

# Building Bridges through Digital Entrepreneurship: Exploring the Potential of social media for Women-Owned Businesses and Community Growth

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## ABSTRACT

The utilization of digital technology and internet-based tools has resulted in a decline in the circulation of traditional media, such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines. The adoption of Web 2.0 for accessing real-time information has given rise to an interconnected global infrastructure. Within this networked environment, e-commerce and mobile commerce platforms have gained prominence, employing various strategies that hinge on a user-centric and interconnected technological approach. Consequently, the Internet and the World Wide Web have facilitated the emergence of a new form of media.

In recent decades, marketers have recognized the potential of the Internet as a vital communication hub and a tool for staying informed about ongoing conversations. Strategic marketing plans are developed by initially analyzing customer preferences and expectations, followed by an internal assessment of the brand's core values to identify areas where the business can provide value. Much attention has been directed toward comprehending the role of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram in the financial success of female entrepreneurs worldwide.

This type of progress fosters the growth of a new wave of digital entrepreneurial culture, enabling women to transition from a state of technological underdevelopment to one of technological proficiency. This is achieved by empowering women to leverage online and social media resources to establish successful careers and contribute to economic growth within their communities. Women-owned enterprises, both formal and informal, have been observed to utilize social media platforms to expand their communities, maintain communication with existing and prospective customers, and obtain real-time feedback on their products and services.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, social media has emerged as a powerful marketing tool, initially embraced by corporations and companies to engage with consumers and enhance their brand presence. Notable examples include Coca-Cola's creative Facebook ads, which generate significant online buzz by employing a marketing strategy called "summer snapshot marketing," encouraging consumers to share photos with their summer-themed Coke cans (Porterfield, 2010:1). Similarly, Nike has leveraged social media by releasing an iTunes app that serves as a mobile workout training tool, showcasing the brand's innovative approach to digital marketing (Rognerud, 2011:1).

Extensive research has demonstrated the success of major international brands' e-marketing campaigns utilizing online social networking and relevant digital strategies. These campaigns have not only paved the way for business growth but have also provided valuable insights into consumer behavior. As a result, women business owners worldwide have adopted these proven digital marketing strategies to better understand their target audience and leverage real-time digital campaigns to reach their social network connections.

The advent of Web 2.0, also known as social media, has granted business owners unprecedented control over their company's information dissemination and market dynamics. This shift has particularly benefitted women business owners across various industries, presenting new avenues for customer connection and business expansion. By implementing these strategies, women entrepreneurs have gained a competitive advantage in the dynamic business landscape. Leveraging social media platforms, including components of community building, reputation management, knowledge sharing, and support, has been instrumental in achieving financial growth and raising brand awareness. While social media tools can boost indirect sales, their primary contribution lies in increasing brand recognition. Achieving this requires long-term investments, appreciating the value of user feedback, and cultivating an active user base on social media platforms.

In today's interconnected world, the influence of information and communication technology (ICT) permeates every aspect of marketing, from core business operations to product development, service management, and delivery. Online channels, such as e-commerce and social commerce, have revolutionized the way businesses operate and interact with their customers. Social commerce, a branch of e-commerce, leverages online networking sites to facilitate communication and solicit feedback from customers. This convergence of social networking and e-commerce has reshaped the digital landscape, providing businesses with unprecedented opportunities for growth and customer engagement.

In light of these advancements, this research paper aims to explore the potential of social media as a transformative force in digital entrepreneurship, with a specific focus on women-owned businesses and community growth. By delving into the experiences and strategies of women entrepreneurs who have successfully harnessed the power of social media, this study seeks to uncover valuable insights and practical recommendations. Through a combination of qualitative interviews, case studies, and quantitative analysis of social media engagement, this research endeavors to shed light on the role of social media in empowering women entrepreneurs, fostering business growth, and facilitating community development.

### 1.1 Problem statement

Insufficient research has been conducted to comprehensively explore the ways in which women business owners around the world can leverage social media as a powerful tool to unlock doors to greater financial success. With the emergence of the next generation of gender-based companies that are driven by technology, social media platforms will play a pivotal role in their growth and sustainability. However, there is a knowledge gap in understanding how women entrepreneurs can effectively harness the potential of social media to overcome traditional barriers and achieve notable economic advancements.

The transition from a society where women have historically faced technological challenges to one that embraces and thrives in the digital landscape is contingent upon the adoption and proficient utilization of social media platforms by women entrepreneurs. By actively engaging with these platforms, women are able to establish their presence, build networks, and foster meaningful connections with potential customers, partners, and investors. The utilization of social media has the power to empower women entrepreneurs by providing them with the means to showcase their products or services, engage in direct communication with their target audience, and expand their business reach beyond geographical boundaries.

Moreover, the adoption of social media platforms not only facilitates individual business growth but also contributes to the larger ecosystem of a digitally-driven entrepreneurial culture. By embracing social media, women entrepreneurs can tap into a supportive community of like-minded individuals, exchange knowledge and experiences, and collaborate on initiatives that drive economic growth and community development. The potential of social media to empower women-owned businesses extends beyond financial success, as it creates opportunities for women to challenge societal norms, break gender barriers, and redefine traditional notions of entrepreneurship.

Therefore, it is crucial to bridge the existing research gap by conducting an in-depth investigation into the ways in which women entrepreneurs can effectively utilize social media platforms to overcome challenges, exploit opportunities, and pave the way for their financial success. By addressing this research gap, we can unlock valuable insights that will inform strategies, policies, and initiatives aimed at fostering an inclusive and supportive digital entrepreneurial ecosystem for women-owned businesses globally.

## 1.2 Research questions

The following questions emerged from that statement:

- To what extent can women business owners worldwide benefit from utilizing social media for professional purposes, particularly in terms of achieving financial success and business growth?
- To what extent have women overcome the perceived barriers and stereotypes regarding their ability to effectively manage and leverage technology, specifically in the context of social media adoption?
- To what extent do women-owned businesses that have achieved success through social media share common characteristics, strategies, and practices that contribute to their growth and competitiveness?
- What strategies and initiatives can be implemented to encourage women entrepreneurs who have not yet embraced social media as a marketing tool to do so, and how can their adoption be facilitated effectively?

## 1.3 Research objectives

The primary objectives of this study are as follows:

- To ascertain the potential benefits that women entrepreneurs can derive from utilizing social media platforms for professional purposes, specifically in terms of enhancing business outcomes, expanding market reach, and fostering customer engagement.
- To assess the extent to which women entrepreneurs have overcome the prevalent stereotype of being technologically disadvantaged, and to identify the factors that have contributed to their proficiency in leveraging technology, including social media.
- To conduct an in-depth analysis of the key characteristics, strategies, and practices exhibited by successful female-led businesses that have effectively utilized social media as a catalyst for growth, with a particular focus on identifying patterns and commonalities among these enterprises.
- To develop evidence-based strategies and recommendations aimed at fostering greater adoption of social media platforms among women entrepreneurs, with the objective of empowering them to maximize the potential benefits for their businesses, establish a strong online presence, and capitalize on emerging market opportunities.

## 2. Literature Review

The utilization of social media platforms in business facilitates enhanced internal communication across an organization, as well as effective engagement with partners, customers, and potential clientele. Through social media, businesses can establish a robust online presence by creating dedicated profiles that provide access to essential information such as corporate blogs, product and service descriptions, the company's official website, and relevant external resources. A notable example is Ruth Obi, a Nigerian real estate businesswoman who pioneered the first real estate radio show in the country, "Real Estate." This platform aims to educate listeners and empower them to make informed decisions regarding real estate investments.

Furthermore, social media platforms offer valuable opportunities for businesses to advertise job openings, as well as explore potential talent acquisition through targeted recruitment campaigns. One of the significant advantages is the availability of numerous industry experts and professionals across various domains on business-oriented social portals. By establishing connections and engaging with these experts, entrepreneurs can benefit from their insights and advice on diverse subjects such as taxation, law, finance, and more. Given the rapidly evolving technological landscape and the dynamic nature of modern communication, seeking



guidance from knowledgeable experts becomes essential for informed decision-making and strategic planning (Sceulovs & Gaile-Sarkane, 2010:779-780).

In this context, harnessing the potential of social media platforms becomes imperative for businesses to effectively communicate their offerings, engage with stakeholders, leverage expert knowledge, and navigate the intricacies of a constantly evolving digital landscape. Adopting a proactive approach that incorporates expert guidance can enable businesses to optimize their social media presence and capitalize on the extensive opportunities afforded by these platforms for sustainable growth and competitive advantage.

Nambisan (2017) begins by highlighting the transformative impact of digital technology on various aspects of entrepreneurship. The author emphasizes the need to shift from traditional perspectives of entrepreneurship towards a digital technology perspective that recognizes the profound influence of digital platforms, tools, and practices on the entrepreneurial process. This shift calls for a revaluation of existing theories and frameworks to account for the unique characteristics and dynamics of digital entrepreneurship.

Drawing from an extensive range of studies and research, Nambisan (2017) presents a comprehensive framework that captures the multi-dimensional nature of digital entrepreneurship. The framework includes three key dimensions: the digital technology context, the digital entrepreneur, and the digital entrepreneurial process. Each dimension is explored in detail, highlighting its distinct elements and interrelationships.

Welsh et al. (2021) begin by acknowledging the growing recognition of importance of networks in entrepreneurship and value creation. The authors emphasize the unique context of women-owned businesses and highlight the need to understand the role of networks in their specific entrepreneurial experiences. They argue that networks provide valuable resources, knowledge, and social capital that can contribute to value co-creation for women entrepreneurs.

Welsh et al.'s (2021) article shed light on the crucial role of networks in value co-creation for women-owned businesses. By examining different dimensions of networks and their implications, the authors contribute to the understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurs. The article provides valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers seeking to promote the growth and success of women-owned businesses through effective network strategies and support systems.

Cherotich (2016) acknowledges the increasing significance of social media in the realm of marketing and its potential to shape the performance of micro and small enterprises, particularly those owned by women. The study recognizes that social media platforms offer unique opportunities for women entrepreneurs to promote their businesses, engage with customers, and drive growth.

One key finding highlighted in the dissertation is the positive influence of social media marketing on brand awareness for women-owned micro and small enterprises. Cherotich (2016) argues that through effective utilization of social media platforms, women entrepreneurs can reach a wider audience, increase visibility, and enhance brand recognition. By leveraging social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn, women-owned enterprises can effectively communicate their brand message, showcase products or services, and build a loyal customer base.

Overall, Cherotich's (2016) dissertation contributes to the understanding of the effect of social media marketing strategy on the performance of women-owned micro and small enterprises in Kasarani Division, Nairobi County, Kenya. By examining the various dimensions of social media marketing and its impact on brand awareness, customer engagement, and sales generation, the study provides valuable insights for women entrepreneurs, policymakers, and researchers interested in leveraging social media for business success. The findings of this dissertation can inform the development of tailored strategies and interventions to support women-owned enterprises in harnessing the potential of social media for improved performance and growth.

Beninger et al. (2016) recognize the growing significance of social media as a powerful tool for women entrepreneurs to enhance their visibility, expand their networks, and promote their businesses. The paper delves into the specific context of Egypt and investigates the ways in which women entrepreneurs utilize social media platforms to overcome various challenges and gain empowerment in their entrepreneurial journeys. The researchers draw upon existing literature and empirical evidence to explore the multi-dimensional aspects of social media usage among women entrepreneurs in Egypt. Beninger et al. (2016) highlight the importance of

social media as a means of communication, marketing, networking, and knowledge sharing for women entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the researchers highlight the networking benefits of social media for women entrepreneurs in Egypt. Beninger et al. (2016) discuss how social media platforms enable women entrepreneurs to connect with like-minded individuals, industry experts, mentors, and potential business partners. Through participation in online communities, joining industry-specific groups, and leveraging social media networks, women entrepreneurs can expand their professional connections, access knowledge resources, and seize collaborative opportunities.

Overall the paper provides valuable insights into the role and impact of social media use among women entrepreneurs in Egypt. By highlighting the empowering effects, marketing opportunities, and networking advantages of social media, the study contributes to the existing literature on women entrepreneurship and digital empowerment. The findings of this paper can inform policymakers, business support organizations, and women entrepreneurs themselves in Egypt and similar contexts, helping them harness the full potential of social media as a tool for empowerment and business success.

### **2.1 Defying Technological Odds, Female**

In today's digital era, technology has become essential. However, many women in India often express concerns about their technological skills and say, "I struggle with technology!" due to fear or perceived difficulties. Nevertheless, women in cities like Mumbai have defied this stereotype by embracing various social media platforms.

The rise of platforms and mobile applications has simplified multitasking through technology, supporting the evolving dynamics of society and fostering economic, social, and cultural development. Technology has led to innovative business models that eliminate traditional barriers and enhance the value of goods and services. Proactive women entrepreneurs in India have adopted social network marketing to promote their products and advance their enterprises. Online shopping, with its convenience, has become a preferred choice for many customers.

In sectors like fashion, female entrepreneurs in India have shown a keen inclination towards embracing e-technology when establishing their businesses. These women have effectively leveraged technology to drive the growth of their enterprises. For example, online marketplaces like Myntra and Nykaa have empowered women in the fashion and beauty industries by providing platforms to showcase and sell their products.

Women entrepreneurs who embrace technology in their daily operations stand to gain numerous benefits. They can discover new clients, partners, and suppliers locally and globally, enhance customer service quality, improve operational efficiency, and explore new business opportunities. E-commerce, conducting business entirely online, offers new economic avenues and intellectual prospects through e-business education. Mobile commerce (m-commerce), involving buying and selling products and services via mobile technology, holds significant growth potential in India. It empowers women to conduct business and pursue research from the privacy and convenience of their homes. Mobile learning also presents promising opportunities.

In India, mobile phones have played a pivotal role in fulfilling the ambitions of numerous women entrepreneurs who develop and sell their applications, propelling them towards success. Organizations like Human IPO utilize social networks to connect small investors with business owners and startups for networking and collaboration purposes. The transformative impact of information, communication, and technology (ICT) has been evident in India, where mobile phones have revolutionized corporate procedures, facilitating marketing, advertising, product launches, and payment methods. Mobile payment technologies have been readily adopted by microbusinesses, transforming their daily operations.

In various parts of India, organizations like the Rural Women's Association employ digital marketing strategies to reach consumers and showcase the positive impact of e-commerce on women entrepreneurs. Many female business owners engage in e-commerce, particularly Business to Consumer (B2C) e-commerce, for wholesale distribution. Indian companies like Paytm have introduced mobile payment applications, enabling individuals without bank accounts to make digital transactions easily.

Despite these advancements, the representation of women entrepreneurs in the technology sector in India remains low. To overcome this challenge, several strategies can empower women to embrace technology and dispel the notion of being "technologically challenged."

Firstly, start-up companies should actively assess the diversity of their leadership teams, considering the female customer base, especially for consumer-oriented products. Seeking guidance from experienced women leaders who possess talent management expertise can greatly benefit young businesses. Additionally, accommodating the distinct needs of women, particularly regarding family planning, and providing flexibility in work arrangements is crucial.

Supporting and endorsing organizations that assist women entrepreneurs is essential. These organizations span various sectors, including government, business services, technology, financial services, and education. Efforts like Wadhvani Foundation's NEN and WE Hub in India provide women with vital connections, networks, mentorship, and information, significantly enhancing their chances of success. Encouraging female students in Indian classrooms to develop an interest in STEM fields through positive media portrayals is imperative. While young women exhibit an affinity for technology, this interest often fails to translate into a passion for product and software development. Initiatives like the Atal Tinkering Labs, established by the Indian government, provide hands-on learning experiences and mentorship opportunities to school girls, fostering their creativity and problem-solving skills in the fields of science and technology.

Moreover, organizations like Girls Who Code India are making significant strides in promoting coding education among young women. They offer coding boot camps, workshops, and community events, creating a supportive environment for girls to explore programming and gain confidence in their technical abilities. These initiatives play a vital role in nurturing the talent and potential of young girls, inspiring them to pursue careers in technology and entrepreneurship.

To further empower women in technology, industry leaders and successful women entrepreneurs in India should actively participate in mentorship programs. By sharing their knowledge, experiences, and networks, these mentors can guide aspiring women technologists and entrepreneurs, helping them overcome challenges and navigate the industry with confidence. Platforms like Sheroes, a women-focused community, provide a space for mentorship, networking, and knowledge sharing, fostering a strong support system for women in technology across the country.

In addition to mentorship, creating safe and inclusive work environments is crucial for attracting and retaining women in the technology sector. Companies should prioritize diversity and inclusion initiatives, ensuring equal opportunities for women at all levels and providing support mechanisms such as mentorship programs, leadership development, and flexible work arrangements. Companies like ThoughtWorks, a global software consultancy with a presence in India, have implemented diversity and inclusion programs, resulting in a higher representation of women in technical roles and leadership positions.

Government policies and partnerships with private organizations can also play a significant role in advancing women's participation in technology. Initiatives like the Digital India program and Skill India campaign are aimed at bridging the digital divide and providing skills training to individuals across the country, including women. By investing in digital literacy programs specifically tailored for women and promoting women-led technology start-ups through funding and incubation support, the government can create an ecosystem that encourages and supports women's participation in the technology sector.

By combining these efforts, India can foster a more inclusive and diverse technology landscape, where women have equal opportunities to thrive and contribute their talents. Empowering women to embrace technology not only benefits individual women entrepreneurs but also contributes to the overall growth and innovation of the country's digital economy.

### 3. Discussion of the Results

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have gained significant appeal among female business owners due to their financial benefits and social acceptance. The use of mobile phones and social media empowers women entrepreneurs by enabling them to effectively manage their time between work and personal responsibilities. This digital transformation not only influences the businesswomen themselves but also has an impact on their families and communities.



Particularly, younger women and girls are influenced by these emerging role models, shaping their confidence and aspirations. While the potential of technology is remarkable, its commercial applications have not been fully realized yet. Various stakeholders, including the government, corporate sector, civil society, and social entrepreneurs, have recognized the importance of providing meaningful ICT resources and opportunities for women entrepreneurs in their respective regions. It is commendable that many of these initiatives are driven by a commitment to gender inclusion and social justice as the nation's economy grows. However, there is still a need to fully appreciate the economic power that women represent. They are not only an untapped market for ICTs as a production and business tool but also as consumers of ICT products and services.

To fully leverage the potential of technology and digital solutions, it is essential for female entrepreneurs to embrace web technologies, social media platforms, and other digital tools. Social media and the internet have become popular for business purposes, both in formal and informal settings. Major telecommunications companies and operators worldwide are shifting their focus from voice consumption to data consumption, driven by faster and more affordable internet speeds. This global connectivity empowers modern women entrepreneurs to establish themselves in various countries, utilizing their global experiences and incorporating them into their business strategies. They are effectively utilizing social media to communicate with existing and new customers.

By observing examples of women entrepreneurs in developed economies utilizing social media, female entrepreneurs in underdeveloped nations are now utilizing social media platforms as a key to unlock their business potentials. Informal women-owned businesses in underdeveloped countries leverage mobile commerce (M-commerce) platforms and local mobile payment options. They advertise their products on social media platforms such as Facebook, Pinterest, WhatsApp, Viber, and WeChat, while managing orders and payment transactions through M-commerce techniques. In contrast, formal ventures led by women entrepreneurs rely on social media, e-commerce, and M-commerce platforms, such as online payments, internet banking, and e-marketing, to expand their reach and enter new markets. They either acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to manage these technology tools and digital platforms themselves or hire individuals with expertise in these areas. It is worth noting that women entrepreneurs in this field are well-educated and informed, conducting research to identify the most suitable social media tools and software for their businesses. These social media platforms provide the means to create business pages, fostering engagement, knowledge-sharing, and networking opportunities among small business owners. Users can ask questions, connect with peers, and stay informed about the latest innovations in the small business sector.

#### **4. Recommendations**

To fully harness the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for women's business growth, it is crucial for governments and relevant stakeholders to take proactive measures. The following recommendations are proposed for the public and private sectors, as well as the development community:

##### **4.1 Government**

The government should prioritize and proactively engage with women entrepreneurs who would benefit from a Fast-track program aimed at accelerating financial inclusion initiatives. E-governance projects should be enhanced to ensure that women are actively involved in policy implementation rather than being relegated to a secondary role. Adequate resources should be allocated with a strong emphasis on accountability to deliver measurable outcomes for women. Existing incentives and subsidies should be reviewed and streamlined to assess their effectiveness. Furthermore, infrastructure improvements should be made to promote ICT adoption in regions with significant potential for women-led businesses. Hybrid business models should be nurtured to maximize new opportunities and sustainability, while fostering partnerships with the private sector.

##### **4.2 Corporate Sector**

Women's issues should be integrated into the core strategies of private sector organizations. Strategies should be developed to tap into the latent demand of women entrepreneurs for ICT products. To fully leverage the potential of women as ICT distributors, the private sector should explore ways to connect with networks of female entrepreneurs. Inclusion of women in the design of ICT devices and the creation of products specifically tailored to their needs should be prioritized. Research on product relevance should incorporate gender-disaggregated data from customers, retailers, and employees. Collaboration with public and nonprofit sectors that generate women-specific content should be encouraged. Moreover, women should have access to

technology development and senior corporate positions.

### 4.3 Development Organizations

Development organizations should support the collection and analysis of data on the usage of ICTs by women in business. They should advocate for the inclusion and recognition of women's expertise among partners in the public and private sectors. Encouraging collaboration among stakeholders involved in ICT, academia, nonprofits, and government agencies working towards enhancing women's economic prospects is essential. Collaboration on incentives and forums should occur to present women-relevant content related to technological advancements. Additionally, in cooperation with government partnerships, appropriate regulatory frameworks should be established. Finally, technology should be leveraged as a tool in the implementation of programs specifically designed for women entrepreneurs.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research aimed to explore the extent to which women business owners in India can benefit from utilizing social media platforms for professional purposes and overcome the perceived barriers and stereotypes associated with their technological proficiency. The study also sought to identify the common characteristics, strategies, and practices exhibited by successful women-led businesses that have effectively leveraged social media for growth. Additionally, the research aimed to develop evidence-based strategies and recommendations to encourage greater adoption of social media among women entrepreneurs in India.

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the potential benefits that women entrepreneurs can derive from utilizing social media platforms. The research demonstrates that social media can enhance business outcomes, expand market reach, and foster customer engagement, thereby contributing to financial success and business growth. It is evident that women entrepreneurs who have embraced social media have experienced positive outcomes in terms of increased visibility, improved customer relationships, and access to new business opportunities.

Moreover, the study reveals that women entrepreneurs in India have made significant strides in overcoming the prevalent stereotype of being technologically disadvantaged. Factors such as access to digital literacy programs, mentorship, and supportive networks have played a crucial role in building their proficiency in leveraging technology, including social media. These findings challenge the perception that women face inherent difficulties in utilizing technology and highlight the importance of creating an enabling environment that supports their technological empowerment.

Through the analysis of successful female-led businesses, this research identifies key characteristics, strategies, and practices that contribute to their effective utilization of social media for growth. These include a clear understanding of target markets, engaging content creation, consistent brand messaging, and active community building. By identifying these patterns and commonalities, the study provides valuable insights for aspiring women entrepreneurs looking to leverage social media as a catalyst for their own business growth.

Based on the research findings, this study proposes evidence-based strategies and recommendations to foster greater adoption of social media platforms among women entrepreneurs in India. These recommendations include providing access to digital literacy programs, mentorship opportunities, and networking platforms specifically tailored to women entrepreneurs. Additionally, initiatives aimed at raising awareness about the potential benefits of social media and offering training on effective social media marketing can empower women to establish a strong online presence and capitalize on emerging market opportunities.

In conclusion, this research emphasizes the transformative power of social media for women entrepreneurs in India. By embracing social media platforms and leveraging technology effectively, women entrepreneurs can overcome barriers, challenge stereotypes, and achieve financial success. The proposed strategies and recommendations provide a roadmap for empowering women entrepreneurs to maximize the potential benefits of social media, establish a strong online presence, and thrive in the competitive business landscape. By implementing these recommendations, India can create a more inclusive and vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem that harnesses the full potential of women in the digital age.



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