



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

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Abstract:

This study focuses 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 ecommerce 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 economic participation (Dwityas et. al., 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 et. al., 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 et. al., 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; Sowmya & Pai, 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 full participation in entrepreneurship (Sowmya & Pai, 2024; Rahman et al., 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 et al., 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; Amah et al., 2024). 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 et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 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 et al., 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 must 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 arrangements. Previous research has shown that social media and internet platforms help women start businesses by making it easier to enter the market and reach a wider customer base (Chatterjee & Banerjee, 2022). Similarly, freelancing and online work platforms are considered important factors that enable women to participate in income-generating activities and improve their skills in the global digital economy (Wood et al., 2019).

However, most previous studies have focused on numerical outcomes or quantitative aspects such as income, business growth, and online activities. As these studies often use quantitative methods, they do not provide a clear picture of how women themselves experience or understand economic independence through online platforms. On the other hand, qualitative methods provide a better understanding of how women use online platforms, especially social media-based platforms, to experience and achieve economic independence (Rahman et al., 2023; UNESCAP, 2022). Additionally, women's empowerment through digital entrepreneurship in Bangladesh has not been studied in great depth. 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 the real-life experiences of women engaged in digital entrepreneurship in Bangladesh. Existing research does not adequately focus on how women use social media-based business opportunities to understand empowerment, overcome challenges, and achieve financial independence in their daily lives. For this reason, this study uses a qualitative method and aims to explore how Bangladeshi women experience and understand economic independence through social media-based business platforms from their own perspectives, experiences, and interpretations (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 businesses (Dwityas et. Al., 2025; Kelly & McAdam, 2022). Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok are often used in Bangladesh for small business activities, communication with clients, and income generation (Fouzder et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 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:

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 homebased business platform (Fouzder et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 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 et al., 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 ecommerce places (Mabrouk et al., 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 et al., 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 **Social Capital Theory** explains how trust, communication, and online social networks help women creating business opportunities through social media (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000). This theory helps to 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. In addition, this study follows Creswell's phenomenological approach, which explores people's real-life experiences and personal feelings or meanings (Creswell, 2007). That 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 in 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 et al., 2023; Rani et al., 2022). Besides, researchers note that women's economic participation improves their social standing and increases opportunities for personal growth and self-reliance (Verma et al., 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 (Hammad & EI 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 et al., 2024). Evidence from Bangladesh also suggests that digital marketplaces have created new opportunities for women by expanding customer access and supporting their contribution to national economy (Ripa et al., 2023). Overall, these studies show that digital entrepreneurship activities play an 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 (Rani et al., 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). However, these studies mainly discuss the benefits of flexibility but give less attention to women's personal experiences in their family and daily lives.

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 (Sowmya & Pai, 2024). Women are now playing a significant role in financial decision-making than ever before, as they can use various digital financial services. (Mabrouk et al., 2023). This statement shows that financial independence is connected to women's daily experiences and how they understand empowerment. Therefore, women's empowerment cannot be measured only by income because women may have different views of economic independence based on their personal and social lives.

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 & Pai, 2024; Verma et al., 2024). Similarly, Studies in Bangladesh and Pakistan show that women entrepreneurs still face social, technological, and institutional challenges despite

the growth of digital business opportunities (Saha et al., 2026; Parvaiz et al., 2026). 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 (Hammad & EI Naggat, 2023). Although previous research highlights the economic benefits of digital entrepreneurship, it mainly focuses on business performance and barriers, while paying less attention to women's own experiences of economic independence and empowerment. Therefore, qualitative research is needed to understand how women personally experience and interpret these issues in their own social and business contexts.

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 their companies (Fernandes et al., 2022). Digital platforms have created flexible business opportunities for women, especially those who face social, financial, or mobility challenges. However, not all women benefit equally because some factors such as digital skills, social support and access to technology affect their success in digital entrepreneurship (Rani 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 et al., 2024). The growth of digital economy has boosted female involvement in flexible work and online income activities (Rani et al., 2022). Scholar's experts highlight that digital entrepreneurship became much more significant after the COVID-19 pandemic because many small businesses converted to ecommerce and digital communication methods (Mabrouk et al., 2023). However, previous studies mainly focus on the flexibility and accessibility of digital platforms, while some researchers highlight their challenges. Leung et al. (2021) suggest that digital platforms can create income opportunities, and they may also lead to problems such as high competition, uncertain working conditions and limited control over online business activities.

Previous literature suggests that digital entrepreneurship supports women's financial participation, communication skills and overall confidence. As noted by (Verma et al., 2024), Digital entrepreneurship enhances economic participation and fosters 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 (Hammad & El Naggar, 2023). In Bangladesh also shows that social media businesses help women entrepreneurs connect with customers and participate in economic activities. However, problems such as limited finance, lack of business skills and marketing difficulties are also very important challenges (Ripa et al., 2023; Fouzder et al., 2022). This shows that digital platforms can support women's empowerment but may also show inequalities that affect their experiences.

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 (Sowmya & Pai, 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). Similarly, Ghosh et al. (2021) show that digital platforms can help women earn income, but challenges such as unstable work, limited access to technology and social barriers can reduce these benefits. Similarly, another research suggests that digital tools and social media can support women's economic empowerment by helping them to promote their businesses and connect with customers. However, women's success also depends on their digital skills and the support they receive (Arif and Saeed, 2025).

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 (Kelly & McAdam, 2022). Therefore, previous studies show that digital entrepreneurship can create economic opportunities for women, but digital platforms alone cannot remove all gender-related barriers.

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. However, social media creates new opportunities for women entrepreneurs, but their success depends on some factors such as digital skills, access to technology and support from their social environment.

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 (Hossain et al., 2022). However, some researchers suggest that social media entrepreneurship is not always empowering, as women may also face challenges such as online competition, difficulties in gaining customer trust, and lack of professional support.

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 social media platforms are popular because they are easy to use and affordable, making them suitable for home-based businesses (Fouzder et al., 2022; Koli, 2024). In addition, the increasing use of smartphones and the internet has helped more women participate in online businesses (UNESCAP, 2022). However, previous studies mainly focus on the accessibility and low cost of these platforms and pay less attention to women's personal experiences and the influence of social, cultural, and family factors on their business journeys.

Research also shows that having internet access does not guarantee equal opportunities for all women. Many women still face challenges such as limited digital skills, online safety concerns, and traditional social barriers (OECD, 2021; UNESCAP, 2022). These challenges often make it more difficult for women, especially those living in rural and semi-urban areas, to succeed in digital entrepreneurship. Therefore, although social media creates new opportunities for women's

economic participation, more research is needed to understand women entrepreneurs' experiences and how they view empowerment, independence, and challenges in digital business.

2.4 Research Gap

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok play an important role in helping women run their businesses and earn income. However, most previous studies focus on online activities and financial outcomes rather than women's real-life experiences. Research by the OECD (2021) and Hossain et al. (2022) shows that digital platforms help women reach more customers, reduce business barriers, and build 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; Cherie Blair Foundation for 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. Previous research shows that digital marketplaces and online platforms can help women entrepreneurs by providing better access to customers, creating income opportunities and supporting financial independence (Ripa et al., 2023). However, women involved in digital entrepreneurship also face different challenges, such as family responsibilities, lack of support and online risks, which can affect their experiences and business activities (Saha et al., 2026). Therefore, this study especially focuses on the lived experiences, understands and obstacles these women face in social media platforms within Bangladesh.

This study 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), especially in qualitative research theory helps the researcher understand people's experiences, thoughts and the meanings they give to a specific situation. This research applies **Social Capital theory** because it helps to understand how Bangladeshi women experience, thought and understand about economic independence through social media business platforms.

- **Social Capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; putnam, 2000)**

This theory helps to explain how social media or online business platform help women create economic opportunities through connections, relationships, trust and networks. This study is not just about how much money women earn using social media. It aims to understand how women do business through online platforms like Facebook and Instagram, build customer relationships, interact with people and experience this journey about their real-life experiences. Since this is a qualitative phenomenological study, understanding women's personal experiences and feelings is the most important focus in this research.

3.1 Social Capital theory

The main theoretical 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. And explain that trust, cooperations and social connections can create benefits for people and communities. (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000). In

addition, Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) highlight that social capital can help people to create and exchange important resources through social relationships.

In this study, Social Capital Theory explains how women in Bangladesh use social media platforms not only to sell products, but also to build customer relationships and grow their businesses. Using Facebook pages, WhatsApp groups, Instagram, and TikTok, women entrepreneurs can promote their products, communicate directly with customers, receive feedback, and build trust. This direct connection between buyers and customers helps improve customer relationships and business success (Chatterjee & Banerjee, 2024).

For example, a woman entrepreneur who communicates well with customers and builds trust is more likely to grow her business and good review or recommendations through online networks. In contrast, another entrepreneur with limited digital skills, weak social connections, or less community support may find it more difficult to grow her business. Therefore, social connections can create opportunities, but they can also lead to inequality because not everyone has the same access to resources and networks (Bourdieu, 1986).

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 (Hammad & El Naggar, 2023).

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. This theory is also appropriate for a phenomenological approach because it allows the researcher to explore Bangladeshi women's personal experiences and understanding. And it helps to understand how their social relationships and online connections impact their financial success on digital platforms.

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 (Maxwell, 2013), a conceptual framework helps to guide researchers by connecting key concepts of qualitative study and explaining their relationships with different elements of the research. 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.

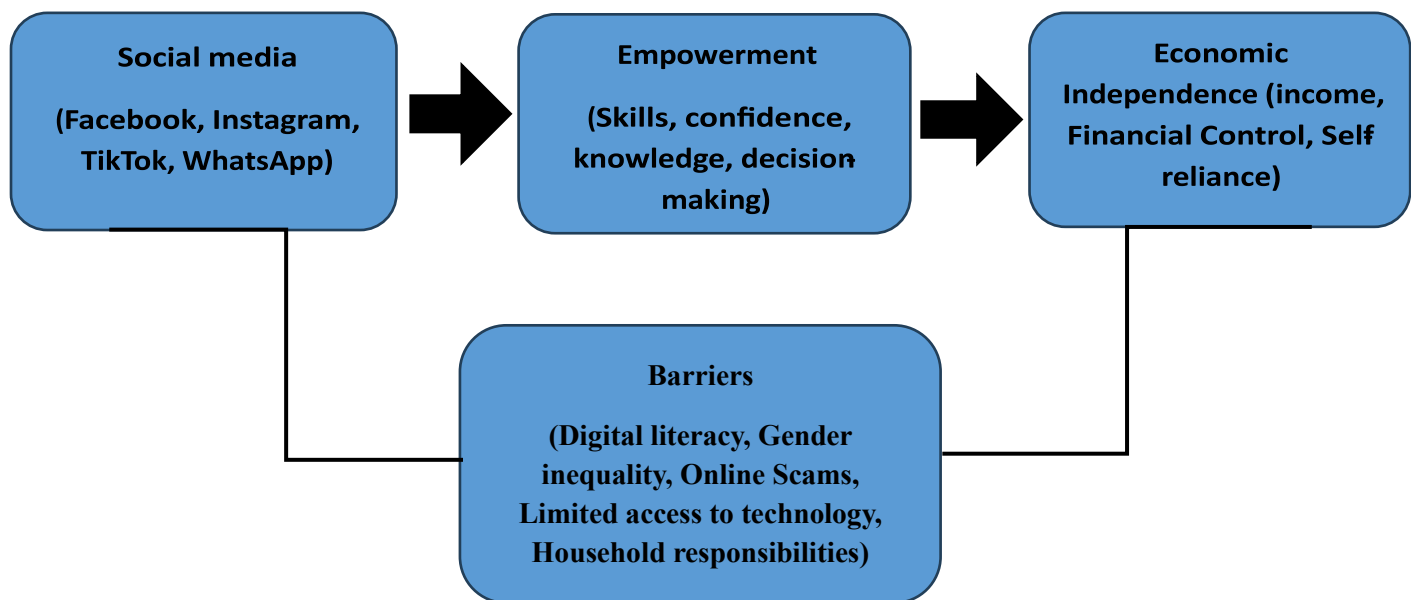


Figure: This Conceptual framework shows the relationship between online platforms (social media), empowerment, barriers and women's economic independence. Source: Develop by the author

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 confidence 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 proper 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 **Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000)**. This theory helps to explain the relationship between social media business activities, social relationships, empowerment and economic independence. Here, Social capital theory explains that economic opportunities are not created only through financial resources or personal skills, but also

through trust, communication and networks with others. And shows online platforms and communication on social media platforms help women build bonding with customer, advertisement, overall business connections. In Bangladesh, this theory explores that while social media increase opportunities for income and entrepreneurship and women's success also depends on resource access, social relationships, networks 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. As the study is based on women's personal experiences, income and real-life situations. This study follows a qualitative research approach which is very effective 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 experiences, interpretations and the meanings they attach to social activities (Aspers & Corte, 2019). 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 guide researchers to 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 research paradigm where there is one fixed and objective reality that can be measured and analyzed 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 (Park et al., 2020). 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 and evidence-based 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 or fixed for everyone. People may experience the same thing differently because of their social and cultural situations (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). This paradigm explores that there is no single reality, but rather that there are 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. In this approach, knowledge is created through discussion between the researcher and participants, where participants' experiences and views are considered important (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

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. 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 create awareness of inequality and give positive social change (Skarstad, 2024).

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 is on understanding women's experiences and feelings.

5.1.6 Pragmatism

Pragmatism focuses on practical solutions and on what works best to answer a research problem. 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, flexible and understood through practical results. Knowledge is created through practical experience and work. And researchers focus on finding effective and acceptable solutions (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). 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 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 because it helps researchers to understand these personal experiences, meaning and perspectives based on their real experiences (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

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 can be understood differently 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 women, 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, there is no single reality about women's economic independence because

each women explain their experience differently as their personal, social, cultural and digital context. Recent research shows that women digital entrepreneurs experience online business differently based on their social and digital environments. Similarly, another research explain that women entrepreneur experiences can be understood by focusing on their personal feelings, meanings and real-life experiences. These studies support the idea that reality is not fixed but created through people's own experiences (Imiren et al., 2026; Oliveira et al., 2024). So, this study views reality as multiple and socially, as each woman experiences online business and empowerment differently based on their personal and social conditions. The main aim of this study is to understand how women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh who use social media for business view their economic independence, opportunities, challenges and empowerment based on their own experiences and understanding.

5.2.2 Epistemology

From an epistemology perspective, this study explains that knowledge is created through understanding the participants experiences and interacting with researchers and participants (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. For gathering information, the researcher will conduct interviews to explore the personal stories, views and daily experiences of the participants. Based on their opinion and experiences, the researchers and participants develop an understanding of how social media contributes to women's economic independence. Recent studies show that to truly understand women in business, researchers must focus on their personal life stories and the meaning they give to their work, rather than just only focusing on business outcomes (Oliveira et al., 2024). In this study focuses on personal experience and understanding of meaning, it is more compatible with an interpretivist approach than a positivist approach.

5.2.3 Axiology

Axiology refers to the role of values in research and how researchers beliefs, experiences and understanding may impact on the way they are collecting data. That's mean research cannot be completely neutral, as the researcher perspective and understanding can influence the whole process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this study, the researcher accepts that personal values and

qualitative research cannot be completely separated, because the researcher plays an important role in understanding participant stories. In this study, the important things are women's voices, equal opportunities and truly understanding the real-life experiences of Bangladeshi women running businesses on social media. However, researchers personal values and beliefs can influence various parts of the study, such as selecting research questions, communication with participants and understanding their experiences. Therefore, researchers will use reflexivity by thinking about personal thoughts or assumptions and concern about how personal values may affect the research paper (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019; Olukotun et al., 2021). Participants will give the opportunity to freely express their experiences without any pressure or influence. During data collection, the researcher will focus on the participants own thoughts and experiences without adding personal opinions and ensure that the results perfectly reflect their real-world experiences (Olukotun et al., 2021).

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).

From 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. 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.

The findings of this study show that social media-based businesses create income opportunities, work flexibility and personal empowerment for women. These findings are also supported by recent studies, which explain that social media and F-commerce have created new opportunities for Bangladeshi women to participate in entrepreneurship and improve their economic contribution (Ripa et al., 2023). However, the literature shows that economic empowerment is not only about earning more money. Women's experiences are also influenced by social, cultural and family factors which can help and create challenges in their business journey (Ahmed et al., 2025; Saha et al., 2026). Therefore, social media should not be viewed as a complete solution to women's economic challenges but as an important platform that creates opportunities while existing barriers continue to influence women's experiences.

Overall, this study shows that social media plays a significant role in enhancing the economic independence and empowerment of women in Bangladesh. At the same time, the study suggests that the benefits for digital entrepreneurs can be strengthened by improved digital skills, supportive policies, ensuring easy access to technology and fostering a more supportive social environment. Furthermore, by understanding the real-life experiences of women, researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders will be able to develop or improved strategies and policies to support women entrepreneurs more effectively in the future.

Reflection:

Completing this research paper has been one of the most valuable learning experiences for me. When I started this module, my knowledge about writing research papers was quite limited. Although I had completed a dissertation during my Master's in English Language and Literature, it was not as detailed or structured as this research paper. This was my first experience writing research in a structured and professional way. I made many mistakes at the beginning and often felt confused. But now I am improving my work based on my teacher's detailed feedback.

One of the most important things I learned in this module was about qualitative research. Before starting this module, I had no understanding of research paradigms, ontology, epistemology, axiology or Creswell's approaches and so many. While working on this research paper, I learned about various research paradigms, including positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism and all of them. Initially, I was confused about the differences between these concepts. Even the meaning of 'critical analysis' was unclear to me. Later, reading various journal articles, Google and reviewing my teacher's lecture and feedback, I came to understand why interpretivism was the most suitable approach for my research. Similarly, after learning about Creswell's five qualitative research methods, I realized that since my study is based on the real-life experiences of women, so phenomenology is the most appropriate approach for this topic.

Another important lesson was selecting an appropriate theoretical framework. At first, I chose a theory that was not fully connected with my research philosophy and methodology. Later, after discussing with my teacher, I realized that a theory must relate to research philosophy, methodology and research questions together. This experience helped me understand why Social Capital Theory is more suitable for my research than the theory I had previously selected. Through this, I learned that it is not enough for a theory to simply relate to the subject matter, but it must also align with the overall research design.

My teacher's detailed feedback played a valuable role in this research paper. Firstly, I found it difficult to understand and it puts pressure on me, as there were comments on almost every part of my work. But now, I realized how important they were for my learning, and it's very helpful and essential for correcting and understanding my mistakes. This feedback helped me identify my

mistakes, improve the quality of my writing and think critically rather than simply describing previous research.

Another biggest challenge I faced in this research was finding suitable journal articles related to the topic. Although many studies were relevant, some were not available for free, so I had to spend a lot of time searching for reliable and easily accessible academic sources. Although this process was often stressful and time-consuming. But now it enhanced my research-finding skills and made me more confident in selecting high-quality academic literature. Another major challenge was my language barrier. English is not my native language, so it took me a long time to read and comprehend academic articles. Firstly, I used to try reading every research paper from the first page to the last, which made the entire process slow and difficult. Later, my senior classmates suggested that I should first read the abstract, introduction and conclusion to decide whether the article was relevant before reading the whole paper. This simple advice made a big difference and helped me read academic articles more efficiently and quickly.

Overall, this module has greatly improved both my research knowledge and my confidence. I have developed better qualitative research skills, critical thinking, analytical skills, academic reading, and problem-solving abilities. Most importantly, now I understand that good research is not just about collecting information. It is about analyzing ideas critically and connecting them in a logical way. I believe the knowledge and experience I have gained from this module will support me throughout my DBA journey and in my future research. Although this journey was challenging, it was a meaningful and rewarding learning experience that has prepared me well for future academic work.

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