IMPACT OF DIGITAL LITERACY ON WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS WITH IN KUDUMBASREE UNITS

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Abstract

The rise of e-commerce has transformed global economies, offering wide opportunities for entrepreneurship with minimal overhead and extensive market reach. Women entrepreneurs, especially within the Kudumbasree units in Kerala, are increasingly entering this digital arena, challenging traditional gender roles and contributing to economic growth. Understanding how digital literacy influences their success is crucial. Digital literacy, empowers entrepreneurs to reach broader audiences, optimize operations, innovate business models, and stay competitive. This study focuses on the current digital literacy levels among women entrepreneurs in Kudumbasree units, the obstacles they face, and the impact of digital literacy on their business growth and market reach. The primary challenges include cost, lack of training, and technical issues, with cultural barriers and safety concerns also playing roles. The positive correlation between digital skills and market reach underscores the potential of digital literacy to enhance business growth. By addressing these challenges through targeted interventions-such as training programs, financial assistance, and technical support-this study aims to empower women entrepreneurs within Kudumbasree units, driving economic growth and promoting inclusivity in Kerala's digital economy.

Keywords:- digital literacy, women entrepreneurs, kudumbasree, e-commerce, economic growth.

The rise of e-commerce has fundamentally transformed global economies, ushering in an era where digital transactions and online marketplaces are integral to commerce. This shift has democratized entrepreneurship, offering unprecedented opportunities for individuals to launch businesses with minimal overhead and global reach. Concurrently, there has been a notable rise in women entrepreneurs entering this digital arena, challenging traditional gender roles and contributing significantly to economic growth. This trend underscores the importance of understanding how digital literacy influences their success in navigating and thriving within the e-commerce landscape.

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In today's digital economy, digital literacy stands as a crucial determinant of success for individuals and businesses alike. It encompasses the ability to effectively navigate, utilize, and leverage digital technologies and platforms. With the rapid proliferationof e-commerce, social media, and digital marketing channels, proficiency in digital literacy has become indispensable. It empowers entrepreneurs to reach broader audiences, optimize operations, innovate business models, and stay competitive in a constantly evolving marketplace. Moreover, digital literacy fosters resilience, enabling individuals to adapt to technological advancements and capitalize on emerging opportunities. Thus, investing in digital literacy not only enhances individual capabilities but also contributes to economic empowerment and sustainable growth in the digital age.

The target audience for this study includes women entrepreneurs from Kudumbasree units. Their interest stems from the profound shift towards digital economies, where understanding the impact of digital literacy on women entrepreneurs is critical for shaping policies, enhancing support mechanisms, fostering innovation, and promoting economic inclusivity in the digital age.

Statement of the Problem

The limited digital literacy among women entrepreneurs within Kudumbasree units in Kerala presents a significant barrier to their full participation in the digital economy. This study aims to comprehensively assess the current level of digital literacy among these women and identify the obstacles they face in adopting and leveraging digital technologies. By understanding these challenges, we can develop targeted interventions to empower women entrepreneurs, enabling them to harness the potential of digital tools for business growth, increased income, and broader market reach.

Significance of the Study

Kerala's Kudumbasree program empowers women through self-help groups and micro-entrepreneurship. This study can highlight how digital literacy can further enhance their entrepreneurial success. Despite high literacy rates, a digital divide might exist within Kudumbasree units. The study can identify areas where women lack digital skills and recommend solutions.

By equipping women with digital skills, the study can contribute to the growth and sustainability of women-owned businesses within Kudumbasree units, ultimately impacting Kerala's economy. Digital literacy helps women entrepreneurs leverage online marketing, e-commerce platforms, and digital tools, increasing their competitiveness in the local and potentially global marketplace.

Financial Independence: The study can demonstrate how digital literacy empowers women entrepreneurs to achieve greater financial independence, contributing to overall family well-being and social development in Kerala. Thriving women-owned businesses within Kudumbasree units can create jobs, stimulate local economies, and contribute to a more vibrant and inclusive society in Kerala.

Targeted Programs: The study's findings can inform the development of targeted digital literacy programs specifically designed for women entrepreneurs within Kudumbasree units, maximizing their impact.

Overall, this study has the potential to be highly relevant and valuable for Kerala. By demonstrating the link between digital literacy and the success of women entrepreneurs within Kudumbasree units, it can empower women, drive economic growth, and contribute to Kerala's social development.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study limited to Kerala only. The critical evaluation is done focus on women entrepreneurs within Kerala's Kudumbasree micro-enterprises. The study will assess their current digital literacy skills, the challenges they face in adopting digital tools, and how digital literacy impacts their business growth, and market reach. This combined approach aims to understand the current landscape and potential of digital technology for empowering these women entrepreneurs.

Objectives of the Study

1. To evaluate the current level of digital literacy among women entrepreneurs within Kudumbasree units in Kerala.

2. To understand the obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs in adopting digital technologies.

3. To examine how digital literacy influences business growth, and market reach.

Literature Review

1. Bhatt, D. (2023). Digital literacy training for women entrepreneurs is crucial, especially in rural areas. COVID-19 disproportionately affected women entrepreneurs, with many facing business declines. A training initiative for 15 rural women demonstrated successful business management and growth through digital tools.

2. Gokhru, N., & Kanchan, P. (2023). In a study on Impact of SHGS on Women's Financial Inclusion. Since 2012, India has prioritized financial inclusion (access to affordable banking, credit, and insurance) for all. This is essential for the poor. The government has launched programs like Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana to expand financial access to the underserved, aiming to boost the nation's growth. This study examines how these programs impact saving habits in a Gujarat village.

3. Azeez N.P, A., Akhtar S.M., J., & Banu M., N. (2022) examined the relationship between demographic factors and digital financial literacy in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh. They found that age, gender, education level, and socioeconomic status significantly influence digital financial literacy. The study emphasizes the need for financial training programs to consider these factors to enhance digital financial literacy, especially in rural India. Data were collected from 500 respondents using a multi-stage sampling technique.

4. De Zwaan, L., Lee, C., Liu, Y., & Chardon, T. (2017). Overconfidence in Financial Literacy: studies that financial literacy is crucial for financial planners to

assess clients' financial capacity. Overconfidence can lead clients to mistakenly believe they understand advice. An online survey of university students measured subjective and objective financial literacy to identify overconfidence. Generally, respondents did not overestimate their financial literacy. However, those with English as a second language were significantly more overconfident. These findings can help planners identify overconfident clients.

5. Agnew, J.R., Bateman, H., & Thorp, S. (2013). Financial literacy and numeracy are linked to financial behaviours. This study examined their relationship with retirement planning in Australia using a survey of 1,024 people. Results show financial literacy levels similar to other countries, with lower levels among young, less educated, unemployed individuals. Importantly, financial literacy positively impacts retirement planning.

6. Chen, J., Jiang, J., & Liu, Y. (2018). Gender differences in loan performance on a Chinese peer-to-peer lending platform were studied. Female investors had higher default rates and lower returns compared to male investors. However, this disparity disappeared among female investors with high education, income, or finance/IT jobs.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design:

The study employs a cross-sectional research design to capture a snapshot of the digital literacy levels, challenges in adopting digital technologies, and the impact of digital literacy on business growth, market reach among women entrepreneurs in Kudumbasree units in Kerala at a specific point in time.

2. Sampling:

The sample consists of 50 women entrepreneurs selected using a stratified random sampling technique. Stratification is based on factors such as age, education level, type of business, and geographic location within Kerala. This ensures a representative sample across different demographics and business types.

3. Data Collection:

Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire focusing on digital literacy, obstacles to adopting digital technologies, and business outcomes. The questionnaire includes sections on the use of digital tools, frequency of use, perceived challenges, and metrics of business growth such as income and market reach.

4. Demographic Variables:

Demographic information collected includes age, education level, type of business, geographic location, and years of experience in entrepreneurship. This allows for a detailed analysis of the sample's composition and helps identify patterns and correlations between digital literacy and business outcomes.

5. Data Analysis:

Descriptive statistics such as percentages, rankings, and means are used to analyze demographic variables and summarize the responses. Inferential statistics i.e., Correlation, is employed to identify relationships and differences between variables. This analysis helps to understand the impact of digital literacy

on business growth, and market reach, as well as to identify the main obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs in adopting digital technologies.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

1. Social media usage is the most commonly possessed digital skill, with half of the valid respondents indicating proficiency in this area. This suggests that many women entrepreneurs are familiar with using social media platforms, likely for marketing and communication purposes.

2. Internet browsing is the second most common skill, with 30 per cent of valid respondents reporting proficiency. This indicates that a significant portion of women entrepreneurs are capable of using the internet for research, information gathering, and possibly online transactions.

3. Basic computer skills are possessed by 10 per cent of valid respondents. This relatively low percentage

suggests that a smaller number of women entrepreneurs have foundational computer skills, which are essential for more advanced digital tasks.

4. Skills in e-commerce and digital marketing are also possessed by 10 per cent of valid respondents. This indicates that only a few women entrepreneurs are engaged in online sales and digital marketing activities, which are crucial for expanding market reach and business growth.

Summary and Evaluationof Digital Literacy Levels:

The analysis of the digital skills possessed by women entrepreneurs within Kudumbasree units in Kerala indicates the following:

- **High Proficiency in Social Media Usage**: 50 per cent of the respondents are proficient in using social media, highlighting a strong presence in this basic yet crucial area of digital literacy.

Table 5.1

Digital skills possess

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Social Media Usage	25	22.7	50.0	50.0
	Internet Browsing	15	13.6	30.0	80.0
	Basic Computer Skills	5	4.5	10.0	90.0
	E-Commerce Digital Marketing	5	4.5	10.0	100.0
	Total	50	45.5	100.0	-
Total		110	100.0	-	-

Source: Primary Data

- *Moderate Proficiency in Internet Browsing*: 30 per cent of the respondents possess internet browsing skills, showing a reasonable level of ability to navigate the web and utilize online resources.

- *Limited Proficiency in Basic Computer Skills*: Only 10 per cent of the respondents have basic computer skills, indicating a gap in foundational digital literacy that could hinder more advanced digital activities.

- *Limited Proficiency in E-commerce and Digital Marketing*: Another 10 per cent have skills in e-commerce and digital marketing, suggesting that few women entrepreneurs are leveraging these advanced digital tools for business growth.

Obstacles Faced By Women Entrepreneurs

To understand the obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs in adopting digital technologies, frequency table detailing the reported challenges is analysed.

1. A significant proportion of respondents (24 per cent) indicate that cost is a barrier to adopting digital technologies. This suggests that financial constraints are a common obstacle.

2. Cultural barriers are reported by 8 per cent of valid respondents, indicating that while less common than other obstacles, cultural factors still play a role in hindering digital adoption for some entrepreneurs.

3. Lack of training is a major challenge, reported by 30 per cent of valid respondents. This highlights a significant need for training programs to improve digital literacy and skills among women entrepreneurs.

4. Technical issues are the most frequently reported challenge, with 32 per cent of valid respondents identifying this as a barrier. This underscores the importance of addressing technical problems to facilitate the adoption of digital technologies.

5. Safety concern is reported by 6 per cent of valid respondents, making it the least common challenge. Although less frequently mentioned, ensuring safety is critical to fostering trust and confidence in digital technologies.

Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis results provide insights into the relationships between digital skills possessed by women entrepreneurs, their market reach, and the support and resources available to them. Here's an analysis of the results:

1. Correlation between Digital Skills Possessed and Market Reach:

The Pearson correlation coefficient is $(r = 0.290)$. The p-value (Sig. 2-tailed) is 0.041, which is less than 0.05.

This indicates a statistically significant positive correlation between the digital skills possessed by the women entrepreneurs and their market reach. As digital skills increase, market reach tends to increase as well.

Table 5.2
Challenges

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Cost	12	10.9	24.0	24.0
	Cultural Barriers	4	3.6	8.0	32.0
	Lack of Training	15	13.6	30.0	62.0
	Technical Issues	16	14.5	32.0	94.0
	Safety Concern	3	2.7	6.0	100.0
	Total	50	45.5	100.0	-
Total		110	100.0	-	-

Source: Primary Data

2. Correlation between Digital Skills Possessed and Support & Resources:

The Pearson correlation coefficient is $r = 0.000$. The p-value (Sig. 2-tailed) is 1.000, which is much greater than 0.05. This indicates no correlation between the digital skills possessed and the support and resources available. Digital skills do not seem to be related to the support and resources these women entrepreneurs receive.

3. Correlation between Market Reach and Support & Resources:

The Pearson correlation coefficient is $r = 0.039$. The p-value (Sig. 2-tailed) is 0.786, which is much greater than 0.05. This indicates no significant correlation between market reach and support and resources. The market reach of women entrepreneurs does not seem to be influenced by the support and resources they receive.

Summary

• There is a significant positive correlation between digital skills possessed and market reach, suggesting that better digital skills are associated with wider market reach.

• There is no significant correlation between digital skills possessed and support & resources, indicating that having digital skills does not necessarily relate to the level of support and resources available.

• There is no significant correlation between market reach and support & resources, suggesting that market reach is independent of the support and resources available to the women entrepreneurs.

• This analysis can help in understanding where to focus efforts for improving market reach and providing necessary support and resources.

Table 5.3

Correlations

		Digital skills possess	Market Reach	Support& Resources
5. Digital skills possess"	Pearson Correlation	1	.290*	.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.041	1.000
	N	50	50	50
15. Market Reach	Pearson Correlation	.290*	1	.039
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.041		.786
	N	50	50	50
11. Support & Resources	Pearson Correlation	.000	.039	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000	.786	-
	N	50	50	50
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				

Source: Primary Data

Findings

1. The analysis shows that 50 per cent of respondents are proficient in social media usage, 30 per cent in internet browsing, 10 per cent in basic computer skills, and 10 per cent in e-commerce and digital marketing. This indicates a varied level of digital literacy, with strengths in social media usage but significant gaps in basic computer skills and more advanced digital literacy areas.

2. The analysis reveals that the primary challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in adopting digital technologies include cost (24 per cent), lack of training (30 per cent), and technical issues (32 per cent), with cultural barriers (8 per cent) and safety concerns (6 per cent) also playing a role. Addressing these obstacles requires a multifaceted approach that includes financial support, comprehensive training programs, and reliable technical assistance. Ensuring safety and overcoming cultural barriers will further enhance the digital adoption and business growth among these entrepreneurs.

3. The correlation analysis indicates a significant positive correlation between digital skills possessed and market reach (Pearson correlation coefficient $(r = 0.290)$, p-value $= 0.041$). This suggests that improved digital literacy is associated with increased market reach. However, there is no significant correlation between digital skills and support & resources, or between market reach and support & resources, indicating that other factors might also influence business growth and market reach.

Suggestions

1. Expand Training in Basic Computer Skills*:* Provide training programs focused on enhancing basic computer skills, which are essential for more complex digital tasks and overall digital literacy.

2. Increase E-commerce and Digital Marketing Training: Offer specialized training in e-commerce and digital marketing to enable more women entrepreneurs to expand their market reach and grow their businesses online.

3. Leverage Social Media Proficiency: Build on the existing proficiency in social media by offering advanced courses that teach strategic use of social media for business promotion and customer engagement.

4. Enhance Internet Browsing Skills: Provide workshops that improve internet browsing skills, including advanced search techniques, evaluating online information, and using online tools for business productivity.

5. Technical Support: Enhance technical support services to resolve technical issues promptly. Invest in reliable and user-friendly digital infrastructure to minimize technical barriers.

6. Training Programs: Develop comprehensive and accessible training programs focused on digital literacy and practical digital skills. Provide continuous learning opportunities to keep entrepreneurs updated with evolving digital tools and technologies.

7. Financial Assistance: Explore financial aid options, subsidies, or affordable solutions to reduce the cost barrier for adopting digital technologies.

8. Cultural Sensitization: Conduct awareness campaigns to address cultural barriers and promote the benefits of digital adoption within the community.

9. Safety Measures: Ensure digital platforms and tools are secure, with robust privacy and safety features. Educate entrepreneurs on best practices for digital safety and security.

10. Continuous Assessment and Feedback: Develop a structured feedback mechanism to continuously assess the effectiveness of digital literacy programs and adapt strategies accordingly.

By addressing these obstacles through targeted interventions, it is possible to enhance the adoption and effective use of digital technologies among women entrepreneurs within Kudumbasree units.

Conclusion

The analysis of digital literacy among women entrepreneurs within Kudumbasree units in Kerala reveals a nuanced landscape of skills and challenges. While there is notable proficiency in social media usage, which facilitates basic digital communication and marketing, other critical areas such as basic computer skills and e-commerce remain underdeveloped. This disparity highlights the need for comprehensive digital literacy programs that go beyond basic skills and encompass more advanced digital competencies.

The obstacles identified, including financial constraints, cultural barriers, lack of training, technical issues, and safety

concerns, underscore the multifaceted nature of challenges faced by these entrepreneurs. Addressing these barriers requires a holistic approach that combines financial support, cultural sensitivity, extensive training programs, reliable technical assistance, and secure digital environments. Importantly, the study establishes a positive correlation between digital literacy and market reach, indicating that improved digital skills can help entrepreneurs expand their market presence. However, the direct impact of digital literacy on overall business growth, which includes factors like revenue and profitability, remains less clear. This suggests that while digital skills are crucial,

they must be complemented by adequate support and resources to drive comprehensive business growth.

In conclusion, enhancing digital literacy among women entrepreneurs in Kudumbasree units is vital for their business expansion and market reach. However, achieving significant business growth requires addressing the broader spectrum of challenges they face. Policymakers, educators, and support organizations should collaborate to create an enabling environment that combines skill development with robust support systems, ensuring that these entrepreneurs can fully leverage digital technologies for sustainable growth and success.

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