

Empowering Women Entrepreneurs for the adoption of e-banking tools through digital education

K. Padachi¹, D. Mauree-Narrainen² and A. Boolaky³

School of Business Management and Finance
University of Technology, Mauritius
Pointes-Aux-Sables
Mauritius

¹Corresponding Author: kpadachi@umail.utm.ac.mu
²d.mnarrainen@umail.utm.ac.mu; ³aboolaky@umail.utm.ac.mu.

It is noticed that many women entrepreneurs especially those who could not pursue higher academic studies are not using electronic banking (e-banking) for their business transactions and waste much time in queuing up to Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) and bank branches for their daily banking transactions. The World Bank stipulates that *“While women are making major strides in terms of educational attainment at primary and secondary levels, they often lack the combination of education, vocational and technical skills and work experience needed to support the development of highly productive businesses”*. One of the specific deficiencies to be addressed in this project is digital skills. Although there is an explosion in the mobile sector and reduction in cost of Information Communication Technology (ICT), lower socio-economic status of women results in lesser benefits from the ICT phenomenon given they are less likely to be able to afford or access ICT. The main aim of this project is to empower women entrepreneurs through digital education to facilitate the use of e-banking tools as a service enabler in their financial transactions by using a personalized and adaptive approach through a learning management system. This paper is a work in progress whereby the investigation has reached half of its project completion. Williams et al., (2003) define digital literacy skills at two levels: Level 1 is related to the understanding of common ICT terminology and use of basic software tools whereas Level 2 includes the use of search engines and databases and the ability to have advanced knowledge of software tools.

The Women's World Wide Web (W4) works as an online crowdfunding platform for the benefit of girls' and women empowerment worldwide with the objective to facilitate the provision of education and job training, improve access to healthcare and participation in economies and civil societies. Thomson, Kim and Paul (2016) a number of factors which shaped women interest in the use of technology namely digital literacy, everyday life, professional use, social-networking, time, privacy and security which appear to provide a means of identifying the pre-disposition of women in the adoption of ICT and engaging in digital literacy. Gbedomon (2016) refers to the story of Judith Owigar, an innovative Kenyan women and co-founder of AkiraChix intending to inspire and develop a successful force of women in technology to change Africa's future. In India, much initiatives have been taken by the Government of India to promote digital literacy in the country. Purohit, Bharti and Joshi (2019) pointed out that the benefits of providing digital literacy to women are many and among are better employment opportunities, making women understand their rights, connecting to the world at a virtual level, creating awareness in relation to cyber ethics and cyber security which ultimately empower women. The 'Digital India' project has brought forth an action plan for promotion of digital literacy among women.

In Mauritius, women empowerment through entrepreneurship is among the main themes in the SME Master Plan. Among the 13 thematic actions proposed for multi-sectoral development potentials, targeting specific inclusive, sustainable or competitiveness issues and which are also likely to be part of the high growth potential strategy, emphasis is given to particular groups such as the women or the youth. The SME Master plan aims to initiate project starter and catalyzer programmed for educated women with value-added projects ideas, provide hand-holding and mentoring supports and network with high net worth women, formalize the women entrepreneur of the Year Award as well as organizing the event on a yearly basis during the National Entrepreneurship Week to reward the winner. As per the SME Master Plan, Fintech

is considered as a game changer for SMEs. Innovation in the financial services industry is expected to bring new financing solutions customized to the needs of entrepreneurs, instead of traditional banking facilities more appropriate to larger enterprises. Day-Hookoomsing and Essoo (2003) found, through a survey done among 25 women entrepreneurs in Mauritius that their training needs included mainly (a) Management, marketing and costing; (b) Specialized training for example design, painting; (c) Information Technology (IT); (d) How to start a business; and (e) Exporting, and proposed IT courses to bring valuable expertise as part of entrepreneurship development programs.

Methodology

The research methodology employs multi-method approach in the initial phases. An initial investigation was conducted by students through site observations at the premises of some women entrepreneurs and in SME fairs which provided inputs for the second phase whereby two focus groups were conducted for the stakeholders. The third phase was further carried out through a quantitative study using a survey instrument. The research findings are detailed below.

Findings

As a preliminary investigation phase, field works namely observation sessions were conducted by some university students during various national SME fairs organized by public institutions for women entrepreneurs in the year 2018 and groups of management students interviewed around 20 women entrepreneurs at their premises to know their existing digital literacy level and the adoption rate in their business. It was noticed that the cash society is still prevailing among this segment of entrepreneurs. Traditional commerce is still adopted by all the women entrepreneurs without any digital facilitation platform that enables electronic payments. Such observations prove the need to further investigate on the ‘raison-d’etre” of such present state

of women entrepreneurs and their adoption of e-banking tools that already available in the Mauritian society.

Hence, in the second phase, a qualitative approach adopted instruments such as focus group discussions and document analysis targeting different stakeholders. A focus group in collaboration with the National Women Entrepreneur Council was organized to gather the opinions of some 15 women entrepreneurs in Mauritius. The findings of this very small sample proved that women entrepreneurs are still lacking behind in the adoption of digital tools such as computer systems, email address as well as other basic digital facilities for enterprises. The very few responded that they are more comfortable with the adoption of ATMs and Point of Sales (PoS) rather than Internet Banking, Mobile banking and SMS banking. The reasons pertain to the lack of knowledge to use the e-banking solution, trust of the system as well as fear due to security issues. Another focus group was later organized with major support agencies for women entrepreneurs, institutions providing digital literacy trainings, and banking institutions in Mauritius having an SME windows. It was found that although there are some existing digital literacy programmes that are readily available on the market, yet a majority of women entrepreneurs in Mauritius still do not tap on the potentials of these IT literacy programmes.

The qualitative part of the study provides much input in the design of the research instrument which is currently being administered to a sample of 500 women entrepreneurs in Mauritius and Rodrigues. The survey attempts to solicit responses regarding their knowledge of digital tools and concepts and their attitudes and behaviours towards the usage of e-banking tools in their business processes. Given the nature of the study and the unit of analysis, it was not easy to reach out to the targeted respondents. As such some 15 UTM students help during the field work, after attending a number of workshops to better brief them on the nature of the study,

the important aspects about the questionnaire and the approach to be adopted during the data collection. A training kit was prepared to account for the technical part of the survey. A form to record insights and difficulties while conducting the field work was also provided to the enumerators. In line with the philosophy of this research, a capacity building workshop on SPSS was organized to the students who participated in the data collection.

The third phase of the study involves the conduct of a training need analysis which shall result in the development of the content for the digital education programme as well as the online platform. This phase has been so far very challenging since it requires much inputs from key stakeholders of this project. The research team conducted a series of meeting with the chief executive of the institutions. Though it was difficult to get the buy-in of commercial banks, the other key stakeholders directly related to the segment women entrepreneurs showed much interest and accepted to provide their expertise and support in the project having a national dimension. Thus with the support of industry expertise focused mainly on women entrepreneurship, IT literacy programmes providers, a technical research assistant and the University of Technology, Mauritius as academic institution, a Technical Advisory Committee was set up to guide the research team in achieving the expected outcome of the research. Ultimately, the considerations being taken are the use of local dialect and focusing on technology which the group is accustomed to. Personalised training materials using adaptive learning mechanisms would be designed on the general device usage, internet and e-banking technologies for the target group to be able to leverage the technology, to trust it and to be independent in its usage in the course of their business activities. A learning management system platform is finally expected to be developed to host the various lessons pertaining to the learning of e-banking tools for women entrepreneurs.

Implications for theory and/or practice

It is expected that such opportunities will contribute to the digital transformation for women entrepreneurs. The women entrepreneurs have been targeted in this project, with an ultimate objective to improve their business operations and to also improve their work like balance. This shall ultimately impact on their productivity, efficiency and effectiveness. Beyond the positive impact in their businesses the e platform strives to in the medium term to integrate other features where women entrepreneurs can migrate to e-commerce and e-business strategies.

How findings can be implemented

The outcome of the project is the development of a learning management system based on adaptive leaning solutions aiming to impart training and develop the basic literacy skills and usage of e-banking tools for women entrepreneurs in Mauritius. The training on e-banking tools namely ATMs, internet banking, mobile banking, SMS banking, credit cards and other related e-banking services will be based on a simulative online banking environment. Additionally, online contents with animated graphics, multimedia support tools such video clips which will be integrated where creole language shall be used with possibilities of adapting to other languages. Moreover, online relevant practical exercises shall be used as validation tools to know whether learning has taken place and to measure their performances online. Another important feature is an online forum with chat groups to support networking among women entrepreneurs as well as the online trainers. Other vital online tools related to finance such as loan calculator and foreign exchange calculators are useful web services for the women entrepreneurs which will be integrated on the e-learning platform at a later stage of the project. Stakeholders of this project are women entrepreneurs, banking institutions, support agencies for businesses, policy makers, industry practitioners, actors in the digital education sphere who can contribute to the realization of this project.

References:

Gbedomon, R. C (2016), Empowering Women in Technology: Lessons from a successful woman entrepreneur in Kenya from the African Community of Practice on Management for Development result at the African Capacity Building Foundation.

Hookoomsing, PD and V Essoo (2003). Promoting female entrepreneurship in Mauritius: Strategies in training and development. SEED Working Paper no. 58: Series on Women's Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality - WEDGE. International Labour Office, Geneva and ILO Antananarivo.

Purohit, Bharti and Joshi (2019), "Partnering for Promotion of Digital Literacy among Women in Rajasthan through Bhartiya Model of Digital Literacy" Working Paper Series

Thomson, Kim and Paul (2016): "I Am Not Sure How Much It Will Be Helpful for Me": Factors for Digital Inclusion among Middle-Class Women in India

Williams, J., Clemens, S., Oleinikova, K. & Tarvin, K. (2003). The Skills for Life Survey: A National Needs and Impact Survey of Literacy, Numeracy and ICT Skills London: Department for Education and Skills.