A socio-anthropological understanding of the reasons for female entrepreneurs' attraction to social media in developing countries

Chux Gervase Iwu[1]
Victoria Openif'Oluwa Akoleowo[2]
Lucky Sibanda[3]
Tendai Makwara[4]

Abstract
Patriarchal, religious, and cultural values have consistently limited women's participation in the public sphere. Nowhere is this more evident than in entrepreneurial activities conducted in the public space. Therefore, the social media revolution is conceptualised as a mode of overcoming the restrictions and limitations on women's participation in the public sphere. More importantly, social media platforms are utilised as media for women's entrepreneurial activities. A cursory look at these platforms reveals that women, who would otherwise have no avenue for carrying out entrepreneurial activities by their limitation to the private sphere, utilise these platforms to actualise their entrepreneurial aspirations. As such, social media platforms present a means of ensuring women's inclusivity and empowerment in the economic sector, contrary to patriarchal, religious, and cultural challenges to women's public participation. However, utilising these platforms also presents its challenges. This paper, therefore, attempts a critical evaluation of the role of social media platforms in women's entrepreneurial activities.

[1] Department of Management and Entrepreneurship, University of the Western Cape, South Africa, cgiwu@uwc.ac.za [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6290-9864].
[2] Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, Nigeria, opeakoleowo@gmail.com [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8182-4567].
[3] Department of Management and Entrepreneurship, University of the Western Cape, South Africa, ckisto@gmail.com [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1421-7337].
[4] Boston City Campus, Stellenbosch, South Africa, makwara.t@gmail.com [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4132-7224].

Introduction

It can be argued that many challenges confronting female entrepreneurship stem from socio-anthropological agents, such as culture, religion, and political power, that militate against equal social and economic participation of men and women in society.

Equally appealing is a proposition that social media has emerged as a tool that enables women to challenge the status quo by demanding greater accountability and transparency, mostly from those in positions of power and influence (Mutsvairo, 2020), such as men in patriarchal and religiously dominant societies. As the use of social media gains traction, female entrepreneurship is fast becoming prevalent as women's contribution is gradually being perceived as key to economic growth, sustaining livelihoods, and the solidification of the social system.

Nonetheless, female entrepreneurs in developing countries lack entrepreneurial support. It has been widely reported that female entrepreneurs confront numerous obstacles such as gender discrimination, unfavourable business, economic and political environments, lack of entrepreneurship training and education, personality-based constraints, and government policies. Other barriers include inadequate capitalisation, inability to access adequate government incentives and protection, high costs of inputs, low-end technology, poor technological infrastructure, external competitive pressures, low partnership-forming propensity by entrepreneurs, and absence of organisational and management skills. Although men also experience these challenges, female-owned businesses are known to experience them rather harshly.

Interestingly, new ways of moving away from these challenges have been researched with social media on top of the list of the panaceas that have been suggested (Al-Haidari, 2017; Cesaroni et al., 2017; Ghouse et al., 2019; Jose, 2018; Mack et al., 2017; Wiid et al., 2014), with evidence suggesting that more women in business are gravitating towards social media to secure their businesses (Mastercard, 2021) and leverage its concomitant positive effect to rise out of the shadows of male entrepreneurship.

According to Al-Haidari (2017), adopting social media increases flexibility in the daily lives of women entrepreneurs and provides an escape route for most of the challenges they experience in business. Several academic research (for example, Cesaroni et al., 2017; Ghouse et al., 2019; Jose, 2018; Mack et al., 2017; Radipere & Scheers, 2005; Rodriguez et al., 2012; Scheers, 2010; Wiid et al., 2014) has examined this new development, with mainstream media stressing that:

- Women are biologically wired for social networking (financesonline.com).
- Women spend nearly 10 minutes social networking through the mobile web or apps daily, whereas men spend a little less than 7 minutes (nielsen.com).

- More than half of women use social media to show support and access deals or promotions from brands, compared to just 36% of the men online (burstmedia.com/brandwatch.com).
- For most women in business, social media is perhaps a way to escape men's domineering and prying eyes (www.wsj.com).
- Social media presents a level playing field for women (www.nytimes.com).

The extant opinions above, in our view, signal a point in history when social media has matured to infiltrate almost every aspect of women's daily experience in society and business. Global data indicate that 71 per cent of women and only 62% of men use social media, with specific trends showing that in some social media sites, the gender gap is skewed in favour of female users: Facebook (84% women versus 73% men), Facebook Messenger (75% women versus 62% men), and Instagram (48 % women versus 35% men) (United Nations, 2020). Statistics from the United States of America, arguably indicative of global trends, also draw an upward trajectory about women's increased appetite for exploiting social media spaces to advance social and business goals. In 2005, 6% of women from the United States of America used social media, rising to 68% in 2015 (Perrin, 2015). In the same era, Mourtada et al. (2011) indicated that the Arab region experienced exponential growth in the use of social media, even among women, despite the overwhelming cultural and patriarchal hurdles that curtail their freedoms. In the United Arab Emirates, for instance, a survey of about 20000 members of the Female Fusion Network revealed that over 95% consider social media channels as a major driver of their businesses (Small to Medium Enterprises) (Mastercard, 2021). Furthermore, it is reported that women entrepreneurs mostly use social media (71%), followed by company websites (57%).

Perhaps to make better sense of these behavioural nuances by women regarding social media use, it is imperative to carry out a socio-anthropological analysis of why women may embrace social media as a credible opportunity to grow their businesses. To this end, we forward a critical analysis of women's participation in business foregrounded on a socio-anthropological perspective. In that regard, this study sought to answer the question: *What socio-anthropological reasons drive female entrepreneurs' attraction to social media in developing countries?* This question is of interest for some reasons. First, there is a nexus between socio-anthropological agents - culture, religion, and political power (Meneses et al., 2017; Knibbe & Kupari, 2020) and how women manage their businesses. For example, regarding business, women have begun gravitating toward social media (Ukpere et al., 2014; Mutsvairo, 2020) despite the challenges associated with obtaining financial support due to gender. Second, new media innovations such as the internet and social media advance sociocultural relations (Wilding, 2020). Additionally, social media appears to have weakened the authority of patriarchy (Eisenlohr, 2011). Third, there is a dearth of knowledge related to how socio-anthropological elements – religion, customs, and tradition – have drawn women, specifically female entrepreneurs in developing economies, to social media.

The first section of this paper exposes the theoretical framework upon which the arguments in this work are premised. In the next section, we highlight cross-cultural and

socio-anthropological perspectives on the challenges and possible opportunities that pertain to advancing the position of women, especially in developing societies. While highlighting the essential differences in how social media utility benefits men and women, the paper equally uncovers researchable aspects of female entrepreneurship literature that add value in constructing both theory and practice.

Theoretical framework: Theory of intersectionality

The study of challenges faced by female entrepreneurs is particularly relevant to the theory of intersectionality, which seeks to understand how multiple forms of oppression and disadvantage intersect and shape individuals' experiences and opportunities (Crenshaw, 1989; Wickrama et al., 1999). Female entrepreneurs who belong to marginalised racial or ethnic groups, for example, may face additional barriers to accessing funds and building networks due to their gender and race or ethnicity. Moreover, female entrepreneurs who are also caregivers may struggle to balance their work and personal responsibilities, which is further compounded if they face economic or social disadvantages. The theory of intersectionality, therefore, provides a framework for understanding how the experiences of female entrepreneurs are shaped not only by their gender but also by other social, economic, and cultural factors and how these factors interact to create unique challenges and opportunities for different individuals and groups.

Literature review

Cross-cultural and socio-anthropological perspectives to advancing women's position

Contemporary societies are characterised by prevalent patriarchy. Such patriarchy is particularly problematic in light of the struggle for equality and equity socially and in business. Prevalent gender roles remain instrumentalised to the detriment of women, as they are assigned weaker and inferior roles, in comparison to men's strong and dominating roles. While the thematic concern of women's marginalisation spans across cultures, women's lived experiences vary from culture to culture. These experiences share one thing in common: some of them derive from religious gender roles.

Religion is one of the essential factors in the construction of gender roles. Its stereotypical ascription of specific traits and values to individuals based on their sexes comes to bear at this point. Religious practices shape gender roles through portrayals of women as inferior, buttressed by scriptural justifications (Klassen, 2009). These portrayals not only promote gender inequality but also entrench traditional patriarchal notions of women where available hitherto and introduce patriarchal views that were previously unknown.

Such stereotypical views are endemic in the social constructions of gender. With gender roles, attributed traits and characteristics of distinct sexes are upheld as 'true' pictures of reality. Adherence to such roles qualifies the individual's status as a religious and social role model. The resultant effect is gender schemas into which incoming generations are socialised. As dynamic knowledge structures, gender schemas enable

children to organise information based on gender categories. These knowledge structures are responsive to contextual and age-related realities and help individuals structure their conduct to fit in with 'appropriate' gender-specific behaviours (Bem, 1983; Martin & Halverson, 1981).

Gender schemas impact not only how people process information but also how they moderate their conduct. These schemas also determine societal values and potentials – where one's gender identity determines what one should value or aspire towards.

As noted above, gender schemas, derived from religious conceptualisations of gender, determine prevailing gender constructs and roles, which differ across cultures. It is, therefore, necessary, at this juncture to examine the cultural differences in gender constructs and roles between societies in the global West and South.

Occidental gender constructs conceptualise gender as a binary hierarchical phenomenon. Such conceptualisations of gender primarily derive from the pervasive Christian religion's account of creation. In this account, the woman is conceptualised as an afterthought of creation, easily deceived and ultimately responsible for the fall of humanity (Hasan, 2017). This conceptualisation is buttressed by accounts from sacred scriptures that hold that women are weaker by nature and, thus, need to be under men's control (King James Bible, 1 Timothy, 2.12). This religious construct was translated into the Victorian ideology gender schema, and thus a running argument that characterises women as the weaker sex, the subordinate, limited to the private sphere and under the control of male relatives (Langland, 1987; Lemmer, 2008).

In praxis, such conceptualisation translated into a public space dominated by men. This can be gleaned from the statement that "women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making worldwide and that achieving gender parity in political life is far off" (UN Women, 2023). Western spaces are characterised by misogynistic ideas and elements that reinforce women's inferior status (Poovey, 1988; Place, 1998) It took the first wave of feminism and the first significant Western feminist work – Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792 work titled "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" to challenge the prevailing state of affairs. This challenge spurred discussions of the differences between men and women, with arguments ranging from the belief that these differences exist, to the belief that women were morally superior to men to a belief in the equality of both sexes. Such discussions remain prevalent in the public sphere, despite the varying waves of feminism that have come after, all characterised by a struggle for women's rights.

From the above, traditional occidental portrayals of women as 'Other' to men's 'I.' Philosophers like Aristotle, and Jean-Jacque Rousseau, among others, all argued that women are distinct from men, being naturally weak and inferior, thus, providing ideological bases for the negative portrayal of women.

In contrast, in most societies in the global South, traditional conceptions of gender were fluid and complementary. Using the Nigerian Yoruba culture as popularised by Oyeronke Oyewumi as an example, spiritual powers, superior to temporal powers, were the sole preserve of women (Oyewumi, 1997). The metaphysical underpinnings of the culture, as extrapolated from its religious accounts, also provide a complementary picture

of both sexes, with religious accounts portraying women's roles as complementary to men, albeit with no fixed or rigid gender roles.

Here, biological differences were not the sole determinant of societal status (ibid). The Yoruba culture, in particular, was characterised by women's charge of the economic sphere, a state of affairs that was distorted by colonial incursion and the imposition of the Victorian ideology. As such, traditional Yoruba culture, prior to the invasion of the colonialist, was one where women were considered an important part of the society. However, that they were considered as such does not translate to a denial of their marginalisation within this society, rather, it translates to the fact that the level of marginalisation was far below the level experienced by Euromerican women.

From the above, it is evident that Western and African perspectives on women differ and cannot, therefore, be approached from a singular approach. Western feminism was an offspring of industrialisation and individualism, where industrialisation and its accompanying economic and social trends pushed women into participating in the public sphere, while individualism led to their demand for individual female bodily autonomy. African feminism, on the other hand, developed from diverse cultural heritages characterised by women's public participation and integration within corporate, agrarian, and family-based societies, coupled with the experiences of colonialism. African feminisms are heterogeneous, with variants determined by regional, cultural and political differences. As such, they are not easily characterised into distinct movements like their Western counterparts (Goredema, 2010).

Women's experiences of subordination within these two regions also differed. In the West, women were completely marginalised and subordinated to men, while in African societies, women enjoyed extensive public participation in many areas, for example, in the economic sphere, while their involvement in a few other areas was marginal. Such extensive participation resulted in African women's significant influence on policymaking, a state of affairs that was eventually disrupted by the colonial Victorian ideology, which restricted their participation in the public sphere (Akoleowo, 2022). This state of affairs has informed the respective contemporary concerns of gender activists in both Western and Global South contexts; while Western scholars attempt to resolve the binary oppositional structures inherent in their gender conceptualisations, African researchers emphasise reconstructing gender categories to acknowledge traditional gender constructs.

From the above, we can identify the fundamental categories that shape the discourse on gender in developing countries as those involving sociocultural, socioeconomic, and anthropological traditions. These categories reflect the concerns of the regional distinctions and ethnic pluralities in Global South feminisms. Nigeria and South Africa provide examples of differing concerns arising from the listed traditions. In South Africa and Nigeria's north, women face a higher rate of gender-based violence than their counterparts in the Global North. Maternal mortality rates are also higher in the Global South (Ugwu & de Kok, 2015). Of particular concern is that the occurrence rates of these challenges differ in these countries, dependent on the locality, urban or rural. In rural communities, these challenges are more evident compared to urban areas. Therefore, it is essential to resolve or alleviate these challenges with critical reflections on the affected

communities' social, cultural, and religious ideologies and values. As such, these approaches must be admixtures of *emictic* and *etictic* measures, where in the former, solutions are proffered that fit in with indigenous ideologies, while the latter involves universal measures that can be applied universally (Gibbons, 2000). Ultimately, education is the best tool for alleviating or resolving these challenges, a predominant challenge in many rural parts of the Global South.

Entrepreneurial experiences of men and women – the utility of social media

The afore cross-cultural and socio-anthropological analysis underpins the argumentation that the challenges faced by male and female entrepreneurs, rather than being inherent to gender, are shaped by societal norms and structures, which are largely derived from scriptural interpretations of gender roles. Whether there are differences between male and female entrepreneurs has multiple facets. Both genders share common characteristics, including ambition, risk-taking, creativity, and determination, and face similar challenges such as managing finances, building customer bases, and adapting to market changes. However, current literature suggests that distinctions can be found in the motive for taking up entrepreneurship, fund acquisition, occupational and social background, personality, and the type of business.

While it is possible to identify differences between male and female entrepreneurs using various indices, scholars agree that women experience more challenges than men in their entrepreneurial pursuits (Etim & Iwu, 2019). Research has shown that women entrepreneurs face unique challenges such as gender bias, lack of access to capital and networks, and work-life balance issues, which their male counterparts may not encounter (Mayoux, 2001). These challenges make it more difficult for women to start and grow businesses. For instance, Naicker and Nsengimana's (2021) study in Rwanda revealed that women must ask for permission from their partners to start a business in a country where women are not free to do so. In short, it is agreeable that women rarely find an easy way out in the entrepreneurship space.

Fortunately, the advent of social media platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram has gone some way to ameliorate some of the challenges confronting female entrepreneurs, at least from a social vulnerability perspective and victimhood from cultural, religious, and political exclusion. For example, social media platforms enable women to start a business without physical offices, which makes it easier to get permission to start such businesses, particularly in situations where the male heads of the household do not support the opening of physical business structures or/and physical networking. In fact, social media has afforded women exclusive space that enhances their chance to revolt against a social order that suppresses their entrepreneurial intentions. In practice, female entrepreneurs have exploited social media to retain a voice about their issues and build and maintain social capital in a manner unimaginable in traditional societies where women are confined to homes. In the process, social media has opened avenues for women to promote a universal identity and push for similar causes by establishing global networks of female entrepreneurs (Ukpere et al., 2014) who connect to share their successes and

confront challenges. Therefore, it is plausible to argue that social media has allowed women to experiment with their entrepreneurial talents to debunk the myth that women are neither risk-takers nor attuned to running a business like their male counterparts. However, despite its positive spinoffs, from their empirical study examining entrepreneurs' use of Internet and social media applications, Mack et al. (2017) found that social media and Internet-based applications use may be another obstacle women's entrepreneurial ventures must overcome. In that study, results indicated that female entrepreneurs were less likely to rank themselves as highly computer competent and adopt new technologies, but more likely to depend on hired technology assistance which complicated the degree to which they could utilise social media. Orser and Riding (2018) concur when they report that women are less likely to adopt information technology. Overall, the literature suggests that the agency role of social media in promoting female entrepreneurship may not be as straightforward as is ordinarily claimed.

Nonetheless, advocacy for female entrepreneurs persists, with female entrepreneurs using social media to overcome gender biases in business. Platforms like Her Network in Nigeria, Lionesses of Africa in South Africa and the Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Mali (AFEM) in Mali are examples. In Nigeria, a group of female entrepreneurs launched the "Her Network" platform on Instagram to support and empower women in business. The platform offers resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities to help women overcome gender bias and succeed in their ventures. Similarly, in South Africa, the "Lionesses of Africa" community uses social media to showcase and celebrate women entrepreneurs' achievements and promote diversity and inclusion in the business world. The platform provides access to resources, training, networking opportunities, and mentorship for women entrepreneurs in Africa, with a mission to empower and inspire them to build successful businesses and contribute to the economic development of their communities (see Her Network website; Kante, 2020; Li, 2016; Lionesses of Africa website; Premkumar et al., 2022).

In context, therefore, the utility of social media by women accounts for their initiatives to redefine socio-anthropological dynamics rooted in gender relations, politics, and religion and that restrict access to entrepreneurial spaces.

Methodology

This study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the existing literature on why female entrepreneurs are attracted to social media in developing countries through a systematic quantitative assessment technique (SQAT) developed by Australian researchers Pickering and Byrne in 2014. Pickering and Byrne (2014) recommended five steps in the SQAT method, which we followed, to search, screen, and evaluate relevant journal articles, institutional reports, websites, and book chapters to answer the research question. Specifically, the five-step method involves (i) defining the topic, (ii) formulating the research questions, (iii) identifying keywords, (iv) identifying and searching the databases, and (v) reading and assessing the publications (Pickering & Bryne, 2014), as presented in Table 1. The SQAT has been used in other studies (Bikefe et al., 2020; Mohammed & Bello,

2022; Musa et al., 2021; Zubairu, 2019) and makes it easier to provide reviews that can be replicated (Pickering & Byrne, 2014). Thus, using the above method, we systematically selected and made exclusions on papers used in the current study (Pickering & Bryne, 2014). The selection criteria for the studies included a focus on female entrepreneurs in Africa and their use of social media for their businesses, specifically with the following search phrases: "female entrepreneurs", "social media", "entrepreneurship development", and "economic anthropology". A total of 66 sources were selected for inclusion in the study, presented in Table 2.

Table 1 - Description and application of SQAT

Steps	Application in the Study
Define topic	What socio-anthropological reasons drive female entrepreneurs' attraction to social media in developing countries?
Formulate research questions	Why are women in business gravitating towards social media to secure their businesses? What, then, must be done to resolve prevalent contemporary patriarchal gender constructs in favour of women? Given the undeniable instrumentalization of gender roles, how can women's position be advanced?
Identify keywords	Female entrepreneurs, social media, entrepreneurship development, economic anthropology
Identify and search databases	Google Scholar/Google
Read and assess publications	A preliminary content scan assessed the literature found during the search. After that, the papers were examined and reviewed for relevance to the discussion topic on a socio-anthropological understanding of the reasons for female entrepreneurs' attraction to social media in Africa.

Source: Own compilation

Table 2 - Literature sources

Type of Source	Quantity
Journal articles- Google Scholar	42
Institutional publications/Reports	3
Theses	3
Books/Book Chapter	12
Websites	12
Total	72

Source: Own compilation

Discussion: Women's participation in business. A critical analysis

This paper aims to explore the anthropological reasons that drive female entrepreneurs' attraction to social media for business in developing countries. Against the prescripts of religion and culture that pontificate male dominance as a societal norm, social media participation by women has arguably provided the opportunity to understand this phenomenon. In the discussion of this issue, it is crucial to pose the following crucial question: What then has to be done to address the patriarchal gender constructs that are still in place today? In contemporary times, the evolution of social media has broken through the clutter of censorship that prevented women from contributing to discourse about their identity in a patriarchal social and economic society. As Schreck and Keim (2013: 69) argue, social media "includes all media formats by which groups of users interact to produce, share, and augment information in a distributed, networked, and parallel process". In that regard, social media is credited with providing space for the articulation of marginalised voices (Mohammed, 2019), acting as a powerful weapon for introducing radical changes to society (Qadir, 2020), and availing affordable technologies which have rendered societies more democratic and homogeneous (Genc & Oksuz, 2015). In her view of social media as an instrument of feminist advocacy against female subjugation in Iran, Rouach (2019) reckons that women have:

> "…seized this new medium, which offers them the freedom refused them by traditional media outlets, intending to use it to transform society and further their denunciation of a system that they find degrading. Social media is revolutionary for Iranian women because it allows them to deconstruct patriarchal culture".

While social media is celebrated for liberalising the dissemination of information and communication and facilitating advocacy for political gender or social issues (Mohammed, 2019; Rahayu et al., 2021), its effect is also widely appreciated in business, particularly for creating entrepreneurial opportunities for women and facilitating trade. A broad category of literature underscores that social media has improved business prospects for female entrepreneurs. In context, the agenda to deconstruct patriarchal cultures through social media is as vital for reforming social norms as it is for promoting women's participation in business, particularly female entrepreneurs. Considering that the traditional entrepreneurship figure is synonymous with being a man (Rahayu et al., 2021) whose masculine image is entrenched through religious and cultural teachings and strengthened by male-designed economic systems, female entrepreneurs are attracted to social media platforms as instruments for self-interest advocacy and challenging stereotypes that undermine their positions in the business. Through social media platforms, female entrepreneurs can alter the narrative and expectations about women entrepreneurs and capitalise on business opportunities (Rahayu et al., 2021) through the online stores provided. Thus, female entrepreneurs have embraced social media for its capabilities to grow their businesses and create female role models of success.

Similarly, gender-based comparative claims assert that female entrepreneurs are more likely to use social media in business than their male counterparts (Ukpere et al., 2014;

Rahayu et al., 2021). Arguably, this trend is a demonstration of escapism from experiences of subordination anchored on cultural and religious laws bent on the 'erasure/silencing' of women's agency (Meyers et al., 2000; Nadwi, 2007; Osiek et al., 2006; Wadud, 1999), in business contexts. As evidence of its success, social media has catapulted modern-day successful female entrepreneurs such as Nigeria's Linda Ikeji and South Africa's Fiona Rossiter into the limelight in a manner best likened to a reincarnation of the hidden scriptural narratives of successful female leaders and entrepreneurs in the Bible, Quran and Hadiths like Deborah, Lydia, Junia, Proverbs 31 woman, Khadijah, Selma, Aisha and Lind (Koehler, 2011).

From the above, it follows that social media has diminished the gatekeeping role of men in relation to women's issues, thus, allowing female entrepreneurs to break glass ceiling barriers and grace the limelight of economic success. An overall assessment of social media's primary attraction to female entrepreneurs shows that social media facilitates women's empowerment by providing an escape route from the physical domestication at home and platforms to challenge stereotypical posturing ingrained in patriarchal social order and entrepreneurial frameworks. Specific ways in which social media support female-led businesses are discussed in the following section.

Social media value to a business

In business, social media has emerged as a major strategic tool for women entrepreneurs to advertise, market, attract clients, and make transactions (Ukpere et al., 2014). Various social media sites may be used by businesses, including Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, Viber, WordPress and YouTube (Maina, 2018; Mehra, 2017). Women can broaden their business network, which might affect their business life, but would hardly impact their private life (Cesaroni et al., 2017; Ukpere et al., 2014). Thus, women enjoy networking opportunities and flexibility by adopting social media in their businesses.

Various scholars have extracted some benefits of the use of social media by women entrepreneurs in developing countries (Cesaroni et al., 2017; Melissa et al., 2013; Vivakaran & Maraimalai, 2016; Upkere et al., 2014), which are mentioned as follows:

- Women can sell products online during their idle time;
- Low investment and operational costs encourage women to establish online businesses;
- Working from home helps women to have a better work-life balance;
- Earning online allows women to have better financial resources;
- Running businesses on social media have helped women make financial contributions to their families and participate in family decision-making;
- Social media platforms require minimal technological literacy; hence, women can easily establish businesses;
- Women enjoy various benefits such as cost-effective promotion, access to a broader target audience, product development and enhancement; establishment of external customer communities; and educating customers (Baghdadi, 2013; Brengman & Karimov, 2012; Cesaroni et al., 2017).

Melissa et al. (2013) have also explored how social media helped to boost women's entrepreneurial activities in Indonesian urban areas. They claim that women see the advantages of social media not only in making friends and increasing their social capital but in opportunities for social media entrepreneurship which avails solutions to women's dilemma of reconciling business careers and family responsibilities. Given that lack of social networks is one of the endemic challenges faced by female entrepreneurs, as they are often restricted from socialising with peers because of conservative social rules in many societies, it can be argued that the positive attributes embedded in using social media in business underscore its transformative effect on the female entrepreneurship landscape (Ughetto et al., 2020) by enhancing the participation of this historically under-represented population group (Aboutaleb, 2020) and unlocking business potentials (Ukpere et al., 2014). Overall, therefore, women in business gravitate towards social media use to secure their businesses.

However, although social media has revolutionised business communication and marketing avenues, it has fallen short of curing all the challenges confronting female entrepreneurs. Ughetto et al. (2020) argue that despite its attractions, the online environment still harbours some offline gender-related factors that undermine the success of female entrepreneurship. Among these factors are the perennial challenges related to a lack of basic digital skills and harmful sociocultural and religious practices (Ukpere et al., 2014) that restrain female entrepreneurs from fully adopting social media usage in business.

Genc and Oksuz (2015) have also noted that problems of imitation of work, professional dissatisfaction among entrepreneurs, difficulty in identifying a specific target market, and sometimes, unfair competition have become prevalent among female entrepreneurs running their businesses using social media platforms. Merza (2019) also raised concerns about the security aspects of social media not being positively correlated with women entrepreneurship in Turkey. Furthermore, the author highlights that women do business while men make the rules. Similarly, Gangwani et al. (2021) found that women in Saudi Arabia had low trust in online privacy and security levels, which limited their use of social media platforms.

The underlying contention in these studies is that social media may have revolutionised communication and interaction channels for women entrepreneurs, yet women entrepreneurs remain trapped by everyday challenges that women face. After considering all these shortcomings, Mourtada et al. (2011) concluded that "the overarching 'real life' barriers for women's empowerment may not be surmountable using social media alone". In short, the anticipated benefits of adopting social media-based business models may be challenging among female entrepreneurs due to the cogent challenges whose indiscriminate effects affect all forms of female entrepreneurship.

Nonetheless, it could be argued that despite its perceived challenges, applying social media tactics to promote female entrepreneurial prospects cannot be postponed. Arguably, the entirety of mankind has migrated to the social media world to connect, do business, establish business entities, connect with mentors, and access both foreign and

domestic markets. In light of this reality, the only logical question that may need to be answered is how and what is required to make social media work for a business.

How and what is needed to make social media work for female entrepreneurs?

Arguably, the keys to making social media work for female entrepreneurs lie in finding solutions to their challenges in accessing, navigating, and utilising social media platforms. Beninger et al. (2016) investigated women's use of social media in Egypt as a road to empowerment. Along with confirmatory findings that social media brought positive professional and personal benefits to female entrepreneurs, they also noted some inherent challenges of social media use in business. Among these were susceptibility to fake client accounts, being cheated and deceived by customers, pointing towards a lack of transparency, occasionally being blocked off the platform by owners, and struggling with time management, as an online business can demand too much time interacting with clients. Mukolwe and Korir (2016) conducted a case study of women online entrepreneurs on a Facebook marketplace in Kenya. The study revealed that many female entrepreneurs did not know where to go, though they could not afford it and did not know how to handle the challenges associated with social media. It further alleged that some female entrepreneurs refrain from social media because they do not know how to start using them, are concerned about what to post, and suspect they will not get a return on their investment.

These observations suggest that broad-based advocacy work may be necessary to educate female entrepreneurs about the benefits of social media to entrepreneurs and overcome their fears. Based on female experiences in Saudi Arabia with its cultural pressures on social media users, Gangwani et al. (2021) opined that there is a need for cultural openness regarding women's use of social media, improved protection and privacy of information shared by women, and building female entrepreneurs' computer skills competences to increase aptitudes for internet-based business practices. Furthermore, the challenge of digital literacy may be combated by encouraging women entrepreneurs to proactively embrace the application of technology in their businesses, including social media, to explore its benefits (Ukpere et al., 2014). The government, private sector, and developmental organisations should also facilitate technologically driven projects, including women entrepreneurs and social media in businesses. It may need stressing that while social media has been lauded as a strategic tool for businesses (Genc & Oksuz, 2015), this has primarily been limited to the marketing communication aspect of the business. Moreover, joining the social media bandwagon does not translate to effective and beneficial utilisation. Mukolwe and Korir (2016) hinted that social media can be powerful but not without the right content, implying that female entrepreneurs must also possess business and marketing knowledge to leverage social media's power in business effectively.

Additionally, like all entrepreneurs, there is a need for the creation of a favourable regulatory environment, the enabling of easy access to better sources of finance, as well

as technical and management skills and support services to entrench organisational capabilities for businesses to gain maximum benefit from utilising social media strategies.

Conclusion

In this study, we draw several conclusions regarding female entrepreneurs' attraction to social media based on our research findings and emphasize two crucial elements that headline matters of female use of social media which are inclusivity and patriarchy.

Social media embodies a sense of freedom and participation that women who feel trapped and disadvantaged in business and society yearn for. Thus, it benefits females who aspire to start their entrepreneurial ventures without leaving the boundaries of their homes. This paper demonstrates women's benefits from using social media in business to overcome various cultural, religious, and economic challenges that hold them back in the business world and society and help them feel more included and economically empowered. As a result, social media breaks down barriers hindering women's business opportunities related to patriarchy, religion, and culture. Furthermore, an increasing number of women are becoming more influential, their roles in families and society are changing, and they are becoming participative in decision-making due to social media usage in business. As female entrepreneurs' attraction to social media continues to rise, mainly due to the younger generation of tech-savvy women coming to the fold, patriarchal, religious, and cultural clampdowns will begin to lose their grip on women, leading to greater female participation in the entrepreneurship economy.

While the use of social media for business has gained traction, it remains a relatively new territory. Among the many questions that may require investigation is whether online female entrepreneurs perform better than brick-and-mortar entrepreneurs. Moreover, there is little information about the size of female online traders in many developing countries, and as such, researching female-owned business proclivities may not yield relevant data. To assuage the above-mentioned, this calls for deliberate research that first uncovers the hindrances to achieving legitimate records of female entrepreneurs and comparative studies about male-owned online businesses' performance.

Despite the use of social media for business gaining traction, it remains a relatively new territory. Online business environments and social media are dynamic and prone to change quickly. Thus, to capture trends, unlike our study, which provides a snapshot of the situation, longitudinal studies that monitor the growth and performance of female online entrepreneurs over time are recommended and can illuminate emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities.

Furthermore, despite doing business online not necessarily needing a physical office, online businesses are also affected by contextual factors governing the business environment where they are registered and may influence the success or challenges confronted by female online entrepreneurs. Considering the above, we therefore recommend future studies focus on contextual factors impacting women's role in the online entrepreneurial landscape, such as local economic conditions, legal structures, cultural norms and access to resources.

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Chux Gervase Iwu is Professor of Entrepreneurship Management and the SBDG Chair in Entrepreneurship in Higher Education at the University of the Western Cape. He has a multidisciplinary background that encompasses degrees in Library Studies, Industrial and Organisational Psychology, Human Resources Management, and an advanced diploma in Management. He sits on the advisory/editorial boards of the Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Emerging Economies (JEIEE) published by SAGE, the Palgrave Macmillan Encyclopedia of Entrepreneurship, the Center for Entrepreneurship Rapid Incubator (CfERI) of False Bay College, among many others. He served as head of the department of entrepreneurship at the Cape peninsula University of Technology, where he led a team that curriculated various entrepreneurship programs. His research interests include socioeconomic issues in emerging economies, business and human capacity development.

Victoria Openif'Oluwa Akoleowo holds a doctorate in Philosophy from the University of Ibadan. She lectures at the Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan. She is a 2020 Fellow of the Andrew Mellon "Decolonization, the Disciplines and the University" Project. Her teaching and research interests include African Philosophy, Feminist Philosophy, Philosophy of Education and Professional Ethics. She is widely published in these areas.

Lucky Sibanda is a doctoral candidate in Management at the University of Western Cape, South Africa, holds a Master's degree in Business Administration (Entrepreneurship), a BTech degree in Business Administration (cum laude), and a Diploma in Entrepreneurship (cum laude) from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Over the past eight years, he has taught face-to-face and distance learning modes in Higher Education. He also co-authored ten peer-reviewed academic articles. He is a facilitator and research supervisor at MANCOSA.

Tendai Makwara is a lecturer at Boston City Campus, Stellenbosch, South Africa. He holds qualifications in marketing management obtained in Zimbabwe and a masters degree in HIV/AIDS management from Stellenbosch University, South Africa. He is currently studying for a PhD (Business Management) at the Central University of Technology, Bloemfontein, South Africa, focussing on small business corporate social responsibility. Over the years, he has taught various business, human resources and health courses in the higher education and high school learning environments in South Africa. He also self and co-authored several articles in his areas of research interests, including health, social issues, entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility.