

A COMMUNITY-CENTRIC STUDY ON PERSONAL BRANDING AND DIGITAL RETAILING FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN VIJAYAWADA, ANDHRA PRADESH, INDIA

K. Swetha Priya Kumari

Assistant Professor
Department of Commerce, Maris Stella College, Vijayawada

P.S.L. Padmaja

Assistant Professor
Department of Business Administration, Maris Stella College, Vijayawada.

K. Poojitha

Assistant Professor
Department of Commerce, Maris Stella College, Vijayawada.

ABSTRACT

In the contemporary business landscape, personal branding—the strategic process of creating a unique identity and image for an individual or enterprise—and digital retailing—the practice of selling products or services through online platforms—have become vital for entrepreneurial success. These tools offer visibility, customer engagement, and income opportunities, especially for small businesses. However, a significant number of unorganized women retailers in semi-urban and urban areas continue to remain unaware of or excluded from such digital advancements, limiting their potential for growth and financial independence.

This paper presents a community-based study conducted in Vijayawada, aimed at empowering women entrepreneurs through personal branding and digital retailing. The initiative involved a structured process beginning with a need-based analysis, followed by community awareness programmes on branding and digital platforms. During the intervention, a budding entrepreneur was identified, for whom a custom logo and brand identity were developed, enabling her to begin income generation through online channels. The paper discusses the methodology, student involvement, activities undertaken, and the outcomes observed. It highlights the impact of community engagement and educational institutions in fostering women's economic empowerment and digital inclusion.

Keywords: Personal Branding, Digital Retailing, Women Entrepreneurs, Community Engagement, Unorganized Sector, Digital Inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale

Women entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in India's socio-economic development, particularly in the unorganised and informal sectors. However, their entrepreneurial journeys often remain limited due to lack of formal training, digital exposure, and structured business development support. In emerging urban areas like Vijayawada, many women engage in small-scale activities like tailoring, snack preparation, or beauty services but struggle with market visibility and scalability. This gap presents an opportunity for educational institutions to intervene through community engagement.

IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL BRANDING AND DIGITAL RETAILING

In today's business environment, personal branding helps entrepreneurs build credibility, distinguish themselves in a crowded market, and create emotional connections with their customers. Meanwhile, digital retailing allows businesses regardless of size to sell products online, reach broader markets, and operate with low overhead costs. For women entrepreneurs, working from home or operating within local communities, mastering these two tools can lead to enhanced customer reach, income generation, and self-reliance. When integrated effectively, they serve as a launchpad for transforming micro-enterprises into sustainable ventures.

RELEVANCE TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN THE UNORGANISED SECTOR

Despite the growing digital ecosystem in India, women in the unorganised sector often face barriers such as low digital literacy, limited access to smartphones, and lack of awareness about online business platforms. These challenges limit their potential to expand or formalise their businesses. A community-centric approach that combines education, awareness, and personalized mentoring can significantly bridge this gap, offering a pathway to economic inclusion and empowerment.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this paper is to highlight how digital retailing remains underutilized by women entrepreneurs in the unorganised sector, despite its potential to significantly expand business opportunities. Through a community-centric approach, this study aimed to introduce the concept and benefits of digital retailing to local women retailers, many of whom were previously unaware of how digital platforms could support their business growth. The paper emphasizes that personal branding is a critical missing element in the development of these micro-businesses.

By engaging directly with the community, the project guided women entrepreneurs particularly one budding entrepreneur on how to build a business identity. This included logo creation, new packaging designs, and product labelling. Furthermore, the team supported the entrepreneur in launching business pages on social media platforms and promoting her products throughout the community. This initiative not only provided hands-on support but also helped bridge the gap between traditional retailing and modern digital practices.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Baker et al. (2013), personal branding has become an increasingly important aspect of entrepreneurship, particularly for female entrepreneurs, who often face added challenges in building their professional reputation, credibility, and visibility in the market.

Personal branding is the practice of presenting one's identity as a marketable asset, and researchers have applied this concept across fields like politics, healthcare, entertainment, social media, and employment (Sugihara et al., 2019; Gander, 2014).

Personal branding is linked to product and service branding, emphasizing differentiation and an attempt to distinguish individuals from competitors based on their unique abilities and characteristics (Boztepe, 2019). Social media have become a valuable tool for developing and curating personal brands (Jacobson, 2019).

According to Parida, Sjödin, and Reim (2019), digital technologies are not just tools for improving existing operations — they actually help innovate entire business models. This

means they create new ways of generating income and offer fresh value-creating opportunities, especially within industrial and business ecosystems.

Digitalization has changed a few ventures during the last twenty years. In this paper, the writers centre around the retail area, where new plans of action assist retailers and providers with meeting the steadily changing and demanding requirements of retail customers - (Atul Kumar, Vinaydeep Brar, SG Walke - 2019)

The rise of social media has transformed the landscape of entrepreneurship, with platforms like Instagram offering unique opportunities for personal branding (Elia, 2021)

RESEARCH GAP

While several studies discuss women entrepreneurship and digital inclusion, limited research exists on community-based, action-oriented interventions that practically demonstrate how personal branding and digital retailing can transform women-led micro-businesses. Most existing literature focuses on policy or digital literacy in general, but there is a lack of studies that document on-ground engagement, student-led initiatives, and localized branding support for women in the unorganised sector. This paper addresses that gap by showcasing a real-time, impact-driven model conducted in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the level of awareness and usage of personal branding and digital retailing tools among women entrepreneurs in the unorganised sector of Vijayawada.
2. To implement and evaluate a community-centric intervention aimed at enhancing digital presence, branding identity, and business visibility of women entrepreneurs through training, mentoring, and promotional support.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach to explore how personal branding and digital retailing can empower women entrepreneurs in the unorganised sector. The methodology is primarily qualitative in nature and action-oriented, focusing on real-time interventions, observation, and engagement with the target community.

STUDY AREA

The study was conducted in a semi-urban locality in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, known for its concentration of home-based women entrepreneurs involved in activities such as home-cooked food, and small-scale product sales.

PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING

The participants included local women entrepreneurs and unorganised retailers, identified through a purposive sampling method during the initial field visit. A total of 45–50 women were approached for need analysis, of whom a few were actively participated in awareness sessions and follow-up support.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

To support the objectives of this study, a primary need-based survey was conducted among women entrepreneurs in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, using a structured questionnaire. In addition to collecting demographic profiles of the respondents, the questions were divided into four key thematic areas:

1. Digital Retailing

2. Improving Existing Retail Business
3. Entrepreneurial Skill Development
4. Personal Branding and Customer Engagement

Among the four thematic areas explored in the need-based survey, the majority of respondents identified “Digital Retailing” and “Personal Branding & Customer Engagement” as their most immediate needs. These areas received the highest positive responses, indicating a strong desire among women entrepreneurs to explore digital selling platforms and to develop a unique identity for their businesses. This insight further reinforced the relevance and timeliness of the community-centric intervention designed in this study.

Table 1: Responses on Awareness and Interest in Digital Retailing (Set I)

Question	Yes (%)	No (%)
Are you aware of digital platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, etc.?	30%	70%
Have you used any online platform to sell your products?	20%	80%
Are you interested in learning how to sell digitally?	85%	15%

Interpretation: Although digital awareness is low, there is a high interest in learning digital selling, which supports the study’s purpose of introducing digital retailing to unorganised women entrepreneurs.

Table 2: Responses on Personal Branding and Customer Engagement (Set IV)

Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)
Do you have a logo or brand name for your business?	10%	90%
Are you aware of the concept of personal branding?	15%	85%
Would you like help creating a brand identity?	95%	5%

Interpretation: The data reveals a major gap in personal branding awareness and application, even though almost all women are open to building their brand identity. This directly aligns with the purpose of the paper, which is to address this gap through community-based branding support.

STUDY HIGHLIGHT: BRANDING & PROMOTING A BUDDING WOMAN ENTREPRENEUR

A key component of this community-based intervention was the identification and support of a budding woman entrepreneur from Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh. She was selected based on her interest, product potential, and willingness to explore digital platforms. The objective was to provide personalised support that would help her establish a brand identity and initiate income generation through digital retailing.

The following interventions were carried out:

- A custom logo was designed to reflect the nature of her products and business values to create a brand identity.
- Guidance was provided in redesigning packaging for better customer appeal, and labels were created to include brand name, pricing, and contact information.
- Business pages were created on platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp Business, with support in uploading product images, writing engaging captions, and maintaining consistency.
- The students and faculty promoted her business through word-of-mouth, peer sharing, and community circles, increasing visibility and encouraging local support.

- Budding entrepreneur was trained on basic digital communication etiquette, order management, and maintaining professionalism online.

This study not only served as a model intervention but also demonstrated the practical impact of personal branding and digital literacy when implemented through community engagement.

FINDINGS

- It is found that most women were unaware of digital platforms, though over 80% showed interest in learning.
- The survey revealed that personal branding elements were missing, yet 95% wanted to develop a brand identity.
- The findings indicate that most participants had smartphones and internet access, but lacked the know-how to use them for business.
- The intervention demonstrated that practical branding support improved business visibility and entrepreneur confidence.
- It is also observed that student participation added educational value while creating community impact

SUGGESTIONS

- It is important to **organize regular awareness programmes** within the community to help women entrepreneurs understand the significance of personal branding and digital retailing.
- Local colleges and educational institutions **can collaborate with community groups** to extend student-led support in branding, packaging, and online marketing.
- The community is encouraged to **form peer learning circles**, where experienced women entrepreneurs can guide others on using digital platforms effectively.
- NGOs and self-help groups **should consider integrating modules** on branding and digital marketing into their entrepreneurship and vocational training initiatives.

CONCLUSION

This community-centric study has demonstrated the potential of personal branding and digital retailing in empowering women entrepreneurs in the unorganised sector. The need-based analysis clearly revealed a strong interest in digital platforms, despite a lack of initial awareness or application. Through student-led activities and practical support, women were guided in creating brand identities, enhancing packaging, and establishing digital storefronts. The focused support provided to a budding entrepreneur served as a successful model for real-time impact and skill transfer. The initiative not only empowered women participants but also enriched students' learning experiences through meaningful community engagement.

REFERENCES

1. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377584539_Personal_Branding_A_Systematic_Literature_Review
2. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305922138_The_digitalization_of_retailing_an_exploratory_framework
3. https://ajmjournal.com/ShowPDF_Paper.aspx
4. <https://www.ijsshr.com/journal/index.php/IJSSHR/article/view/983/836>

5. <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/542519>
6. Retail Management. Success Publications, Pune. 2019. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6662972>
7. Student-Led Activities Documentation. (2025). Community Service Programme: Personal Branding and Digital Retailing Activities by I B.Com (General), Maris Stella College, Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh. - [Click here to view student-led activity documentation \(2024–25\)](#)