

Situating Self-Employed Urban Women Conducting Business through Contemporary Social Media

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Abstract

Informal economy includes varied set of economic activities, enterprises, jobs, and workers. The economy typically consists of enterprises and/or people that are not regulated or protected by the state. The concept originally applied to self-employment in small unregistered enterprises. It has been expanded to include wage employment in unprotected jobs. A home-based self-employed women worker can be involved as a fashion designer, a tiffin service provider, a home tutor, a person working with vendors, selling and reselling apparel, accessories to name a few. Informal self-employment is very large and heterogeneous as a category itself. There are different people working within in an informally self-employed category. The review tries to understand home based business women within the ambit of informal employment. The focus of research turns to technological advancement, social media and its impact on women's economic and business efforts. The review, using a feminist lens, understands academic researches on women's economic efforts. The review's focus will largely be owners and own account (individually run enterprises) women workers of informal enterprises in urban areas which for ease of reference, I have termed as home-based self-employed urban woman.

Keyword: Digital Business Women, Self-employed Women, Business Women, Women in Social Media

Introduction

“Considerable research in past 30 years has been devoted to women and work in the context of shifting divisions of labour globally (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2004). Some of this feminist work proceeds from the development perspectives promoted by the UN and other policy making institutions (Chen et al, 2005), while other research takes a more critical view (Beneria, 2003; Pyle & Ward, 2007). Many studies address changes in the gender division of labour within specific national economies (Freeman, 1999; George, 2005; Rofel, 1995; Sangster, 1995) while others consider the impact of transnational migration on women's class position (Pratt, 2004; Romero, 1992; Stephen, 2007) and women's opportunities for cross-class solidarity and grassroots-based organizing (Mohanty, 2003). More recent feminist research has addressed the restructuring of work and its impact on women and gender culture as an effect of neo-liberal economic adjustments (Adkins, 2002; Enloe, 2004; Federicci, 2008; McRobbie, 2002; Skeggs, 2003).”

- (Ferguson, Hennessy & Zalta, 2012, Feminist Perspectives on Class and Work Section, 3rd Para)

The authors in the above extract aptly describe research on women and work, at a global work front. The authors establish that a woman's labour has been looked at multi-dimensionally. Globally, women have been studied as a part of capitalist organisations, as a migrant worker, under the socio-economic lens, as a resource recipient of UN, Governments and other policy making institutions.

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Lately, as the authors point out, a lot of research focus across academic genres of economics, psychology, management and women's studies has been on women, globalisation and restructuring of work. By restructuring of work, we mean sectors (foods, manufacturing, textiles and technology to name a few), spaces (public and private spheres, to be explained further) and also the kind of work (organised and unorganised work; formal and informal work to be explained further).

Method and Organisation of Literature

For data mining, the researcher followed a dualistic approach- sourced from academic publications and grey literature. Academic publications of the past two decades have been used. Emerald Management Xtra and JSTOR –two large databases of more than 150 peer reviewed management journals were referred. This was complemented by reviewing grey literature of the past decade indexed online. Keyword searches included – “feminist theories on women and work”, “spaces in which women operate their businesses”, “sexual division of labour”, “self-employed women”, “work-life balance”, “Indian home based businesses”, “self-employed women and cyberspace”, “self-employed women and digital selling”, “Indian policies on business” etc.

Review is organised in following categories: the researcher used a funnel approach of delving from a broad base of women and work environment and perception as a general understanding in the dominant west and in India as a contrast. The researcher moved on to a narrow context of self-employed contextualised as middle class in an urban environment. Self-employed home based businesses have been in existence in developing economies like our country, however social media and information technology in general is a new dimension added to the work spaces of home based businesses. Through this review, the researcher has also attempted to delve into two unique characteristics of digital business home-based business women. Firstly, the researcher understands their entry into an unsupportive business ecosystem of India. Secondly, he looks at their sustenance in an established male dominated technological world. The review is backed by key trends intersecting social media, managerial economics, sociology, psychology and women's studies disciplines.

Understanding the Existence of Private and Public Spheres and its Impact on Women's Home-based Work

The private and public spheres are defined in the following manner. “A common practice to divide social world into two gendered spheres -The private sphere is stereotypically a feminine world of household, family, and unpaid domestic labour while the public sphere is the stereotypically masculine world of politics and paid employment” (Crossman, n.d.). For a typical Indian context, it would mean public environment or spaces like waged work, industry, goods/services production for the market, politics, warfare, to name a few, and the private domain as a domestic world comprising of the family, in-laws, children, and self (Mazumdar, 1991).

Understanding the History of Gender Segregated Spheres

The ideology of separate spheres is an age old concept in sociological disciplines. The concept of separate spheres or spaces as it is alternatively called, dominated thoughts and practices about gender roles right from the late 18th century all through the 19th century in America. As Crossman states, historically, “In the conception of the division of gender roles into separate spheres, women's place was in the private sphere – family life and the home. Men's place was in the public sphere – in politics, in the economic world which was becoming increasingly separate from home life as the Industrial revolution progressed, in the public social and cultural activity”. Similar ideas about separate spaces, automatically separate duties-influenced gender roles in other parts of the world. The concept of separate spheres continues to influence a significant portion of opinions on “proper” gender roles today (Crossman, n.d.). As women's history expert, Jone John Lewis states, “*Those women who sought places in the public sphere often found themselves identified as unnatural, as well as unwelcome challenges to the cultural assumptions*” (Lewis, 2015). True to Lewis's contention, the legal status of women as dependents until marriage and under husband's care after marriage – with no separate identity and no personal rights including economic and property rights was in accord with the idea that women's place was at home and a man's place was very much in the public domain.

Implication of Sex-segregated Spheres in Women's Labour

The new "marriage" of patriarchal capitalism operates to relegate women to unpaid or lesser paid caring labour; whether in the household or in wage labour, thus keeping women by and large unequal to men..... However, as it forces more and more women into wage labour, women are given opportunities for some independence from men and the possibility to challenge male dominance and sex segregation in all spheres of social life. Examples (largely, in the west) are the rise of the first and second wave women's movements and consequent gains in civil rights for women.

-(Ferguson, Hennessy & Zalta, 2012, The Public/Private Split Section)

In order to understand, this complex but profound argument, it is importance to explain the term patriarchal capitalism. The above arguments stem from a notable feminist's (Walby, 1990) contention that, capitalists' economies at a macro-economic level and patriarchal household economy at a micro-economic level lead to two basic forms of patriarchy which is: private and public patriarchy. Private patriarchy typical excludes women from economic and political power while public patriarchy works by segregating women even in public spheres (typically low waged and menial sectoral opportunities for work like domestic work, care work, temporary/contractual work, clerical work to name a few depending on socio-economic conditions). Walby observed a sense of re-adjustment of the dual systems (public and private patriarchy) when the older private father patriarchy based on the patriarchal family is broken down due to the pressures of capitalism. But what is important to note here is the possibility of economic independence which is the first step to challenge male domination and sex-segregation, be it home or work.

Sexual Division of Labour and its Effect on Women's Economic Efforts

Sexual Division of Labour and Women's Subordination

The sexual division of labour is a fact of life (Mackintosh, 1984). Sexual division of labour, in simple terms, means

segregation of men's and women's activities. Research documentation in industrialised countries has led to segregation of women not only into certain industrial sectors and also into certain occupations at lower pay. These occupations often come with the labels of less skill requirements, and a low level in the organisational hierarchy. Feminists argue that the divisions of labour are not "natural" and it leads to a perpetuation of subordination of women (Bartky, 1990; Ferguson, 1991). Subordination is a concept emphasizing women's relationships with men which in turn are detrimental to women and are related to economic exploitation. This has both economic and psychological consequences, since women's caring labour (housekeeping, caring for husband, children, and elderly) creates a situation where women tend to become less capable of or motivated to separate themselves from others as an individual and internalize the situation. Hence the women are less likely to protest against such gender exploitation (Ferguson 1989, 1991). Another vein of feminist argument highlights the reason for such inequalities. Women's bargaining power is less than men's because of the power relations involved in the gender division of labour and property (Engles, 1972; Folbre, 1982). While the nature of exploitation may be different, gendered exploitation is rampant in a system of meeting human needs; women in such systems can be seen as a "sex class" (or gender class) across economic class lines (Delphy, 1984; Ferguson, 1989, 1991; Irigaray, 1975; Wittig, 1980).

Women Including Self Employed, Discriminated in the Labour Market as a Result of Sexual Division of Labour and Role Stereotyping in the Private Sphere

The previous section established sexual division of labour as an implication of sex-segregated spheres. This section is dedicated to further exploring the implication and its connection to the social situation of self-employed women and its ultimate bearing on her economic efforts. While caring labour dominates an Indian woman's routine, feminist economists have time and again pointed out multi-dimensional challenges that impede economic efforts of Indian women. The following abstract from Preet Rustagi's paper on 'Understanding gender inequalities in wages and incomes in India', dated 2005 emphatically can set the base for further arguments.

"The discrimination and biases against women witnessed in social spheres gets mirrored on to economic spaces

not only through direct, legitimate routes but also via the resilience in perceptions and mind sets among the agents of the labour markets that reconfigure to retain elements of gender imbalances. The space for unbiased consideration and gender based comparison is not only constricted by data inadequacies but is nullified due to the perceptions derived from the patriarchal role stereotyping that precedes any deliberation on women's contribution to the economy, necessitating the recognition of these elements as precursors to such analysis on gender inequalities". (Rustagi, 2005, pp., 319)

In her paper, Rustagi puts forth an effective argument for gender wage discrimination by providing Indian instances of informal labour market largely consisted of self-employed women (established in the introduction chapter through statistics). While her paper focuses on wage inequalities, Rustagi draws an effective linkage between subordination of women that is seen in public spaces like labour market, due to unnatural relegation of women into caring labour at home and the resultant role-stereotyping as housewife. Her paper highlights the multi-dimensional context of gender inequalities prevalent in Indian labour markets. These inequalities, stemming from the socially derived structures, division of labour, sex segregation and labour market segmentation, provide the basis for propagation and perpetuation of subordination right from entry into the labour market, all through sustenance. Self-employed women face various challenges right from getting hired or getting the business, achieving promotions or bigger business orders, opportunities of business in high-yielding business sectors (Rustagi, 2005).

Across decades, complementing Rustagi, gender researchers have argued that a woman's economic efforts in an informal work set up can never be understood in isolation and has to be contextualised and juxtaposed with her social position, her economic background, education to name a few (Tinker ed., 1990; Agrawal, 1993). More importantly, her traditional role of house-keeping and caring for family members has often been seen as a detrimental factor for economic success. Specifically, for Indian women, the factors affecting or influencing women's economic participation of any kind be it at home or outside are more often than not household decisions as opposed to individual choice (Papola, 1986; Vaidyanathan, 1980).

Contextualising the Existence of Home Based Self – Employment Among Women in the Urban Areas

Since women's roles include domestic responsibilities, number of hours available to them for their labour market participation is very limited. Half of the women exclusively involved in domestic chores express their inability to participate in the economic efforts, because there were no other persons in their household who could replace or significantly support their caring labour. However, in earlier decades of National Sample Surveys, many women across India expressed their willingness to undertake work within the household premises (NSS, 1999-2000). Nearly 31 percent urban women were involved in home based work exclusively showed keenness on earning some additional income besides household responsibilities. As a culture, Indian women recognise the need for economic empowerment (Kalpagam, 1999) and thus negotiate their household responsibilities to incorporate time for paid economic efforts like self-employment.

Home Based Urban Self-employed Middle Class Women are Under-Researched Across Academic Genres of Women's Studies, Management and Economics

Research Invisibility of Self-employed Urban Middle Class Women in Home Based Work, Across Academic Disciplines

Empirical research in social sciences (psychology, sociology to be more precise) and management across decades have largely focused on educated working women in formal sectors (Rajadhyaksha, 2005). Management across last three decades have focused on entrepreneurial activities of women, albeit at a very organised, formal sector and largely registered businesses (Das, 2000-2001). In case of women studies discipline, research on women and work in general, have largely focused on marginalised women, expanding it to include the most underprivileged segments of Indian society such as Dalit women (Rege, 2000). Women studies scholars have also raised the problematic issue of the methodology of studying work

and non-work in India by highlighting the invisibility of women's economic contribution in national income accounting (Krishna Raj, 1983). But on a contextualised basis, self-employed middle class women doing home-based work has been largely invisible. Entrepreneurship research at an academic level itself is only now showing an increase. It is not progressing as other disciplines of social science. Much more concentration needs to be given to ensure development of the subject (Ganapathi, n.d.). In such a situation, focus on women in business with a focus on informal sector is a distant dream. As Rajadhyaksha (2005) concludes,

The disconnect between researchers of work and family in India is rather unfortunate as it reduces the ability to address and resolve basic dilemmas such as the perpetuation of traditional sex-role stereotypes and behaviour even in the midst of modernity and change. It also limits the range of suggested interventions to the problems of balancing work and family. For instance, women's studies have worked tirelessly at bringing about policy change at the macro socio-economic level through the instrument of the state. Psychologists on the other hand have offered plethora of solutions at the level of the individual. However scant attention has been focused at the organisational level.

From Rajadhyaksha's concluding remarks, one observation is strongly emphasized- An Indian woman is heterogeneous in nature and very complex to be brought under one single umbrella or theory for focus. Within entrepreneurship itself, there are registered as well as unregistered businesses and most research has been carried out on registered enterprises (Das, 2000-2001; Sharma, 2013; Surti & Supriya, 1983). Labour economics and women's studies have focused on issues of marginalised and lower socio-economic women self-employed in the informal sector (Chen & Raveendran, 2012; Chandrasekhar & Ghosh, 2007). There has hardly been any research on home based self - employment of middle class women. Because of their invisibility, these women are difficult to define even for policy framework, which leads us to the next section of policy and government measures for self-employed women and where do these women with respect to our study could be possibly placed within this framework.

Unsupportive Business Ecosystem in India, doesn't Deter the Entry of a Large Number of Women in Self-Employment and Business

Problems Faced by Women in the Indian Business Eco-System

Women and business have historically not been seen as going together. Theoretical and empirical research shows that the Indian world of business is not very supportive of women in business or self-employment. A survey and resultant scorecard by Dell (Technology scion) brought to light startling facts. India ranked third last in its support for women in business (Dell Global Women Entrepreneur Leaders scorecard, 2015). The reason cited was lack of equal rights and access to education, opportunities and internet. Yet other studies show the dominance of the masculine work culture (Luff & Ward, 2001), male stereotyping of roles and responsibilities especially entrepreneurship and leadership roles and preconception of women's roles and abilities (Metz, 2005), exclusion from informal communication and political networks (Mackenzie Davey, 2008), lack of relevant management experience (as an outcome of structural barriers), lack of mentoring, the relative under-representation of women in all sectors at all levels restrict the career choices for women.

While much literature has generated possible reasons for limiting opportunities for women in business there has been limited research on women and their experiences in starting up a business or in self-employment. Though the likelihood of both women and men equally wanting to get into businesses (Gupta, Turban, Wasti, & Sikdar, 2009) can be similar, a business 'man' is better identified and accepted than a businesswoman. This is despite the fact that both a man and a woman may belong to same class, race, socio-economic or cultural identity (Gupta *et al.*, 2009). These stereotyped images of masculine and feminine characteristics are culturally so deeply engraved, that men and women acquire it through environmental observation and learning right from their childhood (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Consequently, the stereotyped image of business as male oriented has far reaching negative consequences for women in business. Empirical and theoretical evidence in the last two decades suggests

that women have found business environment to be very hostile to succeed (Gupta *et al.*, 2009; Kolvereid, Shane, & Westhead, 1993). Time and again, research points to issues relating to finding resources like capital, honing business skills like marketing and networking with suppliers, consumers and even business mentors (Bettcher & Mihaylova, 2015; Benderly, 2012; Fay & Williams, 1993; Gatewood, Carter, Brush, Greene, & Hart, 2003; Kaushik, 2013; Thamaraiselvi, 2007, Vishwanathan, 2001).

While on one hand, the business world lacks in providing sufficient support and encouragement, the women also have to deal with societal approval for pursuing a business. This is especially true in case of Indian women where her life is typically shaped by her various roles, relationships and responsibilities, for instance, her spouse's career, child-bearing, child-rearing, and the care of elderly family members. Although men may face similar responsibilities these tend to have less influence on their career as traditionally women have been held as a primary care-giver more likely to experience disruptions in career during child-bearing years and family responsibilities (Ackah & Heaton, 2004). Thus family support, societal sanction towards employment of any kind (service or business) is an important factor in success of their involvement in a paid economic activity (Chaudhury & Verick, 2014; Kaushik, 2013; Vishwanathan, 2001).

The Entrepreneurial Journey of an Indian Business Women is Rigged with Roadblocks Right from Entry to Sustenance

While there is no specific data on the journey of middle class home based business women, self-employment or women entrepreneurship in general is a challenging task for Indian women. Women in the workforce have been perennially facing the challenge of managing work and family responsibilities (Frone, Russell, & Copper, 1992; Guendouzi, 2006; Noor, 2004; Shelton, 2006; Welter, 2004; Rehman & Roomi, 2012). To gain more flexibility and control over their work and personal lives, research points out that many women started their own businesses (Hodges, 2012; Baber & Monaghan, 1988; Machung, 1989; Ward, 2007; Rehman & Roomi 2012). While monetary gains are welcome, they are not their primary goal. Their primary goal is not monetary reward but personal satisfaction and community involvement (Shankar, 2013; Satpal & Rajain, 2014). However,

domestic responsibilities have been proved to have a significant impact on a self-employed woman's work. They have been found to impede professional success of women such as: limit the scope of their businesses and the intensity of work effort in them (Hundley, 2001 in Forson, 2013, p.462). Even at a macro level, a recent report sponsored by Dell, places India as one of the worst countries for a businesswoman to flourish. Besides low acceptance of female leadership, misogynistic attitude towards businesswomen was argued as a major reason for such a low ranking (Kably, 2015; Fok, 2015; Sharma, 2015). Indeed, a large part of the business activities of women employed in small businesses demand the maintenance of their dual presence: at home and at work (Forson, 2013). Besides socio-cultural factors like caring labour and mobility constraints, management research also points out external risk factors like dearth of institutional financial assistance as established before, market entry issues and sustenance and marketing and network building skills for business success (Shankar, 2013; Satpal & Rajain, 2014, Vijayaragavan, 2014).

Despite the societal, cultural and structural issues many Indian women are self-employed and are in business. Women have managed overcome cultural challenges to pursue business opportunities. Self Employed Women's Association of India (SEWA) estimates that a glaring sixty percent of population in self-employment and business are women. This figure is supported by the most recent Indian census which says that ninety-four percent of economically active Indian women work as self-employed persons, pursuing their own business (Bhatia, 2009). Also, nearly fifty percent of the total businesses that are conducted in India are by women, most of these businesses are very small businesses, which are very difficult to define in classic business/economic terms (Dutta, 2015). In a National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) survey conducted in 2011-12, it was found that around thirteen crore women workers are present in India, out of which close to fifty-six percent are self-employed. While a large part of these self-employed women are in the rural areas, close to twenty-four percent women work out of the urban India (First Post, 2014).

To summarise, the landscape of business, family and society do not really uphold a woman as a 'business magnate'. Yet, there have been efforts by many women to establish their own business and make a mark of their own in myriad ways. In such a circumstance present literature

seems to fall short of studying their business experiences. What is then required is to study these women engaged in various forms of economic activity as self-employed women situated within the intersection of gender, caste, class, religion, education and economic status, and family background. This idea is appropriate since women belonging to diverse class and castes have developed unique identities (Mohanty, 2003). For example, an upper caste woman will have a very different public identity as a person conducting business as compared to a Dalit woman. Two women with different economic and educational backgrounds will have a different approach to business. Consequently, access to knowledge and support system for business progression will also be different (Guru, 2005).

While Self-employed Women in West are Moving Towards a Masculine Model of Self-Employment, Indian Women are Keen on Negotiating Work with Family Responsibilities

In order to move away from the image of a non-market work, self-employed women often walk on a tight rope of work proficiency. Intensive client relationship management, maintaining a professional outlook and image are important aspects for businesswomen (Forson, 2013). Small businesses are often characterised by low profit margins but nonetheless involve a high degree of labour involvement. In addition, self-employment doesn't come with support policies of paid employment like maternity leaves, child care support and the likes. Many women have worked late till they went into labour and joined work early as compared to those in paid employment. For African business women, adaptation strategies for coping with career constraints have included the development of linear careers, a replication of the male model. Such a model involves either limited involvement in family life or even the complete rejection of motherhood and marriage (be it intentional or unintentional) (Hewlett, 2002 in Forson, 2013).

However, there is no evidence available of Indian women rejecting family responsibilities in favour of being self-employed. Even for the working women, social approval from family is more important than approval from the workplace (Racherla, 2014). Family is perceived as an area of conflict more than the workplace. In an academic sense, negotiations involved at work is something that is fairly under-researched for women. Even scarce studies

on work negotiations of women in paid employment have yielded vague findings (Racherla, 2014).

Setting Expectations for Self and others, Balancing Family Responsibilities in a Gender Stereotyped Patriarchal Set Up

Women's empirical voices across review highlight challenges posed by domestic responsibilities in the path to professional success (Forson, 2013; Racherla, 2014; Rehman & Roomi, 2012; Rajadhyaksha, 2012). There is specific mention of low level of involvement from husbands to help out with domestic responsibilities. Research participant voices that form the base of my review are specifically of African and Asian origin. These societies have traditionally been patriarchal. This is found to be the primary reason for gender role imbalance, with the bulk of responsibilities falling on a woman's shoulders. Changing gender role expectations often had men providing some support in home and business. However, rigid social structures would not allow equal sharing of domestic responsibilities (Forson, 2013; Racherla, 2014; Rehman & Roomi, 2012). Men preferred to do intellectual help like accounting, helping children with homework, stock monitoring, buying grocery etc. But the onus of housekeeping and childcare rests on women. Class resources often help in replacing a woman's labour for domestic chores like cooking, housekeeping and childcare (Forson, 2013; Racherla, 2014). There are Indian examples of working women executives enlisting help from caterer, housekeeper or parents and in-laws for taking care of house and children. This often makes them believe even more strongly in family support and values (Racherla, 2014). They do not feel the need to question broader imbalance in gender roles. The privilege to outsource household responsibilities comes with reasonable economic and social standing. Self-employed women who are in poor socio-economic conditions often have to grapple with work and domestic responsibilities. Re-organisation of a family structure is sought in such a case. Enlisting the help of grandmothers or sending away children to grow up with elders in the family have been used as a solution. Monetary support for this purpose is given to the elder caretakers. Women with little or no family support often get children to work. However, such solutions were seen rather as a compromise. Women actively tried to compartmentalise their time of work and family duties. Like restricting

work within a time frame, for example. This was mostly done at the cost of losing customers, women were unable to find a solution for keeping both dedicated timings and clients/customers (Forson, 2013). Pressures arising out of family responsibilities often spill onto work and their peer relationships, but women repeatedly mention the need to compartmentalizing issues and prioritizing (Racherla, 2014; Rehman & Roomi, 2012). In Rehman & Roomi's study of Pakistani self-employed women, specific time for work, child care, cooking, shopping for home was charted on a regular basis even at the cost of quality time for self. However, such a study on Indian self-employed women is unavailable to give voice to their opinions. Working women executives have clear priorities and expectations set with family (Racherla, 2014). In order to maintain work-family balance, women set expectations with family members with regards to their household responsibilities. They were also found to rationalise that their husbands would not understand or even empathise with their work problems. These women do not want to change the society, just make minor gender role changes to help them function better.

Our Businesses are Small, we are Scattered Across the Country and World, but Internet Connects us to Our Businesses and Each Other

Across the world, public (work) and private (home) spaces of a self-employed woman are often not watertight compartments. The negotiation of responsibilities with one's husband and family needs to be understood empirically. Women having rigid work rules governed by family responsibilities have to face the brunt of unprofessional image and lose customer loyalty (Forson, 2013). While societal structures may take forever to change, it is important to understand if policy support is possible for entrepreneurial support for women at various levels of business. Formal organisations have included gender equality and child care facilities as part of work-life balance initiatives at an institutional level (Rajadhyaksha, 2012). While their impact needs to be tested, however such initiatives do not percolate to self-employed women whether she is a work-from-home person or has a physical or virtual establishment outside home. In one such empirical study of American women, women working out of home often came across as someone working for 'bonus' income, and a psychological perception of not being just a home maker.

Further, these women were self-employed digital vendors or contractors (computer aided workers) of multi-national corporations. Evidently, they were not entitled to benefits or security of a paid employee (Christensen, 1987). These arrangements often put women in a vulnerable position not just economically but socially as well. Her work seems just like an extension to household duties. Yet, figures show a staggering rate of women turning to self-employment. UK alone is witnessing 1.2 million women who are turning "Mumpreneurs" (Mumpreneur, 2015). Women have been turning to digital world for an alternate career. In India, sectors like jewellery designing, furniture, textiles and clothing, fashion and beauty which are primarily run by women are thriving through social media networking (Agarwal & Basu, 2015; Sharma, 2014, Singh, 2012). Setting up a website, a Facebook page, social networking is all seen as an attempt for a professional image. (Mumpreneur, 2015; Balancing babies, 2015). It is emerging as a dedicated work space within the comfort of one's home.

Introducing Social Media and Internet as a Negotiation for Conducting Businesses

Early research in developed countries clearly looked at technology as a masculine field. Professionally, women were largely under represented in fields like science, technology and management (Beyer, Rynes, & Haller, 2004; Phipps, 2002; Wacjman, 1991). These masculine stereotypes and western women's inhibitions arising due to these stereotypes had led to technology being appropriated largely as a male domain (Gupta, 2014). Contrastingly, recent writings by feminists in the last decade embrace the fact that technology has potential for changing stereotypical gender relations through women empowerment. This argument has specially been made post the advent of the World Wide Web and cyberspaces. Many feminists supporting the above argument opine that women can dream of a world free from gender hierarchy; having been denied opportunities in traditional public spaces of society (Wacjman, 2010; Lawley, 1993). Wacjman further narrates that feminist propositions on gender and technology have travelled a full circle. Early feminist arguments viewed how gender relations affected exposure, opportunities and ultimately empowerment with technology. Traditionally men dominated the technology world and women were largely left behind. However, over the last decade, digital and social media revolution

has brought women to the forefront. Educated, internet savvy women, have had many opportunities to engage in communication, economic and personal growth. This has led to a change in feminist research avenues, which now focus on how technology is affecting gender relations. Distinguished cyber-feminists like Donna Haraway, Sadie Plant to name a few have highlighted positive changes in gender hierarchy and women empowerment (Plant, 1997; Haraway, 1995).

True to feminist arguments, corporate and business houses have predicted rapid strides in economic empowerment in developing countries through the internet world. A study by the Boston Consulting Group prophesied that every second Indian will be an internet user by 2018 (Singh, 2015). There is potential for economic gain worth two hundred billion dollars from the internet. The study also revealed catalytic growth in entrepreneurship and wealth creation besides enormous job creations. These statistics are supported by a Deloitte Consulting report titled 'Value of Connectivity', which reveals that India's internet economy has the potential to create sixty-five million jobs leading to an increase in per capita income as high as twenty-nine percent as more people come online (Singh, 2015).

In the case of women empowerment, social media engagement is playing a huge role. Following data from leading digital and corporate houses break a stereotypical image of 'a digital Indian'. As of December 2013, 39 percent Indian women were found to be 'online', that is digitally engaged (Blakely, 2014). Another study revealed that in India, the heaviest Internet users are women in the age group of 35-44 years (India Digital Future Focus, 2013). Johanna Blakely, the Managing Director and Director of Research at the Norman Lear Centre (a research and public policy institute), has predicted that India will take a long time to get 'online' due to the economic and social divide. However, gender divide will be the easiest to overcome. To support her argument, she quotes the example of a corporate initiative called "Helping Women Get Online" a partnership between Google, Intel, Hindustan Unilever and Axis Bank (Blakely, 2014).

Thus, besides the obvious benefits of social connectivity, networking and communication; many self-employed Indian women today are using digital media to advance their business prospects. Whether it is showcasing

products on a mass social network like Facebook or sharing information, products and services through WhatsApp, women have been creatively using social media to advance their business. In the last couple of years, print media has been sharing stories of women who are live examples of this trend. In a recent article, a newspaper daily shared the stories of five women from Mumbai who were creatively using WhatsApp for selling their products on the occasion of Diwali - a major Hindu festival (Shah, 2015). From selling gift items through Facebook, taking orders for sweets and savories through WhatsApp, the article shares live examples of women spanning age groups of 22-52 using digital media for customer orders, servicing and even post service feedback. What started off as extra pocket money, a hobby to be pursued at home or just a little extra income for oneself; had developed into a full-fledged sustainable business. Similarly, even in non-metros like Udaipur, there have been instances of mothers working out of their homes to build a business through digital medium (Sisodia, 2014). Riding on this social media wave, many websites provide suggestions and business lessons exclusively for women to succeed using social media websites and applications like Facebook and WhatsApp. There are detailed business lessons on identifying the social media market, advertising to them and gaining viable customer feedback (Gunelius, 2009; Open Forum, 2010).

While educated and privileged Indian women have been rapidly organising online business, their experiences however, are still under-represented in academic research. However, few Indian academic papers have introduced women's interactions with social media, largely in the areas of activism and organizing for social networking and information seeking (Subramanian, 2015; Kumari & Sinha, 2014). A few other Indian studies have shown women's interactions with technology as an employee with professional gains (Gupta, 2014). However, nuanced experiences and voices of women doing business in social media are negligent in India. For example, a recent research on self-branding by fashion bloggers documented their social media production and self-representation strategies online (Duffy & Hund, 2015). This facet of women conducting business in a digital medium has been academically under-researched as it is an upcoming area for research.

Concluding Thoughts: Is Digital Technology and Cyberspace a Way of Negotiating Parallel Workspace at Home?

Technology, improved global communication and westernisation have largely contributed towards changing women roles (Nath, 2000; Rajadhyaksha, 2012). Their way of doing business is also changing. One can see self-employed women set up thriving “Facebook” pages and taking orders through “WhatsApp”. Cyber space is viewed as a revolutionary concept where public and private spheres of a woman’s world merge. Though many feminists have believed computers to be essentially male, computers and the Internet should be viewed as places for women to engage in new forms of work and play—where women are freed from traditional constraints and are able to experiment with identity and gain new avenues for claiming power and authority. Cyber feminists believed cyberspace to be a liberating force for women empowerment. Cyberspace has emerged as a welcoming, familiar environment for women, where they can and seize opportunities to advance themselves and to challenge the male authority (Plant, 1997). This belief is unwavering even if digital world and the cultures emerging from the digital interactions contain as many gendered power dynamics as the real world. Feminists compare web connectivity to the consciousness-raising groups of 70s third-wave feminism, where women came together to discuss their similarities and differences. From Leonardo, MIT’s arts journal, in 1998: “the question is not one of dominance and control or of submission and surrender to machines; instead it is one of exploring alliances, affinities, and co-evolutionary possibilities... between women and technology” (Consalvo, 2012; Evans, 2014). Third world Cyberfeminists back then in the late 90’s, notably those like Radhika Gajjala argued that empowerment of women in the field of new electronic media can only result from the interpretation of technology, and access to these tools (Gajjala, 1999; 2004).

Besides, engaging online for business is revolutionary in many ways. It not only reshapes one’s social spaces and relations, but it also reconfigures a community and a market (Shephard, 2013; Subramanian, 2015). In short, the very nature of online spaces debunks traditional ways of pursuing work or business. Women doing business online, posting products on Facebook and WhatsApp claim that they get real-time feedback from peers, quick interaction

with customers and a willing audience (Agarwal & Basu, 2015). This puts a net-savvy woman who is unable to step out of home (public sphere) in a competitive market along with any other privileged entrepreneur who has that access.

Digital organising is like the act of “counter public” (a term developed by Nancy Fraser to critique Habermas’s claim that public spheres are inclusive). “Counter publics” are spaces where subordinated groups (like women) find voice and interact for their own benefit (Fraser, 1990). A couple of decades ago, even in developed countries like the Europe where technology was advanced, it was difficult to locate a woman industrialist but very easy to find self-employed women using technology for advancement (Mitter, 1995). Today, it is a visual reality to see Indian women operating out of home businesses and using online organising opportunities to interact and propagate businesses. However, as established before, due to their home-based work their business often goes unnoticed by academic researches and policy makers.

Further Research Possibilities

While home-based urban self-employed women themselves are hardly visible in academic researches, the ones using technology and social media are practically absent with respect to Indian context. Their business journey is practically invisible in academic research and consequently in policy frameworks. This puts forth a mammoth task in front of any researcher attempting to highlight this segment of women. One not only needs to trace their business journey, their challenges and negotiations but also understand the benefits of digital interaction in their daily life as this is another untapped academic research area.

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