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Gender Equality in Digital Entrepreneurship in the Global South: A Systematic Mapping Study

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ABSTRAK

Studi ini meneliti kesetaraan gender dalam kewirausahaan digital di Global South melalui Studi Pemetaan Sistematis (SMS). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi tren publikasi, tantangan utama, dan faktor pendukung yang memengaruhi partisipasi perempuan dalam kewirausahaan berbasis teknologi. Dengan menggunakan tinjauan terstruktur terhadap studi yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2010 dan 2024, temuan menunjukkan bahwa perempuan menghadapi hambatan multidimensional, termasuk akses terbatas terhadap pembiayaan, infrastruktur digital yang tidak memadai, norma sosial-budaya yang membatasi, dan tingkat kepercayaan diri yang lebih rendah dalam kompetensi teknologi. Pada saat yang sama, bimbingan, jaringan profesional, pendidikan, kebijakan yang mendukung, dan akses terhadap pendanaan muncul sebagai faktor keberhasilan yang penting. Studi ini menyoroti ketidaksetaraan struktural yang terus berlanjut sambil menekankan pentingnya strategi inklusif untuk mempromosikan partisipasi dan kepemimpinan perempuan dalam ekonomi digital. Lebih lanjut, studi ini mengidentifikasi kesenjangan penelitian dan memberikan arahan untuk studi masa depan tentang gender dan kewirausahaan digital di wilayah berkembang.

Kata kunci: kesetaraan gender, kewirausahaan digital, pengusaha perempuan, Global South, ketidaksetaraan structural

ABSTRACT

This study examines gender equality in digital entrepreneurship in the Global South through a Systematic Mapping Study (SMS). The research aims to identify publication trends, key challenges, and enabling factors influencing women's participation in technology-based entrepreneurship. Using a structured review of studies published between 2010 and 2024, the findings reveal that women face multidimensional barriers, including limited access to finance, inadequate digital infrastructure, restrictive socio-cultural norms, and lower levels of self-confidence in technological competencies. At the same time, mentorship, professional networks, education, supportive policies, and access to funding emerge as critical success factors. The study highlights persistent structural inequalities while emphasizing the importance of inclusive strategies to promote women's participation and leadership in the digital economy. Furthermore, it identifies research gaps and provides directions for future studies on gender and digital entrepreneurship in developing regions.

Keywords: gender equality, digital entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs, global south, structural inequality

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the rapid expansion of digital technology has significantly transformed the global economic landscape. The rise of digital platforms, startups, and innovation-driven enterprises has created new opportunities for entrepreneurship, particularly in the technology sector (Ries, 2011; Salamzadeh &

Kawamorita Kesim, 2015). Digital entrepreneurship is increasingly viewed as a key driver of economic growth, innovation, and social mobility, especially in developing regions (Vinuesa et al., 2020).

However, despite these opportunities, participation in digital entrepreneurship remains highly unequal. One of the most persistent inequalities is related to gender. Women continue to be underrepresented in technology-based entrepreneurship, particularly in the Global South, where structural, economic, and socio-cultural barriers are often more pronounced (Elam et al., 2019; Poggesi et al., 2020; Wilson & Patón-Romero, 2022). This imbalance is not merely a question of representation, but also of whose perspectives are included in shaping the future of digital innovation (Vinuesa et al., 2020).

The Global South presents a unique context for examining this issue. While many countries in this region are experiencing rapid digitalization, they also face longstanding challenges such as limited access to education, unequal economic opportunities, and deeply embedded gender norms (United Nations, 2015; Vinuesa et al., 2020). These conditions can significantly influence women's ability to participate in and benefit from digital entrepreneurship. As a result, understanding gender inequality in this context requires not only a focus on individual factors, but also on broader structural and systemic dynamics (Brush et al., 2009; Jennings & Brush, 2013).

Previous studies have shown that women entrepreneurs in the technology sector often encounter various challenges, including limited access to funding, lack of networks and mentorship, gender stereotypes, and lower levels of self-confidence in technological competencies (Dautzenberg, 2012; Kovaleva et al., 2021; Marlow & McAdam, 2015; Wilson & Patón-Romero, 2022). At the same time, research also highlights several enabling factors, such as supportive policies, access to education and training, and the presence of role models (Elam et al., 2019; Kovaleva et al., 2021). However, existing research on this topic remains fragmented and dispersed across different disciplines, making it difficult to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the field (Poggesi et al., 2020; Wilson & Patón-Romero, 2022).

In this regard, a systematic approach is needed to map and categorize existing studies. A Systematic Mapping Study (SMS) provides a structured method to identify, classify, and analyze the body of literature within a particular research area (Kitchenham et al., 2010; Petersen et al., 2008, 2015). Unlike traditional literature reviews, SMS focuses on providing a broad overview of research trends, identifying gaps, and highlighting areas that require further investigation (Petersen et al., 2008, 2015). Therefore, this study adopts the SMS methodology to explore the intersection between gender equality and digital entrepreneurship in the Global South.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a Systematic Mapping Study (SMS) approach to examine the existing body of research on gender equality in digital entrepreneurship in the Global South. The SMS method is particularly suitable for this research because it aims to provide a broad overview of a research area, identify patterns and trends, and highlight gaps for future investigation (Kitchenham et al., 2010; Petersen et al., 2008, 2015).

Unlike systematic literature reviews that focus on answering specific and narrow research questions, SMS emphasizes classification and mapping of studies. Therefore, this study seeks to categorize existing literature based on themes, research methods, and key findings related to gender inequality and digital entrepreneurship (Petersen et al., 2008, 2015).

DISCUSSION

General Findings

This study aims to map the existing literature on gender equality in digital entrepreneurship in the Global South. The findings reveal that although research in this field has increased in recent years, it remains relatively limited and fragmented (Poggesi et al., 2020; Wilson & Patón-Romero, 2022).

The results from RQ1 indicate that most studies focus on industry contexts and rely heavily on qualitative methods such as interviews and case studies. This suggests that the field is still exploratory in nature, with researchers attempting to understand the lived experiences of women rather than developing generalized theories. In addition, the uneven geographical distribution of studies highlights that certain regions in the Global South remain underrepresented in academic research (Jennings & Brush, 2013; Wilson & Patón-Romero, 2022).

From RQ2, it is evident that women face multi-dimensional challenges, including structural, socio-cultural, and individual barriers. These challenges are interconnected and often reinforce one another (Brush et al., 2009; Jennings & Brush, 2013; Wilson & Patón-Romero, 2022). Meanwhile, RQ3 shows that success in digital entrepreneurship is not solely determined by individual capabilities, but also depends heavily on external support systems such as mentorship, networks, and policy frameworks (Kovaleva et al., 2021; Wilson & Patón-Romero, 2022).

Structural Inequality and Global Political Economy

One of the most significant findings of this study is the central role of structural inequality in shaping women's participation in digital entrepreneurship. Limited access to capital, weak institutional support, and unequal digital infrastructure are not isolated issues, but are deeply embedded within broader global economic structures (United Nations, 2015; Vinuesa et al., 2020).

From a global political economy perspective, these inequalities reflect asymmetrical power relations between developed and developing countries. The Global South often faces disadvantages in terms of access to technology, financial resources, and global markets. As a result, women in these regions experience compounded barriers: not only gender-based inequality, but also structural disadvantages associated with their economic context (Brush et al., 2009; Elam et al., 2019; United Nations, 2015).

This finding suggests that promoting gender equality in digital entrepreneurship cannot rely solely on individual-level interventions, such as skills training or motivation. Instead, it requires broader structural changes, including inclusive economic policies, improved digital infrastructure, and more equitable access to global resources (United Nations, 2015; Vinuesa et al., 2020).

The Role of Socio-Cultural Norms

The analysis also highlights the persistent influence of socio-cultural norms and gender stereotypes. In many contexts, technology and entrepreneurship are still perceived as male-dominated domains (Dautzenberg, 2012; Marlow & McAdam, 2015; Wilson & Patón-Romero, 2022). These perceptions shape both societal attitudes and women's self-perception, often discouraging women from entering or remaining in digital entrepreneurship.

Interestingly, socio-cultural barriers appear more frequently than structural or individual challenges in the mapping results. This indicates that even when economic opportunities exist, social expectations can still limit women's participation (Brush et al., 2009; Jennings & Brush, 2013).

Moreover, these norms are often deeply institutionalized, making them difficult to change. Women may face pressure to prioritize family responsibilities over professional ambitions, or may lack social support for pursuing entrepreneurial careers (Jennings & Brush, 2013; Marlow & McAdam, 2015). As a result, addressing gender inequality in digital entrepreneurship requires not only economic interventions but also cultural and social transformation.

Internal vs External Factors of Success

The findings from RQ3 reveal an important insight: external factors play a more significant role than internal factors in determining women's success in digital entrepreneurship (Kovaleva et al., 2021; Wilson & Patón-Romero, 2022).

While personal attributes such as motivation, resilience, and self-efficacy are important, they are often insufficient without adequate external support. Mentorship, networks, access to funding, and supportive policies are repeatedly identified as key enablers (Kovaleva et al., 2021; Langowitz & Minniti, 2007; Wilson & Patón-Romero, 2022).

This challenges the common narrative that entrepreneurial success is primarily driven by individual effort. Instead, it suggests that success is shaped by a combination of personal capabilities and structural

opportunities (Brush et al., 2009; Jennings & Brush, 2013). In contexts where external support systems are weak, even highly capable individuals may struggle to succeed.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have several important implications.

First, policymakers need to design inclusive policies that address both gender inequality and broader structural barriers. This includes improving access to finance, supporting women-led startups, and investing in digital infrastructure (United Nations, 2015; Vinuesa et al., 2020).

Second, there is a need to strengthen mentorship programs and professional networks for women. The presence of role models and support systems can significantly influence women's confidence and entrepreneurial intentions (Kovaleva et al., 2021; Wilson & Patón-Romero, 2022).

Third, educational institutions should play a more active role in promoting digital skills and entrepreneurial training among women, particularly in the Global South (United Nations, 2015; Elam et al., 2019).

Finally, efforts to promote gender equality must also address socio-cultural norms, which often act as invisible barriers. This requires long-term strategies, including awareness campaigns and institutional reforms (Brush et al., 2009; Jennings & Brush, 2013).

Research Gaps and Future Directions

This study also identifies several gaps in the existing literature.

- There is a lack of research focusing on **policy effectiveness** in promoting gender equality in digital entrepreneurship.
- Many regions in the Global South remain **underrepresented**, particularly smaller or less-developed countries.
- Existing studies tend to focus on challenges, with less attention given to **long-term success strategies**.
- There is limited integration of **theoretical perspectives from global political economy**, which could provide deeper insights into structural inequalities.

Future research should address these gaps by adopting more diverse methodologies, expanding geographical coverage, and integrating interdisciplinary approaches.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to map the existing literature on gender equality in digital entrepreneurship in the Global South using a Systematic Mapping Study (SMS) approach. The findings demonstrate that research in this field has increased over time, particularly in the last decade, reflecting growing global attention to

digital transformation and gender inclusion (Kitchenham et al., 2010; Petersen et al., 2015; Wilson & Patón-Romero, 2022).

The results indicate that women's participation in digital entrepreneurship is shaped by a combination of structural, socio-cultural, and individual factors. Structural barriers, such as limited access to capital, weak institutional support, and unequal digital infrastructure, remain significant obstacles, particularly in developing regions (Brush et al., 2009; Elam et al., 2019; United Nations, 2015). At the same time, socio-cultural factors, including gender stereotypes and social expectations, continue to influence both opportunities and perceptions of women in the digital sector (Dautzenberg, 2012; Marlow & McAdam, 2015).

This study also finds that success in digital entrepreneurship is not determined solely by individual capabilities. While personal attributes such as motivation, resilience, and digital skills are important, external factors such as mentorship, networks, access to funding, and supportive policies play a more decisive role (Kovaleva et al., 2021; Langowitz & Minniti, 2007; Wilson & Patón-Romero, 2022). This highlights the importance of creating an enabling environment that supports women's entrepreneurial activities.

Furthermore, from a broader perspective, the findings suggest that gender inequality in digital entrepreneurship is closely linked to global structural inequalities. Women in the Global South face layered challenges that reflect both gender-based and economic disparities, emphasizing the need for more inclusive and equitable development strategies (United Nations, 2015; Vinuesa et al., 2020).

Recommendations:

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be proposed:

1. Policy Recommendations

Governments should develop and implement inclusive policies that specifically support women in digital entrepreneurship. This includes improving access to financial resources, providing targeted funding programs, and strengthening digital infrastructure (United Nations, 2015; Vinuesa et al., 2020).

2. Capacity Building and Education

Educational institutions and training programs should focus on enhancing digital and entrepreneurial skills among women. This includes promoting STEM education, digital literacy, and business development training (Elam et al., 2019; Wilson & Patón-Romero, 2022).

3. Strengthening Networks and Mentorship

The development of mentorship programs and professional networks is essential. Providing access to role models and experienced entrepreneurs can increase women's confidence and expand their opportunities (Kovaleva et al., 2021; Wilson & Patón-Romero, 2022).

4. Addressing Socio-Cultural Barriers

Efforts should be made to challenge and transform gender stereotypes and social norms that limit women's participation. This requires long-term strategies involving education, media, and institutional change (Brush et al., 2009; Jennings & Brush, 2013; Marlow & McAdam, 2015).

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