

A Case Study on Social Norms in Women's Informal Digital Work

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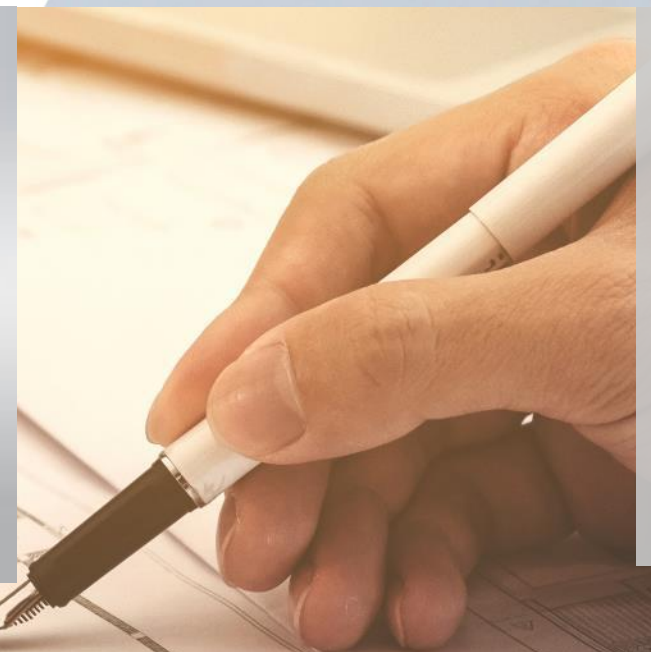
&

Mrs. Fidae El Hassouni



INDL MEA 2024 CONFERENCE

Digital Labor Perspectives from the
Middle East and Africa



Context

Theoretical framework

Research question & hypotheses

Method

Findings & discussion

Conclusion

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The rise of social networking and e-commerce

The COVID-19 pandemic has further amplified the relevance of digital tools and social networks

Morocco is experiencing promising growth in the e-commerce sector, supported by various government initiatives.

Job market
13% = rate of unemployment (2024)

Profile more concerned by unemployment :
Educated women in urban area.

E-commerce like an opportunity
But, they are some constraints related to norms and daily life

The evolving legal framework

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Everything from transportation networks (Sen et al., 2003) to communication systems like the Internet (Tadic, 2001) can be viewed as systems of interacting components.

Network : comprises nodes and links

Social Networks and disease transmission in animal and human populations (Watts & Strogatz, 1998; Potterat et al., 2002; Cross et al., 2004; Corner et al., 2003)

Link

Social Networks and Ethics in Sociology (Replogle, 2014), social exchange, and the development of social ties (Biały, 2017). Other works (Cucchi, 2012) have tried to explain the continuity of social network usage (connection, disconnection, etc.) by recalling theories that can be mobilized (planned behavior theory, rational choice theory, etc.) and by mobilizing Marcel Mauss's gift theory to explain the continuity of virtual social ties (use of Facebook) as an explanatory variable in a logistic regression model with explanatory variables being "giving" and "receiving".

Node

Node

A network consists of a set of relationships between different actors, characterized by their specific nature such as collaboration, control, friendship, or commercial exchanges.

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Network approaches and social embedding

Mark Granovetter

W. Baker [1984]

Sociological attributes (race, religion, etc.) are less significant than the nature and structure of the network in job searching. Social relationships facilitate job access more than traditional formal means (advertisements, interviews, etc.).

Social relationships among agents in the stock market could have a measurable impact on price volatility due to possible clique formation

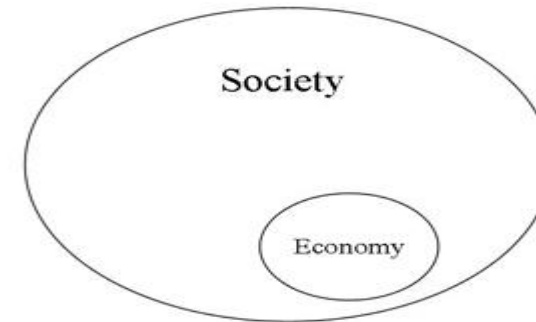
‡planned behavior theory, rational choice theory, etc.

→ This analogy can extend to e-commerce markets (importance of social issues : norms, informal ties, confidence, etc.)

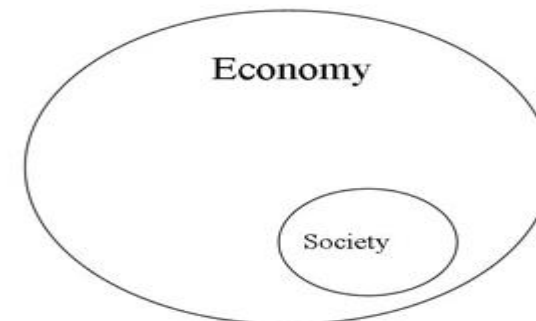
Granovetter's study on job searching highlights the relationship between tie strength (time spent, emotional intensity, services rendered) and gratification (job satisfaction, pay level). Weak ties provide access to relevant new information, thus new opportunities.

Polanyi Made Simple

How it is:



How we think it is:



The impacts, values, and contrasts differ when we change the society, community, or tribe.

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How do social norms and family constraints influence the daily life and entrepreneurial activities of women e-commerce entrepreneurs, particularly in conservative societies, and how do social capital and relationships develop and enhance on social media platforms for these entrepreneurs?.

Given the conservative society, incomplete legal and cyber protection in informal e-commerce, and the ability to hide one's identity, there is a potential for fraudulent behavior and harmful weak ties despite the norms that shape the development of e-commerce.

How does opportunistic behavior in e-commerce influence the daily lives and business practices of women e-commerce entrepreneurs in conservative societies?

The hypothesis is that opportunistic behavior in e-commerce impacts daily life, especially for women e-commerce entrepreneurs.

‡planned behavior theory, rational choice theory, etc.

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In e-commerce, weak ties developed on social networks can be sources of nuisance and opportunistic behaviors due to the anonymity and ease of breaking connections online. Trust is difficult to establish, leading to risk-taking and adventure. When an e-commerce entrepreneur must pay for goods before receiving them or requires customers to prepay, dissatisfaction at delivery can occur, complicating returns.



This study aims to conduct a sociological survey to verify the impact of social networks on the social life of individuals and society in general (Qin et al., 2023; Asad et al., 2021).

CASE STUDY



- Qualitative study (Interviews, participant observation)
- Sample Design and Data Collection :
 - data was collected over more than six months in 2022.
 - The study included 10 semi-structured interviews with an online saleswoman, addressing various topics such as her motivations, the obstacles she faced, and specific instances of lived experiences. **The interviews covered** a wide range of topics, including:
 - ✓ Interactions with an online seller in the United Arab Emirates: Conducted via WhatsApp.
 - ✓ Interactions with a supplier in Casablanca: Initially conducted on Telegram, then moved to WhatsApp.
 - ✓ A fraud case involving a customer from Fez: The customer was first discovered on an online marketplace, then on Facebook, and finally through WhatsApp.

CASE STUDY

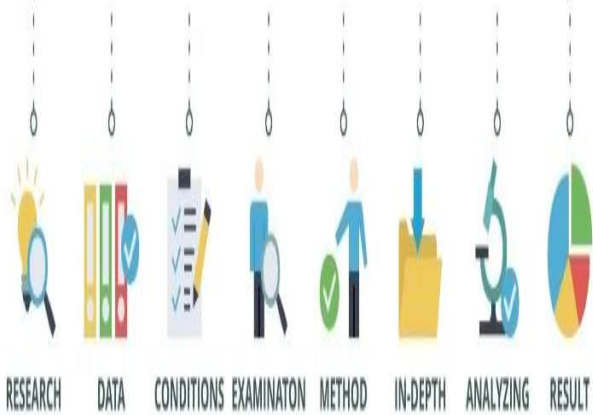


- Qualitative study (Interviews, participant observation)
- Sample Design and Data Collection : **Interviews**
- In addition, 5 interviews were conducted, involving four women and one man :
- ✓ Dealing with a delivery company: Interviews included discussions on account creation commitments and the allowed refund period.
- ✓ Delivery to a customer in a rural area: Addressed experiences of delivering products to rural areas.
- ✓ A man purchasing goods online for his wife: Analyzed the man's motivations for buying products online.
- ✓ A young girl purchasing goods for herself.
- ✓ A woman buying products for her children: Included analysis of purchasing motivations and specific needs for children.

Participants for the semi-structured interviews were selected based on a variety of social and demographic characteristics, including: Gender, Age, Education Level, Neighborhood Type, etc.

The study considered the diversity of purchased products, including traditional and religious clothing, modern apparel, and items for children or adults.

CASE STUDY



- Qualitative study (Interviews, participant observation)
- Sample Design and Data Collection : **Participant Observation Methodology.**

This was implemented five times, where the researcher acted as a delivery agent for customers. The goals of this method included:

- ✓ **Identifying opportunities and obstacles faced during delivery:** Included analyzing logistical challenges.
- ✓ **Evaluating interactions with various customer and supplier profiles:** Included studying how customers interacted with delivery services and the impact on their satisfaction.



- Case Profile: Online Seller
- ✓ **Demographics:** The case study focuses on a woman in her thirties who juggles her roles as a mother and an online seller.
- ✓ **Skills:** She possesses theoretical skills in marketing and sales, acquired through formal education.
- ✓ **Challenges:** She faces difficulties in balancing her professional and personal life, particularly receiving orders during her rest periods, which intrudes on her personal time.
- ✓ **Specialization:** She specializes in selling women's clothing (secondary in children's clothing), including both religious and modern attire.
- ✓ **Solidarity:** Her work helps cover family expenses, providing additional income for investment and personal expenditures.
- ✓ **Flexibility:** She benefits from significant flexibility in her work, allowing her to set her own working hours and choose the products she wants to sell.
- ✓ **Clients:** Her customers vary in terms of generation, education, social class, and geographic location.
- ✓ **Constraints:** Some clients face constraints imposed by men in their purchasing or selling activities.
- ✓ **Delivery:** Deliveries play a central role in her business, even across geographical boundaries.



- Key findings :
- ✓ **Impact of Intermediaries (Short Chain and Opportunity):** The number of intermediaries in the seller's network affects profitability and efficiency. Reducing intermediaries can lead to better financial outcomes.
- ✓ **The research examined the interactions between formal and informal aspects** of e-commerce, revealing the complex relationships between various actors and the implications for the online seller.
- ✓ **Trust and Reputation:** Trust and reputation play a crucial role in online transactions, often equating to financial guarantees.
- ✓ **Customer Diversity:** Customers come from various social and demographic backgrounds, requiring the seller to adapt her strategies accordingly.
- ✓ **Challenges of Weak Ties:** While weak ties can provide new opportunities, they also pose risks due to potential anonymity and opportunistic behaviors.
- ✓ **Impact of Fraud:** Experiencing fraud can have profound effects on the seller's business decisions and confidence in online interactions.



- **Challenges and Opportunities:**

- **Work-life Balance:** The unstable nature of online work makes it difficult for women to delineate boundaries between work and personal life, often leading to overlapping responsibilities.
- **Increased Exposure to Risks:** Online work exposes women to risks such as fraud and cyber harassment, emphasizing the need for robust security measures and protections for women in this field.
- **Cultural and Social Challenges:** In Morocco, women may face cultural and social challenges in e-commerce, including issues related to sexual harassment and gender discrimination.
- **Socioeconomic Empowerment:** Despite the challenges, economic empowerment through e-commerce can help change societal views on women's roles, promoting gender equality in the workplace and community.

Challenges and Opportunities:

- **Disconnecting and the Theory of Gift:** The concept of quitting and disconnecting can be analyzed through the mobilization of gift theory, indicating the nuances of engagement and withdrawal in network interactions.
- **In conservative societies, e-commerce can be viewed as inappropriate for women** : due to the cultural and social norms that dictate how women should interact with others, particularly men.

Here are some key points that develop this idea further :

- **Social Expectations and Gender Roles** : Women are often expected to maintain a certain level of modesty and reserve, especially in their interactions with men.
- **Privacy and Anonymity Concerns** : Engaging in e-commerce necessitates communication with anonymous individuals through social media and other online platforms.
- **Cultural Norms and Online Behavior:** Cultural norms in conservative societies often discourage women from engaging in public or semi-public forums.



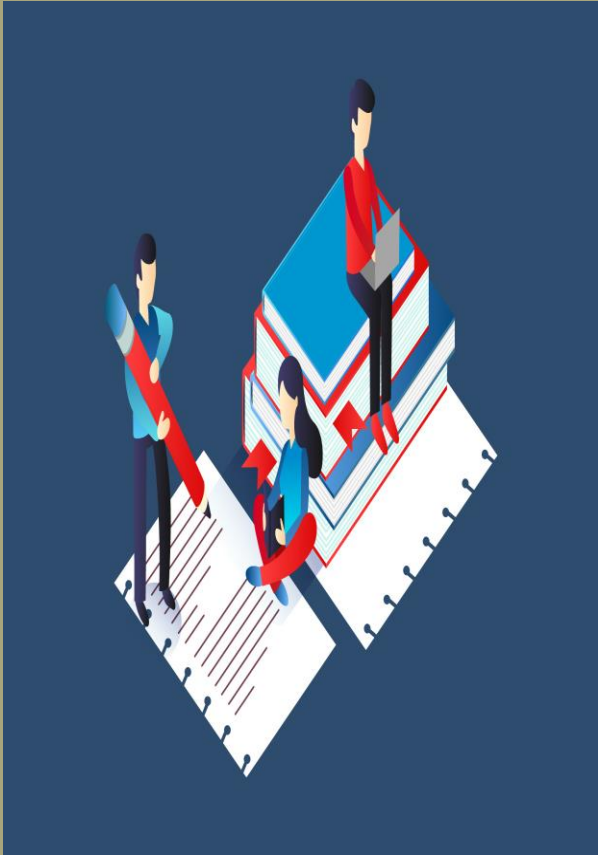
CONCLUSION

Here are some key points that develop this idea further :

- **Risk of Misunderstanding and Harassment:** The anonymity of online interactions can sometimes lead to misunderstandings or inappropriate behavior.
- **Impact on Women's Reputation:** A woman's reputation in conservative societies is closely tied to her adherence to social norms. Engaging in e-commerce might be perceived as compromising her reputation if it involves regular communication with unknown individuals.
- **Balancing Modernity and Tradition:** While e-commerce represents modern economic opportunities, it requires a balance with traditional values. Women who engage in e-commerce in conservative societies must navigate these dual expectations, often adopting strategies to maintain their social acceptability while pursuing their business interests.
- **Opportunities for Empowerment and Change:** Despite these challenges, e-commerce can also serve as a platform for empowerment. It offers women in conservative societies the opportunity to generate income and achieve economic independence. Over time, successful engagement in e-commerce by women can contribute to shifting social norms, demonstrating that online business can be conducted respectfully and within the bounds of cultural expectations.



CONCLUSION



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The background of the slide is a collage of two main images. The top-left portion shows a group of five people (three men and two women) sitting around a table in a meeting, engaged in conversation. The top-right and bottom-right portions show a modern building under construction, with its steel framework and glass panels visible against a bright sky. The bottom-left portion shows a view through a window of a modern building with a glass facade.

Thank you for your attention

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