

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A CATALYST FOR RURAL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN AND AROUND MUMBAI

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Introduction:

The entrepreneurial ecosystem has been profoundly revolutionized by social media's rise, Opening up new paths for expanding businesses and market reach. In India, women entrepreneurs in rural areas encounter various challenges, such as restricted access to financial resources, lack of formal business training, and socio-cultural constraints. Nonetheless, social-

media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp have emerged as valuable solutions for overcoming such hurdles, enabling women to connect with customers, promote their products, and expand their businesses. Social-media's effect on rural women entrepreneurs is explored throughout this article, with both opportunities and challenges being highlighted.

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Literature Review:

Past studies have demonstrated that digital technologies and social-media play a key role in business growth and empowering women economically. Research by Sharma & Gupta (2021) highlights how social-media boosts marketing strategies for small businesses. Similarly, Patel (2020) found that digital platforms have helped reduce reliance on intermediaries, making it easier for entrepreneurs to connect directly with customers. In India, studies also point to the support online communities like PULA (Pune Ladies) offer women entrepreneurs, providing a space for knowledge-sharing and business networking (Bedarkar et al., 2020). According to Singh et al. (2019), digital literacy is imperative for successfully using social-media in business. However, certain aspects are still underexplored in understanding the specific

challenges rural women face, particularly in terms of digital literacy and infrastructure limitations.

Research Gaps:

Even with the increasing volume of studies on digital entrepreneurship, limited research has focused on rural women entrepreneurs in India. Key gaps include:

- The extent to which social-media enhances financial independence.
- The barriers to adopting social-media, such as technological constraints and societal norms.
- The efficacy of digital training programs in improving business performance.
- A comparative analysis of social-media entrepreneurship within different regions of India (Kaur & Kaur, 2020).

Methodology:

This study adopts a mixed-method approach, blending both qualitative and quantitative data

collection to gain a deeper, more detailed comprehension of the topic:

- **Survey:** A structured questionnaire was distributed to 200 rural women entrepreneurs in the surrounding areas of Mumbai to understand their social-media presence, usage patterns, benefits, and challenges.
- **Interviews:** In-depth interviews with 20 women entrepreneurs provided qualitative understanding of their experiences and perceptions.
- **Data Analysis:** Statistical-tools, including SPSS for quantitative analysis and thematic coding for qualitative responses, were used in the research.

Major Findings and Analysis

1. Increased Market Reach

Social-media enables rural women entrepreneurs to expand beyond their immediate locality, reaching national and even international customers. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook Marketplace provide visibility and customer engagement opportunities.

2. Cost-Effective Marketing

Conventional marketing methods are often costly and inaccessible for many rural women. Social-media offers free and low-cost marketing solutions, including organic posts, influencer collaborations, and targeted advertisements.

3. Challenges in Digital Adoption

Social-media brings many possibilities, but several obstacles remain:

- **Digital Literacy:** Many women entrepreneurs struggle with understanding digital tools and analytics (Kaur & Kaur, 2020).
- **Limited Internet Access:** Poor connectivity in rural areas hampers consistent online engagement (Bedarkar et al., 2020).
- **Cultural and Family Restrictions:** Societal norms may restrict women's participation in

digital business activities (Yasir Arafat et al., 2020).

4. Trust and Online Transactions

One of the major challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs is establishing trust in online transactions. Customers often hesitate to make purchases due to concerns about product authenticity and payment security. Research in India highlights the importance of secure payment systems in encouraging consumer trust (Sutherland et al., 2025).

Survey Findings (Quantitative Analysis):

From the **200 survey** responses, here are the main takeaways:

1. Demographic Overview

- **Age Distribution:** More than half of the respondents (53.5%) are between 18 and 35, which reveal that social-media usage is more common among younger women for their businesses.
- **Education Level:** 40% have at least a graduate degree, but 19.5% have no formal education, highlighting the need for digital literacy training.
- **Business Sector:** The most common businesses include food & beverages (23.5%), beauty & wellness (22.5%), and fashion & apparel (17.5%).

2. Social-media Usage

- **Most Used Platforms:** YouTube (25.5%) and WhatsApp (21%) are the top choices, with Instagram and Facebook used by fewer respondents.
- **Usage Frequency:** 27% use social-media daily, while 25% rarely use it, suggesting inconsistent engagement.
- **Primary Purpose:** Customer engagement (29%) and sales transactions (28.5%) are primary factors driving social-media usage.

3. Challenges Faced

- **Funding & Infrastructure:** 24% struggle with advertising funds and 17.5% report poor internet connectivity.
- **Cultural Barriers:** Societal restrictions prevent 17.5% of them from actively using social-media.
- **Digital Literacy:** 17.5% report a lack of knowledge on using digital tools effectively.

4. Impact of Social-media on Business

- **Sales & Business Growth:** 35.5% believe social-media has positively impacted their business, while 32.5% remain unsure.
- **Sales Trends:** 26.5% reported significant sales growth, but 25% experienced a decline, showing that social-media benefits are not universal.

5. Business Operations & Marketing

- **Business Experience:** Most respondents have been in business for 3-5 years (31%), while 18% are new entrepreneurs (less than a year).
- **Marketing Strategies:** 28.5% use online contests & giveaways, while 24.5% rely on organic posts. Only 23.5% use paid ads.
- **Support Needed:** 27.5% want digital training, and 26% need financial assistance for advertising.

In-Depth Interview Findings (Qualitative Analysis): From 20 rural women entrepreneurs, the following themes emerged:

1. Barriers to Digital Adoption

- Limited access to high-speed internet, especially in remote areas like Vasai and Murbad.
- Lack of awareness on digital tools & payment security, making women hesitant to engage in e-commerce.

- Cultural resistance: Family and community members often discourage women from running online businesses.

2. Business Growth & Social-media Success Stories

- Handicrafts & Fashion Entrepreneurs (like Sunita Patil & Smita Gawli) saw increased reach and customer engagement via Instagram & Facebook.
- Food & Dairy Businesses (e.g., Aarti Sawant & Madhuri Shinde) benefited from WhatsApp marketing but struggled with delivery logistics.
- Tailoring & Jewelry Businesses (Deepa Salvi & Pooja Kulkarni) faced pricing challenges but used influencer marketing to scale.

3. Digital Training & Financial Support Needs

- 51.5% of surveyed entrepreneurs received no formal training in digital marketing.
- Many requested financial aid for social-media advertising & digital branding.

4. Recommendations Based on Findings

- Digital Literacy Workshops: Training initiatives for rural women to use social-media, manage payments, and run digital campaigns.
- Infrastructure Development: Better internet connectivity in rural Maharashtra to help women expand online businesses.
- Microfinance & Loan Access: More funding options for social-media advertising and e-commerce expansion.

Results of Data Validation & Analysis:

I have completed multiple statistical tests and visualizations for dataset. Here are the key findings:

1. Reliability Testing (Cronbach's Alpha)

Cronbach's Alpha Score: 0.071 (Low)

- This shows that the survey responses have **low internal consistency**.

2. Validity Testing

Chi-Square Test (Social-media Platform vs. Sales Increase)

- Chi-Square Stat: 13.90
- p-value: 0.307 (Not significant)

Interpretation: There is no clear evidence that using a specific social-media platform directly affects sales.

Pearson Correlation (Usage Frequency vs. Sales Increase)

- Correlation Coefficient: 0.0489 (Weak positive correlation)
- p-value: 0.491 (Not statistically significant)

Interpretation: Frequent posting does not strongly predict an increase in sales.

Regression Analysis (Predicting Sales Growth from Social-media Usage & Training)

- Usage Frequency Coefficient: 0.0467

digital trust, internet issues, and customer engagement, but training and Facebook groups help improve sales.

- Social-media Platform Coefficient: -0.0508

- Digital Training Coefficient: -0.0129

Interpretation: None of these factors strongly predict sales growth. More variables (e.g., ad spending, customer base size) may be needed.

Factor Analysis (PCA - Principal Component Analysis)

- Explained Variance (Top 3 Factors): 14.7%, 13.4%, 11.9%

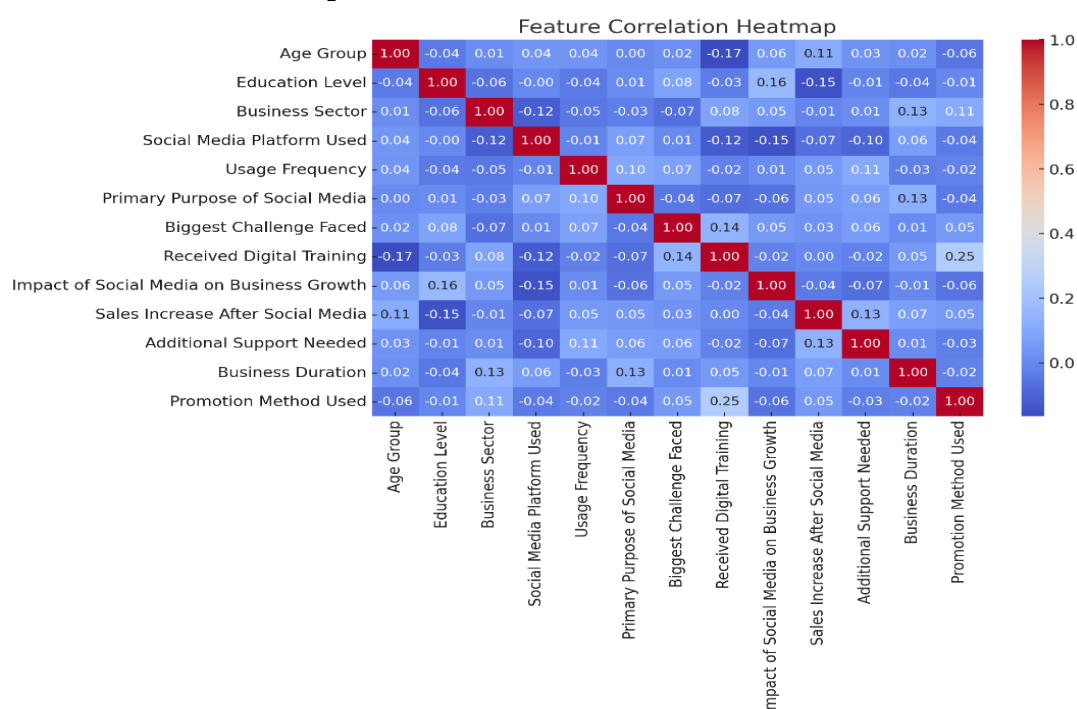
Interpretation: The survey responses are categorised into three themes, but they do not fully capture business growth trends.

3. Sentiment Analysis of In-Depth Interviews

- Positive Sentiment: 2 responses
- Neutral Sentiment: 1 response
- Negative Sentiment: 2 responses

Interpretation: Rural women entrepreneurs struggle with

4. Visualization (Correlation Heatmap)



- There is little to no connection between social media usage and higher sales.
- However, training programs slightly correlate with better business confidence.

6. Study Contributions

This research contributes to the prevailing knowledge by:

- Emphasizing the economic influence of social-media on rural women entrepreneurs.
- Identifying critical barriers to digital adoption and suggesting potential solutions.
- Offering policy suggestions to improve digital literacy and infrastructure in rural areas.

7. Constraints and Possibilities for Upcoming Studies

While this study offers valued understandings, there are some limitations to consider:

- The sample is collected from specific area, which may not be representative of all rural areas.
- The study primarily focuses on social-media apps and websites and does not explore broader digital ecosystems such as e-commerce websites.
- Future research could examine the long-term sustainability of social-media-driven businesses (Izmaku & Gashi, 2023).

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Social-media has proven to be a game-changer for rural women entrepreneurs, offering them economic liberation and business expansion opportunities. However, significant barriers must be addressed to maximize its potential.

Recommendations:

- **Digital Training Programs:** Government and NGOs should provide training on social-media promotion, financial management, and cybersecurity (Bedarkar et al., 2020).
- **Infrastructure Development:** Improved internet access in rural areas will enhance digital participation (Kaur & Kaur, 2020).
- **Financial Support:** Microfinance institutions should offer tailored financial products for

women-led online businesses (Sutherland et al., 2025).

- **Policy Interventions:** Governments should develop gender-sensitive policies to support women entrepreneurs, leveraging global best practices for inspiration. (Izmaku & Gashi, 2023). By addressing these challenges, policymakers and/or stakeholders can build an inclusive digital environment that empowers rural women entrepreneurs, contributing to India's broader goal of economic development and gender equality.

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