

Analysis of the Impediments to Digital Practices for Enhanced Lifelong Entrepreneurial Skills Development Among Women in Marondera, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The landscape of entrepreneurship for women in Zimbabwe particularly in Marondera is evolving with the advent of digital technologies. The integration of digital practices into entrepreneurial skill development is crucial for fostering economic independence, among women. However, women continue to face significant impediments in accessing digital practices. The study examined various challenges that hinder the ability of women entrepreneurs to adopt digital methods effectively, aiming to provide insights into how they can be addressed. Study results reflected gendered constraints ingrained in cultural and social norms, particularly lack of digital Literacy and perceptions on traditional gender roles can discourage women from pursuing entrepreneurial ventures, accessing and engaging with technology. The study utilized the mixed research methods paradigm as major research methodology. The case study was used as the principal research design. Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were adopted in selecting the site of study and study participants. Key Informant interviews, documentary analysis, focus group discussions and questionnaires were used as data collection methods. The study concluded that women are confronted with multi-faceted impediments which hinder positive spirit towards adopting digital practices for lifelong entrepreneurial skills development. The study noted that the implementation of targeted strategies to enhance digital literacy, access to technology, and support networks remains a panacea for the empowerment of women entrepreneurs to continue thriving and navigating the challenges in an ever-increasing and dynamic digital economy. The study highlighted that addressing these impediments required a collaborative engagement among various stakeholders, including government, civil society and relevant community organizations. The study recommends urgent implementation of tailor-made training programs, increased access to technology, creation of networks with community groups, collaborative

policy reforms and upscaling of mentorship programmes to ensure that women in Marondera are empowered to deal with the contextual impediments that hinder digital practices.

Key Words: Analysis, Impediments, Digital Practices, Lifelong Entrepreneurial Skills Development, Women

1.Introduction

In the digital era, entrepreneurship has emerged as a key engine of economic development, innovation, and job creation. Women in many regions of the globe, including Zimbabwe, face major barriers to accessing and utilizing digital technology to improve their entrepreneurial skills development. This study focuses on the barriers to digital practices for improving lifetime entrepreneurial skills development among women in Marondera, Zimbabwe.

2.Background of the Study

Digital practices, such as the utilization of digital technology and online platforms, have become critical to entrepreneurial success. However, women in Marondera confront considerable barriers to obtaining and utilizing digital technology to further their entrepreneurial skills development.

3.Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing recognition of digital technologies as critical enablers for entrepreneurship and lifelong learning, women entrepreneurs in Marondera, Zimbabwe, face significant impediments in adopting and effectively utilizing digital practices for skills development in areas such as financial literacy and marketing. Although internet coverage in Zimbabwe is projected to be less than 50%, women entrepreneurs in Marondera may have restricted access owing to affordability and digital literacy barriers (Matarise, 2024). This results in limited access to opportunities for enhanced entrepreneurial capabilities, hindering their business growth, economic empowerment, and long-term sustainability. Specifically, the lack of access to, affordability of, and proficiency in digital tools and resources, coupled with socio-cultural barriers and inadequate support systems significantly restrict women's ability to leverage digital technologies for lifelong entrepreneurial skills development in Marondera. For example, many women are unable to utilize online marketing platforms to reach a wider customer base. Understanding and addressing these

impediments is crucial for fostering inclusive economic growth and promoting women's entrepreneurial success in the digital age. Therefore, this study aims to identify, analyze, and prioritize the key impediments to digital practices for enhanced lifelong entrepreneurial skills development among women in Marondera, and propose potential solutions for overcoming these challenges.

4.Key Research Questions

- a) What are the main barriers preventing women in Marondera from effectively developing entrepreneurial abilities through digital practices?
- b) How do these impediments impact the ability of women in Marondera to develop and utilize entrepreneurial skills throughout their lives?
- c) What digital techniques are most effective for developing entrepreneurial skills among women in Marondera?
- d) How does a lack of dependable electrical infrastructure impact women's adoption of digital practices for developing entrepreneurial abilities in Marondera?
- e) How does restricted adoption of digital techniques impact women's entrepreneurship in Marondera, both economically and socially?
- f) How can digital platforms and technologies be tailored to meet the requirements of female entrepreneurs in Marondera?

5.Significance of the Study

The study contributed to the existing body of knowledge on digital behaviours, entrepreneurship, and women's empowerment. The research gave insight into the obstacles and possibilities for women in Marondera and identified strategies to overcome the impediments to digital practices and entrepreneurial skills development. The research also informed policy decisions aimed at promoting digital literacy and the design of training programs and capacity building initiatives for women entrepreneurs.

6.Delimitations

The study was undertaken in Marondera urban and looked at entrepreneurial skills development among women.

7.Limitations

Some women were not quite familiar with digital platforms except WhatsApp and some were not willing to participate in the focus group interviews and the researchers had to persuade them.

8.Review of Related Literature

Digital skills are becoming an increasingly crucial criterion for work globally, yet a sizable section of the population still lacks the necessary abilities to perform in a digital corporate environment. Although young people are sometimes dubbed "digital connoisseurs", most of them do not actually have enough of these competences necessary to launching their own entrepreneurial firms (Vucekov , Medic, Markovic, 2020)

8.1 How Digital Tools Can Serve the Entrepreneurs

Digital lifetime learning (DLLL) utilizes easily accessible and user-friendly digital resources to promote autonomous and other learning possibilities. Internet applications like webinars, social networking, and video conferencing are changing how people access information and expertise (Wotto, Basak, &Belanger).In addition, the Canadian government aims to promote digital citizenship, which requires new skills for success in education, career, job, community, and family life (Freidet al. 2017).

8.2 Challenges in Adopting Digital Technologies

Adult learners face unforeseen challenges while using online teaching and learning, despite its popularity. Adult learners may face additional challenges, such as managing commitments and economic constraints, leading to increased stress, anxiety, and despair Tan et al., 2023). Disparities in last mile connection (LMC) availability and use might impair digital skill development, especially in impoverished regions. Developing digital skills may improve economic recovery and resilience, but only if price, use, and access barriers are addressed. (Heneveld, 2022).

8.3 How to Overcome Impediments in Acquiring Digital Skills

To rebuild, civil society, business sector, governments, regional organizations, industrial associations, informal training providers, and educational institutions must improve and adapt their digital capabilities. Heneveld, (2022) highlighted the need of both advocacy and project execution activities. Slower adaptors may face social and digital isolation owing to their unwillingness to use internet services and workplace technology. Evidence-based policies and efforts can assist slower adaptors in developing and maintaining digital competences for online services and technology-rich workplaces (Damoran and Burrows, 2017).

9.Methodology

The study utilized the mixed research methods paradigm (qualitative and quantitative data) as major research methodology. The case study was used as the principal research design. Both

probability and non-probability sampling techniques were adopted in selecting the site of study and study participants.

9.1 Sampling and Sample

Systematic sampling technique was used to choose 30 women and purposive sampling technique were adopted to choose 10 men to come up with a sample of 40 participants.

9.2 Data Collection

Three Focus group discussions of ten participants each were held with women and 10 questionnaires were administered to 10 male participants.

10 Data Analysis

The thematic approach was used to analyses qualitative data in which themes were developed related to entrepreneurship. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyses quantitative data. Tables, and pie charts were used to represent the analyses data.

Results

Results were analysed using sub-themes drawn from key research questions: -

11.1 Key Impediments Hindering the Adoption and Effective Use of Digital Practices

-85% of respondents outlined that there was limited access to digital devices. There was also unreliable electricity supply due to long hours of load-shading.

-Participant number 1 indicated that women had limited knowledge in digital technologies, most of them were only familiar with WhatsApp.

-75% of male respondents highlighted that societal attitudes and norm limited women's participation in entrepreneurship and digital technologies

-100% of respondents indicated that they did not have enough funding to invest in digital technologies and training and entrepreneurship initiatives

-90% of participants pointed out that the digital devices like computers, software, smart phones were expensive as well as the internet services and software.

-There was a consensus among the participants that there was limited access to digital training and entrepreneurship education by government and other responsible authorities.

11.2 Impact of impediments on the Ability of Women to Develop and Utilize Entrepreneurial Skills

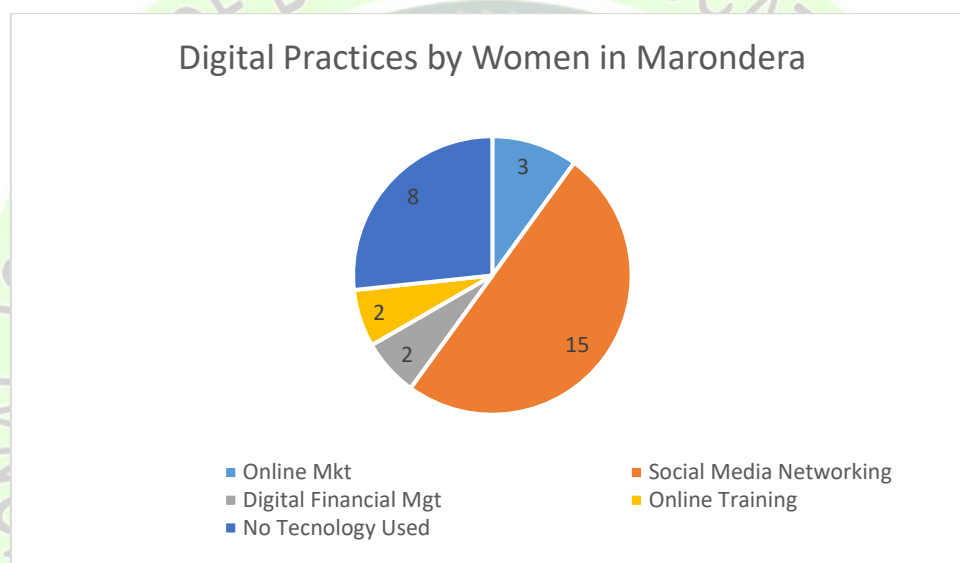
-35 participants indicated that, without digital skills, women may struggle to adapt to changing market conditions, making it difficult to sustain their entrepreneurial ventures

-Participant number 10 highlighted that, women may struggle to achieve financial independence, making them more vulnerable to poverty and economic instability, and they may be forced to rely on others for financial support, limiting their autonomy and decision-making power.

-60% of participants outlined that as a result of these impediments, women may struggle to access networks and resources, limiting their social mobility and opportunities for advancement.

11.3 Specific Digital Dpractices that Enhance Entrepreneurial Skills Development

Figure 1



The above chart depicts the results of the 30 women in the sample – 3 women used online marketing, 2 women were able to use digital financial management, 8 women never used technology, 15 used social media platforms especially whatsapp and 2 were familiar with online training.

Table 1: Barriers to Full Utilisation of Digital Tools

Emerging Themes	Supubstantiating evidence
Lack of Digital Literacy training	<i>Providing women in Marondera with digital literacy training and education is the solution for society to achieve.....(Participant 6, Key Informant interview)</i>
Limited access to digital infrastructure	95% of participants felt that investing in digital infrastructure, such as internet access and digital gadgets, was excellent.
Cultural and social barriers	85% of female participants stated that cultural and societal constraints hampered women's capacity to embrace and use digital activities. This needed to be addressed.
No awareness campaigns on digital opportunities.	<i>Raising knowledge about the potential benefits of digital activities was a priority for women in Marondera, according to 100% male and 83% female participants.</i>

11.4 Lack of Access to Reliable Electricity and Internet Infrastructure

-100% of respondents highlighted that if there was no reliable electricity and internet, this would result in loss of business and customers and the businesses would dwindle.

11.5 Economic and Social Consequences of the Limited Adoption of Digital Practices

-Participant number 7 indicated that limited adoption of digital practices could limit women's economic empowerment, and could also be excluded from social and economic opportunities.

-75% of the respondents were of the opinion that, without digital practices, women-owned businesses may struggle to grow and expand and could also lead to reduced income and profitability.

11.6 Strategies for Adopting Digital Platforms and Tools to Promote and Empower Women Entrepreneurs

-80% of participants outlined that it was ideal to develop digital platforms and tools with simplified user interfaces that are easy to navigate, even for those with limited digital literacy.

-60% of women indicated that it was better to have content and resources that were culturally sensitive and relevant to the Marondera context, taking into account local customs and traditions.

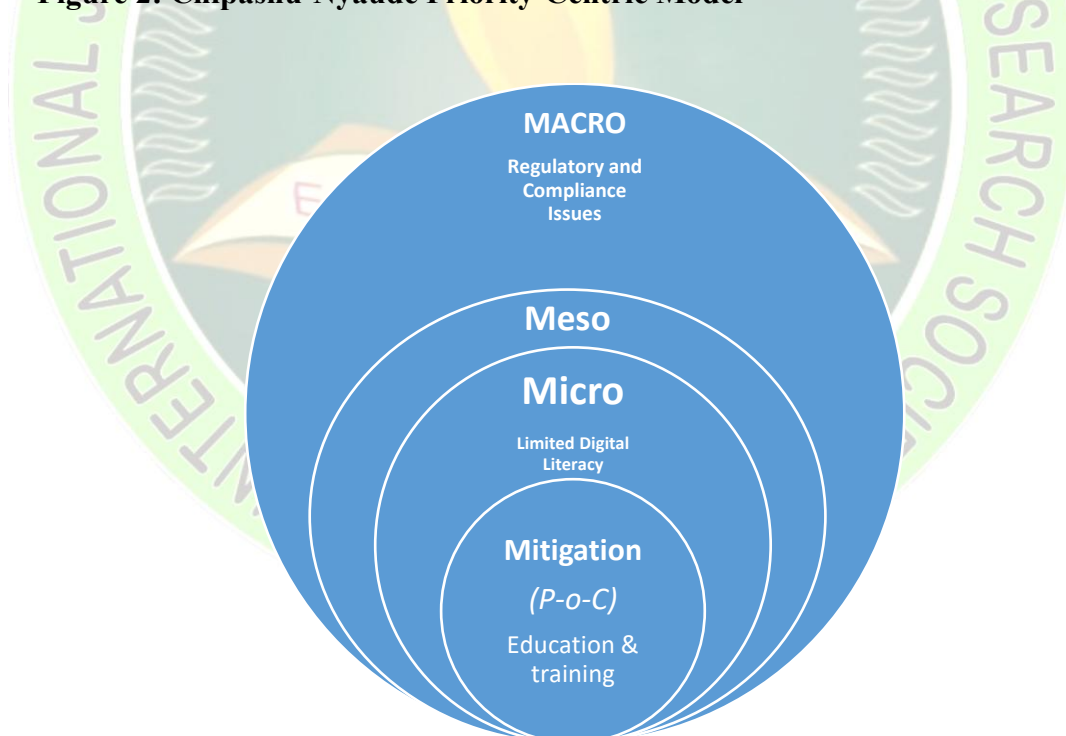
-94% of participants favoured low-cost or free services that address the financial restrictions of Marondera's women businesses.

12 Major Findings

- a) Women had inadequate awareness and apprehension of digital technology, despite their potential benefits for businesses.
- b) Without consistent energy, women were unable to charge their devices, access digital technology, online training, and education, restricting their capacity to build digital skills.
- c) Government and stakeholders had not provided adequate awareness campaigns or training on digital platforms.
- d) Women were unaware of the advantages of digital techniques for entrepreneurship.
- e) Women in Marondera faced patriarchal norms and prejudices, hindering their capacity to embrace and use digital technology.
- f) Women struggled to purchase digital technology due to their high costs.

13. Contribution to Knowledge

Figure 2: Chipashu-Nyaude Priority-Centric Model



Interpretation of the Model

Chipashu-Nyaude Priority –Centric Model

1. It is a model which highlights the key impediments to digital practices. It has three levels, that is, Micro, Meso and Macro. This model is inspired by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory.

This theory represents a convergence of biological, psychological and social sciences, (Crawford, 2020). In this case, limited digital literacy, lack of leadership support and regulatory and compliance issues would all impact on impediments to digital practices.

2. This priority –centric model is coined by the authors after realization that despite so many arguments on impediments, this model puts the impediments voices into three levels and prioritizes the impediments because of their catastrophic magnitude and likelihood.

As such the main principles identified and prioritized (as shown in the model, are:

Micro- Limited Digital Literacy: Employees may lack the necessary skills to effectively use digital tools and platforms.

Meso-Lack of Leadership Support: Without commitment from management, digital initiatives may lack direction and resources.

Macro -Regulatory and Compliance Issues: Industry-specific regulations regarding data privacy and security can complicate digital adoption

Point-of –Convergence (P-o-C) _ The authors creatively coin what they call P-o-C implying the point at which the impediments can be mitigated. The model relies with what it terms Universal Treatment Mechanism (UTM) and in this case education and training remains the powerful bullet to mitigate the impact of impediments.

14. Discussion

Unreliable electricity supply and limited internet connectivity in Marondera made it difficult for women in Marondera to access digital technologies. The high cost of digital technologies and internet services was another challenge for women in Marondera. Women were expected to prioritise domestic caregiving responsibilities over economic or entrepreneurial activities that's why they had limited digital literacy.

15. Conclusion

Basing on the findings and results, it was concluded that digital literacy training was a requirement as well as prioritizing the infrastructures for electricity and internet. Mentorship programs and community engagement were needed to promote women's digital practices. Financial inclusion and affordable digital solutions were required to support women's digital entrepreneurship. Community engagement on digital technology was a priority.

16. Recommendations

- a) The government in partnership with local organisations need to collaborate and provide digital literacy training programmes for women in Marondera.

- b) Awareness campaigns by government are a priority to educate women about the benefits of digital practices and online resources.
- c) Electricity infrastructure in Marondera need to be upgraded in order to provide a reliable power supply.
- d) Internet connectivity needs to be improved as well as lowered the tariffs.
- e) There is need to engage with local communities and leaders to promote digital practices and address socio-cultural barriers.

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