



The Role of Online Platforms in Promoting Women's Economic Independence: A Qualitative Study in Bangladesh

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Abstract:

This study focusses on how Bangladeshi women experience economic independence and empowerment through social media-based entrepreneurial activities. In recent years, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok have become important business platform for women to start small and home-based businesses. Through these platforms, women can earn income, connect with customers and participate in digital businesses, also household activities. This study attempts to understand both the opportunities and challenges for women.

This study followed a qualitative approach and interpretivist paradigm, because it aims to understand women's real experiences and personal meanings rather than numbers. The study used a phenomenological approach which looked at how women understand and explore their everyday online business experiences. However, this study has some limitations such as, this is a small-scale qualitative study, the results may not be perfect for a large population. There may also be limitations due to time limitation, difficulty reaching participants and beliefs in self-reported information. The research especially focuses on the lived experiences, understands and obstacles these women face in social media platforms within Bangladesh. It doesn't include other e-commerce platforms or income sources. It's only based on social media-based business platform facilities and barriers also. And it doesn't focus on male entrepreneurs or offline business activities, the main concentration on women's digital participation in social media based economic activities.

Finally, this study finds that social media-based entrepreneurial activities play a significant role in women's economic independence, confidence, and empowerment. However, these experiences are influenced by social, cultural, and economic barriers. Overall, this study shows that digital platforms play a significant role in the financial and personal development of women in Bangladesh.

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1 Background and Context

1.1 Growth of Online Platforms and social media

In recent years, Online platforms have changed the way people communicate, interact and participate in economic activities. Many researchers shows that online platforms are creating flexible business opportunities for women and supporting entrepreneurship and also economic participation (Dwityas, 2025; Chatterjee & Banerjee, 2022). But the impact of these platforms is not just economic. Because some studies suggest that social media have now become an important place where women can build their networks, connect with customers and promote their business more independently (OECD, 2021). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and TikTok are now increasingly used in Bangladesh for customer communication, promote product and online business activities. At the same time, the growth of smartphone usage, internet access and digital payment systems Has also increased women's participation in social media-based businesses (Rahman, 2023; Fouzder, et al., 2022).

While various online platforms are used for business, but several studies have specifically explained especially social media as one of the most important platforms for small-scale entrepreneurs, especially for women who running businesses at home in Bangladesh (Rahman, 2023; Koli, 2024). At the same time, other researchers believe that social media is not only important for buying and selling products, but also in building a trustable connection between sellers and buyers, maintaining relationships with customers and building personal growth or brands (Hossain, et al., 2022). It means social media is both a business platform and great place of communication. However, some studies highlight that the positive views of social media-based entrepreneurship, but on the other hand some researchers believe that not all women benefit equally, lack of digital knowledge and technological access still exist in many developing societies (OECD, 2021; Ramesh & Sowmya, 2024).

Even with those advantages, women in Bangladesh still face various difficulties in online business platforms. For example, Online harassment, lack of digital skills, low financial literacy and social pressure from family or society which create restrictions on their fully participation in entrepreneurship (Ramesh & Sowmya, 2024; Rahman, 2023). Similarly, some studies shows that women often struggle to maintain household responsibilities and online business activities which

can impact their self-confidence and long-term business growth (UNESCAP, 2022; Fernandes, et al., 2022). So, it can be said that social media-based businesses create new opportunities for women's income and empowerment, but women still face social, cultural and technological problems in many cases.

1.2 Women and Social Media-Based Entrepreneurship

In Bangladesh, social media-based entrepreneurship has become a significant source of income for many women. Various study shows that Many women are now using social media such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and TikTok to run their small businesses selling clothes, cosmetics, food items and handcrafted goods and so many things (Fouzder, et al., 2022). According to researchers, this type of business is especially suitable for women because it allows them to work from home and manage business and family responsibilities together. Similar results found that in other developing countries, where online business platforms are offering women the opportunity to work at low capital and flexibly also (UNESCAP, 2022).

According to research, these social-media platforms help women to increasing their ability to build good network with customers, communicate effectively and bring confidence. In many cases, Women start their businesses informally and step by step grow them through customer feedback, online promotions and social media awareness (Rahman, 2023).

However, while many studies highlight the positive aspects of social media-based businesses, some researchers also said that the success of women's online businesses still depends on a few key factors. Some elements including digital literacy, access to smartphones, internet connectivity and family support, all of these are necessary for social media-based businesses to succeed (World Bank, 2022). Without these supports, many women may face difficulties in maintaining or growing their online businesses, especially in developing countries.

1.3 Economic Independence and Empowerment

In addition to earning money, economic independence also includes women's personal freedom, social empowerment and financial decision-making power. And it is closely related to self-confidence and participation in family and community decision-making. Many researchers believe that women's participation in digital entrepreneurial activities not only increase income but also helps increase their independence and control in the family (Mabrouk, 2023; Rahman, 2023). Just

like this, other studies have shown that the benefits of this empowerment are not equally shared by all women, as its impact depends largely on the use of technology, education and a supportive social environment (World Bank, 2022). Research has suggested that digital platforms provide flexible income opportunities. However, some researchers believe that this independence is often limited if women do not have the power to make financial decisions within the family (OECD, 2021).

Online businesses offer more flexibility of time and space compared to traditional workplaces and allowing women also to work on household responsibilities. Some studies said that it is an important advantage of online entrepreneurship (Mabrouk, 2023). However, this flexibility has been interacting in different ways across studies. Some researchers argue that it empowers women, as it allows them to control their own working hours and gain more independence (Fernandes, et al., 2022). And Other researchers believe that sometimes it increases stress, as women have to balance online businesses and household work (Hossain, et al., 2022).

Overall, this shows that digital entrepreneurship is beneficial for women, but it can also create challenges depending on their personal and social conditions.

1.4 Relevance of the Study

Social media platforms are becoming to play a significant role for Bangladeshi women's economic engagement which makes this study relevant. Research shows that digital platforms support women generate income and increase their opportunities for entrepreneurship (Chatterjee & Banerjee, 2022). Deeper understanding of the benefits and difficulties of digital entrepreneurship by studying how women achieve economic independence through these social media platforms.

The findings may help government, policymakers, educators and development organizations in creating more effective support for female entrepreneurs and making it important for policy development as well. Additionally, this study can help to understand digital empowerment, financial access and gender equality in Bangladesh.

2 Research Problem Statement

Online platforms have become increasingly important for women's economic participation, as they provide opportunities for income generation, entrepreneurship and flexible working. Previous

research said that social media and internet platforms help women to start businesses by making it easier to enter the market and reach more to customers (Chatterjee & Banerjee, 2022). Similarly, Freelancing and online work platforms are seen as important factors that help women take part in earning income and improving their skills in the global digital economy. (Wood, et al., 2019).

However, most previous studies focused on numerical results or quantitative research like income, business growth and online activities. Because these studies often use quantitative methods, so they do not provide a clear picture of how women themselves experience or understand economic independence using online platforms. On the other hand, In Qualitative method shows an understanding how women use online platform especially social media-based platforms to experience and perform economic independence (Rahman, 2023; UNESCAP, 2022). Additionally, empowerment of women in digital entrepreneurship in Bangladesh has not studied in very deeply. It is often measured only in terms of income, rather than as a real-life experience that includes self-confidence, independence, and decision-making ability (BEGUM, 2023).

Therefore, there is still limited understanding of real-life experiences of women in digital entrepreneurship in Bangladesh. There has still Existing research where they are not focuses Properly on how women use social media-based business opportunities to understand empowerment, overcome challenges and achieve financially independent in their daily life. For this reason, this study use a qualitive method and aims to how Bangladeshi women experience and understand economic independent through social media-based business platforms on their perspectives, experiences and meanings (BEGUM, 2023).

3 Research Aim

The purpose of this research is to explore how online platform especially social media-based business platform help Bangladeshi women experience and understand economic independence, as well as how these platforms influence their understand of empowerment, barriers and lived experience.

3.1 Research Questions

According to recent research, social media platforms significantly influence women's economic participation, especially through flexible income opportunities and online business (Dwityas,

2025; K., 2022). Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok are often used in Bangladesh for small business activities, communication with clients and incoming system (Fouzder, et al., 2022; Rahman, 2023).

Based on the study, the following research questions are:

1. How do Bangladeshi women use social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok for businesses activities?
2. How do social media-based business help Bangladeshi's women gain empowerment and income opportunities?
3. What specific Barriers and challenges do Bangladeshi women face in social media-based business activities?
4. How do Bangladeshi women understand the meaning of economic independence in their daily lives through online participation especially social media-based business?

3.2 Research objectives:

According to (Creswell, 2007), well-defined research objectives guide the direction and coherence of qualitative research by ensuring alignment between the central phenomenon under study and meaningful interpretive results. These objectives help maintain focus within an interpretivist framework by emphasizing lived experience and meaning-making processes.

These objectives focus the study on how Bangladeshi women understand and experience economic independence through online business platforms.

- 1 To explore how Bangladeshi women use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok for business activities.
- 2 To examine how the impact on social media based online business activities contribute to women's empowerment and income generation in Bangladesh.
- 3 To identify the barriers and challenges faced by Bangladeshi women in social media-based entrepreneurship.
- 4 To explore how Bangladeshi women experience and understand economic independence in their daily lives through online business activities.

4 Significance of the Study

This study is important because it examines how online platforms, especially social media-based network, influence women's financial independence in Bangladesh. Recently, digital source like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and TikTok has become more significant and necessary for communication, marketing and income generation, especially for women run small and home-based business platform (Fouzder, et al., 2022; Rahman, 2023). These social media tools offer flexible arrangements that help women to engage in economic activities while balancing their household duties.

Current research shows that digital platforms reduce the obstacles to entry for entrepreneurship and increase marketing growth and participation for boosting women's involvement in the digital economy (Dwityas, 2025; Wood, et al., 2019). At the same situation, digital financial services and improve internet connectivity have also contribute to greater engagement of women in e-commerce places (Mabrouk, 2023). However, despite these advancements, participation is not equal, as many women still face technological and social challenges.

Most existing studies focus on female economic independence using quantitative outcomes like salary, income, business performance, employment, online participation. However, they give less attention to women's personal experience and everyday realities (BEGUM, 2023). This gap is essential because true empowerment also requires income generation, confidence, personal independence and decision-making ability.

In Bangladesh, research shows that female digital entrepreneurs face structural and cultural challenges including lack of technical skills, social inequality, lack of online safety and unequal technological access (UNESCAP, 2022; Rahman, 2023). In the meantime, understanding both the benefits and limitations of social-media based entrepreneurship is very important for a deeper understanding of the topic.

Another important aspect of this research is its theoretical significance. The **Capability Approach** explains that women's empowerment is not only related to earning money, but also to independence, confidence, and the ability to make their own decisions in everyday life (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). On the other hand, **Social Capital Theory** explains how trust, communication, and online social networks help women creating business opportunities through social media

(Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000). These two theories help provide a broader understanding of how women in Bangladesh experience economic independence through social media-based entrepreneurial activities. And this research is valuable because it follows an interpretivist approach, exploring how people create meaning from their personal experiences rather than only measuring results (Creswell, 2007). In addition, this study follows Creswell's phenomenological approach, which explores people's real-life experiences and personal feelings or meanings (Creswell, 2007). These approach is appropriate for this study because it helps to understand how women in Bangladesh experience and understand economic independence in their daily lives through social media-based businesses.

Overall, this research can help policymakers, educators and development organizations better understand the real-world experiences of women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. The findings of this research can also help create more effective digital training, online safety support and entrepreneurship opportunities for women in the future.

2 Literature review

2.1 Women's Economic Independence and Empowerment

Recent years have highlighted women's financial independence and empowerment, especially in involvement to online businesses. Scholars explain that empowerment is not limited to just earning an income but also builds self-confidence, improves decision-making ability and increases control over social and financial facts (Mabrouk, 2023; Uma Rani, 2022). Besides, researchers note that women's economic participation improves their social standing and increases opportunities for personal growth and self-reliance (Verma, 2024). Those discussions show that financial freedom is now understood not only as an economic outcome, but also as an economic and social process.

Several Experts also point out that digital tools and online platforms are making new economic prospects for women by reducing many conventional business barriers. Research show that digital platforms and online networks make it easier for female entrepreneurs to access important resources, information, and commercial opportunities (Naggar, 2023). Similarly, other research shows that digital entrepreneurship helps women's social empowerment by increasing their financial involvement, communication abilities and overall self-assurance (Verma, 2024). Overall,

these studies show that digital entrepreneurship activities play a important role not only in increasing income but also in the overall empowerment of women.

Researchers note that internet-based enterprises offer women more comfortable work than traditional business systems. Digital platforms allow women to balance household duties with earning money by providing adaptable work opportunities in the digital market (Uma Rani, 2022). In many developing countries, web-based businesses are increasingly serving as alternative income streams for women facing mobility limitations or restricted entry to formal job markets (Mabrouk, 2023).

Recent studies suggest that financial empowerment should not be understood only through financial outcomes and money earned. Instead, empowerment also involves personal growth, self-confidence and participation in family decision-making (Ramesh & Sowmya, 2024). Women are now playing a significant role in financial decision-making than ever before, as they are able to use various digital financial services. (Mabrouk, 2023). This statement shows that financial independence is closely tied to women's everyday experiences and their personal view of what it means to be empowered.

At the same time, many Researchers also highlight that women continue to face various challenges their economic involvement and empowerment in online platforms. Factors like Limited knowledge of digital skills, unequal access to technology, financial limitations and cultural barriers continue to influence women's potential in digital entrepreneurship, especially in developing nations (Sowmya & Ramesh, 2024; Verma, 2024). Because of these challenges, researchers now emphasize the need to explore women's actual lived experiences and personal views of financial independence rather than focusing only on measurable business results (Naggar, 2023).

2.2 Digital Entrepreneurship and Online Business Platforms

Digital entrepreneurship has transformed how people engage in business, especially through digital technology and online platforms. Researchers note these internet-based networks and social media help individuals to build, promote and grow up their companies (Fernandes, et al., 2022). These digital frameworks have created more flexible opportunities, especially for women who face social, financial or mobility barriers in traditional business.

Several research indicates that internet platforms reduce many traditional obstacles by allowing entrepreneurs to work from home, interact with customers directly and connect with growing their business through digital platforms (Wood, et al., 2019; Verma, 2024). The growth of digital economy has boosted female involvement in flexible work and online income activities (Uma Rani, 2022). Scholar's experts highlight that digital entrepreneurship became much more significant after the COVID-19 pandemic because many small businesses converted to e-commerce and digital communication methods (Mabrouk, 2023).

Previous literature suggests that digital entrepreneurship supports women's financial participation, communication skills and overall confidence. As noted by (Verma, 2024), Digital entrepreneurship enhances economic participation and confidence, skill development, and societal recognition for women. Similarly, in another research highlights that online-based social networks provide female entrepreneurs with valuable access to support systems, new business opportunities and important information needed for entrepreneurial growth (Nagggar, 2023).

However, several researchers also point out several challenges connected with online businesses. Women entrepreneurs often face challenges related to digital skills, online scams, internet access and technological limitations (UNESCAP, 2022; Sowmya & Ramesh, 2024). Research also shows that cultural barriers and unequal distribution of digital tools continue to affect women's full participation in online business, specifically in developing nations (Koli, 2024). In addition, some research suggests that online business can create to mental stress and unpredictability, as women are also contributing their efforts and balance household responsibilities with digital work demands (McAdam, 2022).

2.3 social media-based business platform

Social media platforms have become more important for women's digital entrepreneurship, offering flexible income and simple business management. Those social media platforms reduce many barriers such as high amount of capital, limited market access and finding place for startup, allowing women to start and manage business from home. According to the (OECD, 2021) , digital platforms support women's entrepreneurship by increasing market opportunities and improving access to customers both locally and globally.

Furthermore, (UNESCAP, 2022) reports that Digital platforms including social platforms, play a vital role in increasing women involvement and help them in micro-businesses to give them easy networking and marketing, especially in developing countries. Similarly, another research demonstrates that social media use improves business communication and entrepreneurial capability among social connections and online engagement (Tanjela Hossain, 2022).

In Bangladesh, female entrepreneurs commonly use platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok and Instagram for selling clothing, household things, food, small retail goods and so many. These networks are popular because they are user-friendly and affordable, making them highly suitable for home-based enterprises (Fouzder, et al., 2022; Koli, 2024). Moreover, the rapid growth of smartphone and internet availability has significantly supported women's participation in online E-commerce (UNESCAP, 2022).

However, research shows that connectivity alone does not ensure equal opportunity. Women continue to face obstacles related to digital proficiency, online security and traditional social restrictions (OECD, 2021; UNESCAP, 2022). These factors often restrict the scope to which women can fully succeed in digital entrepreneurship, particularly in Rural and semi-urban areas.

2.4 Research Gap

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and TikTok are all vital for women's businesses and income generation. However, several academic literatures evaluate online engagement and financial facts rather than women's real-life experiences or realities. Research by the (OECD, 2021) and (Tanjela Hossain, 2022) highlights that digital platforms expand market access, decrease business barriers and develop social connections. In the same way, other reports note that female entrepreneurs across developing countries, including Bangladesh are increasingly using on social networks for commercial purposes (UNESCAP, 2022; Women, 2025). However, current studies largely ignore the personal perspectives and emotional realities of how women experience economic independence in these digital environments.

This study focuses on Bangladeshi women Who are involve in social media-based business through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok. It shows how these digital online platforms support women's economic independence and empowerment through online entrepreneurship. The research especially focuses on the lived experiences, understands and

obstacles these women face in social media platforms within Bangladesh. It doesn't include other e-commerce platforms or income sources. It's only based on social media-based business platform facilities and barriers also. And similarly, it doesn't focus on male entrepreneurs or offline business activities, the main concentration on women's digital participation in social media based economic activities.

In addition, current research does not fully explore how women personally feel and understand empowerment in online business. So, there is still a clear research gap in understanding how Bangladeshi women experience and understand financial independence through social media-based businesses. This study aims to fill this gap by using women lived experience of financial independence through social media-based entrepreneurship in Bangladesh with a qualitative interpretivist approach and a phenomenological design based on Creswell's research framework.

3 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework explains the primary concepts and perspective that guide a research paper. According to (Creswell, 2007), theories provide a foundation for interpreting and understanding research issues in qualitative studies, where meaning and lived experience are main thing. This research applies two main theoretical perspectives to understand how Bangladeshi women experience and understand economic independence through social media business platforms.

These two main selected theories are:

1. The Capability Approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011)

2. Social Capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; putnam, 2000)

These theories were chosen because they together provide a balance understanding of how social media business platforms help women build financial opportunities. Here, The Capability Approach focuses on individual independence and empowerment. On the other hand, Social Capital Theory explains that economic opportunities are created through relationships and networks. These two theories are more appropriate than only economic or technological theories, as this research is not only about income, but also about women's empowerment, communication, social relationships and their real-life experiences through digital media. These broad concepts are important for this qualitative study.

3.1 The Capability Approach

The first theoretical framework for this study is the **Capability Approach**, introduced by (Sen, 1999) and later expanded by (Nussbaum, 2011). This theory explains that development is not about only income or financial growth but also about people's real freedom to choose and live they value. This theory basically focusses that what a person is actually able to do in their real-life situation or how they manage their life is what matters.

For example, in many developing countries, a woman may earn money by doing small jobs, but she may not have complete freedom in how she spends that money or how she works. But if she has real capabilities, she can choose her own working hours, manage her own business in her own way or system and make independent decisions.

The Capability Approach also helps to explain the limitations. Even though women can use digital tools, their actual freedom is often limited due to family control, social pressure or lack of confidence. So, this theory is important because it can explain both opportunities and inequalities in digital entrepreneurship (Parvaiz, et al., 2026; Sen, 1999). This concept is also supported in development discussions, where capability is not just to have resources, but also to the ability to make decisions independently in real life (UNESCAP, 2022).

3.2 Social Capital theory

The second framework is **Social Capital Theory**, mainly associated with (Bourdieu, 1986) and (Putnam, 2000). This theory focuses on the importance of social relationships, trust, communication and networks in creating opportunities for individuals and communities. This means that success does not only depend on money or skills, but also on how strong a person's social connections are. According to (Tsounis & Xanthopoulou, 2026), this theory explains that people gain advantages or opportunities not only through money or skills, but through their social relationships, networks and trust within society (Bourdieu, 1986).

For example, an online seller who has good relationships with customers, keeps regular communication and trust with buyers can easily grow his business through recommendations and publicity. On the other hand, someone who does not have a strong network always has trouble growing his business even if he has a good product.

In this research, this theory is important because women in Bangladesh use social media not only to sell products, also to build relationships with customers. For example, through Facebook pages, WhatsApp groups and Instagram communications, TikTok Reels and so many things help women promote products, receive customer feedback and build trust. These social relationships often have a direct impact on business success. However, not all women benefit equally from these social networks. Some women have good relationships with customers and active online communication, while many others struggle due to poor digital skills or weak networks. This means that social capital can help women, but it can also limit them in some cases.

Therefore, social capital theory helps explain how digital entrepreneurial activities work in the daily lives of Bangladeshi women. And trust, communication and networking become important resources for generating income and business growth.

4 Conceptual frameworks

The conceptual framework for this study presents the connections between social media-based business platforms, women's empowerment, and financial independence, along with the barriers that impact this journey. According to (Creswell, 2007), a conceptual framework helps to guide qualitative research by connecting key concepts and explaining their relationships within a study. This study identifies platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and TikTok as important digital platforms through which women engage in business, connect with customers and generate income.

This framework shows the relationships between the key themes of the study. First, social media provides opportunities for women to engage in online business. Through these business activities, many women gradually gain skills, confidence, communication skills and decision-making abilities which help to their empowerment. This empowerment impacts women's economic independence, such as increased earning opportunities, control over finances and increased self-confidence in daily life.

However, this framework also shows that this process is not always easy, as barriers such as limited digital literacy, gender inequality, online fraud, limited access to technology and family responsibilities can impact women's ability to fully empower themselves and achieve economic independence. The conceptual framework is developed based on three main elements: Social

media platforms, empowerment and economic independence, while also considering barriers. these elements together help to understand how women understand and experience entrepreneurship through social media in Bangladesh.

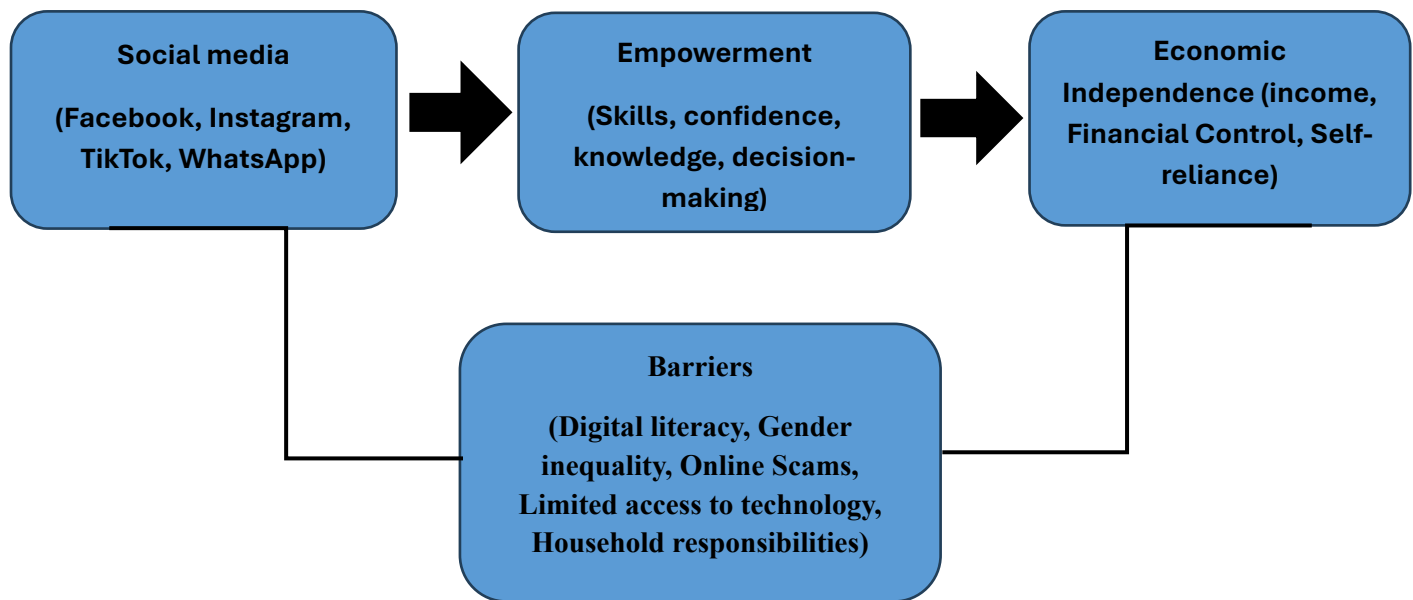


Figure: This Conceptual framework shows the relationship between online platforms (social media), empowerment, barriers and women's economic independence.

Source: Develop by the author

The conceptual framework shows that social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok provide opportunities for Bangladeshi women to participate in online businesses. Through these platforms, women can connect with customers, promote products, build online networks, and earn money from home. As women become more involved in these business activities so they gradually gain confidence, communication skills, business knowledge and decision-making abilities which helps them become empowered. This empowerment also creates women's economic independence. And it allows them to earn an income, gain control over their finances and become more confident in their daily lives. However, this framework also shows that some barriers can affect this process. For example, limited digital literacy, gender inequality, online fraud, limited access to technology and family responsibilities. These barriers can make it

difficult for women to properly participate in online businesses and limit their ability to achieve full empowerment and economic independence through social media-based entrepreneurial activities.

This conceptual framework is connected to the **Capability Approach (Sen, 1999)** and **Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000)**. Those theories help explain the relationship between social media business activities, empowerment and economic independence. Here, the capability Approach explains that empowerment is not only income generation it also includes increasing women freedom and decision-making capacity through social media platforms. Online networking helps build crucial trust and customer relationships. Social capacity theory also shows online platforms and communication on social media platforms help women build bonding with customer, advertisement, overall business connections. In Bangladesh, these theories together explore that while social media increase opportunities for income and entrepreneurship, women's success also depends on resource access, social relationships and traditional barriers.

5 Research Methodology

This chapter explains the overall methodological design of the study. It discusses the research methodology, basic concepts, paradigm and Creswell's framework used to understand how Bangladeshi women experience economic independence through social media-based businesses. This study is based on women's personal experiences, income and real-life situations. This study follows a qualitative research approach because its aim is to explore Bangladeshi women's experiences of financial independence through social media-based business platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok. According to (Creswell, 2007), qualitative research is appropriate when the purpose of the research is not to measure numerical or statistical outcomes, but focus on understanding meanings, experiences and social activities. This approach helps the researcher to focus on the real-life experiences of participants, especially to analyze how women understand empowerment, barriers and financial independence in entrepreneurship.

5.1 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm helps to create beliefs and concepts that help researchers understand reality, knowledge and the research process (Kuhn, 1962; Creswell, 2007). Different paradigms explain different ways of understanding social reality and managing the whole research. Paradigms are important in qualitative research because they help researchers select appropriate methods and

understand how knowledge is created through human experience. In qualitative research different paradigms such as positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism, constructivism, critical theory and pragmatism are commonly used. Each of these is explained below:

5.1.1 Positivism

Positivism is a process where there is one fixed and objective reality that can be measured and analysed scientifically. Researchers who follow this positivism usually collect numerical data, gain information through surveys or experiments and use statistical analysis (Comte, 1853).

According to this paradigm, reality exists independently of human opinion. Knowledge is gained through observation, collection and measurement and researchers try to stay away from neutral and personal opinions during the research process.

However, this paradigm is not suitable for this study, because the main goal of this study is not to analyze numbers or measurable business success, it's suitable for quantitative research but this study is based on Qualitative. Instead, this study attempts to understand how women in Bangladesh personally experience and understand economic independence through social media-based businesses.

5.1.2 post-positivism

Post-positivism is a next modified form of positivism. It holds that reality exists, but humans cannot fully understand it because of the limitations of human knowledge and understanding (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Post-positivist researchers still use the scientific method, but they also find that the researcher's personal opinion and social environment can influence the results of the research. Post-positivists' paradigm is also not fully suitable for this research, because the main purpose of this research is not to make predictions or theories. Rather, the focus is on understanding how women experience and interpret empowerment in real life through social media-based entrepreneurial activities.

5.1.3 Interpretivism

Interpretivism means understanding human experiences, feelings and social reality from the opinion of the participants (Schutz, 1967). According to this idea, reality is not the same for everyone. People may experience the same thing differently because of their social and cultural situations. This paradigm explores that there is no single reality, but rather that there is many

realities for different people. People may experience the same situation differently depending on their situations and background. In this paradigm, Knowledge is created through connection or communication between researchers and participants. The researcher's own opinion and understandings are also considered important in research.

This paradigm is very suitable for this study. Because Bangladeshi women experience social media-based businesses differently. This depends on their personal lives, family situations, social expectations and economic circumstances. For example, some women may feel empowered by earning money online, on the other hand others may still face family pressures or social barriers. So, interpretivism helps to understand these different real-world experiences of women in deeply (Creswell, 2007).

5.1.4 Constructivism

Constructivism explains that reality and knowledge are created through human interaction and experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers follow this paradigm to find out how people create meaning through communication and social relationships. According to this paradigm, reality is created by socially. Knowledge is created through researchers and participants. In addition, values are part of the research process and cannot be separated from understanding.

Although constructivism is relevant to this research, the main focus of this research is more on explaining individual experiences and feelings than on understanding the group construction of reality.

5.1.5 Critical theory

Critical theory focuses on power, inequality, abuse and social change (Habermas, 1972). Researchers following this paradigm for aim to challenge unfair social systems and give voice to the underprivileged. According to this idea, reality is created through social, political and economic power. Knowledge is also related to power and social status. And this type of research is value-based and aims to bring about social change.

This paradigm is somehow relevant to this study, as women in Bangladesh face gender discrimination and social barriers in digital entrepreneurship. However, the main objective of this study is not to change social systems or create movements. Rather than, the main focus here is on understanding women's experiences and feelings.

5.1.6 Pragmatism

Pragmatism focusses on practical solutions and “what works” in research (Dewey, 1938). In this approach, researchers can use both qualitative and quantitative methods according to the needs of the research. According to this paradigm, reality is always changing and understanding through practical results. Knowledge is created through practical experience and work. And researchers focus on effective and usable solutions.

However, this paradigm is not suitable for this study, as it does not use mixed methods and does not aim to find solutions to real business problems. here is on qualitative understanding women's real-life experiences.

5.1.7 Summary and Justification

After explaining different paradigms, Interpretivism was selected as the most suitable for this study. Unlike positivism or post-positivism, this study did not measure business success through numbers. Unlike pragmatism, it does not focus on practical solutions through mixed methods. Somehow this study is relevant to critical theory, but the main objective of this study is not to change social systems or create movements, and also same for constructivism.

So, the main goal of this research is to understand how Bangladeshi women personally experience and observe economic freedom, empowerment and various challenges through social media-based businesses. Therefore, interpretivism gives the most appropriate for understanding these personal and real experiences.

5.2 Ontology, Epistemology and Axiology

5.2.1 ontology

This study follows an interpretivist qualitative approach, which explains that reality is not a single, fixed truth but rather is created based on people's personal experiences and social circumstances (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In this study, economic independence does not mean the same thing to all women. It may be different for those who doing business on social media in Bangladesh.

For some it means earning their own income and for others it means helping with family expenses or for other women it means gaining confidence or freedom to make decisions. Therefore, this

study views reality as multiple and socially, as each woman experiences online business and empowerment differently based on their personal and social conditions.

5.2.2 Epistemology

From an epistemology perspective, this study explains that knowledge is created through understanding the experiences of participants and interacting with them (Schwandt, 2001). The aim of this study is not to measure women's empowerment in terms of numbers or income, but to understand how they connect their experiences doing business on Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok. Because this study explores personal experience and understanding of meaning, it is more consistent with an interpretivist approach than a positivist approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

5.2.3 Axiology

Axiology refers to the role of values in research. This research explains that research cannot be completely neutral, as the researcher's perspective and understanding can influence the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). But the researcher will try to present the experiences of the participants perfectly and respectfully. The stories of women's empowerment, obstacles, confidence and financial independence in this study are important because they help to understand the real-life experiences of women in Bangladesh through social media-based entrepreneurial activities.

5.3 Creswell's Five Qualitative Approaches

According to (Creswell, 2007), there are five main methods for understanding human experience in qualitative research. These are **narrative research**, **phenomenology**, **grounded theory**, **case study** and **ethnography**. Each method collects and analyzes data differently depending on the purpose of the research.

Narrative research focuses on how people's life stories and personal experiences change over time through personal storytelling. Phenomenology specifically deals with people's real-life experiences and how they understand and connect those experiences in their daily life. Grounded theory focuses on developing new theories by collecting and analyzing data from people, rather starting research with existing theories. Case studies focus on a specific person, organization or a particular situation deeply to understand it clearly. Ethnography is used to study the culture, groups

and behavior of a particular group by observing people in their natural environment (Creswell, 2007).

Of these five methods, phenomenology is the most appropriate for this study. This is because the main goal of this study is to understand how Bangladeshi women experience economic independence through social media-based businesses. It tries to explore how individuals experience and understand a particular phenomenon in their everyday life. In simple words, it helps researchers understand “how people feel and what meaning they give to their experiences.” This study is not intended to generate new theories (grounded theory), analyze cultures (ethnography), analyze life stories (narratives) or analyze any specific institution/case (case study). Here is on the real experiences of women using platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok. For example, one woman describes her experience as freedom and confidence, while another woman describes it as challenges or difficulty in balancing family and work. Phenomenology allows the researcher to create these real-life experiences. This is very important for this study because the focus is on meaning, feelings and personal understanding rather than measurement.

About paradigms, Interpretivism provides more suitable research as it allows the researcher to explore how women personally understand their realities within social, cultural and economic contexts. So, Interpretivism paradigm also related to Phenomenology, and it helps researchers understand how women experience, understand and make meaning of their economic independence.

5.4 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, “trustworthiness” is used instead of reliability and validity to ensure the quality of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, trustworthiness was ensured through four factors: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility means accurately representing the real experiences of the participants. This study perfectly presented the real experiences of Bangladeshi women in social media-based businesses. Transferability means describing the results in detail so that they can understand in similar contexts. Dependability means explaining the research process clearly so that the research is easy to follow logically and consistently. Confirmability means that the results are based on the actual statements of the participants, not the personal opinions of the researcher.

Overall, these trustworthiness methods strengthen the research, as it is based on the real experiences of women in Bangladeshi social media-based businesses. By using credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, the research perfectly reflects the women real words and real lives rather than assumptions. This makes the research findings more reliable and meaningful because it shows how women experience economic independence and empowerment through digital entrepreneurship.

6 Research Ethics

Ethical considerations are important in this study, because it involves understand the personal experiences of women in social media entrepreneurship. All participants in this study will be treated with respect and dignity through the research process. In ethical principles of qualitative research, informed consent will be obtained from all participants before data collection. This means that they will be fully informed about the purpose of the study and will voluntarily agree to participate (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Those participants can also withdraw from study at any time without any pressure. The identity and business details of the participants will be kept confidentially, ensuring their privacy and security. This is especially important in online businesses, as revealing their identity can create social or personal risks. All information will be used for academic purposes only and will be stored securely.

7 Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations to this study that need to be mentioned. Firstly, this study was focus only on Bangladeshi women who run social media-based businesses. So, its results not fully applicable for all women entrepreneurs or women in other countries. After that, this is a qualitative study, so the results are based on the personal experiences and opinions of the participants. So, these results cannot be appropriate for all the population. Lastly, the number of participants and the data collection may be limited due to time limitations.

Also, this study focuses on participants' self-reported experiences, which sometimes lead to personal bias or selective memories. Despite these limitations, this study provides important

information into women's real-world experiences and economic independence through digital entrepreneurship.

8 Conclusions

The main objective of this study was to understand how Bangladeshi women experience economic independence and empowerment through social media-based entrepreneurship. It used qualitative research methods and interpretivist approaches to understanding women's real-life experiences rather than numbers. This approach explored the opportunities, challenges and achievement women find when using social media-based business platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok business.

The results of this study show that social media-based businesses create income opportunities, work flexibility and personal empowerment for women. However, their experiences are also influenced by social, cultural and economic barriers. Overall, this study shows that digital platforms play a significant role in women's economic independence and daily lives in Bangladesh.

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