

The Impact of Networking on Business Growth and Funding Access among Women's Entrepreneurship

Mrs. Shreshtha Verma¹, Dr. V. Deepa²

¹Research Scholar and Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Faculty of Science and Humanities, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Ramapuram Campus, Chennai – 600 089

²Research Supervisor and Associate Professor, Department of Commerce, Faculty of Science and Humanities, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Ramapuram Campus, Chennai – 600 089

Abstract:

Networking offered a unique value in building a strong professional network for business success. It leverages access to the resources to explore effective networking strategies. It strengthens the funding programs to build trust among stakeholders and women entrepreneurs. The researcher found that women entrepreneurs face a lack of access to digital platforms and ineffective networking. The descriptive and exploratory design was used to analyze the patterns and relationships of women entrepreneurs. The purposive sampling method was used to collect data from 102 respondents through a structured questionnaire. The findings suggest that the women entrepreneurs must develop value chain linkages and collaboration from stakeholders through an inclusive environment.

Keywords: Networking, women entrepreneurs, challenges, impact on networking

Introduction:

Women face multiple challenges to grow in every stage of their business compared to men. According to a recent report, women often lack social and family support for starting a company due to a lack of networking, mentorship, and digital support. Networking offered a unique value in building a strong professional network for business success. It leverages access to the resources to explore effective networking strategies. It connects with new opportunities to meet people, share their ideas, and find support from funding and investment. Networking plays a crucial role in the success of women entrepreneurs, providing a network of peers and mentorship. It supports women entrepreneurs who connect with Sustainable Development Goals to reduce poverty and inequality and promote gender equality. It benefited from guidance, motivation, skill development, and highlighted real-life success stories to inspire the entrepreneurs to promote the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Networking fosters connections by sharing knowledge and addressing the challenges entrepreneurs face, which drives economic growth, innovation, and social change, affecting women's success.

Significance of the study:

It is beneficial to exchange business relationships to support the business and personal growth of women entrepreneurs. Networking is a bridge between the success of women entrepreneurs in **informal and hybrid networks**. It enables access to the resources through the **connectivity** of women's empowerment in reducing gender inequality. It **leverages** innovation and collaboration with intelligence to adopt knowledge exchange. The study provides valuable insights into sensitive **policy frameworks** to support women in business. It strengthens the **funding programs** to build trust among stakeholders and women entrepreneurs.

Need for the study

Women entrepreneurs contribute to economic development, job creation, and innovation worldwide through knowledge. The supportive system helps women entrepreneurs with the issue of their business sustainability. The unique challenges faced by women are gender-based and unexplored in networking knowledge. The study provides networking through their formal and informal networks, influencing business success opportunities. It promotes networking platforms by bridging the gap between policymakers to strengthen the women's ecosystem in business.

Statement of problem

Women entrepreneurs struggle to access capital and grow their businesses, overcoming networking challenges through outreach initiatives and ecosystem development of business sustainability. The researcher found that women entrepreneurs face a lack of access to digital platforms and ineffective networking.

Research question

- Does networking improve access to funding for women entrepreneurs?
- What challenges do women face in building networks?
- Are digital platforms building a network and growing business for women entrepreneurs?

Objectives of the study

- To examine the network's influence on the growth of the business
- To explore the gains from accessing the funds through networks
- To understand the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs through networks.

Hypothesis of the study

H1: Networking helps to grow their business among women entrepreneurs

H2: Networking mitigates gender barriers by accessing funding for women entrepreneurs

Review of Literature:

Nevi G et al. (2025) explore seven factors influencing the sustainability of women entrepreneurs, supporting financial resources, networking, and cultural support to offer strategies for reducing socio-cultural barriers. It addresses the gap through semi-structured interviews and an exploratory study, providing valuable insight into the challenges of women's entrepreneurship in Italy.

Sadraei, R. (2025) addresses networking, boosting innovation, and the growth of business-initiated mentorship and network-building workshops, which strengthen the women entrepreneurs. Irwin et al. (2025) describe the decision of women entrepreneurs to access funding, an SME group, and the digitalization of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Istrefi, A., et al. (2025) determine that the digital transformation of four dimensions affects the performance of entrepreneurial marketing on women's intentions.

Ahmed H et al. (2025) highlight the socio-cultural barriers and gender discrimination faced by Pakistani women entrepreneurs through in-depth interviews, revealing the challenges of digitalization support to start a business. Lenz, A.K. et al. (2025) demonstrate the importance of peer value supporting the network of developing policies that drive the innovation strategy, enhancing venture survival in Brazil.

Aravik H et al. (2025) analyse the key drivers of inclusive and sustainable economic development of Indonesia, strengthening the community and green economy. The challenges are gender bias, capital access, and the technology gap in economic empowerment through digital platforms. Driscoll P et al. (2025) examine thematic analysis of 19 female healthcare entrepreneurs, focusing on financial hurdles shaping women's entrepreneurial decisions in securing investment and scaling ventures.

Paul S et al. (2024) examine 403 female entrepreneurs of the food sector industry, assessing the mediating role of network resources and how business performance positively influences internal and external investment variables of the business. Nigam N et al. (2024) explain that Lebanese women entrepreneurs are negatively impacted by the lack of knowledge, funding, networking, and entrepreneurial ventures, as found in a study of 350 women entrepreneurs using structural equation modeling (SEM).

Yetim, N (2008) reveals that higher social capital and migrant status provide strong networking through their communities' push and pull factors, female entrepreneurship, and also connect with demographic profiles of age, work experience, and professional training. Hanson S et al. (2009) investigated the impact of a network of social identity focused on gender in shaping entrepreneurs' resources and opportunities. Overall, the researcher indicates that the women entrepreneurs' lack of knowledge in networking is leading to financial hurdles in accessing entrepreneurial resources and challenges in starting a business.

Research methodology

The research design focuses on identifying the challenges of networking that affect women entrepreneurs. The descriptive and exploratory design was used to analyze the patterns and relationships of women entrepreneurs. The sample population encompasses retail & e-commerce, healthcare, cosmetic products, and service-based businesses among women entrepreneurs.

The data were collected from 102 respondents through a structured questionnaire using a purposive sampling method. A questionnaire was organized with 3 sections: Section A, which consists of age, education, types of business, and years of experience. Section B consists of details on networking practices, including four questions, and Section C consists of the impact and challenges of networking with five questions. Two hundred questionnaires were distributed through Google Forms, and 140 were returned, out of which 102 were used in statistical analysis, 38 had missing variables, and 60 were unreachable respondents.

Data analysis and interpretation

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Category	Profile	Total respondents	Percentage
Age	Below 25	22	21.6
	26-35	66	64.7
	36-45	04	3.9
	Above 45	10	9.8
Educational Qualification	School level	03	2.9
	UG	69	67.5
	PG	20	19.6
	Vocational Training	10	10.0
Experience	Less than 1 year	40	39.2

	1-3	33	32.4
	4-6	18	17.6
	Above 6	11	10.8
Type of Business	Retail & e-commerce	19	18.6
	Healthcare	23	22.5
	Cosmetic products	38	37.3
	Service-based business	22	21.6
Participate in a professional network	Yes	66	64.7
	No	36	35.3
Attending networking Events	Never	28	27.5
	Occasionally	24	23.5
	Monthly	27	26.5
	Frequently	23	22.5
More confident about networking	Yes	84	82.4
	No	18	17.6
Recommend to other entrepreneurs	Yes	84	82.4
	No	18	17.6

Source: primary data

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of the demographic profile of the 102 respondents. The majority of respondents (64.7%) fall within the 26- to 35-year age group, and the remaining 21.6% are in the 25-year age group. In the educational qualifications of women entrepreneurs, 67.5% of the respondents hold undergraduate degrees, 19.6% hold postgraduate degrees, and 2.9% hold school-level qualifications.

39.2% of respondents have less than 1 year of experience, 32.4% have 1 to 3 years, 17.6% have 4 to 6 years, and 10.8% more than 6 years of experience. 37.3% of respondents' businesses are in the cosmetic products sector, 22.5% are in the healthcare products sector, 21.6% are service-based businesses, and 18.6% are in the retail & e-commerce sector.

64.7% of the entrepreneurs participated in professional network groups, whereas 35.3% did not participate. 27.5% of the respondents do not attend the network events regularly, whereas 26.5% attend events monthly, 23.5% attend events occasionally, and 22.5% attend the network events frequently. 82.4% of respondents are confident that networking helps business success, while 17.6% are not confident. 82.4% of respondents recommend networking to other entrepreneurs, whereas 17.6% do not recommend it to others.

Table 2: ANOVA between benefits gained through networking and challenges faced, and the growth of the business

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Networking helped grow your business	Between Groups	1.481	4	.370	2.692	.035

Challenges faced in networking	Within Groups	13.342	97	.138		
	Total	14.824	101			
	Between Groups	7.870	4	1.968	2.028	.006
	Within Groups	94.091	97	.970		
	Total	101.961	101			

Source: primary data

Table 2 explains the ANOVA results evaluating whether networking in the business and the challenges faced by entrepreneurs. Networking helped grow the business ($F = 2.692$, $p = 0.035$), and challenges faced in networking ($F = 2.028$, $p = 0.006$), which are statistically significant in terms of benefits gained through networking. The findings suggest that the women entrepreneurs' perceived benefits have positively influenced the targeted networking platforms, such as mentorship, funding opportunities, and skill development, enhancing their entrepreneurial success.

Dependent Variable	Type of Network
Challenges faced in Networking	0.174 ($t=2.113$, 0.037)
R_2	0.776
ADJ R_2	0.757
F	4.466
Df	101
Sig	<0.005

Table 3: Regression results

Source: primary data

Table 3 shows that 77.6% of the variance and the sample size confirm the model fit at less than 5% and statistically significantly influence the challenges in networking and choosing the type of network. The findings indicate that entrepreneurs faced networking challenges towards the type of network in several factors, such as complexity in adaptation, better access to resources, and innovation leads to structural evolution as a driver of networking.

Suggestions & Conclusion:

Based on the findings, the researcher concludes that Women entrepreneurs should participate in networking events to reach and expand their peer group for supporting their business through networking platforms. The networking platform supports entrepreneurs through organising skill-building workshops, ensuring a safe and inclusive environment, and facilitating global connections and a sustainable ecosystem for women entrepreneurs. The findings suggest that the women entrepreneurs must develop the value chain linkages and collaboration between stakeholders, and explore the inclusive networking scorecard to access existing networks through targeted interventions.

References

1. Ahmed, H., Bajwa, S. U., Nasir, S., Khan, W., Mahmood, K., & Ishaque, S. (2025). Digital empowerment: Exploring the role of digitalization in enhancing opportunities for women entrepreneurs. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, 1-32. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-025-02658-0>
2. Aravik, H., Hamzani, A. I., & Khasanah, N. (2025). Women Entrepreneurship In Indonesia: Opportunities And Challenges. *Islamic Banking: Jurnal Pemikiran dan Pengembangan Perbankan Syariah*, 10(2), 327-348. <https://doi.org/10.36908/isbank.v10i2.1422>

3. Driscoll, P., Miller, A., & Baker, P. (2025). From struggles to solutions: understanding the barriers for female healthcare entrepreneurs. *New England Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1108/neje-02-2025-0013>
4. Hanson, S., & Blake, M. (2009). Gender and entrepreneurial networks. *Regional Studies*, 43(1), 135-149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343400802251452>
5. Irwin, K., McDowell, W., & Ribeiro-Navarrete, S. (2025). How can women entrepreneurs overcome funding challenges: the role of digitalization and innovation. *Venture Capital*, 27(2), 225-247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691066.2023.2282542>
6. Istrefi, A., Zeqiri, J., Hasani, V. V., & Komodromos, M. (2025). The role of entrepreneurial marketing and digital transformation on women's entrepreneurial intentions in Kosovo. *International Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning*, 17(2), 174-196. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJTEL.2025.145315>
7. Lenz, A. K., Muskat, B., & de Brito, R. P. (2025). Peer support and value creation among women entrepreneurs. *Small Business Economics*, 1-38. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-025-01074-7>
8. Nevi, G., Ancillai, C., Pascucci, F., & Palladino, R. (2025). Investigating female entrepreneurship: a micro-perspective of drivers and barriers for aspiring and experienced women entrepreneurs. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, 21(1), 11. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-024-01012-1>
9. Nigam, N., & Shatila, K. (2024). Entrepreneurial intention among women entrepreneurs and the mediating effect of dynamic capabilities: empirical evidence from Lebanon. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 30(4), 916-937. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEBr-07-2023-0690>
10. Paul, S., & Amin, F. (2024). Impact of social capital on business performance women entrepreneurs in the food sector: the moderating role of national culture. *Journal of Agribusiness in Developing and Emerging Economies*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JADEE-04-2024-0113>
11. Sadraei, R. (2025). Role of networks in driving innovation and global growth: Enhancing women-led start-ups in the internationalisation arena. *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 26(3), 239-250. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14657503241294194>
12. Yetim, N. (2008). Social capital in female entrepreneurship. *International sociology*, 23(6), 864-885. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580908095913>