



## The Study of the Rising Trends of Digital Marketing and Social Media Usage by Women Entrepreneurs in Pakistan

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study is to explore the learning experience and knowledge of women entrepreneurs during and after the COVID-19 crisis in Pakistan based on the social-cultural context which is considered to be understudied in developing countries mainly in the entrepreneurial learning process. The COVID-19 crisis has changed Pakistan's economy with challenges to women entrepreneurs. Moreover, it has also brought technological development through which women adapt and utilize digital marketing by using social media platforms, therefore, promoting the development of a new revolution of digital marketing and modern digital entrepreneurial culture, by diversification of female society from technologically challenged to digitally savvy one. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to find out whether the rising trends of digital marketing and social media usage have an impact on women entrepreneurs in Pakistan. The research is based on the mono-method technique and the research nature is qualitative, the analysis is done by collecting data through implementing an interview session among young and middle age women entrepreneurs. The findings of this research have shown the results of women entrepreneurs being modified in their entrepreneurial venture by using social media and digital media platforms, with facing challenges and other hurdles they have produced great economic growth in the country and are getting more independent. The lack of studies on the analytical review of digital women entrepreneurship and limited literature in Pakistan required more research on this phenomenon*

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## INTRODUCTION

“Women are the largest untapped reservoir of talent in the world.” As quoted by Hillary Clinton Pakistan’s 48.54% of the total population belongs to women. However, the female labor participation rate is only 25% of labor force statistics (2022-2023). Moreover, according to a global survey, it is being reported that women’s earnings are determined to be half of men’s earnings. In the early phase of life, women were deprived of their businesses (Afsheen & Idrees 2022; Rahayu, Masduki & Rahayu, 2021). It is predominantly Eastern trends that are still being followed in Pakistan where men are more dominant and considered to be high-wage earners whereas women are homemakers (Sadiq & Ali, 2014). In addition, it is very common to see women leave their jobs for the sake of serving their families at home after marriage, while on the other hand, those working women have the toilsome task of equally managing household responsibilities and work (Mubeen et al., 2022; Davendran, 2008). It is also stated by Tripathi & Bhattacharjee (2012) that working women in Eastern countries, especially Pakistan are burdened with domestic responsibilities and social responsibilities with office work.

Internet opportunities have opened many doors in many ways this era is known to be a technological era, and it has altered and offered many different ways of dealing with business, moreover enhancing effectiveness, and developing a variety of prospects for entrepreneurs (Ramadan et al., 2013). Social media plays a vital role in gaining popularity among businesses with continuously getting influences their overall success, therefore it has a major contribution to online interactions along with offering varieties of opportunities by connecting physical dealing with virtual ones (Chakraborty & Biswal 2023; Barnes et al., 2012).

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought devastating destruction all over the economy (Pacho, F., 2023; and Fendel, et al., 2020). Most affected by the pandemic have been micro and small enterprises (MSEs) (Kaur & Kaur, 2020; Shafi et al., 2020). Therefore, females in this arena are facing more difficulties and challenges than their male peers, as it is very important to overcome such obstacles like limited access to financial resources, work and family responsibilities, limited network mentors, and gender biases (Mubeen, Shahid, & Rehan, 2022; Villaseca et al., 2020; Halabisky, 2017). Moreover, the women-owned business also finds many challenges like maintaining and keeping qualified employees along with adapting to new technological advancements and marketplace changes (Afsheen & Idrees 2022; Zeb, & Ihsan, 2020; Mandishaya et al., 2015).

Entrepreneurial learning is the process that arises from the business development process and has a broad concept as experimental learning based on the entrepreneurial process (Politis, 2005; Holcomb et al., 2009; Ettl and Welter, 2010). Notably, the former crisis of 2008-2009 (Abdul Hadi, et al., 2019a) and the recent COVID-19 effects on entrepreneurs, specifically, women entrepreneurs.

The COVID-19 crisis has brought up detrimental issues and challenges to women entrepreneurs. Unlike post-COVID-19, the earlier economic recessions initially affected the business operated by men, therefore women are more vulnerable

now (Alon et al., 2020). COVID-19 has been considered more than to be a health crisis that has impacted massively economies. Traveling, social facets, and civil liberties. Which has brought up the destruction of many businesses and increased inflation (Ghani et al., 2023; Zandi et al., 2022; Abdul Hadi et al, 2019 b). Unlike this pandemic crisis globally, post-COVID-19 conditions where people were more engaged in physical stores than online stores. There was not a good scope entrepreneur. Unlike the destruction, COVID-19 has brought but it has changed the business structure and strategies, people are more engaged in online business and developing their online stores after the massive lockdown in Pakistan. Therefore, bringing lots of opportunities to business women entrepreneurs (Pacho, F. 2023).

Notably, research on digital marketing and social media platform usage by women entrepreneurs in Pakistan has not been explored fully. As per Shah & Malik (2022), social media and digital marketing are playing a vital role in exploring a new generation of gender-based ventures that are technologically driven. The COVID-19 crisis has changed Pakistan's economy with challenges to women entrepreneurs. Moreover, it has also brought technological development through which women adapt and utilize digital marketing by using social media platforms (Imdad, 2022; Abdullah et.al, 2022). Therefore, promoting the development of a new revolution of digital marketing and modern digital entrepreneurial culture, by diversification of female society from a technologically challenged to a digitally savvy one. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to find out whether the rising trends of digital marketing and social media usage have an impact on women entrepreneurs in Pakistan.

Considering the discussion, the following research objectives are set for this study:

- To gauge the experiences of women entrepreneurs through the usage of digital marketing and social media platforms
- To explore the benefits of digital marketing and the usage of social media by women entrepreneurs in Pakistan.
- To identify how women of Pakistan face the stereotype that they are technologically challenged.
- To explore what can be done to examine the use of digital marketing by women entrepreneurs who have not explored the rising trend of digital marketing and social platforms.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Digital marketing and its rising social media trends after COVID-19 can be used to perform communication, attract customers, make potential customers, renew strategies, and advertise of company's products and services. The idea and concept behind social networking are not considered to be radically novel – since humans are social animals, we have been exploring ways to connect, maintain relations through networks, and communicate with one another. However, these efforts have taken on overall new meanings and phenomena in the digital age. Where we initially used word-of-mouth referrals, handshakes, meetups, and stamped letters, whereas today's relationships have begun in the new era and developed through social media platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Google (Milanovic, 2015). It has already

been discussed in many theoretical frameworks of social media. Despite the recent increasing trend of adaptation and use of social media platforms to support business operations. However, a considerable amount of research is available to explore how new businesses, especially in the field of entrepreneurship are using social networks and achieving branding goals (Umar, M., Ali, S. A., & Sial, M. H. 2022; Rehman et al., 2015).

## **Women and Entrepreneurship**

Entrepreneurship is known to be the business-based activities undertaken by its owner with his decision-making skills, creativeness, innovation, initiative, qualities, skills, as well as most important investments and responsibilities (Cadar & Badulescu, 2015). Thus, entrepreneurs established their businesses and are involved in operating, organizing, and bearing the risks of business ventures (Garg & Eisenhardt, 2017). Hence, women entrepreneurs typically participate mainly in entrepreneurial activities and estimate accumulated risks along with creatively utilizing resources, thereby enabling themselves by achieving strengths and opportunities in the given environment as well as developing goods and services (Imdad, 2022; Mordi et al., 2010).

However, entrepreneurship is considered synonymous with men-owned businesses. The entire construction has a deep connection with the historical root of entrepreneurship under cultural and economic processes along with cultural and social norms (Hamilton, 2013). Entrepreneurship is associated with certain gender biases based on the fact that entrepreneurship is initially started by the male gender role (Umar et. al., 2022; Gogar, 2019). As a result, women entrepreneurs seem to be inactive; they appear to be invisible in this stereotype, even though they are very efficient in developing the economy and creating jobs (Javadian & Singh, 2012; Sharma, 2018). According to Emmanuel et. al. (2022) and Zeb & Ihsan (2020), increasing economic growth and development is impossible without interconnecting with the women segment. Additionally, practicing women intervening in the development of economic growth is vital, therefore entrepreneurship is more likely to be the relevant option for them (Kin & Farida 2016; Ismail et al., 2016).

Around 51% of capital originated from women and around 51% of the employment positions are associated with the women's segment and are activated as women-owned (Ahmad, 2011; Hadi et al., 2019; Vijayakumar & Jayachitra, 2013).

## **The Underpinning Theory**

### **Theory Supporting Digital Entrepreneurship Mindset**

Our study is framed around the phenomena and principle of attribution, entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE), and the need for achievement (nAch) theory. Attribution theory states that an individual has attributes to observe the events to their underlying causes based on the covariation of cause and effect (Settle and Golden 1974). It elaborates on the importance of logical points behind the decision-making process to understand and get desirable outcomes. Identifying how attributions are

developed for personal benefits involves the application of an elaborating mindset based on considering the desirability and feasibility of an entrepreneurial act along with utilizing observations of cause-and-effect relationships in the online business environment. Moreover, ESE has worth considerable attention mainly in the field of entrepreneurship research and it is defined as “the characteristics of an individual personal competence and control, which makes sense to convert failures into learning experiences” (Mauer et al. 2009). This theory of one’s self-belief affects the elaborating mindset of an individual’s questions to what extent they utilize and hold power to achieve the desired results.

### **The Theory of Reason Action**

In our study, we are keen to adopt the Theory of planned behavior (TBP) as our literature framework. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TBP) was initially known as the Theory of Reasoned Action and was introduced in 1980 to analyze an individual’s intention to engage in a certain behavior at a particular time and place (Conner, 2020). This theory was established and designed in the way in which an individual experiences all actions over which he has self-control. The important component of this theory is behavioral intent; behavioral intents are impacted by the probability of one’s attitude that the behavior will result in the outcomes as well as one’s assessment of the associated risk and rewards (Ajzen, 2002; Ajzen, 2020).

### **Experiential Learning Theory Perspective**

To experience something by learning is likely to be the most efficient way to polish and enhance a person’s abilities and skills (Cope and Watts, 2000). It has been suggested in the research that entrepreneurial attitudes are highly learned and implemented through environmental, social, and networking experiences as they have gone through their life, work, and observations (Khan et al., 2021; Brewer and Hewstone, 2003). Hence, based on this perspective, we will critically employ the learning experience of women entrepreneurs through direct exposure to digital marketing before and after the COVID-19 crisis.

The main idea of the Experimental Learning Experience is rather to only watch others or read about their experience but to value the direct active or personal experiences (Scho’n, 1983; Kolb, 1984; Corbett, 2005). Experimental learning theory is also described as a continuous process of individuals involved in moving back and forth in terms of opposite modes between feeling and thinking and reflection and action (Kolb, 1984; Rehman et al., 2015). Thus, efficient learning throughout this process requires understanding the conflicts between these two opposed modes, where entrepreneurial learner sketch their attitude, belief, and ways of thinking based on specific situations so that they can be tested, integrated, and examine with more creative ideas (Kolb and Kolb, 2005). For instance, to explore the essence of this perspective; this theory’s central idea is to glorify the scenario of effective learning by involving in the process of integrating both direct action and personal reflection (Scho’n, 1983; Boud et al., 1985; Cope and Watts, 2000).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To measure the impact of the trends of digital marketing and social media on women entrepreneurs in Pakistan, the data will be collected through conducting interviews between young women entrepreneurs and middle age entrepreneurs (Chakraborty & Biswal 2023). Due to the exploratory nature of the research, we are using qualitative methods for the data analyses and results. The qualitative design approach has been followed to determine and discuss the use of social media platforms through digital marketing by women entrepreneurs in Pakistan. The interviews have been conducted among young and middle age women participants in the age group of 18 – 45.

In this study, we are exploring the relationship between digital and social media platforms, moreover, the study aims to explore today's women entrepreneurs in Pakistan to determine their strengths and abilities to be more independent and enthusiastic. The main purpose and the center of the attention of this study are to explore how initially women used to work with men and how they have deviated from their decision-making and overall business structure. As it is mentioned above that around 50% of women are from the total population of Pakistan therefore, the study consists of collecting the data, especially from Karachi, and conducting online interviews from Lahore and Islamabad. This indicates the relationship between digital and social media and their impact on women entrepreneurs in Pakistan (Shah & Malik 2022).

The research is following a mono-method technique for qualitative research study in which we have identified and explored women entrepreneurs lived experiences about their overall business process with digital marketing before and after the COVID-19 crisis. There is an opponent statement by Marshall and Rossman (2006), that the qualitative study is based on exploring the perception about the participant's personal experience. Hence, the study we conduct is based on a qualitative perspective mainly focusing on the female paradigm along with hermeneutical phenomenological research philosophy. The research nature is qualitative and will be done by collecting data through interviews and final data will be collected from recordings of respondents' explanations. The importance of the limited period before and after the COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan and in this difficult time Pakistan how women entrepreneurs face challenges and explore themselves in the rising trends of digital platforms (Imdad 2022).

### Hermeneutical Phenomenological Research Philosophy

Phenomenology refers to attempting the understanding the learning experience of people through their detailed explanations based on asking questions about the subjective world participants live in. On the other hand, Hermeneutics Phenomenology, in which participants interpret their real-life experiences, their success or failure stories, their initial stages, challenges, and so on (Qazi & Rashidi, 2018; Addeo, 2013; Chhapra et al., 2021).

## **Sampling Technique**

This research has focused on the non-probability sampling technique, moreover, based on purposive and judgmental sampling, in this sampling technique, respondents were asked to give a formal interview in which questions were asked that enable the respondent to give answers for fulfilling the research objectives (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). We have conducted our interviews mainly with the female entrepreneurs of Karachi and Islamabad, conducting an interview have implemented in 6 months. In addition, the research perspective relies on a purposive approach, in which the researcher observes those respondents that have become an entrepreneur or have used and experienced digital marketing platforms (Hernawati, et al., 2021; Galdeano et al., 2019). Moreover, phenomenology's significant assumption is to know the language of their participants, therefore, the interview was conducted in English but those who faced difficulty with communicating in English answered in the Urdu language. We have gathered data through in-depth interviews with the help of interview protocols the interview protocol was extracted from the latest paper by Andre D. Slabbert, 2020, and we have recorded the overall interview of each respondent.

A pilot interview was initially conducted with a woman entrepreneur in Karachi and interviews were organized accordingly. Moreover, the interview protocols were further sent to the qualitative research experts for face validity check, and ethical permission was carried out from each respondent. We collected data in almost 1 month and the interviews continued till the saturation point where we did not record new information.

## **Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and Discussion**

Thirteen women participated in the interview session in which they shared their experiences and their overall journey of starting a business, the challenges they have faced, financial constraints, and the family pressures they have faced. Ten successful ladies are running their businesses efficiently in two ladies are still struggling and facing all the societal challenges and family pressures.

**Table 1. IPA Matrix**

No. of Respondents	Inception of Business	Traditional VS Digital	Transformation during COVID-19	Challenges	Lived experience being an entrepreneur	Benefits/ Motives for Being a digital entrepreneur	Recommended platforms	Business journey
2	3 years	Online	Yes	Yes	Gained information	yes	Facebook, Instagram, websites	Difficult
3	2 years	Online	Yes	Yes	Have learned a lot from other success stories	yes	YouTube, TikTok	Easy
4	10 years	Both but it's now online based	Yes	Yes	Gained skills	yes	Facebook, online store	Difficult
5	4 years	Physical but planning to convert into online	Yes	Yes	Gained knowledge and skills	yes	Facebook, Instagram	Difficult
6	5 years	Both	Yes	Yes	Have gained abilities and skills	Yes	YouTube, Facebook, Instagram	Difficult
7	8 years	Online	yes	Yes	Gained confident	yes	Facebook, YouTube	Difficult
8	6 years	Started with both and now dealing with online	I was already using online platforms before COVID-19	No	I am independent and can earn more	Yes	Facebook, Personal websites	Easy and smooth
9	More than 10 years	Online	Yes	Yes, in the initial stage	I am more creative and plan to make unique products	Yes	Facebook, and Instagram	Difficult
10	5 years	Both	Yes	Yes	I learned to manage my time	Yes	Facebook, Instagram	Difficult
11	2.5 years	Online	Yes	Yes	I am more confident	Yes	Facebook, Instagram	Difficult

12	4 years	Online	No	Yes	I have learned how to deal with business activities	Yes	YouTube, Facebook	Difficult
13	6 years	Online	Yes	Yes	I am supporting my husband after COVID-19 Crisis	Yes	Facebook	Difficult

## DISCUSSION

The research analysis illustrated three categories; some women already had their online platform before COVID-19 Crisis and the majority have transformed their physical setup to online business last but not least was the category in which women entrepreneur respondents are dealing with both platforms i.e. Traditional and online.

It has been explored that almost every woman has faced challenges such as permission issues from their male members of the stereotype that only men can earn and women should focus on house chores and other household activities. Moreover, some of the women have faced time management issues; like failures in keeping on track and balancing both family and the business, furthermore, most of the women have faced family pressure of not getting independent. It is also being observed that typically women also faced problems from other entrepreneurial women based on degrading them for their skills and demotivating them throughout their business journey.

During interviews, women entrepreneurs shared their achievements such as gaining more knowledge one of the examples from the interview in which the respondent was handling a physical bakery that she transformed into an online bakery after COVID-19, learned a lot by experiencing new baking methods and creative ideas of grabbing more consumers. Moreover, she has managed to save much time and effort and reduce the handling costs of the physical bakery. Furthermore, the majority of women have achieved more knowledge and skills such as online dealing at their fingertips which many women do not know as housewives before the COVID-19 crisis. Similarly, with the same and different achievements of independency, and contributing financially to their families, single mothers feel more confident and proud in bringing up their children, even some of the young girls afford their educational expenditures through their business earnings.

In the interview session, one of the questions asked by the respondent, through which digital platform women can earn money while sitting at home, mostly answered to this question that in this technological advancement women should use any digital platform but should utilize their skills and abilities mainly from Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, personal websites and TikTok. They have recommended

and wanted to give strength to those women who are still devalued, bounded by the family, a stereotype of male dominancy, although they have skills, due to the challenges, they cannot earn, and Pakistani women face the major problem of illiteracy and lack of knowledge. Moreover, they have suggested training programs for those women who are unaware of digital platforms and spread knowledge and awareness.

It is Pakistani culture that women are more responsible for the family rather than getting independent. Because it is again a stereotype that male is responsible for the contribution of financial expenditure and women should do house responsibilities (Women Thrive Worldwide, 2020). During the interview, almost every respondent faced difficulties, including financial constraints, family pressure, household responsibilities, limited knowledge, restrictions, and so on but according to the observation, they still feel motivated and strong because unlike the challenges they have focused on their objectives and today feel proud to be independent.

## **CONCLUSION**

To summarize our study, we have formally interviewed 13 women entrepreneurs and provided their preliminary insight concerning the role of digital marketing that has impacted their careers most specifically after the COVID-19 pandemic and for the development of digital women entrepreneurs (Qureshi, 2022). We have explored the positive attitude of almost every woman entrepreneur regarding digital marketing and its advancements as it plays a significant role in women entrepreneurs being powerful, self-confident, independent, creative, and self-employed.

It is being explored that the COVID-19 crisis has brought up tremendous change in the overall economy of Pakistan where women started contributing financially to their home, the situation where the whole world is facing economic downfall especially the developing countries like Pakistan. The pandemic crisis deviated from the business structure and competitive strategies (Pacho, F. 2023). According to this study analysis, women who used to work physically, have transformed their business setup virtually and feel more comfortable managing their household and business while staying at home. It was also analyzed that many women faced challenges while planning to introduce their businesses. The main challenges they have faced are family pressure, lack of husband support, laws problems, societal challenges, a stereotype of masculinity dominancy, and lack of financial support. Moreover, digital marketing brought many opportunities for the female segment of Pakistan. It has enabled many uneducated housewives to get knowledge and offers them a platform where they can easily earn money at any place and at any time. Many women entrepreneurs converted to technopreneurs after the COVID-19 crisis (Qasim & Mahmood, 2022). They feel more independent, strong, and enthusiastic and learned and gain knowledge through digital media platforms.

## **LIMITATIONS**

This research has some limitations of limited time, women entrepreneurs sometimes do not want to respond to your interviews and limited financial resources. Data

collection of samples is difficult to gather from middle age entrepreneurs. The online activity of women entrepreneurs, fever literature of the analytical review of women entrepreneurship that has identified a major gap in the digital phenomena of both academic and non-academic research (Umar et. al., 2022; Angela, 2021). There are several misunderstandings and misinterpretations regarding digital women entrepreneurs and still, it has a long way to go. According to Nasim Tavakol, (2017), women entrepreneurs can't bring change unless they have their men; which has brought a result that supports or calls for the perspective of gender-inclusive, which seems to be collaborative between the teamwork between men and women that they have to contribute together financially for economic development. But instead, Tavakol (2017), has represented the fact that women cannot earn and move forward if they don't have men at home, he argues more that is it possible for men to earn and move forward if they do not have women at home. Moreover, if we identify the gap in women's digital skills then the view is more critical, most specifically in the developing world (Fatoki, 2020 Tran, 2021). The sizeable part has been divided for women, particularly in the digital world, incorporate that it has a long way to re-think the overall digital divide. Women competing in the digital economy requires innovation as well as need establishment in the technological development for organizations and industries (Carayannis & Campbell, 2019; Carayannis & Meissner, 2020). Therefore, it has a research gap to discover and explore more women who are enthusiastic and creative but cannot do business due to limited resources, and economic, technological, and natural conditions.

## **FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the future, researchers should enhance digital marketing education and foster supportive networks while conducting consumer behavior research. Encourage government initiatives, collaborations with influencers, and emphasize data privacy and security. Continuously monitor and evaluate strategies, raise awareness and recognition, and partner with academic institutions. Additionally, closely monitor trends and challenges to inform future strategies and recommendations.

## **DECLARATION OF INTEREST:**

It is declared that the authors of this research work have no competing interests

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