



Research Article

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Use of Digital Media Platforms as an Alternative Means of Livelihood among Mizo Women

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ABSTRACT

The advent of digital media platforms and user-generated content has spurred the growth of digital businesses across India, including Mizoram. While platforms like YouTube provide women opportunities to monetize domestic work by transforming it into content, Instagram and other social media/messaging apps enable women to establish and manage their own online businesses. In this context, this study aims to comprehensively examine the potential and challenges of digital media platforms as alternative livelihood sources for Mizo women.

Adopting an innovative approach to address gaps in digital media access and usage, the research strategy is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, tailored to the study's specific objectives. The study draws on multiple theoretical frameworks, including Feminist Economics, Platform Economy Theory, and the Diffusion of Innovation, to analyze digital media's role as an alternative livelihood for Mizo women.

As digital media emerges as a powerful tool for women's economic empowerment—reshaping traditional gender roles, fostering entrepreneurship, and creating pathways to financial independence—localized training in the Mizo dialect and culturally contextualized approaches are essential to accelerating digital media adoption among Mizo women.

This study is part of the ICSSR sponsored major project 2023-24 titled "*Accelerating Women Entrepreneurship in Mizoram: Toward Digital Empowerment for Alternative Livelihood, Self-Reliance and Gender Equality*"

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of digital media platforms and user-generated content has spurred a notable surge in digital entrepreneurship and YouTube-based ventures across India, including Mizoram—a state characterized by a high concentration of Scheduled Tribes and a deeply patriarchal social order. Despite Mizoram's relatively balanced sex ratio, women remain markedly underrepresented in traditional media and public domains. However, the rise of digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook has introduced transformative opportunities for women to circumvent these structural constraints. By enabling the monetization of domestic labor—such as converting household activities into

content—and facilitating online business ventures, these platforms are gradually destabilizing entrenched gender norms that confine women to unpaid care work. This shift not only fosters economic self-sufficiency but also challenges the gendered division of labor. The present study forms part of a larger ICSSR-funded research project (2023–24) titled "*Accelerating Women Entrepreneurship in Mizoram: Toward Digital Empowerment for Alternative Livelihood, Self-Reliance, and Gender Equality*." The project investigates how digital media serves as a catalyst for women's entrepreneurship, economic agency, and broader gender equity in Mizoram's socio-cultural context.

Significantly, the rise of digital platforms has enabled Mizo women to transform traditionally unpaid domestic

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labor into monetized content through YouTube vlogging, challenging conventional economic exclusions of caregiving work. By documenting household activities, these women generate income while reshaping perceptions of domestic work's value. This study examines how such digital visibility translates into financial independence and decision-making autonomy, despite persistent socio-cultural constraints.

Beyond YouTube, platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram have become vital for women entrepreneurs, facilitating market expansion and formalizing previously informal enterprises. Government initiatives, including the *Stand-Up India Scheme* and *Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP)*, further support this shift by providing resources and fostering digital networks. However, structural barriers—such as unequal domestic burdens, limited funding access, and digital fraud risks—continue to hinder progress. Concurrently, Mizoram presents a paradox: while it leads India in female workforce participation at 59% (NSSO, 2022) and managerial representation at 40.8% (PLFS 2022), women still shoulder disproportionate unpaid care responsibilities (Singh & Pattanaik, 2020). This study explores how Mizo women reconcile traditional gender roles with digital entrepreneurship, assessing - Which platforms most effectively support their businesses? Whether digital income correlates with greater household autonomy and how they navigate socio-cultural expectations in online ventures.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the potential and challenges of digital media platforms as an alternative livelihood for women in Mizoram. Therefore, the objectives are as follows:

- To examine digital media as an empowerment tool for women entrepreneurs in Mizoram
- To investigate the role of digital entrepreneurship in breaking patriarchal barriers
- To identify key challenges faced by women in digital entrepreneurship

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant implications for both economic empowerment and social transformation, while simultaneously elucidating the challenges associated with utilizing digital media platforms for alternative livelihood generation. The research demonstrates how digital media serves as a vital alternative economic pathway by facilitating income generation, skill enhancement, and community participation - particularly for women constrained by patriarchal structures and limited traditional opportunities. Through an examination of YouTube utilization among Mizo women, the study reveals how platform monetization enables economic autonomy and entrepreneurial ventures.

The study's findings reveal three significant dimensions of digital entrepreneurship among Mizo women: First, content creation and digital self-expression serve as powerful mechanisms for enhancing women's visibility while simultaneously challenging entrenched gender norms in Mizorami society. Second, the research documents a growing trend of Mizo women's participation in digital entrepreneurial ventures, while also revealing a pronounced urban-rural divide in both access to and utilization of digital media platforms for business purposes. Third, the analysis identifies persistent structural barriers that continue to hinder the realization of full gender equality in the digital economy.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Transformative Role of Entrepreneurship in Socio-economic Development

Entrepreneurship functions as a critical driver of employment creation and socioeconomic advancement, fostering diversified labor markets that enhance community stability and quality of life (Schumpeter, 1934; Becker, 1965). By elevating household incomes, entrepreneurial activities directly improve living standards through increased consumption capacity.

The gendered dimensions of entrepreneurship reveal particularly significant impacts. Empirical evidence demonstrates that women's entrepreneurial participation correlates with:

- Enhanced social status (Jamali, 2009)
- Improved household and community welfare (Scott et al., 2012)
- Broader economic benefits (Ardrey et al., 2006)

However, these potential gains are frequently constrained by structural barriers, including sociocultural norms that restrict women's educational access and professional networks (Sen, 1993a; Subramaniam, 2011). The entrepreneurial landscape itself reflects an evolving paradigm, with conventional profit-driven models (Clarke & Holt, 2010) increasingly complemented by social entrepreneurship frameworks that address societal needs through innovative, sustainable solutions (Sud et al., 2009).

While digital transformation has expanded entrepreneurial opportunities (Castells, 2010), significant gaps remain in understanding how these mechanisms foster inclusive growth, particularly for marginalized groups. Further research is needed to examine the intersection of technological change, gender equity, and sustainable development in entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Opportunities and types of livelihoods available through digital media

The digital revolution has fundamentally restructured economic systems, creating new opportunities for income generation through remote work, flexible conditions, and

innovative production modalities (Castells, 2010). This shift aligns with theories of platform capitalism (Srnicke, 2017) and the knowledge economy (Drucker, 1993), as digital infrastructures enable novel forms of economic exchange.

Key developments in Digital Livelihoods include: Digital Commerce: Online marketplaces (e.g., Amazon, Flipkart) exemplify networked business ecosystems (Kenney & Zysman, 2016), while dropshipping and print-on-demand models demonstrate just-in-time production (Womack & Jones, 2003) and mass customization (Pine, 1993). Affiliate marketing reflects attention economy dynamics (Goldhaber, 1997), and digital product platforms facilitate non-rivalrous good distribution (Shapiro & Varian, 1999). Content Creation: Professionalized within creative industries (Hesmondhalgh, 2019), content production now includes revenue-sharing models, influencer marketing (Horton & Wohl, 1956), and crowdfunding (Mollick, 2014). Service Provision: Digital platforms mediate freelance work (Gray & Suri, 2019), virtual assistance (Gregg, 2011), and online education (Means et al., 2017), exemplifying labor precaritization (Standing, 2011). Corporate Virtualization: Remote customer service (Taylor & Bain, 2005), automated HR (Moore & Robinson, 2016), and data analysis (Alvesson, 2004) reflect the spatial reorganization of labor (Mokhtarian, 1991).

While digital labor markets offer flexibility (Felstead & Henseke, 2017) and global access (Gereffi & Fernandez-Stark, 2016), they also intensify competition (Gandini, 2016) and platform dependency (Langley & Leyshon, 2017). Future research must address regulatory frameworks to balance worker protections with innovation, ensuring sustainable digital labor ecosystems.

Mizo Women, Digital Media Platforms and Digital Entrepreneurship

The burgeoning growth of women entrepreneurs in India has become a focal point in academic and policy discussions, particularly in the context of digital media's transformative potential (Datta & Sahu, 2022). While numerous studies have documented the Government of India's commitment to fostering women's entrepreneurship through initiatives like Stand-Up India and the Women Entrepreneurship Platform (Das, 2021), significant gaps remain in understanding grassroots-level digital adoption, particularly in northeastern states like Mizoram.

Notwithstanding these existing gaps, the digital economy has emerged as a transformative force for women's economic participation in Mizoram, offering novel income-generating opportunities while confronting persistent structural barriers. Historically, Mizo women have played a vital role in the region's socio-economic fabric, contributing to household incomes through traditional crafts, agriculture, and small-scale trade. They have been central to cottage industries, particularly

in handloom and handicrafts, where intricately woven Puan (traditional Mizo attire) and bamboo products serve as both cultural symbols and significant sources of livelihood. Many women sell these goods in local markets, while others engage in small-scale farming, cultivating vegetables, fruits, and spices. However, traditional income streams present considerable challenges. Limited market access forces many artisans to rely on intermediaries, diminishing profit margins. Seasonal fluctuations in agriculture lead to inconsistent earnings, and the informal nature of most women-run enterprises restricts access to formal credit and government support schemes.

Significantly, the advent of digital technologies has opened new avenues for income generation, enabling Mizo women to transcend geographical and economic constraints. E-commerce and social media platforms—such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp—have become vital tools for selling handloom products, homemade snacks, pickles, and organic produce. National and international market access has expanded through platforms like Amazon Seller Hub. Additionally, women are increasingly monetizing their skills through content creation, influencer marketing, and remote freelancing. Empirical data suggests that digital entrepreneurship offers substantial financial benefits: Mizo women engaged in online businesses report 25–40% higher earnings compared to traditional market channels (Lalremruati, 2022). Digital platforms also reduce geographic limitations, with 68% of women entrepreneurs serving clients beyond Mizoram (MSME Department, 2023), while diversification across multiple platforms helps stabilize income streams.

Despite these advancements, significant structural and socio-cultural barriers hinder full participation. Only 38% of rural Mizo women have reliable high-speed internet access (DoT, 2023), and digital payment literacy remains low in peripheral regions. Gendered expectations about “appropriate” work domains continue to restrict women's entrepreneurial ambitions. Algorithmic biases disproportionately affect Mizo-language content creators, while older women face difficulties navigating online payment systems. Cyber security risks, including online fraud, further deter women from digital entrepreneurship. Existing scholarship acknowledges that digital platforms have democratized entrepreneurial opportunities by lowering traditional market entry barriers (Kelkar & Nathan, 2020). However, Chakraborty and Mukherjee (2021) emphasize that structural constraints—such as limited access to quality jobs and digital infrastructure—disproportionately affect women entrepreneurs. Vazquez and Alagaretnam (2022) further highlight the gendered nature of cyber risks, with women facing unique vulnerabilities in online spaces.

Mizoram presents a compelling case for investigation. Despite boasting 89.4% female literacy (Census 2011)—the second highest in India—research on Mizo women's

participation in digital entrepreneurship remains scarce. Preliminary fieldwork indicates that while urban centers like Aizawl show growth in women-led e-commerce ventures, rural areas struggle with inadequate vernacular digital content, payment infrastructure gaps, and cultural resistance to technology adoption (Lalremruati, 2022).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Aligned with contemporary digital social research practices, this study acknowledges the evolving nature of data ecosystems, where emerging data types necessitate flexible methodological approaches (Lindgren, 2022, p. 233). In response to this dynamic environment and guided by principles of methodological pragmatism (Foster, 2023), a mixed-methods design was employed. This approach strategically combines primary and secondary data collection strategies to address the research problem and generate comprehensive insights. Specifically, the study integrates qualitative and quantitative methods to systematically evaluate the role of digital media platforms in empowering women entrepreneurs in Mizoram. The dual-method framework enables both statistical analysis of measurable outcomes (e.g., income changes, platform usage rates) and interpretive examination of lived experiences (e.g., perceived barriers, motivational factors).

Research Design

Qualitative Component

This study employs qualitative methods to understand how digital media platforms shape women's entrepreneurial experiences in Mizoram. Through structured interviews with 20 women entrepreneurs, their live realities - from initial motivations to enter digital work to daily challenges in sustaining their ventures are documented. These conversations explore how digital media tools have transformed traditional economic roles, while also revealing persistent barriers like transportation and location constraints, technological constraints, and limited access to marketplace. To deepen these insights, comparative case studies of 7 purposefully selected entrepreneurs representing both success stories and ongoing struggles. The interview narratives guide case selection to ensure diversity across geography, sector, and business maturity. Conversely, case study findings help contextualize individual stories within broader patterns of opportunity and exclusion. Together, these methods produce rich, grounded insights into how digital media platforms are reshaping women's economic empowerment in Mizoram. This approach particularly values women's own accounts of their digital journeys, treating their experiences as authoritative knowledge about both the transformative potential and real limitations of the digital economy.

Quantitative Component

A cross-sectional survey was conducted among a purposively selected sample of 30 Mizo women entrepreneurs representing diverse business sectors, including handicrafts, handloom, baking, cosmetics, and other micro-enterprises across four districts of Mizoram (Aizawl, Khawzawl, Champhai, and Saitual). The structured questionnaire examined four key dimensions: (1) patterns of digital platform usage and preferences, (2) perceived barriers to digital adoption, (3) self-assessed digital literacy levels, and (4) income-generation outcomes related to digital entrepreneurship.

While the sample size enables robust descriptive analysis, its limited scope permits only preliminary inferential statistical testing. Nevertheless, these findings establish an empirical foundation for future large-scale investigations of digital entrepreneurship among Mizo women. To contextualize the primary data, the study incorporates secondary analysis of government publications (including MSME Department reports and Census data) and industry analyses of e-commerce trends in Mizoram.

Sample Selection and Technique, Sample Size and Method of Data Collection

The target population encompasses a diverse range of occupational categories, including but not limited to: social media-based sellers, traditional artisans adapting digital platforms, home-based bakers, freelance service providers, and e-commerce vendors. This inclusive approach captures the heterogeneity of women's entrepreneurial engagement in the digital economy. The research specifically examines entrepreneurs aged 18-50 years, a demographic range that captures both emerging young entrepreneurs and established middle-aged business owners. This age stratification enables analysis of potential generational differences in digital adoption patterns, technological literacy, and business scalability.

Geographically, the study employs a purposive sampling framework that incorporates both urban and rural contexts. The urban cohort is represented by entrepreneurs operating in Aizawl, Mizoram's capital and commercial hub, while rural participants are drawn from districts including Champhai, Khawzawl and Saitual. This spatial distribution facilitates comparative analysis of digital infrastructure access disparities, platform usage variations, and distinct challenges faced by location-specific entrepreneurs. The sampling methodology acknowledges the importance of sectoral, age, and geographic diversity to ensure findings reflect the complex realities of digital entrepreneurship across Mizoram's socioeconomic landscape. Particular attention is given to capturing the experiences of traditionally underrepresented groups, such as rural artisans transitioning to digital marketplaces and middle-aged women developing late-career digital competencies.

The study engages two distinct but related samples. For survey sample, a total of 30 women entrepreneurs were selected through stratified purposive sampling, comprising of 15 participants from Aizawl district (representing urban digital entrepreneurship) and 15 participants from combined rural districts (for comparative analysis of periphery experiences). Interview samples are selected from the larger survey pool, 7 participants were selected for in-depth interviews using maximum variation sampling based mainly on geographic distribution (4 urban, 3 rural). Within this interview cohort, 4 particularly illustrative cases were selected for comprehensive case study analysis.

Data Analysis Plan

Quantitative Data

- Percentage-based analysis of survey responses to platform adoption rates, frequency of platform usage and reported challenges.

Qualitative Data

- The study employs a three-stage thematic analysis process to examine interview transcripts. First, open coding identifies key themes including: (1) motivational factors (economic needs and social influences), (2) online fraud prevention strategies, (3) barrier categories (cultural, technical, and financial constraints), and (4) adaptation approaches. Subsequently, axial coding establishes relationships between these themes, mapping their connections and interactions. Finally, selective coding synthesizes these relationships into core explanatory narratives that capture the participants' lived experiences.
- Case study analysis involves an in-depth investigation of four representative cases, with comprehensive contextual descriptions that situate the findings within relevant cultural and economic frameworks.

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to ethical standards by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring they understand the research objectives and their rights. To protect privacy, anonymity is maintained for sensitive disclosures, particularly regarding family resistance or online harassment. Culturally responsive practices include conducting interviews in Mizo when preferred by participants, with careful transcriptions to preserve linguistic nuance.

Conceptual Framework

Several theoretical frameworks have been adopted as the basis of this study and used to analyse digital media platforms as an alternative livelihood, particularly for women in Mizoram. These frameworks are used in combination to provide a comprehensive understanding

of how digital media platforms can serve as an alternative livelihood for women in Mizoram.

Knowledge Economy

Drawing on Drucker's (1993) conceptualization of the knowledge economy – where value creation stems from information and skills rather than traditional factors of production – this study examines how Mizo women entrepreneurs leverage digital media platforms for economic empowerment.

Feminist Economics

Building on Ostrom's (2000) feminist economic framework, which challenges traditional economic paradigms by centering gendered experiences and unpaid labor, this study explores how Mizo women entrepreneurs utilize digital media platforms to navigate and transform patriarchal economic structures.

Platform Economy Theory

Based on Anne Helmond's (2015) *Platform Economy Theory*, which examines how digital platforms reshape social and economic relations through datafication and connectivity, this study analyzes how Mizo women entrepreneurs navigate and exploit platform infrastructures for economic empowerment.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Applying Everett Rogers' (2003) *Diffusion of Innovation Theory*, this study examines how Mizo women entrepreneurs adopt and adapt digital media platforms through different dimensions.

Analysis and Interpretation

Digital Media Adoption of Mizo Women Entrepreneurs by District-wise (%)

Figure-1 clearly shows rankings/district-wise differences and highlights Aizawl's dominance in digital media adoption. This finding aligns with Anne Helmond's (2015) platform economy framework, which elucidates how digital accessibility challenges in Mizoram reflect broader platformization dynamics. The urban-rural connectivity divide exemplifies what Helmond identifies as

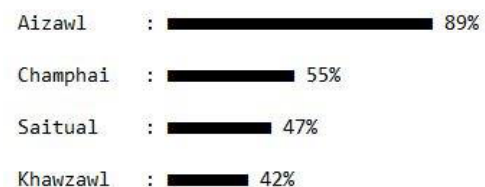


Figure-1: Digital Media Adoption by District (%)

Table 1: Digital Media Adoption by Age (%)

Sl.No.	Age group	%
1	18-30	93
2	31-40	87
3	41-50	36

the infrastructure dependency characteristic of platform economies, where geographic disparities in internet access generate unequal participation opportunities. While urban Aizawl benefits from robust mobile networks that enable platform engagement, rural areas' unreliable connectivity constrains women's capacity to function as platform actors, thereby reinforcing existing economic marginalization.

Digital Media Adoption of Mizo Women Entrepreneurs by Age (%)

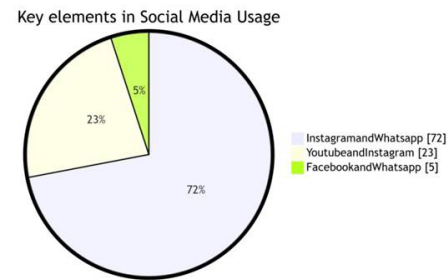
Table-1 data shows that younger Mizo women entrepreneurs (18-30 years) have the highest digital media adoption rate (93%), which declines significantly with age, dropping to 36% in the 41-50 group. This suggests a strong generational divide in digital platform usage for business.

Digital Media Platforms Used by Mizo Women Entrepreneurs

Figure-2 data clearly indicates that women entrepreneurs are not relying on a single platform. WhatsApp emerges as the dominant platform among Mizo women entrepreneurs, with 72% using it in combination with Instagram, while only 5% pair it with Facebook. Meanwhile, 23% utilize YouTube and Instagram, suggesting a growing preference for visual and video-based platforms in their business strategies.

Role of Digital Entrepreneurship in breaking Patriarchal Barriers

The role of digital entrepreneurship in challenging patriarchal barriers can best be understood by examining two key factors: the monetization of domestic labor and the increased visibility

**Figure 2:** Digital Media Platforms Used by Mizo Women Entrepreneurs (%)

of housework. This shift is particularly evident among entrepreneur-homemakers and homemaker-bloggers, whose work is reshaping both economic valuations and cultural perceptions of traditionally unpaid domestic labor.

The rise of homemaker-vloggers in Mizoram is attributed to social media and video sharing platforms like YouTube, Facebook and Instagram and it has significantly altered the economic and cultural perceptions of housework. Monetization of housework through social media has increases the visibility of domestic labor; these content creators have reshaped traditional gender roles, empowered women financially, and challenged societal undervaluation of homemaking. Monetization has begun to turn unpaid domestic work into a legitimate and profitable profession providing financial independence to many homemakers.

Homemaker-vloggers and women entrepreneurs in Mizoram are generating income through different sources.

Women vloggers particularly homemaker-vloggers have brought about an increase in visibility and cultural shift in perceptions of housework by sharing their daily activities at home. Like many other societies, housework in Mizoram was traditionally seen as unpaid, invisible labor largely expected of women but rarely valued economically. Social media has gradually changed this perception by recognizing domestic skills as valuable labor. Cooking, cleaning, childcare, and home management are now showcased as skilled work rather than "natural" duties. Vloggers like "Essievlogs",

Table 2: Sources of Income for homemaker-vloggers and women entrepreneurs in Mizoram

Sl. No.	Sources of Income / Monetization	%
1.	Selling products through WhatsApp group and broadcast, Facebook and Instagram pages	94%
2.	Youtube views and subscribers	45%
3.	Ad Revenue (YouTube ads, sponsored posts for local brands, YouTube Partner Program, Facebook Ad Breaks and others)	57%
4.	Sponsorships/ sponsored posts & Paid partnership/Sponsored product reviews /Brand Collaborations/ brand deals (local brands, local restaurant/local stores, cosmetic/skincare, kitchenware companies and e-commerce sites)	68%
5.	Affiliate Marketing/links (Amazon, Meesho, or Mizoram-based e-commerce) and	18%
6.	Selling digital products and services (Online baking classes, selling e-books	-
7.	Memberships & Donations (YouTube Memberships, YouTube Super Chats	25%

"Terami Renthlei Official channel" and "Thanthani Vlogs" have amassed high number of subscribers and viewers by sharing their cooking and childcare tips and hacks with their audiences proving homemaking requires expertise. With this increasing visibility of houseworks, many Mizo homemakers now earn more than their salaried spouses, thereby, shifting household dynamics and economic empowerment of women. Young women see homemaking as a career option and not just a default role.

These women vloggers are documenting traditional Mizo recipes, weaving, and home practices and in the process, they are keeping culture alive. They also innovate, blending modern hacks with traditional methods. Therefore, they are instrumental in preserving Mizo culture while accepting the transformative changes brought about by digital media itself. While opportunities have grown, challenges for women remain. They are facing social backlash and stereotyping from some conservative elements which dismiss homemaker-vloggers as "*eisiam dan video mai mai*" or "*just cooking videos*" to undermine their work. It is also seen by some people as a distraction from "real" duties. Further, digital divide and infrastructure issues are also identified challenges for women vloggers predominantly for rural Mizoram where internet connectivity is still a problem. Many homemakers in rural areas have no access to Smartphone or editing tools. Women vloggers are also facing challenges of market saturation and algorithm pressures as platforms like YouTube favor consistent uploads; it is adding stress to daily chores. Thus, as more enter the space, standing out becomes harder. Additionally, as many vloggers are generating income through collaborations and partnerships, balancing authenticity and commercialization are posing as challenges. While viewers expect traditional Mizo authenticity, sponsors often push for trendy content. Therefore, some vloggers struggle to maintain cultural integrity while monetizing.

Despite these challenges, women entrepreneurs and vloggers are making positive impact on Mizo culture and economy. Local entrepreneurs in the handloom and handicrafts sector, spice brands, cosmetics and skincare, baking and others and also local businesses have benefits through collaborations. Tourism also boosts as food vloggers promote Mizo cuisine globally. Social media has, indeed, transformed housework from invisible labor to a celebrated, income-generating profession in Mizoram. While challenges like gender stereotypes and digital access persist, digital homemaking is steadily reshaping cultural norms, empowering women economically, and preserving Mizo traditions in innovative ways.

Socio-economic impact of engaging in digital media platforms on women's financial independence and empowerment

Elinor Ostrom's feminist economic framework provides critical insights into how digital platforms are enabling

Mizo women to challenge traditional economic paradigms. The monetization of domestic labor through digital entrepreneurship represents a fundamental revaluation of reproductive work - a core concern in feminist economics. By transforming previously unpaid household activities into income-generating ventures, women are disrupting the artificial production-reproduction dichotomy that has historically devalued feminized labor. The emergence of women-led digital collectives mirrors Ostrom's principles of communal resource management, as self-help groups create alternative economic systems through platform-based cooperation. The documented earnings of ₹10,000–1,00,000 monthly through digital media platforms signify not merely financial gains but a reconfiguration of economic power dynamics within households - a key indicator of feminist economic progress.

Digital media platforms facilitate what Ostrom identified as polycentric governance systems, where women navigate multiple economic spheres simultaneously. The preservation of traditional crafts through e-commerce exemplifies how digital tools can sustain indigenous knowledge systems while creating contemporary value. This cultural-economic mediation challenges mainstream development models that often position modernization against tradition. However, persistent digital divides reveal structural inequalities in resource distribution - a central concern of feminist institutional analysis. The connectivity gaps and online harassment risks reflect how patriarchal norms adapt to new economic spaces. The male participation in supporting women's digital ventures indicates shifting gender contracts. The financial independence gained through digital work represents tangible progress, yet true transformation requires systemic changes in how society values all forms of labor.

Significantly, Mizo women entrepreneurs challenge traditional economic paradigms exemplifies Ostrom's argument that marginalized groups can create effective economic alternatives when traditional systems fail them. As Mizo women develop their own platform-based commons, they demonstrate how digital spaces can become sites of feminist economic practice - challenging exclusionary markets while preserving cultural identity. The ongoing tensions between opportunity and constraint highlight the complex, nonlinear nature of gendered economic change that Ostrom's work consistently emphasized.

Key challenges faced by Women in Digital Entrepreneurship

Mizoram is a predominantly tribal and Christian population; women are facing unique cultural, social, economic and technical barriers in accessing and utilising digital media for livelihood purposes. While Mizoram has relatively higher literacy rates (over 91% with female literacy at 89.27%), digital inclusion for women remains uneven, especially in rural areas. Mizo women



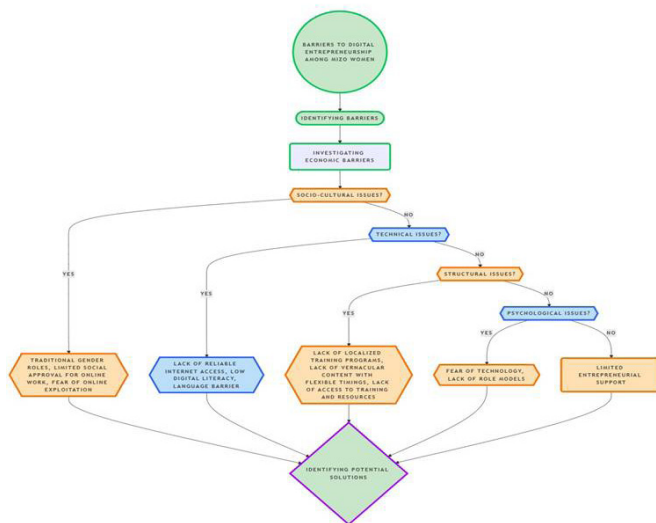


Figure 3: Barriers women face in accessing and utilizing digital media for livelihood purposes

encounter multifaceted challenges in pursuing digital livelihoods. Culturally, persistent gender norms prioritize domestic duties over digital work, while conservative attitudes often stigmatize online entrepreneurship as less respectable than traditional employment. Legitimate concerns about cyber harassment further discourage platform engagement. Economically, high device costs and internet expenses create substantial barriers, particularly in rural areas. Limited financial autonomy restricts access to digital payment systems, perpetuating reliance on cash transactions that hinder online monetization. Infrastructure challenges compound these issues, with unreliable rural connectivity severely limiting e-commerce and freelancing opportunities. Technical obstacles include low digital literacy and language barriers, as most platforms operate in English or Hindi rather than Mizo. Institutional/structural support remains inadequate, with few localized training programs and persistent urban-rural disparities in resource allocation. Psychological barriers emerge from technological unfamiliarity and scarce visible role models, particularly affecting older women and those with minimal education.

Significantly, high device costs and internet expenses which lead to affordability barrier aligns with Helmond's concept of platform capitalism's exclusionary mechanisms, where participation requires not just technical access but sustained financial capacity for data costs. This economic gatekeeping disproportionately affects women in resource-constrained households. Digital literacy gaps demonstrate how platform interfaces - designed primarily for tech-savvy users - create what Helmond terms "programmed sociality" that excludes those without standardized digital competencies. Government initiatives like Digital India represent attempts at what Helmond

describes as platformization of public services, yet their inconsistent impact on women underscores the theory's emphasis on how platforms often reproduce rather than resolve structural inequalities. The cultural constraints on women's training access reveal how platform economies intersect with local gender norms, creating hybrid forms of digital exclusion that combine technological and social barriers.

Case Studies of Mizo Women Leveraging Digital Media for Livelihood Enhancement

This case study analysis examines four Mizo women entrepreneurs who have successfully utilized digital platforms to establish sustainable businesses. The cases demonstrate how digital technologies are transforming traditional economic activities while preserving cultural heritage in Mizoram. Importantly, the study confirms diffusion theory's continued relevance while highlighting needed adaptations for analyzing gendered technological adoption in indigenous contexts. The cases demonstrate how cultural preservation and innovation can synergize when diffusion processes respect local knowledge systems.

Case 1: Malsawmi - Zo_weave Handloom Enterprise

• Business Profile

- Founded: 2016
- Specialization: Traditional Mizo handloom products (puan, baby slings, home decor)
- Digital Platforms: Instagram (15.2K followers), WhatsApp
- Workforce: Supports 63 weavers statewide

• Digital Strategy

- Uses Instagram reels to showcase weaving processes
- Features traditional motifs to appeal to diaspora communities
- Maintains direct customer relationships through WhatsApp orders

• Impact

- Established international clientele (UK, USA)
- Preserves traditional weaving techniques
- Generates stable income for rural artisans

• Key Success Factors

- Cultural authenticity in product design
- Visual storytelling through digital media
- Diaspora engagement strategy

Case 2: JH Lalhriatpuii - JH Handmade

• Business Profile:

- Founded: 2019
- Specialization: Eco-friendly paper products (wedding accessories, gift items)

- Digital Platforms: Instagram (3,542 followers), WhatsApp
- Workforce: Employs one assistant
- Operational Challenges:
- Initial issues with payment collection
- Intellectual property theft (image appropriation)
- Seasonal demand fluctuations

• *Adaptation Strategies*

- Shift to prepayment system
- Balanced public/private account management
- Product diversification

• *Financial Performance*

- Monthly profits: ₹20,000-30,000
- Customer base spans 8 states of India

Case 3: Thanthani - Digital Content Creator

• *Business Profile*

- Platforms: YouTube (198K subscribers), Instagram (195K followers)
- Content: Lifestyle, cooking, home management
- Revenue Streams: Multiple monetization channels

• *Digital Innovation*

- Combines traditional homemaking with digital entrepreneurship
- Leverages nostalgia marketing to diaspora audience
- Maintains professional portfolio through Instagram

• *Impact*

- Supplemental household income
- Digital mentorship for aspiring creators
- Cultural preservation through content

Case 4: Lalthianglimi - Simply Me Skincare

• *Business Profile*

- Founded: 2020
- Qualifications: MSc Biotechnology, certified manufacturer
- Distribution: Hybrid online-offline model
- Product Range: Affordable, science-based skincare

• *Digital Challenges*

- Cybersecurity concerns
- Payment verification processes
- Geographic dispersion of customers

• *Risk Management*

- Strict prepayment policy
- Gradual market expansion
- Quality assurance focus

• *Financial Performance*

- Monthly profits: ₹20,000-50,000

- Serves approximately 100 customers monthly

Comparative Analysis of the case study

The cases reveal several common patterns:

- Digital platforms enable market expansion beyond geographic constraints
- Cultural authenticity serves as a unique value proposition
- Payment security emerges as a universal concern
- All entrepreneurs demonstrate adaptive learning curves

This case study analysis of four successful Mizo women entrepreneurs demonstrates the applicability of Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation theory within a specific cultural context, while revealing important modifications to classical diffusion models. The examined entrepreneurs exemplify distinct adopter categories; with urban-based early adopters paving the way for gradual rural adoption, illustrating the theory's core principles of innovation spread through social systems. The cases particularly underscore the critical role of observability and cultural compatibility in adoption patterns. Successful ventures became visible through church networks and social circles, effectively reducing perceived risks for potential adopters. Platforms accommodating vernacular communication, such as WhatsApp groups and Mizo-language Instagram posts, demonstrated significantly higher adoption rates than English-dependent interfaces, confirming Rogers' emphasis on innovation characteristics in determining diffusion rates.

The innovation-decision process manifests clearly, with women progressing through knowledge acquisition via social networks, persuasion through peer success observation, trial implementation, and eventual business scaling. Younger women are teaching digital skills to older generations, showing how family members help spread new technology in Mizo society. However, the analysis reveals theoretical limitations, as persistent urban-rural divides and gendered adoption patterns challenge classical diffusion assumptions. The findings suggest modified diffusion dynamics in Mizoram, where traditional social structures serve as primary dissemination channels, adoption occurs communally rather than individually, and innovations undergo significant local adaptation. These observations contribute to innovation theory by demonstrating how cultural preservation and technological adoption can synergize when diffusion processes respect indigenous knowledge systems.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To accelerate digital media adoption among Mizo women, localized training in the Mizo dialect and culturally contextualized approaches are crucial. Civil society organizations like SHGs, churches, and the Young Mizo Association (YMA) play key roles in community

mobilization. Essential supports include subsidized digital devices, internet access, banking services, and safe ecosystems to address cybersecurity concerns and mentorship gaps.

While urban Mizo women entrepreneurs rapidly adopt digital platforms - driven by cultural authenticity and low-entry barriers using smartphone tools - rural women face distinct challenges. Beyond digital literacy gaps, unreliable internet and transportation infrastructure in hilly areas remain primary obstacles. This has spawned a hybrid business model combining digital sales with offline community validation through SHGs, effectively building trust while reaching niche markets like the Mizo diaspora.

Three systemic barriers emerge -unequal access to technology and finance, restrictive socio-cultural norms, and digital literacy disparities. Solutions should prioritize vernacular training initiatives, women-friendly digital centers, E-commerce promotion of local handicrafts, financial literacy programs and public-private partnerships for rural connectivity. Moreover, Mizoram's high female literacy provides a foundation for knowledge economy participation. However, as Drucker emphasized, applied knowledge matters more than literacy alone. The proposed approach - combining localized training, mobile units, mentorship, and community hubs - aims to transform Mizo women from passive users to active digital entrepreneurs. This aligns with Ostrom's principles of community-based solutions and Drucker's vision of inclusive knowledge economies where local skills access global markets through appropriate technology mediation.

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