that internet is the first place customers go to get first-hand and updated information about a company, brand or products make GBPs an

essential aspect of a business' existent and operations. In addition, increasingly many businesses are using GBPs to inform customers of their safety and health protocols, new products and opening or closing hours.

Through GBPs, businesses may and have improved their online visibility. According to Rahal (2021), there are myriad strategies by which a business may optimize the use and benefits of its GBP. These suggestions include changing business description, updating businesses photos, specify and clarify business' categorization and the display of accurate and updated information about a business.

2.3.3 Social Media and Digital Space

The extensive use of social media across spheres of life, business included, has made it a widely studied and discussed concept. Notable in many studies and literature is their focus on the impact or importance of social media use in marketing by businesses and sectors of the economy. Essoungou (2010) traces the social media boom in Africa to the first decade of the 21st century. The use of mobile phones in the developing world, especially to access social media, heralded this important period in mid- and late-1990s. While little attention was accorded to Africa as a potential market in that era, the continent had about 400 million mobile phone subscribers by 2010, highlighting Africa's leading role in the mobile telephony shift (Essoungou, 2010).

In a study on how social media has powered small businesses in Africa, Genesis, an analytics company explored the impact of social media and digital economy on small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Senegal and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). According to Nloga (2021), social media platforms are quite effective catalysts for growing and forming new SMEs in the target countries. Moreover, the study established that SMEs that use social media platforms and tools such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and

Facebook Messenger enjoy additional opportunities. For instance, reports Nloga (2021), SMEs that use social media leverage competitively on Africa's young population. What is more, such SMEs create opportunities for and bring in more women into formal economic activities. The study further revealed that the use of social media or digital tools helps the SME industry in Africa to expand and diversify.

In concurrence with Nloga (2021), Mureithi (2021) asserts that social commerce is increasingly becoming important business model in Africa. This assertion is especially true for and important to individuals and companies just starting operations. It is currently common that such individuals or companies seek to run on social commerce platforms (Mureithi, 2021). The main reason for opting for social commerce is the desire by businesses to reach many customers conveniently, affordably and comfortably. According to Bergeron, Raymond and Rivard (2001), social media, through its various platforms and tools, offer these advantages. Mureithi (2021) takes note of the use of influences and sponsored pages in furthering the goal of reaching many people through social media.

In an article published in *Business Insider Africa*, Sodiq (2022) discusses the ways in which entrepreneurs in Africa can earn from social media. This article was founded on the fact that social media has provided Africa with businesses and opportunities to connect with other around the world. Regardless of its size, a business can use social media to build relationships. Subsequently, the relationship may yield enhanced brand awareness and increased profitability. Based on an insightful review and analysis of Facebook and Glassdoor, Sodiq (2022) identified several ways in which businesses in Africa can earn profits from social media. These include, earning commission from sponsored posts, review of affiliate products, selling products and

being paid to share knowledge. Others are collaborating with brands, managing social media account and selling digital products.

Social media marketing is perhaps the most extensively studied and covered aspect of social media in print and electronic literature. In a case study of Africa, Afolabi (2016) explored social media marketing by businesses in the continent. The study by Afolabi (2016) was based on the observation that marketing had drastically changed in the preceding decade, ostensibly with the development and use of powerful mobile devices and social networks. These shifts were, expectedly accompanied by challenges in social media marketing. Blogs, online communities and networks are some noticeable features of the shift in social media revolution.

A major challenge in the social media marketing in Africa, as Afolabi (2016) accurately reports, is the lack of understanding of the acceptance of digital divide in Africa. Moreover, marketers' integration of social media into marketing culture and strategy is the other key challenge. That is, the use of social media in the promotion of brands, increased communication strategy or effort and outcome of social media marketing remain unclear. Other challenge areas include active engagement, participation in, and commitment to social media marketing platforms. These challenges are compounded by the fact that some businesses have lagged behind in adopting as the conversation and practice shift to social media marketing.

In yet another study, Ukpere, Slabbert and Ukpere (2014) explored the relationship between social media platforms and the financial success of modern African entrepreneurs. In the study published in the *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Ukpere, Slabbert and Ukpere (2014) report on the changing entrepreneurial landscape.

The changes are partly attributed to globalization, technological or digital development and corporate acquisitions and mergers. The study particularly emphasized the role and impact of

expanding telecommunications, increased use of the internet and reduced data bundle rates on business in Africa. According to Ukpere, Slabbert and Ukpere (2014), the characteristics of African entrepreneurs that use online social networks, platforms and digital tools include being well-informed, sophisticated and empowered. Through the internet and social media, businesses in Africa have greater control on the information and the marketing process.

Unlike GBPs, which largely lack in academic research and literature, social media is rather well studied and reported. However, most studies and literature focus on the linkages between social media use on one hand and marketing or financial success on the other. Thus, a study that focuses on new relationships is justified. Thus, the present studied is justifiable because it may unearth new knowledge on the impact of social media on a business' digital space.

2.3.4 Websites and Digital Space

A notable consensus in most literature is that websites are essential components of any serious business in the digital world. In fact, asserts Bergeron, Raymond and Rivard (2001), website is and will be the center of a business' online presence and activities in the digital 21st century. This assertion is especially true given that having a website has the additional benefit of helping a business market itself online and to credibility as an enterprise.

A review of the concept of website shows that the literary coverage is quite diverse, thus displaying the various perspectives of website as a concept and as a digital tool. Easily noticeable is the study and literary coverage of website as integral to the highly competitive business environment. In this context, quite many studies and literature explore and discuss issues such as the role of websites, the role of websites in digital marketing, websites in the face of digital transformation and the roles of websites for organizations.

In an article, Hess, Christian and Benlian (2015) takes note of the changing roles of the website in digital transformation. The article particularly mentions the continued importance and roles of websites for SMEs. The effectiveness of websites as digitalization tools best manifest in the myriad case studies on website development and use by for-profit and non-profit agencies. Through these case studies, readers and entrepreneurs are able to understand and appreciate the processes and outcomes of website-based digitalization initiatives (Greenberg, 2021). It is thus imperative that case studies that focus on digitalization and its impact of enterprises' digital space use the case study approach to highlight the correlation. Startups in Kenya are an area in which literature and research on the impact of digitalization initiatives on entrepreneurial digital space is largely lacking. Hence, the present study may help fill the research and literature gap.

Sachdeva (2022) considers website as a digitalization tool or initiative from the perspective of its long-term usefulness or effectiveness. When enterprises or individuals invest in the design of websites, more often than not, little attention is accorded to the redesign. According to Hess, Christian and Benlian (2015), redesign of a website is as important as the initial design. Similarly, observes Yang (2011), websites are most effective at their initial launch while its effectiveness diminishes with time. Nloga (2021) attributes this phenomenon on several issues, namely organizational culture, digital strategy and change.

Ohanians (2022) rightly observes that the internet has continued to evolve rather fast in the recent past, necessitating constant evaluation and reevaluation of digital strategies. It is worth noting that websites are the most critical piece of any organization's or a brand's digital strategy. Thus, asserts Greenberg (2021), marketers should take into account the timeline of a website's effectiveness.

According to Ohanians (2022), having an outdated website design has the effect of damaging a brand's or a business' image. In fact, many customers and users of such a website may consider a business not to be current in its operations, procedures or products. Moreover, a neglected website has no value for the experiences of users or an organization's customers, in particular, emphasizes Ohanians (2022), digital experience means a lot to businesses in the 21st century hence website experience should be prioritized.

Besides design, redesign, evaluation and update, content is the other important component of websites that enterprises should consider. Just like in social media and blog, website content is especially integral to a business' marketing strategy.

2.3.5 Digital Skills Training and Digital Space

Digital training is a concept or practice synonymous with most literature and research on the impact of digitalization and performance. Despite the wide and in-depth study of digital training, little has been researched concerning the correlation with or the impact of digital skills training on organizations' digital space. In fact, how digital skills training affects the expansion of an entity's digital space is an area yet to be studied.

Waern (2022) describes digital skills as a person's or a team's ability to create, find, use content through digital devices and platforms such as smartphones, tablets, computers, social media and websites. In the current settings, organizations insist or require that all types of employees must possess specific digital skills. This trend is unlike the traditional approach in which only a few information technology (IT) staff had digital skills. In this context, Yang (2011) considers communication via email, researching information online and the ability to handle information virtually as basic digital skills. In addition, the ability to safely use cloud-based tools, create and manage spreadsheets and screen sharing during video call are other noteworthy digital skills that

employees should possess. There are several ways a person or an agency can improve digital skills, namely self-learning, online courses and certificate programmes. Importantly, employers can organize internal training for their employees or enroll them for digital training at learning institutions such as colleges and universities (Waern, 2022).

Yang (2011) studied the effects of online training on the performance of employees, highlighting the educational opportunities that new developments in telecommunication present to workers. According to Yang (2011), through digital and telecommunication advances and tools, employees with challenges in the traditional learning methods and setups are able to learn and improve their skills. Subsequently, digital skills training and other learning avenues have helped promote professional development across industries.

Taking into consideration the effects of multiple factors on employees' learning, Yang (2011) considered the role of self-efficacy, socioeconomic status, gender and computer experience on employee's digital skills learning. Focusing on the Taiwanese manufacturing industry, Yang (2011) established that self-efficacy had significant relationship with achievement in online learning by employees.

Perhaps the most extensively researched and reported issue is the importance of or reasons for organizations to train in digital skills. According to Waern (2022), digital transformation of training is a critical requirement for organizations in the 21st century. Besides training to acquire digital skills, a shift to digitize the training process, content and material is necessary (Waern, 2022). This shift would help an entity and its employees keep up with the times and improve their performance. Adopting a digital approach to training has several benefits, including a more efficient training, which may translate into improved productivity, employee retention and

enhanced operational efficiency. What is more, observes Waern (2022), digital skills training may be used as a measure of an entity's return on investment.

When a business trains its employees on digital skills, it presents them with the opportunity to acquire and use several basic but important digital skills. According to Waern (2022), the most basic digital skills that digital skills training imparts on employees include online communication, finding of information online and handling of digital resources. Others are the ability to operate safely and legally on online platforms and networks. In concurrence, Sachdeva (2022) lists the digital skills in which an entity can train its people as coding, data analytics, and digital or social marketing. In addition, employees can be trained in the digital skills related to artificial intelligence and cloud computing.

In an article with a different but a broader perspective, Sachdeva (2022) highlights the role of digital skills training as integral part of economic recovery post COVID19 pandemic. In the opinion of Sachdeva (2022), poor urban communities suffered most during the pandemic, a situation attributable to socioeconomic inequalities reported in such settings. Digital and social divide are examples of these inequalities that existed in such neighbourhoods pre-pandemic. Once the pandemic exacerbated these inequalities, people in urban poor settlements cannot compete for remote or digital jobs with their more affluent counterparts. Moreover, the labour market shocks have hit the young, uneducated and poor people not able to work from home. Thus, recommends Sachdeva (2022) stakeholders must work towards closing or eliminating the digital and social divide in these neighbourhoods.

According to Sachdeva, expanding digital literacy is the best response to the digital divide. Through such an approach, people living and working in vulnerable and informal settlements may acquire or enhance their digital skills. These skills, opines Sachdeva (2022) include data

tools, remote sensing data tools and data analytics and visualization. Overall, the purpose of digital skills training should be to build the digital and technological capacity of the beneficiaries.

2.3.6 The NORAD-Funded Digital Launchpad Project

The Digital Launchpad is a digital project funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development. The main aim of the project is to equip and support SMEs in Africa to attain and sustain success by offering comprehensive digital and digitalization packages. The package offered entails digital expertise and tools the SMEs may use to achieve global access or presence and competitiveness (Africa118, 2022). NORAD partners with Africa118, an entity formed in 2010 to help bridge the gap of lack of vital information about local businesses by 85% of mobile phone users. The mission to provide digital marketing services for SMEs in Africa made Africa118 the ideal partner for the NORAD-funded Digital Launchpad, which also sought global competitiveness for SMEs in Africa.

The NORAD-funded Digital Launchpad project targeted 3,000 SMEs in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Rwanda and Ghana. The services offered to the target SMEs under the project included training marketing, financial literacy, venture building, digital and marketing campaign (Africa118, 2022 on digital). Other services were access financing, E-commerce-payment integration and professional website. It is worth noting that the project was free to the targeted beneficiaries with the Norwegian Agency for Development sponsoring the project. On the other hand, Africa118 was the project's chief implementer, working with other partners such as Google, Equity Foundation and the Norwegian African Business Association.

The NORAD-funded Digital Launchpad project presented the participants with myriad benefits. First, it imparted in the participants the requisite digital skills. Second, the project offered and created tailored digital marketing to the SMEs besides giving out financial training (Africa118,

2022). Under digital marketing, the project offered services such as professional website, social media management, search engine optimization and Google Ads.

The criteria for SMEs to qualify for the project included being a registered business entity in the involved countries. It was also required that only businesses with less than 50 employees would be included. What is more, it had to be established that a business had limited digital marketing expertise. The SMEs were also required to agree to be available for scheduled training, coaching and mentorship programmes. The SMEs would also cover 50% of the cost of services offered in second year of the project and 100% of the costs in year 3. It was also required that the participating SMEs commit to be in the programme for its entirety (2021-2023).

2.4 Summary of Literature Review

The literature review showed that digitalization and related concepts such as digitization and digital transformation is the subject of quite many studies and literary materials. The coverage of these concepts is as wide as their applicability and effects on enterprises and other spheres of life. Notably, researchers and writers have been interested in impact of digitalization on competitive and financial performance of individuals, organizations, sectors, industries and economies. In fact, some researchers have studied the extent to which countries and even regions or trade blocks have adopted and benefitted from digital transformation and digitalization. However, no study has sought to establish the link between various digitalization initiatives with the expansion of the digital space. Moreover, there no case studies that have been studied to help establish how specific digital projects or initiatives have helped hitherto less digitally oriented enterprises to expand their digital space. Subsequently, literature on the effectiveness of digital initiatives on digital space largely lacks, implying no data to back similar projects for expanded digital space. Table 2.1 summarizes the gaps identified in the literature review.

Table 2.1: Research gap analysis

Author/year	Title	Methodology	Findings	Gaps	Contributions Of Present Study
Sachdeva (2022)	“Digital Skills Training Should be Part of Inclusive Economic Recovery in Post-Pandemic Cities.”	Survey	Poor urban stakeholders must work towards closing or eliminating the digital and social divide in these neighbourhoods	Conceptual gap: digital skills training not linked to digital space	Links digital skills with digital space
Yang (2011)	The effects of online training on employees’ performance	Survey	Self-efficacy had significant relationship with achievement in online learning by employees.	Conceptual gap: not linked to digital projects or digital space	Links digital skills training with enterprise digital space
Waern (2022),	Three Reasons Why Training Needs a Digital Transformation	Survey	Digital transformation of training (digitize the training process, content and material) is a critical requirement for organizations in the 21 st century	Conceptual gap: not linked to expansion of digital space	Links skills training with digital space expansion
Ohanians (2022)	Why an Effective Digital Strategy Means Revamping Your Website Every Two Years.”	Literature review	An outdated website design has the effect of damaging a brand’s or a business’ image.	Methodology gap: used literature review, findings may be inconsistent	Uses the more accurate and reliable survey data
Mureithi (2021).	Social Media is Becoming an Important Business Model in Africa		Digitally oriented businesses have adapted better to the changes in	Conceptual gap: not linked to digital space,	Seeks to establish the social media-

			market diversity, digitalization, globalization and complexity	links social with business model	digital space relationships
Van Horne, Dutot and Zhang (2016)	Young entrepreneurs and the digital space: case studies from the UAE	Case study (semi-structured interviews)	Emirati entrepreneurs extensively use the digital landscape in many aspects and processes of their businesses	Not specific or relevant to the context or settings of present study	Contextualizes the study to specific settings, region and conditions
Benedict (2022),	How the Digital Space has Transformed How We Do Business	Survey	79% of businesses with more than 250 employees have fully digitalized with digitalized firms reporting higher labour productivity	Conceptual gap: digital space is the independent variable, digitalization linked productivity, not digital space	Treats digital space as dependent variable, exploring factors that affect it
Nloga (2021)	How Social Media is Powering Small Business in Africa.”	Questionnaire survey	Social media platforms are quite effective catalysts for growing and forming new SMEs in the target countries.	Conceptual gap: social media not linked with digital space or digitalization projects	Narrows on digital space and how the use social media affects it
Rahal (2021)	Why Google My Business Is More Important Than Ever in 2021	Survey	Business may optimize the use and benefits of GBP BY changing business description, updating businesses photos, specifying business’ categorization and the	Conceptual gap; only studies the benefits of GBPs in the general context	Quite specific on SMEs under a digital program thus may be applied for the industry

			display of accurate and updated information.		
Afolabi (2016)	Social media marketing: the case of Africa	Case study	Major challenges in the social media marketing in Africa; lack of understanding or acceptance of digital divide in Africa and poor integration of social media into marketing culture and strategy	Generally studied the challenges of social media marketing in Africa, did not link social media with digital space	Specific on SMEs under a digital program hence applicable to the sector
Hess, Christian and Benlian (2015)	Digital transformation strategies	Case studies	Role of website is fast changing in digital transformation era	Conceptual gap: not linked to digital space or digital projects	Studies specific digital transformation strategies and their impact on digital space
Ukpere, Ukpere & Slabbert (2014)	A relationship between social media platforms and the financial success of modern African entrepreneurs	Case study	Through digitalization, enterprises in Europe and the US have leveraged on data in strategic planning and decision-making	-Conceptual gap: digitization not linked to expansion of digital space -Not linked to specific digitalization project	Links social media platforms with digital space for specific sector and enterprises

2.5 Conceptual Framework

Independent Variables

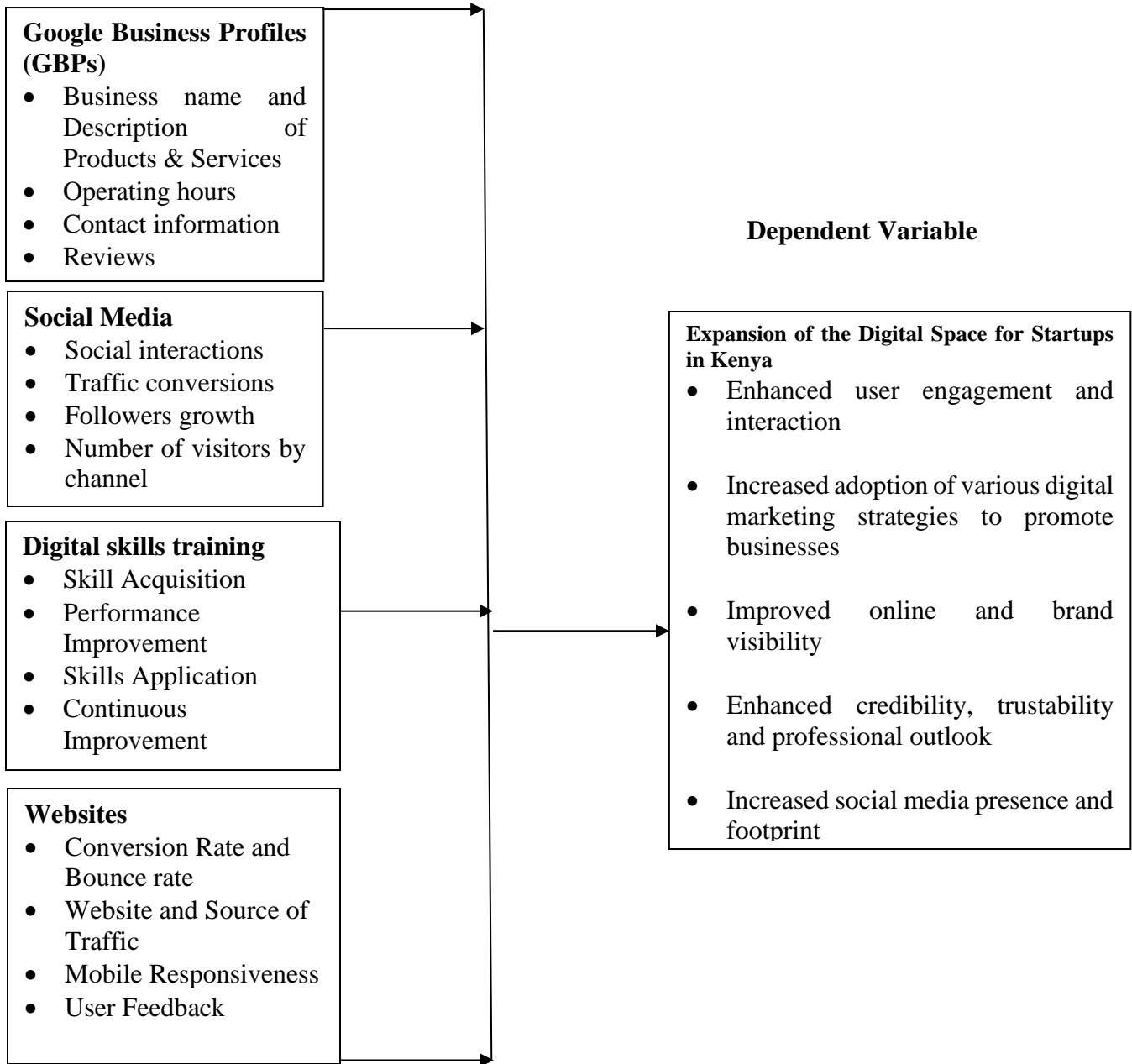


Figure 1: The conceptual framework

2.6 Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between Google Business Profiles (GBPs) and the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between social media and the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between websites and the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya.

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between improved digital skills and the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology used in the study, including research design and method, study area, target population, sampling frame, data collection and analysis methods and the ethical issues considered in the study.

3.2 Research Design and Methodology

The study used the descriptive correlational survey design to establish the relationship between digitalization initiatives and digital space of startups in Kenya. A correlational research investigates the relationship between or among variables in a scientific study in which a researcher does not manipulate or control the variables (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The correlation helps in making predictions and gaining insights into complex real-world relationships. Several factors explain the choice of this research design, especially its suitability for studies that seek to show the direction and magnitude of the relationship between an event and a phenomenon with suspected determinants. Using the descriptive survey, the study may effectively show, describe and explain the relationship that exists between the selected digitalization initiatives and digital space for startups in Kenya.

As Strauss and Corbin (1990) assert, the correlational survey approach enables researchers to accurately identify and quantify the factors or forces that account or intervene in the correlation among or between variables. According to Warfield (2010), correlational research also helps establishes relationships between variables in a sample or a population or across populations. It is similarly noteworthy that the non-experimental nature of the correlational survey design limits the extent to which a researcher can extraneously control a study's independent and dependent variables. The reduced risk of manipulation or control implies correlation surveys accurately determine and quantify the correlation among variables.

In the method, the researcher sampled a population and use questionnaires to collect data on the variables of the study. The selection of the method was based on the strengths of survey in ensuing a researcher captures the experiences and opinions of stakeholders in relations to the topic or issue under review.

3.3 Target Population

The target population for the study was 100 stakeholders from the 350 MSMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project within Kenya. The 100 comprises of individual involved in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of the relevant digital initiatives, thus quite knowledgeable on their operations, impact and challenges.

3.4 Sample Size

The sample size was 100 respondents. The researcher used simple random and purposive sampling to determine the sample. The researcher collected and used primary data from individual owners and investors, managers, employees and users or beneficiaries of various digitalization initiatives or projects under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad. The sample frame consisted of data on the SMEs' digitalization initiatives, namely Google business profiles, websites, social media platforms and digital training. The data targeted mainly relate to the digital initiatives designed and implemented during the NORAD-funded digital launchpad. Based on the provisions by the Krejcie and Morgan's formula for sample size determination, a sample size of 100 from the population of 350 from the startup SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project is proposed. Table 3.1 summarizes the distribution of the 100 respondents across the categories of stakeholders.

Table 3.1: Distribution of sample across SME stakeholders

Stakeholder	Number	Percentage
Digitalization project owners/investors	20	20
Project managers	15	15
Project employees	30	30
SME customers	20	20
Users of digitalization initiatives/projects	15	15
TOTAL	100	100

3.5 Research Instrument

The researcher used a structured questionnaire to obtain the primary data required for the study. The questionnaire was organized based on the objectives of the study. Under each objective there were several items or questions that corresponded to a range of indicators of the variables for each objective. The use of the Likert scale in the study allowed the respondents to select responses from a list of five, indicating their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements or items in the questionnaire. The questionnaires were delivered digitally to the respondents who filled and returned the questionnaires. There are several reasons structured questionnaire was used in the study. They include reduced bias, respondent anonymity and simplicity. The latter advantage, coupled with efficiency and cost-effectiveness enhances the reliability and validity of structured questionnaires.

3.6 Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher collected primary data from the respondents using structured questionnaire. The questionnaire items were categorized and aligned with the study's independent and dependent variables. The advantage of structured questionnaire is its restriction of respondents' input to data and information relevant to the study's aim, objectives, research questions and hypotheses. The

researcher used multiple questionnaire administration methods to reach participants such as MSMEs' employees, customers and users or operations of digital platforms. As considered appropriate, the main method was administration by Google Forms. The researcher obtained contact information of the participants from the NORAD database. In turn, the MSMEs provided contact information of the targeted individuals from the MSMEs.

The primary data was processed through SPSS V.27 software for correlational and regression analysis and descriptive statistics. The raw data was entered in SPSS and respondents' averages for each variable calculated. The averages for the five variables were entered for the 88 respondents in the SPSS software for correlational and regression analyses. The correlational analysis entailed Spearman's rho statistics, which showed the directionality of the correlation between the independent and dependent variables. On the other hand, regression analysis and statistics helped establish magnitude of the impact of changes in the independent variables on the dependent variable. The researcher used SPSS version 27. The researcher also determined and used Sig and F- statistics to ascertain the statistical significance of the regression coefficients.

The regression model used in the regression analysis was:

$$DSE = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{1T} + \beta_2 X_{2T} + \beta_3 X_{3T} + \beta_4 X_{4T} + \varepsilon$$

Where:

DSE - Digital space expansion

X_1 is Google business profiles

X_2 is digital skills training

X_3 is social media

X_4 is website

β_0 is the intercept of the regression model.

$\beta_1 - \beta_4$ are coefficients of regression model with all the variables are constant.

T time trend or time index (time span between observations)

ε is the error of the regression model

3.7 Operationalization of Variables

Table 3.2 shows the way the indicators by which the study's variables were measured, based on the aim and objectives of the study.

Table 3.2: Operationalization of variables

	Objectives	Variables	Indicators	Type of Data	Type of Analysis	Measurement scale
1	To establish the influence of Google Business Profiles (GBPs) on the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya using the case of the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project	Google business profiles	-Having an active Google business profile -Display of business name and logo on GBP -Displays and describes products on the GBP -Displays operating and closing hours and days GBP -Has contact information and physical address on the GBP	Quantitative	Correlational and regression	Interval Ordinal
2	To establish the influence of social media on the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya using the case of the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project	Social media accounts	-Has social media platforms or accounts -Social media interactions have improved -Improvement in the conversion of social media traffic into sales -Number of social media followers of the SME has grown	Quantitative	Correlational and regression	Interval Ordinal
3	To determine the influence of websites on the expansion of the digital space for	Business websites	-Has developed and uses website -Quality of users' journey has improved -Performance of the SME's database has improved	Quantitative	Correlational and regression	Interval Ordinal

	startups in Kenya using the case of the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project		-Full-page load time for the SME's website has shortened			
	To find determine the influence of digital skills training on the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya using the case of the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project	Digital skills training	-Has conducted digital skills training -Number of digital skills training by the SME has grown -Digital skills training sessions have become more technical -Trainings have focused more on the digital competence	Quantitative	Correlational and regression	Interval Ordinal
		Dependent Variable				
		Expansion of digital space	-Enhanced user engagement and interactions on the SME's digital platforms -Recorded improved online and brand visibility -Achieved enhanced credibility, trust and professional outlook -Increased social media presence and footprint -Expanded its Market reach and exposure	Quantitative	Descriptive statistics	Interval Ordinal

3.8 Diagnostic Tests

The listed diagnostic tests were performed to enforce suitability of the data and analysis

3.8.1 Normality Test

The researcher undertook a normality test to determine the data was obtained from a normally distributed population. Several statistical parameters were analyzed to test the normality of the data

Table 3.3: Normality test results

	Descriptive Statistics							
	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis		
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Google Business Profiles	88	1.5723	.62446	.439	1.893	.561	9.786	.250
Social Media	88	2.0732	.57536	.4332	1.7894	.561	5.755	.250
Digital Skills Training	88	2.6229	.50439	.420	.917	.561	1.666	.250
Websites	88	1.7232	.50427	.428	.8341	.561	1.933	.250
Expansion of digital space	88	2.1323	.55423	.545	2.881	.561	8.223	.250
Valid N (Listwise)	88							

Skewness values between -3 and +3 (between 0.8341 and 2.881) showed that distribution curves for the data were symmetrical for all the variables. This conclusion derives from the rule that skewness values within the -3 and +3 threshold are acceptable. The same trend was observed for kurtosis statistics, which ranged between 1.666 and 9.786. that is, in line with the general rule that appropriate kurtosis should range between -10 and +10, the curve for the distribution of the sampled data would be asymmetrically acceptable for a normal univariate distribution.

Since the null hypothesis of normality test is that, the sample data follows a normal distribution, the P (0.000) where $P \leq 0.05$, the hypothesis of the normality was accepted. Thus, there was no need to transform the raw data from the survey. All the skewness values were acceptable because

they were within the generally acceptable range. Similarly, the Kurtosis values were within the acceptable -10 and +10. Hence, the data was from a normally distributed population.

3.8.2 Multicollinearity Test

The researcher carried out a multicollinearity test to establish any correlation among the study's independent variables. The absence of multicollinearity would help ascertain the validity of the findings of the study.

Table 3.4: Variance inflation factors for the independent variables

Variance Inflation Factors			
Date: 07/20/23 Time: 20:00			
Sample: 1 88			
Included observations: 88			
Variable	Coefficient Variance	Uncentered VIF	Centered VIF
C	0.293750	48.70660	NA
Google_Business_Profiles	4.14E-07	1.351794	1.046798
Social_Media	0.115396	1.816357	1.019425
Websites	0.010210	49.71305	1.033939
Digital_Skills_Training	0.126371	1.524323	1.024233

As shown in Table 3.4 on multicollinearity tests, the centered Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) values are less than 4.0 for all the independent variables. Hence, there was no multicollinearity among the independent variables. Thus, these variables did not linearly correlate with one another. Consequently, because the statistical significance of the variables was not jeopardized, statistical inferences may be deduced from the correlational and regression statistics obtained.

3.8.3 Heteroskedasticity Test: White

The researcher ran a heteroskedasticity test establish if the regression model would not explain some or all of the patterns or relationships between thee dependent variables and the independent variables.

Table 3.5: Heteroskedasticity

Heteroskedasticity Test: White

F-statistic	0.500076	Prob. F(9,87)	0.8679
Obs*R-squared	4.923770	Prob. Chi-Square(9)	0.8409
Scaled explained SS	4.212368	Prob. Chi-Square(9)	0.8969

Heteroscedasticity shows that a population has unequal variance in the data sampled. As Table 3.5 indicates with p greater than 0.05, heteroskedasticity was absent in the data, implying equal variance and confirming the validity of the regression statistics.

3.8.4 Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the questionnaire used in the study was ascertained using the test-retest method. In this method, the researcher administered a set of items from the questionnaire to selected 15 respondents twice, over a week. The scores from Time 1 and Time 2 administration were then correlated to confirm the stability of the instrument over time. A test-retest correlation coefficient of 0.764 indicated good reliability levels for the instrument.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION, AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the findings of the study and discussion of the findings in relations to the purpose, objectives and variables of the study. The chapter details what was found out in relations to the objectives of the study, interpreting and comparing the findings with those of other researchers.

4.2 Questionnaire Return Rate

After the survey, 88 of the 100 targeted respondents filled and returned the questionnaire. These statistics corresponded to 88% response rate, which is way above the generally acceptable 50%+ return rate. Hence, the data obtained from the survey was sufficient enough for use in statistical analysis and inferences.

4.4 Digital Space Expansion for Startups

The researcher undertook descriptive statistical analysis to establish the respondents' perception on expansion of digital space for startups. The results are presented in Table 4.7

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics of Digital Space Expansion

Item	Statements on Digital Space Expansion	Strongly Agree(5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree(1)	Mean	S.D
F1	The SME's workforce has acquired vital and additional skills from training under the NORAD-funded digital project	24(27.27%)	28(32.81%)	17(19.32%)	11(12.50%)	8(9.09%)	3.56	1.267
F2	The SME has recorded performance improvement during the digital launchpad project	32(36.36%)	23(26.14%)	17(19.32%)	11(12.50%)	5(5.68%)	3.75	1.234
F3	The digital skills training has enabled the SMEs to achieve continuous improvement as a result of the digital launchpad project	25(28.41%)	33(37.50%)	11(12.50%)	14(15.91%)	5(5.68%)	3.67	1.210
F4	The trainings have improved the digital competence of the SME's workforce and systems	28(32.82%)	28(32.82%)	12(13.64%)	15(17.05%)	5(5.68%)	3.67	1.248
F5	The SME's workforce has acquired vital and additional skills from training under the NORAD-funded digital project	7(7.95%)	66(75.00%)	1(1.14%)	9(10.23%)	5(5.68%)	3.69	0.963
F6	The SME has recorded performance improvement during the digital launchpad project	17(19.32%)	47(53.41%)	11(12.50%)	12(13.64%)	1(1.14%)	3.76	0.959
Composite Mean and Composite S.D							3.68	1.147

The Table 4.1 results can be interpreted as follows;

The first item set out to established whether the SME's workforce has acquired vital and additional skills from training under the NORAD-funded digital project. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 24(27.27%) strongly-agreed, 28(32.81%) agreed, 17(19.32%) neutral, 11(12.50%) disagreed and 8(9.09%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.56 and 1.267 S.D. The recorded weighted frequencies suggest that the NORAD-funded digital project is instrumental in aiding the SME workforce acquire vital and additional skills from training as confirmed by the majority positive responses

The second item was to establish whether the SME has recorded performance improvement during the digital launchpad project. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 32(36.36%) strongly-agreed, 23(26.14%) agreed, 17(19.32%) neutral, 11(12.50%) disagreed and 5(5.68%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.75 and 1.234 S.D. The responses by the majority suggest that indeed the SME has recorded performance improvement during the digital launchpad project

The third item was to establish whether the digital skills training has enabled the SMEs to achieve continuous improvement as a result of the digital launchpad project. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 25(28.41%) strongly-agreed, 33(37.50%) agreed, 11(12.50%) neutral, 14(15.91%) disagreed and 5(5.68%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.67 and 1.210 S.D. The frequency tally weights confirm that the digital skills training has indeed enabled the SMEs to achieve continuous improvement as a result of the digital launchpad project

The fourth item was to establish whether the trainings have improved the digital competence of the SME's workforce and systems. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 28(32.82%) strongly-agreed, 28(32.82%) agreed, 12(13.64%) neutral, 15(17.05%) disagreed and 5(5.68%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.67 and 1.248 S.D. The results confirm that majority were convinced that the trainings have improved the digital competence of the SME's workforce and systems

The fifth item was to establish whether the SME's workforce has acquired vital and additional skills from training under the NORAD-funded digital project. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 7(7.95%) strongly-agreed, 66(75.00%) agreed, 1(1.14%) neutral, 9(10.23%) disagreed and 5(5.68%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for

the item statement was 3.69 and 0.963 S.D. It was confirmed by the majority that indeed the SME's workforce has acquired vital and additional skills from training under the NORAD-funded digital project

The sixth item was to establish whether the SME has recorded performance improvement during the digital launchpad project. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 17(19.32%) strongly-agreed, 47(53.41%) agreed, 11(12.50%) neutral, 12(13.64%) disagreed and 1(1.14%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.76 and 0.959 S.D. It was overwhelmingly agreeable by the majority that indeed the SME had recorded performance improvement during the digital launchpad project

4.5 Objective 1: To Establish the Descriptive Statistics of GBPs and Digital Space Expansion

The researcher undertook descriptive statistical analysis to establish the responses perception on GBP initiatives and expansion of digital space for startups respectively. The results are presented in Table 4.2

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics of GBP and Digital Space Expansion

Item	Statements on GBP	Strongly Agree(5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree(1)	Mean	S.D
B1	The SME has an active Google Business Profile under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project	27(30.68%)	35(39.77%)	9(10.23%)	10(11.36%)	7(7.95%)	3.74	1.236
B2	The SME displays the business name and description of its products its Google Business Profile	24(27.27%)	26(29.55%)	15(17.05%)	14(15.91%)	9(10.23%)	3.48	1.322
B3	The SME displays and describes its products and product reviews on the Google Business Profile	20(22.73%)	31(35.23%)	10(11.36%)	20(22.73%)	7(7.95%)	3.42	1.284
B4	The SME displays operating and closing hours and days on the Google Business Profile	33(37.50%)	17(19.32%)	10(11.36%)	22(25.00%)	6(6.82%)	3.56	1.388
B5	The SME has contact information and physical address on the Google Business profile	29(32.95%)	23(26.14%)	14(15.91%)	16(18.18%)	6(6.82%)	3.60	1.300
Composite Mean and Composite S.D							3.56	1.306

The results in Table 4.2 depicts that the sub-independent variable recorded a composite mean of 3.56 and 1.306 SD which can be the statements' contribution as follows;

The first item was to establish whether the SME has an active google business profile under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 27(30.68%) strongly-agreed, 35(39.77%) agreed, 9(10.23%) neutral, 10(11.36%) disagreed and 7(7.95%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.74 and 1.236 S.D. The statement was positively confirmed by the majority and that strongly suggest that the majority of the SME had an active Google Business Profile under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project

The second item was to establish whether the SME displays the business name and description of its products its Google Business Profile. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined;

24(27.27%) strongly-agreed, 26(29.55%) agreed, 15(17.05%) neutral, 14(15.91%) disagreed and 9(10.23%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.48 and 1.322 S.D. It was established that the SME displays the business name and description of its products its google business profile as confirmed by the majority

The third item was to establish whether the SME displays and describes its products and product reviews on the Google Business Profile. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 20(22.73%) strongly-agreed, 31(35.23%) agreed, 10(11.36%) neutral, 20(22.73%) disagreed and 7(7.95%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.42 and 1.284 S.D. Therefore, it was established that the SME displays and describes its products and product reviews on the Google Business Profile as suggested by the majority

The fourth item was to establish whether the SME displays operating and closing hours and days on the Google Business Profile. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 33(37.50%) strongly-agreed, 17(19.32%) agreed, 10(11.36%) neutral, 22(25.00%) disagreed and 6(6.82%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.56 and 1.388 S.D. It was thus established that indeed the SME displays operating and closing hours and days on the Google Business Profile as suggested by the majority though the SD was relatively high indicating a divided opinion by the respondents.

The fifth item was to establish whether the SME has contact information and physical address on the Google Business profile. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 29(32.95%) strongly-agreed, 23(26.14%) agreed, 14(15.91%) neutral, 16(18.18%) disagreed and 6(6.82%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.60 and 1.300 S.D. The statement was confirmed by majority and thus the majority SMEs had contact

information and physical address on the Google Business profile and direct potential customers on how to possibly reach out to them in case they wanted to contact the SMEs or visit them.

4.5.1 Correlational Analysis for GBPs Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion Startups

This section reports on the findings of correlational and regression analysis for google business profile and expansion of digital space for SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project. Table 4.3 displays the Spearman’s rho statistics for Google business profiles initiatives and expansion of digital space for startups in Kenya.

Table 4.3: Relationship between GBP initiatives and expansion of digital space for startups

Variable		Google Business Profiles	Expansion of Digital Space
Google Business Profiles	Pearson’ Correlation	1	0.563**
	Sig. (two-tailed test)		0.000
	n	88	88
Expansion of Digital Space	Pearson’ Correlation	0.563**	1
	Sig. (two-tailed test)	0.000.	
	‘n’	88	88
**Correlation at 0.05 level of significance (two-tailed test)			

As shown in Table 4.3, there was reported positive relationship between the application of Google business profiles initiatives and the expansion of the digital space for startup enterprises in Kenya. The Spearman’s rho statistics 0.563 is an indicator of the strong positive trajectory of the relationship between Google business profiles and expansion of digital space. What is more, the relationship is shown to be statistically significant at 95% (0.05) confidence level with $p = 0.000$ ($p \leq 0.05$).

The Spearman’s rho statistics of 0.670, 0.520 and 0.615 in table 4.1 show similarly positive and strong relationships between social media initiatives, digital skills training initiatives and website

initiatives, respectively, and expansion of digital space. The implications of these statistics and the inferred relationship is that the startups record expansion of their digital space that correspond to frequency or intensity of their initiatives or projects targeting Google business profiles, social media, digital skills training and websites.

4.5.2 Regression Model Summary

The researcher established the fitness of the regression model for the data collected in the study before conducting the linear regression analysis for the independent variables and the dependent variable. Table 4.4 shows the calculated R square and the ANOVA, which show the fitness of the model.

Table 4.4: Model summary
Model Summary

Model	R	Adjusted Square	Std. Error of Estimate	Change Statistics					
				R Square	of the R Square Change	F	df1	df2	Sig. Change
1	.654 ^a	.442	.324	.67203	.442	45.911	3	704	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Google Business Profiles, Social Media, Digital Skills Training, Websites

In Table 4.4, whereas the R statistics of 0.654 indicates positive relationship between the dependent variable (expansion of digital space) and the independent variables of Google business profiles, social media, digital skills training and websites initiatives, the R Square of 0.442 reveals that the regression model used in the study accounts for or explains 44.2% of the changes in the digital space expansion for startup SMEs in Kenya. That it, about 44.2% of the variations in digital space expansion for the startup SMEs in the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project can be attributed to the startup SMEs' Google business profiles, social media, digital skills training and website initiatives.

**Table 4.5: Analysis of variance for the study's variables
ANOVA^a**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	70.568	4	16.349	45.911	.000 ^b
	Residual	137.342	370	.376		
	Total	207.910	374			

a. Dependent Variable: expansion of digital_space_for_startups

b. Predictors: (Constant), Google Business Profiles, Social Media, Digital Skills Training, Websites

Table 4.5 contains analysis of variance ANOVA establish the difference of the means of the groups of independent variables, testing and confirming whether the differences in the means of the populations were significant or not. As shown in table 4.3, the analysis yielded $F(4, 95) = 16.349$, $\text{Sig}(0.000) p < 0.05$. The p of 0.000 (≤ 0.05) implies that Google business profiles, social media, digital skills training and website initiatives significantly statistically predicted digital space expansion for the startup SMEs that participated in the survey. Hence, it is asserted, the regression model used in the analysis was a good fit for the data collected for the independent variables and the dependent variable.

4.5.3 Regression Analysis for GBPs and Expansion of Digital Space

Regression analysis was conducted to establish the magnitude of the effect of changes in GBP initiatives on digital space expansion for startups in Kenya. Table 4.6 shows the results of the regression analysis.

Table 4.6: magnitude of impact of Google business profiles on expansion of digital space for startup SMEs in Kenya
Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	.450	.125		2.746	.006	.114	.691
Google Business Profiles	.316	.054	.184	3.965	.000	.112	.332
1 Social Media	.370	.072	.311	4.986	.000	.216	.734
Digital Skills Training	.235	0.069	.100	1.836	.044	-.009	.261
Websites	.515	.0821	.148	2.894	.004	.058	.306

a. Dependent Variable: expansion_of_digital_space_for_startups

The ‘Constant’ in Table 4.6 shows that digital space expansion startup SMEs in Kenya remain at 0.450 if the variables or factors of Google business profiles, social media, digital skills training and websites initiatives were held at zero. The Beta coefficient of 0.316 shows that unit change in Google business profile initiatives would yield 0.316 changes in the expansion of digital space for startup SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project in Kenya. Importantly, the ‘Sig’ of 0.000 ($p \leq 0.05$) for Google business profiles shows the relationship is statistically significant. Hence, the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between Google business profile initiatives and expansion of digital space for startup SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad is rejected. The alternative hypothesis that there is significant correlation Google business profile initiatives and expansion of digital space for startup SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project is accepted.

The regression model for Google business profiles become:

$$\text{Digital space expansion startup SMEs} = 0.450 + 0.316X_{it} + 0.125 \dots\dots\dots(4.1)$$

The study established that the design and application of Google business profiles has significant effect or impact on the expansion, thus size of digital space for the SMEs that participated in the survey. Essentially, several elements or aspects of GBPs affect or contribute to the expansion of the digital space for the SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project. They include business name and description of products (goods or services) offered, indication of an enterprise's operating hours and contact information and a section for customers' or other users' reviews. The established positive relationship between GBPs and digital space for SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project explains why enterprises need GBPs as part of their digital space. The most important role of effect of GBPs is that they help enterprises to get discovered via the range of Google products or accounts, including Google Maps. This discovery manifest by way of foot traffic or web traffic. This assertion stems from the fact that Google is the ultimate or most preferred online referrer.

In the digital or internet spheres, GBPs ensure potential users or customers find an enterprise's products in the local and far-off locations. It gets more effective if and when GBPs show searchers an enterprise's location and how to reach the location. GBPs also help businesses by improving their local search engine optimization (SEO). This use is more apparent where a searcher looks for nearby businesses using Google Maps. The other outstanding ways in which GBPs help build or expand the digital space of an enterprise is by allowing for the control of online business information and building of trust through reviews.

Myriad studies and literary sources report findings similar or related to those of the present study. For instance, in a paper on creation of GBPs, Comanescu (2023) highlights the role of GBPs on enhancing and enterprise's online presence, thereby promoting their physical and digital services. The similarity in the findings by Comanescu (2023) manifests in his citing of inclusion of images,

public contact information, offers, news posts, receiving and managing reviews as critical steps in the creation of GBPs.

In another instance, Sodiq (2022) concurs with the findings of the present study on the relationship between GBPs and digital space expansion, pointing out the role of Google business profiles in offering enterprises the all-important consolidated podium for pursuing and attaining online presence for brand and products. Moreover, asserts Sodiq (2022), Google business profiles have the benefit of boosting the credibility of SMEs through marketing within localities.

The study hypothesized and confirms several aspects or indicators of digital space that the variable of Google business profile affects or improves. They include user engagement and interactions, implementation of digital marketing strategies, and online brand visibility. Other elements of digital space expansion that GBPs may affect are an enterprise's online credibility, trustworthiness and professional outlook and social media presence and footprint. Most importantly, GBPs may help expand an enterprise's digital space by enabling it to achieve or expand online market niche, exposure or reach.

4.6 Objective 2: To Establish the Relationship between Social Media Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion Startups

The researcher undertook descriptive statistical analysis to establish the responses perception on social media initiatives and expansion of digital space for startups respectively. The results are presented in Table 4.7

Table 4.7: Descriptive Statistics of Social Media Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion

Item	Statements on social media initiatives	Strongly Agree(5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree(1)	Mean	S.D
C1	The SME has social media platforms or accounts developed under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project	27(30.68%)	33(37.50%)	10(11.36%)	10(11.36%)	8(9.09%)	3.69	1.272
C2	The level and number of social interactions on the social media accounts has improved since the start of the digital launchpad project	25(28.41%)	31(35.23%)	12(13.64%)	14(15.91%)	6(6.82%)	3.63	1.244
C3	There has been improvement in the traffic conversion into sales during the digital launchpad project	22(25.00%)	36(40.91%)	10(11.36%)	13(14.77%)	7(7.95%)	3.60	1.237
C4	There has been growth in the number of followers on social media of the SME during the launchpad project	34(38.64%)	32(36.36%)	13(14.77%)	5(5.68%)	4(4.55%)	3.99	1.088
C5	There has been growth in the number of visitors for various social media channels for the SME	20(22.73%)	38(43.18%)	10(11.36%)	16(18.18%)	4(4.55%)	3.61	1.159
Composite Mean and Composite S.D							3.70	1.200

The results in Table 4.7 depicts that the sub-independent variable recorded a composite mean of 3.70 and 1.200 SD which can be the statements' contribution as follows;

The first item was to establish whether the SME has social media platforms or accounts developed under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 27(30.68%) strongly-agreed, 33(37.50%) agreed, 10(11.36%) neutral, 10(11.36%) disagreed and 8(9.09%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.69 and 1.272 S.D. It can thus be deduced that indeed the SME had social media platforms or accounts developed under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project with majority of the respondents positively confirming the statement

The second item was to establish whether the level and number of social interactions on the social media accounts has improved since the start of the digital launchpad project. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 25(28.41%) strongly-agreed, 31(35.23%) agreed, 12(13.64%) neutral, 14(15.91%) disagreed and 6(6.82%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.63 and 1.244 S.D. There was no doubt from the results as respondents indicated with certainty that indeed the level and number of social interactions on the social media accounts had improved since the start of the digital launchpad project

The third item was to establish whether there has been improvement in the traffic conversion into sales during the digital launchpad project. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 22(25.00%) strongly-agreed, 36(40.91%) agreed, 10(11.36%) neutral, 13(14.77%) disagreed and 7(7.95%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.60 and 1.237 S.D. The was popular with the majority and therefore it can be concluded that there had been improvement in the traffic conversion into sales during the digital launchpad project as created by the project

The fourth item was to establish whether there has been growth in the number of followers on social media of the SME during the launchpad project. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 34(38.64%) strongly-agreed, 32(36.36%) agreed, 13(14.77%) neutral, 5(5.68%) disagreed and 4(4.55%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.99 and 1.088 S.D. There was an absolute positive confirmation by the majority indicating that there had been growth in the number of followers on social media of the SME during the launchpad project

The fifth item was to establish whether there has been growth in the number of visitors for various social media channels for the SME. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 20(22.73%) strongly-agreed, 38(43.18%) agreed, 10(11.36%) neutral, 16(18.18%) disagreed and 4(4.55%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.61 and 1.159 S.D. The responses suggest that to a greater degree of agreement there had been growth in the number of visitors for various social media channels for the SME

4.6.1 Correlational Analysis for Social Media Initiatives and Digital space expansion Start-up Projects in Kenya

This section reports on the findings of correlational and regression analysis for social media initiatives and expansion of digital space for SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project. Table 4.8 contains the Spearman’s rho and Sig or p statistics for social media initiatives and digital space expansion for startup SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project in Kenya.

Table 4.8: Relationship of social media initiatives with digital space expansion for startups

Variable		Social Media Initiatives	Expansion of Digital Space
Social Media Initiatives	Pearson’ Correlation	1	0.280**
	Sig. (two-tailed test)		0.000
	n	88	88
Expansion of Digital Space	Pearson’ Correlation	0.280**	1
	Sig. (two-tailed test)	0.000.	
	‘n’	88	88
**Correlation at 0.05 level of significance (two-tailed test)			

Spearman’s rho statistics 0.670 in Table 4.8 shows strong correlation between social media initiatives and digital space expansion for startup SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital

launchpad project in Kenya. The Sig statistics of 0.000 shows that the relationship is statistically significant at 95% confidence level.

4.6.2. Multiple Regression Analysis for Social Media Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion for Startup SMEs in Kenya

Table 4.9 contains the multiple regression statistics showing the magnitude of the impact of changes in social media initiatives on digital space expansion startup SMEs in the NORAD-funded digital Launchpad project in Kenya.

Table 4.9: Magnitude of impact of changes in social media initiatives on digital space expansion startups

Model	Coefficients ^a						
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
(Constant)	.450	.125		2.746	.006	.114	.691
1 Google Business Profiles	.316	.054	.184	3.965	.000	.112	.332
Social Media	.370	.072	.311	4.986	.000	.216	.734
Digital Skills Training	.235	0.069	.100	1.836	.044	-.009	.261
Websites	.515	.0821	.148	2.894	.004	.058	.306

a. Dependent Variable: expansion_of_digital_space_for_startups

Beta coefficient of 0.370 in Table 4.9 shows positive correlation between social media initiatives and expansion of digital space for startup SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad initiative in Kenya. Moreover, these statistics implies that unit change in social median initiatives results in 0.370 changes in the expansion of digital space for the SMEs that participated in the study. The Sig statistics of 0.000 for social media initiatives shows the statistical significance of the impact of this variable on the expansion of the digital space of the SMEs that participated in the study.

The meaning of these statistics and findings is the rejection of the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between social media initiatives and expansion of digital space for startup SMEs in the NORAD-funded digital launchpad initiative in Kenya. Instead, the alternate hypothesis that there is correlation between social media initiatives and expansion of digital space for startup SMEs in the NORAD-funded digital launchpad initiative in Kenya is accepted.

Based on the regression findings, the multiple regression model for social media initiatives is:

$$\text{Digital space expansion for startup SMEs} = 0.450 + 0.370it + 0.054 \dots \dots \dots (4.2)$$

The positive correlation between social media initiatives and digital space for SMEs in the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project explains the far-reaching impact and implications of social media on the contemporary business. Importantly, it shows how social media enable enterprises to open new avenues or spaces for digital marketing via the available digital platforms like Twitter and Facebook. The other parameters by which social media impact on digital space may be measured or confirmed are the benefits relating to brand loyalty, ease of communication, lasting effect on customers, enhanced customer power and larger audience base.

Like Google business profiles, social media pages or accounts are linked with myriad digital space benefits. In findings similar to those of the present study, Kearney and Hurst (2021) established that properly designed and run digital platforms such as social media pages or websites help an enterprise's digital presence through better and more interactions, higher traffic conversion rates, growth of users, visitors or followers on various channels. Consequently, these benefits may improve a startup SME's digital space and effectiveness. As was established in the present study, Sharma and Tripathi (2023) links social media strategy or initiatives with improved engagement of and interactions with users or potential customers, enhanced online visibility for business and products and improved effectiveness of digital marketing activities.

The present study revealed that many enterprises are increasingly embracing or using social media platforms to strategize the social identity of their brands and products. Through these strategies, enterprises seek to become and reveal their unique identities in the digital spaces, thus sales and profitability. In this context, the findings are similar to those by Luders, Dinkelberg and Quayle (2022) who established the improved creativity and strategy in the exploitation of social media in the building of social identity. In applying social media strategies or initiatives, enterprises take advantage of mutually constituting online realities and interactions with potential customers or partners. Moreover, concurs Luders, Dinkelberg and Quayle (2022), enterprises of different sizes and financial capabilities use or exploit the affordability of social media platforms to connect with like-minded partners in their supply chains via the internet and other digital tools and technologies. Importantly, the present study reveals that SMEs use social media to expand their digital space through building communities of agencies with shared or symbiotic missions, visions, values, narratives and approaches to doing business.

The findings of the present study are similar to those by Hanafizadeh, Shafia and Bohlin (2021) who explored the consequences of social media usage on the performance of firms. According to Hanafizadeh, Shafia and Bohlin (2021), social media initiatives and usage helps improve performance of enterprises through four key steps; accessing and sharing knowledge, enhanced customer relationships, development of new products and process and value creation.

The findings of the present study are also similar to those by Anderson and Rainie (2018), which showed that social media has not only revolutionized digital communication but has also reduced barriers of space and time between supply chain partners. For instance, observes Anderson and Rainie (2018), platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter have shortened the hitherto long-distance relationship between businesses and their customers. In fact, social media has

enabled real-time conversations in the digital space, thereby reshaping enterprises' personal and professional interactions.

4.7 Objective 3: To Establish the Relationship between Digital Skills Training Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion for Startups

The researcher undertook descriptive statistical analysis to establish the responses perception on Digital Skill Training Initiatives and expansion of digital space for startups respectively. The results are presented in Table 4.10

Table 4.10: Descriptive Statistics of Digital Skill Training Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion

Item	Statements on Digital Skill Training Initiatives	Strongly Agree(5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree(1)	Mean	S.D
D1	The SME's workforce has acquired vital and additional skills from training under the NORAD-funded digital project	30(34.09%)	34(38.64%)	6(6.82%)	16(18.18%)	2(2.27%)	3.84	1.154
D2	The SME has recorded performance improvement during the digital launchpad project	23(26.14%)	36(40.91%)	19(21.59%)	5(5.68%)	5(5.68%)	3.76	1.083
D3	The digital skills training has enabled the SMEs to achieve continuous improvement as a result of the digital launchpad project	44(50.00%)	21(26.86%)	6(6.82%)	14(15.91%)	3(3.41%)	4.01	1.236
D4	The trainings have improved the digital competence of the SME's workforce and systems	47(53.41%)	29(32.95%)	7(7.95%)	4(4.55%)	1(1.14%)	4.33	0.893
Composite Mean and Composite S.D							3.99	1.092

The results in Table 4.10 depicts that the sub-independent variable recorded a composite mean of 3.99 and 1.092 SD which can be the statements' contribution as follows;

The first item was established whether the SME's workforce has acquired vital and additional skills from training under the NORAD-funded digital project. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 30(34.09%) strongly-agreed, 34(38.64%) agreed, 6(6.82%) neutral,

16(18.18%) disagreed and 2(2.27%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.84 and 1.154 S.D. The weighted responses suggest that near absolute majority were of the opinion that the SME's workforce had acquired vital and additional skills from training under the NORAD-funded digital project which was very critical to their business operations.

The second item was to establish whether the SME has recorded performance improvement during the digital launchpad project. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 23(26.14%) strongly-agreed, 36(40.91%) agreed, 19(21.59%) neutral, 5(5.68%) disagreed and 5(5.68%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.76 and 1.083 S.D. The responses weight levels were a testament that indeed the SME has recorded performance improvement during the digital launchpad project

The third item was to establish whether the digital skills training has enabled the SMEs to achieve continuous improvement as a result of the digital launchpad project. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 44(50.00%) strongly-agreed, 21(26.86%) agreed, 6(6.82%) neutral, 14(15.91%) disagreed and 3(3.41%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 4.01 and 1.236 S.D. The statement was positively confirmed by an overwhelming majority that indeed the digital skills training had enabled the SMEs to achieve continuous improvement as a result of the digital launchpad project

The fourth item was to establish whether the trainings have improved the digital competence of the SME's workforce and systems. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 47(53.41%) strongly-agreed, 29(32.95%) agreed, 7(7.95%) neutral, 4(4.55%) disagreed and 1(1.14%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 4.33 and 0.893 S.D. There is no doubt judging by the mean score that indeed the trainings have

improved the digital competence of the SME’s workforce and systems and this enabled them to undertake their operations in the digital space without much technological challenges

4.7.1 Correlational Analysis for Digital Skills Training Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion Startup SMEs in Kenya

This sub-theme reports on the findings of correlational and regression analysis for digital skill training initiatives and expansion of digital space for SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project. Table 4.11 outlines the results of the correlational analysis for digital skills training initiatives and digital space expansion startup SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project in Kenya.

Table 4.11: Relationship between digital skills training initiatives and digital space expansion for startup SMEs in Kenya

Variable		Digital Skills Training	Expansion of Digital Space
Digital Skills Training	Pearson’ Correlation	1	0.360**
	Sig. (two-tailed test)		0.000
	n	88	88
Expansion of Digital Space	Pearson’ Correlation	0.360**	1
	Sig. (two-tailed test)	0.000.	
	n	88	88
**Correlation at 0.05 level of significance (two-tailed test)			

The Spearman’s rho of 0.520 in table 4.11 for the variable of digital skills training initiatives shows that they have strong positive relationship with the expansion of digital space for startup SMEs enrolled in the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project in Kenya. Importantly, Sig of 0.000, where $p \leq 0.05$ implies statistically significant relationship. That is, variations in the expansion of digital space for the participating SMEs is not by chance but may be attributed to digital skills training 95% of the time.

4.7.2. Multiple Regression for Digital Skills Training Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion for Startup SMEs in Kenya

The researcher undertook multiple regression analysis to establish the size and direction of the impact of digital skills training initiatives the digital space expansion of the participating startup SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project in Kenya. Table 4.12 shows the important statistics.

Table 4.12: Magnitude of impact of changes in digital skills training initiatives on digital space expansion startup SMEs

Model	Coefficients ^a						
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
(Constant)	.450	.125		2.746	.006	.114	.691
Google Business Profiles	.316	.054	.184	3.965	.000	.112	.332
1 Social Media	.370	.072	.311	4.986	.000	.216	.734
Digital Skills Training	.235	0.069	.100	1.836	.044	-.009	.261
Websites	.515	.0821	.148	2.894	.004	.058	.306

a. Dependent Variable: expansion_of_digital_space_for_startups

As shown by the Beta coefficient in Table 4.12, the regression analysis revealed that unit change in digital training skills initiatives yielded 0.235 changes in the expansion of digital space for the participating SMEs. Importantly, Sig statistics of 0.044, where $p \leq 0.05$ was sufficient evidence of the statistical significance of the relationship between digital Skill training initiatives and expansion of digital space for the startup SMEs from which data was collected. These statistics imply that the regression model for the objective of establishing the relationship between digital space initiatives and expansion of digital space for startup SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project becomes:

$$\text{Digital space expansion for startup SMEs} = 0.450 + 0.235it + 0.069 \dots \dots \dots (4.3)$$

The present study established the digital space of the participating startups expands or improves with an increase in the number or frequency of activities related to digital skills training. These activities, according to the study, entail or target the acquisition of digital skills, improvement of performance of digital systems and tools, application of the requisite digital skills or capabilities and gadgets and their continuous improvement. These digital training initiatives or activities, as researched, targeted or affected various aspects of the startup SMEs' digital space, thus performance. There is a wide range of trends that highlight the digital skills that enterprises should seek for their personnel. These trends include increase acquisition and use of digital devices such as tablets and other digital-interface equipment and increased comfort working with and interacting with digital platforms and communication. What is more, the capacity to design and use data and information management software is an increasingly important competence in modern digital spheres. Importantly, the ability to test, monitor and work with digital devices such as robots is an example of a trend that should direct an enterprise's digital training strategy.

As Scheel, Vladova and Ullrich (2022) confirmed in a study on the influence of digital competences on acceptance of digital learning, acquisition and application of digital skills translates into better engagement or interactions between an SME's digital or marketing department and external users of digital systems, including customers and partners. Through better interactions and engagements via digital platforms, an enterprise is likely to enjoy enhanced credibility, trust and professionalism from the public and customers. Thus, by extension, digital skills training may be linked with firm and brand reputation.

A study by Mui, Kee, Anwar and Gwee (2023) corroborates the findings of the present study, highlighting the impact of digital skills acquisition on employability. Though in an educational setting, the study linked digital competency with on the ability of a person to be employed or assigned a task or a role. The main finding by Mui, Kee, Anwar and Gwee (2023) which supports

the present study was that digital content creation, data- and information-literacy and problem-solving abilities have positive correlation with employability. In the context of the present study, it may be argued, possession of the right skills, via training and other strategies, makes personnel employable to digital functions within an enterprise. Thus, by extension, a business' digital space is likely to benefit from the employability of such personnel.

According to Scheel, Vladova and Ullrich (2022), digital training not only imparts vital skills on the beneficiaries but also builds or enables self-organization and independent learning of digital concepts. Eventually, learners of such skills embrace digital trends. Thus, they recommend, enterprises, and other organizations for that matter, should identify and use other factors that may improve the perception of their people on digital skills training and digital learning in general.

Baeva and Grigorev (2020) concur with the findings of the present study that digital training and other activities that impart digital and technological skills in SME workers help improve online visibility for a company, brand and its products or vision. As Digital Marketing Institute (2018) asserts, training in aspects of digital space such as social media help SMEs and other enterprises to increase their social media presence and footprints, thereby expanding their market exposure, niche and reach.

The findings of the present study and past research on the importance of digital skills training in digital space expansion explains the urgent need for the development of a range of digital skills across enterprises and sectors. This feat can only be achieved through a widened scanning of the landscape to identify the most relevant, appropriate and effective resources, tools and strategies or interventions for developing and supporting digital skills. Through such strategies, it is argued, enterprises and their people will have enhanced and advanced digital access and equity. In other terms, digital literacy is at the core of digital space expansion and digital success, especially for startup SMEs across industries and sectors of the economy. Overall, digital skills training and

competences should not only be for employment but also for lifelong and life-wide learning and development.

4.8 Objective 4: To Establish the Relationship between Websites Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion for Startups

The researcher undertook descriptive statistical analysis to establish the responses perception on website initiatives and expansion of digital space for startups respectively. The results are presented in Table 4.13

Table 4.13: Descriptive Statistics of Websites Initiative and Digital Space Expansion

Item	Statements on Websites Initiatives	Strongly Agree(5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree(1)	Mean	S.D
E1	The SME has developed and uses website under the NORAD-funded digital initiative	32(36.36%)	29(32.95%)	17(19.32%)	9(10.23%)	1(1.14%)	3.93	1.037
E2	The conversion rate and bounce rate have on the SME's website have improved during the digital launchpad project	12(13.64%)	51(57.95%)	10(11.36%)	10(11.36%)	5(5.68%)	3.63	1.043
E3	The user feedback on the SME's website has improved during the digital launchpad initiative	9(10.23%)	48(54.55%)	16(18.18%)	10(11.36%)	5(5.68%)	3.52	1.017
E4	The mobile responsiveness on the SME's website has improved during the digital initiative	32(36.36%)	32(36.36%)	7(7.95%)	6(6.82%)	11(12.50%)	3.77	1.345
Composite Mean and Composite S.D							3.71	1.111

The results in Table 4.13 depicts that the sub-independent variable recorded a composite mean of 3.71 and 1.111 SD which can be the statements' contribution as follows;

The first item established whether the SME has developed and uses website under the NORAD-funded digital initiative. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 32(36.36%) strongly-agreed, 29(32.95%) agreed, 17(19.32%) neutral, 9(10.23%) disagreed and 1(1.14%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.93 and

1.037 S.D. The responses as recorded suggest that majority of the SMEs have developed and uses website under the NORAD-funded digital initiative

The second item was to establish whether the conversion rate and bounce rate have on the SME's website have improved during the digital launchpad project. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 12(13.64%) strongly-agreed, 51(57.95%) agreed, 10(11.36%) neutral, 10(11.36%) disagreed and 5(5.68%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.63 and 1.043 S.D. The score frequency weights are indeed a testament that the conversion rate and bounce rate experienced on the SME's website have positively improved during the digital launchpad project

The third item was to establish whether the user feedback on the SME's website has improved during the digital launchpad initiative. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 9(10.23%) strongly-agreed, 48(54.55%) agreed, 16(18.18%) neutral, 10(11.36%) disagreed and 5(5.68%) disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.52 and 1.017 S.D The weight frequencies has confirmed by the majority depict that the user feedback on the SME's website recorded some improvement during the digital launchpad initiative

The fourth item was to establish whether the mobile responsiveness on the SME's website has improved during the digital initiative. The 88 weighted responses were distributed as outlined; 32(36.36%) strongly-agreed, 32(36.36%) agreed 7(7.95%) neutral, 6(6.82%) disagreed and 11(12.50%)disagreed strongly with the item statement. The mean score for the item statement was 3.77 and 1.345 S.D. The stamen was confirmed by near overwhelming majority that the mobile responsiveness on the SME's website had improved during the digital initiative

4.8.1 Correlational Analysis for Websites Initiatives and Digital Space Expansion for Startups

This sub-theme reports on the findings of correlational and regression analysis for website initiatives and expansion of digital space for SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project. The researcher calculated Spearman’s rho statistics to establish the relationship between websites initiatives and the expansion of digital space for startup SMEs in the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project in Kenya. Table 4.14 shows the resulting statistics.

Table 4.14: Relationship between websites initiatives and digital space expansion for startups

Variable		Websites Initiatives	Expansion of Digital Space
Websites Initiatives	Pearson’ Correlation	1	0.250**
	Sig. (two-tailed test)		0.000
	n	88	88
Expansion of Digital Space	Pearson’ Correlation	0.250**	1
	Sig. (two-tailed test)	0.000.	
	n	88	88

****Correlation at 0.05 level of significance (two-tailed test)**

As shown in Table 4.14, the Spearman’s rho statistics of 0.615 indicates strong positive correlation between website initiatives and expansion of digital space for the sampled SMEs in the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project in Kenya. The implication of this statistics is that digital space expansion increases with an increase in the number or intensity of website initiatives for the sampled startup SMEs in Kenya. In addition, the Sig statistics of 0.000 ($p \leq 0.05$) is an indication of statistically significant relationship at 95% confidence level.

4.8.2 Multiple Regression for Websites and Digital Space Expansion for Startup SMEs in Kenya

The researcher undertook a multiple regression analysis to establish the magnitude of the impact of website initiatives on digital space expansion for the startup SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project in Kenya. Table 4.15 contain the important statistics from the analysis.

Table 4.15: Degree of impact of changes in websites initiatives on digital space expansion for startups

Model	Coefficients ^a						
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized t Coefficients	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
(Constant)	.450	.125		2.746	.006	.114	.691
1 Google Business Profiles	.316	.054	.184	3.965	.000	.112	.332
Social Media	.370	.072	.311	4.986	.000	.216	.734
Digital Skills Training	.235	0.069	.100	1.836	.044	-.009	.261
Websites	.515	.0821	.148	2.894	.004	.058	.306

a. Dependent Variable: expansion_of_digital_space_for_startups

The unstandardized coefficient score of 0.515 in Table 4.15 means that unit increase or decrease in websites initiatives translates into 0.515 changes in the digital space expansion startup SMEs in the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project in Kenya. Like the correlational finding, regression analysis for websites initiatives and digital space expansion for startup SMEs in Kenya reported a Sig of 0.004, $p \leq 0.05$, implying statistically significant relationship. Consequently, the null hypothesis that there is no correlation between websites initiatives and digital space expansion for startup SMEs in the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project in Kenya is rejected. Instead, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Based on the statistics in Table 4.16, the regression model for the variable of website initiatives becomes:

$$\text{Digital space expansion for startup SMEs} = 0.450 + 0.515it + 0.0821 \dots \dots \dots (4.4)$$

Since the statistics showed that website initiatives have positive and statistically significant correlation with the expansion of digital space for the startup SMEs in the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project in Kenya, the null hypothesis that there is no correlation between website initiatives and digital space expansion for startup SMEs in Kenya is rejected.

The present study showed that an enterprise's website initiatives directly relate to or affect its digital space and its usefulness. The indicators or factors by which website initiatives or strategies may affect an SME's digital space and success are users' feedback, mobile responsiveness, website and sources of traffic and conversion or bounce back rate from website. As was the case with the other variables under study, website initiatives were shown to affect various aspects of an SME's digital space, including engagement of and interactions with users of their digital platforms. Most importantly, website initiatives help an SME's digital space by giving it the all-important online trustworthiness and credibility. Moreover, websites make enterprises appear genuine and professional, thereby building their reputation.

Myriad studies, while not contextualized in a similar way, reflect the findings of the current study concerning the digital benefits of websites and website-related initiatives. According to Nassar and Abdou (2013), website initiatives ensures enterprises have constant online presence, enabling their customers to always find them. On the other hand, Verma, Malik and Khanna (2020) cites the other notable digital benefits of websites as credibility, market expansion, consumer insights and online competitiveness. In these contexts therefore, the study by Verma, Malik and Khanna (2020) had similar findings to the present study. As Nassar and Abdou (2013) concurs, the other ways in which website initiatives help established and startup enterprises are brand recognition, expanded target online audience, better lead generation and more informed online customer base.

The findings of the present study, as was those by Kearney and Hurst (2021), highlight the importance of website workability or usability for digital space, more so for activities or functions

of digital marketing. In a review of the importance of websites to enterprises, Sharma and Tripathi (2023) cite user experience as the most important element or factor of effective digital marketing strategy. Like the present study, Sharma and Tripathi (2023) cite bounce rate, session duration and conversion rate as key aspects of digital space that websites and website initiatives or strategies target or may affect. In their discussion, they argue that websites that are difficult to use, browse or navigate or slow and confusing to users implies poor experience for users. Consequently, businesses lose leads or consumers to competitors with better and easier-to-use websites. Hence, it is recommended, enterprises, especially startups and SMEs, should have initiatives or projects that seek to make their websites easier to use, well-organized and optimized for the range of mobile and digital devices that customer use. What is more, such initiatives should make and avail websites that engage users, thus useful in raising leads or conversion rates and making digital marketing successful.

The findings of the present and past research on the relationship between website initiatives and digital space expansion shows the need for enterprises to understand the impact and importance of websites. Subsequently, it is advised, enterprises should make informed decisions and take actions on website initiatives, design and functionality that create good experiences for users and improve engagement and conversion. Sharma and Tripathi (2023) gives more insights into how enterprises may use a range of technologies to expand their digital space. These conventional technologies include protocols, databases, browsers, hypertext markup language (HTML), programming languages and web servers.

4.9 Summary of Hypotheses

This section summarizes the hypotheses of the study based on the statistics yielded in the correlational and regression analysis and their interpretations. Table 4.16 is a summary of the hypotheses of the study.

Table 4.16: Summary for the hypotheses testing

Hypothesis Number	Description	Results	Decision
H ₀₁	There is no significant correlation between Google business profiles and digital space expansion for startup SMEs in Kenya	($\beta = 0.316$, $p = 0.000 \leq 0.05$)	Rejected the null hypothesis
H ₀₂	There is no significant correlation between social media and digital space expansion for startup SMEs in Kenya	($\beta = 0.370$, $p = 0.000 \leq 0.05$)	Rejected the null hypothesis
H ₀₃	There is no significant correlation between websites and digital space expansion for startup SMEs in Kenya	($\beta = 0.515$, $p = 0.004 \leq 0.05$)	Rejected the null hypothesis
H ₀₄	There is no significant correlation between digital skills training and digital space expansion for startup SMEs in Kenya	($\beta = 0.235$, $p = 0.044 \geq 0.05$)	Rejected the null hypothesis

Based on the Beta coefficients for the independent variables of the study, the general regression model for the study becomes:

$$DSE = 0.450 + 0.316X_{1it} + 0.370it + 0.235it + 0.515it + 0.125 \dots\dots\dots(4.5)$$

These statistics and findings justified the overall assertion that there is significant relationship between digitalization initiatives and expansion of digital space for startup SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project in Kenya.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter contains summary of findings, conclusion and recommendations

5.2 Summary of Findings

The first objective of the study was to establish the influence of Google Business Profiles (GBPs) initiatives on the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya using the case of the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project. In this respect, the research established a positive and statistically significant relationship (Spearman's rho 0.563, $p = 0.000$) between GBPs and expansion of digital space for the participating SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project. The regression analysis showed that unit change in GBPs translates into 0.316 changes in the expansion of the digital space of the respondent SMEs. Moreover, the impact was statistically significant at 95% confidence level.

The second objective of the study was to establish the influence of social media on the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya using the case of the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project. The study established a statistically significant positive relationship between social media initiatives and expansion of digital space for the startup SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital project (Spearman's rho of 0.670, $p = 0.000$). Moreover, the regression (Beta) coefficient showed that unit change in social media initiatives resulted in 0.370 changes in expansion of digital space for the participating SMEs.

The third objective was to determine the influence of websites on the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya using the case of the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project. The study established a statistically significant relationship between website initiatives and the expansion of digital space for the SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project (Spearman's rho

0.520, $p = 0.000$). The regression (Beta) coefficient of 0.514 and Sig or $p = 0.004$ showed that unit change in websites initiatives resulted in 0.515 changes in expansion of digital space with the relationship being statistically significant at 95% confidence level.

The fourth objective was to determine the influence of digital skills training on the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya using the case of the NORAD. The study established statistically significant relationship between digital skills training initiatives and expansion of digital space for the SMEs that participated in the study (Spearman's $\rho = 0.615$, $p = 0.000$). Similarly, regression (Beta) coefficient showed that unit change in digital skills training initiatives yielded 0.235 changes in expansion of digital space for the startup SMEs included in the study. Sig statistics of 0.044, $p \leq 0$ implied statistical significance at 95% confidence level.

5.3 Conclusion

The correlational and regression analysis and statistics revealed that the range of digitalization initiatives significantly influences the expansion of the digital space for startup SMEs under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project in Kenya. The conclusion on the achievement of the purposes of the study stems from the establishment of the specific objectives that correspond to the independent variables. In this context, the researcher sufficiently established positive and statistically significant relationship between GBP initiatives, social media initiatives, website initiatives and digital skills training initiatives as independent variables and expansion of digital space as the dependent variable. The other significant finding was the magnitude of the impact of each independent variable on the dependent variable. Whereas the direction of the relationship is positive for the variables of GBPs, social media, websites and digital skills training initiatives, the Beta coefficient for regression and the Spearman's ρ statistics show that the magnitude of the impact differ for the digitalization initiatives.

According to the regression analysis, websites and social media initiatives had the biggest impact on expansion of digital space for the participating startups under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project. This finding highlights the importance of social media and websites to startup enterprises compared to GBPs and digital skills training. Nevertheless, the latter two initiatives similarly had significant impact on expansion of digital space for the sampled startup SMEs. Through the correlational and regression analysis and findings, the study conclusively answered the research questions that corresponded to the variables of digitalization initiatives. Summarily, the study showed that GBP initiatives, social media initiatives, website initiatives and digital skills training initiatives positively and significantly relate with and influence expansion of digital space for startups in Kenya. Thus, all the null hypotheses for the study were rejected with the alternate hypotheses that there exists significant correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable accepted for all the variables.

5.4 Recommendations

Globalization and technological advances are integral factors in enterprises success and competitiveness in the 21st century. However, different types and sizes of enterprises embrace and use digital technology to different levels. Startups face significantly disproportionate barriers in utilizing digital technology and space compared to their more established competitors across professions, sectors, industries and economies. As the study revealed, SMEs are increasingly adopting digitalization tools, techniques, methods and strategies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations, thus profitability and sustainability. Thus, it is recommended, digitalization stakeholders such as SME directors, employees, regulators and government agencies should design and implement policies and interventions that support digitalization by SMEs. The most potent strategies for these stakeholders to promote SME digitalization, thus, digital space expansion include organization-wide involvement, leadership, effective utilization of resources

and expertise and the right choice of technologies and media for digitalization. Importantly, SMEs and other stakeholders should monitor, evaluate and adjust if their present digitalization vision and strategy do not work.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

As the present study shows, there is need for further research to focus on the various factors or strategies by which such enterprises may adopt and fully utilize and exploit digital technology and space. Based on the findings of the present study future and further research should target other such digitalization strategies that may support startups, especially SMEs in developing and emerging economies such as Kenya in their digital drive. Through such research, agency and individual stakeholders such as governments and donor agencies may design and implement the most potent digitalization interventions. It is equally worthwhile that enterprises across sectors, industries and economies implement research-backed and evidence-based digitalization initiatives to maximally utilize the opportunities in the digital space.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Letter of Introduction to Participants

Hi Participant,

*My name is **Obor Millicent**, I am a student at the University of Nairobi taking a course in Master of Arts in Project Planning and Management. I am working on my research project, and I am hoping to get your feedback to the questions in the questionnaire to help achieve the aim and objectives of the study.*

The interview session will last less than 15 minutes. Your identity will not be revealed anywhere in the report while your privacy and confidentiality will be upheld in the report.

If you are interested in participating and sharing your feedback, please tick the button below.

Sign up button.

Best Regards,

Appendix II: Questionnaire for Participants

I kindly request for your participation in this survey. The aim of the survey is to collect data on a research to establish the influence of digitalization initiatives on the expansion of the digital space for startups in Kenya: a case study of the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project.

PART A: DEMOGRAPHICS

Please, respond appropriately to the following questions

1. Under what type of ownership is your SME? (Please tick the appropriate box)

Sole proprietor [1]

SACCO [2]

Limited Company [3]

Others [4]

2. For how long has your SME been in operations? (Please tick the appropriate box)

Less than years [1]

1- 2 years [2]

3-5 years [3]

6-10 years [4]

11- 15 years [5]

More than 15 years [6]

3. What is the number of employees in your SME?

Below 5 [1]

Between 5-10 [2]

Between 11-49 [3]

Between 50-100 [4]

Above 100 [5]

4. In what type of business is your SME involved? (Please indicate)

.....

5. What is the approximate monthly turnover for your SME? (Please indicate in USD)

.....

For part B, C, D, and E, please tick the box that corresponds to the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements

Please, use the 'KEY' below to guide your response.

KEY

5 – Strongly Agree

4 – Agree

3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree

2 - Disagree

1 - Strongly Disagree

SECTION B: GOOGLE BUSINESS PROFILES

	ITEMS	5	4	3	2	1
6	The SME has an active Google Business Profile under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project					
7	The SME displays the business name and description of its products its Google Business Profile					
8	The SME displays and describes its products and product reviews on the Google Business Profile					
9	The SME displays operating and closing hours and days on the Google Business Profile					
10	The SME has contact information and physical address on the Google Business profile					

SECTION C: SOCIAL MEDIA INITIATIVES

	ITEMS	5	4	3	2	1
11	The SME has social media platforms or accounts developed under the NORAD-funded digital launchpad project					
12	The level and number of social interactions on the social media accounts has improved since the start of the digital launchpad project					
13	There has been improvement in the traffic conversion into sales during the digital launchpad project					
14	There has been growth in the number of followers on social media of the SME during the launchpad project					
15	There has been growth in the number of visitors for various social media channels for the SME					

SECTION D: DIGITAL SKILLS TRAINING

	ITEMS	5	4	3	2	1
16	The SME's workforce has acquired vital and additional skills from training under the NORAD-funded digital project					
17	The SME has recorded performance improvement during the digital launchpad project					
18	The digital skills training has enabled the SMEs to achieve continuous improvement as a result of the digital launchpad project					
19	The trainings have improved the digital competence of the SME's workforce and systems					

SECTION E: WEBSITES

	ITEMS	5	4	3	2	1
20	The SME has developed and uses website under the NORAD-funded digital initiative					
21	The conversion rate and bounce rate have on the SME's website have improved during the digital launchpad project					
22	The user feedback on the SME's website has improved during the digital launchpad initiative					
23	The mobile responsiveness on the SME's website has improved during the digital initiative					

SECTION F: EXPANSION OF DIGITAL SPACE

	ITEMS	5	4	3	2	1
24	There has been enhanced user engagement and interactions on the SME's digital platforms during the NORAD-funded digital launchpad initiative					
25	The SME has recorded improved online and brand visibility during the digital initiative					
26	The SME has achieved enhanced credibility, trust and professional outlook during the digital launchpad initiative					
27	The SME has increased its adoption of various digital marketing strategies to promote businesses					
28	There has been significant growth in the SME's social media presence and footprint during the digital initiative					
29	The SME has expanded its market reach and exposure during the digital launchpad project					

Thank You

Appendix III: NACOSTI Permit


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