



## Challenges of Digital Entrepreneurship and Its Role in Women Empowerment: A Sociological Study in District Faisalabad

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores women's challenges in achieving empowerment through digital entrepreneurship in the 21st century. Using a qualitative approach, data was collected via interviews with 16 female entrepreneurs in Faisalabad, Pakistan. Thematic analysis identified key challenges, including limited access to finance, lack of family support and mentorship, difficulty finding vendors and riders, family disturbances, health issues, overburden, networking barriers, gender biases, and inadequate skill development. The study suggests targeted financial support, mentorship programs, policy reforms, awareness campaigns, and tailored skill development initiatives to address these. It advocates for an inclusive digital entrepreneurial ecosystem, ensuring women's active participation and empowerment.*



## Introduction

Entrepreneurship talks about beginning, managing, and growing an enterprise project. It involves identifying opportunities, taking dangers, and organizing sources to create and deliver modern services or products. Entrepreneurs regularly convey new thoughts, technologies, and commercial enterprise fashions to the marketplace (Kraus et al 2019). The entrepreneur is defined as someone who has the ability and desire to establish, administer and succeed in a startup assignment alongside risk entitled to it, to make profits (Ajaz, Mehmood, Ali, & Ashraf, 2014). It can be categorized into small or domestic businesses to multinational groups (Rodríguez-García &

Sendra-García 2021). One principal benefit of being your boss is having manage over while and where to paint and how to increase your business. If you're seeking to determine whether to open a store online or man or woman, don't forget a number of the predominant benefits of virtual entrepreneurship including Scalability, Easy access to customers, Flexibility, Part-time job, Lower expenses, and Potential for the boom (Baron et al 2012). The potential for change from SDGs goal 5 depends on the same participation of women's empowerment, identical access to resources, and freedom from gender-primarily based violence (Ashraf, Li, Dodor, & Murad, 2018). Gender-primarily based discrimination and exclusion. Women are deeply empowered in all societies and government systems around the sector (Kaltenborn et al 2020).

Empowerment of women is one of the maximum arguable problems in improving Countries nowadays. Pakistan is democratic and The Islamic State, the problem of women's empowerment faces new worrying conditions. Considering its multidimensional nature and delivering an empirical issue this check is an index for the understanding of the truth of Islamic teachings and values (Chaudhry et al 2012; Shah et al 2024; 2021). The human capital idea is a concept that emphasizes the significance of investing in education and talent improvement to beautify a character's productivity and financial ability (Ashraf, Murad, Sheikh, & Syed, 2021). It shows that people who possess better ranges of human capital are more possibilities to secure higher activity opportunities, earn better wages, and make a contribution extra effectively to the monetary boom. Women empowerment, then again, refers to the technique of permitting girls to have control over their lives, make independent selections, and take part completely in social, financial, and political spheres (Mitra & Singh 2007).

Entrepreneurship is the main component of financial development. In this period, women are an emerging monetary force. Women lead both society and their own families. The social and economic development of women is essential for the improvement of any U.S.A woman. Every woman desires to begin a business but cannot triumph because of some DE-motivating inner and outside elements (Kaushik, 2013). Women entrepreneurs face many challenges and difficulties starting their businesses in this male-dominated society (Hongbo et al., 2021). Many women entrepreneurs explain that the problems they face hinder their business success and profitability (Mandipaka, 2014).

There has also been an increase in the number of women entrepreneurs in Pakistan's digital space. Many women are leveraging digital technologies and platforms to start and grow their businesses, particularly in sectors such as e-commerce, digital marketing, and software development. These women are breaking traditional barriers and challenging societal norms by venturing into male-dominated industries (Ishfaq et al 2023). Chaker & Zouaoui (2023) are generally perceived as subordinates by all sectors, women have advanced their business picture, which is an essential part of business enterprise performance (Jidda Jidda, Zhen, Ashraf, Nasir, & Amoako, 2025). This paper aims to assess the journey of women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia through a systematic assessment to evaluate the opportunities and demanding situations of professional women marketers for the past 18 years (from 2005 to 2019).

Waheed et al (2022) examined that in this period, where advances in technology and social media are within a handful of unconventional guys, women entrepreneurs remain a large element of an understudied phenomenon (Li, Murad, Ashraf, & Jiatong, 2024). Social media is a path to success for women marketers as it encourages women to be impartial and become their bosses. In online home-based business enterprises, women gained power in a variety of areas compared to men in contemporary literature. Alhothali & Al-Dajani (2022) explained the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality and the increasing number of women entrepreneurs within the MENA area are likely to change the policy of the sport. A growing

framework of studies is examining this issue and the factors associated with this rise, which include virtual entrepreneurship. However, few remain aware of the rise and impact of women-owned digital micro-corporations in disrupting social and economic disruptions, including the COVID-19 pandemic, in Saudi Arabia. Thus, this test explores the impact of feelings on the resilience of female marketers in “Saudi Arabia in Transformation”, to discover the impact they have on shaping the virtual entrepreneurship journeys of women entrepreneurs (Murad, Cai, Javed, Firdousi, & Ashraf, 2019).

Suseno & Abbott (2021) explained the rise of discussion about virtual social innovation (VSI) from the perspective of women entrepreneurs. Using the Differences in Gender and Information Creative Behavior Theory (IDTGIT), this research examines how digital technology is used by women entrepreneurs to create opportunities in response to challenges related to personal identity, personal influence, social influence, and structural influence. Noor et al (2021) argued that women’s empowerment is related to women’s power to create desire, gain easy access to issues, and control key resources. Women’s entrepreneurship is part of the undergraduate degree in Pakistan. The present examination normally targeted women empowerment projects thru entrepreneurship in Pakistan (Wen et al., 2018).

Anzak & Sultana (2020) argued that the heavy use of the digital era, mostly through the use of mobile devices, has fundamentally changed the way we do business. The Internet-connected virtual age and the connected world create new opportunities for social and monetary development through the power of participatory virtual literacy. Existed. This article explores the possibilities of digital literacy for women to become active members of the digital world. Challenges women face in acquiring these competencies, self-development, and financial constraints are also addressed (Li, Murad, Javed, Firdousi, & Ashraf, 2021).

Ughetto et al (2020) described Literature on women's entrepreneurship as a growing and broader entity contained within the challenges women face in organizing and establishing an organization, with specific attention to access to records, finances, and networks. Interestingly, little is known about the position created through digital technologies in the use of adjustments in women’s entrepreneurship. Debnath et al (2020) pointed out that in this era, the rise of women entrepreneurs and their participation in the prosperity of the country's economic establishment is important for a growing US like Bangladesh. Women have now begun to contribute to financial growth through the useful resource of their extraordinary work.

### **Objectives of the Research**

- To find the socioeconomic elements responsible for motivating women to become an entrepreneur.
- To evaluate the problems faced by women in starting a new Digital business.
- To examine the Government policies for women to become digital entrepreneurs.
- To suggest some effective measures for women's empowerment.

### **Methodology**

The research design for this study is qualitative, as it aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the chosen area. (Taylor 2005). The sample size of this study is 16 female participants from the universe of Faisalabad. To find the first respondent for research, the researcher purposely ordered food from Food Panda mobile application and got information from Food Panda's riders about women who were selling food online from home. That's how the researcher got the first female respondent who was ready to give data. The first respondent who was selected purposely told the researcher about 2-3 females who are selling online food through Instagram and that's how the

researcher get her respondents by using both purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The interviews were conducted face-to-face depending on the availability and choices of the individuals. These interviews were consisting open-ended questions and complied with-up probes to explore their experiences, perspectives, and evaluations related to the study's topic. Each interview lasted 15 to 20 minutes and was audio recorded with the participant's consent. Data was collected from March 2023 to July 2023. The coded data was then organized into themes and sub-themes. Themes represented patterns and recurring ideas within the data, while sub-themes provided more specific details and examples (Wong 2008). The themes and sub-themes were interpreted and analyzed to identify key findings and insights related to the research objectives. Throughout the observation, ethical considerations were prioritized. Informed consent changed into received from all participants, making sure of their voluntary participation and confidentiality.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Thematic Analysis**

**Table 1: Main themes, sub-themes, and respondent's explanations about Themes**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Respondent Explanation</b>
Reasons to Start Business	Wish to become an entrepreneur Utilize Skills	Everyone wants to do something to make themselves a beneficial Person in the society women should use their abilities as a source of income.
	Economic problems	Low stranded of leaving and lack of basic facilities push a woman to start a business.
Challenges to Start Business	Family support	To get emotional assistance, investment, care, and security.
	Financial Crisis	being unable to pay for raw materials, lack of savings and budget
	Finding Rider Learning business skills	struggle to get a person who delivers their orders To refine a person's God Gifted
	Finding vendors	qualitative and turn it into a business It is much more difficult for entrepreneurs to find a person who gave the raw materials at wholesale price
Social challenges After starting Business	Family disturbance	At the starting point, women could not give proper time to Family, especially children
	Health issues	Household activities and business activities at the same time affected a woman's health badly.
	Overburden	worked alone to create a huge responsibilities
	Social harassment	Inappropriate message through social media Apps
	Study disturbance	student entrepreneurs faced difficulties to gave proper time to study
	Create audience	Increase followers in social business

		Account
	Customer's demands	Turn traditional methods into modern interest
	Flourished business	creating a successful public relations (PR)
Benefits of Starting a Business	Strong Communication	Overcame the communication gap with the audience as a girl entrepreneur.
	Confidence	Personality grooming
	Strong economic capital	generate personal income and not become a burden on others
	Strong social bounding	People know women because of their work
	Active participation of Family members	involvement in business activities

## **Theme 1: Reasons to Start a Business**

### **Financial Crisis**

Instead of being a burden on others, becoming an entrepreneur is the best solution for them so that they can meet the needs of themselves and their children. *"I embarked on this entrepreneurial journey to support myself and provide a good upbringing for my daughter. Due to my responsibilities as a single mother, I was unable to pursue a conventional job that required me to leave my home. Determined to find a solution, I turned to my passion for cooking and launched my small-scale food delivery service".* (Case study 1)

### **Utilize Skills**

According to (Bushra & Wajiha 2015) every woman has a God-gifted quality, just finding and improving this quality is the greatest success. Respondents who found their quality and started their online business to prove their ability are among the most successful and respected women in society. She is now running her own online business alone. (Case study 10, 11).

### **Become an entrepreneur**

The female respondents said that keeping the human mind free means that one is prone to depression, especially in those households where women are free, there are more fights, and suffer from depression. *"I started my online business to keep myself busy. After attending an exhibition where I received positive feedback and received orders for custom-made dresses, I officially launched my online business"* (Case Study 10). These results are in line with the works of (Bushra & Wajiha 2015)

## **Theme 2: Challenges to Start a Business**

### **Family Support**

No business can be started without the help of family, especially for women it is a very difficult task, there are many outdoor matters which they cannot handle alone they need the support of family. Indeed, a word of support from family members gives a woman a lot of courage and

strength. (Case Study 5, 13) as described in the research (Koneru, 2017). In a city like Faisalabad, there are still many people who do not support the right of women to work outside the home. But their views are changing with time due to online business. Because all these women were working in front of family members at home, they were somewhat comforted by this. So, the family members did not show much interest when they started their work to see what they were doing or not. Due to a lack of family support, women respondents face many difficulties in starting their businesses (Case Study 13).

### **Investment Issues**

The biggest difficulty for them to start their own business is investment because before starting any business, investment is required. How much investment you need depends on your Business. Being women, the respondents did not have much money, they started with their savings, which was a challenge *“Initially, due to financial limitations, I faced challenges in meeting the high demand for decorative cakes prevalent in the age of social media. However, I overcame this hurdle by creatively using household items and sought guidance from YouTube tutorials to improve my cake-making skills”* (Case Studies 2 and 12). But some women started with zero investment, using only their skills, from a few thousand. Some respondents have not faced any kind of financial crisis. This is in line with (Pretorious & Shaw's 2004) and (Atieno's 2009) findings that access to start-up capital is a major barrier to venturing into a new business (Akhwalwa & Havenga 2012).

### **Finding Rider**

In 2019 online business trend increased in Faisalabad. Working from home is easy but selling your product was a difficult task and the bigger task was to deliver the product to your customer in the right condition. The main character is Rider but finding a good rider was a very difficult task for the women respondents. The husband of some respondents helped them in this task. *“Initially, my husband personally delivered the orders, but as the business expanded, he was unable to continue doing so due to his job commitments. After that, I faced too much difficulty to find a local rider. Then I sought a solution by connecting with a driver through In-Drive, a ride-hailing service, who agreed to personally deliver my orders”* (Case Study 9). Local Riders are the best alternative but finding local riders is a very difficult task and if riders are found, there is no more beneficial work.

### **Learning modern business skills**

Moderating your skills is very important for business development. All the female respondents had to take courses to improve their work, some respondents took these courses online, some did take help from YouTube and some took proper classes in the non-vocational institute. *“Resin artwork requires attention to detail and precision, posing a challenge for me to meet customer demands accurately. I worked diligently at home, honing my skills and striving for perfection in my creations”* (Case study 13) as stated in the study of (Hookimsing & Essoo, 2003).

### **Finding Vendor**

It is a difficult task for female respondents to find vendors to buy raw materials to expand their business, it is easier for boys because they have contact outside the home which makes them easy to find but since women stay at home, they have no social contact outside and cannot find vendors. Without vendors, it is very difficult to make a profit in business (Case Study 16). These consequences are in line with the works of (Jebadurai, 2007).

### **Theme 3: Challenges and Solutions after Starting a Business**

#### **Family Disturbance**

Keeping business and family together is possible only because of good management. At the beginning of the business, all the female respondents faced the problem that they were not able to give time to their families because of doing business. *“At the outset, I faced the challenge of managing my business while taking care of my children. However, I overcame this obstacle through effective time management. I dedicated my days to household chores and parenting responsibilities, reserving my nights for business-related tasks. Despite the toll on my sleep and health, I ensured that my family life remained undisturbed”* (Case Study 7) as described in the study (Chinomona & Maziriri 2015).

#### **Health Issues**

Student’s respondent who trades business with studies also affected their health. Due to lack of sleep, they have to face many health problems. *“My studies were initially impacted by the demands of the business. To address this, I adjusted my schedule, dedicating time to my studies at night and seeking assistance from my mother when orders became overwhelming”* (Case Study 14) In line with the study Vijayaragavan, (2014).

#### **Over Burden**

Doing all the household chores, giving full time to their family, and also running the business affairs became too heavy a burden on their shoulders. Due to overburden some of the respondents decided to leave the business but it was not a wise decision to stop the running business so to solve the problem they kept maids with them which help them with household work thus their burden decreased stated in the study of Choudhry et al (2019).

#### **Create Audience**

Akhila (2018) described that starting a business is not a difficult task, but growing this business is a challenge. The female respondents created their PR and advertised their products through bloggers, and because of the hashtags of these bloggers, their followers and customers grew more and more. *“After starting the business I established social media accounts on Instagram and Facebook, branding my business as Wrap Diaries, and shared them with my contacts. My followers began to grow steadily, marking the initial success of my business”* (Case Study 4).

### **Theme 4: Benefits of Starting a Business**

#### **Strong Communication Skills**

For the female respondents who lived at home and had a domestic life, they felt very hesitant to talk to strangers. Running a business without strong communication was difficult. Online things sell only because of businessman’s words. After starting the business, she can now deal with all kinds of customers herself, which she couldn’t do before because she was a girl. Due to their own business and income, the self-confidence of the female respondents increased and at the same time, their personalities also improved as stated in the study of Balasundaram et al (2010).

#### **Help from Family**

Seeing the respondents working so hard and giving cover to their business, their family members also started supporting them and also started appreciating their work, which encouraged them to

start a big business. They would help her in every matter, wherever she faced any problem. Besides, whenever her orders increased, the family members themselves would get the work done together with her so that her burden would be reduced. *“I express gratitude to Allah for my son's involvement in managing the financial accounts, as I am unaware of the exact figures of accounting”* (Case Study 6, 9).

### **Employment Creation**

After running her own business, she started employment creation. She hired new staff because of her growing business, due to which she became a woman who gave a source of income to other people. *“After my crafting business flourished, I expanded my services to include event decoration for birthdays and wedding functions. I created a separate Instagram account called "Events by Craftastics" to promote my event planning services. This decision proved successful, as I began receiving orders for various family functions. To manage the increasing demand, I hired additional workers to help organize and execute successful events”* (Case study 6, 15).

### **Discussion**

Pakistan is a developing country where Gender discrimination is rampant. Women faced many problems in achieving empowerment. The researcher examines the various obstacles and barriers that hinder women's progress in this field and analyzes the impact of these challenges on their empowerment. Women respondents have faced challenges such as limited access to capital, lack of networks, and societal biases. However, the digital economy offers a more level playing field, allowing women to start and grow businesses without these traditional constraints. Women also faced many challenges after starting their businesses, as they run their businesses through social media they received appropriate messages from male customers because they are women, and family disturbance issues faced by all women because they do not give proper time to their children, student's entrepreneur after starting business faced the issue of their study disturbance. The study also investigates the role of digital technologies in promoting women's entrepreneurship and empowerment. According to the above themes, women faced a lot of challenges to start their own online business in today's digital society. Digital entrepreneurship refers to the creation and management of businesses that operate primarily online. All women used social media apps like Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook to run their business, they mostly use Instagram for selling products and WhatsApp for regular communication with customers. Some of them also used the Draz app (an online shopping app) to sell their products. Digital entrepreneurship can provide women with greater flexibility and work-life balance. Many women face challenges in balancing their professional and personal responsibilities, particularly due to societal expectations and traditional gender roles. Dong & Khan (2023) indicates in their studies digital entrepreneurship allows women to work from home or remotely, giving them more control over their time and enabling them to balance their work and personal lives more effectively. After starting an online business all women become successful people of the society. They overcame all their difficulties and flourished in their business. After starting their own business, they become confident because they are now the financially strong woman of the society. Online business not only gave benefit to them but also their family become financially strong. It also gave benefits to govt as the govt has no jobs for youth because of the weak economy. In this Era where there is no job for males, it is a good opportunity for females to start their own business at home through digital media with less investment.

## **Conclusion**

Social media Apps like Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook, give opportunities to women to start their home-based business through these apps. They easily do their jobs in the premises of their homes and become financially strong. The researcher highlights the significant potential of digital entrepreneurship in empowering women economically and socially. It emphasizes the flexibility, work-life balance, and global reach that digital platforms offer, enabling women to overcome traditional barriers to entry into the business world. Through digital entrepreneurship, women can tap into new markets, expand their business opportunities, and achieve financial independence. Additionally, digital platforms provide a sense of community and support, allowing women entrepreneurs to connect with like-minded individuals and share resources and knowledge. However, the researcher also acknowledges the challenges and barriers that women may still face in digital entrepreneurship. The digital gender divide, online harassment, and biases in funding and investment opportunities are significant obstacles that need to be addressed. It is crucial to adopt a multi-faceted approach to tackle these challenges, including policy interventions, education and training programs, and initiatives to promote gender equality in the digital economy.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the above themes, here are some recommendations to empower women:

### **1. Conduct further research**

Conduct further research to explore more challenges because there are some limitations in this research.

### **2. Policy interventions**

Advocate for policy interventions that promote women's empowerment in the digital economy.

### **3. Education and training programs**

Develop and implement education and training programs specifically cooking, baking, arts and Crafts, printing, dress designing, etc for women in digital entrepreneurship.

### **4. Mentorship and networking opportunities**

Establish mentorship programs and networking opportunities for women entrepreneurs in the digital space. This can help create a supportive community where women can connect, share experiences, and access guidance and support from successful entrepreneurs.

### **5. Collaboration with stakeholders**

Collaborate with various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private sector entities, to create a comprehensive and inclusive ecosystem for women in digital entrepreneurship.

### **6. Raise awareness**

Raise awareness about the benefits and opportunities of digital entrepreneurship for women through various channels, such as workshops, conferences, and media campaigns.

### **7. Monitor and evaluate progress**

Continuously monitor and evaluate the progress of initiatives aimed at empowering women in digital entrepreneurship

#### **8. Pre-Entrepreneurial training programs**

The Government should start some training programs for women which will be useful in starting their businesses as well as some training programs for them.

#### **9. Help Line Call Center**

The Government should make a helpline call center and promote these helpline numbers through social media so that women get all the information regarding their businesses.

#### **10. Skills Training Institutions Only for Women**

The government should create some institutions only for women through which they can easily improve their skills or learn new skills to start their businesses and become entrepreneurs.

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