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WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS MASTERING DIGITAL MARKETING FOR CHINNALAPATTI SUNGUDI SAREES: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY OF STRATEGIES, CAPABILITIES AND OUTCOMES

Dr. G. Kanagavalli¹ and Narmadha M²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce,
Alagappa University, Karaikudi.

²Doctoral Research Scholar, Department of Commerce,
Alagappa University, Karaikudi

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual study examines how women entrepreneurs can use digital marketing to build and sustain enterprises based on Chinnalapatti Sungudi sarees, a hand-crafted tie-and-dye cotton textile of Tamil Nadu that belongs to the Geographical Indication (GI) tradition of Madurai Sungudi. Using a theory-driven conceptual design, the paper integrates the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Resource-Based View (RBV) with secondary evidence from peer-reviewed literature and official sources on women's entrepreneurship, digital marketing in micro and small enterprises, and handloom and craft marketing. The study proposes an integrated framework in which women entrepreneurs' perceptions of usefulness and ease of use, together with their digital marketing capabilities, shape the adoption of five strategy clusters: social media marketing, content marketing and digital storytelling, WhatsApp Business, influencer and community marketing, and e-commerce. These strategies are expected to improve brand awareness, sales growth, customer retention and business expansion through two mediating mechanisms, customer engagement and market reach. The relationships are conditioned by digital skills, connectivity, finance, family and social support, and trust and security concerns. Seven testable propositions are advanced. To the authors' knowledge, the paper is among the first to bring a gender-aware, capability-based view of digital marketing to a GI-protected Indian textile craft. It offers entrepreneurs, cooperatives, platforms and policymakers a structured basis for capability building, and it provides a measurement agenda for future empirical work.

KEYWORDS: women entrepreneurs, digital marketing, Sungudi sarees, handloom and craft enterprises

1. INTRODUCTION

Women's entrepreneurship is widely recognized as a source of employment, income and social change, yet it unfolds in contexts shaped by household responsibilities, unequal access to resources and social norms (Brush et al., 2009; Jennings & Brush, 2013). These conditions are especially visible in traditional textile sectors, where women both preserve cultural knowledge and depend on it for a livelihood. According to the Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019–20, women account for roughly 72 per cent of the 35.22 lakh handloom workers in India, about 25.46 lakh women (Ministry of Textiles, 2019; Press Information Bureau [PIB], 2022). Producing a craft, however, is not the same as controlling how it is marketed. Marketing, pricing and customer relationships are the stages at which much of the value of a craft product is realized, and they are where digital tools matter most.

Digital technologies have changed the cost and reach of marketing. Social media, messaging applications and online marketplaces let small producers show their work to distant customers, communicate directly with buyers and reduce dependence on intermediaries (Kannan & Li, 2017; Patra, 2024). For women, digital channels can also lower some mobility and start-up barriers (Jahan, 2026; Samridhi, 2025). At the same time, the benefits are not automatic. In 2024, women in South Asia were still 32 per cent less likely than men to use mobile internet (GSMA, 2025), and studies of women-owned enterprises consistently report limited digital skills, constrained finance and concerns about online security (Mastroianni, 2024; Ramakrishna & Y. L. N., 2025).

Chinnalapatti Sungudi sarees illustrate both the opportunity and the challenge. Sungudi is a cotton fabric decorated by tying thousands of small knots before dyeing; the knotted points resist the dye and appear as dots when opened. The craft is protected in India as a Geographical Indication under the name *Madurai Sungudi* (Geographical Indications Registry, n.d.), and Chinnalapatti, in Dindigul district, is a well-known production centre (Sahas & News Desk, 2024). Competition from mill-made and printed imitations, changing fashion preferences and the reach of large online retailers mean that offline selling alone no longer secures a stable market for these enterprises.

Despite the growing literature on digital marketing among women entrepreneurs, little conceptual work explains *how* women who make and sell a heritage textile choose, build and benefit from digital marketing. This paper addresses that gap. It makes four contributions: (i) it integrates TAM, which explains adoption, with RBV, which explains why adoption leads to advantage for some enterprises and not others; (ii) it maps digital marketing strategies to the specific features of Sungudi, including hand-knotted production, GI status and heritage narrative; (iii) it specifies mediators, moderators and seven testable propositions; and (iv) it proposes a measurement and research agenda for empirical testing.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 sets out the context of women's entrepreneurship, Sungudi and digital marketing. Section 3 reviews the literature. Section 4 states the problem, gap, research questions, objectives and scope. Section 5 explains the methodological

approach. Sections 6 to 8 develop the theoretical foundation, the strategies and capabilities, and the conceptual framework with propositions. Section 9 discusses challenges and enabling conditions, Section 10 discusses implications, and Sections 11 and 12 present limitations, future research and conclusions.

2. CONTEXT AND KEY CONCEPTS

A. Women's entrepreneurship

Women's entrepreneurship refers to women owning, starting, managing and operating businesses, identifying opportunities, mobilizing resources and bearing risk in pursuit of income and independence. Brush et al. (2009) argue that women's entrepreneurial behaviour cannot be understood through the business alone; it must be read through the "5Ms" of market, money, management, motherhood and the meso/macro environment. This gender-aware view is particularly relevant to craft enterprises, where production is often household-based and enterprise, family and community roles overlap. Studies from India link women's entrepreneurship to empowerment and national development (Basil Hans & S. S. S., 2019), while noting persistent barriers in finance, education, commercial skills, networks and institutional support (Mastroianni, 2024). Empowerment, in the sense of expanded capacity to make strategic life choices (Kabeer, 1999), is therefore both a motivation for and a possible outcome of digital marketing adoption.

B. Sungudi sarees and the Chinnalapatti cluster

Sungudi is a tie-resist dyeing tradition of the Madurai region, associated with the Saurashtra community of weavers and dyers who settled in southern Tamil Nadu. In the traditional process, designs are marked on cotton cloth and tiny points are tied with thread so that they resist the dye; the fabric is then dyed, washed and untied to reveal a pattern of dots. The process is labor-intensive and can take several days for a single saree (Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), n.d.). The GI Registry lists *Madurai Sungudi* as a registered handicraft of Tamil Nadu (Application No. 21; Geographical Indications Registry, n.d.).

Chinnalapatti, in Dindigul district, which was formerly part of Madurai district, is one of the centres where the tradition continues. Contemporary production includes hand-knotted sarees as well as printed and wax-printed variants, and the sarees are reported to be sold in Tiruchirappalli, Madurai and Chennai and in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala (Sahas & News Desk, 2024). Karthika (2023) discusses the cultural appeal of the saree and the importance of preserving the tradition, and Gnanadeepam and K. G. (2026) examine the adaptive strategies of women artisans in the Madurai Sungudi craft. Two points follow for marketing. First, the GI is registered for Madurai Sungudi, so entrepreneurs should describe their products in ways consistent with the GI and its usage rules. Second, because hand-knotted and printed sarees differ in labour, cost and authenticity, clear labelling of production method is central to fair pricing and buyer trust.

It is also worth noting the scope of the official statistics used in this paper. The Handloom Census covers handloom weaving broadly, whereas Sungudi is a dyed and printed textile craft classified as a handicraft under the GI Act. The census figures are therefore used only to show the wider importance of women in India's handloom and hand-textile workforce and not as counts of Sungudi entrepreneurs. Tamil Nadu accounts for 2, 43,575 handloom weavers and allied workers, the third highest among Indian states (PIB, 2019).

C. Digital marketing

Digital marketing is the use of digital channels, technologies and data to create, communicate and deliver value to customers and to manage customer relationships (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Kannan & Li, 2017). Its main tools include social media, search engine optimization, e-mail, websites, messaging applications and online marketplaces. Social media in particular are distinguished by their capacity for two-way interaction and user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011), which gives small enterprises inexpensive ways to build visibility. In developing economies, the field is expanding quickly and competition for attention is intense, so continuous updating of content is essential (Monirul, 2021).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The review is organised around three streams that together inform the study: digital marketing and enterprise performance; women entrepreneurs' adoption and use of digital tools; and digital marketing in handloom and craft sectors.

A. Digital marketing and enterprise performance

Evidence from several settings links digital marketing to better enterprise performance. Onyango (2016), studying cut-flower exporting firms in Kenya, reported that firms using digital marketing achieved better results in customers, sales and revenue than those relying only on conventional methods. Bhagat et al. (2021) studied women entrepreneurs in micro and small enterprises in India and found digital marketing adoption to be at an early stage, with a positive relationship between the level of adoption and sales; they also inferred limited digital skills from patterns of media use. Yuxuan (2023) investigated the effect of digital marketing on brand awareness, sales and customer engagement, and Kannan and Li (2017) synthesize how digital channels change customer relationships across the purchase journey. Taken together, these studies support the expectation that digital marketing improves visibility, engagement and sales, but they say little about the *capabilities* that determine whether small enterprises can realize these gains.

B. Women entrepreneurs and digital tools

Mastroianni (2024) reviewed the characteristics and challenges of women entrepreneurs and reported motives such as income, independence, self-confidence, creativity and work-family flexibility, alongside obstacles including financial and educational constraints, limited commercial skills, weak

social connections and inadequate institutional support. Jahan (2026) found that social media allows young women in Bangladesh's fashion sector to promote products, interact with customers and grow at low cost, while limited digital knowledge, scarce funds, online harassment and socio-cultural constraints restrain growth. Samridhi (2025) similarly examines social media and digital marketing as drivers of women's business growth. Sakila and Elango (2026), in a conceptual and review-based study of women entrepreneurs in Tiruchirappalli district, Tamil Nadu, analyses Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp Business and YouTube and link social media marketing to reach, engagement, brand awareness, business sustainability and empowerment, while highlighting digital skills, technological barriers and competition as challenges. On the adoption side, Abed (2021) draws on technology acceptance thinking to explain women entrepreneurs' adoption of mobile applications for business sustainability. Ramakrishna and Y. L. N. (2025) review secondary evidence on the opportunities and challenges of social media marketing for Indian micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), including skills, costs, infrastructure, time and trust.

C. Digital marketing in handloom and craft sectors

Patra (2024) examined e-markets in the marketing of handloom products in Cuttack district, Odisha, and found that digital marketplaces and social networking sites help producers promote products, reduce marketing costs, widen reach and raise the profile of handloom products, with product quality, price and design important for attracting online buyers. The study is limited to one district and does not focus on women entrepreneurs or their strategies. In the Sungudi context, Karthika (2023) discusses how digital tactics such as image-led social media, websites, content about weaving history and culture, search engine optimization, targeted campaigns and influencers can bring attention to the saree and support the tradition, and Gnanadeepam and K. G. (2026) place women artisans' adaptive strategies at the Centre of the Madurai Sungudi craft.

Table 1. Synthesis of selected prior studies and their relevance to the present study

Study	Context	Main contribution	Limitation for present study
Onyango (2016)	Cut-flower exporters, Kenya	Digital marketing firms outperform conventional-only firms in sales and revenue	Export firms, not women-led craft enterprises
Bhagat et al. (2021)	Women entrepreneurs in micro and small enterprises, India	Early-stage adoption; positive link between adoption level and sales	Not craft-specific; capability mechanisms not modelled
Abed (2021)	Women	Technology-acceptance view	Focus on adoption, not on

	entrepreneurs' mobile application adoption	of adoption for business sustainability	marketing outcomes
Yuxuan (2023)	Digital marketing effects	Effects on brand awareness, sales and engagement	General context; no gender or craft lens
Mastroianni (2024)	Women entrepreneurs (review)	Motives and barriers of women entrepreneurs	Not digital-marketing specific
Patra (2024)	Handloom e-markets, Cuttack, Odisha	E-markets widen reach and cut marketing costs	One district; women not the focus
Samridhi (2025)	Women entrepreneurs and digital growth	Social media and digital marketing support business growth	Capabilities and boundary conditions underdeveloped
Jahan (2026)	Young women, fashion, Bangladesh	Low-cost social media promotion; skills, funds, harassment and norms as barriers	Different national and product context
Sakila & Elango (2026)	Women entrepreneurs, Tiruchirappalli	Platform-outcome linkage in a conceptual review	General businesses; no craft or GI focus
Gnanadeepam & K. G. (2026)	Women artisans, Madurai Sungudi	Adaptive strategies of women artisans	Not a digital-marketing framework

Note: Compiled by the authors from the sources cited.

D. Synthesis

Three patterns emerge. First, digital marketing is consistently associated with wider reach, engagement and sales, and social media are especially attractive because of their low cost. Second, women entrepreneurs face a recurrent bundle of barriers: skills, finance, infrastructure, time, security and social norms. Third, studies tend to treat adoption and performance separately: adoption studies stop at intention or use, and performance studies rarely ask which internal capabilities convert use into advantage. No study located for this review models both steps for a women-led, GI-protected textile craft. This is the space the present paper occupies.

4. PROBLEM, RESEARCH GAP, QUESTIONS, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

A. Statement of the problem

Chinnalapatti Sungudi sarees are culturally and commercially significant, yet women entrepreneurs involved in producing and selling them face difficulty in expanding through digital channels. Although digital marketing can connect them to target markets and customers, women-led enterprises continue to be constrained by insufficient digital skills, limited awareness of suitable platforms, scarce finance and the need to balance business with household obligations. How these women decide on, implement and benefit from digital marketing, and whether it yields sales growth, new customers and preservation of the Sungudi identity, is not well understood.

B. Research gap

Existing work either examines e-commerce and digitalization in general terms or studies women entrepreneurs in non-craft sectors. It rarely links women's digital marketing practices to business performance and to the sustainability of a heritage craft, and it seldom combines an adoption theory with a capability theory. Empirical and conceptual evidence on Indian women entrepreneurs who market GI-protected crafts such as Sungudi is particularly thin.

C. Research questions

1. **RQ1.** How do perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and digital marketing capabilities shape women entrepreneurs' adoption of digital marketing strategies for Sungudi sarees?
2. **RQ2.** Which digital marketing strategies are conceptually best suited to the features of Sungudi, and what capabilities do they require?
3. **RQ3.** Through which mechanisms do these strategies influence brand awareness, sales, retention and business expansion?
4. **RQ4.** Which conditions enable or constrain the process for women entrepreneurs?

D. Objectives

1. To conceptualise the role of women entrepreneurs' digital marketing capabilities in the Chinnalapatti Sungudi saree business.
2. To identify and classify digital marketing strategies suited to promoting Sungudi sarees.
3. To explain how digital marketing strategies lead to business outcomes through customer engagement and market reach.
4. To analyse the challenges and enabling conditions that affect adoption and results.
5. To propose an integrated TAM–RBV framework with testable propositions and a measurement agenda.

E. Scope

The study focuses on women entrepreneurs in the Sungudi saree business, particularly in Chinnalapatti, and on their use of social media, WhatsApp Business, online marketplaces, content marketing and digital storytelling. It considers women's entrepreneurship, digital marketing skills,

strategies, opportunities, problems and outcomes in terms of brand awareness, customer engagement, market penetration, sales performance and customer retention. As a conceptual study, it does not collect primary data through surveys or interviews; empirical testing is proposed for future work.

5. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The study follows a theory-driven conceptual design in which existing theory and evidence are integrated to build a new model (Jaakkola, 2020; MacInnis, 2011). Conceptual work of this kind is appropriate where the phenomenon is under-researched, where existing theories address parts of the problem, and where the aim is to generate propositions for later testing rather than to test hypotheses (Snyder, 2019). Sources comprise peer-reviewed articles, official statistics and government documents, and reputable practitioner and journalistic sources, selected for relevance to (a) women's entrepreneurship, (b) digital marketing in MSMEs and crafts, (c) handloom and Sungudi context, and (d) the two theories. The analysis proceeded by (i) extracting constructs and relationships from the literature, (ii) aligning them with TAM and RBV, (iii) adapting them to the Sungudi context, and (iv) specifying propositions and boundary conditions. Because the study is conceptual, no human participants were involved and no primary data were collected.

6. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

A. Technology Acceptance Model

TAM proposes that the acceptance of a technology depends mainly on two beliefs: perceived usefulness, the degree to which a person believes the technology will improve performance, and perceived ease of use, the degree to which using it is believed to be free of effort (Davis, 1989). The model has been extended to include social influence and facilitating conditions (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Venkatesh et al., 2003) and to include trust in online contexts (Gefen et al., 2003). Applied to women entrepreneurs, TAM implies that social media, WhatsApp Business, online platforms and digital payments will be adopted when they are seen as improving visibility, customer communication, sales and efficiency and when they can be used with little effort. Abed (2021) applies this logic to women's adoption of mobile applications for business sustainability. For time-constrained women who balance enterprise and household work, perceived ease of use is likely to be especially influential.

B. Resource-Based View and dynamic capabilities

RBV holds that enterprise performance depends on the effective use of internal resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and organized for use (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991). Digital marketing capability, comprising skills in content creation, platform management, customer interaction, analytics and digital transactions, can be treated as such a resource. Dynamic capabilities theory adds that advantage also depends on the ability to sense opportunities and reconfigure resources as platforms and customer preferences change (Teece et al., 1997), which matters in fast-changing digital environments. For craft enterprises, digital marketing capability is valuable precisely because it connects a scarce and hard-to-imitate asset, hand-knotted skill and

heritage, with modern markets.

C. Integrating TAM and RBV

TAM and RBV answer different questions. TAM explains *why* women entrepreneurs adopt digital marketing; RBV explains *why adoption produces advantage for some and not for others*. In the integrated logic used here, perceptions of usefulness and ease of use drive the decision to adopt and the range of strategies chosen, whereas capabilities determine the quality of implementation and therefore the size of the outcomes. A third element, the gender-aware environment (Brush et al., 2009), and technology-organization-environment considerations (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990) supply the moderating conditions of skills, infrastructure, finance, family support and trust. Together, the three elements offer a firm basis for a conceptual study in which technology adoption is expected to produce positive business performance.

7. DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES AND CAPABILITIES FOR SUNGUDI SAREES

Sungudi sarees are visual, story-rich and made through a process that customers rarely see. These features suit particular digital strategies. Table 2 maps five strategy clusters, plus search visibility, to Sungudi-specific applications, required capabilities and expected outcomes. The mapping is conceptual and offers a starting point for empirical validation.

Table 2. Digital marketing strategies for Sungudi sarees: applications, capabilities and expected outcomes

Strategy	Sungudi-specific application	Key capability	Main outcomes	Basis
Social media marketing (Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube)	Short videos of knotting, dyeing and unknotting; draping styles; festival and wedding lookbooks; customer photos	Visual content creation; posting consistency	Awareness; engagement; reach	Kaplan & Haenlein (2010); Karthika (2023); Sakila & Elango (2026)
Content marketing and digital storytelling (website, blog, video)	Origin and Saurashtra heritage; artisan profiles; how to identify a hand-knotted saree; care guides; GI context	Storytelling; basic SEO; product documentation	Trust; willingness to pay; awareness	Karthika (2023); Beverland (2005); Aaker (1991)
WhatsApp Business	Product catalogue; quick replies; labels;	Customer relationship	Conversion; retention; repeat	Sakila & Elango

	broadcast lists for new arrivals; order confirmation; payment links	management; prompt response	sales	(2026); Oliver (1999)
Influencer and community marketing	Saree-draping creators; micro-influencers; cultural and women's community groups	Partnership selection and management	Credibility; new segments	Karthika (2023); Brodie et al. (2011)
E-commerce and marketplaces (own page and third-party platforms)	Listings with accurate labelling of hand-knotted, printed or wax-printed; quality photography; clear returns	Catalogue management; pricing; logistics; digital payments	Sales; market reach; expansion	Patra (2024); Yuxuan (2023)
Search visibility and local listings	Keyword-based content (for example, hand-knotted Sungudi saree); business profile and map listing	Search optimization; reputation management	Discoverability; local and distant demand	Karthika (2023); Kannan & Li (2017)

Note. Compiled by the authors. Applications are conceptual suggestions, not empirical findings.

A. Digital marketing capabilities of women entrepreneurs

Digital marketing capability is the set of competences that lets an entrepreneur use digital tools to reach and serve customers. For Sungudi enterprises, five components are central: (i) content creation and digital storytelling; (ii) platform management, including choosing and running channels; (iii) customer interaction and relationship management; (iv) analytics, meaning the ability to read enquiries, views and sales and adjust; and (v) digital transactions, including payments and order handling. Capabilities of this kind allow direct communication with customers without intermediaries and access to distant markets (Samridhi, 2025). They are not innate: they depend on training, practice, time, peer support and access to devices and connectivity, which is why they are treated as both a resource (RBV) and a target of capability-building support.

B. Outcomes of digital marketing

Digital marketing is expected to influence five outcomes for women-owned enterprises. *Brand*

awareness rises as products become visible and distinctive (Aaker, 1991; Yuxuan, 2023). *Customer engagement*, the behavioural manifestation of a customer's relationship with a brand beyond purchase (Brodie et al., 2011), grows through interesting content and interaction. *Market reach* expands as enterprises access customers beyond local markets (Patra, 2024). *Sales performance* improves through wider reach and better conversion (Bhagat et al., 2021; Onyango, 2016). *Customer retention* and loyalty are supported by sustained, trustworthy communication (Oliver, 1999). Over the longer term these outcomes may support heritage sustainability and women's economic empowerment (Kabeer, 1999; Sakila & Elango, 2026).

8. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND PROPOSITIONS

Figure 1 presents the integrated framework. Perceptions from TAM (perceived usefulness and ease of use) and capabilities from RBV precede the selection and intensity of digital marketing strategies. Strategies act as the independent variable; customer engagement and market reach act as mediating variables; and brand awareness, sales growth, customer retention and business expansion are the dependent outcomes. Digital skills and training, connectivity and devices, finance, family and social support, and trust, security and privacy concerns condition the process. In the longer run, outcomes contribute to heritage sustainability and women's economic empowerment.

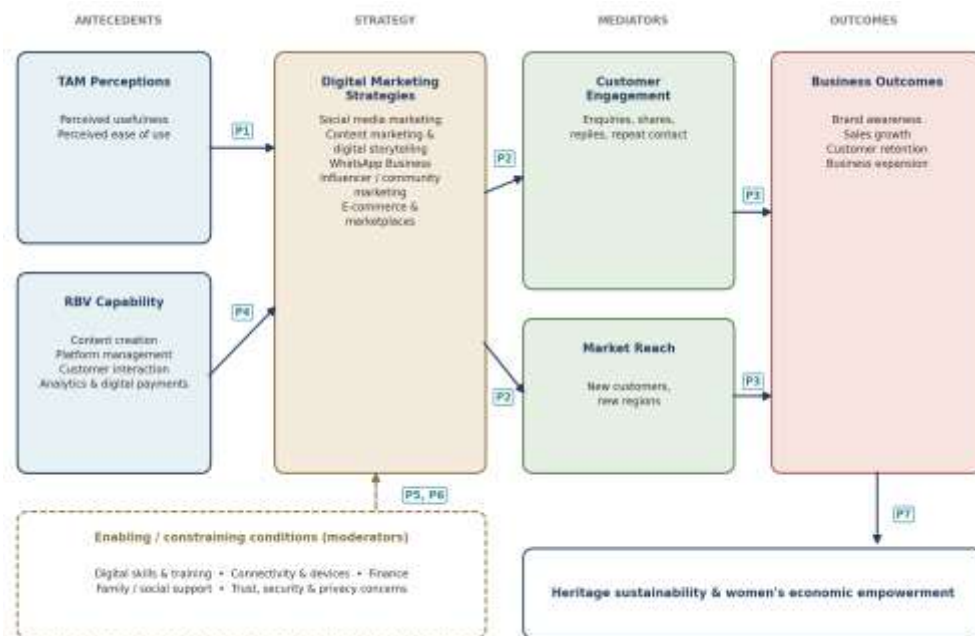


Figure 1. Integrated TAM–RBV conceptual framework for women entrepreneurs' digital marketing in the Sungudi saree business. P1–P7 refer to the propositions below.

The propositions are stated as expectations derived from theory and prior evidence. They are intended

to be tested, and evidence from other contexts should not be taken as proof of the relationships in the Sungudi setting.

Table 3. Propositions, theoretical basis and supporting literature

No.	Proposition	Theory	Consistent with
P1	Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use positively influence the breadth and intensity of digital marketing strategy adoption by women Sungudi entrepreneurs.	TAM	Davis (1989); Venkatesh & Davis (2000); Abed (2021)
P2	The intensity of adoption of digital marketing strategies positively influences customer engagement and market reach.	Digital marketing; engagement	Bhagat et al. (2021); Patra (2024); Yuxuan (2023); Brodie et al. (2011)
P3	Customer engagement and market reach positively influence brand awareness, sales growth, customer retention and business expansion, and mediate the effect of strategy adoption on these outcomes.	Mediation logic	Baron & Kenny (1986); Onyango (2016); Oliver (1999)
P4	Digital marketing capability strengthens the effect of strategy adoption on engagement and reach; higher capability turns adoption into greater advantage.	RBV; dynamic capabilities	Barney (1991); Teece et al. (1997); Samridhi (2025)
P5	Enabling conditions (digital skills and training, connectivity and devices, finance, family and social support) strengthen the link between perceptions and adoption and between adoption and engagement.	TAM extensions; TOE; gender-aware framework	Venkatesh et al. (2003); Tornatzky & Fleischer (1990); Brush et al. (2009); GSMA (2025)
P6	Concerns about online fraud, privacy and harassment weaken the effect of perceived usefulness on adoption.	TAM with trust	Gefen et al. (2003); Jahan (2026); Ramakrishna & Y. L. N. (2025)
P7	Storytelling that credibly communicates heritage, GI status and production method strengthens engagement and supports heritage sustainability and women's	Brand authenticity; empowerment	Beverland (2005); Kabeer (1999); Karthika (2023)

	economic empowerment.		
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Note: Propositions were developed by the authors. Supporting literature indicates consistency with existing findings and is not evidence for the specific Sungudi context.

9. CHALLENGES AND ENABLING CONDITIONS

Adoption of digital marketing is loaded with challenges, especially for small businesses and women entrepreneurs. Many have low digital knowledge and limited confidence in using social media, websites, online shops and advertising tools. Financial limitations make investment in internet access, advertising, content and tools difficult. Poor infrastructure, limited time, weak digital education and doubts about the payoff of digital efforts add to uncertainty. Women entrepreneurs must also manage caregiving responsibilities, limited access to professional networks and fears of online fraud, privacy loss and mistrust (Ramakrishna & Y. L. N., 2025; Jahan, 2026; Mastroianni, 2024). The gender gap in mobile internet use, at 32 per cent in South Asia, reinforces the risk that some artisans are simply not connected (GSMA, 2025).

Public programmes also matter. Ministry of Textiles schemes such as the National Handloom Development Programme and the Comprehensive Handloom Cluster Development Scheme provide support for skill upgradation, design, marketing complexes and publicity (PIB, 2019), and could be used to add digital marketing training and shared content facilities to cluster-level interventions. Table 4 links each challenge to its theoretical lens and possible responses.

Table 4. Challenges, theoretical lens and possible responses

Challenge	Lens	Why it matters	Possible response
Low digital literacy and confidence	TAM (ease of use); RBV (capability gap)	Reduces adoption and weakens execution quality	Hands-on training in WhatsApp Business and short-video making; peer-learning groups; simple content templates
Financial constraints	RBV; TOE	Limits paid advertising, photography, devices and data	Prioritise low-cost channels (organic social media, WhatsApp); shared studio or equipment at cluster or cooperative level
Connectivity and device access	TOE; digital divide	Prevents consistent posting and response	Shared access points; scheduled posting; data-light formats
Time and caregiving burden	Gender-aware framework	Constrains consistent content and customer	Batch content creation; templates and quick replies; shared responsibility within groups or

Trust, fraud, privacy and harassment Competition and imitation Uncertain returns	TAM with trust	response Deters adoption and online payments	SHGs Verified payment methods; clear return policies; platform reporting tools; peer support
	RBV (rarity, imitability)	Printed lookalikes can blur authenticity and price	Explicit labelling of production method; GI-consistent claims; provenance storytelling and process videos
	TAM (usefulness)	Discourages continued effort	Simple tracking of enquiries and orders by source; small pilots before scaling

Note. Responses are conceptual suggestions to be tested in future research.

10. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

A. Theoretical implications

The framework contributes in three ways. First, it separates two questions that are often merged: whether women entrepreneurs adopt digital marketing (TAM) and whether adoption yields advantage (RBV). This helps to explain why enterprises with similar tools can achieve different results. Second, it embeds adoption in a gender-aware context by treating family support, time and trust as boundary conditions rather than background factors (Brush et al., 2009). Third, it broadens the outcome domain beyond sales to include heritage sustainability and empowerment, which is central for craft enterprises whose value lies in preserving knowledge and identity.

B. Practical and policy implications

- **For entrepreneurs.** Start with the channels that best fit current skills, for example WhatsApp Business and short videos, and build capability step by step rather than adopting many platforms at once. Label products by production method and tell the process story to justify price differences.
- **For cooperatives, self-help groups and cluster bodies.** Share equipment, photography and content templates; run peer-learning sessions; and consider collective storytelling around Madurai Sungudi and its GI, which lowers the cost per member and reduces the burden on individuals.
- **For platforms and technology providers.** Provide vernacular interfaces, simple catalogue tools, secure payment features and effective reporting of fraud and harassment.

- **For policymakers.** Add digital marketing training, connectivity and device support and support for GI-consistent marketing to handloom and craft cluster schemes, with gender-sensitive scheduling and delivery (PIB, 2019).

11. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

As a conceptual study, the paper offers no primary evidence. Its propositions rest on secondary sources, several of which come from other sectors, countries or early-stage outlets, and platform features change rapidly. Official handloom statistics are used for context and do not measure Sungudi enterprises directly. The framework may also need adaptation for men-led or mixed-gender enterprises and for other crafts.

Future research can proceed in four directions. (i) *Quantitative testing*: a cross-sectional survey of women Sungudi entrepreneurs and analysis with partial least squares structural equation modelling (Hair et al., 2019) to test P1 to P6, with the constructs in Appendix A. (ii) *Qualitative exploration*: interviews and case studies analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to understand how women decide, learn and manage household constraints. (iii) *Longitudinal and intervention studies*: tracking enterprises before and after capability-building programmes. (iv) *Comparative work*: comparing clusters or crafts, and hand-knotted with printed Sungudi, to examine authenticity and pricing effects (P7).

CONCLUSION

Women-owned enterprises play a central part in keeping the Sungudi saree alive and in taking it into the digital economy. This paper has argued that their success in digital marketing depends both on whether they see digital tools as useful and easy to use and on whether they possess the capabilities to use them well. It integrated TAM and RBV into a framework in which digital marketing strategies raise brand awareness, sales, retention and expansion through customer engagement and market reach, conditioned by skills, connectivity, finance, family support and trust. The seven propositions and the measurement agenda provide a basis for empirical testing, and the practical implications point to capability building, shared resources and clear, honest storytelling around production method and GI status. If these conditions are met, digital marketing can help women entrepreneurs sustain their businesses and continue to promote a valued local textile heritage.

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