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Digitalization in Women Entrepreneurship: Use of social media

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship has come a long way since its inception around a century ago, but women's entry into this field is not very primitive. The era of COVID 19 brought about a new milestone in the way businesses have been operating since so many years. With the advent of pandemic, the businesses got disrupted and entrepreneurs had no choice but to operate their businesses from home through digital platforms. Slowly and gradually many business processes started running through online mode. During this phase many women entrepreneurs in India and abroad also shifted towards this new mode of doing business. Women entrepreneurs specially benefitted from this online set up and in a short span of time many women entrepreneurs started operating their business through social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn etc. due to ease of operation and low-cost involvement. Today social media is a popular platform among women entrepreneurs to show their creativity and business skills while earning profits. There are some challenges also which women face while operating on social media. But these can be dealt with by safe and smart usage of these platforms. The objectives of this paper are to know about the various social media platforms used by women entrepreneurs in India, to examine the benefits to women entrepreneurs of business through social media and to investigate the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in business through social media in our country. Therefore, we can say that the future of business through social media is very bright for women entrepreneurs not only in India but through out the world.

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Keywords: Entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurship, digitalisation, social media

1. Introduction

Current era of digitalisation has led to some major structural changes throughout the world, which in turn have resulted into expeditious changes and advancement in information and communication technology (ICT), posing innumerable challenges in the way we interact and work. Digitalisation gained acceleration with the onset of COVID 19 pandemic where all businesses were struggling with their survival due to Government announced lockdown periods. In March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared COVID 19 as a global pandemic, which led to governmental restrictions like lockdowns, travel restrictions and a halt to business activities (Giones *et al.*, 2020) ^[9]. People and businesses were left with no alternative for interacting with each other, making payments etc. Throughout the COVID 19 era, digitalisation businesses in achieving sustaining competitive edge, boosting their pliancy and flexibility (Guo *et al.*, 2020) ^[11]. Starting from COVID era, there is no looking back in the way we have made our lives easier. Things like cloud computing, robotics, internet, mobile services, and social media have changed the ways in which products are designed and developed, manufactured, standardised, the way businesses collaborate worldwide today, making it possible to match complex demands with supplies (Autio *et al.*, 2018) ^[2].

Entrepreneurship is now considered a key driver of economic growth and development (Sharma, 2018; Roshandel-Arbatani *et al.*, 2019) ^[29, 27]. Modern economies are promoting women entrepreneurs also to help accelerate economic growth by giving other women a chance to share the responsibility of nation building. As a result, we have reached to a level where one in every three women in the world are high growth and innovation entrepreneurs focussing on national and international markets (GEM report, 2023) ^[14] and so women entrepreneurship has been considered to be the key source of development and innovation since the year 2000. But at the same time this is also true that with the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, the most affected women led businesses in a negative manner (Koltai *et al.*, 2020) ^[18]. The reasons attributed to this could be because women generally own short spanned small businesses which are not able to withstand the blow of economic disruption in the country. Therefore, according to 2023 GEM report, business exit rates of women saw a rise from 2.9% to 3.6% during the two-year COVID period. On the one hand this pandemic severely affected many women led businesses but on the other hand it also led to women switching over from operating their business in a physical space to operating the business over the internet. Academic research is flooded with studies on challenges and problems women face in business and its operation but literature related to digitalisation in women entrepreneurship is still scant.

Understanding the key concepts

- **Digital entrepreneurship:** Has been defined as “the pursuit of opportunities based on the use of digital media and other information and communication technologies”. While there are other forms of digital platforms available for entrepreneurs to promote and run their business, social media is becoming far more popular among women due to its two main advantages of flexibility in working hours and facility to operate the business from home. It therefore allows women to achieve work life balance in the comfort of their homes, helping them to save money spent otherwise on infrastructure and space. It assists women so that they can fulfil their ambitions with lower costs and investment thereby earning financial rewards (Cesaroni *et al.*, 2017) ^[5]. Social media has therefore gifted new ways of doing business and has made networking possible for women entrepreneurs (Mukolwe&Korir, 2016) ^[22].
- **Social media:** Is defined as “a group of Internet-based applications built on the ideological and technological foundation of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of user generated value” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 60) ^[17]. Social media “allows businesses to communicate with, listen to, and learn from their customers in a way they have never been able to do before” (Jones *et al.*, 2015, p. 611) ^[15]. Some of the social media platforms popular among women entrepreneurs in India are- Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, twitter, Pinterest etc. social media is now considered as an inseparable part of our social and personal lives (Mack *et al.*, 2017) ^[19]. It provides women entrepreneurs with a lot of opportunities to work from their homes within the constraints of limited time and resources (Patil, 2021) ^[25].
- **Women entrepreneurship:** As per government of India (1984) definition, Women entrepreneurs are the ones

having ownership and control over an enterprise with minimum 51% financial contribution in the business as capital and providing employment to at least 51% women in the enterprise (Vijayakumar & Jayachitra, 2013) ^[31]. Another definition says that a woman or a group of women who initiate, organise and operate a business enterprise is called a woman entrepreneur (Pandian & Jesurajan, 2011) ^[24]. Female led businesses are generally smaller in size and operation (Sandri & Hardilawati, 2019) ^[28]. The reasons behind women led business being informal and smaller in size are attributed to their household responsibilities and time restrictions (Rahayu, *et al.*, 2021) ^[26]. Women entrepreneurs are a very crucial “untapped source” of economic development and women entrepreneurship contributes equally to economic growth in developing as well as developed nations across the globe.

Objectives of study

1. To know about the various social media platforms used by women entrepreneurs in India.
2. To examine the benefits to women entrepreneurs of business through social media.
3. To investigate the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in business through social media.

Review of literature

S. Beninger *et al.*, (2016) ^[4]: The authors in their study titled “A road to empowerment: social media use by women entrepreneurs in Egypt”, investigated the role of social media in the empowerment of 30 women entrepreneurs in Egypt with the help of semi structured interviews and found that social media tools can and do empower women entrepreneurs, which should result in greater economic and social benefits. It has an overall positive impact on the lives of these women entrepreneurs, both professionally and personally.

Yuvraj (2018) ^[32]: In the study titled “A study on the application of technology in business of the women entrepreneurs”, the author explored 200 women entrepreneurs in Thiruvallur District of Tamil Nadu, India, using social media for their businesses and found that these women face problems like Lack of self-confidence, lack of information, lack of equipments, lack of working space, financial problems and lack of knowledge about Government schemes.

Beachum, (2019) ^[3] – In her study titled “Shattering the Entrepreneurial Glass Ceiling through Social Media”, the author has found that through the use of social media, women entrepreneurs can grow their social capital and improve their access to finance for business, increase customer base, and can seek help of mentors for business, thereby breaking the age-old glass ceiling.

Rosca, *et al.*, (2020) The authors in their study titled “Women entrepreneurs as agents of change: A comparative analysis of social entrepreneurship processes in emerging markets”, explored how women entrepreneurs engage in social entrepreneurship processes in uncertain Base of the Pyramid environments. For this, they investigated four firms from two emerging markets – India and Colombia through multiple case study approach and found that women entrepreneurs tend to be more inspired by the social issues which have a direct impact on the female population, this could be due to their empathetic nature. They rely more on personal resources

and networks. They pursue their entrepreneurial journey with support of their families and face challenges along the way.

Jiménez-Zarco et al., (2021) – In the study titled “Female micro-entrepreneurs and social networks: Diagnostic analysis of the influence of social-media marketing strategies on brand financial performance”, the authors investigated the influence of social media marketing strategies on brand performance and found that female entrepreneur’s level of education also plays a very important role in the way she makes use of social media for her business activities. Women entrepreneurs in this study were well educated and therefore had necessary skills to plan social media marketing strategies and implement them.

Anggraini et al. (2022) ^[1]: the authors in the study titled “The impact of SNS marketing use on women entrepreneurs in the new normal era” investigated female entrepreneurs who use SNS marketing in Bali and found that social network site marketing (SNS marketing) affected marketing performance in terms of customer relationship management (CRM) and marketing capabilities and CRM capability and marketing performance of these women.

Fatima & Ali, (2023) In their study titled “How businesswomen engage customers on social media?” and found that women entrepreneurs choose social media for business mainly because they want to promote their business effectively and approach distant customers. Other reason is that their family and friends motivate them to use social media for doing business.

Popular social media platforms used by women entrepreneurs in India

Though there are a lot of social media platforms being used world-wide, the most common social media platforms being used by women entrepreneurs in India are:

1. **Facebook:** It is an online social networking platform owned by American Technology giant Meta Platforms, created in 2004 by its founder Mark Zuckerberg. At present there are 369.9 million users of Facebook in India, representing roughly 22% of population of the country, which is the highest number of users in the world. And it has more than 2 billion users world-wide, which means one can find just anyone on Facebook, this also means one can have an impressive customer base on this platform. This customer base can be converted into a community and then with the help of photos, videos, text messages, reels, short videos, one can easily expand this community and increase the customer base. According to Meta Platforms, 23% of Facebook users in India, creating effective content for publishing are women, which shows a very promising future for women entrepreneurship in India. This makes Facebook as the top social media platform for online business.
2. **Instagram:** It is another social networking application with photo and video sharing facility. It provides facilities like media uploading which is editable with filters, organised by hashtags, and also has geographical tagging feature. Content can be viewed and shared with security options. It was created in 2010 by Americans Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, and was originally launched for iOS. It gained popularity very rapidly and at present has 2 billion users globally and highest numbers of above 332 million users in India. It has bigger user base in urban areas with majority of users under 25 years of age, therefore, it is suitable for business of products related to fashion. and technology. In 2012 it was bought by American company Meta Platforms, after which its content can be synchronised with Facebook and Twitter. Women entrepreneurs use Instagram for business in many creative ways using features like hashtags, explore, filters, videos, reels, stories, Instagram direct, advertising etc.
3. **YouTube:** It is the rated as the second largest search engine after google. It was launched in 2005 by Steve Chen, Chad Hurley, and Jawed Karim. Owned by google and second most visited website of the world. India alone has 467 million YouTube users and more than 2.5 billion users world-wide. In 2006 YouTube was bought by Google. It serves women entrepreneurs in business by facilities like instructional videos, product review videos, product educational videos. When a video is made on YouTube, it also starts to show up on google search results. Women Entrepreneurs can upload the same on other social sites and gain popularity.
4. **WhatsApp or WhatsApp messenger:** It is an instant messaging service owned by American tech conglomerate, Meta Platforms. It was acquired by Facebook in 2014 and became the most popular messaging app by 2015. It has 2.7 billion users worldwide and 487 million users in India, which are growing at the rate of 16.6% every year. It provides its users with the facilities like sending text, voice and video messages, and share images, documents, location, and so many other contents. In 2018, WhatsApp came up with a business app called as WhatsApp business which helps to connect with standard WhatsApp client. Recently WhatsApp has also added WhatsApp payment feature which allows peer to peer money transfer to facilitate businesses. Women entrepreneurs use WhatsApp for sending the images, videos and text messages to their customers. It helps greatly in receiving orders and even making payments.
5. **Pinterest:** It is a American social media service launched in 2010 by Ben Silbermann, Paul Sciarra, and Evan Sharp. It enables a user to find ideas related to a range of subjects like home, style, motivation, recipes etc. as images, GIFs and small videos in the form of pinboards. It began as a social network with boards but has now grown to services like visual search and e-commerce tool containing shopping catalogues. With the use of impressive graphic designs and interesting content, women entrepreneurs get pins and able to increase brand awareness overtime. Interestingly 85% of Pinterest base users are women, so women related products can get popular easily.
6. **Twitter:** Twitter or ‘X’ as it is named now, is a very popular social media platform and a social networking site. It was created in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, Biz Stone, and Evan Williams and acquired by American Billionaire Elon musk in 2022. It provides its registered users with facilities of posting, texting, uploading images and videos. People can post, like, repost, or comment and even can send messages to other users directly. The messages are limited to 280 characters or less. If posts are created in concise, informative and interesting manner, it is reposted and helps women entrepreneurs gain larger audience and go viral.

7. **LinkedIn:** It is a social media platform and a networking site, focussing on business and employment, it works through websites and mobile applications. It was launched in 2003 and owned by Microsoft since 2016. It has 950 million users worldwide and over a 100 million users in India alone. Women entrepreneurs can connect and share professionally the B2B content and get business as clients. Due to its professional design and formal setup, it is more suitable for B2B connect rather than B2C sharing.

Benefits of business through social media: (Neumeyer *et al.*, 2019; Manolova *et al.*, 2020; Guckenbiehl Corral de Zubielqui, 2022; Chakraborty and Biswal, 2023) ^[23, 21, 10, 7].

1. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn and YouTube provide women entrepreneurs with the facility of live interaction and communication with the customers which is not possible in other mediums (Malhotra & Dash, 2019) ^[20].
2. Livestreaming on these platforms connect sellers to buyers directly. Sellers have the advantage of receiving quick feedback from customers directly and buyers can also clarify about their doubts if any, regarding the product.
3. The products for sale can also be showcased with the help of feeds, stories and reels on these platforms.
4. Social media communities with common interests are also present, which provides sellers with an opportunity to sell to large number of people.
5. Facebook and Instagram allow women to showcase their products while WhatsApp helps in operating the business.
6. The biggest advantage of these platforms is that they are user friendly and easy to use.
7. Social media platforms help women entrepreneurs to get connected to a large number of audiences.
8. Business on social media can be started with a small setup, minimum investment, less resources and even lesser risk.
9. Social media women entrepreneurs face lower entry barriers as compared to women entrepreneurs in physical market place.
10. Social media business eliminates the middle man thereby cutting cost
11. A range of products like fashion, jewellery, home furnishing, home décor, beauty products, accessories, shoes etc can be sold through social media.
12. Business on social media often runs on transaction through online payments which makes the process easy and fast.
13. Social media provides women with business round the clock as compared to traditional business which is restricted with time and place.
14. Business through social media enables women to multitask as they have to handle orders, payments, delivery, complaints and queries simultaneously.
15. Social media also helps women entrepreneurs in growing their business when the happy customers share their personal experience on these platforms and this leads to other buyers also placing orders on the basis of reviews.
16. Any new business can use social media as a starting tool in business and create a customer base on social media first and then switch over to physical market mode.
17. Since in social media we have a choice to conceal our

identity, it becomes safer for women to operate through social media.

18. An entrepreneur often requires funds for the business at various stages and when the funds are not available with her, she can obtain the required capital for creating and growing her business by seeking help from angel investors through social media.
19. Funds for business can also be raised with the help of crowdfunding through social media, and raise awareness about their product or services through crowdfunding platforms and can attract money for future projects also.

Challenges/ problems faced by women in doing business through social media (Kamberidou, 2020; Hazudin *et al.*, 2021; Tunio *et al.*, 2023) ^[16, 12, 30]

Without a doubt, social media has proved to be a game changer for women in entrepreneurship as it provides them with novel opportunities to connect, learn and market their product and make positive impact in their surroundings. With the growing use of social media for business, there have been many benefits enjoyed by women entrepreneurs, but with good things always come some bad things and therefore along with advantages there are some challenges also that women face in their entrepreneurial journey while using social media:

1. Finding the target audience: Big businesses are able to enjoy the fruits of their hard work which they put in while researching thoroughly and regularly about their target population for their product or service. This is the biggest challenge in case of women entrepreneurs choosing social media for their business. It is therefore required by women entrepreneurs using social media to be very careful while selecting the right platform for operation and the right audience for their product, otherwise it may pay them heavily.
2. Another challenge is to make the customers buy again and again from them. Once the right platform is chosen and the target customers are selected and connected to, the women entrepreneurs need to maintain this customer base so that they may build strong business ties with them and have loyal relationship for long. This requires good convincing skills, excellent service, personalised touch and understanding while dealing with each customer.
3. A very serious problem in doing business on social media is that the marketing strategy, way of presentation, and sometimes even the product may be easily copied by anyone and everyone as social media platforms are available and free for everyone. This requires designing a smart strategy and changing it frequently so that even if the rival copy it, it may become obsolete quickly.
4. Privacy and security issues are the biggest challenges in digital world for individuals, companies and customers as well. Women entrepreneurs operating through social media also consider it as the biggest problem, being a social platform, people from all walks of life are connected to social media and some of them even do not reveal their true identity. This poses a serious threat to the personal identity like name and age, personal data like phone number, location, banking details etc. of these women entrepreneurs.
5. Maintaining a consistent good image among the customers is also a challenge for women entrepreneurs on social media. Since these women entrepreneurs

depend heavily on outside agencies for logistics, many a times even if the woman entrepreneur does everything well, the delivery of the product gets delayed due to reasons not in her control and that creates a bad impression in the mind of customer. For this the women entrepreneurs must connect with renowned and reliable agencies for safe and timely delivery of their products.

6. Many a times one or two negative comments or feedback on the social media about the product or service may largely tarnish the image created by women entrepreneurs in business. Since social media platforms are open for all, a new customer will twice before be purchasing from a company having negative feedback comments. Sometimes even fake negative comments may be uploaded by rivals to hamper the image and business negatively. Women entrepreneurs should be very careful regarding this issue and make all efforts to eradicate the problem as soon as it arises.
7. Social media platforms are openly accessible to all through out the world. When women operate on these platforms even for business purposes, they are bound to go through online trolling and harassment by some ill minded people and that may shake up their motivation to a large extent. To save themselves from this, they need to make use of all safety and security features available on these social sites.
8. For women who are not well versed with the mobile technology and its updated features, it is quite difficult to operate business on social media. One needs to be knowledgeable about the product and its market and updated on technology to continuously move ahead. Business on social media also requires skills like presentation, communication, confidence, convincing skills etc. which can be improved with some personal efforts.
9. As compared to physical market, showing product on social media is challenging as one cannot showcase a quality product just by photos and videos. Therefore, business on social media should be one of the platforms to show the product apart from a physical market. Social media may be used to increase the reach of business and connect to large number of people.
10. Business on social media is a 24*7 job, it requires connecting to customers even after the working hours, which may pose a threat to personal life and may also lead to mental and physical fatigue. For this, women should define dedicated time for business and personal life. Working on social media is very demanding on one's life as one has to constantly think of ideas for the next presentation to attract customers.

Future of business through social media for women in India

Technology has come to be a boon for women entrepreneurs in India. They can now operate their business with less investment while being at home. Future of business through social media is very bright ahead for women entrepreneurs as the companies owning these social media platforms are adding new features every few months to make these apps more user friendly. There is seen a sudden upsurge in women using social media for business in India, but one needs to be careful while using these apps due to data security reasons.

Conclusion

Women entrepreneurship is now considered as the key source of innovation and development across the world. Earlier researches on the subject clearly indicate that women are now the new drivers of economic and social growth because women entrepreneurs have inclination not only towards earning profits but also towards social upliftment which includes upliftment of other women. India as a nation was not so ahead in women entrepreneurship due to its age old patriarchal societal set up where women have been confined to four walls of her house and have been dependable on their male counterparts for small financial needs. But now times are changing and women also are moving ahead on the entrepreneurial journey, though the sizes of their businesses still remain small. In this progressive journey ahead, women have been blessed with a wonderful tool of social media during COVID 19 era, through which they not only can operate small businesses from home, but also can look after their family responsibilities being at home. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, LinkedIn, Pinterest etc. are readily and freely available to communicate and operate business round the clock. Business through social media offers women entrepreneurs with benefits like working at their own pace, work life balance, connecting to a larger audience, lower investment and cost saving. Along with benefits there are some challenges also which women have to face while operating on social media. Major challenges are personal data and identity privacy issues, online bullying and harassment, online frauds, 24*7 engagement in business etc. Future of women entrepreneurship on social media has a promising future globally as well as in India.

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