Article

Breaking Barriers: Women's Ventures In The Digital Realm A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract – In the rapidly evolving landscape of digital platforms, the rise of women entrepreneurs has become increasingly prominent. Despite traditional barriers, more women enter digital entrepreneurship seeking flexibility and income contribution. However, challenges such as limited resources and societal norms persist. This paper presents a systematic literature review exploring the challenges, opportunities and dynamics of women's ventures in the digital realm. The study utilized a systematic literature review of research published between 2017-2024, sourced from Scopus and Web of Science databases. Thematic analysis is applied to classify findings into reasons and challenges driving female participation in digital entrepreneurship. The review identifies digital platforms as crucial for offering women flexibility and market accessibility, essential for managing work and family commitments. However, gender disparities, family responsibilities and limited access to resources remain significant barriers. This study contributes a comprehensive synthesis of existing literature on women's entrepreneurship in the digital space, highlighting the need for supportive ecosystems, policy interventions, funding and digital literacy programmes in fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment for women entrepreneurs to thrive.

Keywords: "Digital Business", "Digital Platforms", "Women Entrepreneur"

1. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving landscape of digital platforms, the rise of women entrepreneurs has become increasingly prominent. This phenomenon encompasses a diverse spectrum of women, including mumpreneurs, single mothers, and housewives, who are actively engaging in various digital ventures. Despite the traditional barriers and societal expectations, more women are venturing into digital entrepreneurship due to various reasons. Some seek flexibility to balance work and family commitments, while others aim to contribute to their household income. Single mothers face unique challenges and find solace in the autonomy and potential financial stability offered by online entrepreneurship. Additionally, many housewives are utilizing their skills and creativity to establish online businesses, turning hobbies into profitable ventures.

However, their journey is not without challenges. Women joining entrepreneurs encounter unique obstacles such as limited access to resources, lack of technical skills, and navigating the complexities of online marketing. Moreover, societal norms and gender biases can act as barriers, discouraging women from fully embracing entrepreneurship in digital platforms. Despite these challenges, the rise of women entrepreneurs in digital platforms signifies a paradigm shift towards greater inclusivity and empowerment in the entrepreneurial landscape. Women entrepreneurs are not only shaping their destinies but also contributing to the economic growth of their households and communities.

Digital platforms serve as enablers for women entrepreneurs to fulfil their motivations and aspirations by providing access to markets, resources, and networks. E-commerce platforms, social media and online marketplaces empower women to overcome geographical constraints and reach customers globally (Hammad & El Naggar, 2023). Through digital platforms, women can showcase their products or services, engage with customers, and build brand awareness thereby enhancing their business prospects and income potential. Moreover, digital platforms offer opportunities for skill development, learning, and innovation, aligning with women's aspirations for personal and professional growth (Jiang & Huang, 2023). Online courses, webinars, and mentorship programs enable women entrepreneurs to acquire new skills, stay updated on industry trends, and expand their knowledge base. By leveraging digital platforms, women can turn their aspirations into reality and create meaningful impact in their businesses and communities.

Recognizing this potential, governments are beginning to take steps to support and empower women entrepreneurs. By providing training programs, access to funding, and creating supportive policies, governments can play a crucial role in fostering an environment where women can thrive in the digital economy, ultimately leading to stronger and more resilient households. For instance, countries like Malaysia have implemented several policies to promote women empowerment under the Malaysia Madani theme such as the i-Sayang initiative, elevating women to take on at least 30% of decision-making roles in government-linked companies (GLCs), government-linked investment companies (GLICs) and Minister of Finance incorporated companies by 2025, women's emergency assistance fund (*Tabung*

Kasih Rahmah Wanita) and more. In an African country for example Nigeria, the women's digital entrepreneurship program has been introduced to encourage female entrepreneurs to digitalize their businesses and seize the opportunities to leverage in growing an online business (Opportunities for Africans, 2023), Business Resilience Programme (BRP) for women entrepreneurs to improving the digital and financial capability by providing a fundamental financial literacy and business management knowledge digital literacy skills growth support and even micro-grant underserved by female-led business.

This paper contributes to a novel perspective on women's entrepreneurship on digital platforms. Literature suggests various number of studies that have been conducted on various aspects of women in terms of entrepreneurship (Aggarwal & Johal, 2021; Alhothali & Al-Dajani, 2022; Hammad & El Naggar, 2023). However, a consensus on findings and the direction of these topics remains unclear. This paper aims to undertake a comprehensive review of the available literature to determine the research trends in the field of women's entrepreneurship in digital platforms. Our findings enhance our understanding of women decide to join the entrepreneurship and digital platform and what kind of challenges issues that they must face.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
The general objectives of this study are to determine the themes of the studies conducted in the domain of women and entrepreneurship on digital platforms for the past seven years.

2. Literature Review

Sovacool et al., (2023) conducted a review that originated from Grant and Booth, (2009) categorization scheme that has fourteen review types. Among the review, overview review is one of the approaches that has been used to summarise literature to describe its overall characteristics. An overview review is utilised in this review for a summary of the literature and its characteristics' description whereby analysis is based on conceptual or thematic.

The search strategy
The initial stage of the review involved planning, which included the development of a research protocol after identifying the necessity for the review and elaborating on the research questions. This study only used online journal article databases that are Scopus and Web of Sciences (WoS). Both databases according to (Machado et al., 2020), were selected due to their extensive coverage and discerning approach, resulting in a curated compilation of documents. Table 1 outlines the research protocol, providing a summary of its core components that refined the eligibilities through the inclusion and exclusion criteria like publication type, language used year of publication and search of field.

Table 1
Eligibility and Exclusion Criteria

Research protocol	Descriptions/ Eligibility	Exclusion
Research databases	Scopus and WoS	Non-Scopus and WoS
Publication Type	Journals Articles	Journal (review), thesis book series, book, chapter in a book, conference proceeding
Language	English	Non-English
Year of publication	2017-2024	Before 2017
Search fields	Title, abstract and keywords	

The initial search string (see Table 2) for SLR was conducted and Figure 1 for SLR process. The screening of 148 articles was carried out which consist of article from WoS (11) and Scopus (137) from year 2017-2024. Out of these articles, only 41 articles are accepted for further processing for SLR.

Table 2
Initial Search String

Topic	Search terms
Women	"housewive*" OR "housewife" OR "wom?n" OR "marr* women"
AND	
Entrepreneur	"entrepreneur*" OR "entrepreneurship*" OR "mumpreneur" OR "entrepreneurial" OR "women entrepreneur*" OR "business*"
AND	
Digital Business	"digital platforms" OR "internet based" OR "digital business*" OR "digital entrepreneur*"

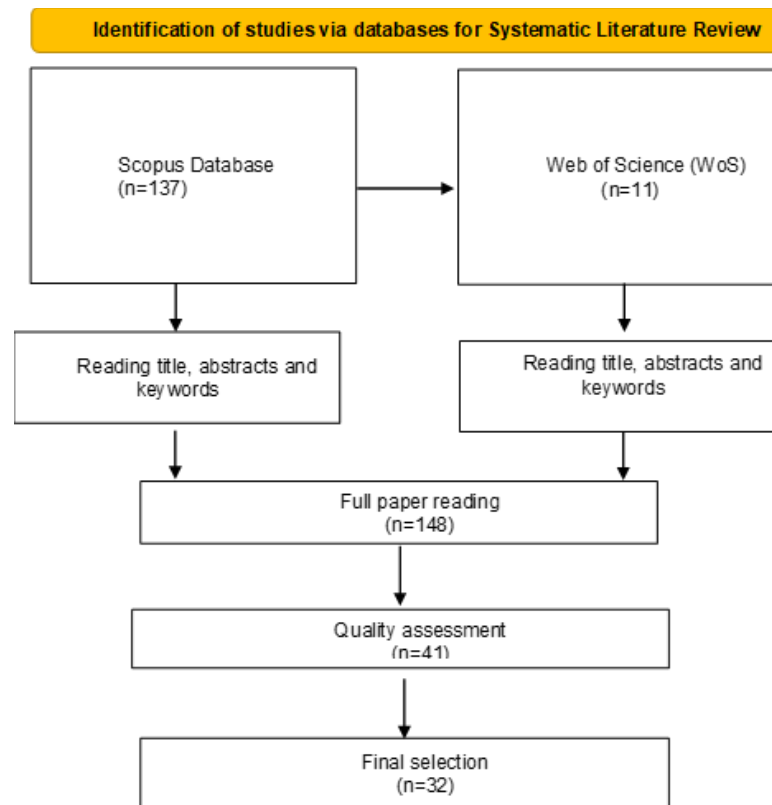| Identification of studies via databases for Systematic Literature Review |
|---|

Figure 1. SLR Process

3. Methodology of Study

The study utilizes a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), enabling researchers to accomplish thematic analysis to synthesize existing literature in the significant research area of women and entrepreneurship on digital platforms. A literature review can provide significant evidence for informing policy and practice in any subject for the respective academic and practitioner groups has underlined the need for a more evidence-informed approach like SLR. SLR by definition is a review of an existing body of literature that follows a transparent and reproducible methodology in searching, assessing its quality and synthesizing it with a high level of objectivity (Kraus et al., 2022).

4. Findings and Discussion

Thematic analysis is an approach for constructing, classifying and offering insight towards patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis is parallel to other methods in social science like content analysis, ethnography and phenomenology (Sovacool et al., 2023). Thematic analysis is used for the synthesis of findings due to its flexibility and well-established research approach that coordinates qualitative data into a list of themes or patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Researchers able to

manoeuvre accordingly the data via analysing the meaning of the whole data or only one specific aspect of a phenomenon in depth.

Thematic analysis

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in exploring the intersection of female entrepreneurship and digital platforms. Women are increasingly leveraging digital platforms to start and even grow businesses, reshape traditional notions of entrepreneurship and uplift their households economically with unprecedented opportunities to generate income and support their families (Burga et al., 2021). Thematic analysis is conducted by classifying the literature into first-order themes, second-order themes and dimensions (Andreini & Bettinelli, 2017; Liñán & Fayolle, 2015; Rashid et al., 2019).

Thematic analysis of the entire sample of 41 articles was carried out to identify themes and sub-themes. Themes and subthemes according to Rashid et al., (2019) encapsulate the main ideas and connections within an article, providing the framework for its research questions, concepts and measurements. The analysis yielded several first-order themes, which were then classified into 15 major themes (second-order themes) separated into two dimensions: reasons and challenges. All 15 major themes separated into reasons and challenges will then be elaborated below. Understanding the causes and factors or challenges driving female entrepreneurship, particularly in the context of digital platforms and household income improvement, is essential for promoting economic empowerment and gender equality. This review explores existing research on the causes and challenges that influence women's participation in entrepreneurship and their ability to leverage digital platforms to enhance family household income.

Table 3
Mapping of the themes of the included studies

Themes	Subthemes	
Reasons	Leveraging digital platform	(Flores-Bañuelos et al., 2023; Hammad & El Naggar, 2023; Hanafi et al., 2023; Jiang & Huang, 2023; Miniesy et al., 2021; Mishra et al., 2023; Pappas et al., 2018; Swartz et al., 2022).
	Empowerment in the aspect of women and policy/laws	(McAdam et al., 2019, 2020; Miniesy et al., 2021; Rashid et al., 2019)
	Experimental towards digital entrepreneurship	(Miniesy et al., 2021; Swartz et al., 2022).
	Motivations/aspirations	(Alhothali & Al-Dajani, 2022; McAdam et al., 2019, 2020;

Themes	Subthemes	
		Miniesy et al., 2021; Molina-López et al., 2021; Nur Asrofi et al., 2023; Shukla et al., 2021).
	Adapting to the digital environment	(Alhothali & Al-Dajani, 2022; Amuda & Alabdulrahman, 2024; Flores-Bañuelos et al., 2023; Hammad & El Naggar, 2023; Hanafi et al., 2023; Kelly & McAdam, 2023; McAdam et al., 2019, 2020; Mishra et al., 2023; Nur Asrofi et al., 2023; Olsson & Bernhard, 2021; Pappas et al., 2018; Shukla et al., 2021).
	Exposure (training/workshops/programmes on digital technology)	(Denes & Boonyasurat, 2023; Molina-López et al., 2021; Olsson & Bernhard, 2021; Pappas et al., 2018; Rashid et al., 2019; Srebro et al., 2023; Sridevi et al., 2019).
	Enabling conditions (supportive policies, regulations, culture, society)	(Alhothali & Al-Dajani, 2022; Amuda & Alabdulrahman, 2024; Dy et al., 2017; Srebro et al., 2023).
Challenges	Gender disparities and gender stereotype	(Dy et al., 2017; Kang, 2022; Luo & Chan, 2021; McAdam et al., 2020; Miniesy et al., 2021; Mishra et al., 2023; Pappas et al., 2018; Shukla et al., 2021; Sperber & Linder, 2022; Wang & Keane, 2020).
	Family constraint	(Dy et al., 2017; Nur Asrofi et al., 2023; Wang & Keane, 2020).
	The challenge of digital platforms and leveraging the digital platform	(Dy et al., 2017; Kelly & McAdam, 2023; Olsson & Bernhard, 2021; Torres et al., 2021).

Themes	Subthemes	
	Identities (gender identities, ethnic identities, social class identities)	(Dy et al., 2017; Kelly & McAdam, 2023; Wang & Keane, 2020).
	Institutional Challenges (regulations/ structural challenge)	(Althalathini & Tlaiss, 2023; McAdam et al., 2019; Sridevi et al., 2019).
	Emancipatory potential (Liberating potential)	(Althalathini & Tlaiss, 2023; Martinez Dy et al., 2018).

5. Discussions

REASONS
Leveraging digital platforms

The advent of changes in digital platforms transforms the way businesses operate and offers the entrepreneur opportunities to access wider markets and operations. With access to a wider market, female entrepreneurs need not for physical presence but can utilize the services platforms such as Shopee, Lazada, Amazon, Shopify, Zalora and much more. Digital platforms offer women entrepreneurs many opportunities to launch and scale businesses with relatively low barriers to entry. The emergence of e-commerce platforms, social media networks and online marketplaces has given a benefit to entrepreneurship by providing easy access to global markets and audiences (Burga et al., 2021). It helps small-scale entrepreneurs to participate in the market by providing closer links between buyers and sellers. They also overcome geographic constraints by enabling these entrepreneurs to reach customers beyond their local communities.

Besides, the flexibility of digital platforms accommodates the needs of women who often juggle multiple responsibilities such as caregiving and household chores. By leveraging these platforms, women can create businesses that align with their schedules and lifestyle preferences. Overall, digital platforms have opened access for female entrepreneurs to launch businesses whether it is small businesses or others in ways previously imagined, and also revolutionizing the entrepreneurial landscape.

Empowerment (women, single mothers, policy/law)

The empowerment of women through digital entrepreneurship extends beyond achieving economic independence to encompass social and political dimensions. For a minor group such as single mothers, entrepreneurship can serve as a pathway to financial security and self-sufficiency (Onileowo, 2021) balancing work and family responsibilities (Topimin et al., 2019). Women's empowerment in digital platform business as entrepreneurs can be significantly influenced by supportive policies and laws that address gender inequalities and

promote equal opportunities in the entrepreneurial systems. Implementing laws and regulations helps women in promoting gender equality and supporting women entrepreneurs. Saudi Arabia for example engages in institutions to alter the behaviour of women entrepreneurs by increasing women's legitimacy as entrepreneurs to reduce sanctions faced by the next generation of female entrepreneurs and change the patterns of thinking and value among them (McAdam et al., 2019). Initiatives such as affirmative action programs, gender-responsive budgeting (UN WOMEN, 2021) and legal reforms to protect women's property rights are essential to create an enabling environment for female entrepreneurship (Burga et al., 2021). For instance, Startup Karnataka, India focus on increasing the presence of women as entrepreneurs through policies, initiatives and networks (Startup Karnataka,2021), (UNCTAD, 2022) on the other hand advocating women through digitalization and Malaysia instance through e-commerce companies such as Lazada introduce stimulus package in various area including education, logistics, financial incentives where it tries to ease the operational cost and grow their online presence while setting up for long term growth and sustainability (Ministry of Communications, 2020). The interconnectedness between policy, legal and women empowerment in the digital entrepreneurship landscape helps to underscore the importance of a holistic approach to create a supportive ecosystem for female entrepreneurs.

Experimental

The digital landscape continually evolves, presenting women entrepreneurs with opportunities to explore innovative business models and experimental approaches. Experimentation in digital entrepreneurship involves testing new ideas, iterating on existing strategies, and embracing failure as a learning experience. Women entrepreneurs are increasingly embracing digital technologies such as blockchain, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things (IoT) to create disruptive solutions and address unmet needs in various industries. For example, female-led startups as reported by Forbes (2023), such as Parla (connecting women with experts in nutrition, fertility, and mental health to receive holistic support) and Maternia (deliver inclusive and tailor-made solutions to make maternal care within reach of every pregnant woman).

Moreover, collaborative platforms and co-working spaces offer women entrepreneurs opportunities to collaborate, share resources, and experiment with new business models. To be involved in the women entrepreneurs' community and to share know-how knowledge will give new direction to the female entrepreneurs. These ecosystems foster innovation and creativity while providing support networks for female founders (Baral et al., 2023). Additionally, collaborative initiatives involving public-private partnerships and grassroots organizations are instrumental in fostering a supportive ecosystem for female entrepreneurship. For instance, incubators and accelerators geared towards women-owned businesses provide mentorship, networking opportunities, and access to funding, as evidenced by studies by Nambisan et al., 2017 and The Asia Foundation (2018).

Motivations/aspirations

Understanding the motivations and aspirations of female entrepreneurs is essential for uncovering the driving forces behind their engagement in digital entrepreneurship and their pursuit of improved household income. Women often venture into entrepreneurship to achieve greater work-life balance, financial independence, and fulfilment of personal

aspirations. Digital platforms offer women the flexibility to balance their entrepreneurial endeavours with familial responsibilities, thereby aligning with their motivations for household income improvement. (Adema et al., 2014) highlight how female entrepreneurs are motivated by a desire to create social impact and contribute to their families' well-being. By leveraging digital platforms, women can harness their creativity and innovation to address societal challenges and generate sustainable income streams, thus fulfilling their aspirations for economic empowerment. Women's motivations for entrepreneurship are multifaceted and influenced by various factors, including economic necessity, desire for autonomy, and pursuit of personal fulfilment. For many women, entrepreneurship represents a means of achieving work-life balance and pursuing their passions while contributing to household income (Akter et al., 2022).

Studies by Welter et al., (2017) and Van Der Zwan et al., (2016) emphasize the role of intrinsic motivations such as autonomy, self-fulfilment, and passion for the business idea in driving women's entrepreneurial pursuits. Moreover, external factors such as family support, social networks, and cultural norms significantly impact women's decision to engage in entrepreneurship (Rusmiati & Khan, 2022; Tambunan, 2023). For housewives, entrepreneurship provides an opportunity to contribute financially to the household while fulfilling caregiving responsibilities. The desire to create a better future for their families and achieve economic independence motivates many women to embark on entrepreneurial ventures (Jiang & Huang, 2023). Furthermore, aspirations for societal change and gender equality drive many women to become entrepreneurs and challenge traditional gender roles (Bullough et al., 2014). By breaking barriers and succeeding in male-dominated industries, women entrepreneurs serve as role models and inspire future generations of aspiring entrepreneurs (Akter et al., 2022). Digital platforms amplify their voices and enable them to reach wider audiences, thereby catalysing social change and empowerment.

Adapting to the digital environment

The ability to adapt to the digital environment is crucial for the success of female entrepreneurs. Research by Hamid et al. (2020) emphasizes the importance of digital literacy and technological proficiency in enabling women to navigate digital platforms effectively. As digitalization reshapes traditional business models, female entrepreneurs must embrace digital tools and strategies to remain competitive in the marketplace. Studies by Ongo Nkoa and Song, (2023) underscore the role of organizational agility and innovation in facilitating women's adaptation to the digital environment. By embracing a culture of continuous learning and experimentation, female entrepreneurs can capitalize on emerging digital trends and seize new opportunities for business growth and income generation. The digital environment presents both opportunities and challenges for female entrepreneurs. While digital platforms offer a wide range of tools and resources for business growth, adapting to the rapidly evolving technological landscape requires continuous learning and adaptation. The importance of digital literacy and technological proficiency in enabling women to navigate digital platforms effectively and capitalize on emerging opportunities. Therefore, it is important for female entrepreneurs to not only possess digital literacy and proficiency but also cultivate a mindset of agility and innovation to thrive in the dynamic digital marketplace.

Exposure (training/workshops/programs on digital technology)

Exposure to digital technology through training, workshops, and educational programs is instrumental in empowering female entrepreneurs to harness the full potential of digital platforms. Research by (Nambisan et al., 2017) highlights the impact of digital entrepreneurship training programs in enhancing women's digital skills and confidence. By providing hands-on experience and mentorship, these programs equip women with the knowledge and resources needed to thrive in the digital economy. Initiatives such as digital literacy campaigns and community workshops play a vital role in bridging the digital divide and empowering marginalized women to participate in digital entrepreneurship. A study by Sak et al. (2023) demonstrates how exposure to digital technology can unlock new pathways to economic empowerment and household income improvement for women from underserved communities.

Exposure to digital technology through training, workshops, and educational programs can also build women's confidence and capabilities as entrepreneurs. Studies by (Rahman et al., 2023) and (Ahammad & Huq, 2013) demonstrate that hands-on training and mentorship programs focused on digital skills development empower women to harness the full potential of digital platforms for business growth. Moreover, initiatives aimed at bridging the digital divide, such as providing access to affordable internet connectivity and digital devices, are essential for ensuring inclusivity and equal participation in the digital economy. Not only that, innovative and experimental approaches are emerging to promote digital entrepreneurship among women, particularly in underserved communities. One such approach is the use of digital literacy and skill-building programs tailored to the needs of female entrepreneurs. Research (Jiang & Huang, 2023) suggests that targeted training programs focusing on digital marketing, e-commerce, and financial management can significantly enhance women's entrepreneurial capabilities and confidence in utilizing digital platforms. All in all, digital technology not only helps female entrepreneurs with the necessary skills and resources to thrive in the digital economy but also enhances their confidence and capability as entrepreneurs. It is important to have inclusive initiatives and targeted interventions to promote equal participation and economic empowerment among women in the digital entrepreneurship landscape.

Enabling conditions (supportive policies, regulations, cultural, societal, individual)

Enabling conditions encompass a range of factors, including supportive policies, regulations, cultural norms, societal attitudes, and individual attributes, that shape the entrepreneurial landscape for women. Research by ILO (2020) and UN Women (2021) emphasizes the importance of gender-responsive policies and legal frameworks in promoting women's access to digital platforms and financial resources. By addressing systemic barriers and promoting gender equality, governments can create an enabling environment that empowers female entrepreneurs to thrive.

Moreover, cultural and societal attitudes towards women's entrepreneurship play a significant role in shaping women's aspirations and opportunities for economic advancement. Studies by Kumar and Das (2012), highlight the impact of social support networks and role models in fostering women's entrepreneurial aspirations and confidence. By fostering a culture of entrepreneurship and celebrating female achievements, societies

can encourage more women to pursue entrepreneurial ventures and contribute to household income improvement. Furthermore, the importance of gender-responsive policies and regulatory frameworks that address systemic barriers and create a level playing field for women entrepreneurs. Moreover, cultural and societal norms that value women's contributions to the economy and recognize their entrepreneurial potential are essential for fostering an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Therefore, policy interventions and cultural attitudes in promoting women's entrepreneurship needs in the community provide a comprehensive overview of the factors that shape the entrepreneurial landscape for women and emphasize the need for a holistic approach to creating an enabling environment. Any feedback from female entrepreneurs would be necessary to explore more potential strategies for policymakers and stakeholders to address systematic barriers and foster a supportive ecosystem for women entrepreneurs.

CHALLENGES

Despite numerous studies, the digital or online platform has become an opportunity for women entrepreneurs to leverage their businesses (Flores-Bañuelos et al., 2023; Hammad & El Naggar, 2023; Hanafi et al., 2023; Jiang & Huang, 2023; Miniesy et al., 2021; Mishra et al., 2023; Pappas et al., 2018; Swartz et al., 2022; Torres et al., 2021) to assist them during unique economic conditions like the pandemic (Alhothali & Al-Dajani, 2022; Torres et al., 2021), to earn extra income for their households (McAdam et al., 2019; Miniesy et al., 2021; Rashid et al., 2019), and to liberate and empower themselves to become successful entrepreneurs (Jiang & Huang, 2023; Miniesy et al., 2021; Molina-López et al., 2021; Shukla et al., 2021). However, research has found that the digital platform is not just a supporting tool in entrepreneurship but also a challenging tool for them. Women have already been marginalized and belong to lower social classes compared to men in the offline or physical environment (Dy et al., 2017; Kang, 2022). Thus, there is a universal belief that the online environment should be a meritocratic space for emancipating women (Dy et al., 2017; McAdam et al., 2020). Nevertheless, several studies have challenged this notion of whether the online environment should be a liberating and democratizing space for women (Althalathini & Tlaiss, 2023; Dy et al., 2017; Martinez Dy et al., 2018). This nuanced and multifaceted relationship between women entrepreneurs and digital technology should be examined critically to understand the whole dynamic experiences of digital women entrepreneurship.

Various studies emphasize how online platforms have become instrumental for women in unique economic conditions to gain extra income and empower themselves to be successful entrepreneurs. However, it also acknowledges the challenges female entrepreneurs to face challenges in the online environment even though they belief online environment should have be meritocratic towards women but somehow it is not.

Gender Disparities and Gender Stereotype

The technological field is populated mostly by men compared to women (Kang, 2022), emphasizing the gender disparities in digital technology. Meanwhile, the lack of literature on the gendered aspects of the digital divide intersecting with entrepreneurship shows the urgency of more comprehensive research in this area (Visvizi et al., 2023). It is found that

the digital platform alone is not sufficient to address gender disparities, as certain aspects of digital transformation tend to persist in the gender gap in entrepreneurship (Gaweł & Mińska-Struzik, 2023). Therefore, gender disparities in digital entrepreneurship are more complex and also require studies on the reproduction of offline gender disparities environment into online or digital environments, such as socio-economic, cultural, and structural barriers (McAdam et al., 2019; Pappas et al., 2018).

The intersectional and positionality theories from (Dy et al., 2017) reveal that intersecting social positions of gender, race, and class status have shaped the digital enterprise activities of women entrepreneurs. The offline reproduction of gender disparities in digital entrepreneurship is prevailing in accessing resources and opportunities to expand businesses, as women often face challenges in accessing funding, mentorship, networks, and digital technologies essential for starting and growing their business ventures (Kang, 2022; Luo & Chan, 2021; Mishra et al., 2023; Wang & Keane, 2020). Women will struggle to compete in the digital marketplace when there is no equitable access to resources, leading to fewer women-owned businesses and narrower representation of women in the digital entrepreneurship sector (Kang, 2022; Wang & Keane, 2020). Gender disparities are also heightened by gender stereotypes and scepticism due to the gendered nature of digital entrepreneurship (Martinez Dy et al., 2018; Pappas et al., 2018; Wang & Keane, 2020). There are perceptions of entrepreneurship seen as a male-typed occupation because entrepreneurial traits like risk-taking, self-reliance, and daring are much more associated with masculine characteristics (Wang & Keane, 2020). Besides, scepticism and beliefs that women are less interested (Pappas et al., 2018) and less competent in their technical and ICT skills cause them to constantly prove their worth in the digital industry, which is predominantly male-dominated (Dy et al., 2017).

Digital platforms are essential, however, they are alone insufficient to address gender disparities as certain aspects of digital transformation perpetuate gender gaps in entrepreneurship. The complexity of gender in digital entrepreneurship requires an examination of how offline gender disparities reproduce in online environments. Intersecting social position of gender, race and class, shape women entrepreneurs' digital enterprise activities. The need for research to address gender disparities in digital entrepreneurship comprehensively considers the intersectionality of social positions and challenging gender stereotypes to relate more equitable opportunities for women entrepreneurs in the digital landscape.

Family Constraint

While women entrepreneurs contribute to their families' household earnings, women are nevertheless confined to their home responsibilities as caregivers, emphasizing the disparity between working mothers and working fathers who are not constrained by these domestic roles. However, due to increased support and recognition from family members, women entrepreneurs can lead to a shift in their family dynamics, where they also become earners for the family (McAdam et al., 2019). Research has shown that family constraints such as family responsibilities and traditional gender roles often create significant obstacles for women who aspire to become successful digital entrepreneurs (Dy et al., 2017; Luo & Chan, 2021; Nur Asrofi et al., 2023; Shukla et al., 2021; Wang & Keane, 2020). Therefore, delving into the personal stories and experiences of women who have navigated these challenges can

provide valuable insights into the subtle ways in which family context intersects with digital entrepreneurship.

The intricate balance women entrepreneurs must strike between their professional aspirations and their responsibilities as caregivers within the family. While their contribution to household income is significant, societal expectations and traditional gender roles often hinder their ability to fully engage in digital entrepreneurship. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize and support women entrepreneurs in overcoming family constraints. This can also involve implementing policies and promoting work-life balance to provide access to affordable childcare options, fostering a supportive environment within family and community. Additionally, amplifying the voices and experiences of women who have successfully navigated these challenges can serve as inspiration and guidance for others facing similar challenges.

Challenges of Digital Platforms

The digital platform is widely used to address internal business challenges such as marketing, customer analytics, branding, and shortages of raw materials (Sridevi et al., 2019). Furthermore, leveraging the digital platform is also seen as a strategic response to navigate various external constraints such as the pandemic (Torres et al., 2021) and traditional gender norms (McAdam et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs within the digital platform have primarily been directed towards marginalized groups such as women of colour (Dy et al., 2017), those with lower socio-economic status (Dy et al., 2017), women affected by socio-cultural and institutional values (Althalathini & Tlaiss, 2023; McAdam et al., 2020; Pappas et al., 2018), and indigenous people (Denes & Boonyasurat, 2023).

Women of colour often employ a 'whitewashing' strategy to erase their racial and ethnic identities on online platforms to gain online visibility (Dy et al., 2017). The literature emphasizes the struggles of managing blurred boundaries in the offline-online realm, such as constant connectivity with clients or customers and exposure to online harassment (Kelly & McAdam, 2023). Apart from dealing with negative online comments and the difficulty of balancing work and personal life, carefully selecting the right digital channels to support their business is also challenging for women digital entrepreneurs (Olsson & Bernhard, 2021).

Identities (Gender, Ethnic and Social Class)

Entrepreneurial identities are significant as guiding tools in business management, given the nature of entrepreneurship requiring self-reliance and independence. Maintaining internal identities such as positivity and resilience is imperative in handling unusual uncertainties like the pandemic (Alhothali & Al-Dajani, 2022). However, the portrayal of external identities in online presence, such as 'whitewashing' to stay relevant in business demands, also poses hindrances to women (Dy et al., 2017). In this capitalistic world of digital entrepreneurship, women not only need to preserve entrepreneurial identities to achieve social recognition and visibility but also need to assert creative identities to stay relevant (Wang & Keane, 2020).

Balancing gender identities of feminine and masculine attributes, such as empathy for the former and leadership for the latter, is essential to solving problems and managing businesses (Dy et al., 2017). Additionally, social class identities, such as women from lower socio-

economic backgrounds, face greater barriers to accessing resources and opportunities. Other than that, studies regarding liminality space revealed how the transition from a previous career to digital entrepreneurship impacts women in terms of uncertainties, emotional turmoil, and navigating new professional identities (Kelly & McAdam, 2023). Women respond to this liminality state by engaging in 'identity play' and 'identity work,' where they experiment with new professional identities such as educating clients in their interests.

Institutional Challenges

Institutional or structural challenges, such as poor policies and laws, could hinder women's potential to become successful entrepreneurs. Before gender reforms and new regulations on gender equality are implemented to empower women in Saudi Arabia (Alhothali & Al-Dajani, 2022), the scarcity of institutional frameworks to encourage entrepreneurship has posed substantial hurdles for women (McAdam et al., 2019). Previous studies have mainly focused on the formal institutional voids, such as lacking policies in legal, banking, or regulatory sectors (Elert & Henrekson, 2017). However, these voids could also be bound to the local cultural context in Middle Eastern countries, thus becoming informal or indirect institutional voids, such as gender segregation, limited access to role models, and social expectations towards women (McAdam et al., 2019).

The necessity to contextualize women's experiences in entrepreneurship is further emphasized in conflict-laden countries like Palestine, an Arab country that hosts the longest sustained military occupation in modern history (Althalathini & Tlaiss, 2023; Maurer, 2012). Palestine, as a Middle Eastern country, not only poses socio-cultural restrictions to women but also institutional regulations, including movement and travel restrictions, lack of tax incentives to support them, limited educational and developmental support, power shortages, and issues with bank transfers. Poor digital infrastructure further constrains women from growing their businesses (Althalathini, 2022; Althalathini & Tlaiss, 2023).

Emancipatory Potential

All the above-mentioned challenges then further question whether the universal assumption that online or digital platforms can provide a liberatory and emancipatory potential for women entrepreneurs, either to sustain businesses in adverse circumstances, to expand their businesses, or even express and develop their identities. The online environment is revealed to reproduce the social hierarchies and gender stereotypes that already appear in the physical sphere (Althalathini & Tlaiss, 2023). Instead of exploring the setting of digital enterprise as an individual-level phenomenon, an in-depth investigation centred on enabling conditions and a social world model that emphasizes *structure, culture, and individuals* is necessary (Martinez Dy et al., 2018). The multifaceted dimensions of women's digital entrepreneurship, encompassing *structural* challenges such as regulatory and institutional challenges, *cultural* restrictions such as traditional gender roles and patriarchal culture, and *individual* aspects such as resilience, positive emotions, and experimenting with new identities, have proven the complexity and nuance of this issue when all these three dimensions intersect. Therefore, this suggests the need for more critical literature and studies to comprehend the uniqueness of women's experiences that can impede their success in digital entrepreneurship.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, this review identifies and examines the existing literature review on women's entrepreneurship in digital platforms. By analysing studies conducted between 2017 and 2024 using Scopus and WoS databases, the objective aims to determine the prevalent themes in women's entrepreneurship within this domain. The study on women, entrepreneurship and digital platforms reveals both motivation/reasons and challenges for women to be involved in this realm. Through SLR, two primary themes have been identified which are reasons and challenges driving women to engage in digital entrepreneurship.

The study elucidates the diverse motivations that drive women to venture into digital entrepreneurship. Women seek for flexibility to balancing work and family commitment to contribute to household income, therefore by understanding the motivations factors, policymakers, businesses and support organizations can tailor interventions and support organizations can tailor interventions and initiates to better support and empower women entrepreneurs.

Lastly, this study highlights a myriad of challenges that encounter by women in the pursuit of entrepreneurship on digital platforms. These challenges encompass various aspects such as gender disparities, family constraints and institutional challenges that act as barriers to full participate in the field. By illuminating this obstacle, the study underscores the importance of addressing systemic barriers and creating enabling environment for women entrepreneurs to thrive.

Overall, this study contributes to understanding of women's entrepreneurship on digital platforms. By recognizing the reasons and challenges underlying women's involvement, policymakers, businesses and support organization can work towards creating more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystems that enables women to realize their full potential and drive economic growth.

7. Limitations of the Study

This study has two limitation that can be address. Firstly, there is a very limited availability of literature specifically focusing on women's entrepreneurship especially in digital realm. Additionally, there are bias in existing literature as most existing literature biased towards certain perspectives or may not adequately represent the diverse experiences of women entrepreneurs in digital realm.

8. Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the limitations of the study, it is important for future studies to expand the study area such as conducting SLR on emerging topics within women's entrepreneurship and digital platforms can identify new trends, gaps and future directions. For example, reviewing literature on the impact of artificial intelligence on women-led businesses or the role of social media in empowering female entrepreneurs.

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