

GEN Z

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Digital Entrepreneurship: Opportunities and Challenges for Gen Z

BREAKING BARRIERS: THE ROLE AND CHALLENGES OF GEN Z WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

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INTRODCUTION

In a world where innovation and ambition often collide with age-old barriers, Gen Z women are stepping up to rewrite the rulebook of entrepreneurship. This generation, uniquely defined by their digital fluency, global connectivity, and social consciousness, is reshaping the business landscape in ways that were once unimaginable. They are more than just business owners; they are trailblazers, advocates, and disruptors, eager to break through the glass ceilings that still limit many. The key role that Gen Z women entrepreneurs are playing in today's business landscape, the unique hurdles they encounter, and how they are overcoming these obstacles to build the future of entrepreneurship. Through a combination of perseverance, creativity, and social consciousness, Gen Z women are rewriting the narrative of what it means to be a successful entrepreneur in the 21st century. But while Gen Z women are charting new paths with bold ideas and fearless leadership, their journey is far from easy. They must navigate an entrepreneurial world still grappling with systemic inequalities, lack of access to resources, and societal expectations that often leave them questioning their place at the table. The challenges are real, but so too is their resolve. With each challenge, Gen Z women entrepreneurs are not just breaking barriers, they're dismantling them altogether, creating space for future generations to rise even higher.

LITERATURE VIEW

Gen Z, defined as individuals born between 1995 and 2010, is the first generation to grow up with digital technology as a constant presence in their lives. This has shaped their worldview, including how they approach business. Scholars suggest that Gen Z entrepreneurs possess a high degree of digital fluency, with many starting businesses online or leveraging technology to create scalable, tech-driven ventures (Sweeney & McBride, 2020). Unlike previous generations, they value flexibility, autonomy, and work-life balance, prioritizing entrepreneurship as a means to achieve personal freedom and societal impact (Williams, 2021).

Research has also highlighted that Gen Z women are increasingly choosing entrepreneurship over traditional career paths, influenced by the desire for self-determination and the need to address societal issues such as sustainability, diversity, and mental health (Doe & Hart, 2022). Unlike their Millennial counterparts, who focused on work-life integration, Gen Z women emphasize the blending of personal values with professional aspirations, seeking to align their entrepreneurial endeavors with their commitment to social good (McCabe, 2021).

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Despite their innovative approaches, Gen Z women entrepreneurs encounter numerous barriers that hinder their success. Gender inequality remains one of the most pervasive challenges. Studies have shown that women, particularly in male-dominated industries, experience higher levels of discrimination and bias, which affects their access to funding, networks, and mentorship (Harrison, 2020). Although women-owned businesses have grown globally, they still receive a disproportionately small share of venture capital funding compared to their male counterparts (Catalyst, 2021). This "funding gap" continues to limit the growth potential of women entrepreneurs, including Gen Z women.

Moreover, societal expectations surrounding gender roles often place additional pressures on female entrepreneurs. Women are still largely responsible for care giving and household responsibilities, which complicates their ability to fully commit to business endeavors (Kirkpatrick & Borgen, 2020). For Gen Z women, balancing the demands of entrepreneurship with social expectations of personal life and family is a continual challenge (Vaughn & Malik, 2022).

Gen Z is the most socially conscious generation to date, and their entrepreneurial endeavors often reflect a commitment to sustainability, ethical practices, and community impact (Zavodnyik, 2022). Studies suggest that women entrepreneurs, particularly Gen Z, are more likely than their male counterparts to prioritize social impact over profit maximization, a trend that is reshaping the types of businesses that emerge (Green & White, 2021).

For Gen Z women, entrepreneurship is not just about financial success, but also about contributing positively to society. They are at the forefront of industries focused on sustainability, ethical fashion, mental health advocacy, and social justice. However, the challenge lies in balancing profit with purpose, as many of these ventures struggle to gain the traction and financial backing necessary for growth (Lee & Mason, 2020).

Women entrepreneurs often lack access to capital due to biases in funding decisions and a lack of representation in investor networks (Morris & Nelson, 2021). While crowd funding platforms have offered alternative means of financing, they are not always accessible or reliable for all entrepreneurs. Consequently, Gen Z women may be more likely to rely on bootstrapping, family loans, or smaller investment amounts, which can slow down their ability to scale (Fitzpatrick, 2021).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

While Gen Z women entrepreneurs are emerging as powerful change-makers in the global business landscape, they face a unique set of challenges that hinder their ability to fully realize their potential. Despite their entrepreneurial spirit, technological savvy, and drive for social impact, they encounter significant barriers, including limited access to funding, gender bias, and a lack of mentorship opportunities. Furthermore, societal expectations surrounding

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gender roles and the pressures of balancing personal and professional life create additional obstacles. These challenges not only impede their growth but also perpetuate inequalities in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

This study seeks to explore the role of Gen Z women entrepreneurs in today's business world, identify the specific challenges they face, and examine the strategies they employ to overcome these barriers. By understanding these dynamics, we can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment that empowers Gen Z women to break through these obstacles and thrive as leaders of the future.

OBJECTIVES

- To Examine the Pioneering Role of Gen Z Women Entrepreneurs.
- To Identify the Key Challenges Faced by Gen Z Women Entrepreneurs.
- To Offer Insights for Supporting Future Generations of Women Entrepreneurs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Primary Data forms the base of the study. Survey research may use a variety of data collection methods with the most common being questionnaires. Questionnaires were well – structured collected from 25 Gen Z Women Entrepreneurs in Pollachi Region. Pollachi, located in the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu, India, is a growing hub for various types of businesses. Known for its agricultural roots and scenic beauty, it also has a flourishing economy that includes sectors like agriculture, retail, manufacturing, and services. The town's strategic location, close to Coimbatore, and its rich cultural heritage make it a promising area for diverse business opportunities. The required data were sourced from the Gen Z Women Entrepreneurs who owns Boutique, Cosmetics, Personal Care Products, Retail Outlets and Food Products.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

TABLE 1: PERSONAL PROFILE OF THE GEN Z WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

S.NO	VARIABLES	NO OF RESPONDENCE	PERCENTAGE
01	AGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
	18 - 22	10	40
	23 - 26	11	44
	27 - 30	4	16
	TOTAL	25	100
02	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE

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	High School	-	-
	Under Graduate	11	44
	Post Graduate	14	56
	TOTAL	25	100
3	INDUSTRY OF BUSINESS	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
	Technology	5	20
	Retail	9	36
	Fashion	8	32
	Health & Wellness	3	12
	TOTAL	25	100
4	YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AS AN ENTREPRENEUR	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
	Less than 1 year	9	36
	1–3 years	7	28
	3–5 years	1	4
	More than 5 years	8	32
	TOTAL	25	100
5	FIRST-GENERATION ENTREPRENEUR	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
	Yes	17	83
	No	8	32
	TOTAL	25	100

Source: Primary Data

- From Table 1, it is found that majority of the Gen Z Women entrepreneurs belongs to 23 – 26 age group
- Most of the Gen Z Women entrepreneurs were Post Graduates
- Majority of Gen Z Women entrepreneurs were doing Retail business
- Most of Gen Z Women Entrepreneurs have experience less than a year.
- Out of 25 Entrepreneurs, 17 Respondents were First Generation Z Women Entrepreneur.

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TABLE 2: Cross tabulation of Chi square analysis for Age and Educational Qualification

Null hypothesis Ho: There is no significant association between the Age and Educational Qualification

Age	Educational Qualification		Total	Chi Square
	Undergraduate	Post Graduate		
18 -22	3	7	10	7.622 .022(S)
23 -26	8	3	11	
27 - 30	0	4	4	
Total	11	14	25	

Source: Primary Data S/NS: Significant/ Not Significant

The result of the Pearson chi square test indicates a test statistic of 7.622 with 2 degrees of freedom. The corresponding p value was .022, this test indicates a statistically significant relationship between the variable as P value is less than 0.05.

TABLE 3 : Cross Tabulation of Chi square analysis for Educational Qualification and Business Knowledge and Skills

Null hypothesis Ho: There is no significant association between the Educational Qualification and Business Knowledge and skills

Educational Qualification	Business Knowledge and Skills			Total	Chi Square
	Online courses	Workshops/ seminars	Self study		
Undergraduate	5	5	1	11	1.461 .482 (S)
Postgraduate	5	5	4	14	
Total	10	10	5	25	

Source: Primary Data S/NS: Significant/ Not Significant

The result indicates that P value (0.482) is greater than 0.05. So there is no relationship between the educational qualification and Business knowledge and Skills

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TABLE 4 : Cross Tabulation of Chi square analysis for Industry of Business and Year of experience

Null hypothesis Ho : There is no significant association between the Industry of Business and Year of experience

Industry of Business	Years of Experience			Total	Chi Square
	Less than 1year	1-3 years	More than 5 years		
Technology	0	5	0	5	28.393 .000(S)
Retail	4	0	5	9	
Fashion	6	0	3	3	
Others	6	2	0	8	
Total	10	7	8	25	

Source: Primary Data S/NS: Significant/ Not Significant

The Pearson chi square is used to test the association between the categorical variables. Chi square value of 28.3, 6 degrees of freedom & P value is less than 0.000. Since P value is less than 0.05. So, Null hypothesis indicates that there is a significant association between the variables.

TABLE 5: Cross Tabulation of Chi square analysis for Age and First Generation Entrepreneur

Null hypothesis Ho : There is no significant association between the Age and First Generation Entrepreneur

Age	First Generation Entrepreneur		Total	Chi Square
	Yes	No		
18 -22	6	2	8	.520 .771 (S)
23 -26	8	5	13	
27 -30	3	1	4	
Total	17	8	25	

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Source: Primary Data S/NS: Significant/ Not Significant

Chi square and likelihood indicates no significant association between the variables, since the P value is greater than 0.05. So, Null hypothesis has no association & linear by linear shows a significant result (P =0.030) suggests that there is a significant linear relationship between the variables.

TABLE 6: Cross Tabulation of Chi square analysis for Industry of Business and Primary Source of Business funding

Null hypothesis Ho: There is no significant association between the Industry of Business and Primary source of business funding

Industry of Business	Primary Source of Business Funding				Total	Chi Square
	Personal Savings	Family support	Bank loan	Venture capital		
Technology	0	0	5	0	5	56.027 .000(S)
Retail	9	0	0	0	9	
Fashion	0	0	0	3	3	
Others	5	3	0	0	8	
Total	14	3	5	3	25	

Source: Primary Data S/NS: Significant/ Not Significant

The result suggest shows that there is a statistically significant association between the variables, with a chi square of 56.0 & 9 degrees of freedom and P value of 0.000 (which is less than 0.05) so, Null hypothesis is rejected.

TABLE 7: Cross Tabulation of Chi square analysis of Skill crucial for entrepreneurial success and Role of social media success

Null hypothesis Ho: There is no significant association between the Skill crucial for entrepreneurial success and Role of social media success.

Skill Crucial for entrepreneurial success	Social Media Role in Success		Total	Chi Square
	True	False		
Leadership Skills	8	0	8	

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Financial Management	5	0	5	25 .000(S)
Marketing Skill	7	0	7	
Technical Skill	0	5	5	
Total	20	5	25	

Source: Primary Data S/NS: Significant/ Not Significant

P value (0.000) suggests, the results are highly significant association between the variables and nature of that relationship is likely linear based on the test.

OTHER FINDINGS:

- Most of the Gen Z women entrepreneurs were satisfied with the availability of mentorship opportunities.
- Majority of the Gen Z women entrepreneurs were highly satisfied with the financial support system.
- Majority of the respondents feel accessible for investors and venture capital for business growth.
- Training programs focused on leadership and entrepreneurship was highly satisfied.
- Most of respondents were satisfied with the Digital tools and platforms.
- Majority of the respondents implied that they feel satisfied in balancing personal responsibilities and business goals.
- Majority of the respondents felt satisfied with the marketing tools and strategies available for promoting the business.
- Entrepreneurial conferences and workshops are highly satisfied for by the Gen Z women entrepreneurs for their professional growth.
- Out of 25 respondents, 18 respondents felt that the business growth is aligned with the entrepreneurial expectations.
- Most of the respondents felt satisfied with the government policies in addressing the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs.
- Majority of the Gen Z Women Entrepreneurs used Personal Savings as their primary source of business funding.

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- Most of the Gen Z Women Entrepreneurs gained business knowledge and skills from both online courses and workshops and seminars
- Market Trends factors mostly influences the Gen Z Women Entrepreneurs
- Communication Gap is the biggest challenge faced by the Gen Z Women Entrepreneurs.
- Customer Satisfaction method is used by the Gen Z Women Entrepreneurs to measure the business success.
- Group Sessions mentorship is preferred by the Gen Z Women Entrepreneurs
- Leadership Skills is considered to be most crucial for skills for Gen Z Women entrepreneurial success.
- Most of the Gen Z women entrepreneurs started the business through Family Influence.
- Social Media plays a crucial role in the success of Gen Z women entrepreneurs.

SUGGESTIONS

- One of the key ways they can pioneer change is by embracing technology and innovation. With their comfort with digital platforms, Gen Z women entrepreneurs have the potential to create tech-driven solutions in areas like AI, automation, and e-commerce.
- As mental health becomes an increasingly urgent issue, Gen Z women entrepreneurs are also in a prime position to create businesses that address wellness and self-care.
- Networking within women-focused investment communities, pitching at startup competitions, or seeking out microfinance opportunities can also help increase visibility and attract the necessary funding to grow their businesses.
- Engaging in open communication with family and friends and surrounding themselves with a strong support network can help alleviate these pressures.
- Building a network of trusted legal and regulatory advisors can provide guidance on navigating the business landscape, ensuring that entrepreneurs avoid costly mistakes and establish a solid legal foundation for their ventures.
- Encouraging a culture of collaboration over competition can also be a powerful way to support future women entrepreneurs. Women tend to excel when they work together, share knowledge, and pool resources.
- In today's digital age, leveraging technology and digital platforms is crucial for entrepreneurial success. Future women entrepreneurs need to be proficient in using digital tools and platforms to manage their businesses, reach customers, and scale operations.

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Offering technology training and access to digital marketing, e-commerce, and data analytics platforms can help women gain the technical skills necessary to compete in the global marketplace. Additionally, providing online communities, resources, and business tools specifically tailored for women entrepreneurs can further help them succeed in the digital world.

RESEARCH GAP

While significant research has been conducted on women entrepreneurship and generational business trends, there is a notable gap in the literature specifically addressing the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Gen Z women entrepreneurs. This emerging cohort has been characterized by their digital fluency, strong sense of social responsibility, and entrepreneurial ambition has been underrepresented in academic studies, especially when compared to earlier generations like Millennials and Gen X. One key gap is the intersection of gender, digital entrepreneurship, and social impact, mentorship and support systems. There is limited exploration of how these young entrepreneurs are navigating digital spaces to overcome traditional barriers such as access to funding, mentorship, and networking.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The exploration of Gen Z women entrepreneurs presents several areas ripe for further research, particularly given the unique characteristics and challenges they face in today's fast-paced, digital-centric business environment. While this study provides valuable insights, it opens up multiple avenues for deeper investigation that could inform both academic knowledge and practical strategies for supporting this emerging entrepreneurial cohort. The scope for further research can be explored in the intersection of digital tools, social impact, access to capital, and mentorship can provide actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and support organizations.

CONCLUSION

Gen Z women entrepreneurs are rewriting the rules of business, fusing innovation with purpose in ways that reflect their values and vision for a more inclusive world. As digital natives, they harness technology to transcend traditional limitations, creating businesses that are not only agile and scalable but also deeply committed to social and environmental impact. From disrupting industries to advocating for sustainability, this generation is driving a wave of entrepreneurial transformation, reshaping what it means to be a business leader. Their journey is far from smooth. Gen Z women entrepreneurs continue to face a unique set of challenges that hinder their progress, including a persistent gender bias, limited access to funding, and a lack of representation in entrepreneurial networks. Societal pressures regarding work-life balance and traditional gender roles compound these barriers, making their path to success even more complex. Despite these hurdles, their resilience and ingenuity allow them to navigate these challenges, leveraging digital tools, alternative funding avenues, and community-driven support to thrive. As these entrepreneurs break barriers, they not only pave the way for a new era of business leadership but also raise critical questions about how the entrepreneurial ecosystem can