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National E-Conference & Award Ceremony on 'Viksit Bharat 2.0': Women Entrepreneurship is E-Commerce and Online Retailing

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Abstract

Economic progress is significantly impacted by the entrepreneurship of women. Women are gaining economic and social power these days by starting their businesses. In recent times, there has been a notable upsurge in women-led e-commerce enterprises and their entrepreneurship, contributing significantly to the growth of both national and global economies. Information technology has made the world much smaller, faster, and easier for people to access through the internet. The internet has completely changed the business's operation through Online sales and digital marketing. Moreover, the pandemic has proven the value of digital technologies. In recent years, with the use of technology, women entrepreneurs can easily enter new markets and have a wider range of customers. Web-based businesses / E-commerce have given huge opportunities to the business sector. This study is qualitative. The conclusions will inspire more women entrepreneurs to continue thriving in the ever-expanding e-commerce landscape. This present study explains the role of women entrepreneurs as a driving force in E-commerce in India.

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KEYWORDS: Women Entrepreneurs, E-Commerce Development, Digital Empowerment, Online Retailing in India, Technology and Gender Inclusion

1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of e-commerce has redefined entrepreneurial landscapes, particularly for women who have traditionally faced barriers in accessing capital, markets, and networks. Online retailing offers flexibility, low entry barriers, and global reach, making it an attractive option for aspiring women entrepreneurs. However, digital entrepreneurship also comes with its own set of gendered challenges that demand critical examination.

2. OBJECTIVES

The following are the main objectives of the research work.

1. To examine the role of e-commerce in empowering women entrepreneurs.
2. To identify the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in online retailing.
3. To analyze the impact of digital marketing and social media on women-led e-commerce businesses.
4. To study the socio-economic benefits of women's participation in online retail.
5. To recommend strategies and policy interventions to support women entrepreneurs in the digital economy.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Kumar, P., & Prasad, V. (2023) [1] conducted a study focusing on the emergence of home-based women entrepreneurs in rural India through the use of e-commerce platforms. The research reveals that digital platforms have significantly empowered rural women by offering opportunities to sell handmade and local products beyond geographic boundaries. The authors highlight that e-commerce not only promotes economic self-reliance but also bridges the gap between urban and rural markets. Importantly, the study identifies increased digital participation as a catalyst for social mobility and female empowerment in traditionally underserved regions. This study supports the argument that digital inclusion is essential for fostering entrepreneurship among women in rural communities.
2. Chatterjee, S., Rana, N. P., Tamilmani, K., & Sharma, A. (2020) [2] explore both the enabling factors and barriers to women's participation in e-commerce across developing countries. Their findings suggest that e-commerce significantly reduces traditional entry barriers such as mobility constraints and high startup costs. However, the study also sheds light on persistent challenges including limited access to digital literacy, lack of infrastructure, and societal norms that inhibit women's full participation. By applying a comprehensive framework, the authors offer insights into how technology adoption can be tailored to support female entrepreneurs more effectively. The research underscores the importance of institutional support and policy reform for sustainable digital entrepreneurship.
3. Brush, C. G., Edelman, L. F., Manolova, T. S., & Welter, F. (2019) [3] present a gendered analysis of entrepreneurial ecosystems and advocate for ecosystem designs that are inclusive of women's unique challenges and contributions. Their work examines how online platforms serve as a compensatory mechanism for women facing systemic barriers in traditional business environments. The paper emphasizes the significance of social networks, mentoring, and accessible digital tools in facilitating women's entry into entrepreneurship. It also encourages policymakers and ecosystem developers to incorporate gender-sensitive practices that support women in scaling their ventures. This work adds a theoretical dimension to the role of e-commerce as a levelling field for gender disparity in business.
4. Bala, R., & Verma, S. (2020) [4] investigate the growth of women-led e-commerce businesses in India and identify key enablers such as mobile technology, digital payments, and the strategic use of social media. Their research illustrates that the digital economy is increasingly favorable for women due to its low capital requirement and flexibility in operations. The authors also emphasize the importance of online visibility and consumer engagement as critical success factors for women entrepreneurs. The study concludes with a call for greater digital inclusion initiatives and skill development programs aimed at female business owners. This contributes to the understanding of how digital tools can facilitate economic participation among women in emerging markets.
5. Nair, M., & Pandey, A. (2021) [5] focus on the role of social media as a driver for empowering Indian women entrepreneurs. Their study reveals that platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp are not only marketing tools but also powerful avenues for brand-building and customer interaction. Social media is shown to enhance entrepreneurial visibility, reduce marketing costs, and allow personalized communication with potential buyers. The authors also highlight how digital storytelling and influencer culture play an important role in shaping consumer trust and loyalty. Their work affirms that social media has become a central pillar in the growth strategies of women-led online businesses in India.

Case Studies

Several case studies illustrate the transformative potential of e-commerce for women:

1. **Nykaa (India):** Founded by Falguni Nayar, Nykaa is an e-commerce beauty platform that became a billion-dollar enterprise, showing how digital retailing can be scaled through niche targeting and a strong digital presence (Forbes India, 2021).
2. **Shea Radiance (USA/Nigeria):** Co-founded by Funlayo Alabi, this company sources ingredients from African women cooperatives and sells through online platforms, combining social impact with global e-commerce strategy (Alabi, 2019).
3. **Pink Lily Boutique (USA):** Founded by Tori Gerbig, this fashion retail store utilized social media marketing and

Shopify infrastructure to grow from a home business to a multimillion-dollar operation.

Examples

1. **Nykaa (India) – *Founder: Falguni Nayar***
   A beauty and wellness e-commerce platform that went public in 2021. Nayar transitioned from investment banking to build one of India's largest online retail platforms targeted at women.
   Key takeaway: Niche targeting and omnichannel expansion.

2. **Shea Radiance (USA/Nigeria) – *Co-founder: Funlayo Alabi***
   Combines social impact and e-commerce by sourcing ingredients from African women cooperatives and selling beauty products online.
   Key takeaway: Ethical sourcing and global e-commerce scaling.

3. **Pink Lily Boutique (USA) – *Founder: Tori Gerbig***
   Started as an eBay store and scaled through Shopify and Facebook ads. Now a multi-million dollar business with a loyal online following.
   Key takeaway: Leveraging social media and drop-shipping.

4. **The Lip Bar (USA) – *Founder: Melissa Butler***
   Vegan beauty brand that started with direct-to-consumer sales online. Despite being rejected on Shark Tank, the brand gained traction through strong digital storytelling. Key takeaway: E-commerce as a resilience strategy for minority women entrepreneurs.

5. **Limeroad (India) – *Co-founder: Suchi Mukherjee***
   An e-commerce fashion platform targeting Indian women, focusing on discovery-led shopping.
   Key takeaway: Gender-focused platform design and content.

6. **Shakti.ism (UK/India) – *Founder: Laura Beck***
   Empowers marginalized women in India by helping them create and sell handmade products via Etsy and the brand's own website.
   Key takeaway: Social enterprise meets online global retail.

7. **Proactive For Her – *Founder: Dr. Madhurima Agarwal***
   A digital health platform offering teleconsultations and diagnostics specifically for women. The company leverages e-commerce to sell wellness packages and services.
   Key takeaway: Women's health tech via online retailing of services.

8. **The Pink Foundry – *Backed by women leadership at RPG Group***
   A skincare brand leveraging influencer marketing, digital-first product launches, and educational content for women consumers.
   Key takeaway: Corporate-backed, women-led beauty e-commerce.

9. **Avni – *Founder: Sujata Pawar***
   A menstrual care brand offering Ayurvedic and sustainable hygiene products. The business leverages subscriptions and D2C e-commerce platforms.
   Key takeaway: Tradition meets tech for women's health.

10. **Brown Living – *Founder: Jaya Iyer***
    An online marketplace for eco-friendly, sustainable products—many of which are made by women-led microbusinesses across India.
    Key takeaway: Green e-commerce with women-led micro-entrepreneurship.

Challenges

1. **Limited Access to Digital Literacy and Training**
   Many women, especially in rural or semi-urban areas, lack the necessary digital skills to effectively use e-commerce platforms. Without proper training in online business operations, marketing, and digital tools, their ability to compete and scale remains limited.
2. **Financial Constraints and Lack of Funding**
   Access to capital remains a major hurdle for women entrepreneurs. Traditional lenders often perceive women-owned startups as high-risk, and many women lack collateral or financial documentation required to secure loans for online business growth.
3. **Balancing Domestic Responsibilities with Business**
   Women often juggle household duties and caregiving roles alongside their businesses. This dual responsibility limits the time and energy they can invest in expanding or managing an online retail venture, affecting productivity and growth.
4. **Limited Networking Opportunities**
   Women have fewer opportunities to participate in business networks, mentorship programs, or industry events. This restricts their access to knowledge, partnerships, and peer support that are crucial for success in the digital business world.
5. **Cybersecurity and Online Fraud Risks**
   Many women entrepreneurs are vulnerable to cyber threats, scams, and data breaches due to inadequate cybersecurity awareness. The fear of fraud and financial loss discourages some from fully embracing e-commerce platforms.
6. **Digital Infrastructure Gaps**
   In many developing areas, women face poor internet connectivity, unreliable power supply, and limited access to smart devices. These infrastructural shortcomings make it difficult to operate a consistent and professional online business.

7. **Social and Cultural Barriers**
   In conservative societies, women may face resistance from family or community when engaging in public or digital business activities. These societal norms can discourage women from promoting their products online or interacting with male customers and suppliers.
8. **Gender Bias in the Marketplace**
   Women-led businesses often encounter skepticism from customers, vendors, or investors due to gender stereotypes. This bias affects trust, limits business opportunities, and creates an uneven playing field in the e-commerce ecosystem.
9. **Lack of Role Models and Mentors**
   A visible shortage of successful women in tech and e-commerce roles reduces motivation and guidance for new entrants. Mentorship is critical for navigating digital entrepreneurship, yet many women lack access to experienced guides.
10. **Inadequate Government Support and Policy Awareness**
    Although there are schemes for women entrepreneurs, many are unaware of them or find the application process too complex. A lack of targeted support policies and poor dissemination of information further widens the gap in participation.

4. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

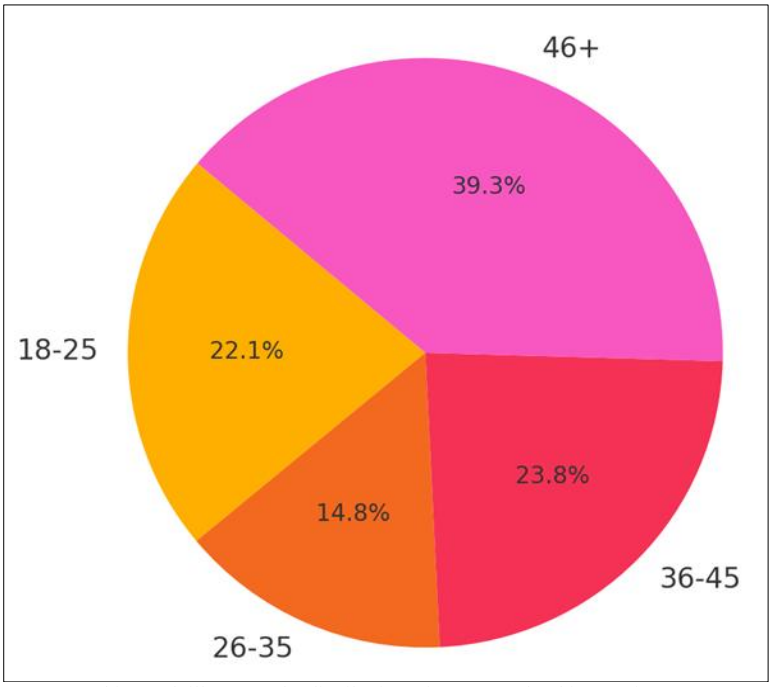
Quantitative data were collected from 75 individuals in a stratified random sample. Semi-structured interviews with twenty-five individuals produced qualitative insights. The analysis included the use of descriptive statistics, correlation, quantitative regression, and qualitative thematic analysis. Strict moral principles were adhered to.

Sampling

To acquire a representative sample of the Population that spans a range of ages, economic statuses, and legal knowledge. The sample size used was 75. To collect quantitative demographic information and responses to the Women Entrepreneurship is E-Commerce and Online Retailing, a Google form was made.

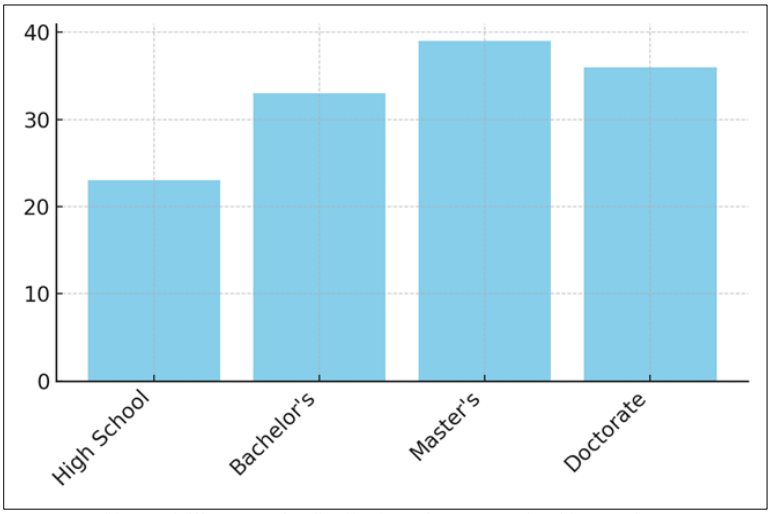
Data Analysis and Survey Questions

Q1. What is your age group?



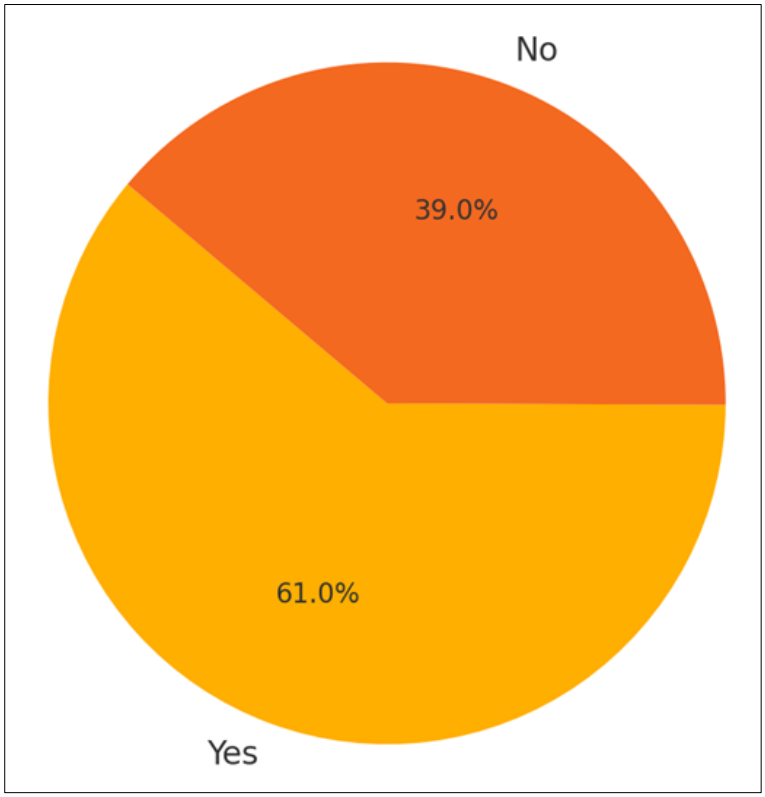
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q2. What is your highest level of education?



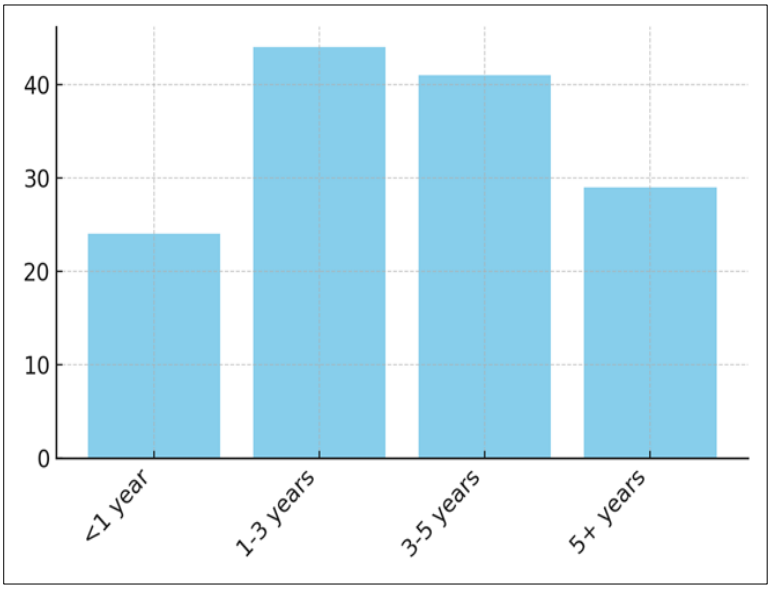
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q3. Are you currently running an online business?



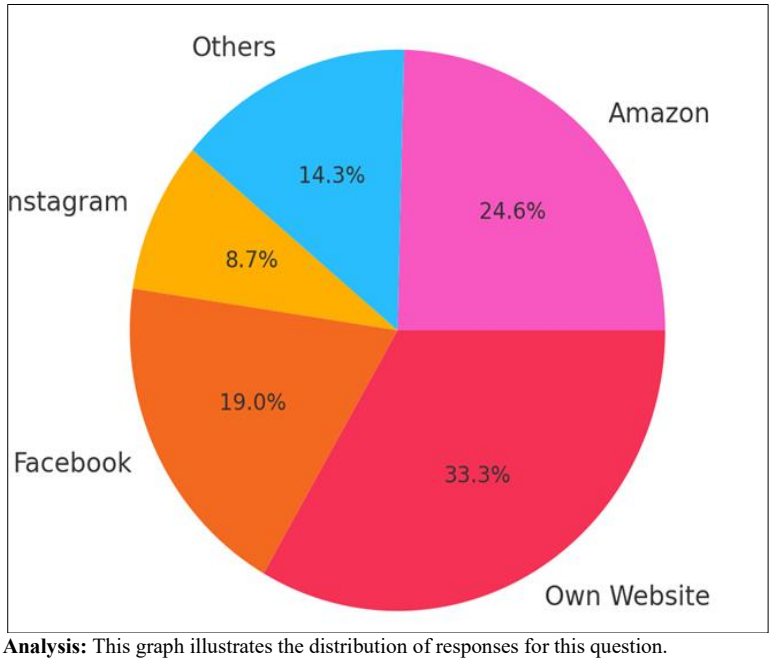
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q4. How long have you been in e-commerce?



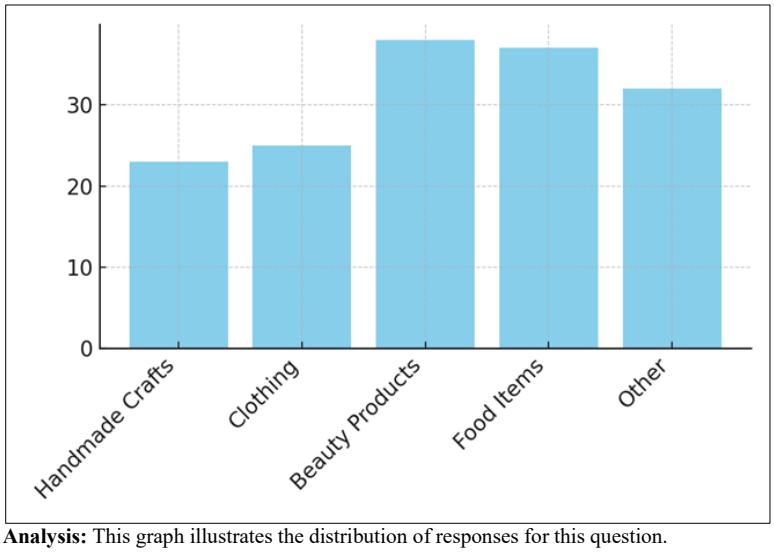
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q5. Which platform do you use for selling online?



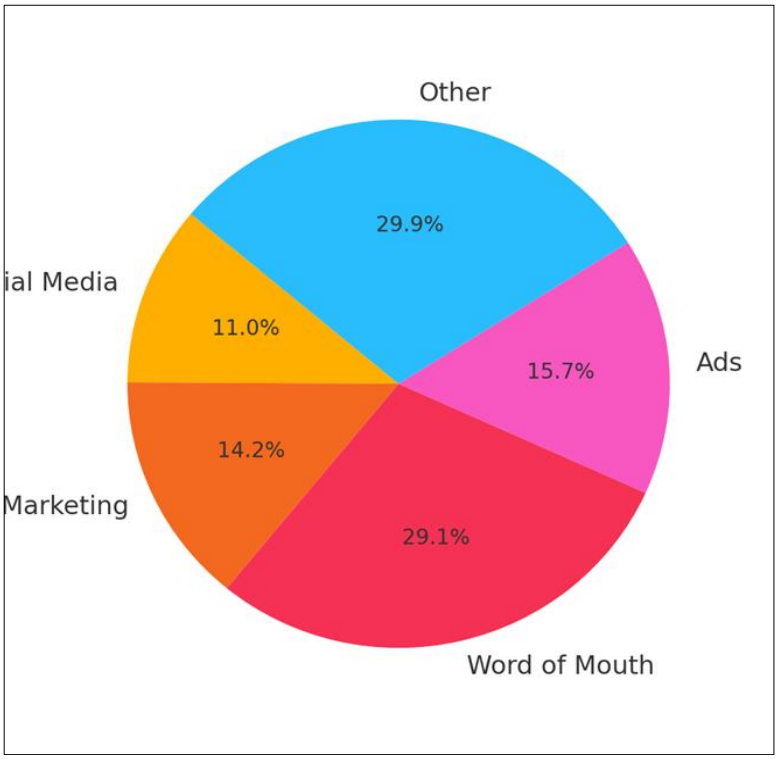
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q6. What kind of products/services do you offer?



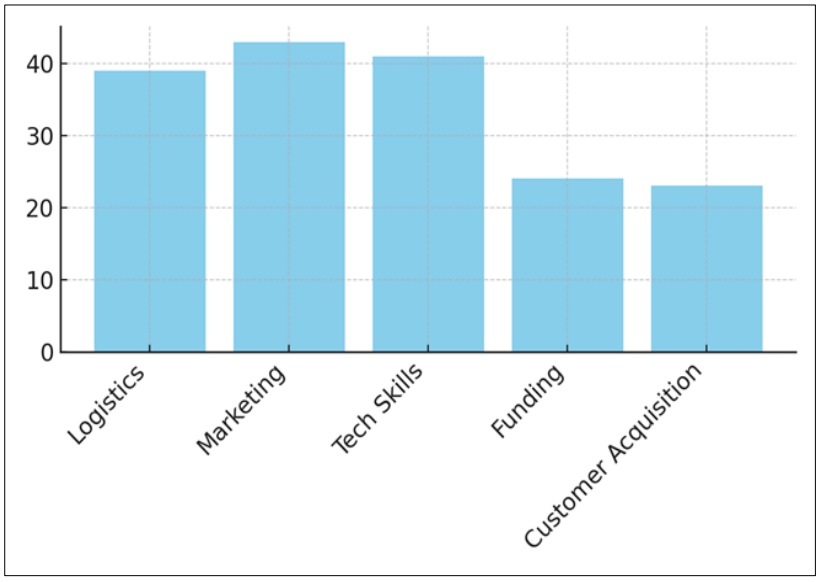
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q7. How do you promote your online business?



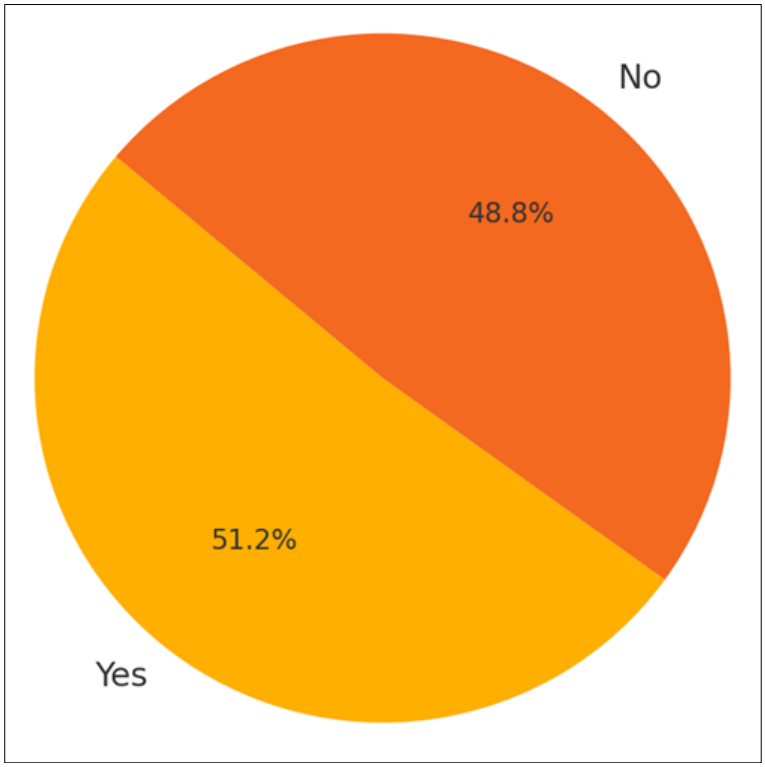
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q8. What challenges do you face in digital retailing?



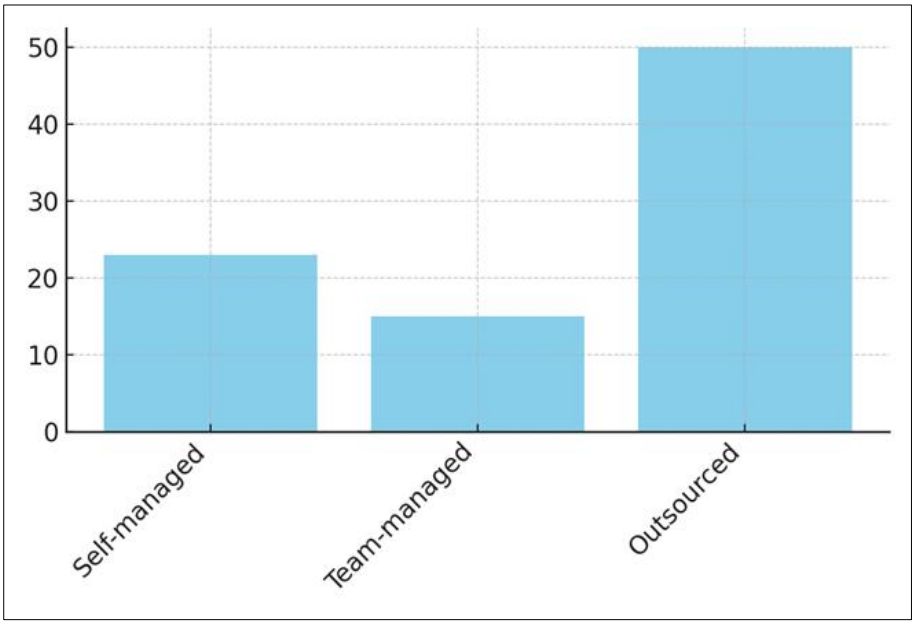
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q9. Have you received any formal training in digital marketing?



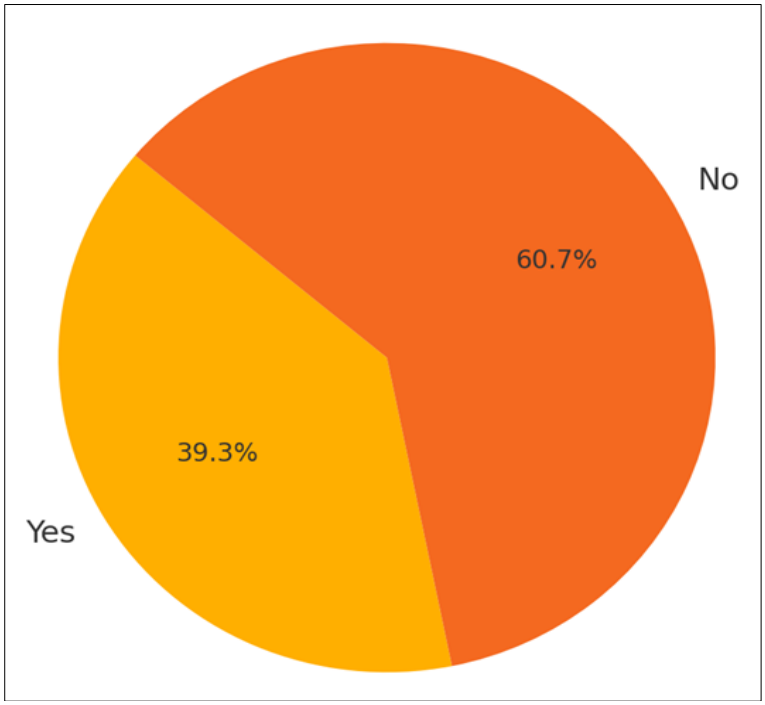
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question

Q10. How do you handle customer service in your business?



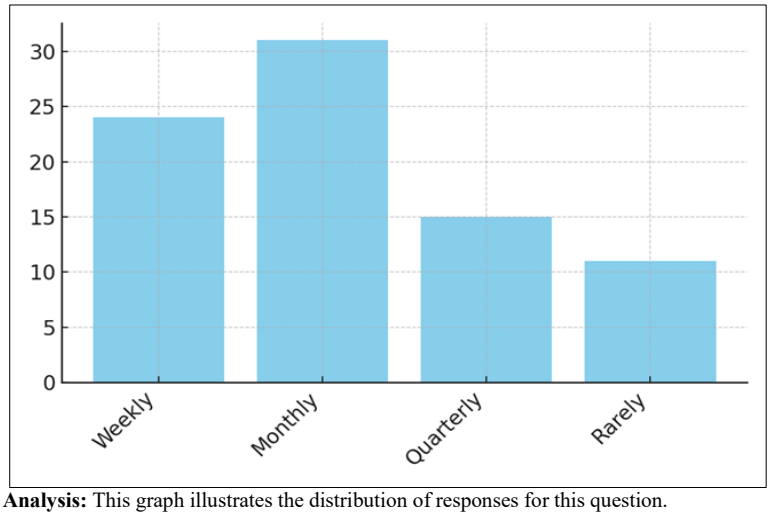
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q11. Do you use digital payment methods in your business?



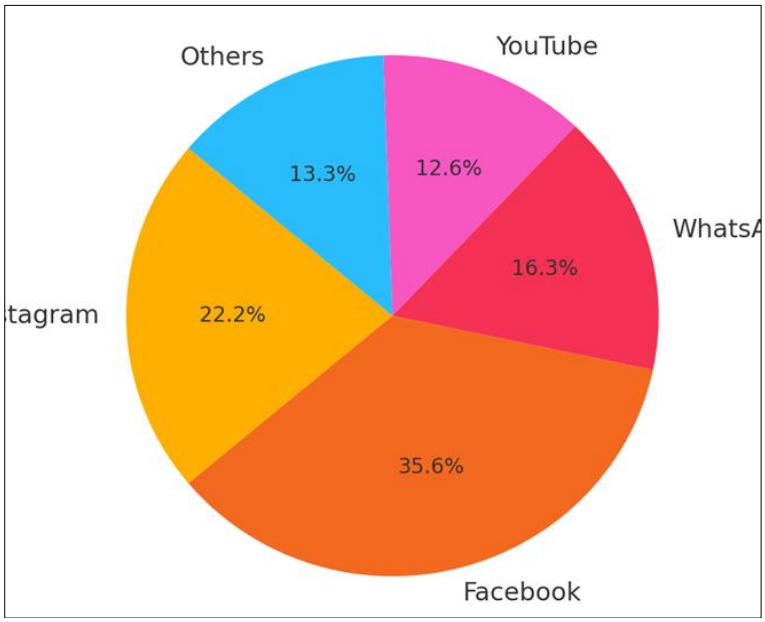
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q12. How often do you update your online store?



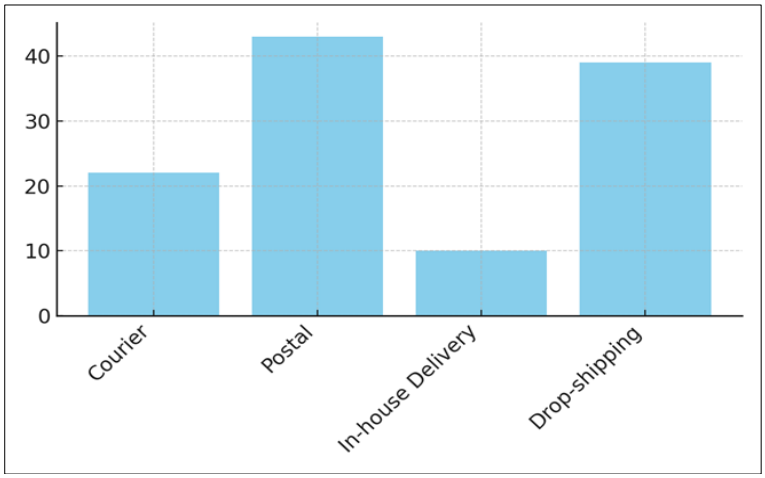
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q13. Which social media platforms are most effective for your business?



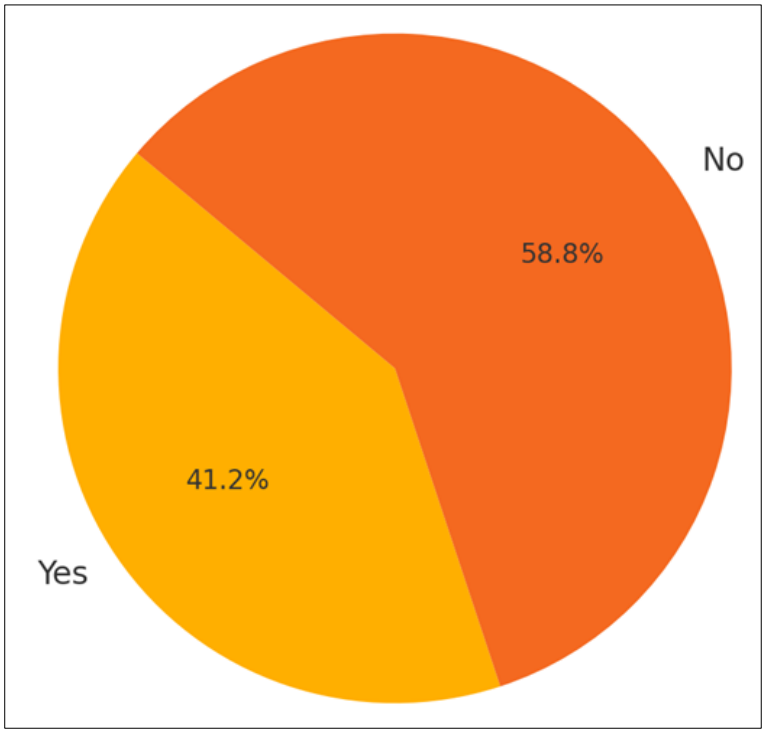
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q14. How do you manage logistics and delivery?



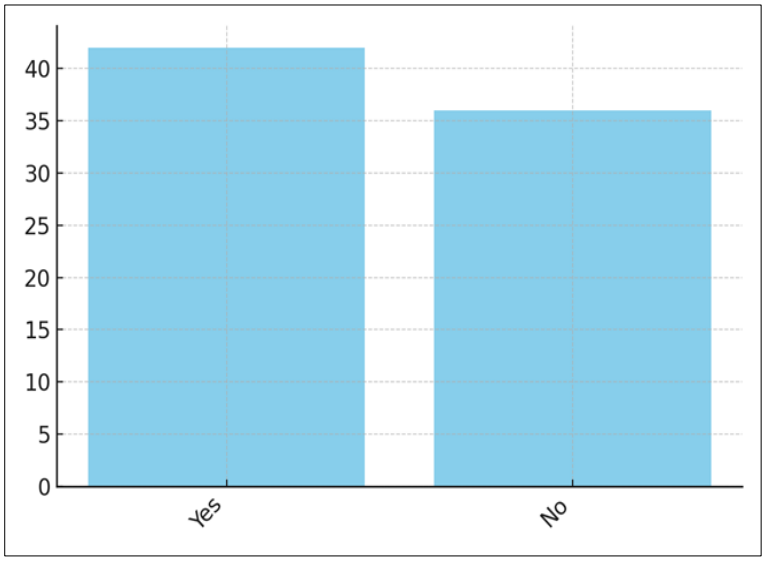
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q15. Have online sales improved your income stability?



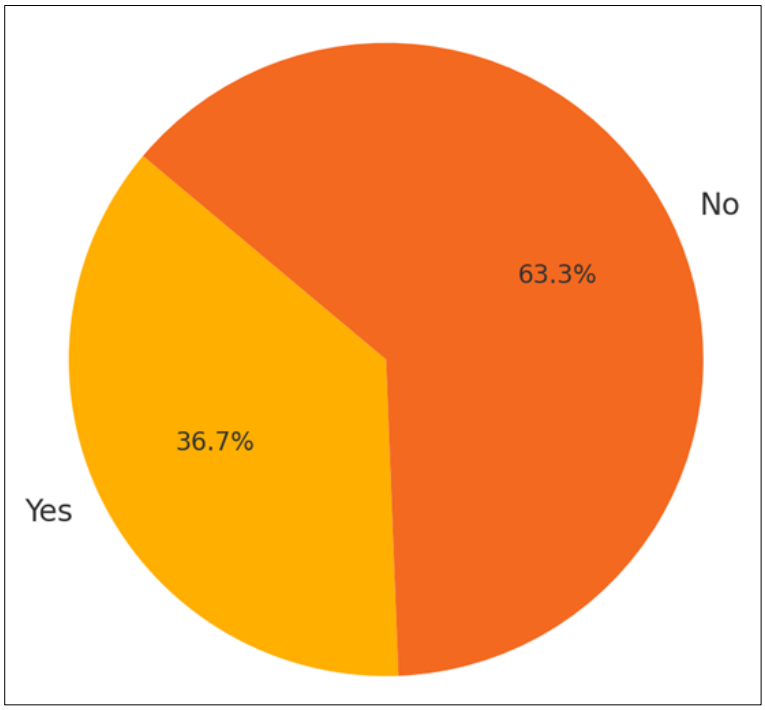
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q16. Would you recommend e-commerce to other women?



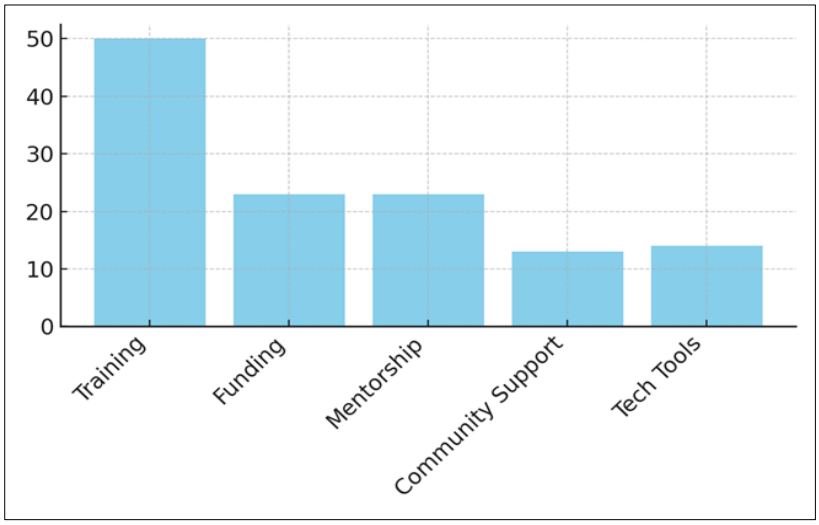
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q17. Do you face gender-specific challenges in online business?



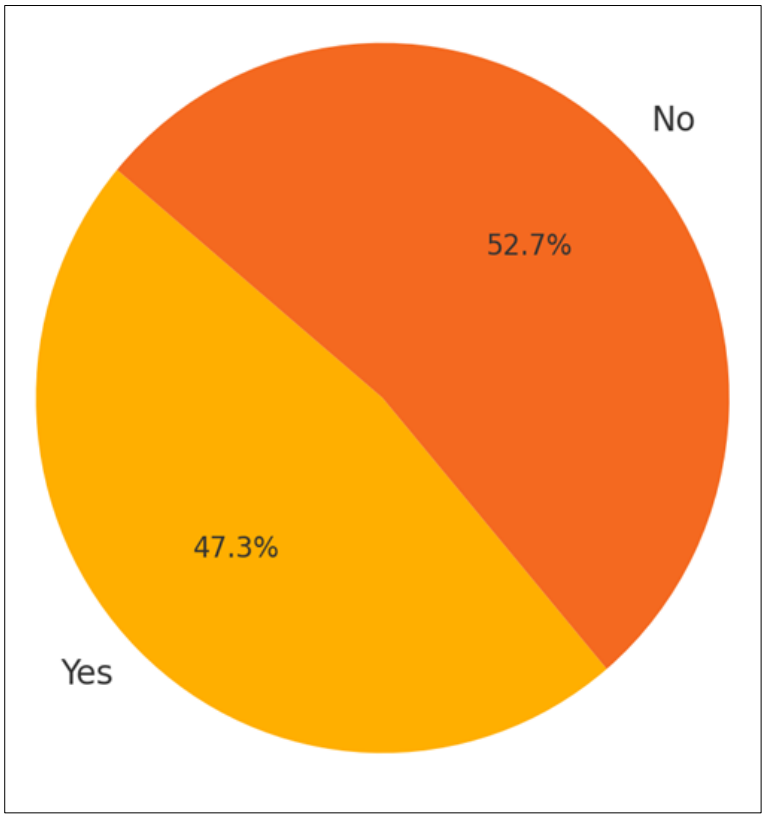
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q18. What support would help you grow your online business?



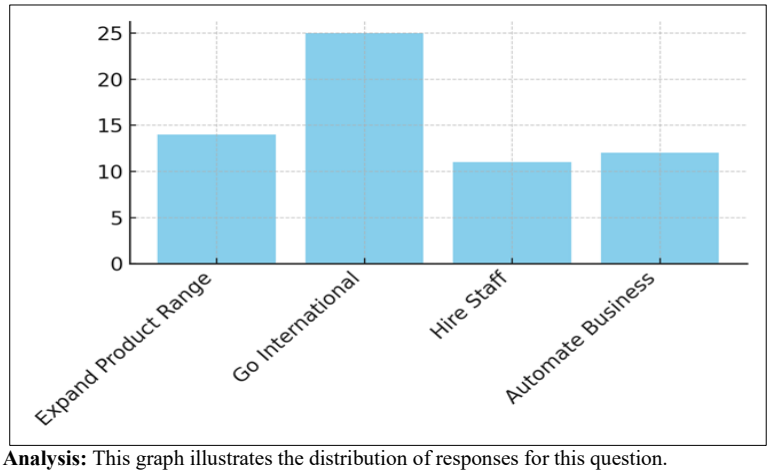
Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q19. Are you part of any women entrepreneur networks or forums?



Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

Q20. What is your vision for your online business in the next 5 years?



Analysis: This graph illustrates the distribution of responses for this question.

The survey reveals valuable insights into the landscape of women entrepreneurs in the digital space. While many women are successfully using digital platforms for business, challenges such as logistics, marketing, and technical skills remain significant. Empowering women through targeted training, mentorship, and access to resources can further enhance their impact in e-commerce and digital retailing.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the challenges outlined—digital divide, cybersecurity threats, economic instability, environmental degradation, and mental health stigma—are interconnected issues that demand immediate attention and collective action. The digital divide highlights the need for equitable access to technology, ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital transformation era. Similarly, addressing cybersecurity threats requires a robust approach to protect individuals and organizations from increasing cyber risks, which can undermine trust in digital platforms.

Economic instability continues to disrupt livelihoods, emphasizing the importance of sound economic policies and resilient business strategies to maintain growth and stability. Environmental degradation, caused by unsustainable practices, calls for global cooperation to preserve the planet's ecosystems and combat climate change. Lastly, the stigma surrounding mental health must be eradicated through education and awareness, ensuring that individuals with mental health conditions receive the support and care they deserve.

To tackle these challenges effectively, a coordinated effort is needed from governments, businesses, and individuals. By fostering collaboration, promoting innovation, and creating supportive environments, society can mitigate these challenges and work toward a more equitable, sustainable, and healthy future. Addressing these issues not only improves the quality of life for individuals but also contributes to global progress and well-being.

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   This research focuses on how social media platforms contribute to business visibility and customer engagement, significantly benefiting women entrepreneurs in online retail.