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Barriers To Entrepreneurship Among Muslim Women: A Factor-Analytic Study of Dewas District, Madhya Pradesh, India

Amreen Shaikh
Research Scholar, School of Economics, DAVV, Indore
Prof. Vidya Telang
Assistant Professor, PIMR, Indore

Abstract

Women's entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as an important pathway for income generation, economic agency, employment creation and inclusive local development. Yet women's entry into and continuation in entrepreneurship are shaped by access to finance, knowledge, markets, family support, social acceptance, institutional services and business capabilities. These constraints may be particularly complex when entrepreneurship is examined within a specific social and community context. This study investigates perceived barriers to entrepreneurship among Muslim women in Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh, India. Primary data were collected from 100 respondents using a structured questionnaire containing 31 potential barrier statements measured on a five-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure, Bartlett's test of sphericity, Parallel Analysis, and Principal Axis Factoring with Varimax rotation were employed. The 31-item scale demonstrated excellent overall internal consistency ($\alpha = .941$). The KMO value was .875 and Bartlett's test was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1854.350$, df = 465, $p < .001$), confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis. Parallel Analysis supported a three-factor solution. The retained dimensions were labelled (1) Individual, Psychological and Socio-cultural Constraints, (2) Business, Managerial and Social-Environment Constraints, and (3) Financial and Institutional Constraints. The strongest individual perceived barrier was lack of awareness about financial assistance/limited financial literacy ($M = 2.06$), followed by documentation requirements ($M = 2.13$), credit-score requirements ($M = 2.15$), interest rates ($M = 2.20$), and loan procedures ($M = 2.21$). Lack of motivation had the highest mean ($M = 3.16$), indicating comparatively weaker endorsement as a barrier. The findings therefore suggest that women's entrepreneurial participation in the study area should not be explained primarily by lack of motivation. Instead, financial capability, institutional access, business preparedness, family conditions and socio-cultural environment appear to form an interconnected constraint structure. The study contributes localized evidence to the literature and offers implications for financial institutions, government agencies, training providers and community-level organizations.

Keywords: Muslim women; women's entrepreneurship; entrepreneurial barriers; financial inclusion; socio-cultural constraints; factor analysis; Dewas; Madhya Pradesh

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is increasingly viewed as an important component of economic development because entrepreneurial activity can generate employment, diversify household income, support local markets and expand opportunities for economic participation. For women, entrepreneurship can also provide a route to greater economic agency where formal employment opportunities are limited or where the organization of paid work is difficult to reconcile with household responsibilities. However, the ability to become an entrepreneur is not determined by individual motivation alone. Access to capital, information, education, skills, networks, markets, mobility, family support and institutional services can determine whether entrepreneurial aspirations become viable and sustainable enterprises.

The Indian literature shows that women's entrepreneurship remains uneven across social and economic settings. Baral et al. (2023), in a systematic review of 74 studies on women entrepreneurs in India, identify recurring research themes around motivations, barriers, success factors and performance while also highlighting gaps in theoretical grounding, geographical coverage and methodological diversity. More recently, Nafees et al. (2025) synthesized 147 Scopus-indexed studies published between 1998 and 2024 and identified cultural biases and gender stereotypes, economic and wealth inequality, work-life balance, empowerment and access to entrepreneurial resources as major themes in the Indian literature.

Financial access is particularly important. Daymard (2015) identifies access to capital, networks, training and facilities as important dimensions of female entrepreneurship in India. Khokhar (2019) reports that affordable credit and women's participation in decision-making are significant correlates of women's entrepreneurship. Kumarasamy et al. (2023) similarly find that use of financial instruments can encourage women's self-employment in rural India. Maurya and Mohanty (2019) show that characteristics such as enterprise size, profitability, diversification and accounting practices influence access to formal credit among women-owned informal enterprises.

The social environment is equally relevant. Devlina and Sahu (2023) demonstrate that societal attitudes and bureaucratic environments can affect female-led microenterprise activity in India. The emerging literature on digital entrepreneurship also shows that women's entrepreneurial opportunities increasingly depend on digital skills, networks and the ability to use online markets (Alhajri & Aloud, 2023; Dale & Saha, 2023).

Muslim women should not be treated as a homogeneous population, nor should contemporary entrepreneurial behaviour be explained solely through religious identity. Their experiences are shaped by the interaction of gender, household structure, education, income, community expectations, local institutions, labour-market conditions and technology. The present study therefore focuses on the concrete barriers reported by respondents rather than assuming that religion itself constitutes a barrier. Dewas district provides a useful localized setting because

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district-level empirical research on Muslim women's entrepreneurship is comparatively limited.

The central purpose of the study is consequently to identify the underlying dimensions of entrepreneurial barriers perceived by Muslim women in Dewas. Rather than asking only whether women are interested in entrepreneurship, the study investigates what makes entrepreneurial participation difficult and whether individual barriers cluster into broader latent dimensions.

2. Context of Women's Entrepreneurship in India

Women's entrepreneurship in India includes a wide range of activities, from own-account and home-based enterprises to registered micro and small businesses. The scale of participation has increased, but many women continue to operate in contexts characterized by limited capital, restricted market access, unpaid domestic responsibilities and weaker institutional linkages. Government policy has therefore increasingly moved toward an ecosystem perspective that combines finance with skills, mentoring, market access, information and institutional facilitation.

The Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) of NITI Aayog has emphasized finance, skilling, mentoring, market linkages and information as important components of an enabling environment. Recent policy work also points to credit readiness, documentation, collateral, financial literacy and institutional processes as practical barriers in women's access to formal finance. These issues are closely reflected in the present study's financial and institutional factor.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Women’s Entrepreneurship and Economic Development

Women’s entrepreneurship is associated with economic independence, employment generation, household welfare and broader development outcomes. Minniti and Naudé (2010) show that female entrepreneurship is influenced by economic, institutional and social conditions across countries. In India, Agarwal and Lenka (2018) argue that women's entrepreneurship requires greater scholarly and policy attention because women's entrepreneurial experiences differ from those of men and are affected by institutional and socio-cultural structures.

Baral et al. (2023) provide one of the most useful recent syntheses of the Indian literature. Their systematic review of 74 articles shows that research has covered motivations, challenges, performance and success factors but remains uneven in geographical and theoretical coverage. This supports the value of localized studies such as the present investigation in Dewas.

3.2 Financial Access and Credit Constraints

Finance is one of the most consistently reported constraints on women's entrepreneurship. Daymard (2015) emphasizes capital access as a key determinant of female entrepreneurship in India. Khokhar (2019) finds affordable credit to be significantly associated with women's entrepreneurial participation. Kumarasamy et al. (2023), using the All India Debt and Investment Survey, report that access to financial instruments is positively associated with self-employment among women and emphasize the relevance of both formal and informal credit.

Maurya and Mohanty (2019) focus specifically on female-owned informal enterprises in India and show that enterprise characteristics such as size, profits, diversification and accounting records affect access to formal credit. This is relevant to the current findings because respondents identify financial literacy, documentation, credit-score requirements, interest rates and loan procedures as closely related barriers. The financial problem is therefore broader than the simple absence of funds; it includes the capacity to navigate financial institutions and meet their requirements.

Roy and Patro (2022), in a systematic review of women's financial inclusion and the gender gap in access to finance, similarly emphasize that financial inclusion involves more than account ownership and requires effective access to appropriate financial services. This distinction is particularly useful for interpreting the present results.

3.3 Education, Skills and Entrepreneurial Capability

Education can improve information processing, financial understanding, communication and access to networks, but its relationship with entrepreneurship is not necessarily linear. Khokhar (2019), for example, did not find female literacy to be significant in his particular model, whereas affordable credit, female labour-force participation and women's decision-making were significant. This suggests that education may operate together with other resources and institutional conditions rather than independently.

Business experience and managerial capability are also important. Women may possess entrepreneurial interest but lack practical knowledge of bookkeeping, pricing, inventory, taxation, registration, marketing and business planning. The present study explicitly includes these dimensions and finds that they form a coherent business and managerial domain.

3.4 Family Responsibilities and Work–Life Balance

Family responsibilities can constrain women's time, mobility and ability to commit resources to enterprise development. Daymard (2015) notes the importance of work-family flexibility in women's entrepreneurial decisions. The more recent systematic review by Nafees et al. (2025) also identifies work-life balance as a major theme in Indian women's entrepreneurship research. The present study incorporates this issue through family-career balance and family-support items.

Importantly, family should not be treated only as a source of constraint. Supportive family members can provide finance, labour, childcare, networks and legitimacy. Thus, the same household environment can either restrict or enable entrepreneurship depending on its structure and attitudes.

3.5 Socio-cultural and Gender-related Barriers

Gender norms affect women's entrepreneurial participation by shaping perceptions of appropriate work, mobility, authority and decision-making. Devlina and Sahu (2023) provide empirical evidence that societal attitudes and bureaucratic environments can influence female-led microenterprise activity in India. Nafees et al. (2025) similarly identify cultural bias and gender stereotypes as central themes in the Indian literature.

The present study measures gender bias, patriarchal expectations, community acceptance, role models, decision-making freedom, freedom of expression and social security. Their clustering within the first factor indicates that social expectations are not isolated variables but part of a broader environment surrounding women's entrepreneurial choices.

3.6 Psychological Factors and Self-efficacy

Entrepreneurship involves uncertainty, risk, responsibility and decision-making, making confidence and perceived capability relevant. However, psychological factors should not be interpreted as purely individual characteristics. Confidence may itself be affected by access to education, role models, training, networks and institutional support. The current study therefore treats psychological factors as embedded within a wider socio-cultural environment.

A particularly important finding is that lack of motivation has the highest mean among the 31 items. Because the scale ranges from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree, the relatively high mean indicates weaker endorsement of motivation as a barrier. This challenges explanations that locate the primary problem within women's willingness or ambition.

3.7 Digital Entrepreneurship

Digital technologies can reduce geographical and market-access barriers, but digital entrepreneurship also requires skills, connectivity, confidence and strategic knowledge. Alhajri and Aloud (2023) reviewed the literature on female digital entrepreneurship and found the field to be fragmented, with institutional and social context among the most investigated issues. Dale and Saha (2023), using 77 Scopus-indexed publications, similarly emphasize digital inclusion, networks, skill augmentation and strategic capabilities. The presence of lack of exposure to e-commerce and internet within the first factor in the present study demonstrates the relevance of this emerging dimension.

Digital entrepreneurship should therefore be understood as a potential enabling mechanism rather than an automatic solution. Without adequate digital literacy and confidence, online markets may remain inaccessible.

3.8 Muslim Women and Entrepreneurship

Research specifically examining Muslim women entrepreneurs is smaller than the general literature on women entrepreneurship. Studies in Muslim-majority and minority contexts indicate that women's entrepreneurial participation is influenced by education, family circumstances, social norms, access to resources, marital conditions and entrepreneurial capabilities. Tlaiss and McAdam (2021), for example, show that Islamic identity and cultural context can shape how Arab Muslim women entrepreneurs understand entrepreneurial success. Muhammad et al. (2019) examine Muslim women's entrepreneurial intentions in Pakistan and demonstrate that marital circumstances can interact with entrepreneurial intentions. Such findings reinforce the importance of examining household and social context rather than treating women entrepreneurs as a uniform population.

The present study adopts a cautious contextual approach. Islamic principles concerning ethical earning and commerce provide historical and normative background, but contemporary barriers reported by respondents are treated as empirical social, institutional and economic conditions. This avoids equating community practices with religious doctrine.

3.9 Research Synthesis and Gap

Taken together, the literature suggests five broad conclusions. First, financial access remains central. Second, entrepreneurial capability requires education, training and practical business skills. Third, family and social norms shape women's ability to participate. Fourth, digitalization creates new opportunities but also introduces capability requirements. Fifth, localized and community-specific research remains necessary.

The gap addressed by this study is therefore threefold: the limited availability of district-level evidence on Muslim women's entrepreneurship; the need to examine financial, institutional, business, psychological and socio-cultural barriers simultaneously; and the limited use of factor-analytic methods to identify the underlying structure of these perceived barriers in this population.

4. Objectives of the Study

- To identify the major barriers perceived by Muslim women in relation to entrepreneurship in Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh.
- To examine the relative prominence of financial, institutional, individual, psychological, socio-cultural and business-related barriers.
- To identify the underlying dimensions of entrepreneurial barriers using exploratory factor analysis.
- To assess the reliability and factorability of the 31-item entrepreneurial-barrier scale.
- To develop policy and institutional implications for strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem for Muslim women in Dewas district.

5. Research Questions

What are the most strongly perceived barriers to entrepreneurship among Muslim women in Dewas district?

What latent dimensions explain the pattern of perceived entrepreneurial barriers?

How important are financial and institutional constraints relative to business and socio-cultural constraints?

Does the evidence support an interpretation of low motivation as a major barrier?

6. Conceptual Framework

The study conceptualizes entrepreneurial barriers as an interconnected ecosystem rather than a single construct. The empirical framework contains three domains: (A) Individual, Psychological and Socio-cultural Constraints; (B) Business, Managerial and Social-Environment Constraints; and (C) Financial and Institutional Constraints.

Domain	Core components
A. Individual, Psychological and Socio-cultural	Education; risk-bearing capacity; family-career balance; self-confidence; legal knowledge; motivation; societal culture; e-commerce/internet exposure; interaction restrictions; family support; entrepreneurial culture; gender bias; role models; decision-making; freedom of expression; social security; community acceptance
B. Business, Managerial and Social-Environment	Business experience; managerial ability; business-administration skills; physical location; competition; middlemen exploitation
C. Financial and Institutional	Financial-assistance awareness/financial literacy; loan procedures; documentation; interest rate; credit-score requirements; government assistance; repayment schedule

The framework is exploratory: the factor labels were derived from the empirical clustering of items and should not be interpreted as proof of causal relationships.

7. Methodology

7.1 Research Design

The study uses a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. The analysis is exploratory because its principal objective is to identify the latent structure underlying perceived entrepreneurial barriers.

7.2 Population, Sample and Sampling

The study focuses on Muslim women in Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh. Primary data were obtained from 100 respondents. Convenience sampling was used. The sample size is adequate for an exploratory study of this scope, but the sampling approach limits generalization beyond the respondents studied.

The demographic profile indicates that 50% of respondents were aged 21–35 years, 26% had undergraduate qualifications and 24% had postgraduate qualifications. Married respondents constituted 55% of the sample, while 51% belonged to joint families. The original dataset contains 100 observations and 31 barrier variables. Personal contact fields were not used in the analysis.

7.3 Instrument and Measurement

The questionnaire contained 31 statements concerning possible barriers to entrepreneurship. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree and 5 = strongly disagree. Consequently, lower means indicate stronger endorsement of an item as a barrier.

The instrument covered financial, institutional, educational, psychological, family, socio-cultural, digital, managerial and market-related issues. This multidimensional design was intended to capture the entrepreneurial environment comprehensively.

7.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Descriptive statistics were used to identify the relative prominence of individual barriers. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. Factorability was assessed using the KMO statistic and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Parallel Analysis was used to determine the number of factors because the eigenvalue-greater-than-one rule can over-retain factors. Principal Axis Factoring with Varimax rotation was then used to identify the underlying dimensions. Factor-level reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha.

8. Results

8.1 Demographic Profile

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	Up to 20	16	16
	21–35	50	50
	36–50	25	25
	51–65	7	7
	Above 65	8	8
Education	No formal education	3	3
	Primary	1	1
	Secondary	11	11
	Higher secondary	14	14
	Undergraduate	26	26
	Postgraduate	24	24
	Diploma/certificate	10	10
	Professional	11	11
Marital status	Single	30	30
	Married	55	55
	Divorced	7	7
	Widow	8	8
Family type	Joint	51	51

	Nuclear	49	49

8.2 Descriptive Statistics of Entrepreneurial Barriers

Rank	Barrier	Mean	SD
1	Financial assistance awareness/financial literacy	2.06	0.941
2	Documentation requirements	2.13	0.917
3	Credit-score requirement	2.15	0.869
4	Interest rate charged	2.20	0.921
5	Loan procedures	2.21	0.967
6	Tight repayment schedule	2.23	0.709
7	Government financial assistance	2.33	0.943
8	Business experience	2.49	0.948
9	Competition	2.51	0.980
10	Entrepreneurial culture	2.54	1.019
11	Physical location	2.55	0.947
12	Business-administration skills	2.60	0.841
13	Middlemen exploitation	2.60	0.995
14	Gender bias/patriarchy	2.64	1.000
15	Role models	2.64	0.938
16	Training access	2.64	0.894
17	Managerial ability	2.64	0.980
18	Family support	2.68	1.072
19	Social security	2.70	1.040
20	Community acceptance	2.70	1.049
21	Interaction restrictions	2.73	1.100
22	Legal formalities	2.74	1.169
23	Decision-making freedom	2.74	1.088

24	Lack of education	2.74	1.284
25	Family-career balance	2.78	1.124
26	Low risk-bearing capacity	2.80	1.214
27	Self-confidence	2.85	1.167
28	Societal culture	2.88	1.183
29	E-commerce/internet exposure	2.88	1.148
30	Lack of motivation	3.16	1.237

The descriptive pattern is substantively important. Financial-literacy/financial-assistance awareness is the most strongly perceived individual barrier, followed by documentation, credit-score requirements, interest rates and loan procedures. These results suggest that women may face difficulty not only in obtaining finance but also in understanding and navigating the institutional processes through which finance is delivered.

At the other end of the distribution, lack of motivation has the highest mean. Given the coding of the scale, this indicates comparatively weaker agreement that lack of motivation is a major barrier. The findings therefore caution against interpreting women's entrepreneurial participation primarily as a problem of motivation.

8.3 Reliability of the Scale

Measure	Result	Interpretation
Cronbach's alpha (31 items)	0.941	Excellent internal consistency

The overall alpha of .941 indicates a highly consistent set of items. However, high reliability does not establish unidimensionality; therefore, factor analysis was undertaken to determine whether the items represent multiple related dimensions.

8.4 KMO and Bartlett's Test

Test	Value	Interpretation
KMO	0.875	Very good sampling adequacy
Bartlett's χ^2	1854.350	Significant
df	465	—
p-value	$< .001$	Correlation matrix suitable for factor analysis

The KMO value of .875 indicates that the correlations among the items are sufficiently compact for factor analysis. Bartlett's test is statistically significant, rejecting the hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix. The data therefore satisfy key prerequisites for exploratory factor analysis.

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8.5 Parallel Analysis

Factor	Observed eigenvalue	Random 95th percentile	Decision
1	11.395	2.405	Retain
2	2.673	2.168	Retain
3	2.308	2.009	Retain
4	1.549	1.876	Reject
5	1.253	1.767	Reject
6	1.220	1.663	Reject
7	1.023	1.569	Reject

Although seven observed eigenvalues exceed 1, Parallel Analysis shows that only the first three observed eigenvalues exceed the corresponding random eigenvalues. The evidence therefore supports a three-factor solution. This is methodologically preferable to relying solely on Kaiser's criterion, which would overestimate the number of dimensions in this dataset.

8.6 Factor Extraction and Rotation

Principal Axis Factoring with Varimax rotation produced three interpretable factors. The first factor is broad and combines individual, psychological and socio-cultural indicators. The second represents business and managerial capability together with selected market/social-environment issues. The third is clearly financial and institutional.

Factor	Recommended label	Key loading items	Reliability
1	Individual, Psychological and Socio-cultural Constraints	Education (.686); risk-bearing (.765); family-career balance (.645); self-confidence (.717); legal knowledge (.699); motivation (.628); societal culture (.736); e-commerce/internet (.783); interaction restrictions (.642); family support (.576); entrepreneurial culture (.593); gender bias (.572); role models (.459); decision-making	α = .938

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		(.525); expression (.479); social security (.519); community acceptance (.408)	
2	Business, Managerial and Social-Environment Constraints	Business experience (.616); managerial ability (.697); business administration (.742); physical location (.689); competition (.486); middlemen exploitation (.665)	α = .842
3	Financial and Institutional Constraints	Financial assistance awareness/financial literacy (.521); loan procedures (.655); documentation (.652); interest rate (.718); credit score (.745); government assistance (.549); repayment schedule (.363)	α = .834

Loadings shown above are the principal loadings used for interpretation. Several social-environment variables also exhibited moderate cross-loadings, indicating that the factors are conceptually related rather than perfectly independent.

8.7 Items Requiring Caution

The training-access item showed a weak maximum loading of approximately .318 and a low communality and therefore does not strongly define any retained factor. Tight repayment schedule also showed a relatively weak loading of approximately .363. These items may be retained for theoretical completeness, but their weaker statistical contribution should be acknowledged. Decision-making freedom, freedom of expression, social security and community acceptance showed moderate cross-loadings and should not be treated as exclusive indicators of a single factor.

9. Interpretation of the Three Factors

9.1 Factor 1: Individual, Psychological and Socio-cultural Constraints

The first factor indicates that individual capabilities and social conditions are closely connected. Education, confidence and risk-bearing capacity occur alongside family-career balance, gender bias, community expectations, role models and restrictions on interaction. This pattern suggests that entrepreneurial agency is socially embedded. A woman's entrepreneurial capability may not translate into enterprise participation if the surrounding environment restricts mobility, decision-making or social legitimacy.

The inclusion of digital exposure within this factor is also noteworthy. Digital capability may function as part of individual entrepreneurial capacity while remaining dependent on the social environment in which women access technology, information and markets.

9.2 Factor 2: Business, Managerial and Social-Environment Constraints

The second factor captures practical enterprise capability. Business experience, managerial ability and administrative knowledge represent the internal competencies needed to operate an enterprise. Physical location, competition and middlemen exploitation represent external market conditions. The factor therefore reflects the practical challenge of converting entrepreneurial intention into sustainable business activity.

This result supports the literature's movement away from finance-only explanations. Even if capital becomes available, women may require training, mentoring, market information and business networks to use capital effectively.

9.3 Factor 3: Financial and Institutional Constraints

The third factor provides the clearest evidence of an institutional finance problem. Loan procedures, documentation, interest rates and credit-score requirements cluster with financial literacy and government assistance. The result indicates that access to finance is partly a knowledge and process problem as well as a supply problem.

This finding is strongly consistent with the Indian financial-inclusion literature. Kumarasamy et al. (2023) show the importance of financial instruments for women's self-employment, while Maurya and Mohanty (2019) demonstrate that enterprise characteristics and record-keeping affect formal credit access. The present study adds a respondent-level perspective by showing that women themselves perceive financial literacy, documentation and loan processes as barriers.

10. Discussion

The findings broadly converge with recent Indian research on women's entrepreneurship. The strong financial and institutional dimension is consistent with Daymard (2015), Khokhar (2019), Maurya and Mohanty (2019), and Kumarasamy et al. (2023). These studies collectively suggest that credit availability, affordability, financial capability and institutional access are central to women's entrepreneurial participation.

The findings also support the institutional perspective developed by Devlina and Sahu (2023), who demonstrate that societal attitudes and bureaucratic environments influence female-led microenterprise activity. In the present study, institutional and socio-cultural conditions appear in different but connected factors, suggesting that formal procedures and informal expectations jointly shape women's entrepreneurial opportunities.

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The socio-cultural findings are consistent with the recent systematic review of Nafees et al. (2025), which identifies cultural bias, gender stereotypes, work-life balance and resource access as major themes in Indian women's entrepreneurship. The present study contributes localized evidence by showing how these issues cluster empirically among Muslim women in Dewas.

The digital component is also increasingly relevant. Alhajri and Aloud (2023) identify the social and institutional context as a central theme in female digital entrepreneurship research, while Dale and Saha (2023) emphasize digital inclusion, skills and networks. The relatively strong endorsement of lack of e-commerce/internet exposure in the present data suggests that digital entrepreneurship deserves greater attention in future interventions.

The most important interpretive finding concerns motivation. Lack of motivation is the least strongly endorsed barrier among the 31 items. Thus, policies should avoid assuming that women simply need to be persuaded to become entrepreneurs. The evidence instead points toward an enabling-environment approach in which information, finance, skills, networks, social support and institutional simplification are addressed together.

The results should nevertheless be interpreted carefully. Because the study is cross-sectional and based on convenience sampling, the factor structure represents the perceptions of the sample and cannot establish causal relationships. The three-factor structure should ideally be validated with a larger independent sample through confirmatory factor analysis.

11. Policy and Practical Implications

11.1 Financial Literacy and Credit Readiness

Financial institutions and government agencies should provide practical financial-literacy programmes covering loan eligibility, credit scores, documentation, interest calculations, repayment schedules, bookkeeping and government schemes.

11.2 Simplification of Loan Procedures

Banks and other lending institutions should provide transparent eligibility criteria, document checklists, assisted applications and local facilitation points for women entrepreneurs.

11.3 Integrated Entrepreneurship Training

Training should combine business planning, bookkeeping, pricing, taxation, registration, inventory management, digital marketing, customer management and negotiation rather than focusing only on motivational seminars.

11.4 Mentoring and Role Models

Local mentoring networks and visible women entrepreneur role models can strengthen confidence, reduce uncertainty and provide practical knowledge.

11.5 Digital Inclusion

Women should receive hands-on training in digital payments, e-commerce, social-media marketing, online customer acquisition and digital bookkeeping.

11.6 Family and Community Engagement

Community programmes should recognize that family support can be an important enabling resource. Interventions should encourage socially supportive attitudes toward women's economic participation without assuming that community or religious identity is itself a barrier.

11.7 Market Linkages and Protection

Women entrepreneurs need access to markets, supplier networks and fair trading arrangements. Support should also address risks of exploitation by intermediaries and improve bargaining capacity.

12. Theoretical Contribution

The study contributes to the literature by empirically demonstrating that perceived entrepreneurial barriers among Muslim women in a localized Indian setting are multidimensional. The three-factor solution links individual capability and socio-cultural context, business capability and market environment, and financial/institutional access. The results therefore support an ecosystem interpretation of women's entrepreneurship in which personal agency is embedded in household, social, market and institutional structures.

The study also challenges deficit-oriented explanations. The weak endorsement of lack of motivation indicates that researchers and policymakers should distinguish between willingness to participate and the practical ability to participate. This distinction is important for designing interventions that remove constraints rather than merely encouraging aspiration.

13. Conclusion

This study examined entrepreneurial barriers among Muslim women in Dewas district using primary data from 100 respondents and a 31-item measurement scale. The instrument demonstrated excellent reliability, while KMO and Bartlett's statistics confirmed factorability. Parallel Analysis provided evidence for a three-factor structure, which was subsequently examined using Principal Axis Factoring with Varimax rotation.

The three dimensions were identified as Individual, Psychological and Socio-cultural Constraints; Business, Managerial and Social-Environment Constraints; and Financial and Institutional Constraints. The strongest individual barrier was awareness of financial assistance/financial literacy, followed by documentation, credit-score requirements, interest rates and loan procedures. These findings highlight the practical importance of financial capability and institutional navigation.

At the same time, business experience, managerial skills, market conditions, family support, gender expectations, social acceptance and digital exposure form important parts of the entrepreneurial environment. The relatively weak endorsement of lack of motivation is especially important: the evidence does not support portraying women in the sample as primarily unwilling to become entrepreneurs. Instead, the results suggest that entrepreneurial participation is constrained by the conditions within which women make and implement economic choices.

For Dewas, the policy implication is that entrepreneurship promotion should move beyond awareness campaigns toward integrated support involving financial literacy, credit facilitation, skills, mentoring, digital capability, market linkages and socially supportive institutions. Future research should test the three-factor model with a larger independent sample and examine whether these dimensions predict entrepreneurial intention, enterprise entry, survival and business performance.

14. Limitations and Future Research

• The sample comprises 100 respondents selected through convenience sampling; therefore, findings should not be generalized to all Muslim women in Madhya Pradesh or India.

• The study is cross-sectional and measures perceived barriers rather than longitudinal changes in entrepreneurial behaviour.

• The exploratory factor structure should be validated through Confirmatory Factor Analysis using an independent and preferably larger sample.

• Several variables show cross-loadings, reflecting overlap among social, psychological and institutional conditions.

• Future research should compare Muslim and non-Muslim women using equivalent measurement instruments and should examine differences across urban and rural settings.

• Qualitative interviews could complement the quantitative findings by exploring how women experience family support, mobility, credit procedures, community acceptance and digital entrepreneurship.

• Future models could use Structural Equation Modelling to test relationships among financial inclusion, socio-cultural constraints, entrepreneurial intention and business performance.

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Appendix A. Entrepreneurial Barrier Items

1. Tight repayment schedule
2. Lack of awareness about financial assistance / limited financial literacy
3. Complicated and time-consuming loan procedures

4. Too many formalities/documentations required
5. High rate of interest charged by lender
6. High credit score required by lenders
7. Inadequate financial assistance from government
8. Lack of education
9. Low risk-bearing capacity
10. Inability to balance family and career
11. Lack of self-confidence
12. Lack of knowledge about legal formalities
13. Lack of interest and motivation
14. Lack of inclination due to societal culture
15. Lack of exposure to e-commerce and internet
16. Reluctance to allow women to interact closely with unrelated men
17. Denied/lack of family support
18. Lack of entrepreneurial culture among women community
19. Gender bias/patriarchal society
20. Lack of role models
21. Lack of freedom to take own decisions
22. Lack of freedom of expression
23. Fear of social security
24. Community unwilling to accept authority of a woman
25. Inability to access training programmes
26. Lack of business experience
27. Limited managerial ability
28. Lack of skills/knowledge in business administration
29. Finding suitable physical location for business
30. Stiff competition
31. Fear of exploitation by middlemen

Appendix B. Statistical Reporting Note

The present manuscript uses the three-factor solution supported by Parallel Analysis. An earlier five-factor interpretation based primarily on the eigenvalue-greater-than-one rule has been superseded because the fourth and subsequent observed eigenvalues did not exceed the corresponding random eigenvalues in Parallel Analysis. The earlier demographic ANOVA results are not presented as causal effects in this manuscript because the underlying composite score and analytical objective differed from the present factor-analytic study. Any future demographic hypothesis testing should use clearly defined dependent variables based on the validated three-factor structure and should report effect sizes and appropriate post-hoc or robust tests where required.