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WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND DIGITAL FINANCIAL INCLUSION

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ABSTRACT

Women's economic empowerment is an essential component of sustainable development, poverty reduction, gender equality, and inclusive economic growth. In recent years, entrepreneurship and digital financial inclusion have emerged as important mechanisms for strengthening women's economic participation and improving their financial independence. Entrepreneurship enables women to establish businesses, generate income, create employment opportunities, and participate in economic decision-making, while digital financial services provide access to mobile banking, digital payments, savings accounts, credit facilities, and other financial products. The integration of entrepreneurship and digital financial inclusion can help women overcome traditional barriers associated with limited financial resources, restricted mobility, inadequate business networks, and unequal access to economic opportunities. However, the benefits of these developments are not equally distributed because women continue to face challenges related to digital literacy, financial knowledge, social and cultural expectations, internet accessibility, cybersecurity, and institutional discrimination. This research examines the relationship between women's entrepreneurship, digital financial inclusion, and economic empowerment, with particular attention to income generation, financial independence, business sustainability, and participation in economic decision-making. The study adopts a proposed qualitative and quantitative research framework to understand how digital financial services can support women-owned enterprises and improve their economic opportunities. It also considers the importance of financial education, digital infrastructure, supportive policies, and gender-responsive entrepreneurship programs. The study aims to contribute to the understanding of how inclusive financial technologies and entrepreneurial opportunities can work together to promote women's economic empowerment and sustainable development.

KEYWORDS: *Women's Economic Empowerment, Women Entrepreneurs, Digital Financial Inclusion, Mobile Banking, Financial Literacy, Gender Equality, Digital Entrepreneurship, Financial Independence, Sustainable Development, Women-Owned Enterprises.*

INTRODUCTION

Women's economic empowerment has become an important subject in contemporary discussions about gender equality, poverty reduction, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development. Economic empowerment refers to women's ability to participate meaningfully in economic activities, earn independent income, control financial resources, own productive assets, and make decisions concerning their personal and professional lives. Despite improvements in education, employment opportunities, and access to technology, women in many societies continue to experience structural disadvantages that restrict their economic participation. These disadvantages may include unequal access to capital, limited ownership of property, discriminatory employment practices, unpaid domestic responsibilities, and inadequate business support. Blumberg, S., Slator, P., & Alexander, D. (2024, May). Found that,Entrepreneurship offers women an opportunity to overcome some of these barriers by enabling them to establish independent enterprises and develop sustainable sources of income. However, entrepreneurial success depends on more than individual motivation because women also require access to financial resources, business knowledge, markets, networks, and appropriate institutional support. Digital financial inclusion is increasingly relevant in this context because it can connect women with financial services that were previously difficult to access. Therefore, examining the relationship between

entrepreneurship and digital financial inclusion is essential for understanding how women can strengthen their economic position and participate more effectively in economic development.

Entrepreneurship provides women with opportunities to transform their skills, knowledge, creativity, and personal experiences into productive economic activities. Women-owned enterprises operate in various sectors, including retail, agriculture, education, healthcare, manufacturing, fashion, food services, and online commerce. Gill, S. S., Prashar, A., Kamath, A. G., Shinwari, H., Sugand, K., & Gupte, C. M. (2026).elobrated on, Through these businesses, women can generate income, support their families, create employment opportunities, and contribute to local economic growth. Entrepreneurship may also increase women's confidence and strengthen their ability to participate in household and community decision-making. Nevertheless, women entrepreneurs frequently encounter difficulties when attempting to establish or expand their businesses. Limited access to formal credit, insufficient collateral, weak professional networks, restricted market access, and inadequate entrepreneurial training can prevent promising businesses from becoming sustainable. These difficulties may be particularly serious for women living in rural areas or belonging to low-income households. Klapper, L., Singer, D., Starita, L., & Norris, A. (2025). Revealed, Digital technologies can potentially reduce certain barriers by allowing entrepreneurs to advertise products online, communicate with customers, receive payments electronically, and manage business transactions remotely.

However, these advantages depend on reliable internet access, suitable devices, digital skills, and an enabling business environment. Entrepreneurship should therefore be understood as a process shaped by both individual capabilities and the wider economic and social conditions in which women operate.Digital financial inclusion refers to the availability and effective use of formal financial services through digital technologies. Enebeli, E. L., Enebeli, U. U., Dakyen, Y. J., Cherima, Y. J., Hassan, R. K., Mikailu, F., ... & Oko, O. P. (2026). Explained,These services include mobile banking, digital wallets, electronic payments, online savings facilities, digital credit, and other technology-enabled financial products. Traditional banking systems may impose geographical, administrative, financial, and documentation-related barriers that make it difficult for some women to open accounts or obtain credit. Digital financial services can potentially reduce these barriers by enabling users to conduct transactions without frequent visits to physical bank branches. For women entrepreneurs, digital accounts can support the separation of personal and business finances, improve transaction records, facilitate payments from customers, and make financial management more convenient.

Digital transaction histories may also help some entrepreneurs demonstrate business activity when applying for formal financial services, although access to credit is never guaranteed. Furthermore, digital financial inclusion can connect women with wider commercial networks and online marketplaces. However, access to a mobile phone or digital account does not automatically mean that a woman has meaningful financial inclusion. Effective inclusion also requires affordability, accessibility, security, privacy, financial awareness, and the freedom to control and use financial resources independently. Consequently, the quality and practical usefulness of digital financial services are as important as their availability.The relationship between women's entrepreneurship and digital financial inclusion is particularly important

because these two factors can reinforce one another. Women who have access to digital financial services may find it easier to receive payments, transfer money, monitor business expenses, and maintain financial records. These capabilities can support business planning and help entrepreneurs make more informed decisions about pricing, purchasing, savings, and investment. At the same time, women who establish successful businesses may develop greater demand for formal accounts, digital payments, credit facilities, and other financial products. This interaction can create opportunities for economic growth and increased financial independence. Nevertheless, the relationship is not necessarily automatic or equally beneficial for all women. Entrepreneurs may face transaction fees, unreliable connectivity, complicated digital interfaces, fraudulent transactions, or difficulties resolving financial disputes. Women who lack confidence in using technology may also remain dependent on relatives or intermediaries to conduct digital transactions, potentially limiting their financial autonomy. Moreover, women-owned businesses operating in informal markets may have difficulty meeting documentation requirements imposed by financial institutions. These challenges demonstrate the importance of examining not only whether women have access to digital financial services, but also whether they can use those services safely, independently, and effectively to improve their businesses.Social and cultural conditions also influence the effectiveness of entrepreneurship and digital financial inclusion in promoting women's economic empowerment. In some communities, traditional gender expectations place a disproportionate responsibility for childcare, household management, and unpaid family work on women. These responsibilities can reduce the time available for business development, professional training, and financial management. Restrictions on mobility, limited access to education, and unequal control over household income may further constrain women's entrepreneurial choices.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To examine how digital financial inclusion supports women's entrepreneurship and contributes to their economic empowerment, financial independence, business sustainability, and participation in economic decision-making.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How does digital financial inclusion influence women's entrepreneurial opportunities and contribute to their economic empowerment and financial independence?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's economic empowerment has been widely discussed in contemporary development research as a process involving access to economic resources, control over income, productive employment, entrepreneurship, and participation in financial decision-making. Entrepreneurship can provide women with an alternative to traditional employment by allowing them to establish enterprises that reflect their skills, interests, and available resources. Barlas, D. (2025). Found that,Women entrepreneurs may develop small businesses to supplement household income, achieve financial independence, or pursue long-term professional ambitions. However, the economic outcomes of entrepreneurship depend on the availability of financial capital, market opportunities, business knowledge, and institutional

support. The World Bank's Women, Business and the Law 2023 report examines the legal and regulatory conditions that influence women's economic opportunities, including entrepreneurship, asset ownership, employment, and mobility. These factors demonstrate that women's entrepreneurial participation is shaped by wider institutional arrangements rather than individual motivation alone. Women may possess strong entrepreneurial abilities but remain unable to establish successful businesses when they cannot access credit, own assets, or participate independently in commercial activities. Enebeli, E. L., Enebeli, U. U., Dakyen, Y. J., Cherima, Y. J., Hassan, R. K., Mikailu, F., ... & Oko, O. P. (2026). Elobrated on, Therefore, entrepreneurship programs must address both individual capabilities and structural barriers. This perspective provides an important foundation for understanding how digital financial inclusion can strengthen women's opportunities to establish, manage, and expand their businesses.Digital financial inclusion has become an important mechanism for extending formal financial services to populations that have historically experienced limited access to conventional banking. Digital accounts, mobile payments, electronic transfers, and online financial services can reduce the practical difficulties associated with geographical distance, time constraints, and some administrative requirements. Dhiman, A., Vasishta, P., & Singla, A. (2026). Explained, Appaya and Abbas (2024) explain that digital financial services offer opportunities to expand women's financial participation, but the benefits depend on addressing the barriers that women encounter when accessing and using these services. Their discussion highlights the importance of developing financial systems that respond to women's specific needs rather than assuming that the availability of technology automatically produces equality. The World Bank's Global Findex Database 2025 further examines financial account ownership, digital payments, savings, borrowing, mobile-phone access, internet use, and digital safety across economies. Its updated evidence provides a useful basis for examining differences in women's access to financial services.

For women entrepreneurs, meaningful digital inclusion requires more than opening an account: women must also be able to understand financial products, complete transactions safely, access customer support, and make independent decisions concerning their money.Digital payment systems can contribute to the operational development of women-owned enterprises by making transactions more convenient, improving financial recordkeeping, and facilitating communication between businesses and customers. Entrepreneurs who receive payments electronically may find it easier to monitor sales, calculate expenses, distinguish business income from household money, and identify changes in customer demand. Digital payment histories can also provide useful evidence of commercial activity and may support applications for financial products where institutions accept such records. In addition, online marketplaces and social media platforms can enable women entrepreneurs to advertise products, communicate with customers, and reach markets outside their immediate geographical areas. The World Bank's guidance on digital solutions for female entrepreneurship identifies the potential of technology to improve access to finance, training, information, skills, and markets. Nevertheless, digital adoption does not guarantee business growth.

Transaction charges, unreliable internet connections, limited customer acceptance of digital payments, and inadequate technical knowledge may reduce the advantages available to small enterprises. Digital payment systems are therefore most likely to support women's economic empowerment when they are affordable, reliable, accessible, and combined with practical

business training and opportunities to reach customers.Financial literacy and digital competence are important factors influencing whether women can convert financial access into meaningful economic benefits. Financial literacy includes the ability to understand budgeting, saving, borrowing, interest rates, transaction costs, debt obligations, and financial risks. Digital competence involves using mobile applications, online banking platforms, digital marketplaces, and security features effectively. Women who lack these skills may hesitate to use formal financial services or may depend on other individuals to conduct transactions on their behalf. Gupte (2026), in a study examining education, digital capability, and women's financial inclusion, reports that educational attainment is positively associated with financial participation and identifies mobile-phone ownership and internet access as important pathways. The study also indicates that digital access does not eliminate education-related disparities.

These findings support the argument that financial inclusion policies should integrate digital education with financial services. Women entrepreneurs need practical instruction in managing digital accounts, protecting passwords, recognizing fraudulent messages, calculating business costs, and evaluating borrowing options. Such skills can strengthen confidence, reduce avoidable financial risks, and help women make more informed decisions about their businesses.Despite the potential advantages of digital financial services, women continue to experience social, economic, and institutional barriers that can restrict their participation. These barriers may include limited ownership of mobile devices, inadequate internet access, low educational attainment, restricted mobility, unpaid care responsibilities, limited collateral, and discriminatory attitudes toward women's business activities. Women living in rural communities or low-income households may face additional difficulties because financial services, digital training, and business-support facilities are not always readily available. The World Bank's Women's Economic Empowerment in Pakistan report examines gender gaps in employment, entrepreneurship, productive assets, financial inclusion, digital ownership, mobility, safety, and decision-making.

METHODOLOGY

The proposed study will examine women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship and digital financial inclusion using a structured research framework that combines relevant academic literature, institutional reports, and, where feasible, primary data collected from women entrepreneurs. The study population may include women operating small businesses, home-based enterprises, online stores, retail businesses, and other entrepreneurial activities. Participants should represent different educational backgrounds, income levels, geographical locations, and stages of business development. If primary research is undertaken, data may be collected through a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews designed to explore women's access to digital financial services, frequency of digital transactions, financial literacy, business income, savings practices, entrepreneurial challenges, and participation in financial decision-making. Secondary evidence may be obtained from published research and recognized institutional sources, including the World Bank's Global Findex database and reports on women's economic empowerment. Appropriate informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and secure data management should be maintained throughout the research process. The study should distinguish between access to financial services and actual control over financial

resources because these represent different dimensions of empowerment. Since no original survey results or interview transcripts have been supplied for this draft, the findings presented below should be treated as literature-informed expectations rather than verified empirical results.The study will adopt a mixed-methods research approach to examine the relationship between women's entrepreneurship and digital financial inclusion from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. The quantitative component will focus on measurable indicators, including digital account ownership, frequency of electronic payments, use of savings facilities, access to credit, business revenue patterns, and reported participation in economic decisions. These indicators may help identify relationships between the use of digital financial services and different dimensions of entrepreneurial performance. The qualitative component will explore women's personal experiences, perceptions of financial independence, confidence in using technology, experiences with financial institutions, and the social barriers affecting business development.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The proposed research design will be descriptive and correlational, with a qualitative component to provide additional contextual understanding. The descriptive element will document the characteristics of participating women entrepreneurs, their use of digital financial services, and the principal challenges they encounter when managing their businesses. The correlational element will examine whether greater use of digital financial services is associated with higher reported financial independence, improved business management, stronger savings practices, or greater participation in economic decisions. If primary data are collected, a clearly defined sampling strategy should be used to recruit participants from relevant entrepreneurial settings. The sample size should be determined according to the study objectives, available resources, and appropriate statistical requirements rather than selected arbitrarily. A cross-sectional design could provide a snapshot of women's experiences at a particular time, although it would not establish whether digital financial inclusion produces long-term improvements in empowerment. Interviews may supplement questionnaire data by exploring how family expectations, digital skills, financial trust, and business conditions shape participants' experiences.The research design should also define operational measures for economic empowerment so that income generation, financial control, asset ownership, and decision-making are not treated as interchangeable outcomes. The study will use clearly defined indicators to measure women's economic empowerment. These indicators may include personal income, control over earnings, ownership of productive assets, access to savings, participation in business decisions, and the ability to make independent financial choices. Digital financial inclusion may be assessed through account ownership, frequency of digital payments, use of mobile banking, access to digital savings, and experience with online financial services. Entrepreneurial performance may be examined through business continuity, customer growth, sales patterns, employment creation, and the entrepreneur's reported ability to meet business expenses. These measures will help distinguish between access to digital services and the economic benefits that women may obtain from using them. Where possible, the research instruments should use clearly worded questions and consistent response scales. A small pilot study may be conducted before the main survey to identify confusing questions and improve the questionnaire. Such preparation can improve the quality and interpretability of the collected information.The research design will also consider ethical and practical issues that may influence participation. Women

entrepreneurs should receive a clear explanation of the research purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and the intended use of their responses. Participants should not be required to disclose account passwords, personal identification numbers, confidential banking information, or other sensitive financial credentials. Data should be anonymized where appropriate and stored securely.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data collected through questionnaires will be analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, may be used to summarize participants' demographic characteristics, business types, financial access, digital payment practices, and reported economic outcomes. Cross-tabulations may compare digital financial participation across educational levels, income groups, geographical locations, and business categories. Where the data and sample size permit, correlation analysis may examine relationships between the frequency of digital financial service use and indicators such as business performance, savings behavior, or financial decision-making. Regression analysis may be considered to investigate whether these relationships remain after accounting for relevant characteristics, including education, business experience, household income, and access to the internet. Statistical assumptions, missing data, measurement reliability, and potential sampling bias should be assessed before interpreting the results. The analysis should distinguish between statistical association and causal impact. Without a suitable longitudinal or experimental design, the results would indicate relationships among variables rather than prove that digital financial inclusion directly causes economic empowerment.Qualitative information gathered through interviews or open-ended questionnaire responses will be analyzed through thematic analysis. The process will involve familiarization with the collected material, initial coding, identification of recurring patterns, development of themes, and interpretation of those themes in relation to the research question. Potential themes may include financial independence, digital confidence, business flexibility, access to customers, family support, financial literacy, privacy concerns, fraud prevention, and difficulties accessing credit.

FINDINGS

The literature suggests that digital financial inclusion can create opportunities for women to strengthen their financial independence by improving access to accounts, electronic payments, savings services, and financial information. Women entrepreneurs who can independently manage digital accounts may find it easier to receive payments, monitor business income, and make financial decisions without depending entirely on other individuals. Digital financial services may also help women maintain more organized business records and distinguish personal expenses from business transactions. The World Bank's Global Findex Database 2025 emphasizes the importance of examining financial participation alongside mobile connectivity, internet use, and digital safety. However, the potential benefits depend on women having meaningful control over their accounts and sufficient knowledge to use financial services effectively. Account ownership alone cannot demonstrate financial independence when women lack control over transactions or decisions concerning their earnings. Therefore, digital financial inclusion should be evaluated in terms

of both access and practical financial autonomy.A second anticipated finding is that digital financial inclusion may support the development of women-owned businesses by facilitating payments, improving transaction management, and enabling participation in digital markets. Women entrepreneurs who use online platforms may reach customers beyond their immediate communities and develop additional opportunities to sell products or services. Electronic transaction records may also improve the visibility of business activity and help entrepreneurs understand their income and expenditure patterns. The World Bank's guidance on digital solutions for female entrepreneurship identifies the potential of technology to improve access to finance, information, training, and markets. Nevertheless, business development will likely depend on factors beyond digital finance, including product quality, demand, competition, marketing skills, operating costs, and access to working capital. Digital services should therefore be viewed as enabling resources rather than sufficient conditions for entrepreneurial success.

CONCLUSION

Women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship and digital financial inclusion represents an important opportunity to promote financial independence, gender equality, and inclusive economic development. Entrepreneurship can enable women to generate income, develop professional skills, establish enterprises, and contribute to household and community prosperity. Digital financial services can complement these opportunities by making payments more convenient, supporting financial recordkeeping, facilitating savings, and potentially improving access to formal financial products. When women can use these services independently and effectively, digital financial inclusion may strengthen their capacity to manage business activities and participate in economic decision-making. However, the relationship between digital financial inclusion and empowerment is complex and depends on the economic, educational, social, and institutional conditions in which women operate. Access to a digital account should not be treated as sufficient evidence of empowerment because meaningful economic participation also requires control over financial resources, opportunities to generate sustainable income, and the ability to make independent decisions.The study also highlights the importance of addressing barriers that prevent women from benefiting fully from entrepreneurship and digital finance. Limited financial literacy, inadequate digital skills, unequal access to mobile devices, unreliable internet connectivity, insufficient capital, and restrictive social expectations may reduce the effectiveness of financial inclusion initiatives. Governments, financial institutions, educational organizations, and entrepreneurship-support programs should therefore cooperate to provide accessible digital training, affordable financial products, secure payment systems, business mentoring, and appropriate consumer protection. Particular attention should be given to women who operate small enterprises in rural communities or informal economic settings, where access to services and support may be limited.

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