



RESEARCH PAPER

Online Engagement to Offline Empowerment: Exploring the Socio-economic, Cultural, and Psychological Challenges of Women Digital Entrepreneurship

¹Dr. Sadia Jabeen, ²Dr. Sonia Omer and ³Syeda Darakshan Kokab

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Virtual University of Pakistan
2. Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, University of the Punjab, Lahore
3. BS Sociology Student, Virtual University of Pakistan

Corresponding Author sadiajabeen@vu.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

In Pakistan, women are increasingly using digital platforms for income-generation and to empower them financially. This research aims to investigate the use of social media as a source of women entrepreneurship and to explore the socio-economic, cultural, and psychological challenges they face in digital entrepreneurship. This study used a qualitative research design. Through the purposive sampling method, fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis. The results suggest that social media has empowered women through low-cost entrepreneurial entry, expanded visibility, networking, and income generation. Increased economic independence, confidence, and decision-making power within households were also key findings of the study. Digital entrepreneurship motivated women for self-directed digital learning, health issues awareness, and mobilization of the family. Study concluded that social media platforms create meaningful opportunities for women's empowerment, but their transformative potential is constrained by socio-cultural and technical limitations. Targeted interventions in digital literacy, financial inclusion, and social support systems are crucial to sustaining and scaling women's digital empowerment.

Keywords: Digital Empowerment, Social Media, Women's Empowerment, Qualitative Research, Digital Entrepreneurship

Introduction

The advancement in today's digital technologies has significantly altered the dynamics of many factors in societies, including ways and means of interaction, disseminating information, and certain collective actions that speak of culture and traits in any society (Amedie, 2015). The transformation of social media platforms from a recreational space to an awareness medium has been a significant element in social change in most of the societies (Damota, 2019). Pakistan, being a developing country, does not reveal a positive picture for women's empowerment. Most of the indicators in this sphere present a dismal picture (Ahmad et al, 2016). Gender inequality in the country is primarily seen in the deeply embedded social and cultural practices. In such a scenario, the social media platforms offer unparalleled prospects for women to express their opinions, obtain significant awareness of their rights, and challenge harmful patriarchal norms (Afsheen & Idrees, 2022). The usage of different media platforms is increasing among women in Pakistan with each passing year, be it Facebook, X, TikTok, etc. Multiple reports reveal that 56.4 percent of the adult population in Pakistan is using social media platforms, and 35 percent of them are women. Though there is still a gender divide reported, where men hold a greater number in terms of usage of these platforms (Kepios, 2025). These dynamics are much more visible in urban Pakistan, where women, along with men, enjoy a privileged life in terms of better facilities and better access, even in the utilization of media platforms.

As a matter of fact, social media as a catalyst has proved to be a powerful tool globally, where certain movements worldwide, for instance # MeToo movement has surpassed the boundaries and have proved to be an influential voice for marginalized groups, in particular women (O'Neil et al., 2018). Such movements have spoken loudly on issues of gender inequality, different forms of harassment, and workplace discrimination. In the case of Pakistan, the general but pressing issues like the rights of girls' education and child marriages have been addressed at these platforms. These have been topics that are traditionally overlooked due to societal pressures in both urban and rural parts of the country (Rafaqat & Shabbir, 2024; Muzaffar, et al., 2019). So, this study has an aim to explore the use of social media and digital media in empowering urban women by enhancing entrepreneurship, health awareness, social recognition, and skill development, and to identify the challenges and barriers faced by women engaging in digital entrepreneurship.

Literature Review

Besides, the actors in policy making in the country, like Pakistan, the government, social activists, women's rights agencies, and non-government organizations, have been found using social media platforms successfully in organizing protests, conducting seminars, and rallies to highlight pivotal issues related to women. In addition, coordination with international agencies through social media platforms results in pressure building and social action in the country, which usually turns in favor of women and their rights in Pakistan and impacts significantly in urban areas due to better education and access of women to media platforms (Saeed, 2019; Muzaffar, et al., 2020). Beyond the domain of awareness and activism, social media is an important means of education and skill-building among women in Pakistan. The online education means inform of different educational institutions is a major source of increasing literacy among the urban population in the country (Ameer & Hukamdad, 2025; Salam et. al. 2024).

Moreover, the usage of social media platforms in career building has been a game-changer for Pakistani women whose success has been eclipsed mostly due to restrictions on mobility or harassment cases when they are out of their homes. The online courses, tutorials, digital skills, financial literacy platforms, and jobs are empowering the urban women of this country in a great manner. The concept of entrepreneurship and online businesses has economically empowered Pakistani urban and peri-urban women who are promoting their businesses with the help of their Facebook or Instagram pages. Such economic contributions not only empower urban women but also challenge traditional gender roles within communities in the country (Jabeen, et al., 2024). Furthermore, key health issues in Pakistani women are mostly seen under the influence of social and cultural practices in the country.

The lack of education, awareness, and the patriarchal system have damaged women's health in the country, which is evident in many surveys, revealing poor health indicators among women in Pakistan. The issues related to maternal health, reproductive rights, child care, menstrual cycles, and hygiene have been questionable so far, as women's awareness of the issues in Pakistan is concerned (Asghar et. al., 2025; Zainab, Mansoor & Mansoor, 2023). The media platforms, for instance, videos and even WhatsApp groups in local languages, facilitate in bridging information gaps, in particular for women with low literacy. The government agencies and other institutions working on women's health help take advantage of these media platforms in disseminating information on women's health (Haq et al., 2024). Despite its transformative potential, the significant role of social media in urban Pakistan is marred by multiple issues. There is an element of digital divide even in the urban cities where access to the internet and information on the right use of media platforms is a challenge to urban Pakistani women (Shair et al., 2023). In addition, an element of fraud and online harassment has found to be visibly disturbing to women due to their virtual presence. The greater majority of women in Pakistan still do not hold right information on cybercrime and cyberbullying. Such elements discourage many women to

discontinue their businesses. Apart from online harassment, cybercrime, hacking of media platforms, and bank accounts are common. These are pervasive threats that undermine women's digital empowerment (Khan, Irshad, & Din, 2025).

Material and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, aiming to explore and understand the lived experiences of women in urban areas who used social media for empowerment. A phenomenological approach has been used to deeply examine how women in urban settings interpret and give meaning to their digital experiences in relation to their rights, agency, and social roles. In this regard, women from Rawalpindi and Islamabad were approached. Women aged 18 and above who were active on social media platforms were selected. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who met specific criteria via digital platform i.e., Facebook, WhatsApp, X (Twitter), and LinkedIn. Those women were included who run e-commerce businesses or use social media platforms for income, and those who have experience of using social media for more than one year. A total of 15 participants were selected for semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with the aid of a flexible guide that makes it possible to identify key topics and personalize stories. The in-depth interview data were transcribed and analyzed through thematic analysis. The process involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, analyzing patterns and themes throughout the story (e.g., power, skill building, resistance, change), reviewing and refining themes. We've connected what we've found in our study to existing thought and research and extended it (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Ethical Considerations

Informed (written or verbal) consent was obtained from the patients. All interviews were conducted in the participants' language of choice (Urdu or local dialect) and were culturally and religiously sensitive. Respondents were told they are under no obligation to participate and can stop taking the survey at any time. Names were kept anonymous.

Results and Discussion

The socio-demographic characteristic of the fifteen (15) respondents showed that the majority were young adults between 20 and 35 years, with a mean age of about 26.9 years. 60% of them were single and 40% married. The majority had some college education (60%), followed by postgraduates (13%), undergraduates actively studying at degree levels (14%), and secondary (13%). All the respondents were dwellers of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The entrepreneurial appearances ranged from 12-month-old start-ups to seven-year-old firms, and all the entrepreneurs had spent roughly 26 months actively pursuing e-commerce.

With respect to technological accessibility and platform use, all the participants possessed a personal smartphone with reliable access to the internet at home, and some also had laptops for business purposes. Instagram and WhatsApp were the most popular platforms (both 87%), followed by Facebook (53%) and TikTok (20%). The line of businesses was from women's modest wear (abaya/clothing) to handmade crafts (crochet/bags/jewelry) to home-based bakeries to personalized gifts, foodstuffs, and even household items.

Social Media as an Enabler of Women Entrepreneurship

The first and most prevalent theme was social media as a gateway for women entrepreneurs who experience restricted mobility and have limited startup capital. Social media at the outset presented itself as more than just a new mode of communication, but rather an alternative economic terrain that could avoid some of the old gatekeepers. It

focuses on affordability, accessibility, and ease of entry into Business. Participants were asked why they had moved their business online and whether social media had provided them with new opportunities. Respondents indicated that social media was breaking the traditional barriers to business entry, particularly for women who have been constrained by a lack of finances, limited mobility, or family responsibilities. Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook have been the bedrock of their entrepreneurial journey. As one of the respondents said, "Due to limited financial resources, starting a shop was not possible. Instagram seemed like a good platform to begin without much investment."

The Internet was a way to connect, as expressed by one of the respondents, "Given the financial constraints, I couldn't begin a shop. For something low-cost to start, Instagram seemed like a good place to be." Another respondent expressed a range of drivers in making that decision to support her family, as well as wanting to stay safe. "I was motivated both because I want to earn something for my husband... social media is the only platform which has a lower cost and a wider reach" Another participant, started a home baking business: "I didn't have the capital to do the shop or the bakery so it gave me a chance to sell directly at home on social media." As one informant put it, working online allowed her to remain "respectable" (in cultural terms) while still being able to make money: 'people appreciate that I am earning and they don't have to go out for it. In that way, social media was not only economically cheap but also socially acceptable as a way to reconcile the earning of an income with old-fashioned ideas about what was proper behavior for women.

Business Visibility and Networking through Social Media Platform

This theme examines the manner in which online activity increases visibility, access to audiences, and networking for entrepreneurial purposes. This subtheme investigates how computer networking promotes visibility, audience outreach, and networking relations for female entrepreneurs. Participants claimed that they have been getting more visibility and "customers from everywhere" as well as partnerships during networking with other entrepreneurs. Affordability accounted for entry, whereas visibility and connectivity explained sustainability. Again, participants talked about how social-media algorithms, hashtags, and group dynamics had broadened their audience beyond just local neighborhoods. One of the respondents added: "I've also met and shared with several women entrepreneurs, creative artists, and customers from various cities." Another respondent exemplified the way in which these "virtual" connections convert to physically experienced gains. "Through social media, I have gained customers from all over Pakistan and women entrepreneur groups." Through such groups, she picked up on hot-selling items, trusted suppliers, and even which courier was offering a discount. Such informal systems of shared knowledge can be viewed as collective intelligence mechanisms that compensated for the relative absence of women from higher or formal education and mentoring landscapes. The force of the viral overdrive was maybe best expressed in a story about what virality could produce, as one of the respondents said, "One of my reels actually went viral and started bringing me way more followers/customers." Exposure, rather than marketing, defined the identity. And for some, digital identity was a means to be known as a professional, not an amateur. One of the respondents said that she had begun to call "a businesswoman" instead of "a housewife who sells things online."

Technical Challenges in Digital Entrepreneurship of Women

This theme reveals some of the challenges preventing women from going digital in their entrepreneurial journey. Respondents frequently repeated that although the internet made it easy to "start," running an online business required skills, capital, and emotional fortitude. And the difficulties are many - technical, financial, socio-cultural, and psychological. Almost all respondents reported some technical problem that affected the business functioning. Their stories are the story of the second-level digital divide: not one of access, but one of skill and platform know-how. "I can't get my stuff in front of people

because of algorithms,” As one of the respondents said, she had no idea what made it click. Platforms turned into a “black box” as well, and algorithmic opacity made platform “guesswork,” she said. It is indicative of international research that finds small business owners have less knowledge about algorithms: for most, platforms are both an opportunity and an opaque authority. Another respondent described the malfunctioning of it as well by stating “Internet down or offender in system sometimes affects processing of orders.” Unreliable connection, especially as it offers delayed communication with customers. A number of users recalled the psychological stress of getting blamed for late replies or unsuccessful transactions when, in fact, a fault had been in the technology. Another common finding was not having proper knowledge and information about digital payments. As one of the respondents admitted, “I did not know how to navigate online payments and websites.” Not knowing about payment gateways or website builders, she instead depended on direct bank transfers and manually kept her records. This dependence made her more vulnerable to error or fraud.

Financial Challenges of Women’s Entrepreneurs

Beyond technology, the scarcity of funds pervaded participants’ experiences. Nearly all respondents began with minimal savings, often repurposing personal items or borrowing small amounts from family. As one of the respondents said, “I did not have much capital, so I could only stock a few pieces at once.” With the limited selection, it was also not easy to scale up spikes in demand or to offer variety, leading to fewer customer orders. Another respondent further added regarding the cost pressures in handicraft production: “You have to invest in buying good yarn and materials, which you can sometimes find it hard to afford without a reliable income.” Her comment perfectly sums up the lethal financial cycle of low-income entrepreneurs, which in turn inhibits sales. In the same vein, another respondent shared the same concerns: “Started with all the money, just basic tools and a phone camera.” Although the low-cost model facilitated entry, insufficient working capital impeded growth beyond subsistence. Lack of funds can be a typical hurdle for entrepreneurship, but when it comes to women in a conservative Pakistani environment, lack of money is accompanied by poor mobility and negligible control over the purse strings at home. Many of the interviewees said that even among supportive families, husbands or elders dictated significant purchases. Low-income earners feared approaching micro-credit institutions because they were not reliable. An interviewee confided that she, personally, was reluctant to make any paper signing because she feared the law. Some tried pre-order models, where they would take payment before going into production, but that came with its own problems of slow delivery and customer disgruntlement. Others turned to selling or drop shipping, which required less up-front inventory but produced slim margins. The emotional trace was fatigue. It sucks when you can’t afford to move on to the next thing,” As one of the respondents said, “I am stuck between the dream and the reality.” Accordingly, the lack of financial means is not only money-related, but it also confines perceived options which strengthen dependency and self-restriction.

Socio-cultural and Gender based Challenges

Women were told that their work was devalued due to home-based work. As one respondent said, “Some of my relatives do not see my job as serious work because I am doing it at home.” Another stated, “Women are expected to focus on home or marriage instead of working for professional development in their lives. As a woman, I’m required to do the housework. My dreams are hobbies, not business. “Women like me are expected to do housework and nothing else. The way I do things is considered a hobby type of game, not serious business.

All responders mentioned challenges faced in balancing the interplay between “entrepreneurial self” and their domestic responsibilities. As one of the respondents said, “My business doesn’t look that serious to some family members, because I’m living with

them and operating from home.” The work, socially acceptable for women’s labour, paradoxically belittled them as entrepreneurs; it made what they did invisible or insignificant. As one of the respondents said,

“Society believes a home or marital affair is more important for a woman than to grow better in own field.” This endorsed the mindset that women’s primary responsibility is to deal with somatic work. In this context, another respondent articulated the contradiction, “...as a woman I have to bring the house in order. I’m sorry for dreaming” is what my dreams are thought to be, something you mess around with as a hobby but not real business.” Her statement is the perfect reflection of the issues entrepreneurs face. You have to be committed to succeed, and yet that very commitment can be labeled as a disregard for domestic duty. Participants described working their way around those expectations, for example, adhering to work during business hours when children were sleeping and describing their work as “helping the family” rather than “building a company.” Some respondents were occasionally criticized by older relatives who think that sharing pictures or names publicly is indecent. One woman says that she had removed her profile photo “because my uncle told me ‘it doesn’t look right for our family.’” These micro-censoring examples show us how patriarchal surveillance operates online.

Online engagement translates to Offline Empowerment through Skill Upgradation

This theme thus reflects that empowerment is not a sheer consequence of structural change but rather an ongoing and contested process. In the absence of formal training or mentoring, participants were taking the internet itself as a classroom. Many had stories of late nights spent poring over photography, branding, or digital-marketing tutorials on YouTube and Facebook.

As one of the respondents said, “I do my best to stay consistent and watch free online videos to improve on my marketing and photography.” I did the same thing, added by another respondent, “I taught myself through youtube and free online courses.” “I’m always learning from online videos and watching successful small businesses for ideas.” Women reclaim their business-paid digital spaces for knowledge procurement, undifferentiating learning and work. One of the respondents said that when she learned to watch a brief online tutorial on “flat-lay” product photography — a style of lighting and prop setting that produces clean, elegant images of items fetishizing “drop shadows” — the result was professional-looking pictures: “Then my customers even asked if I had hired a photographer.” “You could be good at that,” was the sort of feedback that assured her she was on track to become better and spurred the desire to try again. For many, every new digital skill mastered — editing a reel, writing captions, parsing engagement data — was the equivalent of gaining confidence. The tireless efforts highlight the continuing gendered reality of a double shift in learning and caring. Yet they repositioned learning not as another chore, but as an investment in their own self-sufficiency. As one of the participants phrased it, “If I don’t learn, who’s going to do it for me?”

Conditional Family and Social Support

One of the major themes that emerged from the data was family and social support. Support was frequently expressed in more practical terms rather the expressions of emotional endorsement. Husbands or brothers took deliveries, sons managed mobile payments, and mothers participated in production tasks. Such redistribution of housework subtly validated women’s work for household economy. Participants expressed gratitude for such help but noted its conditionality as support was contingent upon performing visible “decency”. In many cases, this support was a symbol of social advancement in places where female entrepreneurship had long been considered taboo. Family approval also influenced self-worth. One of the respondents said being treated with respect at home made her “less scared” of the judgment online. On the other hand, another participant remembered times

when relatives' disapproval made them guilty, "You need to concentrate (focus) on the kids," chipping away at her self-esteem. Proof of earnings eventually wore down resistance. She laughed, "When you pay the electricity bill out of my sales, it becomes supportive." This financial contribution was thus re-coded from pastime to duty, releasing pride and taking over from tension. Family support, for example, functions as both a resource (time, labour), recognition that makes agency possible, and social validation of fulfilment. But the balance is precarious, where family dependence limits empowerment to something rather than all.

Personal Empowerment and Financial Independence

Throughout the interviews, participants related their online activity to a growing sense of empowerment across financial and social dimensions. All of the entrepreneurs identified entrepreneurship with a real sense of economic independence, irrespective of levels of profit. One respondent said, "Although it's not much, it gives me a sense of independence to be earning something for myself." Another said, "Running a company has made me more independent in day-to-day life." The higher the income, the more influence on decisions in the household. "I now make decisions over our finances for myself, and as well help with any household bills."

All of these quotes imply that empowerment begins at the micro-level as making a purchase without permission, paying funds toward bills, or saving small amounts of money. For many of the women, however, the first time they spent earnings that were entirely their own was transformative. As the respondent recalled, "The first time I got an order online, it dawned on me that I can also make money without depending on anyone." Economic power shifted the dynamics at home, too. Before working, she did not feel comfortable making comments about expenses; after having earned money, "they came to ask me what we should buy for the house." Crucially, that independence came with gratitude and not resentment. Women made sense of their own earnings not by competing with the male breadwinner but by contributing. "I want to share responsibility, not challenge anyone". And some respondents reported months with little or no income: But even irregular income was seen as evidence of "ability." One of the respondents summed up, "Even if sales stop, I know I can start again. That kind of knowledge is freedom." Her comment seems to capture the heart of financial independence: belief in capability beyond current conditions.

Social Recognition

The greatest societal impact of women entrepreneurs was observed in the behaviour of others toward them. As one of the respondents shared circumstantial accounts of newfound status among family members or neighbours, "My work is more respected now by my family because they see I can use my talent to do something productive"; "It's not only teaching, it's a business in which (I am engaged)". This status recognition often started at home before it became part of the public domain. For instance, one participant noted, "When I first opened my 'Facebook shop', everyone laughed. But now, they all ask me for advice on online selling". Once productivity and regular income became evident, the argument in families changed from being a recipient to being a giver. They noticed, yet their neighbors and Facebook friends began doing the same. The interviewees noted friends and neighbors referring to them with their business names. One of the respondents said, "Everyone near me started calling me the crochet lady. It made me smile". Such occupational labels equate beyond the formal ones, while kinship identifiers exist in the form of mother, wife, daughter, and work-based identifiers trumpet their worth beyond it. A majority of the participants mentioned that comments on their creativity or professionalism mattered more than profits, as one of them explained, "When someone tells me, 'Your designs are so good'... it feels like all the effort is paying off." Hence, a direct positive feedback loop from customers bolstered their self-worth and balanced the business costs. One of the respondents said, "Money started coming, people started supporting; otherwise they thought we were wasting time."

Beyond family members, the recognition in online communities was equally important. They interpret likes, comments, and shares as displays of admiration. They also used it to compare their success in the market and their own worth. So, a few of those folks admitted that they themselves constantly looked for notifications, too. The result, eventually, was a shift in self-image. And some of them used the terms “born” and “leaving the shadows.” One of the participants added, “I was invisible in my own home before; now people I don’t know are walking down the street asking for me by name.” Another stated said “It just finally feels like I exist in the world outside,” adding he wonders what people who work there are thinking when they see him come out of it.

Digital Empowerment and Health Awareness

Another finding that came out of the respondents' interviews was the indirect role of digital empowerment on health awareness and reproductive rights, as well as access to health facilities. Most of the respondents showed increased health awareness, importance of nutrition, mother care, and the use of preventive measures to improve the quality of life of children within the resources. In this way, the awareness also leads towards better physical and emotional well-being with informed decision-making.

Digital awareness has not only empowered women financially but also regarding education and skills and provide them with digital health education, as one of the respondents said, “ I am now aware of what is quality of life and it is very important to prioritize my health and consult the doctors timely rather than ignoring the health issues for a long time as I did previously.”

In the same vein, another participant shared, “We get information about some diseases online, and it is easy to search hospitals and nearby clinics through the internet.”

The increased awareness and health care access are the positive outcomes of the digital empowerment, leading towards healthy women and children. The increased access, proper information, and technology have generally improved the well-being of women in particular.

Psychological Struggles of Female Entrepreneurs

Running an online business also demanded emotional stamina. Participants disclosed periods of demotivation, anxiety, and self-criticism, internal struggles rarely visible to outsiders. One of the respondents stated, “I feel on some days, slightly down and low in self-confidence, especially when I haven’t had many sales.” The uncertainty in the number of orders and low sales, along with personal challenges, badly affect the mental state of the respondents, as one of the respondents said, “There are days I get no orders, and it really does set my tone,” And this volatility is exacerbated by the immediacy of the digital marketplace. One post that goes viral can drive dozens of orders, while a spirited receiver's silence seems close to failure. As one of the respondents felt even less self-confident, “I was not as confident then, especially after a person criticized my work.” Virtual disapproval took place in person and added to low self-confidence and self-esteem. “Fear of ‘people thinking that I’m greedy’ was the bigger concern.” Among a number of respondents, some of whom said it often stopped them from experimenting or charging more. Entrepreneurship, it seemed, suffused emotional labour with the relentless exertion of managing impressions and putting on a happy face. Isolation combined with the psychological toll. For most women, there were no colleagues with whom they could discuss business setbacks. In many cases, the family was not encouraging to share the problems. This inflicted more pressure not only to be bright and happy, but grateful as well. “Consuming part of their souls,” as one respondent reflected. “When you’re your own boss, you’re also your own critic; it can eat you up. The psychological empowerment process of digital entrepreneurship is cyclical: motivations activate actions and actions result in validation, which reactivates the motives.

Social norms also had an impact on these perceptions. It was a weird thing to be in, and there wasn't much of an outlet for frustration or burnout without feeling unappreciative.

Discussion

In the wake of significant social and cultural barriers that undermine Pakistani women's capacities, the social media platforms have functioned as a pivotal place to empower women of this country. The social and digital media platforms have created awareness, sensitization opportunities, and economic possibilities, in particular for urban Pakistani women as they have access to better internet and smartphone usage (Majid, Mustafa & Nazar, 2025). These platforms are not only the means or tools that have a commercial usage, but they are a place of exposure, learning, and confidence building among women in Pakistan. The current study found these media platforms to be an enabler of entrepreneurship among Pakistani women. With different modes of engagement on these platforms, these women develop their interest and gain knowledge of different market trends, platforms to generate incomes, and find life paths that are different and challenge traditional domestic roles (Malik et al., 2025). The present study also indicates that, unlike traditional businesses, these digital platforms do not require much capital, which is a major obstacle in Pakistan to starting any venture. With limited assets and setups, the businesses of garments, home-based food delivery and services, educational consultancies, and content creation for instance, are seen as businesses that flourish in Pakistan for these women with the help of Facebook, Instagram or TikTok. While bypassing male-dominated marketplaces and social and cultural barriers, the accessibility in the digital world makes women's lives inclusive and full of opportunity in Pakistan (Waheed et al, 2022). Another factor revealed in this study is the multidimensional issues and barriers that exist in Pakistan for these women while taking advantage of media platforms. This includes a low literacy rate in Pakistan among women, which deprives them of even having and using basic media tools. As the study revolves around urban women, the situation is better in major cities where women have better access to social media platforms, while the digital literacy rate remains high in urban vicinities (Masudi & Mustafa, 2022).

The reality remains that despite being an effective tool, digital entrepreneurship comes with many challenges. Apart from technological constraints in terms of the availability of the internet and gadgets, the society still has resistance for women to join digital media platforms. The biggest obstacle is the issue of online harassment since the accounts go public and women are under constant scrutiny. The personal information, privacy and credibility of women in a country are affected, which leads to diminishing confidence and growth. This important finding in the present study further highlights that digital access alone is not sufficient unless there are mechanisms in societies that support women to advance their careers in the digital world (Ahmed et al 2025). Besides, an unreliable digital payment system, since Pakistan still lacks development in this area, remains a constant barrier for women to manage digital businesses. While the study also reflects other important dimensions where social media platforms have played a transitional role in Pakistani urban women's lives, these platforms have not been merely seen as recreational digital place, but they have emerged as a catalyst where women can raise their voices and receive awareness. Many women advocacy organizations, both government and non-government institutes, have used digital platforms to highlight issues of Pakistani women and suggest suitable interventions (Javed, Ashraf, & Shahbaz, 2025). Some movements and campaigns talk of child marriages, girls' education, women's labor force participation, inheritance rights for women, apart from awareness on different forms of violence. These media platforms are the best place where knowledge is disseminated on the laws and provisions available for women's rights in Pakistan. The positive results from movements like #MeToo have paved ways through which voices of women can be registered that safeguard their rights and sensitize them about their duties too (Khalid, Manzoor, & Nargis, 2024).

Through online seminars, workshop and other means of awareness, the government and non-government organizations receive access to millions of women, thus pressure is built within the country and abroad that helps to empower women in different aspects. This digital activism reinforces the pivotal role of social media platforms in shaping the public discourse and bringing social change in society (Qureshi, Abbasi & Shahzad, 2020). The study further found certain educational potential sources that are means of literacy for women who aim to receive education at home. The online degrees, tutorials, and skill development digital learning platforms are key to women's empowerment in urban Pakistan. The study reveals that digital platforms are informal but powerful tools through which the education ecosystem is sustained, and it eventually increases women's personal and professional growth (Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025).

Another critical theme that emerged in the study is health awareness and information on better access to available facilities for urban Pakistani women. The facilitation of social media in informing women on their reproductive rights, child care, maternal and child health, and overall physical and mental well-being of women is a game-changer in Pakistan's health scenario. From consultancies online to WhatsApp groups and informative videos on Instagram and Facebook, highlighting significant women's health issues provides urban women a path towards better health and wellbeing (Arif et al, 2025). Though challenges of misinformation and too much reliance on available literature on digital media health without knowing the actual resource remain a challenge in this scenario (kazi et al., 2024). The noteworthy indicators that reveal the status of Pakistani women highlights country's ranking low in the world (Khalid, 2025).

The current study noted that the women's visibility, inclusivity, and autonomy in Pakistan is embedded in certain social, cultural, and religious practices. The patriarchal attitudes and norms remain a shadow over women that prevent them from being productive members of society. The usage of digital media platforms empowers women despite the tension that exists between their empowerment and restrictions. The continuous negotiation within cultural expectations and information on social media channelize women's inner abilities and thought-provoking process, thus bringing a social change in society (Ahmed et al., 2025). Another noteworthy finding of the research threw light on the fact that cyberbullying, fraud and hacking are outcomes of usage of the digital world and have a bad impact on women in particular. Such factors are a great source of discouragement and disappointment for women. However, at the same time, these digital platforms are also the source of the right information that can prevent incidents of cyberbullying and harassment among women. There is a dire need for a safer digital environment to ensure sustainable empowerment among urban women of Pakistan (Iqbal et al., 2025).

Conclusion

This study concluded a significant transformative role of social and digital media platforms in empowering urban women of Pakistan. The study revealed that amid obstacles and constraints in social, cultural, and economic spheres for women in Pakistani society, these platforms serve as an important learning arena where women can engage in meaningful activities that empower them in every aspect. The women on the receiving end at these media platforms build confidence, sensitize themselves with issues related to their growth and development and can indulge in economic activities to achieve economic sustainability. These media platforms have truly challenged conventional roles of women, where patriarchal practices and traditional male-dominant marketplaces remain an obstacle for women's growth in Pakistan.

The businesses, including food services, content creation, and remote jobs, regardless of their wider and small scales, have flourished in urban Pakistan for women due to the accessibility of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube or TikTok. The study further threw light on the role of social media platforms in strengthening the voices of

women while encouraging and promoting digital activism. The study concluded that dissemination of knowledge linked with the health of women, the education provisions, rights, and legal freedom women have in the country is possible through these media spaces. have changed the public discourse while making women aware of these rights and provisions. However, the findings of the current study also revealed the fragility and structural barriers involved in the digital empowerment of women in Pakistan. Issues like lack of education or low literacy among women, accessibility to gadgets like laptops or smartphones, limited digital skills, unreliable internet issues, and lack of information on the digital payment system limit women's approach and access to these media platforms for their own benefits. Similarly, the women's own exposure on the platform for any purpose, which increases their visibility online, also hinders the path of cyberbullying and online harassment.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings received from this study, there are significant recommendations proposed for women's strong visibility on media platforms for achieving empowerment in urban Pakistan. As Pakistan is struggling to achieve educational goals, including girls' education enrollments, there is a dire need to focus on digital literacy from primary education too. The government and non-government organizations may prioritize digital literacy and also work on the digital divide, where access to the internet, laptops or smartphones is only limited only to the wealthy class of society. The focus of digital knowledge needs to be on the right use of media platforms, virtual education, and job provisions, online marketing, where tailored training initiatives can be taken to enhance women's capacities. Another important recommendation is to ensure safe digital empowerment where women's visibility remains safe, and cases of cyberbullying or harassment are not only prevented but also dealt with through strict laws where needed.

Besides, the fraudulent activities in money transfer and secure digital payment platforms must be strengthened in order to build confidence among rural women to enjoy digital spaces with freedom. The dedicated incubation centers promoting digital Entrepreneurship and funding opportunities at institutional levels need to be promoted in boosting women-led ventures of any kind on media platforms. There is a dire need for urban women's social, cultural, and economic needs and realities to be reflected in a true manner in national digital policies and planning. Furthermore, policies need to remain flexible and soft where women's activism highlighting women's issues and challenges flourishes and is promoted fearlessly on social media platforms for women's growth, empowerment, and development in Pakistan.

References

- Afsheen, S., & Idrees, N. (2022). Social media and women empowerment in Pakistan: A study of opportunities and challenges. *Journal of Mass Communication, Department of Mass Communication, University of Karachi*, 27, 432.
- Ahmad, N., Hameed, M., Khan, H., & Rafi, S. (2016). Gender equality and women's empowerment in rural Pakistan. In *Agriculture and the rural economy in Pakistan: Issues, outlooks, and policy priorities* pp.391.
- Ahmed, H., Bajwa, S. U., Nasir, S., Khan, W., Mahmood, K., & Ishaque, S. (2025). Digital empowerment: Exploring the role of digitalization in enhancing opportunities for women entrepreneurs. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, 1–32.
- Amedie, J. (2015). *The impact of social media on society* (Undergraduate student paper). Santa Clara University
- Ameer, S., & Hukamdad, M. (2025). Digital citizenship and online learning in Pakistan: Highlighting the need for promoting responsible online behavior in a growing digital education landscape. *ProScholar Insights*, 4(2), 81–95.
- Arif, M., Sajjad, M., Khan, R. A., & Ehsan, H. R. U. (2025). Development and validation of a tool to measure telehealth educational environment (THEEM). *BMC Medical Education*, 25(1), 136.
- Asghar, N., Cheema, A. T., & Muzaffar, M. (2025). The Impact of Media Coverage on Political Behavior among Pakistani Students: A Case Study of GC Women University Sialkot. *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 6(2), 266–279. [https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2025\(6-II\)23](https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2025(6-II)23)
- Ashraf, N., & Ali, I. (2025). Role of social media algorithms in shaping market visibility for women entrepreneurs in Pakistan. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5595592>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Damota, M. D. (2019). The effect of social media on society. *New Media and Mass Communication*, 78(9), 1–9.
- Haq, Z. U., Naeem, A., Zaeem, D., & Sohail, M. (2024). Development of a digital platform to promote mother and child health in underserved areas of a lower-middle-income country: Mixed methods formative study. *JMIRx Med*, 5(1), e48213.
- Iqbal, M., Shahbaz, M., Ahmad, B., & Saleem, H. A. R. (2025). Breaking barriers: Empowering women's professional development in Pakistan to achieve gender equality. *The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies*, 3(1), 397–411.
- Jabeen, M., Aakif, Z., & Afridi, H. A. (2024). Unlocking Pakistan's digital potential: A roadmap for workforce digitalization and economic transformation. *Journal of Information Technology Teaching Cases*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20438869241280980>
- Javed, A., Ashraf, M. Z., & Shahbaz, S. (2025). Digital transformation and its influence on women's economic empowerment in Pakistan. *Sustainable Futures*, 10, 101092.

- Kazi, A. M., Ahsan, N., Jabeen, R., Allana, R., Jamal, S., Mughal, M. A. K., & Malik, F. A. (2024). Effects of COVID-19 illness and vaccination infodemic through mobile health, social media, and electronic media on the attitudes of caregivers and health care providers in Pakistan: Qualitative exploratory study. *JMIR Infodemiology*, 4(1), e49366.
- Kepios. (2025). *Digital 2026: Pakistan* [Report]. DataReportal.
- Khalid, A., Manzoor, S., & Nargis, M. (2024). Feminism in question: A survey of feminist stance in MeToo movement on social media. *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(1), 246–258.
- Khalid, H. (2025). Family rights in Pakistan: Intersecting international obligations and plural national legal frameworks. *Indus Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(2), 320–340.
- Khan, I. A., Irshad, S., & Din, H. S. J. U. (2025). Cyber harassment and online violence against women: A critical analysis of women protection law regime in Pakistan. *Journal of Law & Social Studies*, 7(1), 12–25.
- Majid, H., Mustafa, M., & Nazar, M. (2025). Digital access and women's work in Pakistan: Constraints, use patterns, and policy directions. *Development Policy Review*, 43(6), e70042.
- Malik, N., Mumtaz, F., & Kiran, S. (2025). Challenges of Digital Entrepreneurship and Its Role in Women Empowerment: A Sociological Study in District Faisalabad. *Indus Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(1), 753-763.
- Masudi, J. A., & Mustafa, N. (2022). Challenges and opportunities of social media in Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Media Sciences*, 3(1), 484–495.
- Muzaffar, M., Chohdhry, S., & Afzal, N. (2019). Social Media and Political Awareness in Pakistan: A Case Study of Youth, *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 3 (II), 1-13
- Muzaffar, M., Yaseen, Z. & Safdar, S. (2020). Role of Social Media in Political Campaigns in Pakistan: A Case of Study of 2018 Elections, *Journal of Political Studies*, 27 (2), 141-151
- O'Neil, A., Sojo, V., Fileborn, B., Scovelle, A. J., & Milner, A. (2018). The #MeToo movement: An opportunity in public health? *The Lancet*, 391(10140), 2587–2589.
- Qureshi, S. F., Abbasi, M., & Shahzad, M. (2020). Cyber harassment and women of Pakistan: Analysis of female victimization. *Journal of Business and Social Review in Emerging Economies*, 6(2), 503–510.
- Rafaqat, S., & Shabbir, T. (2024). Feminist movement in Pakistan: Challenges and consequences. *Annals of Human and Social Sciences*, 5(3), 841–853.
- Saeed, A. (2019). #MeToo Pakistani moment: Social media for taboo activism (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. 3475933). SSRN.
- Salam, Z., Jamil, M., & Muzaffar, M. (2024). The Role of Social Media in Political Awareness and Engagement among University Students: A Quantitative Study. *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 5(4), 691–702. [https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2024\(5-IV\)61](https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2024(5-IV)61)
- Shair, W., Tayyab, M., Nawaz, S., & Amjad, K. (2023). Digital divide in Pakistan: Barriers to ICT adoption. *Bulletin of Business and Economics*, 12(2), 243–252.

- Shoaib, M., Waris, T., & Iqbal, S. (2025). Virtual learning environments and gendered spaces in higher education in Pakistan: A quantitative approach. *Regional Lens*, 4(2), 65–78.
- Waheed, S., Sattar, S., Bhatti, Z. I., & Naeem, M. (2022). Social media encourages women entrepreneurship: A study of challenges and empowerment. *International Journal of Media and Information Literacy*, 7(2), 596–605.
- Zainab, A., Mansoor, B., & Mansoor, F. (2023). Reproductive health of women under patriarchy and low socio-economic status in Pakistan. *Archives of Women's Mental Health*, 26(3), 415–416.