

Digital Landscape in the Empowerment of Women: A Systematic Literature Review and Future Agenda

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on determining women's empowerment in the digital age by examining the key factors that support it through digital media. It focuses on three main areas: 'digital acceptance,' which means the willingness to adopt digital technologies; 'digital adaptation,' the use of these technologies in daily life; and 'gender digital mediation,' how gender affects these processes in larger social and cultural contexts. The study also suggests futuristic studies to address theoretical gaps and promote the creation of inclusive digital policy frameworks.

The study adopted the PRISMA methodology. Here, a sum total of 47 articles were selected from the time frame of 2020-2025 and analysed through thematic analysis. This methodology provides a comprehensive, structured analysis of empowering women through digital media.

The findings suggest a profound impact of digital media platforms on women's empowerment. Women using such platforms feel financially, economically and socially empowered by digital media. The findings have a far-reaching impact of various challenges and harassment of using this media. Although empowered women face cybercrime, digital harassment and other socio-cultural barriers while using digital media. Despite this, women are willing to use digital media for self-improvement and empowerment.

This study shows an extensive picture of the presence of digital media in the lives of women. By synthesizing the study, we elucidate how digital participation fosters autonomy and self-

reliance. This research provides direction for future researchers and academic practitioners seeking digitally equitable inclusion.

Keywords: Women empowerment, digital media, digital mediation, social media, digital adaptation, digital empowerment

Introduction

Women Empowerment

The concept of empowerment was formulated in the early 1920s but reached the masses by the 1970s. Moreover, in the early 1970s, this phrase of women empowerment originated due to the necessity for social equity and gender parity (Grabe, 2012; Mackey & Petrucka, 2020; Opening up Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, n.d.). In past couple of years, many researchers have used this concept to achieve a better understanding of women's empowerment. According to a recent study, digital literacy has a major impact on women's overall growth and empowerment. Today, women are at the forefront in all spheres of life.

Women empowerment means having the capacity and power to express, access and avail all the necessary resources (Cornwall, 2016), further extending to form a partnership to attain her goals (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Globalisation has led to growth in the empowerment of human rights (Grabe, 2012). Today, it would be correct to suggest that with the advancement in technology, social media or digital media has truly empowered the disempowered sections of society (Bühler & Pelka, 2014; Khan et al., 2022).

Technology is a vital component in imparting voice to the voiceless and an opportunity to the oppressed (Chatterjee et al., 2020). The word digital and its related terms have evolved because of rigorous research in the past few years. Internet-based technology allows individuals and organizations to digitally connect and exchange knowledge and expressions (Hsieh & Wu, 2019). Moreover, numerous studies summarize that digital platforms can empower people by fostering collective spaces and enhancing or enabling skills (Kozinets2021) and helps women from ignorant community in decision making (Khan et al., 2022).

However, digital empowerment is not uniformly experienced. Women in rural Uganda experience 43% lower smartphone ownership compared to men (Abima et al., 2021), and

female entrepreneurs in Nigeria experience higher rates of cybercrime victimization compared to men. (Oluwatosin Otokiti et al., n.d.). This disparity demonstrates how, depending on infrastructure, cultural attitudes, and platform governance, digital technologies can both advance empowerment and maintain current gender disparities.

Intersection of Women and Digital Media

A report published by BBC Media Action states, “Evolution of Digital media can have two facets: either it can be a threat to women or it can provide opportunities through the leading socio-economic importance of digital media”. While gender equality and digital empowerment are interlinked (Karyotaki et al., 2022) many women still believe that online identity risks their security (Seo et al., 2022). On the contrary, this new media will also provide women a platform to fight against existing disparities between the genders (Rathi et al., 2022). The central theme of this study supports the idea that digital media transforms lived realities rather than being a medium to escape (McAdam et al., 2020).

When addressing women's intersection with digital media, one prominent example is a leading weekly rural newspaper, ‘Khabar Lahariya’ founded by Kavita Devi and Meera Devi (Khabar Lahariya). With its widespread digital reach has an acclaimed international presence. It is one such publication with all rural women journalists and reporters, the newspaper empowers women from rural regions (wiki). This 2002 grassroots-based newspaper empowers women from different castes and from the most disadvantaged communities.

Research Gap

It is observed that women can access and perceive new knowledge and insights through the usage of digital-mediated platforms (Rosser, 2005). However, there is still a need for a better understanding of how digital media has a transformative effect on women. Despite, studies on the implications of digital media technologies occurred in the last few years on small and large businesses (Ughetto et al.). Moreover, with movements on social media like #MeToo, #Bekhauf Azadi, etc, women are known as social media feminists (Akhila & John, 2024). A comprehensive paper on digital transformation for women empowerment is left to be outlined. To expand and enhance the insights into the ways and extent to which women's empowerment involves new technologies.

There are numerous articles on women's entrepreneurship with a digital perspective (Kamberidou, 2020). Generally, women's desire for social connection, entrepreneurial potential, and informational demands (Camacho-Miñano & Gray, 2021) are the driving forces for social media activity. A study argues for the adoption of laws to support the empowerment of women (Jitendra Khaire, 2011). Therefore, this study aims to explore various facets of empowerment that women are experiencing in digital media. Existing research demonstrates fragmented understanding of digital empowerment processes. While studies examine women's entrepreneurship in digital economies (Kamberidou, 2020) and social media feminist movements like #MeToo and #BekhaufAzadi (Akhila & John, 2024), a comprehensive synthesis linking theoretical frameworks to empirical evidence across diverse global contexts remains absent. Existing literature falls short in fully examining how digital media can both empower women while also reinforcing gender inequalities through algorithmic bias, increased labor demands, and digital violence. This issue is especially relevant for marginalized women who deal with overlapping challenges related to caste, class, rural location, and religious or cultural constraints.

Additionally, related research faces methodological limitations. Much of the existing work relies on qualitative approaches, which provide important perspectives but limit the ability to draw broad conclusions or accurately measure empowerment outcomes. Many studies are regionally focused, particularly on South Asia, resulting in limited understanding of empowerment dynamics elsewhere. Rapid developments in digital platforms—from Instagram's visual commerce tools to TikTok's short-form videos—necessitate continuous assessment of their impact on empowerment opportunities.

This study aims to disclose the below mentioned research questions:

RQ1. What are the different factors that drive digital media engagement among women?

RQ2. How does digital media influence women's empowerment, agency, and access to opportunities?

Below are the mentioned objectives of the following study:

O1. To determine personal, social, and structural factors that affect women's engagement with digital media platforms, including both facilitators and barriers.

O2. To elucidate the digital media impact on women empowerment encompassing personal, economic, social and technological dimensions.

Methodology

This article's literature review methodology was created utilising the PRISMA 2020 framework (Page et al., 2021). This framework, which was first published in 2009 and revised in 2020, was created to evaluate systematic evaluations of literature from various fields. PRISMA searches, chooses, and analyses existing literature using a consistent methodology. To guarantee reliability, it has a proven checklist. The framework guides the conduct and reporting of systematic literature reviews and meta-analyses using a 27-item checklist and a four-stage processed chart.

Here, this systematic review used three databases. These databases were selected due to their extensive coverage of social science literature. Scopus and WOS provide structured, peer-reviewed content, while Google Scholar includes interdisciplinary gender studies research, such as regional journals and conference proceedings. The selection basis for articles focused on the study's aim. Additionally, articles from social sciences that examined women's empowerment in relation to digital media were included in the paper.

Search and Selection Criteria

Primary search string: The term used in all three databases for the literature search was keywords: “digital media” OR “social media” OR “new media” AND gender AND women AND empowerment OR agency OR "economic participation".

Secondary search string: To understand the impact of digital inclusion for women, keywords: factors OR “demographic factors” OR “socio-economic” OR determinants OR reasons.

Temporal Scope: Articles published from January 2020 to March 2025, including early-access 2025 publications, were considered to capture recent developments in digital empowerment research following the COVID-19 pandemic's acceleration of digitalization.

The search was first carried out in Scopus, which yielded an initial dataset of 66 articles. The second one was carried out in WOS, which brought a result of 71 articles and the last one on Google Scholar where a total of 200 articles resulted from the database.

Inclusion Criteria

- Study Design: Empirical research employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approaches
- Topic Relevance: Direct examination of women's empowerment outcomes related to digital media platform use
- Empowerment Measurement: Explicit discussion or measurement of at least one empowerment dimension (economic, social, personal, or technological)
- Language: Published in English language only
- Publication Type: The articles published in peer-reviewed journals articles at national and international levels and conference proceedings
- Temporal Scope: Published between 2020-2025

Exclusion Criteria

- Studies focusing solely on digital access without discussing empowerment outcomes
- Non-empirical publications (opinion pieces, editorials, conceptual papers without original data)
- Studies exclusively addressing men's digital participation without gender analysis
- Research focused solely on students' technology use without examining gender dimensions
- Studies addressing mobile technology without examining digital media platforms specifically
- Media studies not examining digital platforms (e.g., traditional print or broadcast media only)

Screening

The resultant 337 articles were extracted to an Excel file for analysis. All of these full-text published research articles were reviewed, spanning the years 2020 to 2025. Additionally, articles from 2025 were included in the analysis. Moreover, articles written in English were

only examined, leading to the rejection of 107 articles. The keywords, along with the necessary Boolean operators, were inputted into the search tabs of the databases, yielding a sum of 230 articles, as illustrated in Fig. 1 Later, 22 duplicate articles from different databases were removed. This brought to the total to 208 articles.

Later, the title, abstract and Keywords of 208 articles were and some articles were excluded which (a) did not follow a gender perspective; (b) addressed chiefly the effect on men in the said context; (c) addressed the digital role and impact on students; (d) addressed mobile technology in the long run (e) addressed media and not digital media in the study. This brought to a sum of 61 articles; 2 from Scopus, 2 WOS, and 57 from Google Scholar.

In the later stage, the resultant 61 manuscripts were one-by-one extensively reviewed, bringing a total of 39 articles; the final set comprises 1 from Scopus and from Web of Science and 37 from the database of Google Scholar.

Data Extraction

The articles included in this analysis were organized into various groups employing a data extraction template. Each publication's methodology was reviewed and assessed, covering aspects such as the title, unit of analysis, and the country of study. The information was compiled in a table and summarized narratively (PRISMA Results Report). Moreover, included studies were required to directly measure or discuss women's empowerment outcomes related to digital media use, including economic, personal, social, and technological empowerment.

Those studies were rejected if they focused merely on digital access without discussing empowerment outcomes, or if they were not based on original empirical research. The final sample comprised diverse methodological approaches.

Qualitative methods: 34 studies (72%) such as semi-structured interviews: 18 studies, Case studies: 9 studies, Discourse analysis: 5 studies, Ethnographic approaches: 2 studies.

Quantitative methods: 7 studies (15%), Survey-based research: 5 studies, Social network analysis: 2 studies.

Mixed methods: 6 studies (13%), Sequential explanatory design: 3 studies, Convergent parallel design: 3 studies.

The geographic concentration in Asia, particularly India (n=12, 26% of total), reflects both the region's large population and rapid digitalization, but also indicates limited representation from sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, and Pacific regions.

Table1. Results of the systematic literature review

Author	Country	Context	Methodology
A Mackey, P Petrucka	Global	women, social media, ICT, digital, computer, smartphone, laptop, empower	Qualitative
A Shukla, P Kushwah, E Jain	India	Women entrepreneurship, PLS-SEM, ICT, Internet skills, Entrepreneurial intention	Qualitative
AS Dewi	Indonesia	Instagram, women empowerment, SMEs	Quantitative
B Abima, B Engotoit, GM Kituyi	Uganda	Technology, gender, digital literacy	Mixed Method
BO Otokiti, AN Igwe, CPM Ewim	Nigeria	Social media, women entrepreneurs, business growth, Nigerian women, digital literacy, online marketing, economic empowerment	Mixed Method
C Blanco-González-Tejero	Global	Women Entrepreneurs, empowerment, Twitter	Qualitative
C Khoo, ECL Yang, RYY Tan	Latin America	Women entrepreneur; digital competency; digital entrepreneurship, gender digital divide	Mixed Method
CW Liu, TJV Saldanha...	India	diversity, equity, and inclusion	Qualitative
E Ughetto, M Rossi, D Audretsch	Italy	Digital technologies, female entrepreneurs	Qualitative
EF Agyemang, GA Bokpin	Africa	economic empowerment, digitalization, social networks	Qualitative
G Steel	Sudan	Female entrepreneurship, Sudan, ICT for development, Diaspora networks	Qualitative
H Chaker, S Zouaoui	Tunisian	Challenges, entrepreneurship, social media, Tunisian women	Qualitative
Samaira Tawangar, Raj Kovid, Vikas Kumar and Manju Lata	India	social change, social media, women empowerment	Qualitative
H Heizmann, H Liu	Australia	Critical entrepreneurship studies, intersectionality, identity, Instagram, discourse	Qualitative
I Kamberidou	Global	Gender pay gap, Gender leadership gap, Work-life balance, Digital skills, Degendering, Multitasking whirlpool	Quantitative
IM Khan, S Sahadev, T Rashid, S Banerjee	UK	Empowerment; Facebook; Gender; Islamic tourism; Muslim women; Social 19 media	Triangulation
J Suk, A Abhishek, Y Zhang, SY Ahn	Global	affective public, connective action, natural language processing, retweet network analysis, timeseries analysis	Qualitative

Author	Country	Context	Methodology
K Kondakciu, M Souto, LT Zayer	Global	Gender, digital self-presentation	Qualitative
KP Akhila, J John	India	MeToo, social media feminist discourse	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews
L Savolainen, Uitermark, JD Boy	Netherland	Filtering, Feminism, Instagram	Qualitative
M Dhanamalar, Preethi, S Yuvashree	India	Digitization, women empowerment, regions	Quantitative
M Karyotaki, L Bakola, A Drigas, C Skianis	Greece	Digital technologies, female entrepreneurs	Qualitative
M Kumari	India	Cybercrime, Digital Media, Digital Literacy, Empowerment, Rural and Urban India, Social Media, Women	Qualitative
M McAdam, C Crowley, RT Harrison	Saudi Arab	Cyberfeminism, digital entrepreneurs, economy	Qualitative
MJ Camacho-Miñano, S Gray	Global	Digital age, young women, health and fitness on social media	Qualitative
N Nanditha	India	Me too, digital feminism, feminist movements	Questionnaire
R Miniesy, Elshahawy, Fakhreldin	Egypt	social media, women empowerment, youth male entrepreneurs	Mixed Method
S Chatterjee, SD Gupta, P Upadhyay	India	ICT Adaptation, Women Entrepreneurship	Qualitative
S Ghaffari	America	Social media-critical discourse	Qualitative
S Jain	India	Digital platforms, feminist activism	Qualitative
S Kadeswaran, Brindha, R Jayaseelan	India	Women Empowerment, Social Media, ICT, Social Networking	Qualitative
S Peña-Fernández, Larrondo-Ureta	Global	Young people, gender studies, identity, feminism, social media, digital activism	Qualitative
SP Caldeira, S Ridder...	Global	instagram users, photographic self representation, likes, comments, captions	Quantitative
U Chakraborty, Biswal	India	Female empowerment, Entrepreneurial marketing, Psychological empowerment, Social media, Uses and gratification theory, Female entrepreneurship	Qualitative
X Duan	China	Consumer behavior, influencer marketing, vlog marketing, video blogs (vlogs), advertising effects, social media influencer, female empowerment advertising, femvertising	Qualitative
Y Suseno, L Abbott	Australia	digital social innovation, women entrepreneurship, information system	Qualitative
Z Hurley	Saudi Arab	social media empowerment, postdigital	Qualitative
Ditta-Apichai Gretzel, Kattiyapornpong U.	M.; Thailand U.;	Platform empowerment, female entrepreneurs, micro entrepreneurs, Facebook, tourism dependent country, sustainable development	Qualitative
Seo, HJ	America	Incarceration women, technology access	Quantitative

RQ1: Identifying Women’s Digital Media Engagement

The systematic review of the 39 studies uncovered multiple overlapping factors influencing women’s digital media engagement across a variety of global contexts. Among all entrepreneurial and economic motivations were the most common engagement factor. Many of the studies (n=23) examined female entrepreneurs' use digital platforms to boost their enterprises, including, but not limited to, small and medium-sized ventures (SMEs) in Indonesia (Dewi, 2020) Vulnerable and precarious employment in diaspora networks in Sudan. Women utilized social media platforms to expand their businesses through digital marketing, customer acquisition, and market access, with notable platforms including Instagram (Caldeira et al., 2020), Facebook (Ditta-Apichai et al., 2024), and Twitter (Blanco-Gonzalez-Tejero & Cano-Marin, 2023; Peña-Fernández et al., 2023). Social Activism and Advocacy (Ghaffari, 2022) were similarly effective engagement factor. Studies from India (Shukla et al., 2021), the Netherlands, or global studies collectively outlined women's engagement as part of feminist movement participation, #MeToo campaigns (Nanditha, 2022), or digital activism (Suk et al., 2021). The platforms were spaces for collective action, social change, and feminist dialogue, demonstrating that social justice motivations informed ongoing patterns of engagement. Digital Literacy Development motivated engagement among women who were seeking to address the digital divide in access to technology. Research from Uganda, Latin America, and various developing contexts demonstrated how women's focus on developing their digital competency, ICT skills, and technological power informed their participation on the platforms, particularly to address the continuity of the gender digital divide (Abima et al., 2021). Identity Expression and Self-Presentation motivated engagement through visual platforms, where photography engagement was examined (Hurley, 2021).

RQ2: Elucidate Digital Media on the Empowerment of women

The analysis demonstrated that digital media shapes women's empowerment in four dimensions that are interrelated. Most studies showed that women experience multidimensional outcomes of empowerment. The Personal and Technological Empowerment dimensions were documented in the greatest number of studies, 39 each. The equal emphasis on the two Personal and Technological empowerment dimensions reflects the

linking of women's engagement and use of digital media with both the development of individual agency and building technological capacity (Kadeswaran et al., 2020).

Studies consistently demonstrated that women improved their individual self-efficacy, confidence and digital literacy through their participation in digital media (Seo et al., 2014). Economic Empowerment dimensions were found in 26 studies and were exhibited through entrepreneurial activities, accessing new markets or gaining financial independence and development of their business. Digital media platforms allowed women to navigate aspects of formal economic participation that would otherwise be difficult, especially in developing economies where women may have minimal access to formal economic settings(Oluwatosin Otokiti et al., n.d.). Social Empowerment was found in 26 studies and was exhibited through community building, broadening social networks and facilitating collective actions or participation in social movements. Moreover, past studies confirm social media increasing role in women, providing spaces that allowed them to connect and engage across geography and culture, and cooperative advocacy.

Patterns of Multidimensional Empowerment(Kumari) were also present across the entire dataset, where 26 studies documented outcomes and evidence of women's empowerment in all four dimensions at once. This pattern suggests that the empowering impacts of digital media and women's empowerment are inseparable, and as technological access is provided, it contributes to a cascading effect.

Theoretical Framework: Understanding Digital Empowerment

The findings of this systematic review can be understood through a combined theoretical framework that brings together two related perspectives: empowerment theory and technology acceptance and adaptation frameworks.

Empowerment Theory and Multilevel Analysis

Classical empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 1995; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995) suggests that empowerment occurs at three levels—individual (psychological), organizational (social), and community (structural). Psychological empowerment includes intrapersonal elements (self-efficacy, control), interactional elements (critical awareness, resource mobilization skills), and behavioral elements (participatory actions).

Individual Level (Personal Empowerment): Digital platforms improve self-efficacy and agency through skill development and identity affirmation. Indian women entrepreneurs show increased confidence in business decision-making through Instagram engagement (Chakraborty & Biswal, 2023). This example highlights the intrapersonal component, focusing on internal perceptions of capability and control.

Organizational/Social Level (Social Empowerment): Digital communities support collective action and resource sharing. UK Muslim women's Facebook groups illustrate the interactional component. Members gain critical awareness of inequities in the tourism industry and share knowledge to navigate patriarchal family structures (Khan et al., 2022).

Community Level (Economic Empowerment): Digital platforms allow participation in formal economic systems that were previously closed due to discrimination, mobility issues, or geographical isolation. The e-commerce activities of Sudanese diaspora entrepreneurs show behavioral empowerment, emphasizing actual participation in market systems that change material conditions (Steel, 2021).

Technology Acceptance, Adoption, and Adaptation

We combine Davis's TAM, Venkatesh's (UTAUT), and Rogers's Diffusion of Innovations theory to explore engagement factors identified in RQ1.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

There are a few limitations to consider regarding these findings. The high percentage of qualitative studies reviewed—72% of the literature—indicates that focusing more on quantitative studies could help highlight measurable aspects of empowerment or show where empowerment acts as a cause. The geographically located studies were also located in specific areas with limited representation, which suggests further opportunities for research that falls within the empowerment continuum for neglected contexts. Future work should take a longitudinal approach to determining how rapidly or to what extent digital empowerment can be maintained over time. It would also be beneficial to explore the ways each digital medium can be understood theoretically and how each may offer different empowerment experiences, especially given the impact of design choices (e.g., what form of contestation and collaboration does algorithmic design facilitate?). Another significant aspect of future

research is the relationship between people's digital empowerment experiences and other dimensions of identity (i.e., race, class, disability etc.) that influence the development of inclusive digital development. For empowerment to be measured, there needs to be conceptualised measurement frameworks proposed, instead of empirical. Such frameworks could inform future comparative research as well as programme evaluations. Lastly, research is necessary to imagine the future of empowerment with respect to artificial intelligence and emerging technologies, so that we may stay ahead of emerging technologies.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review has thoroughly explored the digital environment's impact on women's empowerment, synthesizing findings from 39 studies in multiple global contexts from 2020-2025. This analysis highlights a complex but largely positive relationship between women's engagement with digital media and multidimensional women's empowerment. Moreover, also draws attention to ongoing issues that must be resolved. This research makes three valuable input to our understanding of the processes of digital empowerment. First, it demonstrates that the path to women's digital media engagement is motivated by multiple and interrelated audiences, with entrepreneurial and economic opportunities as the main facilitators of change (along with social activity and self-expression). This finding runs counter to linear models of technology uptake, i.e., bureaucratically controlled social campaigns, for example, by elucidating the multiple motivations that inform women's digital participation (Jain, 2020). Secondly, it is shown that the digital empowerment process operates on four interrelated categories of empowerment - personal(Caldeira et al., 2020), technological(Chaker & Zouaoui, 2023), economic(Agyemang & Bokpin, 2025a), and social(Steel, 2021), with most empowerment interventions having major effects on more than one sphere. This type of non-linear interrelated category of change suggests that digital technologies often help catalyze an entire transformation at many levels(McAdam et al., 2020), rather than a technology skill set or motivation for technical use/re-use (Shukla et al., 2021).

This finding supports and expands upon empowerment theories grounded in holism and social constructionism (Duan, 2020)through showing that developing women's agency is a complex, interrelated process. Finally, the data support the global relevance of digital empowerment by demonstrating that women are mobilizing their agency through digital

media as an empowerment process, regardless of socio-cultural context(Khan et al., 2022), from advanced economy contexts such as Australia or the USA (Heizmann & Liu; Khoo et al., 2024; Suseno & Abbott, 2021) to emergent economies South Africa(Agyemang & Bokpin, 2025b) or India (Liu et al., 2025; Tawangar et al., 2025). The themes identified in this review suggested similar organizations, models (Chakraborty & Biswal, 2023) or types of systems supporting and utilizing digitalization towards women's agency (Kondakciu et al., 2022), empowerment and digital literacy were found, within and across, contexts. With the effect of pandemic women's digitalization process has increased with greater urgency, the implications concerning women's empowerment involving digitalization and the intersectionality of gender and other forms of oppression were evidently linked.

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