

Journey of Women Towards Empowerment

Ravneet Duggal

Assistant Professor

Sri Guru Gobind Singh College Of Commerce

University Of Delhi

Abstract

The study was undertaken with the intention to learn about the journey of a woman towards empowerment. It is a well-known fact that a woman faces more challenges when she moves out in the world to find a place for herself as compared to males. She is burdened with responsibilities which sometimes she takes up because of her moral values and sometimes society plays that role. The study also aims to find out the role of government and social media in helping her come out of this vicious circle. To better understand the journey a survey was undertaken on 100 women who have taken up small or medium scale businesses. The research was carried out using primary data collected with the help of personal interviews and a questionnaire along with secondary data. The results present the prominent role of social media in empowering women.

Keywords: social media, empowerment, government schemes, consumer engagement, awareness, communication

Introduction

Women considered the pillars of society have never been able to get the recognition they deserve. They have always remained at the back end but now they want to move to the forefront. Government women empowerment plans and policies along with the changed perception of society towards women have helped them to move out and seek their valid recognition in society. Women empowerment has attained great momentum in recent years and we can now see them not only in high and good positions in various companies but also as entrepreneurs doing independent businesses successfully. The journey of moving out of internal and external obstacles that women have been facing for since long is commendable. The studies have presented different factors that have posed hindrances in a woman's struggle for recognition and also those factors that have helped her to cope with these challenges and it is essential to know the challenges and opportunities to better understand the growth journey of women entrepreneurs.

The major challenges that a woman faces when she decides to move out of her house and start up a business of her own include gender biases, her lack of business skills and guidance to acquire those skills, shortfall of finances, difficulty in formulating networks and building relationships, issues at the family front because of family responsibilities and social culture, safety issues and the list goes on.

SWOT Analysis

If we talk about SWOT analysis based on studies undertaken by researchers, we observe that woman has a lot of patience, courage, mental strength and an attribute to socialize easily with others. Her patience gives her the strength to face all challenges she encounters, her mental strength boosts her energy to move forward, her courage motivates her to come out and face the world with full enthusiasm, and her nature to meet and interact with people helps her to socialize and build relations which act as a great opportunity for her to enter the new world of entrepreneurship. These strengths had been undiscovered in the past or we can say had been suppressed by the weaknesses she had.

Weaknesses comprise the inner feeling of insecurity, fear of challenges from the outside world, lack of support from the family end, or responsibilities of the family. These weaknesses have been overpowering her desires and aspirations. But with the introduction of different policies of government for women and the social media platforms that provide her various opportunities to cope with the difficulties they were facing, many new avenues have opened up for women and they can bring work-life balance by meeting their responsibilities at both family and work-related.

Opportunities are always accompanied by unforeseen threats and here opportunities brought by social media carry threats in the form of privacy threats, Cyber Crime, threat of legal issues in the absence of complete knowledge and many more. However, it is visible that women can work upon their obstacles and are successfully coming up as leaders, innovators, creators and risk-takers in the entrepreneurial world.

Social Media

Social media platforms have played an important role in the growth of women entrepreneurs. Different social media platforms offer different features that make it easy for anyone to use them and take advantage of them. Social media provides an opportunity to reach mass audiences fast, with ease, develop relations, scroll down expenses and many more. Due to these benefits women who are going to set up their startups are looking for a social media platform to get recognition and already established entrepreneurs are using it as a platform to build goodwill. Social media has given confidence and exposure to women to come out and convert their aspirations into reality.

Social media is used by entrepreneurs to achieve different goals. New entrants or startups look to make their presence recognized while others aim at building a brand image with a growth perspective. Some go for building relationships by engaging consumers to interact with them while others aim at expanding and capturing new market segments through mass communication. Social media has in-store services to serve the needs of all. The only thing is one needs to be aware of the risks associated with the usage of social media as the information on social media is accessible to large segments. However, with precaution and write strategies these challenges can easily be handled.

Social media platforms provide multiple features and benefits which has helped women in their journey to empowerment. Some of the features that attract women include;

1. Consumer engagement

It has been observed that not only women but all entrepreneurs aim at engaging consumers because this is the only way by which consumers can be satisfied. Involving consumers in decision-making processes by seeking their suggestions helps in creating a loyal customer base. Moreover, one can better understand the needs and requirements of consumers leading to lesser chances of non-acceptance of one's products when commercialized.

Consumer engagement is gaining momentum and all firms are using different social media platforms to engage their customers as much as possible. They go for either the services of social media directly or create their websites where consumers can interact. These websites are user friendly and people can directly interact with the companies to present their views, doubts, suggestions and firms can also respond on the same platform immediately and resolve the issues before they cause damage to the firm reputation. However, monitoring the flow and type of information on these platforms is very essential else it can have a negative impact. While using social media platforms extra care needs to be taken since information is in an open platform viewed by a large segment of social media users.

Women entrepreneurs who are in the initial phase of their business are in great need of such type of services as they don't know much about the work culture and lack resources. So interacting with the consumers directly, getting their reactions, and formulating business strategies in accordance with that is the best solution. This helps a woman to gain confidence and grow. Moreover, since consumers are directly involved, she gets first-hand information and her chances of not getting acceptance are reduced to minimal.

2. Awareness

By awareness, we mean the knowledge that consumers have about the firm, its products and its existence. Awareness from the aspect of the firm is equally important to better understand the opportunities available and likely threats it might encounter. Social media helps women to get this awareness. Women who are new to the business world need a lot of information about the market, economy, competition, sources of supplies, consumer base and many more things to smoothen their journey towards entrepreneurship. Social media has multiple users who are always putting their content on social media platforms. Women can use this information to their advantage and gain knowledge. This information acts as a guide map.

3. Communication

Communication with the consumers is the main focus of any firm to get itself recognized, build image and position its products. Communication here means informing the public about the company and its products or services so that a need can be created. When we talk about startups by women or women empowerment where women try to establish themselves in the business field, communication becomes very important. Social media provides her with a platform where she can easily reach consumers at a fast pace and that too economically. It helps women not only circulate their information but also get an idea about the market trend which comprises the number of competitors, their products, and strategies used by them. This helps her in planning her plan of action to compete with the world.

These are the three basic features of social media that help a woman to move towards success but the list of benefits social media provides is huge. It entirely depends upon the woman entrepreneur as to what benefits she is looking for and the level of risk she is ready to take. For best utilization and avail maximum benefits from the features of social media, she should frame out good strategies for social media usage.

Literature Review

Various researchers have talked about the challenges in the path of women who aim to be entrepreneurs. They are of the view that those who face difficulties in coming out of their family responsibilities generally go for household industries while others who are confident and have strong willpower from the beginning can achieve great heights. The reason may be any but the fact is women's empowerment is necessary for the development of society and nation. (NithyaPrem, 2022). To help women different government schemes have been introduced which can give support and boost to women to come up. (Vijayran, 2022). The government not only has launched schemes for the upliftment of women but has also taken the initiative to educate and provide training to women along with financial aid. (Misra & Ghai, 2020)

Women are using social media for their business and researchers have found that they use it very effectively for empowerment and establish small businesses where scarcity of funds is the main constraint. (Bagani et al., 2022). Besides finances, women need information and a support system that could help them to be updated and connected with people. (Spandana et al., 2022). Social media helps in procuring the requisite information and also to spread the same most effectively. (Sajane & Gaikwad, 2022). Studies have been undertaken to understand the reason why women entrepreneurs showed less involvement as compared to men and which social media platform they preferred and why. Studies found Facebook as the most preferred mode by women entrepreneurs for their businesses. (Razak & Jah, 2018). The role of ICT and its impact on women entrepreneurs is very dominant and needs due recognition. (Sharma, 2018). During the pandemic, when businesses were slowed down, social media helped in moving out of the crises. (Syaifullah, 2021)

A researcher (Saha et al., 2022) has talked about the online communication done by social media to build the brand image. He says that communication feature is used to build loyalty among consumers as they can present their issues and those are immediately resolved by the experts whom firms have designated to provide these services. Researchers also state that though social media is acting as a great solution provider and helps in deciding its target audience its users do face a lot of challenges. (Khan et al., 2014).

Studies have shown that viral marketing and eWOM have helped in the circulation of the market leading to better interaction and understanding between buyers and sellers. Now it has become possible for the firm to monitor and mold the behavior patterns of consumers. (Alghizzawi, 2019). Viral marketing though useful impacts in positive and negative sense needs to be analysed before taking it up. (Borges-Tiago, Tiago & Cosme, 2019). It was found that the effectiveness of viral marketing was greatly based on the smoothness with which the information was forwarded to the consumers and this resulted in the formulation of consumers' attitude towards the firm. (Fard & Marvi, 2020)

Awareness about the existence of the firm and its product plays a great role in the life cycle of firm and its product. Social media was used to create awareness about the tourism industry. Ministry of tourism used social media for this purpose and results were satisfactory. (Gupta et al., 2022). Using social media helps a firm to collect and analyse data quick and easy. (Kumar, Nanda & Tawangar, 2021). Information available on social media helps the consumers also too take right decisions regarding buying. (Jashari & Rustemi,

2017). Social media provides a platform to the consumers where they can interact, comment, criticize and appreciate the firm and its products. (Goyal, 2016)

Besides the basic benefits which a consumer and firm looks for on social media, the level and type of consumer engagement is vital. Consumer engagement helps in determining the consumer satisfaction and helps in estimating future growth based on the creation of loyal customer base. (Majeed et al., 2022)

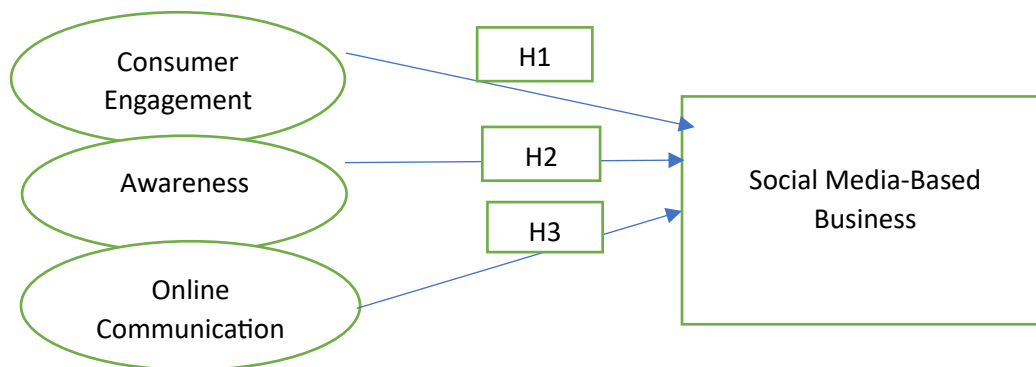
Research Methodology

The study was undertaken taking women who have started their startups and doing pretty well. A sample of 100 women was taken from Delhi who were operating small and medium-scale businesses. Case studies and primary data collection were undertaken to get firsthand information. Secondary data through journals and websites was also used. The data collected was based on interviews and a structured questionnaire. The information collected was then analyzed using factor analysis.

Research Objective

The objective of the study was to find if government initiatives and social media have an impact on the decision of women to be empowered and help women in their journey to empowerment and growth. The impact of social media was studied using three variables namely consumer engagement, awareness and communication. The reasons behind their decision to go for startups were analyzed and their journey was studied. Based on the objective hypotheses were framed.

Research Model



Hypothesis

H₀₁: Consumer engagement feature of social media does not have any impact on the decision of women to go for entrepreneurship or its growth

H₀₂: Awareness feature of social media does not have any impact on the decision of women to go for entrepreneurship or its growth.

H₀₃: Online communication does not have any impact on the decision of women to go for entrepreneurship or its growth.

Variables Extracted

Three variables were taken under study namely

1. Consumer Engagement was used to see how the firms used social media to keep consumers involved which comprised five items CE1, CE2, CE3, CE4, CE5
2. Awareness aimed at understanding how social media helped them in keeping customers informed about the firm. Five items were used namely AW1, AW2, AW3, AW4 and AW5.
3. Communication was used as a variable to interact with the consumers. Items used here were Com 1, Com 2, Com 3, Com 4 and Com5.
4. The social media-based business was taken as a dependent variable to understand the impact of independent variables, consumer engagement, awareness and communication, on it.

Research Analysis

The government realizes the importance of women's empowerment because of this it is taking a lot of initiatives to motivate and support women.

Government schemes to provide financial help to women

The study was undertaken to better understand the perspective of women towards empowerment. We all are aware that an empowered woman not only can get self-satisfaction and a feeling of success but is an asset to society and her family, and a contributor to the growth of a country. This is the reason why the government is motivating women and taking steps to provide all possible help to come out of their shells and grow.

1. Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP)- Started by NITI Aayog in partnership with SIDBI. The aim is to provide financial help to existing and upcoming women entrepreneurs. They provide a platform where all women entrepreneurs can come together and share their ideas and act as a support system for each other.
2. Udyogini Scheme- It was introduced by the Women Development Corporation, especially for women entrepreneurs coming from rural and underdeveloped areas. The scheme provides women interest-free loans up to Rs. 3 lakhs to start a small-scale industry. The only condition is their annual family income should be less than Rs. 1.5 lakh.
3. Mudra Loans- Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana was launched to provide loans to small enterprises involved in manufacturing, agriculture, retail and service sectors, without any collateral security. Based on the loan amount, loans were named as Shishu loans for loans up to Rs. 50000, Kishor loans for amounts between Rs. 50000 to Rs.5 lakh and Tarun loans for loan amounts ranging from Rs. 5lakh to Rs.10 lakh.
4. Bharathiya Mahila Bank Business Loan- The scheme provides loans to women up to Rs. 20 crores if they go to start a real estate business or a manufacturing business. It also offers collateral-free loans up to Rs. 1 crore.
5. Annapurna Scheme- This scheme provides financial assistance up to Rs. 50000 for starting food catering but only against a guarantor and security. It also has a time limit for repayment of loan which is 3 years.
6. Stree Shakti Scheme- It is a scheme applicable for all women entrepreneurs, existing or planning to be one, in any type of business, sector or self-employed. The interest rate is quite low and no security is taken for loans up to Rs. 5 lakhs. The only condition is that the women taking loans need to be part of Entrepreneurship Development Programs run by the State government.
7. Dena Shakti Scheme- The scheme provides a loan facility of up to Rs. 20 lakhs, repayable over 7 years, with a 0.25% concession in applicable interest rates to women entrepreneurs focused on agriculture, retail trade, education, housing, and the SME segment.

These government schemes helped in solving the financial problem to a large extent.

The study has highlighted that these government schemes have provided help and are acting as a good support system for women who are looking for financial aid.

On moving further in the study, a lot of challenges that women faced during their journey were noticed. The challenges faced include:

Challenges

1. Household responsibilities because of which women are not able to maintain work-life balance. In such situations family expects her to give priority to family.
2. Restrictions from family due to cultural issues and societal norms where she is not expected to go out and work.
3. Lack of financial support from family without which she found it very difficult to even start her journey. She was neither provided funds from family nor was aware of the sources from where she could raise funds.
4. Lack of knowledge and confidence to interact with the outside world as she always had been within the four walls of her house. She lacked confidence in herself. Moreover, she had no idea how she would go on with the business concept. She lacked the skills and knowledge that are essential for a startup and was unaware of the sources to get the requisite knowledge.

5. Fear of failure was another big challenge. As she had never interacted with the business community and had no knowledge about the type of work culture and competition that existed, she had an inner fear of not being able to deal with these unforeseen challenges.
6. Difficulty in getting access to resources due to lack of knowledge of sources and means to get them.
7. The attitude of society towards women as a lot of discrimination exists based on gender in society. We have moved towards modernization but still it is quite visible that society is still male-dominated to a large extent.

Reasons for the change of attitude

Irrespective of the hurdles that came in the path of women and acted as bottlenecks, she has managed to come out successfully. The reasons for this transformation of attitude are many depending upon the situational factors. In some cases, she decided to empower herself while in others the circumstances forced her to get empowered. Some reasons which have come out from the research undertaken include;

1. Some women had always had the desire to have recognition in society and zeal to prove themselves but never got an opportunity or we can say circumstances did not permit them to go into fulfilling their aspirations. Now when they found an opportunity, they grabbed it.
2. A few of the women had no option other than empowering themselves because of the financial needs of the family. To fulfill the basic needs of the family when she had no source of income, the woman overcame her fears and entered the business world to explore herself.
3. It was also noticed during research that many women who had been doing very well in their professional careers also decided to move towards empowerment because of a corporate environment and work culture. They believed that the stressful work culture did not allow them to think for themselves. Moreover, discrimination also existed based on gender at times.
4. Women who wished to conquer the world but lacked in some aspect or the other because of different types of insecurity got confidence when the government came up with different financial assistance programs for women so that they could fulfill their dreams. To further motivate them social media came up with multiple features to add more convenience to women to move towards their journey to success.

Role of social media in women's empowerment

Social media has played a very important role in empowering women. Nowadays we can see a large segment of women entrepreneurs who are doing very well. Here we are talking about those women who are into small-scale or medium-scale businesses. They have started their businesses from their home and not only supporting their family but empowering others. The study has helped in understanding how social media has helped them and in which aspects.

1. Social media has helped women financially. As we know many women who wanted to do something were not able to fulfill their dreams because of lack of resources. However social media does not ask for large funds to provide its services. The basic knowledge about the use of social media and a mobile phone is the basic necessity to use it.
2. Women had to manage their families so they were not taking up any ventures. But social media provided them a platform to do business without going out. It gave them the opportunity and convenience to work.
3. Women who had the fear to interact also gave the feature to communicate with the world online mode. This gave time to them to gather the confidence to face the world.
4. With the help of social media women were able to create a good consumer base without spending much on financial terms and also saving upon time. Consumer engagement was possible because of user-friendly sites which made interaction with consumers easy and fast leading to a satisfied and loyal customer segment.
5. Social media provided them with the service of circulating the information of their existence in the market which opened up new avenues for them.

Based on the responses of the respondents it is quite clear that all three variables of social media taken under study played a dominant role in impacting the decision of women to be empowered and also played an important role in their growth journey.

Hypotheses Testing

H₀₁: Consumer engagement feature of social media does not have any impact on the decision of women to go for entrepreneurship or its growth.

When structural equation modeling was used it was observed that p value was 0. When p value is less than 0.5 it is considered that null hypotheses is rejected. This proves that consumer engagement feature has a significant impact on the decision to be empowered and growth of women-oriented businesses.

H₀₂: Awareness feature of social media does not have any impact on the decision of women to go for entrepreneurship or its growth.

Structural equation modeling was used and it was observed that p value was 0. When p value is less than 0.5 it is considered that null hypotheses is rejected. This proves that creating awareness feature of social media has a significant impact on the decision of women to be empowered and growth of women-oriented businesses.

H₀₃: Online communication feature of social media does not have any impact on the decision of women to go for entrepreneurship or its growth

When structural equation modeling was used it was observed that p value was 0. When p value is less than 0.5 it is considered that null hypotheses is rejected. This proves that consumer engagement feature of social media has a significant impact on the decision to be empowered and growth of women-oriented businesses. So, we can conclude that all the three null hypotheses were rejected and alternate hypothesis were accepted which says that social media does impact the decision of women to go for entrepreneurship and its growth.

Conclusion

The entire study has focused on women and the factors that help them cope with their challenges to achieve the success they deserve. The research represents the fact that there are a lot of opportunities and facilities available for women with the help of which they can accomplish their dreams and get respect and recognition in not only their families but in society. During interactions the limitations, and internal and external challenges faced by women came to the forefront through which they came out because of their strong willpower and the support coming to them from government and social media. The study has taken up the role of social media and government in the journey of women's empowerment but many more factors influence and act as a guiding force for a woman towards empowerment. The government schemes provide financial aid to women who want to enter the entrepreneurial world and once they can establish their presence then they can deal with the situations in their capacity without looking for a support system.

Women empowerment has not only given women the feeling of achievement, success and satisfaction but also has changed her position in family and society. her viewpoint is asked and is given the authority to take decisions. Now, she is looked upon with more respect and dignity. Her skill, knowledge and worth has now has not only been recognized but appreciated. Her contribution towards society is prominent and that is the reason why every country is putting extra efforts to empower women.

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