

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Challenges, Support Ecosystem, and Survivability Dynamics of Women Entrepreneurs in Urban Area of Pakistan

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Abstract: The primary aim of this research study is to critically analyse the dynamic interplay between socio-cultural constraints and economic coping strategies among urban women entrepreneurs in Pakistan. This involved multi-faceted approach to first identify and categorized the core systematic barriers, especially the limitation imposed by gender inequality i.e., patriarchal control and financial execution, which restrict the growth and formalization of women-led micro enterprise. At the same time, the study aimed to investigate how well self-driven strategies specially, the quick uptake of digital platforms can get around traditional market limitations and overcome physical mobility barriers. Lastly, the study aimed to derive strong, contextualised theoretical implications and practical policy recommendations necessary for building a truly inclusive an enabling entrepreneurial environment within the urban Pakistani context by assessing the applicability and usefulness of current institutional and policy support mechanisms against the lived realities and needs of these entrepreneurs. Purposive sampling technique is used in this study. Semi- structured interviews and phenomenology are used in this qualitative study to examine the experience the barriers of 30 women and determine their barriers to becoming sustainable entrepreneurs in urban area of Pakistan.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurs, Women Chambers of Commerce and Industry (WCCIs), Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), Survivability

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is defined as the process of establishing, developing, and operating a new business while accepting all of the risks associated with making a profit (Sapiro, 2024). Entrepreneurship is not limited to any particular gender. The concept of entrepreneurship is widely recognised as an essential way of addressing issues such as unemployment, poverty, and recession on a global scale (Baid, n.d.; Sapiro, 2024). According to (Rodrik & Stiglitz, 2025), the development of new business ventures and the rapid expansion of existing enterprises are both key inputs in the economy for nation. It has been observed that the economic development of a nation is impossible to achieve without the promotion of women's educational and professional opportunities (Iqbal et al., 2025). As a means of achieving this goal, entrepreneurship is regarded as the most viable option, the empowerment and participation of women is regarded as a crucial instrument for the growth of a nation (Işık et al., 2025). The term "woman entrepreneur" refers to a woman who takes on all of the risks in order to satisfy her demands and create a financially independent life for herself (Panwar et al., 2025).

According to (Ghag et al., 2025), a term "women entrepreneur" refers to women who engage in the process of starting and managing a business operation, as well as driving the business forward via the experiences of creativity, risk taking, coordination, and leadership. A French economist, Richard Cantillon, is the first person to establish the idea of entrepreneurs in the 18th century. After that, a number of other economists, including Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, and others, have made remarkable

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contributions to the field of economics (Thomas, 2024). Moreover, Muslims also participate in business practices according to teaching of Islamic practices (Anisah et al., 2017). Prior researchers investigate the significant relationship between the concept of Islamic entrepreneurship and the Islamic concept regarding entrepreneurship (Raza et al., 2025). The western concept of entrepreneurship measures success in terms of profit, whereas the Islamic concept focusses on entrepreneurial, ethical, socioeconomic, and faith-related aspects, with an emphasis on maximum output while also ensuring the fulfilment of religious goals for women (Kojana, 2020). The concept of women entrepreneurship is not a new one. Prior to the 20th century, women had been running their own enterprises for decades in order to reduce poverty and to enhance their income (Ogbari et al., 2024a).

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), women entrepreneurs not only establish themselves, but they also provide employment opportunities for other women and inspire them to improve their standard of lifestyle (Qadeera et al., 2024a). In addition to this, it is a significant contributor to the reduction of poverty and serves as a more beneficial half for the society are women entrepreneurs (Ogbari et al., 2024b). Women entrepreneurs in Pakistan, a society that is dominated by men to a significant extent, women are restricted to staying inside the home (Rizvi et al., 2023). This stops them from obtaining an education, entering the job market, and other opportunities; hence, gender bias is another obstacle for women who want to start their own businesses (Singh & Dash, 2021). Women entrepreneurship has been regarded as an essential means of fostering economic growth not only among local communities but also on a global scale (Anwar & Saleem, 2025). Women entrepreneurs are at the forefront of these developments (Qadeera et al., 2024), which is a result of the fact that entrepreneurship is helping to shift the traditional beliefs and norms of the society in Pakistan (Rizvi et al., 2025). Despite this, the majority of women entrepreneurs in developing nations have limited resources and frequently participate in urban business activities (Ogundana et al., 2021). Prior researchers investigate the similar findings which are observed for urban's women entrepreneurs (Correa et al., 2024).

Previous research studies have shown the women's contributions to economic empowerment through successful entrepreneurial activities and find the significant relationship for these activities which can boost the economic growth (Bobek et al., 2023). Numerous positive outcomes have been attributed to women's entrepreneurial efforts, including the creation of employment opportunities, the promotion of social inclusion, the promotion of gender equality, the promotion of wellbeing, and the improvement of living standards through the reduction of poverty (Ogbari et al., 2024). Due to the fact that women entrepreneurs serve as a vital power for the development of inclusive economics, emerging economies reap the benefits of women's entrepreneurship (Pleyers et al., 2025). Businesses that are managed by women all over the world create both important job opportunities and innovations, as well as enhance household income while simultaneously lowering poverty rates (Tang, 2022).

Given that women make up almost 50% of the population yet are significantly under-represented in business, Pakistan has the ability to grow economically and socially (Hoor-ul-Ain & Iraqi, 2022). Among South Asian nations, Pakistan has the lowest percentage of female entrepreneurs. According to statistics, barely less than 10% of small and medium-sized businesses are owned by women; in contrast, Bangladesh and India show greater results due to their specific programs for female entrepreneurs (Zeb & Ihsan, 2020). The gender gap in Pakistani women's entrepreneurship is caused by a number of factors (A. Raza et al., 2024). Women are prevented from launching new businesses and managing those that already exist for expansion due to a variety of complex societal factors, institutional barriers, financial difficulties, and technological limitations (Ajiva et al., 2024). These limiting variables have been the subject of numerous research. The biggest obstacle keeping women from engaging in entrepreneurial activity is financial exclusion. Lack of starting funds, discrimination in financing processes, and inability to produce enough security to meet criteria are some of the obstacles that female entrepreneurs face when trying to establish new enterprises (Irwin et al., 2025).

The primary aim of this research study is to critically analyse the dynamic interplay between socio-cultural constraints and economic coping strategies among urban women entrepreneurs in Pakistan. This involved multi-faceted approach to first identify and categorized the core systematic barriers, especially the limitation imposed by gender inequality i.e., patriarchal control and financial execution, which restrict the growth and formalization of women-led micro enterprise. At the same time, the study aimed to investigate how well self-driven strategies specially, the quick uptake of digital platforms can get around traditional market limitations and overcome physical mobility barriers. Lastly, the study aimed to derive strong, contextualised theoretical implications and practical policy recommendations necessary for building a truly inclusive an enabling entrepreneurial environment within the urban Pakistani context by assessing the applicability and usefulness of current institutional and policy support mechanisms against the lived realities and needs of these entrepreneurs.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the primary challenges faced by women entrepreneurs operating in urban areas of Pakistan?

RQ2: What forms of public support are available for women's entrepreneurship, and how effectively do these programs operate in urban setting across Pakistan?

RQ3: What are the factors that contribute to women entrepreneur's survivability in the urban context of Pakistan?

Research Objectives

With a particular emphasis on the primary challenges that women entrepreneurs in Pakistan face when beginning and operating their businesses, the factors that lead women to give up on entrepreneurship, and the ways in which social integration can support the growth and success of female entrepreneurs, the purpose of this qualitative research study is to investigate the experiences of women entrepreneurs in Pakistan. The aim of this research study is to provide guidelines and interventions to policy makers that can targeted to promote sustainability and supporting the new startups for supporting female entrepreneurs in urban area of Pakistan. These findings will be obtained through in-depth interviews and the use of phenomenology research design.

1. To identify the primary challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in urban areas of Pakistan.
2. To explore the forms of public support are available for women's entrepreneurship, and how effectively do these programs operate in urban settings across Pakistan.
3. To examine are the factors that contribute to women entrepreneurs' survivability in the urban contexts of Pakistan.

Literature Review

Entrepreneurship has geographic and physical aspects in the connection of the society (Lamotte, 2025). The context of entrepreneurship is an essential component which has not received as much attention in the research for women (Kirsch et al., 2025). For women home and family is a very important component of life, therefore, women frequently choose the most practical location for business is the home (Jones & Nadin, 2025). The socio-culture norms in Pakistan restrict women to start home-based business because women have few options to start their business in developing country like Pakistan (Sarfraz et al., 2025). Women must understand the factors which drives them to mange a business to become an entrepreneur in underdeveloped country like Pakistan (Kalaivani et al., 2025).

In the literature, the factors which provide the survival for entrepreneurs, social networks have discussed that activities (Ma et al., 2025). Social networks are more significant and stronger in urban areas as compared to rural areas, particularly when it comes to acquire micro-loans for start-up or survival of the business for women (Zhang et al., 2025). To access resources and opportunities for entrepreneurship women

entrepreneurs required social capital for facilitate and maintain their business (Trivedi et al., 2025). Social networks contribute to the promotion of social capital, which is essential for women entrepreneurs. Urban women entrepreneur's probability to earn is greater income is increased as a result of the more employment possibilities available to them in both informal and formal ways (Lehri et al., 2025). Moreover, the opportunities of these employments are not consistent. Urban women entrepreneurs, on the other hand have to face a number of social cultural limitation, a reduced number of job opportunities, lower level of jobs, greater competition and restriction from society, and restricted access to the market, which make them an entrepreneur more difficult (Sarfraz et al., 2025). These obstacles that exists between women entrepreneurs in urban areas of Pakistan. The inequalities between urban and rural areas are demonstrated by the average income values for urban areas. For instance, research suggests that the average income and spending of an urban individual is twice as much as that of a rural individual (Hao et al., 2025).

Methodology

The main goal of this research study is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the dynamic interplay that exists between socio-cultural restrictions and economic strategies for coping among urban women entrepreneurs in Pakistan. The research study is exploratory and based on qualitative research design and focused on understanding and lived experiences and strategic adaptations of women entrepreneurs in the urban context of Pakistan. Data was collected from major urban areas in Pakistan (i.e., Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, and Quetta). The focus on urban areas was intentional, given the higher density of market activity, digital access, and institutional presence. The study utilized a purposive sample of 30 women entrepreneurs. This size was determined based on the principle of thematic saturation, ensuring depth of insight rather than statistical generalization. Five respondent was selected from every city who were involved in different business sector including handicrafts, food service, dress designing, professional service, educational services, e-commerce that are representing both informal and formally register businesses, with tenure ranging from 1 year to more. Primary data collection method is used in this research study. In- depth interviews are conducted from respondents who were willing to give interview from 30 to 45 minutes and were recorded with the explicit consent of the participants.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, data was collected from five entrepreneurs' women from each urban city. Six urban cities were selected for data collection (Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, and Quetta). 10 open ended questions were asked from each respondent to find the research objectives of the research study. Age group is from 25 to 50 of respondents who were engaged in entrepreneurial activities. Education level is bachelor level to M Phil level of the respondent who belongs to different cities of Pakistan. 87% women are married, 10 percent are unmarried, and 3% are separated. Following themes are created from the interviews:

Theme 1: Patriarchal control & mobility constraints (PCMC)

"Socially mandated gender roles, the need for explicit family approval, and security-related mobility restrictions fundamentally limit women's ability to operate and network in the public business sphere across all urban area"

Coding: PCMC (patriarchal control & mobility constraints)

Sub-codes: SOP-FAM (Social Opposition- Family), MOB-SEC (Mobility/Security), SEG-NET (Segregation/Networking), WLD-BUR (Workload/ Double Burden).

Theme 2: Financial Exclusion & Capital Access (FECA)

"Despite the presence of numerous banks, women face systematic financial exclusion due to lack of collateral (land ownership) and low financial literacy, resulting in low uptake of formal credit and dependence on informal funding"

Coding: FECA (Financial Exclusion & Capital Access)
Sub-codes: LACK-COL (lack of Collateral), LIT-BANK (Literacy/Banking), GAP-LOAN (Loan Uptake Gap), FUN-BIAS (Funding Bias/ Traditional vs. Tech).

Theme 3: Digital Adaptation & Market Bypass (DAMB)

“The Strategic use of digital platforms, e-commerce, and social media serves as a vital survival and growth mechanism, enabling women to bypass physical market restrictions and directly access consumers and niche high value markets”

Coding: DAMB (Digital Adaptation & Market Bypass)
Sub-codes: BYP-MOB (Bypass Mobility), SOC-MAR (Social Media Marketing), E-LOGIS (E-Commerce/ Logistics), NICHE-EXP (Niche market/ Export).

Theme 4: Institutional Relevance & Utility (IRUT)

“Public support programs, training initiatives, and incubation centres are often available but suffer from low utility, as they frequently prioritize formalized, tech-based startups, failing to address the specific needs of the vast informal and traditional micro-enterprise sector”

Coding: IRUT (institutional Relevance & Utility)
Sub-codes: SUP-DISC (Support Disconnect/ Niche Focus), FORM-EXC (Formalization Exclusion), QUA-TRAIN (Quality/ Relevance of Training), ADV-EF (Advocacy/Effectiveness).

Theme 5: Resilience, Education, and Formalization (REF)

“Long-term business survivability is achieved through a combination of high personal resilience, strategic business acumen gained through education, and the critical step of business formalization (registration/Tax compliance)”

Coding: REF (Resilience, Education, and Formalization)
Sub-codes: PERS-RES (Personal Resilience), EDUC (Education), FAM-END (Family Endorsement), BUS-FORM (Business Formalization).

The three-research question (RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3) on women entrepreneurs in urban area of Pakistan can be categorised into three overarching themes. While the core challenges and success factors remain broadly similar across the urban centres of Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, and Quetta, the intensity and manifestation of these factors vary based on the city’s specific socio-economic and institutional context.

Theme 1: Socio-Cultural & Mobility Constraints (RQ1 focused)

This theme addresses the traditional, gendered barriers that restrict a women’s entry and operation in the public business sphere.

City	Prominent Characteristics	Specific Manifestations
Karachi	The Economic hub: High population density, high commercial activity, but also high security concerns and weak public transport.	Safety and Commute: High risk of harassment and security issues; reliance on costly transport; mobility restriction and physical security are an issue
Lahore	The cultural centre: Deeply rooted traditional Punjabi culture with strong family structure; emerging business and IT hub.	Patriarchal pressure and time: strongest societal pressure to maintain the double burden (Home/Work); greater family resistance to public

City	Prominent Characteristics	Specific Manifestations
Islamabad	The capital and planned city: Higher literacy; modern infrastructure, more liberal social environment with strong government institutions	Networking Gatekeeping: Socia mobility is higher, but formal business networks are highly male dominant.
Rawalpindi	The Garrison and commercial twin: Conservative culture with a focus on SME/traditional trade; close to Islamabad’s resources.	Traditional trade barriers: Challenges are more pronounce in traditional supply chains and wholesale markets (like Raja Bazar) where social segregation is strict.
Faisalabad	The textile and industrial hub: Economy dominated by manufacturing /industrial capital, which is traditionally male.	Industry Exclusion: Exclusion from the industrial and manufacturing value chain; women’s entrepreneurship is often relegated to textiles, clothing, or home-based services based or informal.
Quetta	The provincial capital and traditional society: Highly conservative social norms; lower literacy/ financial inclusion rates; focused on small trade.	Severe Mobility and risk: Most accurate mobility restrictions due to cultural norms and security issues; women’s businesses are overwhelmingly home-based or informal.

Theme 2: Formal Support Access and Effectiveness (RQ2 focused)

This theme examines the availability, awareness, and actual utility of public and institutional support mechanisms.

City	Prominent Characteristics	Effectiveness
Karachi/Lahore	Financial and institutional density: Host the main branches of SBP, major commercial banks of Pakistan.	High awareness: High availability of financial schemes (like SBP loans) and training but low uptake due to collateral requirements and complex formalization processes.
Islamabad/ Rawalpindi	Incubation and Government focus: Having many National Incubation Centres (NICs), government bodies (SMEDA)	Incubation Bias: strong focus on tech-based and formal startups; many homes based or traditional service-based entrepreneurs feel the support is too niche and high-tech for their need.
Faisalabad	Industrial Focus: Has a major Chamber of Commerce (FCC&I) but with a strong industrial/male focus.	Sectoral Mismatch: Support is geared towards large-scale manufacturing, leaving women’s micro-enterprises in the informal sector with little relevance assistance to their skills.
Quetta	Remote and underdeveloped: limited institutional presence; lower digital penetration; higher reliance on NGO/ international agencies.	Resource scarcity: Support is minimal and fragmented; extreme necessity for microfinance and very basic business development services, with digital literacy programs being a major gap.

Theme 3: Digital Adaptation & Internal Resilience (RQ3 focused)

This theme is focused on the internal characteristics and strategic use of technology that contribute to a women’s survival and growth.

City	Prominent Characteristics	Key Survivability Factors
Karachi/Lahore	High Digital penetration: large consumer base, high access to e-commerce and logistics networks.	E-commerce mastery: Success is highly dependent on effective use of social media marketing (Facebook, Instagram) to bypass physical market restrictions and utilize specialized, low-cost logistics.
Islamabad/Rawalpindi	High education/IT access: Concentration of universities, tech startups, and highly educated workforce.	Formalization and innovation: survivability linked to business formalization (NTN/SECP registration) and the pursuit of high-value, innovative service-sector business (e.g., IT, consulting).
Faisalabad	Home-based Artisanship: Strong traditional skills in embroidery, garments, and design.	Niche market access: Survival involves leveraging digital platforms to access higher-end niche markets (local/export) for their textile products, escaping the low-price wholesale market.
Quetta	Extreme physical constraints: Minimal physical mobility necessitates alternative channels.	Family endorsement and home-based reliance: Success is almost entirely dependent on strong, active family endorsement.

Theme 4: Institutional Relevance & Utility (RQ2 focussed)

This theme analyses the availability and perceived quality of non-financial public support (training, incubation, advocacy) provided by government agencies and Women Chambers of Commerce and Industry (WCCIs).

City	Relevance and Gaps in institutional support
Karachi/Lahore	Advocacy Vs. Implementation: Active ACCIs provide strong advocacy and networking, but there’s a disconnect between high-levels policy support and on the ground implementation of schemes at the bank level.
Islamabad/Rawalpindi	High availability, low specificity: Abundance of NICs and SMEDA offices, but often training is often too generic or too focused on high-tech startups, missing the mark of traditional micro-enterprises.
Faisalabad/ Quetta	Sectoral mismatch and scarcity: Support is either skewed towards large-scale manufacturing (Faisalabad) or is scarce and fragmented (Quetta), often relying on sporadic NGO intervention rather than sustained government programs.

Theme 5: Resilience, Education, and Formalization (RQ3 focussed)

This theme focused on the internal factors and strategic choices (education, mindset, and formalizing the business) that enable long-term sustainability and growth.

City	Critical internal Factor for Survivability
Islamabad/ Karachi	Use of formal legal/ financial structure (NTN/SEP registration), and scaling beyond the informal sector.
Lahore/Quetta	Family endorsement and resilience: Survival is highly correlated with active support from male family members. High personal resilience is necessary to constantly manage the social backlash alongside business demand.
Faisalabad/Rawalpindi	Strategic niche selection: Survivability depends on the ability to choose business niches (e.g., specialized clothing, services) that minimize direct confrontation with the male-dominated industrial/wholesale sector.

Discussion

Investigation of Constraints and Adaptation in Urban Area

This qualitative study explores complex dynamics defined by a constant negotiation between deeply entrenched socio-cultural constraints and strategic, self driven economic adaptation. This study drawn from 30 women from 6 cities of Pakistan, 5 women from each city to explore the vast understanding for women entrepreneurs. The discussion synthesized the findings across the Five core themes. Theme 1 Patriarchal Control and mobility Constraints (PCMC), theme 2 Financial Exclusion and Capital Access (FECA), theme 3 Digital Adaptation and Market Bypass (DAMB), Theme 4 Institutional Relevance and Utility (IRUT), and theme 5 Resilience, Education, and Formalization (REF) to investigate the reality of women entrepreneurs in urban area or Pakistan.

The Pervasive Nature of Structural Impediments

The structural limitation that defined the operating environment is defined by Theme 1 and theme 2. Theme 1 define the fundamental barriers to market participation, directly connecting to the segregation of networking opportunities. According to theme 3 this forces many enterprises to be home-based, suffer the double burden and confining business operations to socially accepted private spheres. Simultaneously, theme 2 formalizes this exclusion in the economic environment. Moreover, theme 2 and theme 3 defines the difficulties in accessing commercial credit worthiness and lack of collateral for worthiness for allocation of loan opportunities. Theme 4 and theme 5 indicates the structural bias reliance on costly, and less institutional relevance, finding genuine scaling and perpetuating the visible gap between male and female entrepreneurship.

Digital Bypass and Self-Propelled Resilience

Entrepreneurs have developed formidable mitigating strategies, in respect of the structural barriers according to theme 1 and theme 2. The adoption of strategic digital plate form is merely a preference but an essential survival mechanism. Theme 1 allows entrepreneurs to effectively get advantages from mobility constraints by establishing presence a damaging transaction remotely. Theme 4 and theme 5 enables direct engagement with customers, democratizing market access and allowing for the development of profitable niche market without the prerequisite of physical presence. This digital access is underpinned by theme 3. The necessity for continuous negotiation and adaptation against societal pressure has created high personal resilience. Furthermore, according to theme 5 education and business are not just a valuable asset but prerequisites for navigating both the digital marketplace and the necessary step towards formalization.

However, the reliance on individual resilience highlights a significant systematic failing success often depends on extraordinary personal efforts rather than an enabling ecosystem.

The Institutional Disconnect

The theme 3 and theme 4 exposes a critical policy gap. While program exists, they frequently suffer from lack of support. With the help of focusing resources and training on formalization profound support disconnect. By focusing on training and formalization resources, often high-tech sectors, institutions neglect women operating in the informal, traditional, and small enterprise sector. Theme 5 emphasises to lead to formalization exclusion, as the majority of entrepreneurs find the available support irrelevant to their immediate needs such as scaling home production or navigating local logistics thereby undermining the utility of these programs and stalling the broader transition from informal to formal economic participation as sustained entrepreneurs.

Theoretical and Practical Implication of the Study

The finding and conclusion from the experience of Women entrepreneurs from urban area of Pakistan offer significance contribution across both academic theory and real-worlds policy application.

Theoretical Implication

This research study significantly explores the existing theories on entrepreneurship, development economics, and gender studies by introducing contextualized framework:

1. Contextualizing institutional voids (IRUT)

This research challenges traditional western-centric models of entrepreneurship by highlighting the concept of an “institutional relevance void” in developing nations. While existing theory acknowledged “institutional void” (gaps in market supporting intermediaries), this study shows that the issue is not always absence, but misalignment. The theme of Institutional Relevance and Utility (IRUT) suggest that government and non-profit support structures often fail because their mandated and training re designed for formal, high growth startup, rendering them useless to the vast majority of women operating in the informal, home-based economy. This calls for a theoretical shift from analysing “what is missing” and “What is irrelevant”.

2. The digital sphere as a “Boundary Object” (DAMB and PCMC)

The study provides as empirical basis for theorizing the digital sphere (theme DAMB) not just a marketing tool, but a “boundary object” a concept used in sociological literature to describe something that is flexible enough to adapt to local needs and constraints, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity. The use of social media allows entrepreneurs to satisfy the constraints of Patriarchal control and mobility constraints (PCMC) operating from home while simultaneously accessing commercial market. Theoretically, the digital platform acts as a mediator between the private, restrictive cultural sphere and the public, competitive economic sphere, a novel function unique to contexts defined gender segregation.

3. Reframing Financial

The findings on Financial Exclusion and Capital Access (FECA) contributes to financial inclusion theory by demonstrating that the challenges is not just one of access, but of assets-based exclusion. The systematic lack of collateral due to familial assets ownership prevents women from accessing formal credit, regardless of their business’s cash flow or profitability. This necessitates that researchers shift focus from traditional measures of financial inclusion (e.g., bank account ownership) to collateral parity mechanisms as the true bottleneck for entrepreneurial scaling in gender-segregated capital markets.

Practical Implications

This research study provides the clear and actionable guidelines and directions for financial institutions, policy makers and business development organizations operating in Pakistan and similar underdeveloped countries.

1. Policy Prioritization and Resource Allocation (IRUT and FECA)

Policymakers should immediately reallocate resource away from generalized, high-cost incubation programs and towards targeted interventions that address the FECA and IRUT gaps. This includes mandating cash flow-based credit products (as recommended) and establishing training that directly address the needs of the informal sector, such as quality control, supply chain management, and small scale digital transactions, ensuring institutional utility is optimized.

2. Designing the Mobility Bypass" ecosystem (PCMC and DAMB)

Business support organization should invest in and promote secure logistics and co-working infrastructures. This practically manifests as subsidized access to secure, women-operated delivery services and the creation of physically safe networking hubs that allow and maximizes the market reach afforded by DAMB.

3. Leveraging Informal Resilience for Formalization (REF)

Organization should recognize that Resilience, Education, and Formalization (REF) are interconnected. Instead of imposing complex, top-down formalization process, there is a need to create tangible "Formalization Incentives." This include making the process simple (a single-window digital registration) and immediately rewarding it with preferential access to local government procurement contracts or corporate supply chains, providing a clear and immediate financial justification for moving out of the high-risk, informal domain.

Conclusion

This qualitative research study explores the entrepreneurial realities in urban area of Pakistan, it also explores the resilience of women, who have brilliantly leveraged the digital sphere to counteracts socio-cultural immobility and financial invisibility. However, for growth to be truly inclusive, policy must shift its focus from rewarding already successful, formalized business to dismantling the constraints faced by the majority. Addressing the root causes identified in theme 1 and theme 2 and aligning institutional support with the practical, traditional needs of the sector, remain essential to transforming individual adaptation into sustainable nationwide economic empowerment. The most comprehensive theoretical farmwork that accounts for the full scope of the study's findings is the Theory of Entrepreneurship in Institutional Voids (EIV). The framework of this exploratory study is specifically designed to analyse business activity in emerging or developing economies' where market supporting institutions both formal and informal are absent, weak, or unreliable. The EIV theory directly accommodates the study's complex causality Patriarchal Control and Mobility Constraints (theme 1), theme 2, theme 3, theme 4, and theme 5 as manifestations of these institutional voids. Specifically, theme 3 reflects a void in informal, socio-cultural institutions that fail to guarantee equal mobility and labour access. Theme 2 is the classic void in formal financial market; and theme 3 identifies a support mechanism void where forma institutions are present but functionally irrelevant. Crucially, the theory provides a robust lens through which to analyse the entrepreneur's responses: theme 4 and theme 5 are understood as the entrepreneurial strategies used to mitigate and substitute for these failures. DAMB, for instance, substitutes for the void in physical market access, while REF represents the essential internal creation of human and social capital necessary fro survival and eventual formalization outside the void. By adopting EIV, the study moves beyond merely describing internal resources (as RBT does) to offer a powerful, holistic explanation of how female-led enterprises achieve competitive advantage despite being structurally constrained by the environment.

Future Recommendations

The future recommendation for festering women's entrepreneurship in urban area of Pakistan must begin by comprehensively addressing the deep-seated constraints related to gender dominations and mobility in society as well as financial support according to theme 1 and theme 2. The counteract the mobility restrictions imposed by theme 1, policy interventions should focus on creating subsidized, secure logistics corridors utilizing female entrepreneurship and establishment of women only co-working and networking hubs in commercial centres to formalize professional interactions outside the private environment. Simultaneously,

reforming the theme 4 landscape is essential' these necessities a fundamental shift by microfinance institutions towards cash flow-based credit scoring, leveraging digital transaction history instead of immovable property as collateral and designing small scale working capital loan product that are culturally sensitive and minimized documentation requirements, thereby PayPass the structural issue of non-ownership of assets. Furthermore, leveraging the existing success in digital adaptation and market bypass requires moving beyond basic digital literacy to offer advanced skills training in areas like SEO and e-commerce data analytic, alongside subsidizing integration tools to professionalize inventory and order management, allowing entrepreneurs to maximize the market bypass potential of online platforms. This adaptation must be supported by enhancing Resilience, Education, and Formalization through structured, formal peer-to-peer mentorship networks, where established women entrepreneurs guide new entrants, and by linking formal business registration to tangible incentives, such as preferential access to public procurements contracts. Finally, overcoming the institutional relevance and utility deficit according to theme 5 demands a localization support: mandates must be established to diversify training curricula away from an exclusive focus on high-tech startups to include essential skills for traditional sectors (like mega sourcing and quality control), and institutions must implement a simplified, low-cost, single-window digital registration process to provide a clear economic incentive for the voluntary migration of micro-enterprises out of the informal economy.

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