

## Chapter 2

# Riding the Wave: Understanding the Context of Female Entrepreneurship in Pakistan

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### **ABSTRACT**

*To date, most of the literature on female entrepreneurship reveals a paucity of research on developing market contexts. The authors build on this to establish the constraining challenges and barriers faced by Pakistani women entrepreneurs. In this chapter, they adopt the perspective of institutional logics as a particular reference point due to its influence in shaping entrepreneurial action. The choice of adopting a contextual approach also aims to highlight differences to Western models where institutional frameworks are perceived to be more benign. The case study of Pakistani women entrepreneurs therefore presents an interesting evidence for examining the complexities of women entrepreneurship. Within the remit of this chapter, the goal is to elucidate the uniqueness of Pakistani women entrepreneurs as influenced by its institutional context. It is expected that the findings from this study will contribute to new knowledge and have practical and policy implications for enhancing women entrepreneurship.*

## INTRODUCTION

The growing majority of studies on women entrepreneurship support the notion that female entrepreneurs demonstrate new opportunities by employing fellow women (Welter, Smallbone, Isakova, Aculai & Schakirova, 2004; Aidis, Welter, Smallbone & Isakova, 2007). This substantive notion suggests that the autonomy and development of women entrepreneurship is very critical, such that outcomes lead to self-empowerment, social security and confidence among women. Without a doubt, since entrepreneurship contributes to societal development; it therefore becomes pertinent that women entrepreneurship is given the desired attention. While previous studies have examined women entrepreneurship in developed economies (Coughlin & Thomas, 2002; Carter & Shaw, 2006; Marlow, Carter & Shaw, 2008) there exists a paucity of research that has examined women entrepreneurship in Pakistan. Interestingly, the renewed interest in women entrepreneurship in developing economies, suggests a need to examine how it varies according to context. Despite repeated government claims of fostering women development within developing economies, the complete set of socio-economic factors considered in improving female entrepreneurship have worsened. This we argue is one of the hallmark constraints to female entrepreneurship, and allows for a greater understanding of the complexities faced by Pakistani women entrepreneurs.

Interestingly, the most striking feature of the Pakistani market is the growing proportion of female entrepreneurs. Rising unemployment and an increase in gender inequality has resulted to deterioration in the living standard for Pakistani women (Zakaria & Fida, 2012). Sensitivity to the barriers faced by Pakistani women entrepreneurs reveal a high level of masculine domination across every sphere of the society. The underlying norm in these societies consider women as '*virtuous*' and men as custodians who dictate rules by keeping women on the right path (Roomi, 2013). Such norms justify that women should be instructed to remain dressed in the *hijab* rather than being entrepreneurial (Syed, Ali & Winstanley, 2005). Although, relatively lower access to capital has been a cause for concern, the challenges facing Pakistani women entrepreneurs are particularly severe. Thus, the experiences of women entrepreneurs reveal that contextual challenges such as cultural and religious norms restrict entrepreneurial development. This is particularly interesting as traditional and religious societies are strongly patriarchal in their nature; such that women are often confined to child nurturing (Danish & Smith, 2012). In this stem, Pakistani women are treated as second-class citizens within their society. It is reported that Pakistani men solely decide the education, health and finance of the family, while women are confined to the less negotiable role of motherhood (Gronlund, 2007; Rehman & Roomi, 2012).

More nuanced perspectives reveal affiliations to women networks, which are often based on kinship and tribal structures (Smith & Luttrell, 1994; Lyon & Porter, 2009; Walther, 2014). Pakistani women have responded to the features of their difficult environment by conducting business activities through ties to trade networks. We assert that these associations provide benefits to their members and the Pakistani society as a whole. Within the remit of this study, we adopt an institutional logics approach to highlight how socially constructed institutional practices affect entrepreneurial action. The core assumption of this approach recognises that identities, norms and beliefs are embedded within prevailing institutions (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Our presented analysis is based on findings from the interviews of 5 Pakistani women who participated in the international exhibition organised by Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP). In the respective case studies, we examine how these socially constructed practices provide meaning to entrepreneurial behaviour. Our insights were aimed at revealing how women entrepreneurs cope with complexities of the Pakistani environment. The analysis of our empirical contribution is focused around one objective:

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