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Social Media as a Catalyst for Women Entrepreneurship: An Exploratory Study in West Bengal

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Abstract

Social media plays an important role in the digital era (Web 2.0). It became a huge deal for everyone, and it changed people's lifestyles around the world. It is also prominently reshaping how businesses are created, sustained, and expanded. Previous studies have shown that social media provides unique opportunities for people, especially women, to grow their businesses and reach more people. This platform enhances their visibility, expands their networks, builds personal brands, engages with customers, and helps them create successful businesses or brands. This research will investigate how women from both urban and rural West Bengal use social media to build brands, reach customers, and achieve economic independence. By conducting in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs and psychology experts, supplemented by case studies, the study will investigate the role of social media in business communication, specifically in women's entrepreneurship. This study also addresses challenges such as digital literacy, infrastructural barriers, socio-cultural constraints, and sustainability. This study will provide region-specific insights into the role of social media platforms in the economic, social, and psychological empowerment of women in West Bengal.

Keywords: #SocialMedia #WomenEntrepreneurship #WomenEmpowerment #WestBengal #BusinessCommunication

Introduction:

Social media is the integral part of human lives now days. The emerged of social media platforms has changed the way of communication and how people connect with people in global scale [1]. As of 2024, India has more than 600 million active internet users, with a considerable number participating in social media daily. Social media platforms have transformed numerous facets of society, particularly in the realm of business. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, and LinkedIn have become essential to the everyday lives of Indian consumers, offering businesses unparalleled opportunities to connect with and engage their target audiences. (Sampath, 2024) Specially women with previously unheard-of chances to promote their business endeavors and raise awareness of their voices [2].

¹Ashida Singh & Vinay Vikram Singh 'Role of Social Media in Empowering women Entrepreneurs in India' (2024)

² Krishna Priya k, Dr. M. Thaiyalayaki 'A Study on the Impact of Social media on women Entrepreneurship and Empowerment' (2024)

The empowerment of women is a significant process that guarantees equal access to opportunities in every aspect of life: economic, cultural, social, and political. This not only enhances their personal potential but also aids in societal development. (MWCD, 2025) However, the Government of India's efforts to advance women's empowerment have resulted in noticeable improvements across various sectors, from social and economic involvement to access to crucial services through the comprehensive initiative 'Mission Shakti' spanning 2021-22 to 2025-26. Initiatives such as the distribution of women-owned MSMEs vary by state. West Bengal (23.42%) has the highest percentage of women-led MSMEs. (MoMSME annual report 2021-22) In contrast, programs like Kanyashree, Lakshmir Bhandar, Anandadhara, and Banglashree have been introduced by the Government of West Bengal to support women's empowerment. Nevertheless, India has 63 million micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), of which around 20% are owned by women. India is positioned 57th among 65 countries in the Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs. (MIWE, 2021)

In Indian society women career decisions encounter five socioeconomic and personal realities which are highly gendered and biased. These gendered realities are (a) expectations and responsibilities, (b) support and motivation from parents/husband, (c) flexibility from the workplace, (d) conflict between life roles, and (e) life balance. (Tiwari, 2021) Many times women face different type challenges in their daily life as well as in their business also, like limited access to capital, restricted mobility, lack of networking opportunities and socio-cultural barriers.

This study aims to explore that how far social media platforms can help to overcome these obstacles. As these platforms are very much flexible since anyone can develop their business even without or bare minimum investment in marketing facilities from their home. Through their profile or page, and various virtual groups women can promote their business through social media and they can communicate with their customer globally.

What is social media?

Social media refers to web-based platforms that enables users to create, share and exchange content. Social media platforms allow individuals, communities, and business to connect, communicate, and engage with each other [3]. Examples of popular social media platforms include facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

What is entrepreneurship?

As the historical evidence the term and usage of the entrepreneurship come along side with economics and natural resources where always dealing with profits and income. The earliest historical references to entrepreneurship come from field economics and the nature and sources of profit all economics value was thought by the classical economics to come from some combination and land, labor, and capital.

³Ashida Singh & Vinay Vikram Singh 'Role of Social Media in Empowering women Entrepreneurs in India' (2024)

Objectives

- To examine the role of social media in promoting women entrepreneurship in West Bengal.
- To explore the challenges and barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in social media.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two theoretical models:

- Uses and gratification model
- Technology acceptance model

With these theories we can provide an in-depth foundation for understanding how and why women entrepreneurs use social media or digital media and they promote their business or they can build their brand.

1. Uses and gratification model (UGT): This model was given by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch in 1973. This model emphasizes the active role of user select their useful media and they fulfil their specific needs. Uses and gratification model portrayed that individual users consciously choose their preferable social media handle or any kind of media and satisfy their various personal, social, and psychological gratification. In the context of women entrepreneurship this model is relevant in identifying the motivations behind social media usage.

2. Technology acceptance model (TAM): this model is given by Davis in 1986, in this model he describes users' acceptance and use of technology based on two core constructs,

□ Perceived Usefulness (PU): This extent explains a person believes that using a particular technology will enhance their performance.

□ Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU): This extent explains a person believes that using the technology will be free to effort.

In this study, this model explains how women entrepreneurs in West Bengal adopt and continue using social media platforms for business purposes. Additional variables such as attitude toward use, behavioral intention and actual usage can also be considered. With the help of this model, we can explain how women perceive social media as useful for their business growth. How they find it easy and learn navigate.

Integration of UGT and TAM

While UGT focuses on why women entrepreneurs use social media for their own gratification, TAM helps to understand how they come to accept and adopt social media as a viable tool in their entrepreneurial journey. By combining these two frameworks, the study adopts a holistic approach on analyzing both motivational and technological dimensions of social media usage among women entrepreneurs in West Bengal.

This integrated approach allows the researcher to explore:

The psychological motivations as well as the perceived utility and usability of social media usage by women entrepreneurs.

Research Methodology

To explore the opportunities and challenges of using social media by women entrepreneurs and to understand the overall scenario this study will employ qualitative research methods.

- In-depth interview (Telephonic) of 5 women entrepreneurs from different business category from West Bengal, who are not only running the business, but also teach the others, as primary data. Interviewees are chosen according to convenience from Facebook.

Also, an interview (Telephonic) of psychology specialist as primary data.

- This paper will also use previous studies, and social media handles as secondary data to analyze the context in depth.

Data Analysis

- **In-depth Interview**

Women Entrepreneurs

Questions

- a. How many years you are in this profession?
- b. Why did you choose this career?
- c. How much social media help you for this initiative? (Which social media platforms are frequently used by you for which purpose?)
- d. Approx income
- e. Do you face any challenges in these platforms?
- f. How do you deal with negativity in these platforms?
- g. What do you think about the sustainability of this profession, based on social media?
- h. According to you, what role is played by social media in women's entrepreneurship?

1. Baisakhi Bhattacharjee (Hangla's Day Out) – Content Creator (Howrah Urban area)

<https://www.facebook.com/share/1E36king4G/>

<https://www.facebook.com/share/1ZCYTqoiyH/>

Started food blogging in 2017, That time, she uses to wrote food blogs for passion. After that she started making food vlogging, get viral, and it started like this. According to Baisakhi, “This career has chosen me.” She started her journey primarily on Facebook, but she is now on Instagram, and YouTube also. Simultaneously she extends her content creation from only food vlogging to daily vlog. Though she started her journey as content creator in social media before 8 years, but got monetization 2/3 years ago. According to her, “I earned from social media platforms, but my major income comes from brand promotion. But without these platforms there is no existence of Hangla's Day Out, this vlogging profession totally based on social media. This not only gives me the economic independence, but it also gives me an identity.” When she has asked about the challenges of working in this sector, she highlights about reach consistency factor, and negative comments problem. To cope with it She focused on consistency, quality followers, and ‘Just Ignored Theory’. Baisakhi Said, “Social media platforms are like open window, if you wanted to do something positive it has range of scope, especially for women entrepreneurs. I have

personally taken an initiative to do free promotion of some women entrepreneurs, yearly.” She suggests that “Don’t flow with trends or don’t copy, try new idea following your talent and knowledge.”

2. Neha Majumdar (Owner of Mehendi Junction & Weeding Junction) – Artist (South 24 Parganas)

<https://www.facebook.com/share/176Hv1SP6w/>

<https://www.facebook.com/share/1MeJdbXx32/>

Started from love for art work, when in class 11. Her mehendi work got viral. After that from mehendi junction to wedding junction (a range of customize weeding things) now have own shop. According to Neha, without social media, nothing could be happened. Neha said “This is totally a candid career to me. After that am preparing for government job.” Now weeding junction have a team of approx. 5 women, from both town and rural area. Neha also run training class for mehendi, alpona, etc art work. Neha tells that, “This emerged to an industry, not only weeding purpose, but also another decoration purpose. Raw materials mainly come from rural area. Income depends on, efforts are main, social media presence also important. That can extend to content creation, as she earns from Facebook.” Alongside she highlights some challenges, Trolling, negative comments. For this she just ignored. She highlights another major challenge that is economical same, that she faced. Some scammer selling below quality product by using her name. As she observes Product demand based on urban and township, but students are coming from rural area, this is truly inspiring to her.

3. Puja Adhikary – Resin artist, MUA (Behala)

<https://www.facebook.com/share/1CDFFxn9Bn/>

Started by passion. According to Puja, resin art is very new to our state, it popularized just before some years. It is basically art of memory preservation. Puja said, “I have cleared NET, use to dream to be a teacher, but crisis in job market in our state forced to choose this as career.” She working as Resin artist, take classes, as well as works as MUA (Makeup Artist). She told that for my business specially for resin art social media help me a lot. From learning, to finding raw material, and marketing, total credit goes to social media. Puja said, “social media makes far, close. I got major orders from Instagram and Facebook.” According to her, income depends on quality of work, and marketing (social media presence for online business). Though there is some challenges that she mentioned, like product picture or video scam, uncertainty about reach, and existence of profile or page etc. She adds on her observation, though there is low demand in rural are for buying resin art, but many students come to her from rural areas.

4. Piu Das (Atraye) – Professional Bridal Model, Kolka artist (Howrah)

<https://www.facebook.com/share/1B3EaLJPc9/>

Started her career as bridal model in 2019, for passion, when she is in class 9. After some shoot some of her photos and video got viral, and she started to get more booking for shoot. That is how she started her journey in ‘Bridal modelling’ industry. According Piu this ‘Bridal Make-up artist (MUA) and Modelling industry’ is totally based on social media. From getting contacts to booking all are depended on social media platforms, especially Facebook and Instagram. This industry increased in West Bengal from 2021. This industry opens some new professional opportunity like, Makeup artists, Bridal Model, Kolka Artists,

Mehendi Artists etc. Piu Said, “Our bookings and payments depends of our social media profiles reach.” According to her these models are mannequin to MUA’S to get real clients. Piu Said, “If you want to grow in this sector, you should maintain consistency in both work, and Social Media Presence.” She added, “Now Days this professional extended their earning simultaneously as content creator also.” She left her graduation course after 2nd Semester, to pursue this career fulltime, as she thinks in the job crisis period in this state, this profession is better option. When she has asked about the challenges of working in this sector, she highlights, about sustainability threats in virtual platforms, negative comments. According to Piu, “These professions mainly dominated by women.” Piu Says that, “Many women from rural are coming to this profession, using social media. But from rural area it is tuff to stand in this profession. This industry demand based on mainly township, so that who want to flourish in this profession.

5. Sreemoyee Bhaduri (Owner Shree’s Bakery) – Home Baker (Howrah)

<https://www.facebook.com/share/17EU8zeSWA/>

<https://www.facebook.com/share/1NgpVhinCg/>

Started her journey from nutrition practical class, by passion. Take it as profession 5 Years ago. Social media helped her to search for training programme and raw material at the beginning. She said, “Currently I am professional home baker, customized chocolate maker, and trainer. My Identity Shree’s Bakery, mainly based on social media (Facebook). Now I have FSSAI certificate for my business.” According to her, to grow as home baker as one should focus on food quality, simultaneously social media presence, and marketing is important to reach broader audience. The main positive side of social media that anyone can use it as free marketing tool, as well as through promotional content, they become content creator. Through this content they also can earn from social media. Along with these positive sides she highlights some challenges, like Product picture copy paste, virtual cheating etc. She shared her observation that, this profession is mainly women dominated, as it is mainly home-based work, women can support her family, get economic empowerment as well as psychological satisfaction. She said, “This profession increased rapidly during lock down, as many people lost their job.”

Psychology Expert

Anindita Mukherjee, Assistant Professor

Department of Psychology, SNU, Kolkata

Questions

- a. How does social media influence women's motivation to start and sustain entrepreneurship?
- b. Can social media contribute to women entrepreneurs to build psychological empowerment and self-efficacy along with economic empowerment?
- c. What are the most common psychological challenges women entrepreneurs face while using social media as a business tool? how to cope with it?
- d. Do you think social media can help women to overcome the stigma or barriers in pursuing business careers?
- e. What interventions like training, awareness, digital literacy, workshops can help in boosting women’s psychological readiness for Digital Entrepreneurship?

Answer:

Social media popularized as marketing tool to women entrepreneurs, because of easy access of this platform, as well as they can manage it from home corner, that can reach broadly.

Through social media platforms as they influence from others, they can influence others.

This is not only about economic empowerment but also psychological empowerment, it gives them a social appreciation, that can boost up their confidence level.

According to ma'am, to cope up with negativity, one should increase acceptability power, ignore negativity, but think about constructive criticism. Though she considers that negativity effects vary person to person. So, she suggests to grow women entrepreneurs, as digital literacy, social media marketing training or session is important, simultaneously psychological sessions will be also helpful.

Inspiring Examples

Priyanka Dey

<https://www.facebook.com/share/17FZ5B3sG1/>

A student of hotel management from Madhyamgram, North 24 Parganas, currently running homemade beauty product business, have 186k followers in her Facebook page. She has a team of women employers. Some of her brand product like sindur organically made by women sex workers. Priyanka promotes her product and business journey, daily life, through Facebook.

Swapna Karmakar (swapna dir rannaghar)

<https://www.facebook.com/share/16uAz1zbjF/>

<https://www.facebook.com/share/174YjGqMx8/>

https://youtube.com/@bengaliranna3047?si=9PYfIA0ZLs_F35nF

https://www.instagram.com/swapna_dir_rannaghar/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet

A middle age woman from Bangaon, North 24 Parganas, running food home delivery service. She has a noticeable social media presence, with the help of her family. She has own FB profile with 589k followers, FB page with 207k followers, YouTube channel with 6.31 lakh subscription, have Instagram page with 5076 followers. She shared her daily cooking process as content.

Previous Study

There is very limited study founded in this context, focusing on West Bengal. This study consider them as secondary data.

- Hossain and Halder (2022), In their study found that, social media act as backbone for rural women's sustainable entrepreneurship, ensuring economic, social and environmental benefits.
- Chatterjee and Banerjee (2024), through there study they highlights that, social media empowers women by expanding, business opportunities, networks and balance between family and career in the digital era.

Major Findings

Integrating both primary and secondary data this study identify some observation,

- Various new professions are growing based on social media, which are dominated by women.
- These professions are mainly increased after corona.

Women entrepreneurs may use social media for:

- Information Seeking (e.g., market trends, business strategies)
- Social Interaction and Networking (e.g., connecting with customers, peers)
- Self-presentation and Brand-building
- Economic empowerment (From business as well as content creator)
- Identity Construction
- Helping others to empower
- Career and Family life balance

Why they choosing social media:

- Easy to access
- Low cost
- Broad reach
- Crisis in job market

Challenges

- Negative Comments
- Scam
- Uncertainty of virtual media
- Conclusion

In recent times, the advent of digital platforms has begun to transform the landscape by opening new avenues for women to establish and expand their business. State like West Bengal, where a rich cultural heritage and diverse consumer markets coexist, social media has provided opportunities for women entrepreneurs in sector such as home-based bakeries, clothing, jewelry, handicrafts, and beauty services-products, and much more. These digital platforms have not only enhanced accessibility but also fostered a supportive community where women entrepreneurs can exchange ideas, share, and experiences and collaborate. Social media not only provides a space for marketing but also empowers women by enhancing confidence, expanding their networks, and allowing them to bypass conventional barriers of mobility and limited financial resources. This shift reflects the transformative role of digital platforms in fostering women's empowerment and contribution of socio-economic development.

Limitations

Small Data is the major limitation for this study, as per time inconvenience. In future following the major findings district wise, or rural-urban-township wise comparative study can possible with quantitative data.

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