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Published in the USA
 International Journal of Media and Information Literacy
 Issued since 2005
 E-ISSN 2500-106X
 2022. 7(2): 596-605

DOI: 10.13187/ijmil.2022.2.596
<https://ijmil.cherkasgu.press>



Social Media Encourages Women Entrepreneurship: A Study of Challenges and Empowerment

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Abstract

In this era, where technology advances and social media are in the hand of common man, women entrepreneurs remain a largely understudied phenomenon. Social media is the road of success for women entrepreneurs as it encourages women to be independent and become their own-bosses. In online home-based business women attained power in different factors as compared to men in the existing literature. Growing industrialization and urbanization, spasmodic mobility and social legislation change the status of women in global world. Presently, women come forward to take up higher education, technical and professional education and their proportion in the workforce has also been increased. Encouraging women as entrepreneurs in the recent scenario are the government initiative over the globe. Women's empowerment is related to women's decision-making power, easy access to information, and resource control. Semi-structured interviews from 25 women entrepreneurs has been conducted in Lahore, Pakistan Study explored the role of social media which empowering women and the challenges they faced while running online business. In-depth interviews were used to collect data on telephone and were recorded by the researcher and also make notes of the highlighted points. Uses and gratification theory is applied to identify women entrepreneurs personal integrative on social media platforms.

Keywords: women entrepreneurs, social media, qualitative research, in-depth interviews, women empowerment, Lahore, Pakistan.

1. Introduction

Social media itself is a platform which is in reach of every common man. Social media not only make our life easy to communicate but also enhance the people to earn. People can share their ideas with single click according to A. Lipsman, G. Mudd, M. Rich, S. Bruich (Lipsman et al., 2012). With use of social media applications people can share the pictures of their products, expand their business not with in boundary but also across border. It facilitates the people by increasing the followers, make their community relation strong and promote their business in every corner of the world.

In recent era, social media tools offer dominant way for professionals to raise their professional profile and act as an open voice for knowledge. This research similarly observes how social media are tangled with better improvement. Social media platforms and applications are frequently measured as useful instrument for free enterprise. They facilitate entrepreneurs to easily detect changes and chances in business formation through interactions and communications with peers on networks. Social media offers unlimited ventures to reach target customers and generate new ideas for initializing business cited by W.M. Teoh and S.C. Chong (Teoh, Chong, 2014).

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Social media platform is encouraging women to peruse businesses online and become their own bosses. Contributions of face book, Instagram, YouTube bring endless opportunities for women in this digital era.

For this study social media is used as it is an emerging tool and people now a days are highly rely on it. There are many applications like Instagram, Facebook that make the women to utilize them in comfort of their homes. Social media is gradually difficult in nature, becoming a necessary part of social lives and specific uniqueness, from users “following” celebrities on Instagram, to consumers “liking” their favorite brands on Facebook mentioned by M. Delbaere, B. Michael, B.J.Phillips (Delbaere et al., 2021). However, most people use digital media for delicate causes, many joined the power of social media to moneymaking business projects, such as the emerging peers of bloggers creating beneficial contracts with well-known brands from clothing to accessory companies, and even cooking. Women are now self-governing and use social media because it is easy, convenient and available for 24/7 to run their businesses and generate revenue.

Entrepreneurship is essential for economic expansion and its main element is entrepreneurs stated by K. Tran (Tran, 2014). In existing time women are an evolving economic vigor. Social and economic expansion of women is needed for advancement of country (Singh, Nanda, 2018).

In modern years, social media has become widespread tool for entrepreneurs to cluster around Y. Wu and D. Song (Wu, Song, 2019). Now women are no more depend on males to fulfill their needs. As they are not allowed to do job in work places , so women choose an alternative way that is to do home based business and earn money and in this way they are independent to earn and meet their needs. So, this study also seeks empowerment among women and their talent through use of social media.

To establish and accomplish an enterprise, specifically a business, generally with great initiative and risk, women entrepreneurs need to assume several challenges quoted by S. Belwal, R. Belwal, F.A. Saidi (Belwal et al., 2014). Major difficulties faced by these entrepreneurs were inadequate financial assets and access to peripheral sponsoring. The findings help to explain regional imbalances in entrepreneurial activities locally and globally. Specific objectives are to examine which media tools and social platforms women are using to start and sustain their businesses, to explore women’s reasons to start online business, to create women perceptions for use of social media in their business, to identify the benefits women gain from social media to run online business and to investigate the challenges women are facing in digital entrepreneurship indicated by K. Tran (Tran, 2014).

2. Materials and methods

Uses and Gratification Theory has been selected for this research study. UGT supposing that an individual person active in choosing and selecting media applications and content according to their own needs and wants. Reason to select this theory was it supports the personal and social integrative needs of UGT as entrepreneurs socially interact with a massive audience cited by E. Katz, J. Blumler, M. Gurevitch (Katz et al., 1974).

Through social media women entrepreneurs have easy access to worldwide communication. They easily deliver their messages and promote their products. Social integrative needs also shift the advertisement of products from door to door services campaign towards single click by the use of social media applications.

Through social interaction women entrepreneurs easily gain huge circle of friends or followers that can gratify their needs by increase their number of customers, promotion of their products and growth of their business. Literature review is divided into different segments. Like studies related to Social Media, studies related to Women Entrepreneurs and Empowerment and studies related to Challenges of Women Entrepreneurs.

E. Melissa, A. Hamidati, M.S. Saraswati (Melissa et al., 2012) explained in their article “*Social Media Empowerment: How Social Media Helps to Boost Women Entrepreneurship in Indonesian Urban Areas*” that social media is more convenient than other medium for business growth especially for women who face problems to do job or continue their career with family lives. They highlight that mobility and flexibility promoted by social media helps women to start their business in a low budget and not need any investment that is usually necessary in traditional business.

J.Y. Park, C.S. Sung, I. Im (Park et al., 2017) wrote in their research, entitled “*Does social media use influence entrepreneurial opportunity? A review of its moderating role*”. They described that Social media gives entrepreneurs and prospect to interact and talk their customers.

Social media also nurture aware of marketing knowledge and customer's attitude. By use of social media entrepreneur can gain selling knowledge and learn customer service how to deal with their clients and how to satisfy them in a positive way through social media.

W. Teoh and S. Chong (Teoh, Chong, 2014) point out the talent of women to become successful entrepreneurs in the article *"Towards strengthening the development of women entrepreneurship in Malaysia"*. They stated that women are more passionate to do dual work in a meaningful way and manage their work easily with other household activities.

T. Varghese (Varghese, 2011) defined in his article *"Women Empowerment in Oman: a study based on women Empowerment Index"* the process of women development and also what actually means women empowerment, this article give us tools which help us to indicate to know how women plays role in economic development. He framed those women empowerment consequence shows that they are good decision makers in household activities and in economic choice creating.

E. Melissa, A. Hamidati, M.S. Saraswati, A. Flor (Melissa et al., 2015) in their article *"Examining the Impact of Social Media on Women Empowerment"* argues that online business not only support women to be financially independent but it also encourages women to gain confidence and self-grooming that lead a solidier post in family and society towards empowerment.

G.T. Althothali (Althothali, 2020) in his article *"Women entrepreneurs doing business from home: motivational factors of Home-based business in Saudi Arabia"* state that entrepreneurship is becoming the solution of unemployment especially for women. He concluded the motivational factor for home based business is passions that inspire woman to take interest in their work. The positive reviews on social media by happy customers increase encouragement for women to become more successful.

F.I. Omar, N.A. Othman, M.A. Salleh, N.H. Abdullah (Oyesomi et al., 2014) in their research, *"How sociable are women on social media? An experiential study on Nigerian women"* explores that how women use the social media for social commitment and liberation. Moreover, this study is fastened on UGT, which requires how women use social media and satisfaction they pursue and grow from the media.

M.A. Roomi and G. Parrott (Roomi, Parrott, 2008) described in their article *"Barriers to Development and Progression of Women Entrepreneurs in Pakistan"* that the patriarchal system still exist in Pakistan where man is superior that women and are still not allowed to do a job in any institution in Pakistan. This point make sense that women can encourage themselves to show their skills by home based business and maintain a position in their lives.

M. Haque (Haque, 2013) in her article *"Women Empowerment through Online Clothing Stores in Bangladesh: Prospects, Barriers and Challenges"* state that ICTs help to empower women entrepreneurship through social media and break the dilemma that men can grip towards technology. She discusses that social media can generate equality by breakdown the pathetic male dominance and in online business there is no gender discrimination.

Qualitative research method was used in this study. According to L.A. Guion, D. C. Diehl, D. McDonald (Guion et al., 2011), In-depth interview were preferred to connect telephonic with female respondents and obtain detailed opinion to collect specific set of information from women entrepreneurs that use specific social media platforms i.e. face book, Instagram and YouTube to run or established their home based business according to K.L. Barriball and A. While (Barriball, While, 1994). Questionnaire is used as an instrument of research methodology.

Population of collected data was women who owned their business by using social media from Lahore, Pakistan. Age of collected data was about 20 years to 40 years which included students, housewives, and professionals, literate or even illiterate females. "Non-probability procedure of sampling were used. Convenience sampling techniques was applied. 25 women entrepreneurs were selected which is easily reachable according to their number of followers J.L. Suarez (Suarez, 2016).

Women who owned their home based business with maximum years of experience and who had more than 5000 followers were selected for participant in this study. The experiences that participants had during the home based business gave them a basis from which to evaluate the challenges towards women empowerment.

Demographic information of participants is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of participants

Sr. No.	Name	Qualification	Type of business
1	Ms. A	Master Interior designing	Customize baker
2	Ms. B		Home décor
3	Ms. C	MPhil finance Master Islamic education	Clothing
4	Ms. D	B.A	Fabric
5	Ms. E	B.Com	Stitching/ clothing
6	Ms. F	MSc. Interior designing	Baker/ teach baking online
7	Ms. G	Master fine arts	Food / baking
8	Ms. H	Bachelor in physics	Making jewelry
9	Ms. I	BS Physics	Handmade gifts
10	Ms. J	BS Nutrition	Baking
11	Ms. K	Matric	Customize wedding stuff
12	Ms. L	BS Mass Communication	Home accessories
13	Ms. M	BS Mass Communication	Customize birthday baskets
14	Ms. N	MBA Finance	Customize art and craft
15	Ms. O	MPhil business administration	Makeup Accessories
16	Ms. P	Master psychology	Baking
17	Ms. Q	B.Com	Catering
18	Ms. R	MBA	Handmade decor
19	Ms. S	Master Interior designing	Catering
20	Ms. T	BS Mass Communication	Baking
21	Ms. U	BS International Relation	Clothing
22	Ms. V	BS Sociology	Kids clothing
23	Ms. W	Intermediate	Makeup land
24	Ms. X	MPhil Journalism	Art and craft
25	Ms. Y	B.A	Jewelry and watches

6 participants belong from the field of baking. 5 women entrepreneurs belong from the field of clothing. 5 of them belong from the field of customize birthday and wedding gifts. 3 of them belong from the field of handmade home decor accessories. 2 participants belong from the field of catering. 2 of them belong from the field of makeup land. 2 of them belong from the field of jewelry making.

Themes which were drawn by taking interviews:

Theme 01: Social Media tools

Theme 02: Financial incentives

Theme 03: Personal interest

Theme 04: Desire to fill time

Theme 05: Ease of use

Theme 06: Social media gives women empowerment

Theme 07: Professional benefits

Theme 08: Compensate with customers

Theme 09: Meet with competitors

Theme 10: Critical comments

After the interviews were completed, all 25 audio clips were transliterated exact and examined through a textual analysis. Research Questions of this study are given below:

1. Which media tools and social platforms women are using to start and sustain their businesses?
2. What are the reasons for women to start online business?
3. Why women use social media for their business?
4. What are the Benefits women gains from social media to run online business?
5. What challenges female is facing in digital entrepreneurship?

3. Discussion

RQ (01): Which specific digital media tools and social platforms women are using to start and sustain their businesses?

Social media tools: Media tools are essential for online business. Mobile devices are important tool for online business. It is noted that mobile phone are used by many respondents like Ms. Q stated that without mobile phone i am not able to start this business it's a need source for me and I used mobile phone for multi purposes like click pictures, make videos, chat with clients, receive orders and even dispatch the order is all in this device (Park et al., 2017). Moreover, it is also noted that laptop is also used by many respondents for editing their videos and audio voice. For example, Ms. N tells that i use mobile phone and laptop for this business. I use laptop for editing of my tutorial videos and from Photoshop software in laptop I edit my product pictures. Ms. O also tells that I use DSLR for models photo shoot of my clothing brand states by Y. Wu and D. Song (Wu, Song, 2019).

RQ (02): What is the main reason to start online business?

Financial incentive was noted by several respondents. For example, Ms. O, R, H & D mutually explained that they are jobless and in need of earn so they start this business and to be self-employed. Moreover, Ms. L also tells that I was looking for job but not found so start this online business. Ms. T stated that I have to meet my financial matters and also I want to kill free time too cited by D. Raj and P. Avinash (Raj, Avinash, 2021). On the other hand Ms. U explained that "home based business is not just to earn money but a girl start this business as a hobby and I don't think it's make us financially strong that we meet all our financial needs". Ms. Y also shares their experience that "I think a single girl can't run her expense alone by doing this business, for financial matters it's just a help with your spouse in earning".

Personal interest: For every single work in any field, organization, and job and in business personal interest matters a lot. For women entrepreneur's personal interest is an important element i.e. according to the collected interviews Ms. A talks about her love for baking motivating her to start her business. While Ms. B stated that "it was a coincidence. My nieces motivate me to start baking because I have a yummiest taste and even my both nieces create a page for me and also send following request to my friends and other family members quoted by J.Y. Park, C.S. Sung, I. Im (Park et al., 2017). So, in this way I start my business". Ms. M, N & Y also make customize things and when asked why they started their business, their mutual answer is that they have original interest in accessories and homemade jewelry inspires to start this business. Ms. C stated

in this question that she started this business as a hobby and then it became a profession. I do it for the sake of passion and interest.

Desire to fill time: Ms. I explain: “I was a university student and want to do something in tedium and due to family strictness I don’t allow going outside and do job so I prefer online business”.

Ms. K specified that she was feeling bored because of her incomplete education she was not able to do a job and also utters that she want to do a bit change in her way of living by doing something interested to work in spare time and also by doing home based business no one target her low education. She describes that “This business gives me two opportunities at once. Firstly I fill my tedium in free time and secondly as my education is not high I just passed my matric so now I am independent and enough strong that nobody question on my low education” quoted by W. Zulqarnain, N.U. Hashmi, A.Z. Zulqarnain (Zulqarnain et al., 2020).

R.Q. (03): Why women use social media for their business?

Ease of use: Many women entrepreneurs described that Instagram was comparatively more easy to use. The word ‘easy’ seemed during the interviews. For example, Ms. C stated that Because in social media there is no strictness I am my own boss and can’t depend on other person and freedom to work according to my comfortably by G.T. Alhothali (Alhothali, 2020). Similarly, Ms. S stated that it is easy to use, comfortable, no need a huge investment, no rent fare issues, and in short can’t go out from house to earn. Ms. F noted that social media give me a proper platform like food forums give me a lot of recognition and business. So, it’s now very easy for me to approach people and also for customers to approach me through Instagram which was the easiest of all the platforms available according to V.N. Devi and G. Kavitha (Devi, Kavitha, 2021).

Social media give women empowerment: Ms. A stated that “social media play a role for empowering women, when a girl come up with nice ideas and low expertise and for granted in social media then they are admired it. As a girl you no need to go out and in a single platform you can do it no need of any shop, it’s a quick grab and it’s more hustle free for women according to S. Noor, F.M. Isa, L. M. Nor (Noor et al., 2021). Help out to make things ease out. Social media is free from all discrimination” as stated in the writings of M. Abrar ul Haq, S. Victor, F. Akram (Abrar et al., 2021). Ms. C stated that “for a girl, social media is the best platform to run your own business and without any pressure or hesitation I run my business very nicely (Ming Yen Teoh and Choy Chong, 2014). Moreover, in social media there is no gender inequality, like Ms. H stated that “Social media is a platform in which no gender discrimination and I think its best opportunity for women and online business is also acceptable in our society which is not friendly for women to go out for job”.

Ms. L stated that it is best platform for female at small scale I can earn without any restriction or hesitation and I think being a girl there is no harassment of job in social media. Even uneducated women also sell their best skills as stated in the study of Y.T. Uhls, N.B. Ellison, K. Subrahmanyam (Uhls et al., 2017).

RQ (04). What are the Benefits women gains from social media to run online business?

Professional benefits: Respondents prominent that using social media to run their businesses allowed them to raise their marketing range. Ms. A stated that it gives me inspiration and I learn baking from tutorials and easily connect with international bakers as well and use their expertise.

Ms. C stated that Instagram helps me to promote my products and learn marketing also.

Ms. F define that I gain business through Facebook pages, people start recognizing me, people give reviews about my products tag your page and through hard work people know me as a professional baker according to G.T. Alhothali (Alhothali, 2020). Ms. H listed that social media makes huge growth in my sales and now I can understand marketing for my brand. There is an easy way by sending PR packages to famous group on Facebook and other nationwide bloggers on Instagram due to this I can easily make more followers and increasing in number of customers. Some respondent highlighted the help of bloggers for their business. For example, Ms. I stated that for professional benefits, I think international bloggers boast my page and I learn marketing a lot by use of social media in my business. Ms. K and V stated that professionally I learn marketing and due to face book pages of organizations gives me a chance to enhance my business. Worldwide many organizations appreciate my work and offer me big orders that help me to use my all skills and ideas to become successful entrepreneur cited by N.H. Ismail, M.K. Nasir, R.S. Rahman (Ismail et al., 2021).

Q 05: What challenges female is facing in digital entrepreneurship?

Compensate with customers: By the use of social media is also notable result of challenging factor for women entrepreneurs. Ms. A stated that “if the fault is from my side then I compensate it with sending some free alternative thing also I can’t get money for that product. Moreover, online buyers can inquire before taking order and not create mess. Mess created by the online buyer who still is the stalk of ambiguity.” It is noted that many respondent gives discount as a compensation. Like, Ms. C says that “My customers are 90 % satisfy with my products but my business is clothing so there is chance of any technical issue like if there is problem in embroidery then I communicate my customers and tell them it’s not my fault and also compensate it by giving them 20 percent discount or return 50 percent money back” by G.L. Priya and S.S. Bose (Priya, Bose, 2021). Ms. F stated that I can’t face any issue where I use compensation but I usually compensate my customer as launching new product I give it to my clients as a giveaway gesture with his order. Ms. H noted that if the order is damage by her side then she immediately send clients a new fresh piece but if there is any delivery issue then she used to explain them that this is not her mistake. Ms. L stated that I convince my customer by giving alternative thing in emergency situation but if they are not agree with my alternative option than I give them discount according to order cited by I.S. Chaudhry and R.Y. Paquibut, (Chaudhry, Paquibut, 2021).

Meet with competitors: There is enormous competition on social media and its challenging to meet the competitors because for every product there are a lot of pages and in this way tough women entrepreneurs’ competition was also noted. Ms. A stated that “I keep on learning and polishing myself and for stand up with competitors I have to come up with something new, I do work in sugar free products which is different and also I boast myself in specialty of carrot cake making which is not available in common bakery so unique things help me a lot to meet the competition. So carrot cake is now my signature cake and wants to remain in pipeline” cited by M.Z. Zafar, A. Toor, T. Hussain (Zafar Toor et al., 2019). Most respondents use a new idea of product for the competition on social media. Likewise, Ms. F along with Ms. L stated that by launching new and unique products my work is different and I also make according to customers taste so easily meet competitors. Ms. H stated that by giving PR packages to well-known brands and also applies some different theme to make my product attractive so that I can easily meet my competitors according to F.I. Omar, N.A. Othman, M.A. Salleh, N.H. Abdullah (Omar et al., 2018).

Critical comments written by clients on every post are very important and the negative comment can ruin all the hard work and it also effects on the brand reputation. Like Ms. A shared that “it is very difficult to handle critical and I usually try to explain them if there is something wrong and taste issue because customer service matters a lot if one person gives a bad comment than it might harm my reputation. I try to give full attention because I want to make my customer happy”. Ms. V shares her reaction on critical comments by saying “it hurts a lot and mostly negative points are related to prices because we can’t compromise with quality so prices are fixed of every dress. Furthermore, haters going to hate, we can’t make everyone happy if there are 99 positive comments that 1 negative comment not matter for me” stated by N.R. Devi and Surana (Devi, Surana, 2021).

For avoiding negative comments it is noted that women entrepreneurs always do apologize either it’s their fault or not to make their customers happy. Ms. F stated that “It is difficult for me to say sorry a lot of time even I was not wrong, I politely and humbly handle them not make arguments simply apologies them”

4. Results

Feedback from the participant in this study showed that having online business helps the women to become independent and financially strong. According to the outcome, women are not doing online business just for the sake of earning it depends on other motivational factors too. Respondents also reported that earnings from the business are just for the help of their spouse in financial matters because earning in this business is not fulfilling all the expensive. So, financial incentives are not only the reason for women entrepreneurs to start business hence other factors also shown in this study.

Eighteen out of twenty-five respondents had negative response for financial incentives in online business. Maximum participants mentioned that personal interest is the motivational factor to start online business. Study also describes that family concern and their support to encourage the female interest motivated them to start their business and converted a successful entrepreneur.

Thirteen out of twenty-five respondents start this business to kill the spare time. Another factor also resulted as a reasons for starting business for a girl is strictness by family to go out and do job is also reported as an aim of starting online business by many participants.

According to the research all participants use social media apps for their online business but it is noted that Facebook and Instagram is effective apps that are used by huge amount of people as well as sellers and buyers. Moreover, it is also reported that WhatsApp is commonly used for communication purpose and in touch with regular clients. Participant's talks that it is quicker way to run business and save time as well as narrow down expenditures towards beginning business and boosted wages.

According to F.I. Omar, N. A. Othman, M.A. Salleh, N.H. Abdullah (Omar et al., 2018) in recent era where technology is more advance and in this why traditional media is converged to new media or can say as social media. Social media replace the traditional media not in entertainment and infotainment but also people prefer social media for their business. Results revealed that social media is only a platform which gives women empowerment to runs and sustains their business. Women at workplace face many issues like, gender discrimination and harassment which is the reason that our society not allowed women to do job at workplace but in social media there is no gender discrimination n and harassments.

It is reported that women gain personal and professional benefits from online business. Through personal benefits they gain economic liberty, gain independence, gain confidence, no physical effort and safe and sound to utilize skills. On the other hand through professional benefits women improve awareness, grow sales and build reputation. The twenty-five women entrepreneurs talks about professional benefits of using social media in business and shows positive point of views towards this advantage and also maintain hope in future to become professional in business.

In online business where social media gives women numerous benefits as well it is also generating some challenging factor for women to sustain their business according to D. Raj and P. Avinash (Raj, Avinash, 2021). The proverb "customer is always right" seems by all respondents in this interview. Women entrepreneurs debates that compensation with customer is also a challenging factor in online business. It has been observed that respondents talk about critical comment which is written on public post is difficult to handle. It might ruin the entrepreneur's brands reputation.

5. Conclusion

Social media apps like Facebook and Instagram are used by women to do their business online. Results indicated that social media applications empowered women by providing benefits for them and emerged than other mediums like TV, radio etc. Women become independent and have opportunity to do this business in the premises of their house. They are flourishing as designers, bakers, decorators, makeup artist, chefs, product makers and well-known tailors and still discovering new opportunities of economic contribution. Through use of social media women are clever to connect worldwide by promote their business with zero investment. These social media opportunities make women financially strong, independent, confident, and build their reputation with their talent. Social media gives equal rights to male and female without any gender discrimination. This equality brings women a chance to fly high and acceptable in society by the use of their talent and skills. The outcomes of existing research provide that social media will empower more women entrepreneurs as stated in the study of I.S. Chaudhry and R.Y. Paquibut (Chaudhry, Paquibut, 2021) which will be effected in better monetary and profits. Usage of social media having challenges and women entrepreneurs faces difficulties in their path of success. Women are ready to face every challenge and cross the hurdles in their path.

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