

Conference calls on women to embrace - not fear - technology disruption

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The 20th annual Women in Business Conference on 16 August 2019 at the UCT Graduate School of Business will be bringing together industry leaders to explore how female disruptors can win in a world transformed by technology.



More opportunities are opening for women, especially black women, in the fields of innovation and technology in business, [says](#) Baratang Miya, founder of GirlHype, an NGO that promotes women in science, engineering, technology and maths (STEM) and teaches girls software programming and coding. “There is more money in the market and the space is beginning to accept us, and that anti-women culture is gone.”

Miya will be one of the speakers at the upcoming Women in Business Conference held on 16 August 2019 in the new conference centre at the UCT Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB) in Cape Town. The theme of the event is Disrupt: Industry 4.0 and it will be looking at how women can take advantage of advances in technology; including the impact of AI, social media revolutions, and data management.

“The fourth industrial revolution will unlock many opportunities for women in business, especially for those leveraging the power of a globalised network to push for greater change,” says UCT GSB Director of Executive Education, Kumeshnee West. However, gender bias is strong in the tech sector and needs to be consciously overcome, she cautions.

According to UNESCO and Forbes, less than one-third of the world’s technical workforce are women, and the numbers aren’t growing. In the field of AI, women constitute only [22%](#).

West says more women need to be brought into the conversation to share and learn about how to best support each other while navigating the complexity and uncertainty of digital disruption. There are positive signs that things are starting to shift in the tech sector. Facebook recently [announced](#) it would double the percentage of women working in its offices, while also doubling the number of black and Hispanic employees in the US over the next five years.

At the same time, research shows that women use social media more than men do. According to a [recent](#) survey, 71% of women use social media compared to 62% of men. Interestingly, 62% of sharing on Facebook is done by women, with the rise of the mommy blogger being an interesting phenomenon. In the US, there are 3.9 million mom blogs – many with businesses and products behind them. In South Africa, [Mommy Mall](#), a mom-to-mom trading concept is operated by women for women, with online trade and shopping activity among 80,000 members in 18 Mommy Mall branches across the country.

Conference committee co-chair and MBA student at the UCT GSB, Nicole Funk says technology has already changed the way people use transport, book restaurants, pay for accommodation and watch movies. She believes the impact on businesses and women in business will be huge.

“People tend to be scared of what they don’t know, of new things. That is why this conference is important, to show people what is coming and to embrace it”

“There are many misconceptions about technology,” says co-chair Yossabel Chetty, also an MBA student. “The fourth industrial revolution is not only about AI and changes in the job market; it is also about sustainability, alternative energy sources, social impact ventures and how technology can be used to uplift and better lives, for instance using drone technology to distribute medicine or improve agricultural practices.” There are so many opportunities for women here, she believes.

Encouraging more women to study and train in tech fields, launching start-ups and getting involved in tech is key to capitalising on these opportunities, believes Funk. The conference aims to bring together professionals from across sectors as well as private and public enterprise into an environment where thought-provoking and energising conversations can take place and powerful connections can be made, while enjoying lectures and panel discussions featuring industry leaders like Thato Kgathanye, founder and CEO of the Rethaka Group, Pascale Henke, co-founder and CEO of Brownie Points, Samantha Perry, co-founder of Women in TechZA, Lynette Hundermark, co-founder of Useful & Beautiful, and Christelle Colman, MD of Elite Risk Acceptances, who was voted one of the top 50 most creative people in business in South Africa by Fast Company in 2015. For more information visit <http://gsbblogs.uct.ac.za/womeninbusiness/>.

Join the conversation: #WomeninTech #WomeninBusiness. The annual Women in Business Conference at the UCT GSB is organised by students at the school. All funds raised through the event go towards a bursary fund to enable women to study at the school.

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