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Entrepreneurial Opportunities for Marginalized Communities through Digital Platforms

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Abstract

Although there is considerable emphasis on the feasibility of entering entrepreneurship through low-cost digital platforms for those 'omitted' from traditional labor and capital markets, evidence on who benefits, how, and under what conditions is dispersed across disciplines. This paper documents that evidence through a systematic synthesis of 20 peer-reviewed publications from 2021 to 2024 on refugees, women, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ communities, and other marginalized groups. Five opportunity mechanisms and four constraints were coded for each source. The opportunity mechanisms that emerged most often were Empowerment and agency (65% of sources), social capital and networks (60%), and market access (45%), while institutional exclusion (45%), digital divide and skills deficits (35%), and social norms and safety risks (35%) were the predominant constraints. There were more opportunity themes from sources with direct digital focus than from contextual sources (2.79 themes per source vs. 1.33 themes per source). The opportunity-to-constraint ratio ranged from 1.00 for refugee-focused studies to 3.40 for studies of general platform ecosystems; opportunity and constraint emphasis were not correlated ($r = -0.01$), suggesting that platform benefits are not necessarily correlated to exclusion. The findings inform an opportunity-conversion framework and offer practical implications for platform designers, policymakers, and support organizations. The results are indicative, based on a coded evidence base rather than primary data.

Keywords: Digital Platforms, Marginalised Communities, Digital Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Opportunities, Social Capital, Digital Inclusion, Evidence Mapping.

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Introduction

Digital platforms, such as social networks, online marketplaces, mobile services, and virtual communities, have transformed the business landscape and how businesses can be established. It offer an alternative pathway to wealth and independence for those marginalized by rigid job and credit markets by reducing the investment, spatial, and qualification requirements of traditional entrepreneurship. Studies on digital entrepreneurship platforms have grown rapidly, but the field remains fragmented and needs a more holistic approach (Fernandes et al., 2022). Digital technologies have also transformed the entrepreneurial landscape and sustainable business processes in smart cities, and digital technology-based entrepreneurial pursuits have opened possibilities for marginalized groups, who are most concerned about access risks (Dana et al., 2022; Ghauri et al., 2022).

This promise is well documented in a growing body of context-specific work. Online platforms and social media can influence economic opportunities for North Gujarat's tribal women entrepreneurs (Dhanula Anjali & Amarjeet Kumar, 2024). Moreover, social media can be used as a means of Empowerment for Jordanian women entrepreneurs (Boshmaf, 2023). Digital platforms play a role in women's entrepreneurial opportunity process, with online social capital potentially influencing it (Hammad & El Naggar, 2023). These studies suggest that platforms can affect both markets and the relationships and trust they offer.

The same volume also cautions against assuming platform neutrality. Platforms can have design values that conflict with the values of LGBTQ+ communities, affecting their ability to be safe and effective when using them (DeVito et al., 2021). The lived experience of women entrepreneurs in the digital space can be understood through the concept of 'liminality' and its scaffolding (Kelly & McAdam, 2022). Refugee entrepreneurship is not a one-off venture choice but a journey over time (Lee et al., 2023). The research stream on refugee entrepreneurship is fragmented because it is multidisciplinary and produces context-specific findings, as shown in a systematic and thematic analysis of 131 publications on refugee entrepreneurship (Abebe, 2023).

Three gaps follow. First, evidence is arranged by community (women, refugees, LGBTQ+), so mechanisms and constraints are not compared across communities. Second, the same studies that highlight promise also highlight fewer barriers to progress, although often studied separately, leaving the question of whether sources that emphasize opportunity also emphasize fewer obstacles to progress. Third, guidance is limited on which constraints apply to a specific group and which are general characteristics of digital entrepreneurship, which affects the design of targeted support.

This paper aims to address these gaps and is guided by the following four research questions. RQ1: What are the most common opportunity mechanisms reported in the literature for digital platforms for marginalised entrepreneurs? RQ2: What are the most common constraints encountered in those opportunities? RQ3: How do mechanisms and constraints differ across groups and between digitally focused studies and contextual studies? RQ4: Is a greater focus on opportunity associated with a lower focus on constraint? The study has three contributions to make:

- It offers a cross-group quantified map of nine themes of opportunity and constraint, based on 20 recent peer-reviewed studies.
- It provides evidence that this is not the case and that opportunity/constraint emphasis is uncorrelated throughout the evidence base, undermining the notion that access to technology is sufficient to address exclusion.
- It develops an opportunity-conversion framework and group-specific recommendations for platform designers, policy makers and support organizations.

The paper is structured as a sequence of evidence rather than as a theory-then-test structure. The literature review is summarized in Section 2, the evidence-mapping design is briefly described in Section 3, and the findings are summarized and presented in Section 4, the main thrust of the paper. Section 5 then inductively derives a framework from those results, Section 6 discusses these, Section 7 states implications, Section 8 discusses limitations and future research, and Section 9 concludes.

Literature Review

Platforms as Spaces of Value Creation and Learning

The digitalization opens up value co-creation opportunities to social enterprises via digital social entities and valuable communities, thereby making platforms relational infrastructure, rather than just sales channels (Mursalzade, 2024).

Based on entrepreneurial learning in online communities, peers and shared practices and informal mentoring in the online environment can complement less formal training of the marginalised entrepreneurs (Schou et al., 2022). In the business level, digital sustainable entrepreneur can be interpreted as business potential that requires awareness and the practice of the entrepreneurs (Nicolau et al., 2022).

Mobile access and Empowerment

Mobile phone can be one of the factors that empower rural women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh (Rahman et al., 2023). Their setting is helpful to remind us that the relevant digital technology is not necessarily a sophisticated marketplace, but a basic handset, for many marginalised entrepreneurs, and that device-level access is a precursor to empowerment outcomes that can precede the ability to undertake a platform strategy.

Refugee Entrepreneurship and Structural Exclusion

The most advanced strand of the corpus is the refugee focused scholarship, the least is its digitalization. The review of previous work is systematic with the aim of highlighting themes and establishing a research programme (Newman et al., 2024). Empirical study of refugee entrepreneurship motivations in Sweden and Germany reveals the importance of the host country context for refugee entrepreneurship motivations (Zalkat et al., 2024). The central issue can also be presented as the problem of multi contextuality and differential exclusion, that is, the refugee is not excluded in the same way, but differently, depending on the context in which she or he must act (Yetkin & Tunçalp, 2024). Research also challenges the assumption that refugees are entrepreneurs in humanitarian development programmes as refugees, as entrepreneurship implies a certain responsibility for the individual, which may be problematic if confronted with structural problems (Nascimento & Pureza, 2024).

Disability and Entrepreneurship

The world of digital entrepreneurship for disabled people is studied using a bibliometric approach (Rahmawati et al., 2024). In this area, a systematic review of fifty years of research on differently abled entrepreneurs and the development of entrepreneurship scholarship in this area is done (Sodhi & Dwivedi, 2024). It suggest that digital pathways are part of a longerstanding and more general debate on disability and self-employment in which accessibility and recognition and institutional support are thematic.

Synthesis and Research Gap

The review brings three observations. Platforms are cited as relational and symbolic resources (community, learning, voice) as much or more as commercial platforms. The constraints are very specific to the group and can vary from legal conditions for refugees to normative pressures for women. Lastly, there is no systematic comparison between patterns across groups. This paper answers the question by coding each of the twenty sources on a common frame, allowing for quantification of cross-group patterns.

Evidence-Mapping Design

Approach and Corpus

The study is designed structured evidence-mapping. To avoid the time and expense of new data collection, it codes the content of a defined set of peer-reviewed studies to a common frame, and quantifies the prevalence of each theme overall and by subgroup. This design is appropriate for the aim of comparing patterns across studies with varying methods, country and population, and is similar to the thematic design employed in systematic reviews in this context (Abebe, 2023). The corpus contains 20 journal articles and conference papers that were published between the period 2021–2024 (see the References). Sources were selected when focused on entrepreneurship, self-employment or venture creation with a marginalised population or the digital environment in which entrepreneurship occurs. Groups were distinguished by the source focus (either group or non-group), by the year of publication and by the type of design (empirical, review/mapping, conceptual) and digital focus. A direct digital focus is when platforms, social media, mobile tools or online communities are at the heart of the analysis, while a contextual focus is when marginalised entrepreneurship is the focus and digital technology is the background.

Coding Frame and Analysis

As shown in table 1, nine codes were generated, five for opportunity mechanisms (A1-A5) and four for constraints (B1-B4). The codes were dichotomously presented (1 = present as a substantive theme; 0 = absent) in each article's title, abstract and stated contribution. The analysis was carried out in four phases: (i) Frequency counts and percentages for each code; (ii) Cross-tabulation of codes by group; (iii) Mean opportunity and constraint counts by source, and the Pearson correlation between opportunity and constraint counts for each source; and (iv) Pairwise co-occurrence

counts. Frequencies refer to the source, and are not a measure of the size of any effect, but rather how much attention a theme receives in the literature.

Table 1: Coding Frame Used to Classify the 20 Sources

Code	Theme	Operational definition (coded 1 if a substantive theme)
A1	Market access and visibility	Platforms widen customer reach, visibility or sales channels beyond the local market
A2	Low-cost venture creation	Lower start-up capital, premises or formality requirements; mobile or social tools replace costly infrastructure
A3	Social capital and networks	Peer, community, mentor or diaspora ties formed or strengthened, online or offline
A4	Entrepreneurial learning	Acquisition of business, digital or sector knowledge through platforms, communities or programmes
A5	Empowerment and agency	Gains in confidence, voice, autonomy, identity or decision-making power
B1	Digital divide and skills	Limited access, connectivity, devices, digital literacy or accessibility
B2	Platform bias and governance	Design values, algorithms, moderation or terms that disadvantage or misrepresent users
B3	Institutional exclusion	Legal status, regulation, credit, recognition or programme design that restricts participation
B4	Social norms and safety	Gender, family or community norms, stigma, harassment or safety risks

The analytical vocabulary used in the remainder of the paper is defined in table 1. The A-codes report what platforms or digital tools are allowing, and the B-codes report what is limiting the enabling. By separating the two, it is possible to determine if correlated in movement (RQ4), and the broad definitions enable the same code to be used across studies as varied as one of Bangladeshi mobile-phone surveys and a conceptual paper on refugee programmes.

Results

Profile of the Evidence Base

The corpus has been summarised in table 2. It is very recent and fast-paced: eight sources (40%) were published in 2024, six in 2022, five in 2023 and one in 2021. Eleven sources (55%) are empirical, five (25%) are reviews or mappings and four (20%) are conceptual. Refugees and generic/multi-group platform studies (6 sources) are the most dominant group of studies, followed by women entrepreneurs (5) and disability (2) and finally the research on LGBTQ+ (1). Fourteen sources interact directly with digital technology (70%), of which six are mostly refugee studies, and one a disability review.

Table 2: Profile of the Evidence Base (n = 20)

Dimension	Category	n	%	Sources
Group focus	Refugees	6	30	Abebe; Lee et al.; Nascimento & Pureza; Newman et al.; Yetkin & Tunçalp; Zalkat et al.
	Women (incl. rural / tribal)	5	25	Anjali & Kumar; Boshmaf; Hammad & El Naggar; Kelly & McAdam; Rahman et al.
	General / multi-group platforms	6	30	Dana et al.; Fernandes et al.; Ghauri et al.; Mursalzade; Nicolau et al.; Schou et al.
	Disability	2	10	Rahmawati & Purnomo; Sodhi & Dwivedi
	LGBTQ+	1	5	DeVito et al.
Design	Empirical	11	55	Anjali & Kumar; Boshmaf; DeVito; Hammad; Kelly; Lee; Mursalzade; Nicolau; Rahman; Schou; Zalkat
	Review / mapping	5	25	Abebe; Fernandes; Newman; Rahmawati; Sodhi
	Conceptual	4	20	Dana; Ghauri; Nascimento & Pureza; Yetkin & Tunçalp
Digital focus	Direct	14	70	All women, LGBTQ+ and general sources; Lee et al.; Rahmawati & Purnomo
	Contextual	6	30	Abebe; Nascimento & Pureza; Newman; Sodhi; Yetkin & Tunçalp; Zalkat
Year	2021 to 2024	20	100	2021: 1 (5%); 2022: 6 (30%); 2023: 5 (25%); 2024: 8 (40%)

Table 2 is important because of two reasons. It indicates the evidence is emerging and developing and that conclusions are tentative. More significantly, it reveals an imbalance: refugees, with the most mature body of entrepreneurship-

related research, are the group which has the least digital research, with only Lee et al. (2023) coded in relation to digital technology. Percentages represent percentages of all 20 sources, and the Sources column provides a list of members of each source to facilitate auditing of the coding.

Opportunity Mechanisms and Constraints (RQ1, RQ2)

Table 3 provides the source level coding for all the counts in this section, enabling readers to track each statistic to individual studies. A 1 indicates that the theme was coded as present, whereas a dash indicates that it was coded as absent; the last two columns indicate the total opportunity (A) and the total constraint (B) themes that each source has.

Table 3: Source-Level Coding Matrix (1 = theme present)

Source	Group	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	B1	B2	B3	B4	ΣA	ΣB
Abebe (2023)	Refugee	–	–	1	–	1	–	–	1	–	2	1
Anjali & Kumar (2024)	Women	1	1	–	–	1	1	–	–	1	3	2
Boshmaf (2023)	Women	1	1	1	–	1	–	–	–	1	4	1
Dana et al. (2022)	General	1	1	1	–	–	1	–	–	–	3	1
DeVito et al. (2021)	LGBTQ+	–	–	1	–	1	–	1	–	1	2	2
Fernandes et al. (2022)	General	1	1	1	–	–	–	1	–	–	3	1
Ghauri et al. (2022)	General	1	1	–	–	1	1	–	1	–	3	2
Hammad & El Naggar (2023)	Women	1	–	1	–	1	–	–	–	1	3	1
Kelly & McAdam (2022)	Women	–	–	1	–	1	–	1	–	1	2	2
Lee et al. (2023)	Refugee	–	–	1	1	–	1	–	1	–	2	2
Mursalzade (2024)	General	1	–	1	–	1	–	–	–	–	3	0
Nascimento & Pureza (2024)	Refugee	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	0	1
Newman et al. (2024)	Refugee	–	–	1	–	1	–	–	1	–	2	1
Nicolau et al. (2022)	General	1	1	–	1	–	1	–	–	–	3	1
Rahman et al. (2023)	Women	1	1	–	1	1	1	–	–	1	4	2
Rahmawati & Purnomo (2024)	Disability	–	1	–	–	1	1	–	1	–	2	2
Schou et al. (2022)	General	–	–	1	1	–	–	–	–	–	2	0
Sodhi & Dwivedi (2024)	Disability	–	–	–	1	1	–	–	1	–	2	1
Yetkin & Tunçalp (2024)	Refugee	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	1	1	1	2
Zalkat et al. (2024)	Refugee	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	1	–	1	1

Table 3 indicates that coding is not saturated but sparse – sources have between 1 and 6 themes in total (usually 3-5) and no single source has all nine themes. It also allows one to see clusters, such as all A1 entries being on a women-focused or general platform study, all refugee sources having no A1 or A2, eight of the nine B3 being from refugee or disability sources. The totals in the last two columns are used in the scatterplot in fig. 2 and for the means in table 5.

The number of sources in each category of theme are reported in fig. 1. The coded themes are displayed along the x-axis and the number of sources for each theme along the y-axis (the blue bars indicate opportunity mechanisms and the orange bars indicate constraints, as shown in the legend below the plot). The number and percentage of the corpus are indicated on the bar labels.

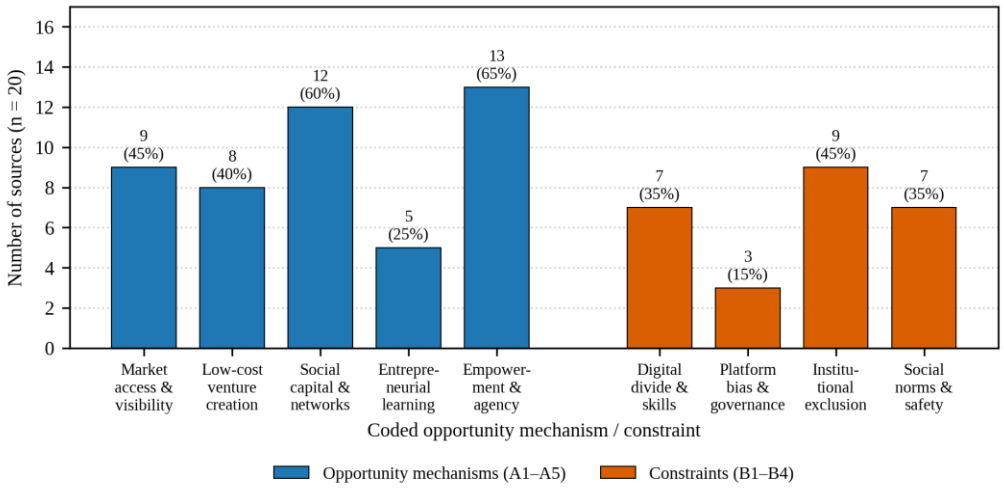


Fig. 1: Frequency of Opportunity Mechanisms and Constraints Across the 20 Sources

Within opportunity mechanisms, Empowerment and agency (A5) is present in 13 (65%) of the sources, whereas social capital and networks (A3) is present in 12 (60%), market access and visibility (A1) is present in 9 (45%) and low-cost venture creation (A2) is present in 8 (40%). The least common (25%) is entrepreneurial learning (A4). In terms of constraints, 45% of the sources mention institutional exclusion (B3), 35% digital divide (B1) and 35% social norms and safety (B4). Platform bias and governance (B2) is present in just three sources (15%). Overall there are 47 opportunity code assignments and 26 constraint assignments (or 2.35 assignments per source).

Two readings follow. Relational and psychosocial benefits (agency and networks) are mentioned more often than commercial benefits (market access and cost reduction), indicating that literature takes platforms as valuable as much for relational and psychosocial purposes as for commercial ones. Second, the low frequency of A4 and B2 sources indicates under-explored areas, including learning recognised as a mechanism by only a quarter of sources, and critical analysis of platform design and governance focused in a relatively small number of studies.

Differences Across Groups (RQ3)

The nine codes are cross tabulated by group in table 4. Each cell displays the number of sources in the group with the code, divided by the number of sources in the group (column header).

Table 4: Number of Sources Carrying Each Code, by Group Focus

Code	Refugee (n=6)	Women (n=5)	Disability (n=2)	LGBTQ+ (n=1)	General (n=6)
A1 Market access and visibility	0	4	0	0	5
A2 Low-cost venture creation	0	3	1	0	4
A3 Social capital and networks	4	3	0	1	4
A4 Entrepreneurial learning	1	1	1	0	2
A5 Empowerment and agency	3	5	2	1	2
B1 Digital divide and skills	1	2	1	0	3
B2 Platform bias and governance	0	1	0	1	1
B3 Institutional exclusion	6	0	2	0	1
B4 Social norms and safety	1	5	0	1	0

The table shows that there are very different profiles. All refugee-related sources (6 of 6) are coded for institutional exclusion, while no source is coded for market access or low cost venture creation; this is consistent with the perspective that legal status and programme design rather than tools is the limiting factor (Yetkin and Tunçalp, 2024; Nascimento and Pureza, 2024). Sources focused on women demonstrate the opposite signature, with all five including Empowerment (A5), four including market access, and none including institutional exclusion, and social norms and safety (B4). The focus of general platform studies is on commercial mechanisms (A1 in five of six sources) and on norms or safety (none of six). Disability columns are based on two and LGBTQ+ columns are descriptive.

Opportunity-Constraint Balance (RQ3, RQ4)

Each source is represented in fig. 2 by a point showing how many opportunity themes (x-axis) and how many constraint themes (y-axis) it carries (0-5, 0-4, respectively). The group focus is indicated by the shape and colour of

the markers in the plot, which are keyed to the legend at the bottom of the plot. Markers are offset slightly around each integer position to ensure no markers are obscured or hidden; the dashed line indicates equal emphasis as many sources have the same position.

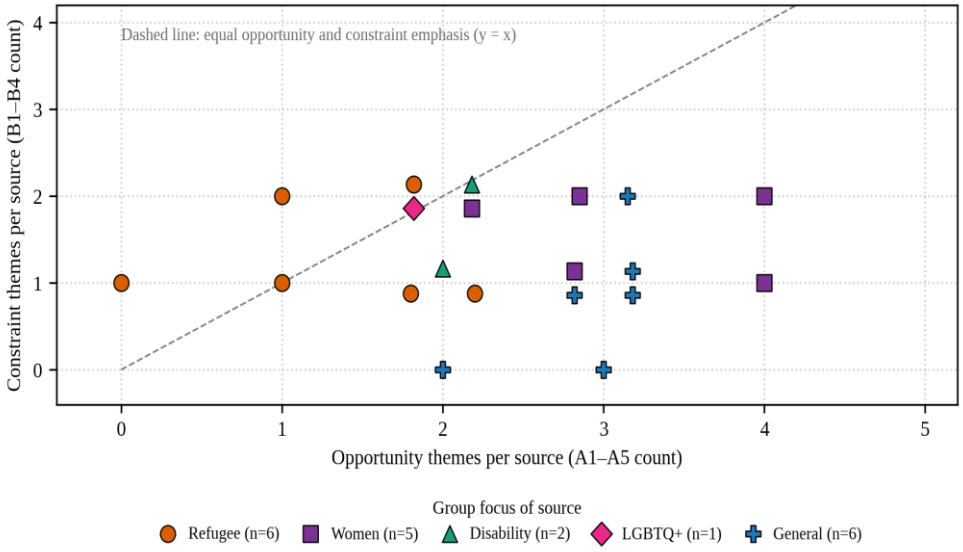


Fig. 2: Opportunity Emphasis Versus Constraint Emphasis for Each Source, by Group Focus

More opportunity themes than constraint themes are found at the majority of points below the dashed line; five of these have the same number of themes and two fewer. However, there is no correlation between the cloud and the increase or decrease (Pearson r = −0.01, n = 20), so there are more constraints reported by a source that emphasizes more opportunities. 20 sources, 17 of which carry both types of theme. The women focused sources are grouped at the right (two to four opportunity themes with one to two constraints), refugee sources at the left (zero to two opportunity themes with one to two constraints) and generic platform studies at the bottom right, two of which do not report any constraints at all. it provide a critical examination of the entrepreneurship framing itself in the single source with no opportunity theme.

The pattern is quantified in table 5. Group differences are large: ratio of 1.00 for refugee and LGBTQ+ sources, and 3.40 for general platform studies. The most instructive comparison for RQ4 is that of the sources with a direct focus on the digital domain in terms of opportunity themes, which show nearly double the amount of opportunity themes compared to the contextual sources (2.79 versus 1.33), though the number of constraint themes is almost the same (1.36 versus 1.17). To put it another way, integrating digital technology into the analysis increases the visibility of opportunities, but does not eliminate barriers. Empirical studies also report higher number of opportunities (2.64) compared to conceptual (1.75), which may be due to reporting of realised benefits in field data.

Table 5: Mean Opportunity and Constraint Themes per Source, by Subgroup

Subgroup	n	Mean opportunity themes	Mean constraint themes	Opportunity-to-constraint ratio
By group focus				
Refugee	6	1.33	1.33	1.00
Women	5	3.20	1.60	2.00
Disability	2	2.00	1.50	1.33
LGBTQ+	1	2.00	2.00	1.00
General / multi-group	6	2.83	0.83	3.40
By digital focus				
Direct digital focus	14	2.79	1.36	2.05
Contextual	6	1.33	1.17	1.14
By design				
Empirical	11	2.64	1.27	2.07
Review / mapping	5	2.20	1.20	1.83
Conceptual	4	1.75	1.50	1.17
All sources	20	2.35	1.30	1.81

Co-Occurrence of Themes

The most common theme pairs of the literature are presented in table 6, revealing which themes occur together.

Table 6: Most Frequent Pairs of Co-occurring Themes

Pair	Themes	Sources	Interpretation
A3 + A5	Social capital + Empowerment	7	Relational empowerment pathway
A1 + A2	Market access + low-cost creation	7	Commercial entry pathway
A5 + B3	Empowerment + institutional exclusion	6	Agency is reported despite structural barriers
A1 + A5	Market access + Empowerment	6	Income and confidence reinforce each other
A2 + B1	Low-cost creation + digital divide	6	Cheap entry depends on access and skills
A5 + B4	Empowerment + social norms and safety	6	Empowerment is negotiated against norms
A1 + B1	Market access + digital divide	5	Reach is conditional on connectivity

In table 6, two clusters are seen. There are two paths of social capital and empowerment (7 sources) and market access and low-cost creation (7 sources). Both types of constraint pairing indicate six of the eight sources (75%) and five of the nine sources (56%) observe the digital divide, respectively; and five of the nine sources (56%) and two of the eight sources (25%) observe the market access constraint, respectively. Cheap entry is thus often paired with the disclaimer access and skills. Agency is associated with institutional exclusion in six places and social norms in six places, indicating that agency is generally said to be something that can be done despite, and not because of, constraints.

Summary of Principal Findings

The main opportunity mechanisms in response to RQ1 – Empowerment and agency, are social capital and market access. For RQ2, institutional exclusion, the digital divide and social norms and safety are the leading constraints. In the case of RQ3, constraint profiles are highly group specific, opportunity emphasis does not necessarily diminish constraint emphasis, and direct digital focus increases opportunity emphasis. In RQ4, the evidence does not compensate for opportunity and constraint is not compensated by opportunity, with an effective correlation value of zero.

Opportunity-Conversion Framework Derived from the Results

The results enable an induction of a framework instead of an assumption beforehand. The results are presented in four stages in fig. 3. Platform affordances (box 1) would correspond to codes A1-A4. It activate an opportunity conversion process (box 2) whereby marginalised entrepreneurs identify, seek, mobilise and maintain opportunities, a process similar to the opportunity conversion process analysed by Hammad and El Naggar (2023). It is important to note that the outcomes of conversion (box 4) are feeds back into the process, including venture creation, income, Empowerment and inclusion. Constraints (box 3a) narrow down conversion, while enabling conditions (box 3b) expand it. The grey band shows that the constraint which binds most depends on the group context.

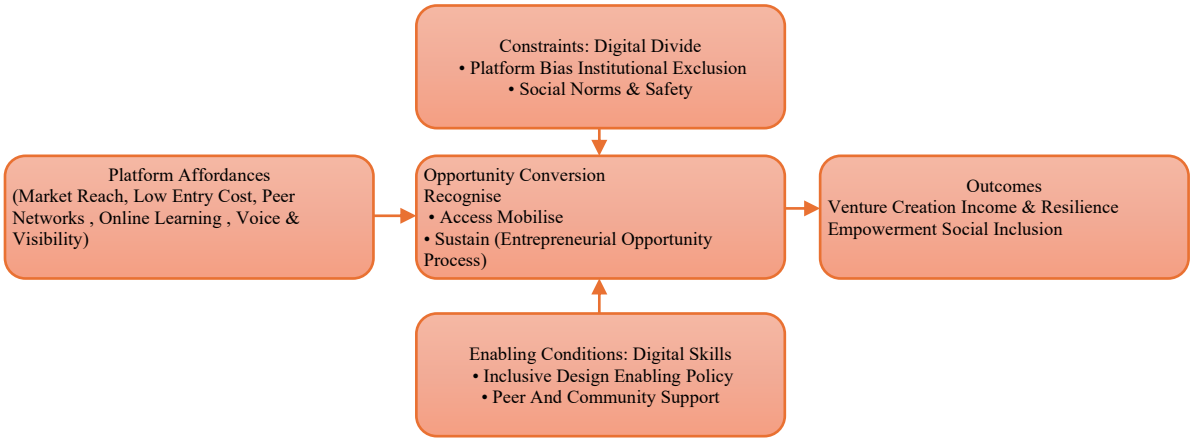


Fig. 3: Opportunity-Conversion Framework for Marginalised Entrepreneurs on Digital Platforms

The interpretation of fig. 3 should follow a left to right reading, and be read vertically for influences. Solid arrows represent the principal flow, dashed arrows represent feedback from outcomes to the process, and vertical arrows represent that constraints decrease, enabling conditions increase, conversion. The evidence gives rise to 4 propositions. P2: Platforms provide relational value and agency more frequently than commercial value. P2: binding constraint: group-specific (institutional: refugee group, normative: female platform users, commercial-capability: general

platform users). P3: digital emphasis increases the visibility of opportunity but doesn't change the constraints (unless there are enabling conditions). P4: low cost entry is contingent on digital access and skills.

Discussion

The headline result of uncorrelated opportunity and constraint emphasis makes perfect sense. Studies reporting opportunity would report fewer constraints if platforms were eliminating obstacles. Digital tools seem to offer additional opportunities over an existing base of structural constraints, reflecting the view that exclusion is differential and context-specific, as well as the alertness that entrepreneurship framings might conceal structural issues. Empowerment and social capital are highlighted, which justifies the view that internet networks are a resource of their own. It also indicates that an overly narrow measure of digital inclusion programmes based on sales and income will overlook a lot of what participants say. Notably, if entrepreneurial learning is coded at all, it is rarely coded (25%), while the coding of entrepreneurial learning by online communities shows that these communities can function as learning environments. Learning could be under-reported because it is treated as a means to an end rather than an end in itself, and future research could measure learning explicitly. Group profiles have real-world impact. Norms and safety are universal for women entrepreneurs, while institutional barriers do not exist, and hence interventions need to focus on online safety, family acceptance, and visibility rather than legal access. In contrast, for IDPs, market-oriented mechanisms are missing, and institutional exclusion is universal, meaning that a platform will have limited impact until issues of status, licensing, and financing are tackled. The small platform-bias literature (B2) suggests a design agenda because misaligned platform values can jeopardize the communities that designed for. Lastly, the contrast between direct and contextual pathways has an implication for research design. Digital pathways are reported less frequently in the less digital strands of the literature (refugee and disability). This could be because fewer opportunities are presented, but it may also be because digital pathways have not necessarily been examined in these strands. This represents a discovery and a research path to follow.

Implications

Table 7 translates the findings into actions for four stakeholder groups and ties each to the evidence from Section 4.

Table 7: Practical Implications by Stakeholder

Stakeholder	Priority action	Supporting evidence
Platform designers	Audit design values, moderation and algorithms with the communities served; build safety and accessibility features	B2 coded in DeVito et al., Kelly & McAdam and Fernandes et al.; B4 in 7 of 20 sources
Policymakers	Pair connectivity programmes with recognition of legal status, licensing and access to finance, especially for refugees	B3 in 6 of 6 refugee sources; B1 in 35% of corpus
Support organisations and NGOs	Combine digital skills training with peer networks and mentoring; measure Empowerment and learning, not only income	A3 + A5 in 7 sources; A4 reported in only 25%
Researchers	Study digital pathways for refugees and disabled entrepreneurs; compare groups using common measures	Contextual sources carry about half the opportunity themes of direct sources

Table 7 indicates that none of the instruments is suitable for all groups. The central thrust is that digital provision is a necessary but not sufficient condition – it needs to be combined with the enabling conditions in fig. 3 and needs to be sequenced in line with the ‘binding constraint' of the group in question.

Limitations and Future Research

The results have to be interpreted in light of several limitations. The percentages refer to an evidence-base that is small (20 sources) and purposive and should not be generalised as representative of all research in the field. Titles, abstracts and stated contributions have been used for coding, and binary indicators cannot measure the strength of an effect; there is not an inter-coder reliability statistic, and some sources (particularly design and digital focus) are coded based on judgement, as others may have made different decisions. Two sources are included in the disability classification, and one source in the LGBTQ+ category, and they can only be described. Frequencies are due to the unit of analysis, and do not necessarily mean that the entrepreneur's profile is widespread. Future studies should expand the corpus by systematically searching for full-text coded items and independent double coding, as well as gather primary data on the use of the platforms by marginalised entrepreneurs, and use a longitudinal or comparative design to test the propositions P1-P4.

Conclusion

The current study has analyzed 20 recent studies about entrepreneurial opportunities and their lack among marginalized populations via digital platforms. This synthesis revealed three opportunity mechanisms, which are Empowerment and agency, social capital, and market access; three constraint mechanisms are institutional exclusion, the digital divide, and social norms and safety. According to the results, there is no statistical connection between the opportunity and the constraint emphasis ($r = -0.01$). It means that more opportunity emphasis does not correlate with less constraint emphasis. The direct focus on digital aspect greatly expands the spectrum of opportunity topics, opportunity emphasis reaches 2.79 while it is 1.33, and the change in constraint emphasis is insignificant and equals 1.17 while it is 1.36. Based on the findings, one can conclude that digital access should not be considered as a separate measure for overcoming entrepreneurial exclusion. Rather, it should be viewed as a single element of a multi-faceted package, involving institutional recognition, digital and entrepreneurial competencies, proper design of the platform, market linkages, and safety measures depending on the conditions of specific marginalized groups. The results have also illustrated the necessity of taking into account group-specific constraints in the design of digital entrepreneurship programs, given the fact that the mechanism through which platforms generate opportunities may differ between groups. The opportunity conversion framework and four propositions generated by this research may serve as an empirical base for further investigation. Empirical research based on primary data analysis can check those propositions and explore the process of digital opportunities conversion into entrepreneurial success.

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