

# Economic Opportunities and Social Media: Assessing the Impact of Online Platforms on Entrepreneurship among Tribal Women in North Gujarat

Dhanula Anjali<sup>1\*</sup> and Dr. Amarjeet Kumar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Madhav University, Pindwara (Sirohi), Rajasthan, India

<sup>2</sup>Research Guide, Department of Sociology, Madhav University, Pindwara (Sirohi), Rajasthan, India

\*Corresponding Author: Dhanula Anjali

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## ABSTRACT

*This research investigates the impact of social media platforms on entrepreneurial opportunities for tribal women in North Gujarat, where access to conventional business resources remains limited. Social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram offer tribal women a cost-effective means of marketing, reaching customers, and expanding their network, thereby helping them overcome barriers related to geography, finances, and social constraints. Through a mixed-methods approach involving a survey of 200 tribal women entrepreneurs and in-depth interviews with 20 participants, this study explores how these women utilize social media to market traditional crafts, sell products, and gain financial independence. Findings indicate that social media enhances visibility and customer engagement, supporting income generation and enabling community development. However, challenges such as digital literacy, limited internet access, and technological constraints restrict the full potential of social media as an entrepreneurial tool. The research underscores the importance of targeted support in digital literacy and infrastructure improvement to amplify these women's entrepreneurial success. This study contributes to the understanding of social media's role in economic empowerment for marginalized communities and suggests policy interventions to support sustainable, inclusive growth through digital entrepreneurship for tribal women.*

**Keywords:** north gujarat, entrepreneurship, tribals women, financial independence, social media

## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media platforms have emerged as transformative tools for enhancing economic opportunities and empowering marginalized groups, particularly women in rural and tribal areas. In India, where digital penetration has significantly increased, social media has become an essential channel for entrepreneurship, enabling individuals to connect with global markets, access new resources, and expand their business reach. Among the many communities that stand to benefit from this digital revolution are the tribal women of North Gujarat, a region where socio-economic challenges, including gender inequality, lack of infrastructure, and limited access to education, have historically restricted women's participation in the formal economy.

The tribal communities in North Gujarat, like many other indigenous groups across India, have long been engaged in traditional forms of livelihood, including agriculture, handicrafts, and local artisan work. However, these activities often operate in isolation, with limited access to larger markets, business networks, and opportunities for skill enhancement. For women in these communities, entrepreneurship has been doubly constrained—not only by economic barriers but also by social and cultural norms that prioritize male entrepreneurship and limit women's mobility and economic independence. In this context, the advent of digital platforms represents a potential game-changer for tribal women entrepreneurs, offering them new avenues to overcome these barriers and engage in income-generating activities that were previously inaccessible.

This research focuses on understanding the role of social media in fostering entrepreneurship among tribal women in North Gujarat. With increasing internet accessibility and smartphone usage, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp are emerging as powerful tools for these women to connect with markets, showcase their products, and build networks. These platforms facilitate the dissemination of business information, provide a space for creative expression, and offer opportunities for skill development and collaboration. Moreover, the ability to bypass traditional market intermediaries allows women to directly reach customers, thereby enhancing their earning potential and financial independence.

However, despite the promises of digital entrepreneurship, the journey is not without its challenges. Many tribal women face significant hurdles in accessing and effectively utilizing digital technologies. Issues such as low levels of digital literacy, poor internet connectivity, and limited access to affordable smartphones remain substantial obstacles. Furthermore, deeply

ingrained gender biases and cultural norms continue to restrict women's autonomy, even in the digital space. These challenges necessitate a comprehensive understanding of both the opportunities and constraints that social media presents for tribal women entrepreneurs.

The objective of this research is to assess the impact of social media platforms on the entrepreneurship of tribal women in North Gujarat. Through a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs, this study investigates how these women are using social media to market their products, expand their businesses, and connect with a broader audience. It also explores the socio-cultural dynamics influencing their entrepreneurial activities, including community support, access to resources, and gender-specific barriers. By examining the opportunities and challenges faced by tribal women in this digital age, the paper aims to provide valuable insights into how social media can be a catalyst for economic empowerment and social inclusion, as well as identify policy measures to address the barriers that continue to limit their potential.

Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on digital entrepreneurship, particularly in the context of marginalized communities. By focusing on the experiences of tribal women in North Gujarat, this study offers a nuanced understanding of how digital platforms can be leveraged to promote inclusive economic growth and empower women in traditionally underserved areas.

Kili Paul and his sister Neema, from Tanzania, became viral on social media through their viral lip-sync videos and traditional dance performances, showcasing how digital platforms can empower individuals from marginalized communities. Their success parallels the findings of the research, highlighting how social media can drive entrepreneurship and cultural expression for underserved groups, including tribal women.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of social media in fostering entrepreneurship, particularly among marginalized groups, has garnered increasing attention in recent research. Studies suggest that digital platforms offer new economic opportunities for women in rural and tribal communities by providing access to markets, skill development, and network expansion (Venkatesh et al., 2016). In India, tribal women often face multiple barriers such as social exclusion, gender norms, and limited access to traditional business opportunities (Bhat & Sethi, 2019). However, social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp have been found to bridge some of these gaps by enabling women to showcase and sell products, enhance visibility, and connect with customers (Rai & Sahu, 2021).

Research by Sharma and Gupta (2020) highlights how digital platforms empower women in rural areas by overcoming logistical constraints and opening new avenues for entrepreneurship. Similarly, studies on social media's impact on tribal communities, such as that of Chattopadhyay et al. (2018), indicate that digital literacy programs and online entrepreneurship can significantly enhance income and social mobility.

Despite these opportunities, challenges remain, including limited digital literacy, infrastructure gaps, and gender-based discrimination (Jain & Jha, 2020). Addressing these barriers is critical for ensuring that social media can serve as a sustainable tool for empowerment and entrepreneurship among tribal women in North Gujarat.

## III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to assess the impact of social media on entrepreneurship among tribal women in North Gujarat. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 200 tribal women actively using social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp for business purposes. Participants were selected from various sectors, including handicrafts, agriculture, and small-scale businesses, within tribal areas of North Gujarat.

Data were collected using two primary methods:

- 1. Surveys:** A structured questionnaire was administered to capture quantitative data on social media usage, business growth, income generation, and perceived challenges.
- 2. In-depth Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 women entrepreneurs to explore qualitative insights into their entrepreneurial experiences, digital literacy, and socio-cultural barriers.

The survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) and correlation analysis to identify trends between social media usage and income. The interview data were transcribed and analyzed through thematic analysis, identifying key themes such as empowerment, challenges, and social norms.

Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were prioritized. The study's limitations include its geographic focus on North Gujarat and reliance on self-reported data. Overall, the methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of how social media influences tribal women's entrepreneurship in the region.

#### IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of the data gathered from 200 tribal women and 10 women entrepreneurs in North Gujarat reveals the significant impact of social media on entrepreneurship in marginalized communities. The data collected through surveys and in-depth interviews highlight key patterns of social media usage, business growth, challenges, and opportunities. Below, the findings are presented with a focus on the influence of social media in shaping the entrepreneurial activities of tribal women.

##### 1. Social Media Usage Patterns

The first aspect of the analysis explores the frequency and types of social media platforms used by tribal women for entrepreneurial purposes. Table 1 provides an overview of the social media platforms utilized by the participants.

**Table 1:** Frequency of Social Media Platform Usage Among Tribal Women Entrepreneurs

| Platform  | Percentage of Women Using | Frequency of Use |
|-----------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Facebook  | 68%                       | Daily            |
| Instagram | 52%                       | Weekly           |
| WhatsApp  | 92%                       | Daily            |
| YouTube   | 16%                       | Monthly          |
| Twitter   | 8%                        | Rarely           |

From the data, it is evident that WhatsApp is the most widely used platform, with 92% of women using it daily for business communications, networking, and customer inquiries. Facebook follows closely, with 68% of respondents using it regularly to showcase products, connect with a larger audience, and market their businesses. Instagram, although popular for visual marketing, is used less frequently (52%) but shows potential for expanding visibility, particularly for women involved in handicrafts and local products. YouTube and Twitter are used infrequently, likely due to lower digital literacy and the need for more advanced content creation skills.

##### 2. Impact on Business Growth and Income Generation

Social media usage has led to notable improvements in business growth and income generation. Table 2 compares the income levels of women before and after engaging in social media-driven entrepreneurship.

**Table 2:** Income Levels Before and After Using Social Media

| Income Range (Inr) | Before Using Social Media | After Using Social Media |
|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| BELOW 5,000        | 78%                       | 22%                      |
| 5,000 - 10,000     | 16%                       | 30%                      |
| 10,000 - 20,000    | 4%                        | 28%                      |
| ABOVE 20,000       | 2%                        | 20%                      |

The data shows a clear shift towards higher income brackets after using social media. Before engaging with digital platforms, 78% of tribal women earned below INR 5,000 monthly. However, after using social media for business, only 22% remain in this income category, while 30% earn between INR 5,000 - 10,000, and 28% earn between INR 10,000 - 20,000. This shift reflects how online platforms can provide access to larger markets, reduce intermediaries, and increase direct sales.

##### 3. Challenges and Barriers Faced

Despite the benefits, several challenges still hinder the full potential of social media for entrepreneurship. Table 3 outlines the main barriers experienced by tribal women in leveraging social media for business.

**Table 3: Challenges Faced by Tribal Women Entrepreneurs on Social Media**

| Challenge                      | Percentage of Women Reporting |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Limited Digital Literacy       | 61%                           |
| Poor Internet Connectivity     | 47%                           |
| Gender and Social Norms        | 52%                           |
| Lack of Access to Devices      | 34%                           |
| Limited Knowledge of Marketing | 43%                           |

The primary barriers identified were limited digital literacy (61%) and poor internet connectivity (47%), which make it difficult for tribal women to fully utilize the potential of social media for business. Additionally, gender and social norms (52%) continue to restrict women's mobility and autonomy, even in the digital space. There is also a notable gap in marketing knowledge (43%), with many women not fully aware of how to use social media effectively to grow their businesses. Despite these challenges, the data suggests that with the right support, these barriers can be overcome.

#### 4. Insights from Women Entrepreneurs

Interviews with 10 women entrepreneurs who have successfully integrated social media into their business strategies further confirm these findings. They highlighted that social media has not only provided a platform for showcasing products but has also been instrumental in skill development, customer engagement, and overcoming traditional business limitations. However, these entrepreneurs also mentioned the need for training programs on digital tools, gender-sensitive policies, and improved infrastructure to ensure broader success.

## V. CONCLUSION

The findings from this research highlight the significant role that social media plays in empowering tribal women entrepreneurs in North Gujarat. By analyzing the data collected through surveys and in-depth interviews, several key insights have emerged that illustrate both the potential and the challenges of using digital platforms for entrepreneurship among marginalized communities. The data, as presented in the tables, offer a clear picture of how social media is influencing income generation, market access, and the entrepreneurial landscape for tribal women in this region.

Firstly, the data in Table 1 demonstrate that social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp and Facebook, are central to the entrepreneurial activities of tribal women. With 92% of women using WhatsApp daily for business communications, it is evident that this platform provides an accessible, low-cost method of reaching customers, sharing product information, and engaging with a broader market. Facebook, used by 68% of women, serves as a powerful tool for product marketing, customer outreach, and expanding business visibility. Instagram, although less frequently used, shows strong potential for women in the handicraft sector, where visual content is essential. The minimal use of platforms like YouTube and Twitter suggests a gap in digital literacy and content creation skills, indicating that further support is needed to help these women tap into advanced digital marketing strategies.

In terms of economic impact, the data from Table 2 clearly indicate the positive influence of social media on the income levels of tribal women entrepreneurs. Before using social media, a vast majority (78%) of the women earned below INR 5,000 per month, with limited scope for business growth. After engaging with social media, however, this number dropped dramatically, with only 22% remaining in the same income bracket. There was a significant increase in the number of women earning between INR 5,000 and 20,000, and 20% of women reported earning above INR 20,000. This shift in income levels demonstrates how social media can open up access to new markets, reduce the reliance on intermediaries, and allow women to directly engage with customers, thereby increasing their earning potential. This is a critical finding, as it shows how digital platforms can contribute to greater financial independence and empowerment for tribal women, a demographic historically excluded from mainstream economic opportunities.

However, despite these opportunities, several barriers continue to limit the full potential of social media for tribal women entrepreneurs. As shown in Table 3, challenges such as limited digital literacy (61%) and poor internet connectivity (47%) remain significant obstacles. These barriers prevent women from fully harnessing the potential of digital platforms for business growth. Many women face difficulties in understanding how to effectively use social media for marketing, creating content, or engaging with customers, leading to suboptimal usage of these platforms. In addition, gender and social norms (52%) continue to restrict women's autonomy, even within the digital space. Social expectations around women's roles in the family and community often limit their ability to invest time and resources into growing a business. Moreover, limited access to devices (34%) further exacerbates the digital divide, particularly in rural areas with inadequate infrastructure.

While these challenges are significant, they are not insurmountable. The findings suggest that targeted interventions are necessary to support tribal women in overcoming these barriers. Digital literacy programs, tailored to the needs of rural women, would equip them with the skills required to navigate social media platforms more effectively. Additionally, improving internet infrastructure and ensuring access to affordable smartphones and devices would empower women to engage more fully with online entrepreneurship. Finally, addressing gender-specific constraints through community sensitization and gender-inclusive policies would further enable tribal women to break free from traditional societal norms that limit their entrepreneurial potential.

In conclusion, while social media has shown immense potential in empowering tribal women entrepreneurs in North Gujarat, a combination of digital literacy training, improved infrastructure, and gender-sensitive support systems is essential for maximizing these benefits. The findings from this study suggest that with the right interventions, social media can serve as a powerful tool for enhancing economic independence, fostering entrepreneurial growth, and promoting social inclusion for tribal women in marginalized communities.

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