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Women in small and medium enterprises: Embracing Social media for women entrepreneur's economic empowerment and well-being: A qualitative analysis on select women entrepreneurs of North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

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Abstract

Social media has expanded drastically in recent years, penetrating into almost every facet of people's lives, transforming their lifestyles and adding to their wellness. The purpose of this study is to address how effective is women entrepreneurship using social media? What does social media provide to women entrepreneurs? The intent of this study is to explore how women entrepreneurs in small businesses use social media at work by combining theoretical insights from studies concerning women entrepreneurs in small businesses, whether social media gave them the liberty to balance career and personal life, whether digital skills and knowledge management helped them grow in this digitized world. Qualitative analysis was done with 15 in-depth interviews taken from 15 women entrepreneurs residing in North 24 Parganas having different small businesses. Findings show that social media has provided opportunities to women entrepreneurs to enter into business and has also pulled many others into the field. Small business owners have used this medium to channelize their resources and abilities to reach out to everyone for monetary, intellectual and personal gain. It also shows that effective knowledge management through digital literacy is needed for entrepreneurial success. Social media entrepreneurship is welcomed due to its versatility and adaptability and women entrepreneurs have experienced enrichment, happiness, sense of worth by doing business through this medium.

Keywords: Social media, women entrepreneurs, digital literacy, well-being, women empowerment, qualitative analysis

1. Introduction

Across the country, a new boom has emerged known as 'Entrepreneurship'. Many people around the country are pursuing a career as entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship enables the economy's production, volume via creativity and competition (Acs *et al.*, 2008; Zanjirchi *et al.*, 2019) ^[1, 32]. Internet-based technology as well as online culture have grown to be a significant part of their everyday existence, and this has caught the eyes of many scholars and policymakers. Women entrepreneurs are creating unique online business using social media at their own ease. Social media is an amalgamation of computer-driven technologies that enable individuals or businesses to produce, disseminate information, professional interests, thoughts, and audio-visual contents in online spectrum. They bring about profound, widespread innovation in the relationships between corporations, businesses and in person (Ang, 2011; Agerdal-Hjermin, 2014) ^[8, 31]. As variation, modifications and access to data are the key players nowadays, this period is usually referred to as "the age of information and communication revolution." The wide array of data and the rapidity with which information spreads are two of the features that distinguish this era. As a result, this epoch may also be referred to as the "era of information." Furthermore, the blurring of national lines, cultural levelling, and market upheaval have led to the naming of this epoch as the "universal era". Whatever it is named, the basic goal of this era is to get greater market share in the global market and increase societal prosperity by becoming a digital society.

The introduction of social media has given rise to new methods to communicate, participate, cooperate, and collaborate with other parties in everyday affairs, including business. Such aspects are advantageous for SMEs with limited resources and talents, especially for female entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, there has been little research on how small and medium-sized firms (SMEs), particularly those run by women, use social media to empower themselves. As a result, there are certain gaps in the body of knowledge since SMEs, particularly in developing countries such as India, play a crucial role in the country's growth, as evidenced by their contribution to employment and GDP.

Digitalization is a vehicle for both innovation and entrepreneurship (Nambisan *et al.*, 2019) ^[21]. Rapid improvements in technology for communication and information are transforming, redefining, and analysing work and communication factors, stirring up the industry, and producing new consumer expectations as a result of structural changes in the form of digitalization (Aloulou, 2019) ^[4]. Social media frequently involves significant changes in corporate operations, influencing how goods and amenities are generated and distributed, as well as organisational procedures and organisational principles. As a result, businesses are confronted with new competitive tendency as technological innovation becomes an intrinsic component of business strategies. Entrepreneurs are pivotal to the development of local economies, and small businesses promote economic expansion (Bernhard and Olsson, 2019) ^[9]. Digitalization, as a social development, has an impact on small firms and entrepreneurs as it allows growth with the aid of advanced technology helping communication, commerce, and mediums (Nambisan *et al.*, 2019) ^[21]. Several studies, however, emphasise that small company owners, as entrepreneurs, rarely have all of the expertise and abilities required to build their enterprises to solve social digital concerns. There is a desire for more study on how social media is applied in organisations in relation to social media sensemaking processes. Understanding and knowledge is frequently dependent on digital abilities gained via personal usage of social media (Olsson, 2019) ^[9] and how those abilities are applied to empower the entrepreneurs who are also the users of social media. In the light of the above context, this research focus on how women entrepreneurs utilize social media to support empowerment economically and their well-being.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical Background

For this study the uses and gratifications theory and theory of social influence were considered. Kelman (1958) introduced the idea of social influence, indicating that the might of fellow members of society impacted the conduct of individual emotions and behavioural patterns. According to Kelman, the societal impact manifests itself in three ways: compliance, identification, and internalisation. Blumler and Katz (1974) also formulated the notion of uses and gratifications explaining why individuals engage in media use. According to Blumler (1979), people use certain media to gratify certain needs, like diversion the need to relax, personal relationships the need to maintain personal relationships), personal identity the need to discover one's self and surveillance the need to learn about what is going on around them.

2.2 Digital Knowhow, Knowledge Management and Digital Skill in Social Media

Knowledge management is a methodical handling of an organization's knowledge resources in order to generate consistent value with strategic objectives. Knowledge management include methods, strategies, infrastructure for storage, sustainability indicators, as well as knowledge transmission, assessment, generation, and change (Al-Emran *et al.*, 2020) ^[6]. Only when knowledge is utilised in a proper way in an organization, it holds value. If technology-driven businesses can't readily discern the correct type of information in the specific area, they'll have trouble competing. Businesses must apply the necessary expertise in an articulated manner to maximize their benefits and outcome (Alici, 2018) ^[7].

For entrepreneurs, digitization is essential to continually improve the firm by adapting to new digital work processes and behaviours at the workspace. Learning digital skills is also a vital requirement (Nambisan *et al.*, 2019) ^[21]. Furthermore, research reflects that small enterprises rarely have all of the information and abilities required to grow business in order to deal with modern social digital concerns (Smith and Barrett, 2014) ^[28]. Entrepreneurs must learn throughout the life span of their firm, not only at its incubation period. Entrepreneurial knowledge may be considered as a concurrent process of business expansion and personal growth and knowledge acquisition through different learning experiences, emergencies, and impediments. Rajahonka and Villman (2019) states that evolving digital technologies modifies women entrepreneurs' continuous learning experience, while blending applied learning and perceiving technology as a means to adapt the learning. They inherit the language of digital techniques and apply it on the business venture. Many studies of women entrepreneurship shows that the co-owners, employees, infrastructure, close associates initiate the digitalisation thoughts (Bernhard and Olsson, 2020) ^[10], mentors, and women groups in online-social space (Rajahonka and Villman, 2019) ^[25] or hiring in or partnering with persons with essential abilities. Digital mediums are used for information and knowledge dissemination, collaborative learning, creativity. It is well acknowledged that mingling in social media and connections play a significant part to provide women entrepreneurs the access to a variety of resources (Brush *et al.*, 2009; Zhang and Hamilton, 2010) ^[12, 33].

2.3 Social Media, Women Entrepreneur's Empowerment and Well Being

Experiential and psychological indicators are commonly used to define wellness. While subjective wellness refers to emotions of enjoyment, devoid of pain, and life satisfaction (Diener *et al.*, 1999) ^[15] psychological wellness includes thoughtful direction and favorable operations (Seligman, 2011) ^[26]. Wiklund *et al.* (2019) ^[31] defined entrepreneurial well-being incorporating both aspects, as "the experience of satisfaction, positive affect, infrequent negative affect, and psychological functioning in relation to developing, starting, growing, and running an entrepreneurial venture." Entrepreneurship training and business creation programmes, in particular, can provide options for independent thought, self-determination, empowering features and fulfilment for marginalised women who face scarcity in opportunities (Wiklund *et al.*, 2019) ^[31]. If

profitable business formation does not satisfy individual entrepreneurial aspirations, entrepreneurs' well-being may differ. Thus, research should be conducted to analyse the well-being of various types of entrepreneurs (Shir, 2015) [27]. It is interesting to evaluate individual entrepreneurs' well-being and to explore the reason behind different phases of well-being among different entrepreneurs.

2.4 Women entrepreneurship and empowerment through social media

Entrepreneurship is a critical strategy for eliminating poverty and economic growth (Bruton *et al.*, 2013) [13]. Entrepreneurship offers financial autonomy (Itani *et al.*, 2011) [18], a platform for creative self-expression, accomplishment with a source of power (Jamali, 2009) [19]. Women are attracted towards business as it provides them with a high level of liberty, self-actualization, and prosperity (Powell and Eddleston, 2008) [24]. The positive association discovered in the Western setting between money and power may not apply to women in developing countries because misogyny, social and cultural customs may prohibit monetary profits from being considered as empowerment (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013) [5]. According to Ajjan *et al.* (2014) [2], online social networking use by women-preneurs in developing markets strengthens a woman's self-worth and generates wider social assets, thereby supporting women empowerment which is a multifaceted concept defined as "a process by which women gain the ability to organise themselves in order to increase their own self-reliance, assert their independent right to make choices, and control resources that will aid in challenging and eliminating their

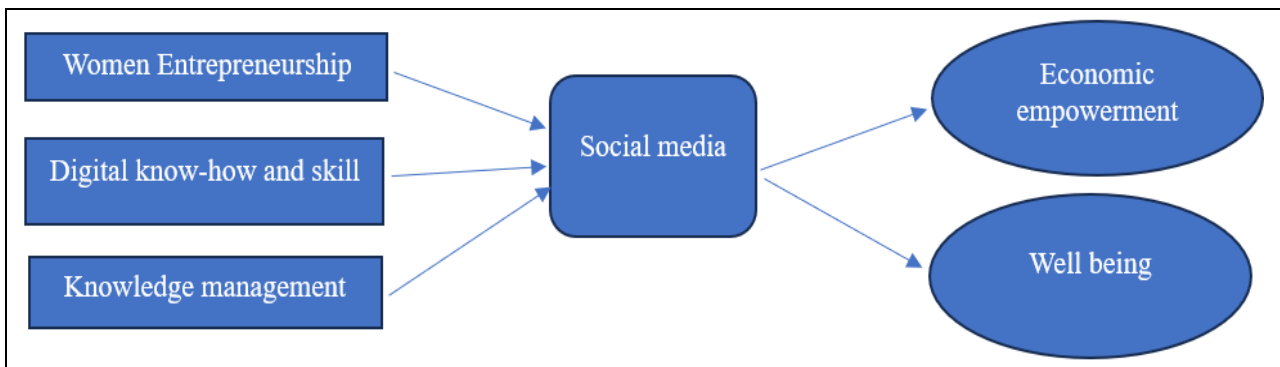
own subordination" (Keller and Mbewe, 1991) [20]. Building a sustainable economy is critical for strengthening and laying the groundwork for a secure, robust, and independent existence (Bjornskov & Foss, 2020) [11]. The capacity to acquire various products and attain numerous economic possibilities defines a person's financial well-being and earnings is the most crucial indication that straight away influences the financial well-being (Park, 2017) [23]. Entrepreneurship has a decisive and substantial influence on wellbeing; it demonstrates the willingness to participate in business clarifies the entrepreneurial desires for independence (Park, 2017) [23].

3. Research objectives

The study's vision has been stated in the objective. It reflects what the researcher must achieve through the study. Based on the research question that does women entrepreneurship through social media provides economic empowerment and well-being to small and medium women entrepreneurs, certain objectives have been outlined. The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To explore the potentials of social media in empowering women entrepreneurs.
2. To analyse the importance of digital know-how, digital skill and knowledge management in business expansion.
3. To determine how social media entrepreneurship creates a harmony between career and personal life.

4. Conceptual framework



Source: Author's own compilation

Fig 1: Show Social media

5. Methodology

This study aims to explore how women entrepreneurs in small and medium businesses grasp digital skill and its knowledge application and management through social media for their business growth and individual well-being. Qualitative technique was used to construct the study based on the nature of the research problem and objective (Gioia *et al.*, 2013) [17] because learning and understanding are difficult to gauge and quantify (Cope and Watts, 2000) [14]. 15 in-depth interviews were taken spanning for four months (February 2023 to May 2023) with 15 women entrepreneurs residing in North 24 Parganas having different small businesses. All the semi structured interviews were confidential and recorded with due permission without posing any conflict to their personal interest and privacy. The interviews were face to face interview and telephonic interview. To safeguard their privacy, each respondent was

numbered R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R10, R11, R12, R13, R14 and R15. Convenience sampling method was applied. Moreover, in order to gain an improved comprehension, the research is guided by anecdotes interpreting interviews as women entrepreneurs' perspectives, experiences and observations of their digital presence and prospects.

Secondary data was collected from different research papers, articles, reports published in different journals and magazines.

6. Analysis and findings

The respondents were involved in different business such as bakery, art and creative design, handloom and handicraft, jewellerys and fashion, food and catering, event management. The women entrepreneurs were holding either sole ownership or shared ownership. The employee strength

varied from 2 to approximately 14. The businesses are located either in main city or in densely populated colony. Those entrepreneurs were considered who had their business

operations on social media for more than 2 years. Table 1 reflects the profile of the respondents.

Table 1: Profile of the respondents

Respondents	Time of the interview	Age	Years of operation	Business type	Ownership type	Number of employees
R1	February' 23	31-40	5	Art and creatives	Sole	4
R2	February' 23	41-50	6	Jewellery and fashion	Sole	7
R3	February' 23	41-50	3	Jewellery and fashion	Partnership	5
R4	February' 23	41-50	5	Art and creatives	Sole	9
R5	March' 23	31-40	5	Food and catering	Sole	6
R6	March' 23	31-40	4	Food and catering	Sole	8
R7	March' 23	31-40	7	Bakery	Sole	9
R8	April' 23	51-60	6	Bakery	Sole	7
R9	April' 23	51-60	7	Handloom and handicraft	Partnership	5
R10	April' 23	41-50	6	Handloom and handicraft	Partnership	4
R11	April' 23	31-40	5	Event management	Sole	13
R12	April' 23	31-40	7	Event management	Sole	14
R13	May' 23	31-40	8	Food and catering	Sole	10
R14	May' 23	41-50	5	Handloom and handicraft	Sole	7
R15	May' 23	31-40	7	Jewellery and fashion	Sole	6

Source: Author's calculation

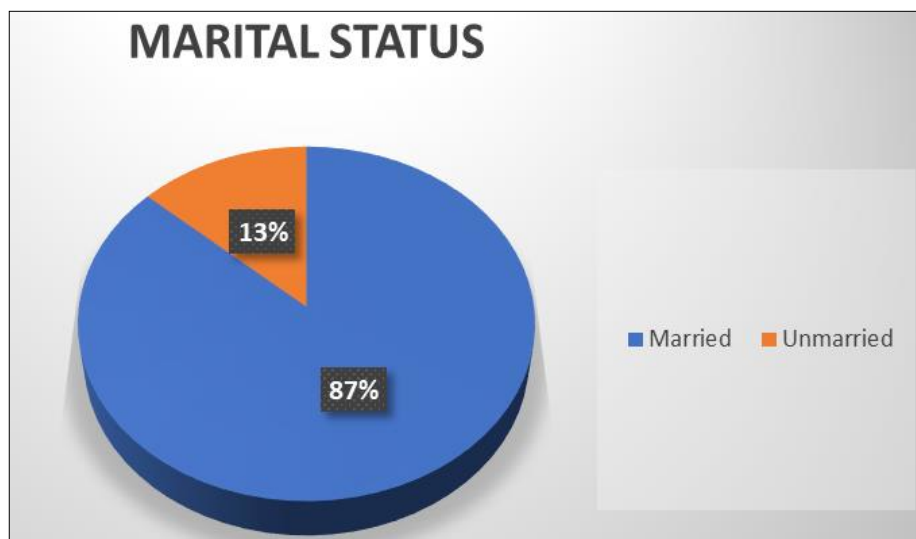
Table 2 reflects the digital presence in the online spectrum like having websites, blogs, pages in social networking sites,

interactive digital channels etc.

Table 2: Digital presence in the online spectrum

Respondents	Business type	Website	Blog	Facebook page	Reels		YouTube channel
					FB	IG	
R1 R4	Art and creatives	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
R2 R3 R15	Jewellery and fashion		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
R5 R6 R13	Food and catering	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
R7 R8	Bakery	✓		✓	✓	✓	
R9 R10 R14	Handloom and handicraft	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
R11 R12	Event management	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: Author's calculation



Source: Author's calculation

Fig 2: Marital status of the respondents

The present study seeks to understand how women entrepreneurship through social media provides economic empowerment and well-being to small and medium women entrepreneurs. Their narratives and encounters are laid down in the quotes below catering to the above-mentioned objectives.

6.1 Social media empowering women in business

Findings show that social media has opened avenues for the women-preneurs to enter the workforce and has attracted many others into this sphere. Social media has inspired small business owners to use their resources and talents in an effective way to reach out to all. Phrases like “feel enriched” (R13), “standard of living has raised” (R6), “feel more confident” (R3), “people know me in my community” (R15) certainly invoke dimensions of empowerment.

I had started it small and now it has grown bigger than I thought. (R3)

I have grown step by step every day. Without any money for physical retail outlets, I opted for cloud marketing. I used different social networking sites to reach my audience. Now I have a physical retail outlet of my own and also, I operate through social media. It's still growing... (R7)

I started to lose hope when I lost my job and couldn't get another one to earn a living. My in-laws stopped considering my decision in any family matter. I thought of displaying my creative skills in Facebook and things turned from there. This business of mine not only gave me an identity, it also gave me wings to fly. It took time, but now my in-laws favour me and are proud of my achievements. I hold the highest income in the family now. (R14)

My friend suggested to post my content in different online groups. I still remember my first day of my posting the jewellery accessories in four different Facebook groups and two WhatsApp groups. I had literally counted...I sold 82 different items and made a profit above 11k in the first day. (R2)

Social media is the craze...without any additional marketing charges, I can promote my business in a very cost effective and convenient manner which helps me to sell my items in a reasonable rate. By avoiding all the marketing and advertisement costs in other media like print and TV, you're always in a win situation when it comes to money earning and profit making (R6).

6.2 Curating digital skill, know-how and constructive knowledge management for business sustainability

Findings also show that entrepreneurs are mastering the digital skill and know how to get the optimum benefit in their business. The productive use of knowledge management is becoming an essential part of entrepreneurial success. All the respondents laid stress on the importance of continuous learning of digital skills to survive in the competitive digital space. Their statement “finding new dimensions for expanding knowledge and skill to be creative” (R12), “technically shaping the intellect” (R8) contributes to intellectual growth.

We have created our own brand and through effective communication and marketing through social media, the brand value has increased. We have honed the branding skills by watching different lectures in YouTube and attending seminars and workshops regarding the same. (R10). Having a specialist to handle social media automation has significantly streamlined my business

operations and freed up my time for other productive tasks related to my business. It's pivotal to constantly upgrade the skills and expertise to maximize efficiency and growth. As a result, that skill is helping to capture the audience details who visits the website and makes my job easier to understand customers' need and perspective (R11).

We both take huge efforts in planning at every step and appreciate knowledge exchange sessions. Without having knowledge to understand customers' engagement level and their pattern of choices, none can have any skill to apply those for business growth. By effective knowledge implementation and digital skills, we try understand customer's need and bring forth those products which facilitates a good buying experience. You have to be both digitally and intellectually smart to understand your customers' needs and preferences (R9).

I constantly try to collaborate with other technologically sound people to upgrade my knowledge level. In order to survive in this technologically driven society, one must keep adding something or the other to one's existing knowledge. Even art can be given a unique touch to make it visible to a larger audience only if digital know-how, digital skills and knowledge is crafted well (R1).

A good website does a lot to the business. It's like the fuel to success. Initially, my website wasn't yielding much which I learned it through different interactions with customers. They told me their navigating experiences. I learned what changes to be made by giving them a page full of delights in terms of information. Although my website is designed by an expert, yet I have shared my part of the knowledge in terms of whatever content to be reflected in the website (R12).

If I have to sustain in the competition, I must develop new skill and do research to intensify knowledge-based actions and gift them to my target customers in the form of a high end, updated product (R4).

6.3 The balancing Mantra-The magic of social media

Respondents have agreed to the magical role of social media in terms of balancing between career and family life. While it is challenging to balance the roles, 14 women entrepreneurs have mentioned the ease of using social media as a reason for the balancing act. They have stated “coping smoothly with dynamics of life” (R9), “improving relations at home” (R7) which certainly indicates satisfactory personal behaviour and attitudes. Only R15 talked about the negative aspect of social media business, disrupting family life.

For married women, there is a stereotyped notion that she only has to take care of the family. I do have my household chores and after playing the role of a daughter and wife, I take out my time to play the role of an entrepreneur. There's no fixed working hour when you're operating online. I even remain online at midnight to post a content or reply to my customers' query. Convenience in regards to time and place, is one major reason I opted for a cloud store (R8).

I am a single mother and my child is only four years old. Being a single mother, I am one to be responsible for my business and family. I could not have survived in the business, if there was no social media. The flexibility of this medium is the trump card (R5).

A proper support system from both family and in profession is all you need to have a proper balance in work and in personal level. Once, my daughter was extremely sick and

had to be rushed to the nearby hospital at an earliest. My husband was out of town. I was entirely tied up in taking care of my daughter for over a month. All my business dealings were taken care by my extended family i.e. my family at work. Whenever I got time, I used to just scroll down the updates given by them in the social networking sites. Had it not been the support from co-workers and the ease of working through social media, I couldn't have maintained a balance between my work and family. (R13) Both are priorities and both should be taken care with utmost responsibility. There is a constant flow of emails, comments, queries from customers which has to be taken care of at an earliest. Attending to them round the clock has made it difficult for me to spend some quality time with family. Initially I struggled to cope with the situation, but now I have specific time slot for my business and I strictly adhere to it (R15).

7. Discussions

From the findings it is evident that social media has been an instrumental tool towards providing empowerment and hence is the first step to well-being. The women entrepreneurs in different small and medium business are introspecting into divergent use of technology to compete in the digital spectrum of entrepreneurship. Women entrepreneurs involved in this study are seen independently taking their business ahead. Although three women entrepreneurs have partners who are also women, still they all have their share of decision-making powers as shared in their narratives. The proper usage of social media has been beneficial for their business. All the respondents agreed to the incorporation of knowledge with technological advancements being advantageous to their business. All the respondents are embracing digital literacy and applying that learning for business sustainability. All of them have expressed that somewhere intellectual well-being is connected to how much they know and from where they shall know about any further developments needed for their business. Fourteen respondents have acknowledged that balancing family and career does not seem to be a challenge whereas one respondent reported difficulty in balancing both as time and place is not a restraint when working in social media and customers' need has to be addressed round the clock. All of them agreed to have experienced financial growth, business development, self-satisfaction and well-being through social media entrepreneurship.

8. Conclusion

This study highlights insights related to empowerment and well-being of women entrepreneurs doing business through social media. The narratives explored the encounters of digital experiences, learning, upgrading their knowledge for taking a leap in their business endeavours. The future is laid upon on how well the entrepreneurs learn to access the social media to amplify and enrich their business. The different online space like blogs, Instagram & Facebook reels, YouTube channels are being used by the entrepreneurs not only for maximum reach and promotion of their products and goods but also for effective customer management. Few also have their own website through which business promotion is done and customer engagement is possible. Analyses have clearly proven that using social media helped women entrepreneurs expand their network and, as a result, could profoundly impact women's

situations, not merely in their job life, but also in their private and social space. Furthermore, having the ability and capacity to balance family and career reflects a different version of women being empowered.

9. Limitations of the study and future prospect

- a. The study is limited to fewer small and medium business; hence it cannot be generalised to other small and medium business. In future, different set of small and medium business can also be studied to have a broader overview.
- b. This study is limited to only North 24 Parganas. Hence the results shouldn't be generalised for entire India.

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