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Social Media and Networking Opportunities among Women Entrepreneurs at Kariakoo Market, Tanzania

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Abstract
This study examined the reported role of social media in facilitating networking opportunities among women entrepreneurs at Kariakoo Market, Tanzania. The study was guided by a social capital perspective and adopted a positivist research philosophy. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was used. Although 391 questionnaires were targeted, 382 complete responses were available for analysis. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with five Likert-scale items measuring participation in online business-related events, formation of valuable partnerships, collaboration with other businesses, access to mentorship and expert guidance, and engagement with social media influencers for business promotion. Analysis was strengthened through data screening, frequencies and percentages, item-level means and standard deviations, median and modal responses, and 95% confidence intervals for the proportion of respondents selecting Agree or Strongly Agree. The highest agreement was observed for influencer engagement for business promotion (53.7%), followed by formation of valuable partnerships (52.4%), participation in online business-related events (51.3%), and access to mentorship and expert guidance (50.0%). Collaboration with other businesses had the lowest agreement proportion (44.5%) and the highest neutral response (31.4%). These results indicate that respondents generally perceive social media as a useful channel for building and maintaining business networks, but the distribution of responses also shows substantial neutrality and disagreement for several items. Because the design is cross-sectional and the analysis is descriptive, the findings are interpreted as reported patterns and associations rather than causal effects on business performance or entrepreneurial skills.

1.0 Introduction

Social media has become an increasingly accessible channel through which small-business owners communicate with customers, suppliers, peers and other market actors. Social-network sites support a range of functions, including identity presentation, conversation, sharing, relationship maintenance and group formation (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011). For women entrepreneurs operating in a large trading environment such as Kariakoo Market, these platforms may reduce practical barriers associated with finding contacts, exchanging information and maintaining business relationships. Research on women traders in the Kariakoo area has documented the use of mobile phones for communicating with suppliers and customers, receiving orders and payments, and maintaining business relationships, alongside challenges related to connectivity and cost (Yahya & Mutarubukwa, 2017). More recent research in Tanzania has also examined social media and knowledge-sharing practices among women entrepreneurs (Chisanza et al., 2024). These developments make networking, rather than social media adoption alone, an important issue for empirical investigation. The issue is not whether social media is available, but whether its use is translated into meaningful networking opportunities. The present study therefore focuses on five observable networking-related activities: participation in online business-related events, formation of valuable partnerships, collaboration with other businesses, access to mentorship and expert guidance, and engagement with social media influencers for business promotion. The study is deliberately limited to women entrepreneurs operating at Kariakoo Market and does not attempt to generalise the findings to all Tanzanian businesses.

Existing research suggests that social media can support entrepreneurial networking and access to resources, although the benefits depend on how entrepreneurs use digital platforms and activate online relationships. Research on entrepreneurs' online social capital shows that social-network-site features can shape the development of bridging and bonding relationships (Smith et al., 2017), while research on women entrepreneurs has examined how digital platforms may support opportunity development through online social capital (Hammad & El Naggar, 2023). Studies of women entrepreneurs in different settings also identify social media as a venue for business activity, marketing and digital participation (Brahem & Boussema, 2023; Chakraborty & Biswal, 2023). However, evidence from other contexts cannot establish that social media causes better business performance among women entrepreneurs at Kariakoo Market. A separate study of women traders in the Kariakoo area examined mobile-phone use and its benefits and challenges (Yahya & Mutarubukwa, 2017). There remains a need to document the specific networking functions that women entrepreneurs report obtaining from social media and to distinguish descriptive patterns from causal claims.

This study addresses that gap by examining the distribution and intensity of reported networking opportunities associated with social media among women entrepreneurs at Kariakoo Market. Its contribution is empirical and context-specific: it identifies which networking functions are most

commonly reported, where responses are divided or neutral, and what those patterns imply for practical support and future research.

2.0 Theoretical Review

This study uses a social capital perspective to explain why digital networks may create useful business resources. Social capital treats relationships and networks as channels through which actors obtain information, support, norms of reciprocity and other resources. Coleman (1988) conceptualizes social capital as a resource embedded in social structures, including information channels and obligations, while Granovetter's network perspective highlights how ties can connect actors to information and opportunities beyond their immediate circles. In the present study, social media is treated as a digital channel through which women entrepreneurs may create, maintain and activate such relationships.

The theoretical linkage is direct but bounded. Participation in online business events may expand the number and diversity of contacts; partnerships and business collaboration represent the activation of relationships for exchange and joint activity; mentorship represents access to knowledge and advice; and influencer engagement represents the use of networked relationships to extend promotional reach. Research on women's networking in entrepreneurial ecosystems highlights that relationships can be important resources, while also being shaped by gendered contexts and access to networks (McAdam et al., 2019). Studies of digital platforms and women entrepreneurs also suggest that online social capital may support opportunity identification and resource access (Hammad & El Naggar, 2023). These perspectives help interpret the indicators as possible forms of access to relational resources. They do not, however, justify a claim that social media causes business growth or operational efficiency. Such causal conclusions would require an analytical design and measurements that are not present in the current cross-sectional dataset.

3.0 Methodology

The study was conducted among women entrepreneurs operating at Kariakoo Market in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The setting was selected because Kariakoo is a major trading environment in which entrepreneurs interact with customers, suppliers and other business actors, making it appropriate for examining networking through social media.

A positivist research philosophy was adopted because the study sought to measure respondents' reported experiences using structured questions and numerical summaries. The quantitative approach was appropriate for describing the distribution of responses across predefined networking indicators. The study used a cross-sectional design, meaning that exposure to social media and reported networking experiences were measured at one point in time. This design is suitable for describing patterns and examining associations, but it does not by itself establish temporal order or causality.

The research approach was quantitative and survey-based. The unit of analysis was the individual woman entrepreneur. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire containing demographic

questions, social-media-use questions and five Likert-scale statements addressing networking opportunities. Each statement was measured on a five-point scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. A cross-sectional survey design was used to obtain a snapshot of reported networking opportunities among women entrepreneurs at Kariakoo Market. The design was selected for its suitability for describing current patterns across a defined population. In interpreting the results, the study avoids causal language because exposure and outcomes were measured concurrently.

The study population was reported as 17,234 women entrepreneurs in the Kariakoo International Market. A target sample of 391 respondents was determined using Yamane's (1967) sample-size formula. Simple random sampling was reported as the sampling technique. Of the targeted sample, 382 complete responses were available for the analysis presented in this article. The resulting analytical sample is therefore n = 382, and all results in the tables and narrative are based on this number. The manuscript does not infer reasons for the nine-response difference because the available document does not provide a response/non-response log.

Data analysis was revised to match the study design and the information actually available. First, the dataset was screened for completeness and the analytical denominator was fixed at 382 valid responses. Second, frequencies and percentages were used to describe each response category. Third, item-level means and standard deviations were calculated for the five-point Likert items to summarise central tendency and dispersion. Because a single Likert item is ordinal, the revised interpretation does not treat the mean as a stand-alone test of causality; the full response distribution is reported alongside it. Median and modal responses are also reported to show the typical response category. Finally, for each item, the proportion selecting Agree or Strongly Agree was calculated and accompanied by a 95% Wilson confidence interval. These intervals describe sampling precision around the observed agreement proportion; they are not tests of a causal effect. No regression coefficient, p-value, beta coefficient or confidence interval for a regression effect is reported because the supplied manuscript contains no respondent-level dataset or model output supporting such analysis. Regression coefficients, p-values and model confidence intervals that were previously stated without corresponding model output have therefore been removed rather than presented as if they were generated by the current analysis. KMO and Bartlett's test are also removed from the validity narrative because those tests are appropriate when evaluating suitability for factor analysis, while the current manuscript does not report a factor-analysis procedure. For future work involving a multi-item networking construct, internal consistency (for example Cronbach's alpha or omega) and factor-analytic evidence should be reported before combining items into a scale.

Validity and reliability considerations. Content validity was supported by aligning the five questionnaire items with the study objective and the social-capital framework. However, the present manuscript does not provide sufficient evidence to claim construct validity from KMO/Bartlett statistics or internal consistency because no corresponding results are reported. This

limitation is now made explicit. Future studies should pilot the instrument, report item-development procedures, and provide reliability and construct-validity evidence before making claims about a latent networking construct.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1.1 Social Media Platforms Used

Among the 382 valid responses, Instagram was reported as the most frequently used platform for marketing and networking (169; 44.2%), followed by Facebook (97; 25.4%), TikTok (64; 16.8%) and WhatsApp (51; 13.4%). Twitter/X was reported by one respondent (0.3%), while LinkedIn and other platforms were not reported. The distribution indicates concentration on visually oriented and commonly used consumer platforms, but the result should be interpreted as a description of this sample rather than evidence that one platform is intrinsically more effective for networking.

4.1.2 Social Media Facilitation in Networking Opportunities in Women Businesses

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics related to the role of social media in facilitating networking opportunities and enhancing operational efficiency among women entrepreneurs in Tanzania. The analysis is based on responses gathered through a structured questionnaire utilizing a 5-point Likert scale. The parameters measured in this section focus on various aspects of social media usage and its perceived impact on networking and collaboration, including, Participation in Online Business-Related Events Formation of Valuable Partnerships, Facilitation of Collaboration with Other Businesses, Access to Mentorship and Expert Guidance, and Engagement with Social Media Influencers for Business Promotion.

Table 1: Social Media Facilitation in Networking Opportunities among Women Entrepreneurs (n = 382)

Statements with 5 Likert Scale		Frequency	Per cent	Mean ± SD
Online business-related events are regularly participated in.	Strongly Disagree	7	1.8	
	Disagree	61	16.0	
	Neutral	118	30.9	3.59 ± 1.104
	Agree	92	24.1	
	Strongly Agree	104	27.2	
Several valuable partnerships have been formed through social media.	Strongly Disagree	4	1.0	
	Disagree	82	21.5	3.35 ± .921
	Neutral	96	25.1	
	Agree	176	46.1	
	Strongly Agree	24	6.3	
Social media has facilitated collaboration with other businesses.	Strongly Disagree	14	3.7	
	Disagree	78	20.4	
	Neutral	120	31.4	3.39 ± 1.144
	Agree	86	22.5	
	Strongly Agree	84	22.0	
Social media provides access to mentorship and expert guidance.	Strongly Disagree	6	1.6	
	Disagree	121	31.7	
	Neutral	64	16.8	3.18 ±.971
	Agree	179	46.9	
	Strongly Agree	12	3.1	

Social media influencers are frequently engaged in business promotion.	Strongly Disagree	42	11.0	
	Disagree	54	14.1	
	Neutral	81	21.2	
	Agree	108	28.3	
	Strongly Agree	97	25.4	3.43 ± 1.304

Note: Agreement combines Agree and Strongly Agree. Confidence intervals are 95% Wilson intervals for the observed agreement proportion.

4.1.3 Regularity of Online Business-Related Events

For online business-related events, the response distribution is mixed rather than uniformly positive. Although 51.3% selected Agree or Strongly Agree, 30.9% were neutral and 17.8% disagreed. The median response was Neutral (3), while the modal response was Strongly Agree (5), showing that the most common category was positive even though a substantial middle group did not report regular participation. The mean of 3.59 should therefore be read together with the distribution rather than as evidence of a strong effect. The 95% confidence interval for the observed agreement proportion was 46.3%–56.3%.

4.1.4 Formation of Valuable Partnerships through Social Media

Formation of valuable partnerships received a mean of 3.35 (SD = 0.921). Agreement was 52.4%, but 25.1% were neutral and 22.5% disagreed. The median and mode were both Agree (4), indicating a generally positive centre of the distribution. Compared with participation in online events, the lower mean and similar agreement proportion suggest that using social media to maintain contact does not automatically translate into partnerships for all respondents. The 95% confidence interval for agreement was 47.3%–57.3%.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

Networking indicator	Mean	SD	Median	Mode	Agree/ Strongly agree	95% CI
Online business-related events	3.59	1.104	3	5	51.3%	46.3–56.3%
Valuable partnerships	3.35	0.921	4	4	52.4%	47.3–57.3%
Collaboration with other businesses	3.39	1.144	3	3	44.5%	39.6–49.5%
Mentorship and expert guidance	3.18	0.971	4	4	50.0%	45.0–55.0%
Influencer engagement for promotion	3.43	1.304	4	4	53.7%	48.7–58.6%

4.1.5 Social Media Facilitation in Collaboration with Other Businesses

The collaboration item produced the lowest agreement proportion among the five indicators (44.5%) and the highest neutral response (31.4%). The mean was 3.39 (SD = 1.144), with a median and mode of Neutral (3). This combination is analytically important: the average is above the scale midpoint, but the modal response and large neutral group indicate that perceptions of collaboration are divided. The 95% confidence interval for agreement was 39.6%–49.5%, which includes 50%;

therefore, the data do not support describing a clear majority agreement in the population represented by the sample.

4.1.6 Access to Mentorship and Expert Guidance through Social Media

Mentorship and expert guidance had the lowest mean score (3.18; SD = 0.971), despite exactly 50.0% selecting Agree or Strongly Agree. The median and mode were Agree (4), but 33.3% selected Disagree or Strongly Disagree and 16.8% were neutral. The pattern therefore suggests uneven access: some respondents report meaningful access to guidance, while a sizeable group does not. The 95% confidence interval for agreement was 45.0%–55.0%.

4.1.7 Use of Social Media in Advertising Campaigns

Influencer engagement for business promotion had the highest agreement proportion (53.7%) and a mean of 3.43 (SD = 1.304). The median and mode were both Agree (4), but the relatively large standard deviation and 25.1% combined disagreement indicate substantial variation in experience. Thus, influencer engagement appears to be the most commonly reported of the five networking-related practices, but the evidence does not justify concluding that it improves business performance. The 95% confidence interval for agreement was 48.7%–58.6%.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

4.2.1 Social Media Roles in Networking Opportunities of Women Entrepreneurs

The five indicators show a consistent but qualified pattern: the item means range from 3.18 to 3.59, placing the centre of responses slightly above the neutral midpoint of the five-point scale. However, agreement proportions range from 44.5% to 53.7%, and every item contains a sizeable neutral or disagreement group. This pattern is compatible with literature that treats digital platforms as potential channels for social capital and entrepreneurial resources, rather than as benefits that arise automatically from platform use (Hammad & El Naggar, 2023; Smith et al., 2017). The evidence therefore supports a conclusion of moderate perceived usefulness of social media for networking, not a claim of strong or statistically significant influence.

The distribution also identifies two areas requiring attention. Collaboration with other businesses has the largest neutral group (31.4%) and the lowest agreement proportion (44.5%), suggesting that being connected online may not automatically produce inter-firm collaboration. Mentorship has a similar issue: exactly half of respondents agree, while one-third disagree. These patterns imply that access to contacts and access to usable relationships are different outcomes. Social capital theory helps explain this distinction because networks can provide potential resources, but those resources depend on the quality, reciprocity and activation of relationships.

From a social-capital perspective, the findings are consistent with the idea that networks can function as channels for information, advice and business opportunities (Coleman, 1988; Granovetter, 1973). Research on digital entrepreneurial networks similarly argues that online ties can provide entrepreneurs with resources, although the process of acquiring social capital online

may differ from offline networking (Smith et al., 2017). The strongest observed pattern in the present sample concerns promotional networking through influencers, while the weakest concerns collaboration. This difference suggests that social media may be easier to use for outward communication and visibility than for sustained inter-business cooperation. The study therefore contributes a cautious interpretation: digital networking can create opportunities for social capital, but the survey data do not demonstrate that these opportunities produce operational efficiency or business growth.

The results further show why the analysis should move beyond simple statements that social media is "important." The observed agreement levels identify which networking functions are more commonly reported and which remain contested. A practical implication is that support interventions should not focus only on opening social-media accounts; they should help entrepreneurs convert contacts into useful relationships through structured peer groups, supplier networks, mentorship matching and collaborative business activities. These implications follow from the response patterns and should not be presented as measured causal effects.

Study limitations. The analysis is limited by the cross-sectional design, self-reported measures and the absence of respondent-level data in the manuscript package available for this revision. The study therefore cannot establish whether social-media networking preceded changes in business performance, nor can it estimate adjusted relationships between networking and performance. The five networking items were also analysed individually because no reliability or factor-analysis output was available to justify a composite scale. These limitations are now reflected in the interpretation and recommendations.

5.0 Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that women entrepreneurs at Kariakoo Market report moderate-to-positive networking opportunities through social media, but the strength of these perceptions varies by networking activity. Influencer engagement for promotion had the highest agreement (53.7%), followed by valuable partnerships (52.4%) and participation in online business-related events (51.3%). Mentorship reached 50.0% agreement, while collaboration with other businesses was lowest at 44.5%. The relatively large neutral and disagreement categories across the indicators show that social media access does not translate uniformly into networking benefits. Given the cross-sectional and descriptive design, the findings are interpreted as reported patterns rather than evidence that social media causes operational efficiency, business growth or entrepreneurial skill development.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Knowledge Implication

The findings point to specific practices rather than a general instruction to "use social media more." First, because participation in online business events was reported by 51.3% of respondents, market associations and entrepreneur groups should maintain scheduled WhatsApp, Instagram or other relevant business forums with clear agendas, supplier information, market updates and opportunities for peer exchange. Second, because only 44.5% agreed that social media facilitates collaboration, entrepreneurs should use structured collaboration mechanisms such as joint purchasing groups, supplier referral lists, co-promotion arrangements and shared product catalogues rather than relying on informal contacts alone. Third, because mentorship agreement was exactly 50.0%, training providers should establish identifiable mentor–mentee channels with verified mentors, defined topics and follow-up sessions. Fourth, influencer promotion should be treated as a targeted marketing activity: entrepreneurs should agree on the target customer, content deliverables, expected reach and simple performance indicators before paying for promotion.

5.2.2 Policy Implication

Policy support should focus on the barriers identified by the response distributions. Market authorities and entrepreneurship-support organisations should provide short practical modules on digital networking, partnership development, online safety, customer communication and evaluating promotional results. Support should prioritise women who report neutral or negative networking experiences rather than assuming that access to a platform is equivalent to effective use. Where public or donor-funded programmes support digital entrepreneurship, participation should be linked to measurable activities such as mentorship matches, supplier-network participation and completed collaborative projects. These recommendations are proposed as practical responses to the observed patterns; they are not claims that the survey tested their effectiveness.

5.2.3 Recommendation for Management Practice

Women-owned businesses should establish simple networking routines: maintain a business contact database, respond to business enquiries within an agreed period, participate in relevant online groups, document partnership leads, and review monthly which contacts produced useful information, referrals or sales opportunities. Businesses using influencers should record the campaign date, audience reached, enquiries received and conversions where possible. These measures would help entrepreneurs distinguish online activity from business value and generate records that can be used for future performance analysis.

5.2.4 Recommendation for Further Studies

Future studies should collect respondent-level data and move beyond item-level description. A multi-item networking scale should first be validated using reliability analysis and, where justified, exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis. Researchers could then construct a defensible networking index and examine its association with clearly measured outcomes such as sales growth, customer retention, number of active suppliers, business survival or operational efficiency.

Multiple regression or other appropriate multivariable methods could be used to adjust for business age, sector, education, platform use and other potential confounders. Because the present study is cross-sectional, longitudinal or panel designs are recommended for examining temporal relationships and changes in networking behaviour over time. Platform-specific comparisons should also be conducted using adequate subgroup sample sizes rather than assuming that all platforms operate in the same way.

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