
Empowering Women Food Entrepreneurs: Unveiling their Social Commerce Readiness and Digital Challenges

*Journal of
Entrepreneurship and Business*
E-ISSN: 2289-8298

Vol. 13, Issue 1, pp. 8-24. Mar. 2025

Faradewi Bee A. Rahman* (Corresponding Author)
Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam Campus,
Selangor Darul Ehsan, MALAYSIA
Email: fara1234@uitm.edu.my

Faculty of Entrepreneurship and
Business, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan
Locked Bag 36, 16100 Pengkalan Chepa
Kota Bharu, Kelantan, Malaysia
<http://journal.umk.edu.my/index.php/jeb>

Date Received: 1st Jul 2024
Date Accepted: 15th Dec 2025

DOI: 10.17687/jeb.v13i1.1369

Nurul Wahidayah Zulkifli
Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam Campus,
Selangor Darul Ehsan, MALAYSIA
Email: wahidayahnurul@gmail.com

Siti Nur Aqilah Wahid
Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam Campus,
Selangor Darul Ehsan, MALAYSIA
Email: nuraqilahwahid@gmail.com

Wan Ainin Sofia Abdullah
Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam Campus,
Selangor Darul Ehsan, MALAYSIA
Email: sofiaabdullah99@gmail.com

Mohd Hafiz Mohd Hanafiah
Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam Campus,
Selangor Darul Ehsan, MALAYSIA
Email: hafizhanafiah@uitm.edu.my



This work is licensed under a Creative
Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported
License

Abstract—This study investigates the readiness of women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to engage in social commerce and its implications for business readiness. Utilizing a quantitative research design with purposive sampling, data were collected from 2024 women-owned SME owners through an online survey. The study reveals strong positive correlations between social commerce activities, technological information gaps, financial conditions, and the readiness of women-owned SMEs. Specifically, increased engagement in social commerce significantly enhances business preparedness, while gaps in technological information and financial constraints pose substantial challenges. The findings point out the importance of bridging these gaps by providing adequate technological and financial support to empower women entrepreneurs in Kuala Selangor. Such support is crucial for fostering the growth and success of women-owned SMEs in the region's increasingly digitalized business landscape. Practically, the findings suggest that policymakers and support agencies should prioritize tailored training programs and financial support to empower women-owned SMEs with the tools and knowledge needed for successful engagement in social commerce. This study highlights the need for targeted policies and initiatives within Selangor to address these challenges, ensuring that women-owned SMEs in the region can fully participate in and benefit from the digital economy.

Keywords: “Social Commerce”, “Technology Readiness”, “Women-Owned SMEs”

1.Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are integral to the Malaysian economy, serving as major contributors with significant impacts across various sectors (Rahman et al., 2023). Their contributions are multifaceted, encompassing job creation, innovation, and the promotion of regional development. Rahman et al. (2023) emphasize that SMEs are instrumental in generating employment opportunities, which in turn supports economic stability and growth. Beyond employment, they contribute to the equitable distribution of income and resources, fostering social cohesion and reducing economic disparities. Understanding the criteria for defining SMEs requires an appreciation of the diverse regulations governing these enterprises worldwide. Each country applies distinct standards for recognizing SMEs, influenced by their unique economic conditions and regulatory frameworks (Liberto, 2023). In Malaysia, SMEs form the backbone of the economy, offering a foundation for understanding their economic contributions and regional impacts.

The entrepreneurial ecosystem within SMEs also serves as a breeding ground for innovation. Unlike larger corporations, SMEs are often more agile and adaptable, enabling them to respond swiftly to market changes and evolving consumer demands. This adaptability is particularly crucial in an increasingly dynamic and competitive global market. Moreover, their ability to innovate and diversify positions them as key players in driving economic transformation.

Another significant role of SMEs lies in regional development. By promoting economic activities in rural and less-developed areas, SMEs contribute to balanced national growth, addressing disparities between urban and rural regions. As primary drivers of sustainable social and economic development, SMEs are recognized for their impact on fostering inclusivity and resilience within communities (Fatima & Bilal, 2020; Rodríguez-Gutiérrez et al., 2015; Teng et al., 2022).

In addition to their traditional roles, the rise of digital transformation is reshaping the SME landscape. In today's rapidly changing business environment, the adoption of digital technologies is no longer optional but essential for survival. SMEs are increasingly embracing digitalization to enhance competitiveness, streamline operations, and meet the demands of modern consumers. This shift toward digital transformation underscores the evolving nature of SMEs as they adapt to new challenges and opportunities in the global economy.

1.1. Digital Transformation in SMEs

SMEs' adoption of digital technology is transforming their operational and strategic landscapes, making digitalization an essential component of modern business practices (Hasan et al., 2022). This shift is not merely a trend but a necessity in today's competitive business environment. The transition to a digital environment marks a significant step for many businesses and organizations. It involves implementing various transformation initiatives to stimulate corporate development and create new opportunities (Agustian et al., 2023). Digital technology has become more user-friendly, catering to expanding business

groups' growing demands and ambitions (SME Corp Malaysia, 2019). This evolution is particularly evident in SMEs, where digitalization has introduced numerous innovations to the business landscape. These innovations include increased operational efficiency, reduced human errors, enhanced data storage security through cloud technologies, lower operational costs, and advanced data analysis capabilities (Factory, 2021).

The capacity of digital technologies to enhance cost-efficiency and enable differentiation strategies is paramount for SMEs. These technologies help SMEs expand their market opportunities and boost profitability (Le, 2024). The advantages of digitalization materialize through several mechanisms, such as the customization of products and services, addressing latent consumer needs, and optimizing manufacturing processes to mitigate expenses. Nonetheless, despite the evident benefits, the adoption of digital technology remains uneven across businesses, with many SMEs lagging (Le, 2024). Telukdarie et al. (2023) and Le (2024) assert that SMEs face impediments in embracing digital technology, primarily stemming from limited managerial resources and financial constraints.

Digital transformation is integral to SMEs' success, fostering long-term growth and enhancing competitiveness. The implementation of digital tools brings extensive improvements to efficiency and strategy. Hasan et al. (2022) argue that digitalization is no longer optional but necessary for maintaining a competitive advantage in the modern market. Integrating digital technologies can streamline operations, reduce costs, and improve the quality of products and services. However, the adoption of digital technology among SMEs is not uniform. Many SMEs face significant challenges in embracing digital transformation. These challenges include financial constraints, limited access to technological infrastructure, and a lack of managerial expertise (Telukdarie et al., 2023; Le, 2024). For women-owned SMEs, these challenges are often exacerbated by additional barriers such as limited social capital and the need to balance business and family responsibilities (Altaf et al., 2024; Musa et al., 2016). Institutional support, including access to resources and training, is essential to overcome these barriers and facilitate the digital transformation of SMEs (Chen et al., 2021; Singh & Belwal, 2008).

1.2. Social Commerce and Women-Owned SMEs

Social commerce represents a significant opportunity for SMEs, particularly women-owned enterprises. By leveraging social media platforms, these businesses can reach a wider audience, engage with customers more effectively, and enhance their market presence. Theis and Rusconi (2019) highlight that social commerce can empower women entrepreneurs by providing them with greater access to financial resources and enabling them to utilize digital platforms more effectively. Despite the potential benefits, several factors often hinder the adoption of social commerce among women-owned SMEs. These include limited access to digital tools, inadequate understanding of social commerce strategies, and financial constraints (Musa et al., 2016; Theis & Rusconi, 2019). Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes providing training and resources to women entrepreneurs, enhancing their digital literacy, and improving access to financial support.

1.3. Challenges for Women-Owned SMEs

Both women-owned and male-owned SMEs face challenges in adopting digital technology, largely stemming from limited managerial resources and financial constraints. In Malaysia,

women-owned SMEs encounter significant hurdles, particularly regarding financial limitations, which demand attention (Alam et al., 2021; Musa et al., 2016). Furthermore, managing their businesses becomes increasingly difficult due to restricted access to social capital (Musa et al., 2016; Setini et al., 2020). Despite the rise in women entrepreneurs, their likelihood of success remains low (Alam et al., 2011; Aliyu et al., 2019; Jeffrey., 2019). Balancing work and family responsibilities adds further complexity, contributing to women's underrepresentation in business and politics (Aljuwaiber, 2021).

According to Theis and Rusconi (2019), the business landscape is evolving due to women's usage of and outlook on the future. When women attempt to utilize the tools and platforms available now, they encounter limited access. The promise of social commerce to help women-owned SMEs grow and to provide them with greater access to financial resources can only be fulfilled if there is a deeper understanding of how women use digital platforms. This comprehension is crucial, as social commerce has the potential to empower women entrepreneurs and expand their access to resources. The evolving business landscape, driven by women's utilization of digital platforms, underscores the importance of investigating how they navigate and utilize available tools (Theis & Rusconi, 2019).

The digital transformation of SMEs is essential for their sustained growth and competitiveness, offering numerous benefits such as increased operational efficiency and enhanced market presence. However, Women-owned SMEs face additional challenges when adopting digital technology, particularly in leveraging social media. Despite significant policy advancements, Malaysia still grapples with a persistent gender digital divide. Howe (2024) highlights this disparity, noting that 55.7% of all social media users are male, and remain slightly more active online compared to women. Specifically, the research examines the preparedness of women-owned SMEs in Kuala Selangor to engage in social commerce. It analyses the impact of technological access, financial conditions, and social commerce engagement on their business readiness. This research focuses on the preparedness of women-owned SMEs in Kuala Selangor to participate in social commerce. It examines how technological access, financial conditions, and social commerce engagement influence their business readiness. The study aims to address the digital adoption gap among women-owned SMEs, exploring the impact of limited technological access, financial constraints, and social commerce readiness on their ability to thrive in the digital economy.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the willingness of women-owned SMEs to engage in social commerce and its implications. The objective is to examine how social commerce, technology accessibility, and financial conditions influence their ability to establish and manage their enterprises. The significance of this study lies in shedding light on the challenges faced by women-owned SMEs from diverse backgrounds and providing them with encouragement and motivation to improve their businesses. The study also intends to educate women-owned SMEs on the advantages of social commerce and how it can help them improve their operations to better align with current trends. This study aims to support women's professional growth and success in online business ventures by equipping them with the knowledge and skills to use digital platforms efficiently. Ultimately, it hopes to create a more promising future for entrepreneurs.

This study explores the willingness of women-owned SMEs to engage in social commerce by investigating the correlations between social commerce, technological information gaps, financial conditions, and the readiness of women-owned SMEs. It also identifies strategies to foster their growth and success in the digital economy. By addressing the unique challenges women entrepreneurs face and enhancing their digital literacy, this study seeks to empower women-owned SMEs and promote their participation in the business landscape. The originality of this study stems from its geographic and contextual focus on Kuala Selangor. In this region, there has been limited research exploring the intersection of social commerce and digital readiness among women entrepreneurs. By addressing these specific challenges, the study seeks to offer valuable insights and practical recommendations to help women-owned SMEs overcome obstacles, embrace the digital economy, and achieve sustainable growth.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Commerce

Social commerce, a subset of e-commerce, refers to using social media platforms to facilitate exchange functions, incorporating a social aspect into electronic commerce. Rahman et al. (2021) discuss how social commerce introduces collaborative shopping features, allowing consumers to comment on and review product lists, transforming business-consumer interactions. This transformation provides new marketing, customer service, and direct sales avenues, allowing SMEs to reach a broader audience without significant infrastructure or capital investment. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok enable SMEs to showcase products, engage with customers, and process transactions, making customer experiences more personal and engaging (Smith, 2020). Social commerce presents a promising opportunity for women-owned SMEs to enhance their market presence and resource access.

The rise of social commerce offers numerous benefits, particularly for women-owned SMEs. It provides a cost-effective way to increase brand awareness and customer reach, thereby leveling the playing field for these enterprises. Lăzăroiu et al. (2020) highlight that social commerce enables women entrepreneurs to build online communities, engage in peer-to-peer marketing, and leverage user-generated content to enhance their brand's credibility. This community-driven approach is especially beneficial for those with limited access to traditional financial resources or business networks, as it encourages collaboration and community-driven marketing. However, Alam et al. (2011) and Aljuwaiber (2021) identify several challenges associated with adopting social commerce. These include a lack of technical expertise, unreliable internet connections, and cultural constraints that limit online business activities. Additionally, women entrepreneurs often juggle business responsibilities with family and household management, further complicating their ability to fully engage in social commerce.

This and Rusconi (2019) argue that understanding how women use digital platforms is crucial for fulfilling the promise of social commerce, as it has the potential to empower women entrepreneurs and expand their access to resources. Given these challenges, there is an impending need to explore the willingness of women-owned SMEs to engage in social

commerce and examine the influencing factors, such as technology accessibility, by understanding these dynamics, targeted support can be provided to foster the growth of women entrepreneurs in the digital age.

2.2. Lack of Technological Information

Rachinger et al. (2018) describe digitization as converting analog data into digital formats, emphasizing the process, not the underlying technological mechanisms. Similarly, Reis et al. (2018) generalize digital transformation as integrating technologies like cloud computing and automation to enhance organizational performance, without detailing the technological aspects. Ros et al. (2017) and Omowole et al., 2024 suggest that a limited understanding of technology can lead to reluctance to adopt new digital tools, highlighting the technical challenges that impede digital transformation. These challenges, particularly in social commerce, include integrating new technologies with existing systems, lack of technical support, and insufficient resources to understand and apply these technologies effectively. Women-owned SMEs face additional barriers, such as limited access to technology resources, training, and social capital, making it crucial to understand the specific technologies required for successful social commerce adoption (Dsouza & Panakaje, 2023; Matt et al., 2015; Quinton et al., 2017). Zhovtyuk (2018) and Cullen (2018) discuss changes in change management practices necessitated by technological advancements but lack detailed insights into the specific technological innovations driving these changes. This information gap can lead to confusion and hesitation among women-owned SMEs considering social commerce adoption.

2.3 Financial Conditions

In Malaysia, financial conditions pose significant challenges for women-owned SMEs, limiting their ability to access necessary capital and affecting their growth potential (Dutta et al., 2019; Musa et al., 2016). These struggles are further compounded by limited social capital and the complex balance of work and family responsibilities, which contribute to lower success rates among women entrepreneurs (Alam et al., 2011; Jeffrey, 2019). Similarly, Aljuwaiber (2021) highlights that financial and social barriers significantly contribute to the underrepresentation of women in business. With these barriers, the entrepreneurial landscape in Malaysia is evolving, with an increasing number of women defying traditional gender roles and engaging in entrepreneurship (Alam et al., 2011; Azmi & Basir, 2016; Bijker 2023).

Globally, women in countries such as Togo, Indonesia, Romania, Colombia, and Iran, are also challenging stereotypes by leading innovative entrepreneurship ventures. This demonstrates that financial constraints are not insurmountable barriers to business success (Caputo et al., 2017; Singh, 2024). However, according to Panda (2018) across a developing country, financial conditions remain one of the major constraints women entrepreneurs face across developing countries face. This is partly because entrepreneurs, especially women, fall into the high-risk category (Henry et al., 2022). Issues such as information asymmetry, lack of credit history, and inadequate collateral make it difficult for all entrepreneurs, particularly women entrepreneurs, to access loans (Pareek & Bagrecha, 2018). In Malaysia, women entrepreneurs play a crucial role in driving economic development, yet despite their growing numbers, their performance is often hindered by

financial challenges (Abd Rani & Hashim, 2017; Abd Wahid et al., 2021; Sreevas Sahasranamam & Ionescu-Somers, 2024).

In Malaysia, despite the growing number of women entrepreneurs who play a crucial role in driving economic development, their performance is often hindered by persistent financial challenges (Abd Rani & Hashim, 2017; Abd Wahid et al., 2021; Sreevas Sahasranamam & Ionescu-Somers, 2024). The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic further exacerbated these financial challenges with many women-owned businesses facing difficulties securing financial resources, negatively impacting their performance (Chipfunde et al., 2021). Consequently, many women started their businesses (Khursheed, 2021). However, the growth and performance of these businesses are hindered by insufficient financial resources, particularly during the startup and expansion phases (Al-Shami et al., 2020; Kanapathipillai & Azam, 2019). Women entrepreneurs must reconsider their business strategies to secure the necessary financial resources for long-term sustainability (Al-Shami et al., 2020).

Women entrepreneurs often face significant obstacles in obtaining the financial capital needed to invest in their businesses (Kanapathipillai et al., 2021). They may struggle to secure profitable business contracts due to insufficient funding (Chipfunde et al., 2021; Kanapathipillai & Azam, 2019). According to Yu et al. (2024), financial shortages are a common issue for women entrepreneurs, making it crucial to secure funding for business development (Chipfunde et al., 2021; Al-Shami et al., 2020). Women entrepreneurs typically prioritize internal equity sources, relying on personal funds and bank loans (Jha & Alam, 2022). However, Henry et al. (2022) found that women entrepreneurs consistently receive significantly less equity capital than their male counterparts, making them more dependent on personal funds and bank loans. As such, there is a need to explore the willingness of women-owned SMEs to engage in social commerce and identify the factors influencing their adoption to provide targeted support and foster a more inclusive entrepreneurial landscape in the digital age.

3. Study Methodology

A non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, was employed due to the targeted nature of the study. Purposive sampling is appropriate when specific characteristics of a population are sought. In this case, the population included women SMEs in Kuala Selangor who own micro and small food enterprises. These food businesses contribute to the local economy and reflect the challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurs in the food industry. The findings from this study can be highly relevant and impactful for policy formulation and practical interventions aimed at overcoming barriers faced by women in the food industry, such as access to finance and technological resources, and can inform targeted support initiatives. In addition, the absence of comprehensive data on this population (sampling frame) justified the use of purposive sampling to effectively gather relevant data that will enhance local entrepreneurship programs and tailor support systems to the unique needs of women SME owners in the food industry.

To determine the required sample size, G*Power software was utilized, which proposed a minimum of 196 respondents. This sample size was deemed essential for ensuring the

accuracy of the study's objectives and the robustness of its conclusions. The results will provide evidence-based insights that can inform policy decision, such as the need for financial literacy training initiatives to enhance the digital readiness of women-owned SMEs.

The selected participants were assessed based on their readiness and their various business challenges. A 5-point Likert scale was chosen for measurement due to its simplicity and user-friendliness, which can lead to higher response rates and improved data quality (Joshi et al., 2015; Król, 2024). The scale allows respondents to express their level of agreement or disagreement on a symmetric agree-disagree scale, enhancing the reliability of the data collected and contributing to accurate decision-making in subsequent phases of policy development and support framework creation.

The study instruments were adapted and revised according to the study setting, considering the context, population, and research objectives. Before the main survey, a pre-test was conducted to gather expert panel feedback on the questionnaire's credibility, clarity, user-friendliness, and validity. This step ensured that the survey instrument was well-designed and capable of capturing the intended data accurately. A pilot test was carried out following the pre-test to identify and rectify any potential issues. The results from the pilot study confirmed a high degree of reliability, with a reliability coefficient exceeding 0.90, well above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating that the scales used in this analysis are highly reliable. The rigorous validation process strengthens the credibility of the findings, which can later be used to refine development support services.

Data was collected online using a Google survey, which was disseminated through social media to ensure broad distribution and participation. This method was chosen for its efficiency and ability to reach a large audience. The questionnaire was made available in both English and Malay to accommodate respondents' language preferences, enhancing the inclusivity and comprehensiveness of the data collection process. The widespread reach of the survey supports inclusive policy development that addresses the needs of women entrepreneurs across different demographics.

A total of 204 valid responses were obtained, meeting the study's inclusion criteria. Self-administered surveys were employed to facilitate the data collection process. The collected data were coded and analyzed using IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the responses, including means, percentages, and standard deviations. For the study's primary objective, Pearson's correlation coefficient was utilized to explore the relationships between variables. The results will provide insights into key barriers and opportunities for women-owned SMEs in social commerce, ultimately supporting practical interventions aimed at understanding women SME owners' readiness and challenges in the context of social commerce.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Correlation Between Social Commerce and the Readiness of Women-Owned SMEs

The study found a strong positive linear relationship between social commerce and the readiness of women-owned SMEs. Based on Table 1, the Pearson correlation coefficient

between mean social commerce and mean readiness of women-owned SMEs is 0.808, with a significance level (p) of 0.000. This indicates a statistically significant correlation at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), suggesting a very low likelihood that this relationship is due to chance. This implies that as social commerce activities increase, the readiness of women-owned SMEs also tends to increase. Consequently, social commerce emerges as a critical factor in encouraging women-owned SMEs to conduct business online, fostering community participation in the business world (Ali et al., 2021). Enhancing social commerce practices could positively influence the preparedness and success of women-owned SMEs.

Table 1: Correlation Between Social Commerce and the Readiness of Women-owned SMEs

	Mean Social Commerce	The readiness of women-owned SMEs
Mean Social Commerce	Pearson's Correlation	1
	Sig (2 tailed)	
	N	204
Mean the Readiness of Women-owned SMEs	Pearson's Correlation	0.808**
	Sig (2 tailed)	0.000
	N	204

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

4.2. Correlation Between Lack of Technological Information and the Readiness of Women-owned SMEs

The analysis reveals a strong positive correlation between the lack of technological information and the readiness of women-owned SMEs ($r = 0.758$, $p < 0.01$). The correlation coefficient of 0.758 highlights a significant positive linear relationship between the lack of technological information and the readiness of women-owned SMEs. This suggests that approximately 75.8% of the variability in the readiness of women-owned SMEs can be explained by the variability in the lack of technological information. The significance level is less than 0.01 indicating that the observed relationship is unlikely to be due to random chance. Addressing technological information gaps among women-owned SMEs is crucial for enhancing their readiness and performance. Providing adequate technological support and information can significantly improve the preparedness of women-owned SMEs in an increasingly digitalized business environment.

Table 2: Correlation Between Lack of Technological Information and the Readiness of Women-owned SMEs

	Lack of Technological Information	The readiness of women-owned SMEs
Lack of Technological Information	Pearson's Correlation	1
	Sig (2 tailed)	
	N	204
The readiness of women-owned SMEs	Pearson's Correlation	0.758**
	Sig (2 tailed)	0.000
	N	204

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

4.3. Correlation Between Financial Conditions and the Readiness of Women-owned SMEs

The Pearson correlation coefficient for the relationship between financial condition and the readiness of women-owned SMEs is $r = 0.548$, as shown in Table 3. This value indicates a moderate positive linear relationship between the two variables. As the financial condition of women-owned SMEs improves, their readiness to utilize social commerce also tends to increase. The positive correlation suggests that better financial health is associated with a higher likelihood of readiness to adopt social commerce. The significance level (Sig 2-tailed) of 0.000 is below the 0.01 threshold, indicating that the observed correlation is statistically significant at the 1% level. This confirms that the relationship between financial conditions and the readiness of women-owned SMEs to use social commerce is not due to random chance. Improving the financial health of these businesses may enhance their preparedness and willingness to adopt social commerce platforms.

Table 3: Correlation Between Financial Condition and the Readiness of Women-owned SMEs Toward Using Social Commerce

	Financial Condition	The Readiness of Women-owned SMEs
Financial Condition	Pearson's Correlation	1
	Sig (2 tailed)	
	N	204
The readiness of women-owned SMEs	Pearson's Correlation	0.548**
	Sig (2 tailed)	0.000
	N	204

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The findings highlight significant correlations between the variables under study and the readiness of women-owned SMEs. The strong positive correlation between social commerce and readiness suggests that enhancing social commerce activities can significantly boost the preparedness of women-owned SMEs. This is supported by the work of Ali et al. (2021), who emphasize the role of social commerce in fostering community participation in business. The strong positive correlation between the lack of technological information and readiness indicates that technological gaps must be addressed to improve the preparedness of women-owned SMEs. This finding aligns with the literature emphasizing the importance of technological support and information for SME success in a digitalized environment (North et al., 2020; Ros et al., 2017). Finally, the moderate positive correlation between financial conditions and readiness suggests that improving the financial health of women-owned SMEs can enhance their readiness to adopt social commerce. This is consistent with existing research highlighting financial resources as a critical factor for SME growth and performance (Al-Shami et al., 2020). The theoretical and practical implications of the research findings underscore the interconnectedness of social commerce, technological information, financial conditions, and women-owned SMEs' readiness.

4.4. Theoretical Implication

The strong positive correlation between social commerce and the readiness of women-owned SMEs has several theoretical implications. Firstly, it highlights the significance of digital platforms in empowering women entrepreneurs and fostering their readiness to engage in online business activities. This aligns with theories of digital entrepreneurship and underscores the role of social commerce as a catalyst for women's economic empowerment. Secondly, the findings contribute to the literature on gender and entrepreneurship by emphasizing the positive impact of social commerce on women-owned SMEs' preparedness. This aligns with feminist theories that advocate for interventions and policies promoting women's participation and success in business ventures. Meanwhile, the strong positive correlation between the lack of technological information and the readiness of women-owned SMEs highlights the importance of addressing information gaps in digital readiness frameworks.

This finding supports theories of digital divide and technological readiness, emphasizing the need for inclusive strategies to bridge information disparities among women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, it contributes to the literature on technology adoption and SMEs by showcasing how technological knowledge and access influence business readiness. Theoretical frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Diffusion of Innovations Theory can be enriched by considering the specific challenges women-owned SMEs face in accessing and utilizing technological information.

The moderate positive correlation between financial conditions and the readiness of women-owned SMEs to use social commerce underscores the intersectionality of financial resources and digital preparedness. This finding also contributes to discussions on digital transformation and small business management theories by highlighting the role of financial stability in facilitating technological uptake. It emphasizes the need for targeted financial support programs tailored to women-owned SMEs to enhance their digital capabilities and competitiveness.

4.5. Practical Implications

Managers and policymakers can leverage the research findings to develop targeted training programs and support initiatives to enhance social commerce practices among women-owned SMEs. This may include workshops on digital marketing strategies, e-commerce platforms, and social media engagement tailored to the needs of women entrepreneurs. Moreover, fostering collaboration between digital platforms and women's business networks can create synergies that promote knowledge sharing and resource access. This can lead to the developing of tailored solutions and supportive ecosystems for women-owned SMEs in the digital marketplace.

Addressing the lack of technological information requires a multifaceted approach. Managers can partner with technology providers, industry associations, and educational institutions to offer training programs, access to digital tools, and mentorship opportunities to enhance technological literacy among women entrepreneurs. Additionally, implementing inclusive digital policies and regulatory frameworks can promote equal access to information and technology resources, reducing barriers to digital readiness for women-owned SMEs.

Recognizing the link between financial conditions and digital readiness, managers can advocate for tailored financial support mechanisms such as grants, loans, and venture capital specifically designed for women-owned SMEs. These financial resources can be allocated towards investing in digital infrastructure, upgrading technology systems, and hiring digital expertise. Furthermore, fostering partnerships with financial institutions and impact investors can create pathways for women entrepreneurs to access capital for digital transformation initiatives. This can enhance competitiveness, market reach, and sustainability for women-owned SMEs in the digital age.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study contributes valuable insights into the impact of social commerce on SMEs run by women, particularly in Malaysia. The findings affirm the hypothesis, indicating a strong positive relationship between social commerce and the readiness of women-owned SMEs to adopt and leverage digital platforms effectively. These findings align with previous research by Ahmad et al. (2019) and Al-Adwan & Kokash (2019), highlighting the positive correlation between increased social commerce usage and higher business success rates. Effective utilization of social commerce enhances business trustworthiness, security, and customer satisfaction and saves time and resources, as Ahmad et al. (2019) suggested. However, this study underscores the crucial role of technological information in preparing women-owned SMEs for successful integration into the digital economy. Despite the stringent security measures in place, the lack of technological readiness remains a significant barrier, as echoed by Tajvidi et al. (2020). Policymakers and stakeholders must prioritize initiatives that provide technological support and bridge the information gap for women-owned SMEs, as emphasized by Nguyen & Khoa (2019).

Furthermore, the study acknowledges the financial constraints faced by women-owned SMEs and notes the support available, such as TEKUN loans, which aid in their efforts to embrace social commerce. However, gender disparity persists, with more men in business roles compared to women, who are often relegated to office jobs. Future research should delve deeper into local business dynamics through thorough site examinations to comprehensively understand these challenges and opportunities. As such, leveraging social commerce and addressing technological information gaps are pivotal steps toward unlocking the potential of women-owned SMEs and facilitating their seamless integration into the digital economy. By aligning policies, initiatives, and research efforts with these objectives, stakeholders can contribute significantly to women entrepreneurs' growth, sustainability, and inclusivity in Malaysia and beyond.

6. Limitations of the Study

The study has several limitations. The study's reliance on women-owned SMEs may limit the generalizability of the findings. The impact of this limitation is that the results may not fully represent the broader population of women entrepreneurs across different industries or regions. Besides, the study adopts a cross-sectional design, capturing data at a single point

in time. This design limitation prevents the establishment of causal relationships between variables. While correlations provide valuable insights, they do not imply causation. The reliance on self-reported data from participants introduces the potential for response biases such as social desirability or recall bias. Participants may provide answers that they perceive as favorable or may not recall past experiences or behaviors accurately. The impact of this limitation is that it could affect the reliability and validity of the data, potentially influencing the strength or direction of correlations.

7. Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the study's limitations, future research should consider longitudinal studies that track changes over time, which help establish temporal relationships between social commerce, technological information, financial conditions, and the readiness of women-owned SMEs. Additionally, combining quantitative data with qualitative insights through mixed-methods approaches can enrich the understanding of the factors influencing the readiness of women-owned SMEs. Qualitative data can uncover nuanced perspectives, experiences, and challenges that quantitative measures alone may not capture fully. Moreover, conducting comparative studies across diverse industries and geographical regions can enhance the generalizability of findings. Examining variations in social commerce adoption, technological gaps, and financial conditions among women-owned SMEs in different contexts can yield valuable insights into contextual factors shaping readiness levels. Incorporating these suggestions into future research endeavors can address the limitations identified in the current study and contribute to advancing knowledge on social commerce, technological information, financial conditions, and the readiness of women-owned SMEs in a more robust and nuanced manner. Future studies should expand the study area and collect information from management and employees. Again, future studies should group the respondents' firms into small and medium.

Disclosure Statement

The authors reported no potential conflict of interest.

Funding

The work described in this study was funded by the Universiti Teknologi MARA Selangor, DUCS-FAkulti, 600-UITMSEL (PI.5/4) (101/2022)

Acknowledgement

N/A

References

Abd Rani, S. H., & Hashim, N. (2017). Factors that influence women entrepreneurial success in Malaysia: A conceptual framework. *International Journal of Research*, 4(1), 16-23.

- Abd Wahid, N., Abd Aziz, N. N., Ishak, M., & Hussin, A. (2021). The critical success factors of business growth among women entrepreneurs in Malaysia: A qualitative approach. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(9), 1445-1459.
- Agustian, K., Mubarak, E. S., Zen, A., Wiwin, W., & Malik, A. J. (2023). The impact of digital transformation on business models and competitive advantage. *Technology and Society Perspectives (TACIT)*, 1(2), 79-93.
- Ahmad, S. Z., Abu Bakar, A. R., & Ahmad, N. (2019). Social media adoption and its impact on firm performance: The case of the UAE. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 25(1), 84-111.
- Al-Adwan, A., & Kokash, H. (2019). Social commerce as an essential tool for increasing business profit: An exploratory study. *International Journal of Advanced Computer Science and Applications*, 10(3), 411-416.
- Alam, K., Ali, M. A., Erdiaw-Kwasie, M. O., Murray, P. A., & Wiesner, R. (2022). Digital transformation among SMEs: Does gender matter?. *Sustainability*, 14(1), 535.
- Alam, S. S., Jani, M. F. M., & Omar, N. A. (2011). An empirical study of the success factors of women entrepreneurs in the southern region in Malaysia. *International Journal of Economics and Finance*, 3(2), 166-175.
- Aliyu, R. M., Ahmad, T. S. B. T., Nordin, N. B., & Abdullahi, I. M. (2019). Innovation as a mediator on the assessment of market orientation, training, social network, access to finance and women business performance in North-Western Nigeria: A proposed framework. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 9(1), 367-378.
- Aljuwaiber, A. (2021). Entrepreneurship research in the Middle East and North Africa: trends, challenges, and sustainability issues. *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies*, 13(3), 380-426.
- Altaf, M., Ullah, K., & Atiq, M. (2024). Women-owned businesses and access to finance in Pakistan: a study of perceptions, experiences and behaviors. *Qualitative Research in Financial Markets*.
- Al-Shami, S., Mamun, A. A., Sidek, S., & Rashid, N. (2020). Causes of failure among Malaysian female entrepreneurs: A qualitative case study of Malaysian microcredit borrowers. *Qualitative Research in Financial Markets*, 12(1), 43-71.
- Azmi, I. A. G., & Basir, S. A. (2016). Motivation and challenges among Indonesian Muslim women entrepreneurs in small and medium enterprises (SMEs): A qualitative study. *Advanced Science Letters*, 22(12), 4146-4150.
- Bijker, E. E. (2023). *The influence of financial and social barriers on female entrepreneurs in Twente* (Bachelor's thesis, University of Twente).
- Bianchi, C., & Andrews, L. (2020). Social media marketing and customer engagement: A literature review and research agenda. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 37(1), 132-153.
- Caputo, A., De Vita, L., Mari, M., & Poggesi, S. (2017). Female entrepreneurship in developing contexts: Characteristics, challenges, and dynamics. In *Women entrepreneurship in family business* (pp. 183-207). Routledge.
- Chen, C. L., Lin, Y. C., Chen, W. H., Chao, C. F., & Pandia, H. (2021). Role of government to enhance digital transformation in small service business. *Sustainability*, 13(3), 1028.
- Chipfunde, D., Yahaya, S. N., & Othman, N. A. (2021). The determinants influencing the performance of women entrepreneurs in Malaysia: A conceptual framework. *Studies of Applied Economics*, 39(4).
- Cullen, S. (2018). Managing change in the digital age. *Journal of Change Management*, 18(1), 1-3.
- Dsouza, A., & Panakaje, N. (2023). Factors Affecting Women Entrepreneurs' Success: A Study of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises-A Review. *International Journal of Case Studies in Business, IT and Education (IJCSBE)*, 7(2), 51-89.

- Dutta, A., Banerjee, S., Sarkar, O., Roy, A., Sana, A. K., & Mukherjee, S. B. (2019). Emergence of Women-Owned SMEs as a Game-Changer of Malaysia in the Era of Digitalization. *Asian Journal of Managerial Science*, 8(3), 15-23.
- Factory. (2021, September 27). *What is the role of digitalization in business growth?* Factory.dev. <https://factory.dev/blog/digitalization-business-growth>
- Fatima, T., & Bilal, A. R. (2020). Achieving SME performance through individual entrepreneurial orientation: An active social networking perspective. *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies*, 12(3), 399-411.
- Guzman, J., & Kacperczyk, A. O. (2019). Gender gap in entrepreneurship. *Research Policy*, 48(7), 1666-1680.
- Hasan, N. A., Abd Rahim, M., Ahmad, S. H., & Meliza, M. (2022). Digitization of business for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). *Environment-Behaviour Proceedings Journal*, 7(19), 11-16.
- Henry, C., Coleman, S., Orser, B., & Foss, L. (2022). Women's entrepreneurship policy and access to financial capital in different countries: An institutional perspective. *Entrepreneurship Research Journal*, 12(3), 227-262.
- Howe, S (2024). *Social Media Statistic for Malaysia*. Meltwater. <https://www.meltwater.com/en/blog/social-media-statistics-malaysia>
- Jeffrey, S. (2019, March 09). *Why Businesses Run by Women Often Fail*, Daily Express, Daily Express Malaysia. <http://www.dailyexpress.com.my/news/132151/why-businesses-run-bywomen-often-fail/>
- Jha, P., & Alam, M. M. (2022). Antecedents of women entrepreneurs' performance: An empirical perspective. *Management Decision*, 60(1), 86-122.
- Joshi, A., Kale, S., Chandel, S., & Pal, D. K. (2015). Likert scale: Explored and explained. *British Journal of Applied Science & Technology*, 7(4), 396-403.
- Kanapathipillai, K., & Azam, S. F. (2019). Women entrepreneurs' path to success: An investigation of the critical success factors in Malaysia. *European Journal of Human Resource Management Studies*.
- Kanapathipillai, K., Narayanan, S., & Kumaran, S. (2021). Are women entrepreneurs business performances influenced by financial resources? Empowerment women entrepreneurs in Malaysia through financial resources post-COVID-19 pandemic. *European Journal of Management and Marketing Studies*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejmms.v7i1.1173>
- Khursheed, A. (2022). Exploring the role of microfinance in women's empowerment and entrepreneurial development: A qualitative study. *Future Business Journal*, 8(1), 57.
- Król, K. (2024). Retrospective Analysis of Municipal Geoportal Usability in the Context of the Evolution of Online Data Presentation Techniques. *ISPRS International Journal of Geo-Information*, 13(9), 307.
- Lăzăroiu, G., Neguriță, O., Grecu, I., Grecu, G., & Mitran, P. C. (2020). Consumers' decision-making process on social commerce platforms: Online trust, perceived risk, and purchase intentions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 890.
- Le, T. P. (2024). Factors influencing SMEs' digital transformation: The case study in Central Highlands in Vietnam. *Journal of System and Management Sciences*, 14(1), 175-187. <https://doi.org/10.33168/jsms.2024.0111>
- Matt, C., Hess, T., & Benlian, A. (2015). Digital transformation strategies. *Business & Information Systems Engineering*, 57(5), 339-343.
- Musa, M., Shuibb, R., Selamatc, N. H., Isad, S. M., Osman, I., & Bakar, S. A. (2016). A study of women entrepreneurs in Malaysia: Livelihood strategies and challenges. *3rd KANITA Postgraduate International Conference on Gender Studies, Centre for Research on Women and Gender, Graduate School of Business, University Sains Malaysia*, 16–17 November 2016, 380-388.

- North, K., Aramburu, N., & Lorenzo, O. J. (2020). Promoting digitally enabled growth in SMEs: a framework proposal. *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*, 33(1), 238-262.
- Nguyen, T. P. L., & Khoa, B. T. (2019). The relationship between social media marketing and customer engagement: The case of SMEs in Vietnam. *Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, 6(2), 295-304.
- Omowole, B. M., Olufemi-Philips, A. Q., Ofadile, O. C., Eyo-Udo, N. L., & Ewim, S. E. (2024). Barriers and drivers of digital transformation in SMEs: A conceptual analysis. *International Journal of Frontline Research in Multidisciplinary Studies*, 5(2), 019-036.
- Pareek, P., & Bagrecha, C. (2018). An analysis of the financial challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. *International Journal of Scientific and Engineering Research*, 9(10), 2229-5518.
- Panda, S. (2018). Constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in developing countries: review and ranking. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 33(4), 315-331.
- Quinton, S., & Rogers, M. (2017). Digital business strategy: Towards a next generation of insights. *Strategic Change*, 26(1), 93-99.
- Rachinger, M., Rauter, R., Müller, C., & Vorraber, W. (2018). Digitization and its implications on business model innovation. *Journal of Manufacturing Technology Management*, 29(6), 964-986.
- Rahman, F. B. A., Hanafiah, M. H., Zahari, M. S. M., & Jipiu, L. B. (2023). Social commerce adoption: A study on consumer's online purchase behaviour of perishable pastry products. *British Food Journal*, 125(1), 318-344.
- Reis, J. C., Amorim, M., & Sousa, R. M. (2018). Digital transformation in the retail banking industry: A structured literature review. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 36(6), 1073-1097.
- Rodríguez-Gutiérrez, M. J., Moreno, P., & Tejada, P. (2015). Entrepreneurial orientation and performance of SMEs in the services industry. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 28(2), 194-212.
- Ross, J. W., Sebastian, I. M., & Beath, C. M. (2017). How to lead a digital transformation. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 58(2), 39-46.
- Sahasranamam, S., & Ionescu-Somers, A. (2024, January 8). *How more support for female entrepreneurs will help everyone*. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/01/six-global-trends-in-female-entrepreneurship/>
- Setini, M., Yasa, N. N. K., Supartha, I. W. G., Giantari, I. G. A. K., & Rajiani, I. (2020). The passway of women entrepreneurship: Starting from social capital with open innovation, through to knowledge sharing and innovative performance. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 6(2), 25.
- Shafwatullah, P., & Arquisola, M. J. (2024). Creating a more prosperous life through beauty: how entrepreneurship education empowers women MSME in Indonesia. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science* (2147-4478), 13(4), 495-506.
- Singh, G., & Belwal, R. (2008). Entrepreneurship and SMEs in Ethiopia. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 23(2), 120-136.
- SME Corp Malaysia. (2019). *Entrepreneurship driving SMEs. SME Annual Report 2018/2019*, 1–202. http://smecorp.gov.my/images/SMEAR/SMEAR2018_2019/final/english/SME_AR_-_English_-_All_Chapter_Final_24Jan2020.pdf
- Smith, A. N., Fischer, E., & Yongjian, C. (2020). Social commerce: A look into the factors driving social media influencers' purchase intentions. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*.
- Sreevas Sahasranamam, & Ionescu-Somers, A. (2024, January 8). *How more support for female entrepreneurs will help everyone*. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/01/six-global-trends-in-female-entrepreneurship/>
- Tajvidi, R., Richard, M.-O., Wang, Y., & Hajli, N. (2020). Brand co-creation through social commerce information sharing: The role of social media. *Journal of Business Research*, 121, 476-486.

- Teng, X., Wu, Z., & Yang, F. (2022). Research on the relationship between digital transformation and performance of SMEs. *Sustainability*, 14(10), 6012.
- Telukdarie, A., Dube, T., Matjuta, P., & Philbin, S. (2023). The opportunities and challenges of digitalization for SME's. *Procedia Computer Science*, 217, 689-698.
- Theis, S., & Rusconi, G. (2019). *Social commerce entrepreneurship and new opportunities for women's financial inclusion in India and Indonesia*. Women World Banking. <https://www.womensworldbanking.org/insights/social-commerce-report-2019/>
- Yu, W., Fei, J., Peng, G., & Bort, J. (2024). When a crisis hits: An examination of the impact of the global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic on financing for women entrepreneurs. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 39(2), 106379.
- Zhovtyuk, A. (2018). Managing organizational change in the digital age: The role of leaders and managers. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 31(2), 360-374.