

## ROLES OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN EMPOWERING MICRO SCALE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN GOMBE STATE, NIGERIA

***Aishatu Mohammed LAWAL,***

*Department of Business Administration, Gombe State University, Nigeria*

*Ashmad450@gsu.edu.ng*

***Isyaka Mohammed SALISU, (CA),***

*Department of Business Administration, Gombe State University, Nigeria*

*isyakam1@gmail.com, isyaka@gsu.edu.ng*

**&**

***Adama BAPPA-YAYA,***

*Department of Business Administration, Gombe State University, Nigeria*

*adamabappayaya@gsu.edu.ng*

### ***Abstract***

*Despite various efforts aimed at inclusive development both at the national and international levels, gender inequality is still prevalent in many developing countries especially in the field of entrepreneurship. This is particularly evident patriarchal societies such as north eastern Nigeria where women micro entrepreneurs face several socio-cultural and institutional challenges. The aim of this study was to assess the role social media plays in empowering micro scale women entrepreneurs in Gombe State Nigeria. A random sample of 92 women entrepreneurs operating in both old and new markets of Gombe metropolis were chosen for the study. A structured questionnaire was designed using to collect data from the respondents. The study found that social media is empowering women entrepreneurs in Gombe metropolis by increasing their social capital and self-efficacy. This study recommends that the government should further educate the women entrepreneurs especially micro scale entrepreneurs on the prospects of social media in enhancing business purposes, and hence their ability to contribute actively to community and national development whilst also training them on how to overcome potential risks on social media platforms. The study further recommends that, the government should liaise with the telecommunication companies to provide a good quality internet connectivity to their customers in order to enhance business activities.*

***Keywords:*** Empowerment, Entrepreneurs, Women, Social Media.

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## **1. Introduction**

In recent time, there has seen a surge in entrepreneurial activities (Acs, 2010). This increase can be attributed to the rapid changes occurring globally that provide for entrepreneurial opportunities for both men and women (Langowitz and Minniti, 2007). Malach et al., (2010) argued that the rate of women starting businesses is twice that of men globally. This argument strengthens the position of Afrah & Fabiha (2017) who purported that the role entrepreneurship plays especially in developing nations is immense.

In Nigeria, women entrepreneurs contributes to high economic growth because women constitute about 25-30 percent of registered businesses (Halkias et al., 2011). However, In the Northern part of the country and Gombe State in particular, there is a widely held belief that women's primary responsibility is to fulfil her role as a mother and housewife. As a result of this, Zivkovic (2014) notes that this is the major factor hindering Northern Nigerian women from starting businesses or venturing into entrepreneurship.

Small scale businesses are essential in almost every economy in the world and women entrepreneurs are increasingly being seen as key drivers for future economic development and especially in developing countries like Nigeria. Yet, the barriers that women entrepreneurs face in third world nations mean that there is a need for more research focused on how they could be empowered and one of such avenues is the social media. In Gombe State, women micro-entrepreneurs face numerous challenges relating to culture, tradition and religion which constrain even the most gifted entrepreneurs from going out. This adds to the difficulties in raising capital (financial constraints) to own or rent business stores to run entrepreneurial ventures. Could the advent of social media (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc.) help in tackling some of these challenges? Most studies have reflected a consensus on the important role of social media in business opportunities and marketing of goods and services.

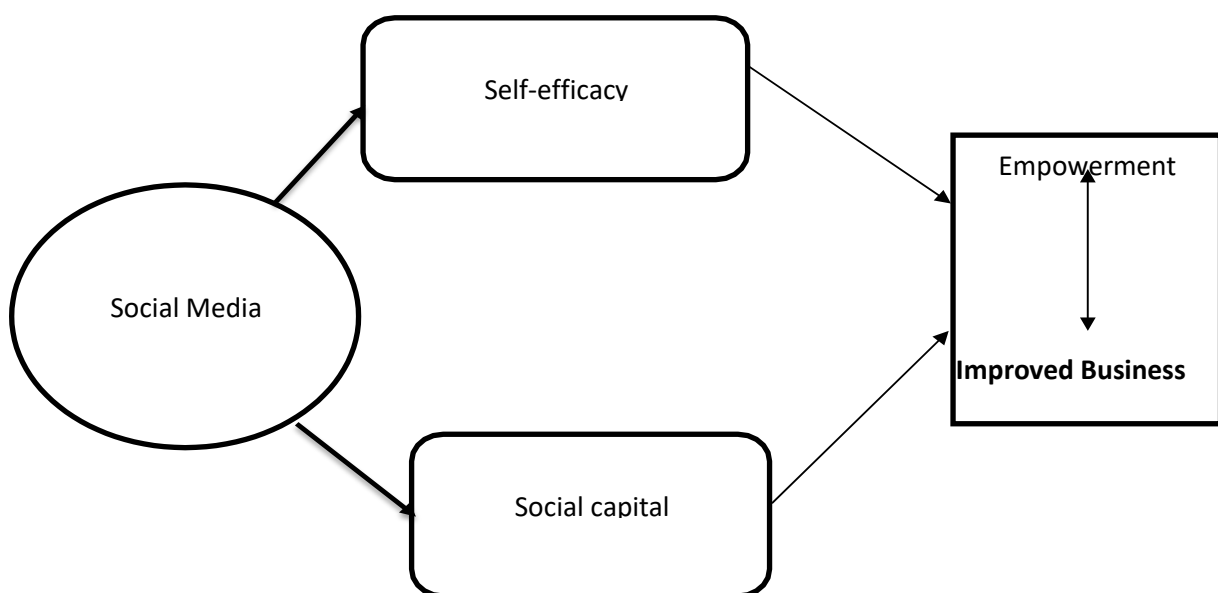
The ICT age is an interesting era that promises to bridge the gap between the global north and south mostly through empowerment and the sharing of knowledge (Gurumurthy, 2012) with its impact already being recorded in places as reported by (Beninger *et al.*, 2014). ICT in recent age has increased the potentials of entrepreneurs operating on various scales and had greatly increased the potentials for women empowerment. However, despite this recorded achievement, there are also gender-related challenges linked to ICT. For example, based on ITU report, (2016), the regional gender gap is highest in Africa (23%), compared to America

(2%). In developing countries, the internet penetration among females is 37.4% compared to the 45.0% in male and regarding internet usage, 16.8% of men compared to 15.8% for females.

Most of the existing literature on women’s business ownership is focused on entrepreneurial development in developed countries (Kantor, 2001; Minniti and Arenius, 2003; Mueller, 2004; Minniti and Naudé, 2010). Few studies have been conducted in developing countries contexts, and to date, very scarce data is available on the role of women entrepreneurs especially in Gombe State. It is evident that to provide empirical support for certain policy options to help women; more studies have to be conducted especially in the face of arguments that female entrepreneurs in Gombe State are confronted with the challenge of running competitive businesses due to their relatively low education and skill levels (Woldie and Adersua, 2004). . Nonetheless, there is still a rarity in literature as to the role of social media in empowering micro-women entrepreneurs especially in a developing country context like Nigeria. This study attempts to contribute to filling that gap. The study looks at the role of social media in empowering women micro-entrepreneurs in North-Eastern Nigeria and Gombe State in particular.

H<sub>i</sub> Social media does not have any significant effect on Micro scale women in Gombe state.

## 2. Conceptualization



**Figure 1: Conceptual Model**

From the model, social media empowers entrepreneurial women through self-efficacy and social capital. About self-efficacy, they contend that when women entrepreneurs are exposed to social media platforms, they can imbibe messages and skills which have a positive impact on their ability to define their career objectives in life and garner the requisite resources to pursue those objectives.

### **Social Media**

As earlier given the definition of social media in chapter 2. The remarkable growth in the use of social media is attributed to the relative ease of use of the tool because it is not limited to a specific device (Baruah, 2012). It is a valuable tool because it permits the ease use of human networks, it also supports interaction session rather than broadcast communications, and it also facilitates not only text but also video, audio and multimedia means of facilitating communications (Landsbergen, 2010). There are various social media tools that can be used to market products by women entrepreneurs. Social media channels such as Facebook, YouTube, Google, and Twitter, enables customers to be reached almost anywhere and anytime (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2010). Social media is a useful tool for businesses due to its instant messaging, low-cost of information disclosure, and wide networking (Genç and Öksüz, 2015).

### **Social Capital**

Social capital is defined as tangible or virtual resources, which individuals gain through associating with their networks (Mamun *et al.*, 2016). Women entrepreneurship is recognized as the key contributor to employment opportunities and sustainable economic development (Mamun *et al.*, 2016). Social media was used by entrepreneurs to increase their interaction with customers, to access more information from other businesses and access more resources through ideas and opportunities through a social network (Shabbir *et al.*, 2016) This is because it is all about socializing and sharing opinions. Social media can assist micro scale businesses to expand their businesses through a large range of weak ties (Zuwarimwe and Kirsten, 2010). It could be theorized that the use of social media by women entrepreneurs increases their social capital leading to improved marketing of their products (Davidsson and Honig, 2003). The internet was found to maintain stronger relationships with large social networks (Wellman *et al.*, 2001). Moreover, social media is also seen as a tool that helps to maintain close ties between close relations and improve such ties with distant relationships (Boyd and Ellison, 2007).

## **Self Efficacy**

Self-efficacy can be described as the process transforming the inner perception and their ability to be independent and make choices on their own (Beninger *et al.*, 2014). Social media is said to increase women entrepreneurs self-efficacy. The idea of self-efficacy as we have discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, the exposure of women to social media platforms provide the opportunity to learn from others successes and failure as well as the means through which they were able to overcome common challenges. This way, women entrepreneurs do not feel isolated in their feelings and choices. Hence, they would be encouraged to step forward and own their decisions. Therefore it could be agreed that social media increases women feelings of ownership and making choices as well as improving the business image (Shabbir *et al.*, 2016). This will, in turn, improve the marketing of their business.

## **Improved Business**

By improved business, we are referring to the possibility for enterprises to sustain themselves through profit making, or breaking even and the ability to withstand shocks. Relating this to the present study, in cases where women enterprises are unable to break even or stand the risk of collapse as a result of institutional and sociocultural barriers, we could argue that their businesses have improved if they can make a turnaround (Ajimobi and Kyobe, 2016). This by no means suggests that profitability is the only indicator of improved business performance. As the discussed above with the use of social media, micro-scale women entrepreneurs enhance their businesses through social capital and self-efficacy which reflect in various forms including better marketing ability, access to more cost-effective means of doing business, and sustainable profit-making (Ali, 2011). Based on the analysis of the framework in chapter 4 it will be shown that social media improves the businesses of women entrepreneurs.

## **Women Entrepreneurs in North Eastern Nigeria**

Globally, new businesses are established on a daily basis. Indeed, it has been estimated that over 200million people are starting up a new business across the world (Kelley *et al.*, 2012). Although there is evidence that some of the businesses reported on in the above study are owned or operated by women, it is also suggested that out of the figures women are mostly engaged in starting businesses in informal sectors. Flowing from the above, some studies have concluded that women entrepreneurs account for a sizable majority of small-scale entrepreneurs in Africa (Hemalatha *et al.*, 2014). There is some suggestion that the seeming

high visibility of women in entrepreneurial start-ups is a natural consequence of their lack of access in the formal sector (Naser et al., 2009). Though this point may require further interrogation, this current study is rather interested in how women employ innovative platforms such as social media for business and empowerment purposes and the challenges that confront them as a result. Women entrepreneurs engage their small businesses with small or no employees to assist them. The fact that women-owned businesses are smaller, grow less, and often employ no employees supports the significance of the business owner's entrepreneurial capabilities (Revell-Love and Revell-Love, 2016). Most women experience more obstacles compared to their men. Azmat, (2013) argued that generally, women entrepreneurs experience some barriers and limitations in exploiting their abilities, unlike their men counterparts. This point underscores the need for addressing the plight of women entrepreneurs in ways that ultimately benefit the nation as a whole.

However, it appears that although issues relating to gender inequality have been variously highlighted, not much has been achieved through traditional, often formalized processes, of addressing such disparities. In Northern Nigeria, it has been reported that women entrepreneurs face numerous challenges, little has been done to address these challenges, with the result that not only are women frustrated in pursuing their business but also the gender gap keeps widening (Adekola and Olawole-Isaac, 2014). It, therefore, follows that it is imperative for new ways to be explored to address the challenges of women especially in patriarchal contexts such as northern Nigeria.

Arguably, recent observation in the literature about the potential of social media to complement, or even serve as a replacement for, formal processes of empowering women in businesses offers some window of hope. In the next sub section, we provide a detailed discussion of the challenges cited above following we explore the literature on the role of social media in empowering women entrepreneurs.

### **The Role of Social Media in Women Entrepreneurship**

Since the advent of social media, entrepreneurs have often been compelled to continue to adopt and utilize social media to manage their businesses. This shift in, or rather add to, a business communication strategy is attributed to the benefit derived from using it because the applications in social media are user-friendly; users can tag pictures and offer information of products to likely customers with a single click.

This is most common with women entrepreneurs who mostly engage in informal sectors which are cheap and easier to manage. Social networking sites have produced a new generation of entrepreneurs, permitting their businesses to be established and promoted at a very low cost. This undoubtedly gives everyone an opportunity to succeed (Indrupati and Henari, 2012). This has significantly reduced the number of unemployed in the society

Social media is said to have increased communication with customers. Mangold and Faulds, (2009) argued that social media is a mix component of business promotion because in traditional sense it allows entrepreneurs to talk to their customers while in a non-traditional sense it enables customers to communicate directly with one another. Similarly, Jagongo and Kinyua, (2013) argued that social media tools offer greater access to market and Customer relationship which in turn have a substantial impact on the growth of SMEs. However, the pricing of products and innovativeness part offered by social media have had a very slight impact on growth in the SMEs.

In a research of the use of social media in the Arabian gulf, (Indrupati and Henari, 2012) found that over 87 per cent of the entrepreneurs interviewed stated that their social media profiles have been helping their businesses while over 98 per cent said they believe that social media are in fact helping all entrepreneurs. Also, in a similar study in Indonesia carried out interviews with women who use Facebook for selling products and gives evidence that the social media does foster the entrepreneurial activities of these women (Utomo, 2016).

Social media has transformed the means in which small businesses maintain and build customer and their stakeholder relationships. Women entrepreneurs who are mainly engaged in small business use social media to improve their business. It was found that Small businesses now use social media to increase their reputation, strengthen their brand and respond to their customers and suppliers (Jones, 2010).

### **3. Methodology**

The study adopted survey research design which allows the collection of data from the respondents in the field; describe, analyze, interprets the results of the analysis, and make relevant recommendation.

Primary data was sourced from structured questionnaire questions that were sent to 92 women entrepreneurs who use social media for their business. Use of questionnaire would help to

collect valid and dependable data that are significant to the research questions above since the respondents are given the opportunity to write their views (Saunders et al., 2009). The questionnaire was structured to include both open ended and multiple choice questions

An observation approach was also employed. Data was sourced through observation to notice the online interaction of these women entrepreneurs and their customers using social media as a marketing tool on their social media account.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondent**

S/N	Characteristic	Respondent Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Market Location	Old Market	29	31
		New Market	63	69
		<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100</b>
2	Period of Business	Below 1 year	24	26
		1 – 5 years	63	69
		5 – 10 years	5	5
		More than 10 years	0	0
		<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100</b>
3	Social Media Usage	Facebook	30	33
		WhatsApp	9	10
		Instagram	28	30
		Twitter	25	27
		Others	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100</b>	
4	Age	Below 20 Years	0	0
		20 – 30 Years	63	68
		31 – 40 Years	19	21
		41 – 50 Years	10	11
		Above 50 Years	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Field Survey 2022

As shown from the result obtained from the survey,, 31% of the respondents are entrepreneurs operating in old market in Gombe local government, while 69% represent the respondent from new market. Furthermore, it was noted that the majority of surveyed women entrepreneurs operated micro scale businesses. 26% of the respondents have been in the business in less than one year, 69% of the respondents operate their business for almost five years while 5% of the respondents have being in their business for over 5years.

It could be seen above that 33% of the respondents used Facebook 30% uses Twitter While Instagram for their business, compared to 27% who use Twitter and 10% WhatsApp as their



major social media platform for their business. It was noted that none of the respondents chose others as a platform marketing their business. This was surprising and led to the researcher to ask for some of the respondents for not choosing other social media.

Concerning the ages of women entrepreneurs, From the table below 68% of the respondents are between the age of 20-30years, while 21% of the respondents are over the age of 30years but below the age of 50 while 11% of the respondents refuse to disclose their age.

#### 4. Data Presentation

**Table 2:** Self Efficacy disaggregated by social network and improving Business in Gombe Metropolis

Self-Efficacy Themes	N	Min	Max	Mean Scores	Decision
Accessing a wider market	92	1	5	3.2	Accepted
Boost more confidence	92	1	5	3.3	Accepted
Empowerment	92	1	5	3.1	Accepted
Reaching target audience	92	1	5	3.2	Accepted
Self-independent	92	1	5	3.6	Accepted
Sectional Mean				3.3	

Source: Field Survey 2022

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of Self Efficacy by social network and improving Business in Gombe Metropolis. They are accessing a wider market, boost more confidence, empowerment, reaching target audience and self-independent, on improving Business in Gombe Metropolis. All the variables of the study were measured on a five-point Likert scale. Table 2 revealed a mean response of 3.2 for are accessing a wider market, 3.3 for boost more confidence and 31 for empowerment, 3.2 reaching target audience and finally mean of 3.6 for self-independent. Empowerment has the lowest mean response, while self-independent has the heights mean response. The sectional mean of 3.3 indicates that Self Efficacy has effect on the improving Business in Gombe Metropolis.

Table 3 below highlight the evidence from this study of how social media improves social capital.

**Table 3:** Themes of Social media and Social Capital

<b>Social Capital</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean Scores</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Building bonding social capital	92	1	5	3.6	Accepted
Building bridging social capital	92	1	5	3.3	Accepted
Gaining new customers	92	1	5	3.4	Accepted
Improving connections	92	1	5	3.2	Accepted
Tool for advertising	92	1	5	3.1	Accepted
<b>Sectional Mean</b>				<b>3.2</b>	Accepted

Source: Field Survey 2022

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of Social capital by social network and improving Business in Gombe Metropolis. They are Building bonding social capital, Building bridging social capital, Gaining new customers, Improving connections and Tool for advertising, on improving Business in Gombe Metropolis. All the variables of the study were measured on a five-point Likert scale. Table 3 revealed a mean response of 3.6 for Building bonding social capital, 3.3 for Building bridging social capital and 3.4 for Gaining new customers, 3.2 Improving connections and finally mean of 3.1 for Tool for advertising. Tool for advertising has the lowest mean response, while Building bonding social capital has the heights mean response. The sectional mean of 3.2 indicates that Social capital has effect on the improving Business in Gombe Metropolis.

H<sub>i</sub> Social media does not have any significant effect on Micro scale women in Gombe state.

**Table 4:** Contingency Table

<b>OPTIONS</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Self-Efficacy	73	66	56	73	66	334
Social Capital	19	26	36	19	26	126
<b>Total</b>	92	92	92	92	92	460

$$\text{Expected frequency for} \quad \frac{RT \times CT}{GT} = \frac{92 \times 334}{460} = 66.8$$

$$\text{Expected frequency for } \frac{RT \times CT}{GT} = \frac{92 \times 126}{460} = 25.2$$

O	E	O-E	(O-E) <sup>2</sup>	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
73	66.8	6.2	38.44	0.58
19	25.2	-6.2	38.44	1.53
66	66.8	-0.8	0.64	0.01
26	25.2	0.8	0.64	0.03
56	66.8	-10.8	116.64	1.75
36	25.2	10.8	116.64	4.63
73	66.8	6.8	38.44	0.58
19	25.2	-6.8	38.44	1.53
66	66.8	0.8	0.64	0.01
26	25.2	-0.8	0.64	0.03
				10.68

Degree of freedom DF= (R-1) (C-1) = (2-1) (5-1) = (1) (4) = 4

From the X<sup>2</sup> Table 4 under 5% (0.05) = 9.49

Calculated value = 10.68

**Decision:**

In the above illustration, the calculated (x<sup>2</sup>) (10.68) is greater than the critical value or table value (9.49). Hence the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted(H<sub>i</sub>).

This means that Social media does not have any significant effect on Micro scale women in Gombe state.

**5. Discussion of the Findings**

The study was conducted to assessed the roles of social media in empowering micro scale women entrepreneurs in Gombe State Nigeria.

Based on the analysis, social media has enabled the women entrepreneurs to feel empowered. This could be seen about their ability to make decisions by themselves, and freedom to start their business without the influence of the environment. The self-confidence has allowed them to control their lives. It has allowed the women to be agents of change in their own lives

and not merely recipients of change.

In Nigeria, the greatest incentive of women owing is the ability to gain control over their own working lives (Woldie and Adersua, 2004). Studies have demonstrated the use of social media in improving self-efficacy of women entrepreneurs. For instance, Steel, (2017) argued in a study in Sudan that women who were physically restricted by factors such as class, family responsibilities and gender norms in carrying out their businesses, mobile phones and internet access have given women the freedom to be economically active across space and time.

One issue worth noting about the relationship between social capital and social media is that, apart utilizing it to build business relations both at the primary (bonding) and secondary (linking) levels, social media also helped women entrepreneurs to build strong, personal ties with acquaintances. While this point is important, it is equally significant to note that personal links were only useful to the extent that women were able to engage in other mutually beneficial relationships such sharing experiences beyond businesses and providing useful leads where particular needs are being sought. Here, it should also be pointed out that this kind of social capital was not very common among respondents in the survey.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, while it is beyond the scope of this study to show the impact of the use of social media by women entrepreneurs in the national economy as a whole, it is possible to note that social media has been a powerful tool for bringing to change to women entrepreneurs. It has changed the view of women who were previously secluded in their home to engage more freely. Social media is empowering women entrepreneurs to build broad network of relationships across different geographical regions

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, some recommendations are proposed to inform practice and policy. These recommendations are as follows:

- The sample of the women entrepreneurs was selected mainly based on users of social media. A comparative study could examine on non-social media users and social media users to find out the difference and if social media is having a greater impact on their entrepreneurial success compared to non-social media users.

- Another possible area of research could be the impact of social media on the national economy by reducing poverty and promoting employment opportunities.

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