

The quest for surviving COVID-19: adoption of online technologies by self-employed women in Mauritius

The quest for
surviving
COVID-19

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Abstract

Purpose – This study sheds light on the impact of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on self-employed women in Mauritius and delves into their coping strategies amid unprecedented circumstances.

Design/methodology/approach – The study employs a comprehensive methodology encompassing both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative analysis is conducted via interviews with self-employed women in Mauritius, capturing their experience with COVID-19. Quantitative analysis uses survey data from 732 firms to investigate factors affecting online sales, a major survival strategy adopted by businesses.

Findings – The study finds a notable trend wherein many interviewed women have transitioned their businesses online – a pivot that stands out as a common response within the sample. The quantitative analysis indicates the significance of a strong online presence, particularly on social media and web-based platforms designed for the sale of goods and services. These factors correlate with higher online sales, potentially enhancing resilience during pandemic-induced lockdown periods.

Originality/value – This study stands out for its originality, representing the first study investigating how women entrepreneurs in Mauritius have navigated the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis.

Keywords COVID-19, Self-employed, Women, Gender, Empowerment, Pivot

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1. Introduction

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, women have taken on more responsibilities (Alon *et al.*, 2020). Sevilla and Smith (2020) propose that, unlike men, working women have had to manage extended hours of childcare while simultaneously handling demanding work schedules. This crisis has not only adversely affected women's mental well-being but has also affected their future careers. The repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis are likely to be more pronounced among self-employed women due to their unique individual and business characteristics. Mauritius, a small island nation in the Indian Ocean with a population of approximately 1.2 million, has been significantly impacted by the pandemic. The country's heavy reliance on exports, along with its tourism-driven economy that welcomed over a million visitors before COVID-19, renders Mauritius an intriguing case study. Self-employment is prevalent in Mauritius, and the economy is particularly dependent on service-intensive sectors, such as tourism and hospitality, which have been hardest hit by the pandemic.

This study aims to review the current situation of self-employed individuals in Mauritius within the setting of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular focus on women. The investigation delves into how the pandemic impacted self-employed women and sheds light on strategies they have employed to cope. Utilizing a qualitative analysis approach, the study



draws insights from interviews with women entrepreneurs across various sectors in Mauritius. After examining the pandemic's impact on their businesses, the study explores the various strategies employed by these women to cope with the crisis and sustain their enterprises. Notably, the study finds that business model pivoting has emerged as an important strategy to navigate the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many women-owned businesses have transitioned some or all of their activities online, significantly leveraging social media platforms to maintain operations, albeit at a reduced capacity. Supplementing the qualitative analysis, the study employs survey data to quantitatively investigate the factors driving online sales, a crucial coping mechanism for businesses during lockdowns. Based on these findings, the study aims to provide relevant policy implications tailored to the Mauritian context. The study shows that pivoting business models have emerged as a viable strategy for women-owned and managed businesses striving to survive these unprecedented times.

The remaining sections of the paper are organized as follows: [Section 2](#) provides a concise literature review. [Section 3](#) presents a brief background of the Mauritian economy and discusses the country's response to the crisis. [Section 4](#) elaborates on the data and outlines the methodology employed. [Section 5](#) discusses the qualitative analysis findings and their implications. [Section 6](#) presents the results of the quantitative analysis, highlighting the importance of online presence and web-based solutions in maintaining customer engagement. The study concludes in [Section 7](#).

2. Literature review

[Filho et al. \(2020\)](#) provide evidence that the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are more intense and ever-lasting than any previous crises observed in recent times. Unlike previous crises, the COVID-19 crisis is likely to have a profound gender impact ([Alon et al., 2020](#)). A growing body of literature has emerged concerning the gender dimensions of the COVID-19 crisis ([De Paz et al., 2020](#)). Due to the pandemic and school closures, women have shouldered a substantial portion of the burden, especially in terms of increased childcare responsibilities. In previous crises and economic downturns, men employed in pro-cyclical sectors, such as manufacturing and construction were more affected. Women, on the other hand, often chose recession-resistant sectors such as healthcare and education. COVID-19 has recognizably exerted a substantial influence on sectors where female employment dominates, including restaurants and the broader hospitality industry.

Overall, those in self-employment have borne the brunt of the crisis ([Blundell and Machin, 2020](#)). As proposed by [Djimatey \(2021\)](#), examining the implications of the pandemic for the most vulnerable workers and communities globally has become a primary global policy priority. [Djimatey \(2021\)](#) indicates that the pandemic has resulted in massive dislocation among small businesses. The closure of businesses such as schools, clubs, restaurants, beaches, cinemas and other entrepreneurial activities has severely impacted demand.

In less developed economies, "lockdown," "stay home" or "shelter in place" orders limited women's capacity to dedicate more hours to productive paid work ([Al-Dajani et al., 2020](#)). In extreme cases, lockdowns and stay-at-home orders triggered a sharp rise in domestic violence, as proposed by [Chandan et al. \(2020\)](#). Additionally, the absence of adequate social protection mechanisms in less developed economies left women without the support of such measures, especially during periods of hardship.

[Mukherjee and Pahan \(2021\)](#) find that COVID-19 infection rates are equally probable between males and females from a health perspective. [de Paz et al. \(2020\)](#) propose similar possibilities and go even further to suggest that the pandemic could lead to reduced working hours and permanent exit from the labor market. Adding to the complexity, women are

overrepresented among the inactive population and engaged in vulnerable forms of work. Female labor force participation is particularly susceptible to the pandemic's effects.

Consequently, the pandemic's impact on the gender distribution of work raises concerns. Furthermore, as noted by [Wenham et al. \(2020\)](#), women are disproportionately employed in sectors such as occupational sectors covering health care, social services, educational services and other fields where remote work is challenging. Hence, women seem to face a higher risk of exposure to the virus due to the nature of their work. [Carli \(2020\)](#) agrees that the pandemic has presented challenges for women, undermining progress towards a more gender-equal society. Initial data from specific countries suggest that more women compared to men have lost their jobs, while simultaneously more women hold essential jobs that expose them to contagion and mental stress.

While advanced economies have made strides toward gender balance, this is unfortunately not the case in many emerging and less developed economies where gender disparities remain pronounced. [Alon et al. \(2020\)](#) propose that the consequences of the pandemic on working mothers are likely to persist. On a positive note, businesses have embraced flexible working arrangements, including remote work, which is likely to continue. Additionally, fathers are being called upon to play a more prominent role in childcare, especially when mothers are employed in healthcare and other sectors where remote work is not feasible. According to [Alon et al. \(2020\)](#), this shift in behavior could erode gendered roles and promote a more equitable society.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has had repercussions on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 and gender equality goals. While progress was being made in the pre-pandemic period, with fewer girls forced into early marriages and more women assuming leadership positions, the pandemic has set back gender equality efforts significantly. There is evidence that the pandemic has also led to an increase in gender-based violence, including domestic violence.

2.1 Women entrepreneurs and the pandemic

Limited research has investigated how self-employed women or female business owners have navigated past crises. As proposed by [Cesaroni et al. \(2015\)](#), female Italian micro-entrepreneurs responded to the 2007 financial crisis mainly with a defensive strategy, opting to downsize their activities and improve efficiency. Conversely, their male counterparts adopted an offensive approach, focusing on expansion and growth. In the wake of the 2007/08 global financial crisis, [Henley \(2017\)](#) finds that pull elements played a more significant role in driving transitions to self-employment, contributing to higher business formation rates post-2008. [Cesaroni et al. \(2015\)](#), in their study of sole proprietors in Italy, find that the work-life balance of female entrepreneurs remained relatively unaffected by the financial crisis.

However, the situation differs with the pandemic, as women are more heavily represented in service industries, which have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic ([Grandy et al., 2020](#)). [Manolova et al. \(2020\)](#) find that the crisis has proportionately disturbed women entrepreneurs, particularly for newer and smaller firms. [Grandy et al. \(2020\)](#) argue that the pandemic has exacerbated structural inequality and the "(in)visibility" of women entrepreneurs. [Stephens et al. \(2021\)](#) analyze data on Irish women entrepreneurs, considering periods during confinement and post-confinement. Their results highlight the resilience of women entrepreneurs in Ireland throughout the ongoing crisis. Similarly, in Brazil, [Ayatakshi-Endow and Steele \(2021\)](#) find a commitment to entrepreneurial survival and flexibility among women entrepreneurs. Their study suggests that, during the ongoing crisis, women entrepreneurs in Brazil must navigate their businesses while addressing gender role expectations. Through an interpretive approach based on 13 semi-structured

interviews, the authors conclude that negotiating gender roles empowers women to challenge established norms.

2.2 Business model pivot and women entrepreneurs

[Morgan et al. \(2020\)](#) find that following significant external shocks, firms often consider business model pivoting, wherein they change the product or the service they offer to exploit emerging opportunities. Business models focus on achieving more competitive placement, with additional focus on activity systems. In other words, business models concern the mechanisms that businesses use to create value for their customers. [Seddon et al. \(2004\)](#) propose that there is a considerable misperception and divergence about the definition of a business model.

[Chaparro and de Vasconcelos Gomes \(2021\)](#) provide a clear definition of a pivot that examines the strategic decisions made after a business fails to achieve its initial objectives. As proposed by [Morgan et al. \(2020\)](#), not every change in the way of doing business can be termed a “pivot.” They further propose that pivoting is a more suitable option for newly created firms whose capabilities have not yet “ossified”. [Valinsky \(2020\)](#) states that the duration of a crisis is a determining factor for a pivot. However, [Morgan et al. \(2020\)](#) point out that arbitrage opportunities (buying low and selling high) infrequently warrant a true business model pivot. The literature indicates that pivoting is a preferable possibility for newly created firms as business model pivoting would require a “rethinking” of all aspects of business decisions ([Morgan et al., 2020](#), [Christensen et al., 2016](#)), [Li and Tallman \(2011\)](#) propose that major exogenous shocks disrupt the progressions of economic systems and unsettle economic balance. They instigate significant alterations in labor markets and render many dominant business models obsolete.

The literature has recognized that when faced with adverse situations, men and women can react very differently. These reactions include the way they deal with risk-taking, their attitude towards investing, their investment in innovation and decisions regarding business growth. However, more than often, business strategy papers do not consider the gender of the entrepreneur, and most studies are, in fact, gender-blind. [Manolova et al. \(2020\)](#), studying the UK context, contest the categorization of crisis response into an orthodox gendered separation: women seeking risk reduction and men pursuing opportunities. They provide evidence that business model pivots are taking place even in women-led businesses.

3. Background of the Mauritian economy

Mauritius is an island nation covering an area of 2040 square kilometers, situated in the Indian Ocean to the east of Madagascar. Like other countries, Mauritius was also caught off guard by the speed with which COVID-19 emerged and drastically reshaped the socio-economic landscape in a matter of days. According to the Mauritius Labor Force surveys, the proportion of self-employed workers in Mauritius has more than doubled over the past decades ([Svirydzenka and petri, 2017](#)). [Kasseeah and Tandrayen-Ragoobur \(2014\)](#) demonstrate that self-employed women in Mauritius have distinct characteristics and face numerous constraints. This is in line with findings of [Tandrayen-Ragoobur and Kasseeah \(2017\)](#). Given the importance of self-employment in the Mauritian economy, the Government of Mauritius has implemented a self-employment scheme to assist individuals who have suffered income loss due to the lockdown(s) implemented in response to the fight against COVID-19. As proposed by [Ramtohul \(2019\)](#), despite progress in several areas, Mauritius still maintains an entrenched patriarchal and conservative culture. The economy is heavily reliant on tourism and the pandemic has highlighted the risks associated with an excessive dependence on tourism for employment and income.

4. Data and methodology

The experience of women entrepreneurs and their strategies for coping with and navigating through the challenges posed by COVID-19 is lacking in the context of Mauritius and island economies in general. Hence, this study holds significant importance as it contributes valuable insights into this particular area of research. The originality of this study lies in its qualitative approach, employing interviews with self-employed women from diverse sectors, encompassing services, retail and manufacturing. These interviewees span a broad spectrum of ages and socio-economic backgrounds.

Table 1 outlines the characteristics of the women who were interviewed for this study. The selection of businesses was carried out through a combination of purposive and criterion sampling. The common criterion was that the businesses must be owned and managed by women. Moreover, the businesses needed to be established before the onset of the pandemic, having successfully navigated the lockdown period while remaining operational. This criterion was integral in enabling an examination of the strategies these businesses employed to weather the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis. The details presented in Table 1 include the respondents' age (Column 2), marital status (Column 3), years of experience in the business (Column 4), number of children (Column 5), the highest level of education attained (Column 6), sector of business operation (Column 7) and the number of employees within the business (Column 8).

The age distribution spans from relatively young to those approaching retirement. The majority of the interviewed women are married and their years of working experience span from 1 to 40 years. Among the six women interviewed, four do not have children. Educational backgrounds within the sample vary, ranging from basic primary education to university degrees. As expected, a significant portion of the businesses operate within the services sector, including segments like food catering, retail, beauty and wellness, with a minority being engaged in the manufacturing sector. The number of employees also displays variation across the interviewees. While some businesses have no employees, one business employs between 80 and 120 part-time staff members. These findings align with previous literature suggesting that women are predominantly concentrated in contact-intensive sectors. The restrictions imposed during lockdown, coupled with physical distancing rules, have had a major impact on service-oriented sectors.

	Age	Marital status	Years of experience	Number of children	Education level	Field of business	Number of employees
Self-employed woman 1	45	Married	20	2	Ordinary level	Catering/Food	80–120 part-time
Self-employed woman 2	35	Married	3	0	Advanced level	Jewelry	0
Self-employed woman 3	36	Married	1	0	Primary schooling	Handicrafts	Less than 10
Self-employed woman 4	33	Married	15	0	University degree	Retail/Hardware	4
Self-employed woman 5	23	Single	10	0	University degree	Beauty/Wellness	0
Self-employed woman 6	59	Widow	40	5	No qualifications	Manufacturing	18

Table 1.
Characteristics of self-employed women interviewed

Source(s): Interviews; table by the author

5. Findings and implications from the qualitative analysis

Table 2 summarizes the COVID-19 impact on businesses, revealing a universal decline in demand during the lockdown period. As previously discussed, the swift decline in demand was particularly impactful due to the prevalence of contact-intensive sectors among women entrepreneurs, making it one of the initial blows of the COVID-19 crisis. The drop in demand led to cash flow challenges for these women. The other main problem that was widely cited by these women entrepreneurs was the lack of access to finance. This is echoed in their statements:

- Prices have increased, and combined with low demand, challenges have arisen.
- Raw material costs have surged and I am struggling to import the necessary raw materials.
- Access to bank loans is problematic, demanding guarantors.

Furthermore, findings show that a significant number of women increased their online presence, by employing social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram or transitioning to online sales platforms. Businesses seem to have boosted their usage of digital technology for marketing, accepting orders, communication and client base expansion. While the majority of respondents wanted to grow their businesses, they also expressed a desire to maintain a level where personalized services and direct client interactions remain feasible.

A report by UNCTAD (2021) shows that the epidemic has expedited the digital revolution. Similarly, this study observes an accelerated adoption of digital transformation among women entrepreneurs, along with an increased reliance on social media. Grewal and Levy (2013) define social media as content shared through social exchanges. This digital transformation has been expedited, a process that would have taken years. The report also points out that the pandemic has exacerbated inequalities, particularly affecting women, especially in e-commerce, who grapple with shifting global value chains. Furthermore, women faced uneven access to knowledge, proficiencies, networks and resources.

	COVID-19 experience
Self-employed woman 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cancellation of bookings• Coping with rising prices
Self-employed woman 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opened a small shop to survive• Selling online and advertising on WhatsApp and Facebook• Facing difficulty in importing raw materials• Unable to receive clients at home
Self-employed woman 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facing challenges in accessing financing• Dealing with competition from large businesses• Providing design services online and increasing the use of Facebook and Instagram
Self-employed woman 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Household chores consuming a significant amount of time• Experiencing difficulty in exporting• Shortage of trained workers• Paying rent even without income• No issues with accessing to finance
Self-employed woman 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increasing online presence, through digital marketing, and social media platforms• Facing intense competition due to low entry barriers
Self-employed woman 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transitioning business operations online• Retiring and passing the business to children• Operating a well-established business with no major constraints

Table 2. COVID-19 experience Source(s): Interviews; table by the author

The results from this study contribute to the discourse raised by [Manolova *et al.* \(2020\)](#), challenging the dominant narrative in entrepreneurship research that gender dictates a specific crisis response, either defensive or aggressive. For instance, conventional literature suggests that women tend to respond defensively, while men lean towards aggressive reactions. However, interviews conducted for this study indicate that such a clear-cut division did not manifest in the Mauritian case. Crisis responses comprised a blend of both defensive and aggressive strategies. While some businesses pivoted to survive and navigate the crisis, others capitalized on the opportunity to explore new markets and reposition their product and/or services.

I operate a catering business and with the lockdown, there was absolutely no revenue. Hence, I opened a small shop to sell snacks and cakes, which enabled me to generate some income.

These findings highlight the short-sightedness of concluding that entrepreneurs' responses to crises are strictly gender-stereotypical. The majority of women interviewed expressed appreciation for government support, emphasizing its significant role in weathering the storm. A notable statement underscored the value of this support.

The wage assistance provided by the Government has been a Godsend. It helped me weather the worst of the storm.

The Mauritian Government provided support measures for SMEs to help them cope with the impact of the crisis, particularly in the form of financial support. This includes the Self-Employment Assistance Scheme (SEAS), designed for self-employed individuals. The SEAS is a financial initiative by the Government of Mauritius to support folks who work for themselves and who have experienced income losses due to the lockdown following the COVID-19 pandemic. The scheme applies to people who operate their own businesses and work for themselves either in the formal or informal sector. What emerged from the interviews was that, despite challenging times, most of these women remained positive and hopeful.

Female entrepreneurs encountered unique barriers, and the transition to digital services was critical for women-owned SMEs to survive during this crisis ([Pugalia and Cetindamar, 2022](#)). These women cannot navigate these challenges alone; they require guidance, necessary human capital and assistance with the new aspects to effectively apply technology to their businesses. Government programs aimed solely at ICT firms result in the marginalization of women.

As proposed by [Orser and Riding \(2018\)](#), social media can pose a barrier for women entrepreneurs. However, case studies of businesses such as Blended Sense and Skida show that women can indeed utilize IT and social media effectively ([Manolova *et al.*, 2020](#)). [Jones *et al.* \(2015\)](#) propose that through social media, entrepreneurs can gain visibility with a wide customer base and respond promptly to customer queries, facilitating the development of lasting relationships. [Jones *et al.* \(2015\)](#) provide evidence that having a web presence is important for small businesses, enabling convenient and cost-effective communication with customers worldwide, while also introducing novel opportunities for sales and growth.

Well before the pandemic, [Bennett \(2012\)](#) introduced the idea that the internet and social media can have extensive effects on business processes and success, as online communication can replace physical proximity. As shown in the literature, access to digital technologies is vital for small businesses ([Barnes, 2012](#); [Levy and Powell, 2003](#)). This holds even truer for women. Websites and social media platforms offer women opportunities to override constraints related to time and financial resources, allowing them to effectively reach customers and nurture business growth.

[Olsson and Bernhard \(2020\)](#) investigate women entrepreneurs in the context of digitalization, referring to them as “digital immigrants” —those lacking the proper skills

or knowledge to use digital technologies. The findings indicate that with the advent of digitalization, women entrepreneurs must adopt the role of digital entrepreneurs and actively seek innovative ways to conduct business. Hence, it is important for businesses, especially women-owned businesses, to recruit digitally skilled young employees to foster knowledge sharing.

The pandemic has also shown how social media can be used by businesses to continue operating, increase their online presence, or stay connected with their customers as indicated by the following statements:

I increased my visibility on social media to stay connected with my customers and also kept an eye on market trends by exploring new designs.

I have a Facebook page and use Instagram more frequently now compared to before the pandemic.

The interviewed women were also optimistic about the future, and they had all made plans. Their resilience in the face of the pandemic was evident in their statements:

I plan to invest in additional hardware to offer a full-service package.

I am looking forward to recruiting proficient, motivated, and trustworthy personnel.

I intend to rent a physical location that will accommodate more customers and facilitate business growth.

Women with more established businesses faced fewer problems during the lockdown.

There were no major issues since my business is well-established.

I have solid clientele and supportive parents; I am not facing any major difficulties.

Hence, the extent to which these women-owned and managed businesses were affected during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Mauritius depended on the extent to which these businesses were “established” or new enterprises. However, the findings indicate that all surviving firms attempted to alter their “normal” business practices. This can be defined as a “soft” or “nearby” pivot as these women entrepreneurs sought ways to help their businesses survive the pandemic.

6. Empirical specification and results

In this section, we present empirical evidence for the hypothesis that businesses have been shifting towards utilizing digital platforms, leading to their enhanced survivability. To accomplish this, the study employed survey data from 726 Mauritian firms. This survey was conducted as part of the Enterprise Surveys, an ongoing initiative by the World Bank aimed at collecting firm-level data across various operational aspects. The survey was conducted in Mauritius between February 2020 and November 2020, coinciding with the first phase of the pandemic when lockdowns were imposed worldwide. In Mauritius, the first lockdown spanned 6 weeks, starting in the last week of March 2020. Due to the pandemic situation, the survey was exclusively conducted via phone. Summary statistics are shown in [Table 3](#).

A reduced-form specification was employed to examine the variables influencing the level of online sales. The regression specification is as follows:

6.1 Percentage of online sales: $f(\text{Firm Age, Employment Level, online presence and FemaleOwner})$

The dependent variable is the percentage of online sales. The regressors encompass a set of factors derived from the existing literature that are believed to impact a firm’s online sales.

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
Percentage of Online Sales	717	3.492	14.520	0	100
Firm Age	717	21.884	17.402	0	190
Employment Level	694	2.996	1.283	0	8.517
Website	717	0.778	0.416	0	1
SocialMedia1	94	0.691	0.464	0	1
SocialMedia2	94	0.362	0.483	0	1
FemaleOwner	717	0.132	0.339	0	1

Note(s): The dependent variable is the percentage of online sales. Firm Age is the variable that represents the age of the firm in years; Employment Level captures the number of employees; Website indicates whether the firm has its own website or social media page; SocialMedia1 captures the firm's presence on social media platforms through which online sales could be made while SocialMedia2 captures the existence of web-based platforms within firms, designed for the sale of goods and services. FemaleOwner is a binary variable indicating whether the top manager is female

Source(s): Author's own calculations

Table 3.
Summary statistics

These factors include the firm's age (*Firm Age*), its size (*Employment Level*), its online presence on social media platforms (*Website*, *SocialMedia1* or *SocialMedia2*) and a control for the gender dimension (*FemaleOwner*). *Firm Age* represents the firm's age in years, while *Employment Level* signifies the number of employees. The variable "*Website*" indicates whether the firm owns a website or social media page; "*SocialMedia1*" captures the firm's presence on social media platforms capable of facilitating online sales, whereas "*SocialMedia2*" identifies the existence of web-based platforms designed for the sale of goods and services. "*FemaleOwner*" is a dummy variable indicating whether the top manager is female, which helps to capture the gender dimension.

The regression results are displayed in Table 4. Column (1) shows that age is inversely related to the level of online sales. This suggests that younger firms are more inclined to generate higher sales from online sources compared to older firms. While firm size, measured by employee count, is positively correlated, the results are statistically significant only in column (1). To control for the gender effect, a dummy variable is introduced to the regression, capturing firms with female top managers. The coefficient of this gender-related dummy variable is positive and statistically significant. This suggests that contrary to common assumptions, women are more likely to engage in online sales. In column (1), the presence of a firm's website is used as a proxy for online presence, which is expected to positively affect

	1	2	3
Firm Age	−0.097*** (0.034)	−0.339*** (0.138)	−0.305*** (0.127)
Employment Level	1.008*** (0.470)	0.369 (2.352)	−2.040 (2.287)
FemaleOwner	1.663*** (1.331)	17.709*** (8.777)	14.356*** (8.197)
Website	3.526 (1.600)	—	—
SocialMedia1	—	−2.852 (6.739)	—
SocialMedia2	—	—	24.841*** (6.792)
Constant	0.817 (1.592)	31.627*** (8.915)	20.951*** (8.232)
Adjusted R2	0.019	0.079	0.202
Number of Observations	694	90	90

Note(s): The variables are as defined in Table 3

***, ** and * indicate significance at the 1%, 5% and 10%, respectively

Source(s): Author's own calculations

Table 4.
Regression results

online sales. However, the results suggest that this variable lacks statistical significance in affecting online sales, suggesting the need for improved metrics to measure online presence.

The study introduces two measures to address this issue. Firstly, it employs “*socialmedia1*” to capture the firm’s presence on social media platforms, facilitating online sales. Secondly, “*socialmedia2*” captures the existence of web-based platforms within firms, specifically designed for the sale of goods and services. These refined measures greatly result in a significantly reduced sample size, comprising only 90 eligible firms. In column (2), social media’s impact on online sales is considered using *socialmedia1*, accounting for firms capable of conducting sales through social media platforms. In column (3), social media’s influence is measured through the existence of web-based platforms using *socialmedia2*, tailored for goods and services sales. The results indicate that social media exhibits a positive influence on online sales only in column 2.

Overall, the results indicate that social media presence might increase the level of online sales. These regression results indicate that the primary factors influencing online sales are a firm’s online presence and its age. Younger firms with an established online presence experience higher sales through online means. These insights suggest that firms can benefit by increasing their online presence and boosting their online sales, especially in pandemic periods where in-person sales might be challenging to execute.

7. Conclusion

The economic hardships resulting from the COVID-19 crisis have impacted both males and females. However, unlike previous crises, this unprecedented situation has disproportionately impacted women. This phenomenon holds across all economies, irrespective of their development levels. This paper studies the experiences of self-employed women in Mauritius during the lockdown period and the COVID-19 crisis. The findings indicate how the government’s policies played a crucial role in supporting many of the interviewed women. One significant contribution of this study lies in shedding light on the coping strategies employed by women entrepreneurs, particularly in a region that has been understudied in the existing literature. This study enriches the literature from both a gender perspective and the unique context of a small island economy. The study finds that women’s agency was paramount during this crisis. Despite facing heightened challenges, women managed to navigate the crisis by adapting their businesses and leveraging online technologies.

This study highlights the importance of understanding the specific context in which changes are unfolding. As previously mentioned, the situation in Mauritius, much like other island economies heavily reliant on tourism, differs significantly from other economic landscapes. The application of business models and survival measures in the face of a pandemic must take into account the economic and social structures in which businesses operate, as advocated by [McGrath and Macmillan \(2009\)](#). Amid the COVID-19 crisis, businesses must manage risks to ensure their survival in the short-term, while simultaneously reimagining their strategies in the long-term to capitalize on opportunities generated by the pandemic. For Mauritius, which has a limited market and excessive dependence on tourism, the need for a national e-commerce strategy becomes imperative. [Cooper \(2021\)](#) proposition emphasizes the pivotal role of adaptability and rapid innovation in navigating crises such as the COVID-19 crisis and preparing for potential future crises. Recognizing opportune moments and fostering innovation become crucial factors in recovering from shocks and crises.

Nonetheless, the study underscores the need to enhance social and economic support for self-employed women. As suggested by [Mustafa et al. \(2021\)](#), the multifaceted impact of COVID-19 on the well-being of women brings to the forefront the importance of addressing gender gap disparities when formulating policies for COVID-19 or similar crises in

developing and emerging economies. This is particularly pertinent for Mauritius, where self-employed women would greatly benefit from targeted training, especially in bolstering their digital presence both locally and globally. Skills-focused training programs would empower these women to better respond to both endogenous and exogenous challenges, safeguarding their businesses and livelihoods. Policies aimed at alleviating the household burdens on women through government-funded childcare, for instance, could also play a pivotal role. Analyzing the gender-specific impacts of COVID-19 on female entrepreneurs and devising strategies to support their enterprises, currently facing turbulent times, is essential as the next crisis may emerge at any moment.

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