An Exploratory Study on The Role of Social Media Influencers in Shaping Digital Women Entrepreneurship in Pakistan

Asmaa Ammar Shah

MSI&E 2K20

A thesis submitted to NUST Business School for the degree of Master of Science in Innovation and Entrepreneurship

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE CERTIFICATE

It is Certified that final copy of MS I&E thesis written by **Ms. Asmaa Ammar Shah Registration No. 330554** of NUST Business School has been vetted by undersigned, found complete in all aspects as per NUST Statutes/Regulations/MS Policy, is free of plagiarism, errors, and mistakes and is accepted as fulfilment for award of MS degree. It is further certified that necessary amendments as pointed out by GEC members and foreign/local evaluators of the scholar have also been incorporated in the said thesis.

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I hereby state that no portion of the work referred to in this dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other University or other institute of learning

Student's Name: <u>Asmaa Ammar Shah</u>

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DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENET

For my son, Rayyan, I hope this shows you that no matter what the odds are, you can do anything you put your mind to.

I'd like to take a moment to express my gratitude to a few people without whom this thesis (and degree) would not even be anywhere near completed. I'd like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Madiha Gohar, for her unending support and for being so understanding and patient with me. Her guidance and advice throughout this entire degree has made the whole process so much easier and smoother. I'd also like to thank my GEC members Dr. Ayesha Abrar and Dr. Owais Anwar Golra for their invaluable insights that helped make my thesis what it is today.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of social media influencers (SMIs) in shaping digital entrepreneurship for women in Pakistan. It aims to study the entrepreneurial motivations behind women entering the social media space and starting their own businesses. Additionally, it aims to view social media influencers as agents of change and explore their influence on women entrepreneurship. The study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the SMIs influence on digital women entrepreneurship. Twenty-four social media influencers were selected for semi structured interviews to explore and understand their perspective of the digital women entrepreneurship and the role they have and can play in the promotion of an.. entrepreneurial ecosystem in Pakistan. The data obtained was analysed through thematic analysis. The findings reveal among the various factors influencing women's entrepreneurial motivation, the presence of social media influencers, is the strongest. Further, the social media influencers are seen as change agents playing a huge role in shaping the entrepreneurial ecosystem for women. It also came across unexpected results wherein it found that after being in the business of influencer marketing for a significant period of time, influencers tended to make the switch from influencer to entrepreneur.

Keywords: Social-Media Influencers, Online Entrepreneurship, Change Agents, Women Entrepreneurs, Qualitative Research, Pakistan

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Entrepreneurship plays an important role in economic development worldwide; women are increasingly contributing to it. In 2022, 43% of the world's entrepreneurs were women (GEM 2022). As the landscape of entrepreneurship changes and more women enter the arena, gender stereotypes are being broken. The GEM Global Report (2019) centred around the theme of "entrepreneurship of all kinds" so as to embrace women entrepreneurs and acknowledge their presence and contribution to the field globally. Academics, educators and policymakers are interested in studying the motivational factors that stimulate individuals' entrepreneurial intentions and behaviors (Maheshwari et al., 2022). Additionally, studies have been conducted to determine female entrepreneurs' motivation and driving factors behind starting business ventures (Wulandari and Djastuti 2017; Arshad et al 2020). These factors can usually be regarded as the "push" or the motivating or the "pull" i.e., the demotivating factors. The push factors contain need for achievement and need for independence (Bjekić et al., 2021), entrepreneurial skills, propensity to take risks, and innovativeness (Muhammad Farrukh et al., 2021) but few studies have been conducted on social media as a motivating factor for entrepreneurial intentions, specifically for digital entrepreneurs. Digital technologies paved a way for a new type of entrepreneurs named digital entrepreneurs who utilize the digital arena for their entrepreneurial ecosystem (Kelly & McAdam, 2022). Since digital technologies "redirects and reimagines what empowerment means for girls and women" (Banet-Weiser, 2018: p. 17), it provides a path for women to express themselves by negating the barriers they face in their entrepreneurial journey. However, the role that media, more specifically, social media plays in motivating female entrepreneurs is an area that requires more research (Hasan 2019; Belanche et al., 2020; Lou et al., 2019; Kim and Kim, 2020). According to GEM (2019), 59% of respondents believed that media (including social media) and media coverage was favourable for entrepreneurship.

The realm of influencer marketing, which comes under the umbrella of social media marketing, is relatively new and has gained momentum in the latter half of the last decade. In early days of 2016, the industry was estimated to be worth $1.7 million

worldwide (Influencer Marketing Benchmark Report, 2020)[1]. Since then, it has grown at a rate of at least 50% each year and is fast approaching a market size of almost $16.4 billion (Influencer Marketing Benchmark Report, 2022)[2]. This then poses the following questions: what is influencer marketing? And how did the industry grow so rapidly to the state it is in today?

Influencer marketing, in essence, is a hybrid of celebrity endorsements and real-life testimonials. Social media users with a significant number of followers (who are then termed as social media influencers) do product placements, reviews and sponsored posts related to their niche and share them on their profiles. These can be to promote a specific brand, raise awareness for a cause or simply just provide content that would lure the viewer in and encourage them to follow their pages. Influencer marketing entails treating oneself as a brand and a commodity (Jerslev & Mortensen, 2015). This means that Social Media Influencers (SMIs) portray themselves in a way that commoditizes their opinions and views and makes it a coveted marketing tool for entrepreneurs. However, Audrezer, Kerviler, & Moulard (2020) posit that the claim influencers put forward, that once in a while if they do a sponsored post and follow a script that the brand dictates to them, they are not compromising on their authenticity. This is something that entrepreneurs need to be well aware of. There are times that the SMI will charge for product placement and promotion. At the end of the day, influencer marketing has a significant impact on consumer sentiment towards brands (Dreifaldt & Drennan, 2019) and remains a competitive channel of marketing for "forward-thinking" brands. They (SMIs) garner a lot of support from the public that looks at them for trends, innovation and daily life advice. A lot of ventures know of the power that these SMIs have, and hence, move towards influencer marketing. Being influential causes these SMIs to change the perception and behaviour of their followers in a certain way, according to a study by Jin et al., (2019), the consumers of a certain brand felt that a celebrity endorsement was more trustworthy than their own marketing campaigns, which led to a higher sale of said product. Using this study, it can be seen that these influencers hold power over the consumer buying behaviour and perceptions.

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[1] https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-benchmark-report-2020/
[2] https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-benchmark-report/

Who then, are these social media influencers (SMIs)? According to Freberg et al. (2010) they are independent third-party endorsers who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets and the use of other social media. There are four different categories of influencers. The major classifying feature is the number of followers the individual has on their social media platforms (Henderson 2020). They are as follows:

1. **Nano influencers** (1,000 – 5,000 followers): These are people whose major following is friends and family as well as other people who may have happened across them while browsing. These types of influencers are just starting out, and unless someone is interested in a given niche, it is unlikely that they would know who these people are.

2. **Micro influencers** (up to 10,000 followers): These types of influencers are considered to be experts in their chosen field. They create engaging and high-quality content that make them stand out and make their followers interact with them.

3. **Macro influencers** (greater than 10,000 followers): These are people who have become famous because of their online presence. Brands approach them themselves for collaborations and to help them build brand awareness.

4. **Mega influencers** (millions of followers): These are people who have, over time, turned into household names, who are renowned worldwide. They might not necessarily have the same depth of product knowledge like the first two types, nor do their followers belong to a particular niche. However, any product or service they endorse sees its sales skyrocket overnight.

VanAntwerpen (2020) stressed the importance of influencers becoming "part" of the experience and organically cutting through the noise and reaching the intended customer. The research further argues that at present there are several mediums to market your product, sometimes it overwhelms the consumer, and the important messages get lost in the chaos. Therefore, it is vital to choose your "ideal" influencer so that your business has the best shot at successfully marketing your product. The ideal influencer should be someone who:

1. Is already using your product or something similar
2. Should have the same target audience as the one you intend to market to
3. Has a significant following
4. Is capable of holding a conversation about products

5. Is able to influence decision making without it seeming like they are

SMIs are a relatively new resource in the marketing world in Pakistan. This is also partly because social media marketing itself is a relatively new concept because the country in actuality does not have a significant marketing industry (Hussain, 2020). One of Pakistan's leading newspapers published an article in 2020 (Dawn, 2020) that stated that social media marketing will soon take over conventional marketing in the country because it's effectiveness can be analysed and using data driven analytics tools. Apps like TikTok for example have seen an exponential growth in the number of users especially during the COVID19 pandemic. This growth has led to people creating their own content, attracting more followers and then becoming "influencers" over time. This has in turn given a rise to influencer marketing. It is no longer just celebrities and influential people who are partaking in influencer marketing. People from all walks of life are using their personal social media accounts and posting reviews, opinions, and content in order to boost their followers. More following means that they are more influential which subsequently helps them create an online brand of themselves. The article found that since the median age of Pakistan's population is 22 years, it is difficult for them to relate to celebrity endorsements or even watch or read conventional media. They seem to have an easier time trusting the views and reviews of social media influencers (SMIs), especially if they belong to the same social class as them. Hussain (2020) state that influencer marketing has become so popular in Pakistan that a recently launched start up, Amplifyd, that represents over 40 brands was able to bring 300 influencers on board within 3 months.

In Pakistan, digital entrepreneurship is already on the rise reflecting an increased digital consumption within the country (McKinsey report, 2019)[3]. This digital consumption also includes the usage of social media, bringing Pakistan's total of active social media users to over 35 million (PTA, 2022[4]). The levels of women entrepreneurship, however, have always remained lower than that of men (Salahuddin et al., 2022). Qureshi and Mian (2012) published a report on entrepreneurial activity and trends in Pakistan. They found that the Total Early State Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA Rate) for males is 17%

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[3] https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/innovation-and-growth/ten-highlights-from-our-2019-research
[4] https://www.pta.gov.pk/en/media-center/recent-media?recent-updates

higher for males than it is for females. Women in the country were less inclined to want to start their own businesses, online or otherwise. The barriers to entry that women faced, be it cultural or financial, are still prevalent today. But with the rise in social media platform popularity, some of these are being torn down slowly, giving more women the opportunity and motivation to start their own businesses.

The proposed study is going to try and ascertain whether the SMIs have an influence on the motivational levels of women to gear them towards digital entrepreneurship and act as agents of change that drive digital entrepreneurship for women in Pakistan.

1.2 Research Aim

The aim of this research is to determine whether or not social media influencers can act as motivators and whether they can be termed as change agents due to their influencing women to take up forms of digital entrepreneurship.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To explore the connection of influencer marketing and digital women entrepreneurship
2. To understand the influence of social media influencers on the motivation of digital women entrepreneurs
3. To gain insight into whether SMIs act as agents of change, prompting women to start their own digital entrepreneurship ventures

1.4 Research Questions

1. How is influencer marketing linked to the realm of digital women entrepreneurship?
2. How do SMI(s) influence the motivation of women to start digital enterprises?
3. How do SMIs act as agents of change in encouraging women to start their own digital entrepreneurship ventures?

1.5 Justification and Rationale of the Study

Female entrepreneurship is fast gaining entrants in Pakistan, where more than half of its population comprises women (Yunis, Hashim, & Anderson, 2018). In 2019 there

was a call for papers for the International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship by Sage Publishing that called for more research into the field of social media and the entrepreneurs. Since 2019, multiple researchers have focused on social media and entrepreneurship, however, to the best of the researcher's knowledge none have looked at SMIs and their influence on shaping the digital entrepreneurship with a specific reference to women. More and more women are leveraging social media platforms for starting their ventures (Wasonga, 2021). What helps them and motivates them for this, is something yet to be researched. One such factor are social media influencers. These are people, men or women, who use social media to promote various brands that they endorse. There has yet to be a study that delves into why and how this kind of marketing (influencer marketing) is spurring a certain part of the population to be proactive and try to leverage it. The literature review will also cover the gaps that need to be filled.

1.6 Significance and Scope of the Study

After extensive review of the literature, it has become apparent that although several aspects of SMIs and women entrepreneurship have been studied, little is known about the influence of SMIs in shaping entrepreneurial motivation of women in Pakistan. This study will add to the body of knowledge of SMI and entrepreneurship by providing insight into the Pakistani perspective. Since the levels of women entrepreneurship are currently low, as women's need for being an entrepreneur is increasing but they are not able to fulfill said need, studying phenomenon that might have a direct influence on boosting up those numbers would not only be beneficial to others who want to enter the field but also to the government to identify where it can step in and lend support.

Additionally, this research will help managers and heads of departments in businesses to decide which SMIs are worth partnering with for their endorsements. At the heart of it, this study will look into how SMIs and their presence on social media can influence other women to do the same and become digital entrepreneurs. In a country like Pakistan with several barriers that hinder women entrepreneurship, and where there is such little data around SMIs and women in business, this study aims to help bridge the gap. The outcomes of this can be used by both the public and private sector to pinpoint how levels of digital women entrepreneurship can be boosted and how SMIs and

Influencer marketing can be used as valuable tools to get important messages to the masses and bring about societal change that can greatly benefit all parties involved.

1.7. Overview of the Study

This study will be divided into the following Chapters.

Chapter 1 consists of the background and context of the study, the research questions and significance of the study.

Chapter 2 consists of the literature review which analyses the previous studies

Chapter 3 elaborates on the methodology which includes the type of research and the particulars of the sample.

Chapter 4 consists of the findings and discussion.

Finally, the last chapter (chapter 05) presents the conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents a review of the existing research on entrepreneurship from a gendered perspective to understand and highlight the significance of women entrepreneurship. It then moves on discussing the various factors shaping the path of women entrepreneurship in general and in the cultural context of Pakistan with reference the social media and the role of social media influencers in shaping the entrepreneurial motivation. In essence this chapter provide literary background of the current research.

2.1 Women Entrepreneurship

Research on women entrepreneurship spans around various aspects such as the factors affecting their empowerment, the 5Ms of women entrepreneurship, etc., however it still needs further investigation (Dy et al., 2017; Minniti, 2010; Minniti and Naude, 2010). Previous research argues that female entrepreneurs act as drivers of growth (McClelland et al., 2005; Minniti, 2010; Ramadani et al., 2013; Sharma, 2018), therefore the interest in the importance of women entrepreneurship has increased globally (Ahl, 2006; Henry et al., 2016). Women entrepreneurship, as it increased in importance, holds great contributions to the socio-economic growth of a society (Kelley, Bosma, & Amoros, 2010, as well as causing an increase in the diversity of the entrepreneurial market (Verheul et al., 2006).

Bird and Brush (2002) stated that in the past entrepreneurship has been a 'man's' domain" (p. 41) as most of the literature revolved around male entrepreneurs even though during the time of their study, almost 6% of the SMEs were women owned. Even though the construct of women entrepreneurship has been increasing nowadays, gender is only used as a variable for most of the studies being conducted (Villanueva-Flores *et al.*, 2021). The empirical focus used to be one sided and is still building up (Hughes *et al.*, 2012). Research however do agree that women entrepreneurs face more issues and challenges in their entrepreneurial journey as their male counterparts (Ama *et al.*, 2014), due to the socio-cultural factors, especially the gender discrimination (Ughetto *et al.*, 2020), this inequality then affects their entrepreneurial intentions (Ilie *et al.*, 2021).

The use of digital technologies, especially the internet has paved new ways for the e-commerce industries, by making them more innovative, efficient and creating new opportunities for the incumbent and existing entrepreneurs (Ramadani et al. 2013). This has led to the gaps between the socio-economic development of a society being filled (Ajjan et al. 2014). Nowadays, modern technology, especially social media has made it easy for people around the globe to connect and communicate (Amer, 2016) which eventually impacts their behaviour (Anagnostopoulos, Kumar & Mahdian, 2008), lifestyle and taste. According to Olanrewaju et al. (2019), intensive use of IT and social media has changed the outlook of the entrepreneurial market, positively impacting women entrepreneurship. This has led women entrepreneurs to create change, communicate and engage in the global market while collaborating and taking initiatives for themselves, by themselves (Mathew, 2010). Previous research states that women entrepreneurs experience challenges but also advantages when using digital technologies (Rajahonka and Villman, 2019) and that they also partake in a broad range of online activities. There is global acknowledgement of the potential of social media platforms for women entrepreneurs (Ukpere et al., 2014; Genç and Oksuz, 2015; McAdam et al., 2019). However, there are still calls for more research on ICTs and small businesses, especially women entrepreneurs' adaptation to highly digitalized work (Sharafizad, 2016; Rajahonka and Villman, 2019) and becoming a digital entrepreneur (Kaplan and Malach-Pines, 2010; Dy et al., 2017; Nambisan, 2017; McAdam et al., 2019; Rajahonka and Villman, 2019).

2.2 Women Entrepreneurship in Pakistan

This study intends to explore digital entrepreneurship for women in Pakistan, hence this section will present a contextual portrayal of the phenomenon. Yunis, Hashim & Anderson (2018), while painting the picture of women entrepreneurship in Pakistan, opined that like in any other conservative and masculine culture, in Pakistan also it is mostly men who step into the business arena and take risks to start their own ventures reasons being ease of start up for them as compared to their female counterparts. This is in part due to the cultural norms that society upholds across the country. Though in recent years, more women have stepped into the online entrepreneurship, however, the number of entrepreneurs does not reflect that at all. GEM data from 2012 indicated a strong and wide a gender gap in entrepreneurial activity in Pakistan. The TEA (total

early-stage entrepreneurial activity rate) is lowest in this region 1.2 for women as compared to 21.27 for men (GEM, 2019)[5].

Female entrepreneurial activity level in the country is only a meagre 0.1% (PSLM, 2015). Tambunan (2009) argued that most female entrepreneurs in the Asian subcontinent found themselves headed towards starting their own businesses due to "push" factors: such as necessities. However, it can be argued that although this remains true, many women are now starting ventures due to "pull" factors as well. These include wanting to be independent or pursuing a hobby. Khan (2014) concluded that these very "pull" factors are increasingly more significant for women in Pakistan given their frustrations against an ingrained patriarchal system. These pull factors are leading to a steady rise in the number of women pursuing entrepreneurial ventures. These women find solace and motivation in "gated" social media communities where they encourage each other to explore entrepreneurship (Yousaf, Naseem & Mustafa, 2020). The rising popularity and ease of online businesses makes this a very accessible avenue for women in Pakistan now, especially with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor's policies that encourage new businesses to open (Saad, Ijaz, Asghar & Yamin, 2020) and increased access to financial resources for female-led startups (Tara, Arshad, Aziz & Yamin, 2020). Although women are generally discouraged to start their own ventures and to think about their own careers (Nasir et al., 2019), the number of women entrepreneurs is growing at a quick rate in Pakistan with women breaking barriers (Salahuddin et al., 2021). The arena is primed, women are willing to start their own digital ventures, the motivation to do so has many facets behind it, one of which this study intends to explore.

2.3 Social Media and Women Entrepreneurship

Ramadni et al (2013) has dubbed the current era as the technological era. They maintain that the internet has completely changed how businesses operate and have created a multitude of opportunities and prospects for entrepreneurs. Social media has become widely popular and adopted by businesses because it allows them to substitute physical dealings with online ones (Barnes et al., 2012). In Pakistan, there has been a steady rise in the use of social media since 2014. Over 19 million users were recorded using

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[5] https://www.gemconsortium.org/economy-profiles/pakistan-2

Facebook in 2014 (Kemp, 2015). This proved to be the most popular social media platform and provided many opportunities for budding, small-scale entrepreneurs especially women. Gómez & Rungsaridworakarn (2018) determined that platforms like "Instagram" where women find more success encourages the influx of more women as this increases potential for influencer collaborations which is a "win-win" situation. Similarly, Lokithasan, Simon, Jasmin & Othman (2019) established that women are encouraged to start their own mini ventures as they are fond of disseminating as well as consuming "infotainment" of which a huge source is existing influencers.

A new breed of online women entrepreneurs has emerged. They are not only encouraging new start-ups on social media but are also using the platform to enhance the existing businesses and create networks of customers like never before (Fischer & Reuber, 2011). Social media is seen as "a natural extension" of the communication environment (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012). This means that marketing on social media feels like an extended conversation. By extension then, influencer marketing is to be so effortless that it feels like one is being given a recommendation by a peer that one trusts.

Surprisingly, little is known on the role played by digital technologies in driving changes in female entrepreneurship (Ughetto et al., 2019). Digital developments, in the form of new technologies and applications, are changing the entrepreneurial landscape, expanding the options for start-ups and prospective entrepreneurs (Dholakia and Kshetri 2004; Khajeheian 2013). While in the last few years academic research has started to analyze the role, that digital technologies play in entrepreneurial ecosystems (Sussan and Acs 2017; Brush et al. 2019), the gender perspective has remained largely unexplored.

The adoption of social media by women entrepreneurs has aided them into being self-employed and created new and innovative opportunities for them as well as paving a way for their training, education and providing services (Ajjan et al., 2014). This helps them create a business where they can stay at home but interact with stakeholders beyond the boundaries of their physical state (Ajjan et al. 2014). Digital technology, especially social media aids mothers by helping them overcome the barriers that most women face in the contemporary world such as maintaining work-life balance and time-

space restrictions (Ekinsmyth, 2013). Especially for women in Pakistan, where it's tougher for women to go out of their homes and manage a business while managing a home, social media helps break this barrier. According to a study by Niehm and Bosselman (2018), social media holds more privacy as it gives voice to the voiceless where people can express their opinions and concerns while being behind an avatar. Social media also helps find information that might not be easily accessible for women due to societal issues. This in short, gives them a safe space to speak up and identify as themselves (Guta & Karolak, 2015). This interaction and freedom help women to eventually communicate easily and move further with their businesses. Social media nowadays is actively being used for social media marketing, while helping one promote and advertise their venture globally (Slabbert & Ukpere, 2014b). This not only helps with interaction and communication but also helps with the growth of one's venture (Alalwan et al., 2017). Based on the challenges women face in Pakistan which restricts their time and space, social media aids with most of these issues that they face (Beninger et al., 2016). Little is known about the impact of social media influencers on the digital technologies in Pakistan, hence this study aims to enhance the understanding of influencers in Pakistan.

2.4 Social Media Influencers as Change Agents

Change agents, according to Rogers (2003) are those people who have the ability to exert influence on the decisions of others. They can successfully steer them in the direction they want, whether it is to get people to adopt new ideas or even just preventing them from what they deem undesired behaviors. It is understood that SMIs can alter and shape the behaviors of their audiences regarding product recommendations, however they are also able to change behaviors regarding lifestyle or personal changes (Mediakix, 2020a). Therefore, influencers may be suitable agents for communicating change processes to their target groups (Durau, 2022). Weismeuller et al., (2020) found that SMI's expertise positively influenced the followers' purchase intentions which meant that the followers subconsciously started buying the things the influencer was posting or would follow anyone the SMI would post on their social media. Another study by Ki and Kim (2019) suggested that the way an individual evaluated an influencer's expertise was positively linked to the perception of that influencer as a "taste leader", meaning that the SMIs have the ability to influencer their

audiences' tastes and buying behaviors in the long run. Martensen et al., (2018) concluded that if the consumer perceived any similarity between themselves and the influencer, coupled with the said influencer's persuasive intent can positively affect the follower's brand attitude. Similarly, Shan et al. 's (2019) study found that if there was a higher similarity between the consumer's self-image and the SMI's image, it leads to a more favorable brand attitude and purchase intention. Social media influencers effectively have the ability to change human responses such as attitudes and behaviors (De Veirman et al., 2017). However, despite the fact that SMIs and influencer marketing are increasingly being adopted and recognized both in business and academia, academic research has yet to provide a holistic description of the ways SMIs influence their online peers (Ki and Kim, 2019).

Although few studies have been conducted on women entrepreneurs as change agents, more women are prone to be influenced by the behavioral and buying patterns of the influencers. Miller (2019) and Levin (2020) state that influencers as brand endorsers and opinion leaders can be called "change agents". According to Durau (2022), it is completely plausible to look at SMIs as change agents, given their popularity. She draws parallels between influencer characteristics: knowledge/expertise, authenticity, identification and interaction and states that these are applicable to change agents as well. Both influencers and change agents need to have a good grasp on their subject knowledge, they must have a close connection with their followers and must be able to engage and interact well with them, or else steering them in the direction they want will not be possible (Durau, 2022). Therefore, it is reasonable to term SMIs as agents of change, namely Influencer Change Agents (Durau, 2022). These "influencer change agents" may make sure of storytelling by sharing their lived experiences to appear more authentic. Though SMIs can be termed as change agents (Miller, 2019), there is little empirical research on this topic. The role of corporate influencers has only been studied, that too in German Academia (Borchers & Enke, 2020; Hesse et al., 2020). Scholars have mostly focused on one aspect of the attitudinal effect of SMIs' influence attempts – the verbal effect of opinion leadership (Uzunoglu and Kip, 2014; Song, Cho and Kim, 2017; Casalo, Flavian and Ibanex-Sanchez, 2018). Although peer consumers often regard SMIs as role models whose preferences and behaviors are worth mimicking (Forbes, 2016), few researchers have investigated whether peer consumers indeed feel inspired to mimic SMIs after exposure to their content online (Ki and Kim, 2019).

Argyric et al (2020) demonstrated that if the posts by the SMIs and followers are largely on the same subject and interest, the followers are likely to put their trust in them and engage more with them, and ultimately focus on what they're saying and follow through.

This study intends to look at SMIs as change leaders and their role in shaping digital entrepreneurship for women.

2.5 Entrepreneurial Motivation and the Way forward

Although publications have determined factors such as increased investment from international entities (Keating, 2018), increased reliance on influencers from brands (Al-Qatami, 2019) and migration to urban centers as factors positively affecting female entrepreneurship in Pakistan (Hasan, 2019), there is still a lack of research into SMIs and their influence on women entrepreneurship and women run businesses. In a country like Pakistan where more than half of its population comprises women, the female entrepreneurship arena is fast gaining newer entrants. More and more women are looking to start their own small ventures and are leveraging social media platforms to do so. What helps them and motivates them is something that is yet to be researched. It is pertinent to research this as women entrepreneurship is increasing day by day and more women are looking into entrepreneurship through social media. One such factor is social media influencers. There has yet to be a study that delves into why and how this kind of marketing (influencer marketing) is spurring a certain part of the population to be proactive and try to leverage it. Olanrewaju et al. (2018) states that the influence of social media and digital tools has been overlooked in research so far with regards to its possible influence on entrepreneurial motivation when it comes to starting their business.

Previous research on entrepreneurial motivation, as mentioned in earlier sections, categorized motivation as either "opportunity-driven" or "pull" entrepreneurship or "necessity driven" or "push" entrepreneurship (Reynolds, 2002; Strenberg et al., 2005). However, more current research has argued that entrepreneurial motivation cannot be strictly categorized into these two types (Langevang et al, 2012; Adom, 2014)

especially with the advent of social media (Wang et al., 2016), which opens up a whole new world of possibilities and invites innovation.

The majority of studies done so far focus on case of product endorsements by influencers (Lou et al., 2019; Belanche et al., 2020; Kim and Kim, 2020), however little research has been done to determine whether or not these influencers have prompted people, especially women to start their own ventures keeping SMIs in mind as an advertising avenue. Studies have also been conducted on followers' responses to influencers' product endorsements in terms of product attitude (Kim and Kim, 2020; Schouten et al., 2020) and purchase intention (Lou and Yuan, 2019; Ladhari et al., 2020; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). In research on social media and entrepreneurs, the majority of the studies have been geared towards looking at factors that drive social media adoption by entrepreneurs (Olanrewaju et al., 2018), not on whether it drives entrepreneurial motivation. Given that influencer marketing is on the rise, who are SMIs and how do they influence consumer behaviour is now a topic of interest for academics and practitioners alike, therefore more research in this area has become a necessity (Vrontis, Makrides, Christofi & Thrassou, 2021). Lopez et al. (2020) found that high influencer-product congruence leads to their followers trusting them more and finding them to be more credible, which in turn lead to an increased follower interest and more followers searching for more information. The study however is limited to the SMIs influence on followers' purchase intentions and not on whether they in turn convince others to follow in their entrepreneurial footsteps. Casalo et al. (2018) found in their work that the more the consumer's personality matches the SMI's the greater their intention to follow their advice, but again this is in the context of people buying what SMIs endorse, not following down the same career path as them.

This study intends to look into SMIs and digital entrepreneurship for women in Pakistan. It intends to explore entrepreneurial motivation as well as the role of SMIs as change agents when it comes to digital entrepreneurship.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the research methodology used in this study. It will explain how the research was conducted, how the participants were selected and recruited and the sampling strategies. It will also elaborate on the data collection methods, the data analysis method, the reliability and validity of the research as well as the ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Design

This study follows the interpretivist paradigm and is qualitative in nature. The aim was to explore in depth the lived experiences of the participants by gathering and analyzing primary data to provide insights into understanding their motives and underlying reasons for a social phenomenon (Creswell, 2014), in this case digital women entrepreneurship and SMIs. Smith (2015) stated that the qualitative approach is best used when looking to answer questions that need well detailed data or in-depth descriptions. This study intends to look at the real-life journeys and experiences, as well as the opinions of the participants on the subject matter, hence, the need for a qualitative study was overwhelming. The aim is to allow the participants an opportunity to express their beliefs and tell their stories and experiences so as to get the most authentic account. This study, like most that follow this research design, is inductive in nature (Bahari, 2010). This means that after all the data has been collected, it is analyzed and developed into themes. Once the themes are developed, they are organized to form patterns, theories or generalizations, which are then compared to experiences and existing research or literature (Creswell, 2009).

The objective of this research is to explore and understand the role SMIs play in digital women entrepreneurship in Pakistan and their ability to act as change agents that shape this arena.

3.3 Sampling Techniques

Since this study aims to look at social media influencers and explore their role in the digital entrepreneurship arena for women, the population of the sample was SMIs who

use social media and are proponents of women entrepreneurship. In this study female social media influencers on Instagram, from all over Pakistan, were selected for the interviews. Primarily purposive sampling is used in this study, due to the interpretive nature of this study. Also, a criterion was developed and the participants who tend to fulfil the criteria were selected for the purpose of data collection which categorises the influencers based on their followers and the type of social media account they're running. There are four main categories that influencers fall under, as mentioned in chapter 01. Participants from each of these categories were selected, based on the criteria that classifies influencers by type.

Further to purposive, the snowball sampling technique was also used to get referrals. Influencers were also asked if they could refer at least one other fellow influencer who met the research criteria. This could be someone from their own field, their direct competitor, someone they follow and trust or someone they aspire to be. Both male and female influencers were targeted, however, the primary focus was on female influencers. These influencers were targeted based on already, nationally recognized work and repute.

A total of 45 SMIs were approached via email, social media, referrals and calls to managers/agents. The requests for interviews were all sent out simultaneously, asking for in person (face to face) or telephonic interviews, 24 agreed to participate and were interviewed (Table 1). It is important to note that the point of theoretical saturation (Hennink, Kaiser & Marconi, 2017) was kept in consideration. While all the participants that agreed to be part of the study were interviewed, themes and patterns had started emerging after the initial 16 interviews.

The following table contains the details of all the participants:

Participant	Gender	Age bracket	Type of Influencer	Number of Followers	Area of Expertise
SMI 1	Female	18-28	Nano influencer	1000 – 5000	Lifestyle
SMI 2	Female	18-28	Nano influencer	1000 – 5000	Parenting
SMI 3	Female	18-28	Nano influencer	1000 – 5000	Social work
SMI 4	Female	28-38	Nano influencer	1000 – 5000	Lifestyle
SMI 5	Female	18-28	Nano influencer	1000 – 5000	Food
SMI 6	Male	28-38	Nano influencer	1000 – 5000	Fashion
SMI 7	Male	18-28	Micro influencer	Up to 10000	Fashion
SMI 8	Female	28-38	Micro influencer	Up to 10000	Social work
SMI 9	Female	18-28	Micro influencer	Up to 10000	Lifestyle
SMI 10	Female	28-38	Micro influencer	Up to 10000	Infotainment
SMI 11	Female	18-28	Micro influencer	Up to 10000	Food
SMI 12	Female	28-38	Micro influencer	Up to 10000	Fashion
SMI 13	Male	18-28	Macro influencer	> 10000	Parenting
SMI 14	Female	18-28	Macro influencer	> 10000	Lifestyle
SMI 15	Female	18-28	Macro influencer	> 10000	Infotainment
SMI 16	Female	28-38	Macro influencer	> 10000	Lifestyle
SMI 17	Female	18-28	Macro influencer	> 10000	Social work
SMI 18	Female	18-28	Macro influencer	> 10000	Fashion
SMI 19	Female	28-38	Mega influencer	More than 1 million	Parenting
SMI 20	Female	18-28	Mega influencer	More than 1 million	Infotainment
SMI 21	Male	28-38	Mega influencer	More than 1 million	Lifestyle
SMI 22	Female	18-28	Mega influencer	More than 1 million	Infotainment
SMI 23	Female	28-38	Mega influencer	More than 1 million	Social work
SMI 24	Female	18-28	Mega influencer	More than 1 million	Fashion

Table 1: Details of the interviewees

3.4 Methods of Data Collection

Since the study follows an inductive approach, semi structured interviews were conducted. Where possible, these were held in person. Though the majority were conducted using video calling applications and software because the aim was to draw a sample from across Pakistan.

When conducting interviews, it is always best to draw up an interview guide which is structured in a way that the data collected answers the research questions (Ritchie et al., 2014). The purpose of preparing the guide is to act as a reminder of the important topics that need to be covered in each interview. This allows for consistency in the data collected as well as the flexibility to allow participants to dive into more detail on the topic they want to. The prompts used in the interviews are presented in Appendix 1. These were used to get the participant to start talking and also guide them into talking about the subject at hand if the interview veered too far from what was being researched. The interview guide/prompts were developed after reviewing the literature to ensure consistency of the data.

The interviews were designed in way that helped to understand the backgrounds and origin stories of the participants and their views on SMIs, digital women entrepreneurship and the implications of their platforms.

Pilot interviews were conducted with 5 influencers first, these served the purpose of testing out the interview guides and questions. After these interviews, some changes were made to the interview guides before continuing on to interview the rest of the sample. These initial 5 participants were also approached for a follow up interview to cover what was left out of the initial interview.

All interviews began by providing an introduction to the study and its objectives. Next the participants were explained the procedure and all their queries were clarified. After which the proper interview began. Each interview was scheduled to run 45 minutes to one hour, though some ran longer because the participants had more to say. During the interviews, follow up questions and simple probes were used as necessary to elicit more details on the original responses of the interviewee, to ensure that the themes were

covered adequately, and all bases were covered. Great care was taken to ensure the quality of the interviews. At the end of each interview, the interviewee was asked if they could refer someone else who fit the interview criteria. These interviews were recorded and transcribed, additionally notes were taken during the interview as well to further help with the analysis of the data.

3.5 Data Analysis

Once all the interviews were conducted, all the recordings were transcribed, verbatim exactly as the interviewees had spoken. After this was done, to delve deeper into the gathered responses, the interview segments were coded using an inductive approach. Whereby the coding and theme generation was directed by the content of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Saunders et al., 2009). Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis allow for using coding as a means of processing qualitative information as well as a systematic way of seeing. To analyze the data, several phases of the thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) were used in this research:

- **Data familiarization:** the data from the interviews was transcribed, and initial ideas were noted. Major ideas, important and recurring words and phrases were written down for each transcript
- **Generating initial code:** during transcription, keywords and phrases representing a specific idea or opinion were coded. The information was condensed, and memos were also written to keep track of it.
- **Searching for themes across the data:** the data was gone over multiple times to narrow down the number of codes and to categorize them into identifiable themes. The codes were analyzed and then grouped into subsequent themes.
- **Reviewing themes:** all the interview data was re-read to ensure that the themes matched the codes. The first order codes were then further cleaned and condensed into second order codes. These were again matched to the emergent themes.
- **Producing the report:** after the themes had been drawn up, extracts from the data (statements/phrases/keywords) were taken to match with the themes as examples that showed the patterns that had emerged.

An example of the codification process is shown below in Table 2.

Category	Theme	Sub Themes	Codes
Factors influencing digital entrepreneurial motivation	Surrounding attitudes	Supportive	Supportive family
			Supportive friends
			Supportive parents
			Supportive significant other

Table 2: Example of codification process

A complete coding template is shown in Appendix 2.

3.6 Reliability and validity of the research

To ensure the reliability of the study a number of procedures were used. All participants in the study were selected using planned sampling techniques (purposive and snowball sampling). They were all informed that their participation was voluntary and complete anonymity would be maintained. To reduce biases, it was ensured that the researcher did not have any direct relationship with the interviewees. The semi structured nature of the interviews was to reduce the researcher error. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to maintain reliability. And the systematic coding and data analysis approach was taken so that the data could be well structured.

To enhance the validity of the study the strategy used is that of thick and rich descriptions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). According to Holloway (1997), thick and rich descriptions contribute to creating a detailed description of a phenomenon in which the researcher makes all the patterns explicit and places them in context. When the researcher establishes detailed descriptions of the context and offers many viewpoints about several themes, the findings are more realistic and richer, thereby increasing the validity.

3.7 Ethical Considerations of Research

Ethics are the moral values one need to ensure while performing any activity. Ethics in research is highly imminent as it ensures the credibility of one's research and future research. According to Bryman and Bell (2022) there are 10 major pointers one need to consider for their dissertation to be ethical. This study was conducted keeping in mind all ethical considerations. The anonymity of all participants is maintained. Their right to privacy is upheld. Every participant will be asked for consent when it comes to taking part in the research and for using their data in the study. The respondents will not be

coerced in any way and are to take part of their free will. If at any point, should they choose to leave the study and have their information withdrawn, they will be allowed to do so. All interviewees will be treated fairly, with respect and dignity. They will not be placed under any metal or physical stress or duress. The purpose of the research and its intended use will be clearly communicated to all participants so as to avoid misconceptions. All processes will be clear and transparent, there will be no use of any kind of deceptive tactics by the researcher to gain an unfair advantage. While carrying out the research and writing the paper, strict academic values will be upheld. The researcher will ensure that all work put forth is their own and proper citation is done of any work that is being quoted to avoid plagiarism. It will be ensured that all interviewees are aware of the fact that they are being recorded. It will also be ensured that great care is taken to transcribe the recordings exactly as they are with no interviewer notes or biases.

3.8 Summary

This chapter discussed the research methodology, design and data collection methods used in this study. It talked about the participants and sampling techniques, as well as the data collection and analysis methods that were used. It also discussed the reliability and validity of the research and the ethical considerations that were taken into account. The next chapter will present the findings from the data analysis.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to present the research findings and analyze them to shed some light on the research questions that were posed. After transcription and the first stage of coding (first order codes), themes began to emerge, which were matched to the keywords and phrases spoken by the participants. These codes were then aggregated and condensed into related themes and categories (second order themes and codes) and were given structure. The following sections of this chapter will show an in-depth analysis of the research findings.

4.2 Themes of the Study

The two categories were created before the study was conducted to ensure that the data that was being collected had some direction and stayed within the limits of this study. Despite being created beforehand, the first and second order themes that have been presented were generated after the interview transcripts were analyzed. This study was supposed to find the reasons behind entrepreneurial motivation as well as ascertain if SMIs act as change agents. In doing that, it also covered another aspect through the interviews with the participants, which will also be presented and discussed in the coming sections. This then became the third, emergent category. The final three categories are as follows:

1. Factors influencing digital entrepreneurial motivation
2. Influencers as change agents
3. Influencers turned entrepreneurs

The detailed table depicting the first order codes, themes and sub themes can be found in Appendix 2.

4.3 Factors influencing digital entrepreneurial motivation
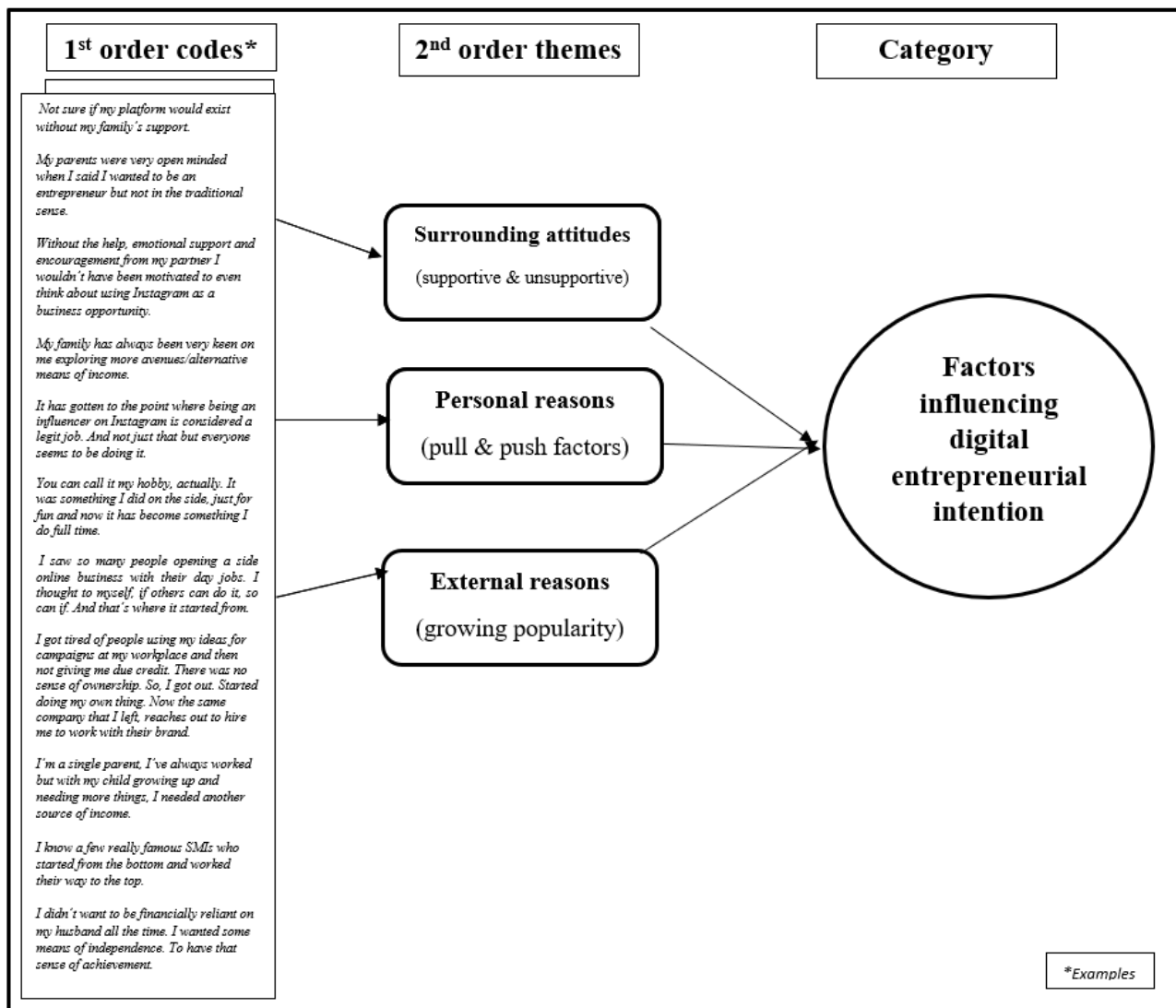
The first category that was researched, entailed exploring the factors that effected the motivation levels when it came to digital entrepreneurship by women. This category explored the reasons the respondents turned towards digital entrepreneurship and started their online ventures. It also explored the origin stories and the reasons they opted to start their businesses.

After analyzing the transcripts, it became evident that the majority of respondents when asked about the factors that affected their entrepreneurial motivation responded with answers that were in line with Tambunan's (2009) push factor theory as well as Khan's (2014) pull factor theory. The most dominant push factor that was cited was financial reasons. Respondents identified financial insecurity and unchanging dire circumstances as the motivation behind setting up online businesses.

In a country like Pakistan, where there are so many cultural and societal barriers to women entering the business arena, women who found themselves being "pushed" (Khan 2014) to work due to their circumstances, turned towards digital platforms to start and run their businesses (Nasir, Iqbal and Akhtar, 2019).

"This is not done in our family! Is something I have heard a lot since deciding to start my own online business. I belong a to a very conservative family. But my parents had just gotten divorced and my mother couldn't support us, I had to put aside the cultural norms and do what I needed to." (P/22)

In a society where it is considered morally unethical for women to enter the business realm (Nasir, Iqbal and Akhtar, 2019), women often find themselves turning to digital avenues. According to one respondent (P/17)

"My father and elder brother did not allow me to pursue arts in university because they thought it wasn't a respectable degree. I ended up doing BBA, but painting was my passion. It was my outlet to express myself. I ended up starting an Instagram page where I would just take pictures and showcase my work so people could see it. I just wanted it out there. Once my page started gaining popularity, I turned it into an arts business where I now sell my paintings, without my family's knowledge."

It is not just negative aspects that "push" women to start their ventures, sometimes it is the fact that they want to do something for themselves.
However, in most cases, the push comes from hard to ignore, serious circumstances. One the respondents (P/5) cites the death of her father as the catalyst behind her looking for ways to start an online business. She wanted to ensure that her and her siblings' education was not negatively impacted by the loss that they had borne.

"My family went through a major financial set back when my father passed away. Everyone had to pitch in to keep us afloat. So, I turned to social media and worked hard to make a name for myself. I used my skills as a photographer to take on work and worked with brands for exposure before I built up my own brand." (P/5)

Another participant (P/8) shared that she was forced to look for alternative means of income when she and her husband could not make ends meet on his salary.

"My husband and I were struggling on just his income so I had to find ways to help out." (P/8)

Yet another participant (P/1) referenced financial constraints being the reason behind her motivation when. She stated that she was a single parent and there was no way she could manage all her child's expenses on her meagre salary.

"I'm a single parent, I've always worked but with my child growing up and needing more things, I needed another source of income." (P/1)

It is noteworthy though, that all the participants who turned towards digital entrepreneurial avenues, none of them had any prior knowledge of setting up or running websites. They were social media users to begin with and when they saw that there was an upwards trend in the number of SMIs and people using Instagram, Facebook etc., pages to run their business, they thought that to be an accessible form of starting a business from the comfort of their own homes and decided to try their hand at it.

"I knew I had to do something. We were very strapped for cash. We had cut down on everything but necessities and could still not make ends meet. I had no idea how to start a website, but I had seen people using Instagram to promote their homemade items and I thought, Okay I can do that. So, I did." (P/7)

"I was very young when I got married and had kids right away so I didn't get to complete my education. I was barely computer literate. But I knew how to use social media. When my husband wouldn't let me work, I thought I could start a lifestyle blog and see where it went. I knew that a website was not in the cards, I didn't know how." (P/3)

This also ties in with the fact that due to the added visibility of watching other people on social media, especially influencers who started with nothing and now had hundreds of thousands, if not millions of followers, the respondents were motivated to try their hand at online businesses.

"There is this person I follow on Instagram, I found her via the explore page a few years ago. She has a personal shopping business. She spends half her time in the US and half in Pakistan and buys designer products to sell to people back home. She started

from zero followers and is now up to over 100k. She makes a good deal of money. I split my time like this as well and since her business model isn't hard to replicate, I have started my own version of the personal shopping business too." (P/13)

"I know a few really famous SMIs who started from the bottom with their Insta pages being a hobby and a means to express themselves. 10 years later, they are the most coveted people to work with because they built a brand for themselves. (P/18)

Analysis of the responses also found that entrepreneurial motivation in women is deeply affected by the attitudes of those around them, whether negative or positive. Seventeen participants attributed their motivation to the support and encouragement they received from their family, friends, parents and loved ones. Having a supportive network and having someone to act as an enabler, of sorts, to keep them focused on their dreams. Thompson (2010) coined the term "entrepreneurship enabler" to describe people or things that support or motivate anyone to start their own business. In the case of the respondents of this study, after analyzing all the transcripts it was determined that all 24 of them had someone in their life who played this role for them and motivated them to get online and start something.

"I would not be where I am today without the push and encouragement given by my family members." (P/2)
"My friends made me see that what I said had substance and that I should consider actively growing my followers and doing this full time." (P/11)
"My parents were very open minded when I said I wanted to be an entrepreneur but not in the traditional sense." (P/19)
"My parents supported me throughout my journey. From my first review post to my first sponsored post and everything in between." (P/4)
"Without the help, emotional support and encouragement from my partner I wouldn't have been motivated to even think about using Instagram as a business opportunity." (P/6)

The research also showed that many respondents also credited SMIs normalizing being digital entrepreneurs and making it look so easy and effortless that it made them curious to want to try it for themselves. In 2016 SMIs were a scare and relatively new resource,

fast forward to 2022, they are now the most sought-after resource in terms of marketing and changing audience perspectives and habits, which the industry now being worth billions of dollars (Influencer Benchmarking Report 2022). This means that in the last 5 years, there has been a huge increase in the number of people who have become SMIs. It has become the new normal. When asked to elaborate what they mean by this "normalization" interviewees said this:

"In the last few years so many random people have risen to fame and have become so well off seemingly overnight. They have talked about their struggles and how they got here and how everyone can get there if they try." (P/13)
"So many SMIs have appeared in the space recently, it has become so normalized to have influencer marketing become a lucrative business venture." (P/18)
"It has gotten to the point where being an influencer on Instagram is considered a legit job. And not just that but everyone seems to be doing it." (P/4)

The data showed that social media played a large role in motivating other women to start their online ventures and also take up influencer marketing. The findings found support from studies conducted in the past that suggested that women find more success on online platforms and then try to disseminate information of how and why they got to that point (Gómez & Rungsaridworakarn 2018, Lokithasan, Simon, Jasmin & Othman 2019, Yousaf, Naseem & Mustafa 2020). They also take a step towards exploring the role digital technologies play in driving changes in women entrepreneurship (Ughetto et al 2019).

4.3.1 Discussion

The previous section presented the findings of the first category: factors influencing digital entrepreneurial motivation. The analysis shows that while there are many factors that play a role and act as catalysts in jump starting the entrepreneurial journey for women, there were some that had a greater impact on the respondents of this study.

Push factors such as financial constraints, were among the top motivators for the respondents. This study was conducted during times of economic turmoil i.e., in the aftermath of the Covid19 wave that hit the world, as well as when there is political and economic instability in Pakistan (Husain 2022). The financial ramifications of both are

felt far and wide. The respondents also cited these two external catalysts that factored in their decision to take up digital entrepreneurship, for example, the death of the main breadwinner in one respondent's family led to her having to find a means of earning, in another case, the rising inflation made it harder for another respondent's family to make do on one income so she was pushed into looking for alternate means of earning.

As ever, familial support and having a supportive community was also something that the respondents credited with giving them the confidence and strength to take the leap towards digital entrepreneurial ventures. Women are generally discouraged from starting their own ventures and furthering their careers (Nasir et al., 2019), however with such strong support systems acting as their backing more and more women are seen breaking barriers (Salahuddin et al., 2021). In a male dominated society like Pakistan's the gender discrimination does take a toll on entrepreneurial intentions (Ughetto et at., 2020), but with the rise of the use of digital technologies and the advent and adoption of social media, it has become easier to break through.

The normalization and spread of social media as well as massive reach it boasts, were another motivational factor. Social media and digital entrepreneurship have levelled the playing field and have positively impacted women entrepreneurship (Olanrewaju et al., 2019), thus getting rid of another barrier for women: the inability to step out of their homes physically (Ajjan et a., 2014). The last decade has seen an exponential increase in the use of social media, be it for personal or business purposes. Many people, the world over, have used it as a means of self-expression and a way to escape their actual lives.

This has led to the emergence of SMIs and have made them widely popular. Social media in itself is relatively easy to use and understand, it is seen as a natural extension of the communication environment (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012) which has aided in its adoption, especially by women. Digital technologies especially in the form of applications on mobile phones has made it easier as well to turn an idea into a business, especially when one sees other people doing similar things on similar platforms. It is interesting to note that the involvement and impact of SMIs and the ease with which participants were able to get up businesses on social media, were also key motivators. Among the women that participated in this study, many credited the SMIs

they follow on social media platforms as the motivational factor in starting their own entrepreneurship ventures. They shared that they follow these SMIs because what they do and share on their pages resonates with them and it makes them feel like they can also follow in their footsteps (Martensen et al., 2018).

4.4 Influencers as Agents of Change
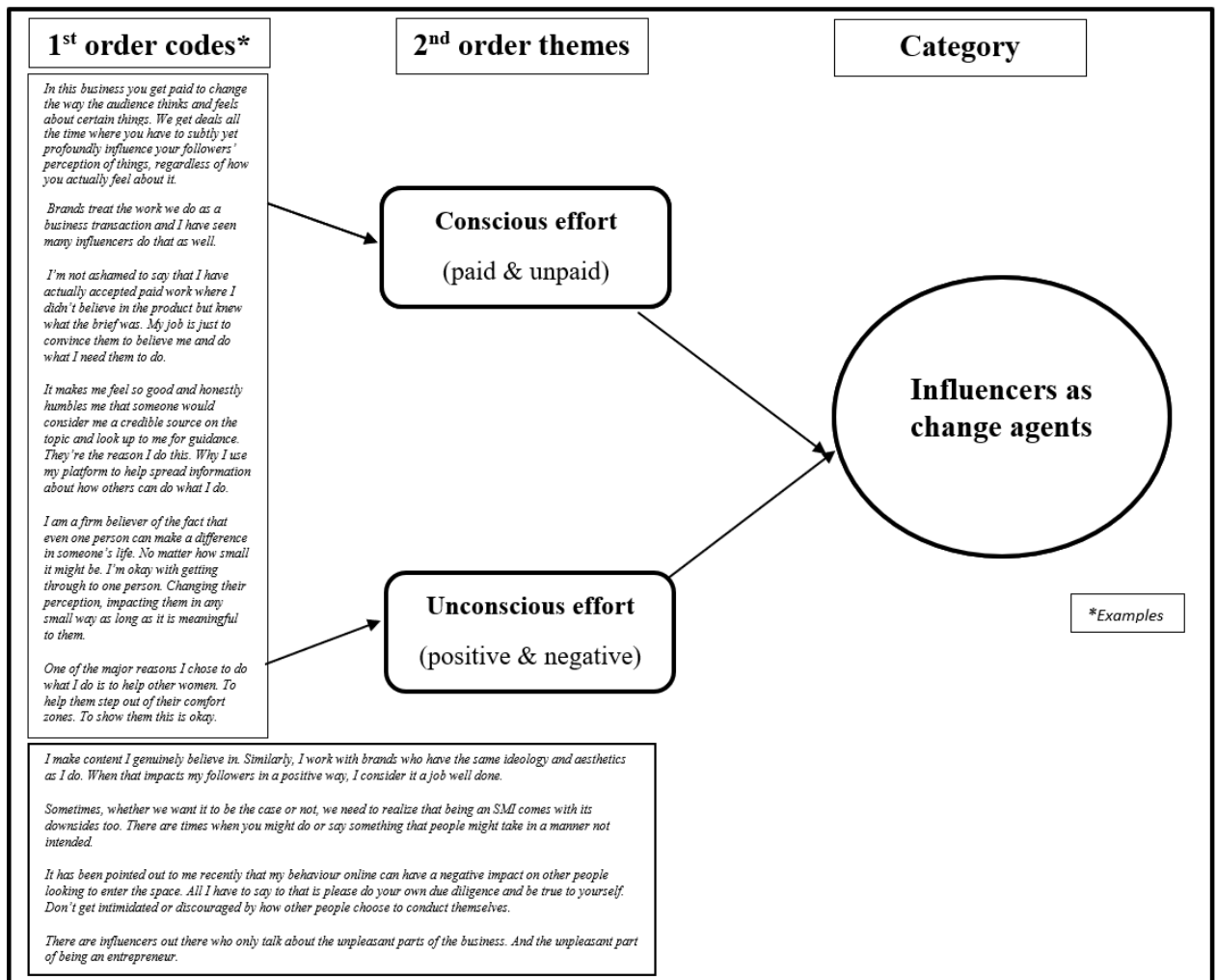
The second category that was researched explored the possibility of SMIs acting as agents of change (Miller 2019). The goal was to ascertain if these influencers are able to change women's mindsets and perceptions and gear them towards digital entrepreneurship. It explored the reach and impact these influencers have on their audience and their ability to influence their actions and decisions.

Becoming an SMI is in itself a form of digital entrepreneurship. The influencers are in essence selling services in the form of endorsements, reviews etc. When analyzing the

content of the transcripts, it became apparent that SMIs either expended conscious or unconscious effort in behaving a certain way online with regards to speaking about or endorsing or reviewing products and services. This means that either the influencer knows exactly what they are doing when they try to alter the behavioral patterns of their audience or that they simply do not know the effect their actions online have on their followers. This stemmed partly from whether or not any financial factors were playing a role, however other subsequent factors also played a role.

Those respondents who made a conscious and calculated effort to influence their audiences in a certain way, explained that to them, their presence online as just business to them and this is what they did for a living. They claimed that they understood the power they had on their followers, but their loyalties lay with the brand or company they were working with.

"In this business you get paid to change the way the audience thinks and feels about certain things. We get deals all the time where you have to subtly yet profoundly influence your followers' perception of things, regardless of how you actually feel about it." (P/9)

However, this then brings into focus, the dark side of social media and the influencers who have amassed such huge following. It shows that by treating their social media pages and places of purely business transactions, these SMIs are risking compromising the integrity and breaking ethical boundaries. And moreover, the fact that these brands are onboard with that because they are getting what they want, is something that does not paint this business in a good light. One response explained her experience:
"Brands treat the work we do as a business transaction and I have seen many influencers do that as well. I was approached by a brand to promote a sanitary napkin to my female followers. They said to make the content believable and authentic. And to make the audience feel like they can relate. But literally everyone out there knows this particular brand is really bad for health and causes many serious conditions. I turned it down but I know many who did not." (P/14)

The other side of the story was also narrated by another participant. She stated that

"Most of us, or at least me and other SMIs I know are very selective of who we work with and what we do or say online. Simply because we know the kind of power we wield when it comes to voicing our opinions or supporting a cause. That is why when its paid work, I make sure I take the repercussions into account." (P/21)

This then shows that the responsibility to be authentic and not deceive your followers lies on you, as a SMI, regardless of whether someone is paying you or not. At the end of the day, it is a business but there are always ethical considerations. Especially since most of these SMIs have a wide audience and reach, and which such huge power, comes even more responsibility. Some of which is acknowledged by the SMIs.

"We know the kind of power we wield when it comes to voicing our opinions or supporting a cause." (P/24)

The analysis showed that SMIs are changing the way we perceive things as well. One respondent shared that if it were not for SMIs she follows online, she would never have considered online business or even working as an influencer as a business model she could have adopted.

"I follow this influencer on Instagram and she said the way we perceive things is changing now. Our definitions of what constitutes a business are changing and I think everyone who can should explore these platforms for such opportunities." (P/18)

The findings show that social media influencers and the way they conduct themselves online can be a source of motivation and demotivation for others who want to follow in their footsteps.

"I am a firm believer of the fact that even one person can make a difference in someone's life. No matter how small it might be. I'm okay with getting through to one person. Changing their perception, impacting them in any small way as long as it is meaningful to them." (P/20)

Depending on the situation, the level of awareness these SMIs have about their own influence on their followers varies. The level of interaction these influencers have with their followers determines their level of awareness. More than half of the influencers

said they regularly interact with their audience via DMs (direct messages), story replies, comments and live sessions:

"My goal is to have my followers interact with me as much as I can. I live for those interactions. When people dm me and tell me what a difference I have made in their lives, it instantly makes the hard work I put into this platform worth it." (P/10)
"I try to show my followers: We are a community, a family. I know when I put myself out there, I might strike a chord with someone. I understand the influence we have on people." (P/3)

One respondent said that the primary reason she chose to be an influencer along with her side business was the help out other women. She wanted to show them that it was acceptable and entirely possible to step out of their comfort zones, pay no heed to any societal/cultural/familial restrictions and do something for yourself.
"One of the major reasons I chose to do what I do is to help other women. To help them step out of their comfort zones. To show them this is okay." (P/12)

Another participant placed a lot of importance on social media "community" that an influencer builds with their platform. She said

"To have other people from my community tell me they see me as a role model, a catalyst for their decisions to finally leap over the fence they had been standing on, it's unreal. Truly humbling." (P/20)

The analysis also showed that the influencers shared that they have received messages from their followers crediting them as the reason they considered entering the digital entrepreneurship arena.
"It makes me genuinely so happy to get dm (direct messages) from other women who tell me that they have been following me for a while and have decided to be brave and start out in the digital arena with their businesses and pages." (P/22)

As a result of their actions, the way they conduct themselves online and due to their encouragement and guidance, other women from their follower base are starting their own entrepreneurial ventures. Four participants shared that being the reason for this

positive change made them feel *"honored"* as well as gave them a *"sense of achievement and accomplishment." (P/3, P/14, P17, P/22)*

In an article published by Forbes (2016), it was said that consumers often regard SMIs as role models and people whose behavior is worth mimicking. However, the influencers that were interviewed were quick to point out that although they try to be as authentic as possible, they don't want people to emulate them in all things, but rather take what they can do whatever suits them best.

"I try to be very authentic and real on my page. Whatever I do in my day-to-day life, I share on here. When I give tips on how to tackle things in your life, work, finances, running a business, I do it as my way of sharing my experience. I don't do it so that people will actually go do things my way or do what I am talking about. When it happens that way it's a pleasant surprise." (P/23)
"I try to keep it 100% real for my followers. So, I have been known to be the person who will tell you about the bad side of things as a warning because of the good. I just want them to have a complete picture before they do anything. I feel like I might be sending subliminal messages that might impact other people's motivation and make them hesitate." (P/20)

Martensen et al., (2018) and Shan et al., (2019) claimed that if the audience can draw parallels between themselves and the SMIs, then they are more like to do what the SMIs want and behave in the way that they intend for them to do so. However, if the SMIs come off as abrasive and negative, the opposite is true as well. Which means that they then become a source of demotivation and end up dissuading any entrepreneurial motivation the other person may have. The data that was analyzed corroborated this as well.
"There are influencers out there who only talk about the unpleasant parts of the business. And the unpleasant part of being an entrepreneur." (P/22)

4.4.1 Discussion

The analysis revealed that while these respondents had not considered themselves as "change agents" mostly because they had not heard of the term, they did however understand the influence they had on their audience. Some respondents made it clear that if they were being paid for the job, their loyalties lay with the brand, and they were able to set their personal beliefs and opinions to a side and just do the work.

However, the respondents understood that social media is a powerful tool that can help change the thinking and behavioural patterns of their viewers. This ability to change the perceptions can be used in both a positive and negative manner. In this age of social media, there has been a steady rise in "cancel culture" (Habermas 1991). Though this phenomenon has recently gained a lot of traction, the term is by no means a new one, with early use of it appearing in the early 1960s (Clark 2020). Though the term has deep roots in history across many cultures, in today's age of social media, it means to completely cut out and withdraw support from a person, thing, service etc. (Clark 2020). An apt summation of the concept was stated by Jonah Engel Bromwich in an interview as "total disinvestment in something (anything)" (2018, npa, Clark 2020). It is known that positive influence of SMIs can do wonderful things for the brands, products or services they are endorsing. Negative influence however, can be catastrophic. Since the rise of cancel culture, any SMI with a significant following online has the ability to completely ruin the reputation and business of anyone on social media just by conveying to their followers that the said person or brand is cancelled. The followers then unfollow or cut out the brands/people etc that the SMIs are cancelling or negatively talking about, leading to a massive loss for the latter. SMIs need to be careful and understand the power they wield just by speaking their minds on their platforms.

Similarly, SMIs that participated in the study also understood that the ability to change their followers' perceptions and thinking could also be used in a positive manner. Raising awareness for social causes, for example, is a good demonstration of the positive impact of being a SMI. Pakistan was hit with the worst flood the country has ever seen in the monsoon season of 2022, many SMIs stepped up and either through partnerships with charities and non-government organizations or by themselves spoke

up for donations for flood relief. Many even encourage people to take matters into their own hands and hold donation drives and go out into communities to help.

It all depends on the discretion of the SMI. Influencers act as change agents for either personal gain or for the benefit and betterment of their audience. Those who care about societal, environmental, etc issues use their platforms to bring about positive change and spread awareness. Those are the behaviours that are worth mimicking (Ki and Kim, 2019).

This study found that in the eyes of their followers, the SMIs were people they aspired to be like. Following the SMIs' journeys, they were able to draw parallels and similarities among what they wanted and what the SMIs had achieved. This then gave them the push they needed to follow down the same path. These SMIs go from being social media influencers to becoming influencer change agents (Durau 2022), regardless of whether they had set out to assume that role or not. Argyric et al., (2020) found that the more the followers were able to relate to the influencer, the more likely they were to trust them and engage with them, and then ultimately follow in their footsteps.

4.5 Influencers turned entrepreneurs

1st order codes*	2nd order themes	Category

I had a goal in mind when I started out on the SMI path, ultimately, I wanted to do this for a bit and then also start my own entrepreneurial venture. This is a form of business, yes. But I wanted something more where I could create a product or service and then go on to launch my business and make that my primary focus.

When I started as an influencer, I was already running a photography page. I had an actual thriving business but needed more clients. I had decided that I would try to make it as an influencer and then once I had enough followers, go back and focus on my business side by side. It was always in the plan.

Who could have known that me starting this page as a teenager would someday allow me to gain enough exposure, make contacts and have enough expertise to start my own online business?

Did I plan starting my own entrepreneurial venture after I had made it as a SMI? No. it seemed like the next logical step. I had learned so much being on set and working with so many companies. I felt like I was ready.

Planned (forward thinking)

Unplanned (next logical step)

Influencers turned entrepreneurs

*Examples

Working as an influencer with so many different kinds of brands and businesses I was able to find a niche. I found where I fit. Once I did that, I realized that there was so much potential in that market. I was vocal to companies about it when I gave feedback, but when I saw there was not much being done, I took the opportunity to address the gap. Got an idea for a business and worked to launch it.

The research findings also revealed another, unexplored dimension: influencers turned entrepreneurs. This was a category that emerged from the data that was analyzed. The responses of the participants lead to the discovery of this category.

All of the respondents in the study were influencers, but after the interviews were conducted, it was revealed that many of them had also started entrepreneurial ventures. Being in the influencer marketing space for so long, they were able to gain a loyal follower base, business and industry know-how and also gain contacts. Some of these influencers chose to leverage these and start their own entrepreneurial ventures.

"Working as an influencer with so many different kinds of brands and businesses I was able to find a niche. I found where I fit. Once I did that, I realized that there was so much potential in that market. I was vocal to companies about it when I gave feedback, but when I saw there was not much being done, I took the opportunity to address the gap. Got an idea for a business and worked to launch it." (P/15)

A follow up question during the interviews was able to reveal that these influencers who later became entrepreneurs fell into two categories: those who became influencers with the goal in mind to later leverage that to start their own businesses, and those for whom it seemed like the next logical step, but they didn't plan for it to happen.

Makrides et al. (2020) found in their research on SMIs that for some of their participants, being influencers became their career choice. Through the use of social media, the participants were able to find a niche following and then make a career out of it. O'Connor (2017) found that in some instances people took this a step forward as well, Chiara Ferragni launched her blog in 2009 and by 2017 she had collaborated with multiple global brands and launched her own shoe line, which then became popular enough for her to expand her product lines into clothing and accessories as well. This is similar to what this study has found. One participant decided to take her love for make-up and testing out new products to the next level and started a beauty business. Another went from reviewing jewellery pieces sent to her by brands to launching her own jewellery line.

Some participants claimed that going from influencer to entrepreneur was actually in their entrepreneurial road map. This is because they knew the power of social media and that once you build up a loyal follower base, when you set out to start your own venture you will already have a tailor-made target audience that you know how to reach very precisely.

"Me coming on to social media to be an influencer was backed by the motive of promoting my family business as well as trying out something I was curious about. Since I have gained popularity, I have used it to promote all sorts of issues as well as my business. Now that I have an established follower base, I spend more time on my business than I do online. But I still take work with brands and other small businesses." (P/17)

"I had a goal in mind when I started out on the SMI path, ultimately, I wanted to do this for a bit and then also start my own entrepreneurial venture. This is a form of business, yes. But I wanted something more where I could create a product or service and then go on to launch my business and make that my primary focus." (P/16)

One participant was quoted saying *"Since I have gained popularity, I have used it to promote all sorts of issues as well as my business. Now that I have an established follower base, I spend more time on my business than I do online. But I still take work with brands and other small businesses."* (P/11)

There were also those respondents who were pleasantly surprised by the turn of events. These were those who concluded that the next logical step for them would be to start their own entrepreneurial ventures.

"Did I plan starting my own entrepreneurial venture after I had made it as a SMI? No. it seemed like the next logical step. I had learned so much being on set and working with so many companies. I felt like I was ready." (P/19)

4.5.1 Discussion

Although this was not a category that was decided beforehand to guide the research, it was interesting to see this previously unseen dimension come into the light. The respondents opened up about their journeys that spanned navigating their rise to becoming influencers, running their pages as an outlet for being hired for influencer marketing, to finding their niche and starting related businesses. This however, is an area that will need further research to truly understand how SMIs make the transition from being influencers to becoming entrepreneurs.

Ouvrein et al., (2021) stated that most social media influencers are driven by a one of two types of passions when starting their online journeys: having the expertise on a particular subject matter or having the entrepreneurial passion and want the financial gains; however, many of them are steered by a mixture of both later on in their journeys. They termed this as having domain specific passion and used the following example. Someone might start a food blog because they are passionate about cooking and sharing recipes, once they get popular, they might take up paid endorsements and this is when they become true entrepreneurs. The tension between one's genuine passion for something and the drive to get financial gains through it is something that a lot of social media influencers struggle with (Audrezet et al., 2017). The participants of this study

were all SMIs across various fields. They had all started out because they were either interested in their particular subject matter and wanted to share their opinions, or because they wanted this to be their career path. Some of them, after being in the business for a while had found themselves naturally going down the path of becoming entrepreneurs and starting their own business ventures, and some had joined the space with their own business as the end goal, in mind from the get go.

Social media entrepreneurship (Çiçek, 2018) is when an individual leverages the use of social media platforms to start and run their own business ventures. This means that instead of traditional online means, they sell their products or services via social media. Ouvrein et al., (2021) classified the types of social media entrepreneurs, stating that there was a clear distinction between the two: those who intentionally develop strategies to make money and those who are non-intentional influencers, i.e., entrepreneurship for them is not a priority. Despite making this classification, Ouvrein et al., (2021) still calls for more research into the area of social media influencers and the shift from SMI to Social media entrepreneurs. Further in-depth research is required into understanding how SMIs make the switch from influencer to entrepreneur.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Implications

5.1 Conclusion and Implications

This study was aimed to give deeper insights into the role of social media influencers in shaping digital entrepreneurship for women in Pakistan. Based on the interviews conducted of a group of social media influencers from across Pakistan, this study explains the lived experiences and differing viewpoints of these influencers with regards to digital entrepreneurship among women. The study was meant to explore a few things. It meant to look into the link between influencer marketing and online women entrepreneurship as well as gain a better understanding of the influence of social media influencers on the entrepreneurial motivation of these digital women entrepreneurs. Lastly, it attempted to view these social media influencers as agents of change and explore the possibility that they might have something to do with shaping the realm of digital entrepreneurship.

The results and analysis of this study not only confirmed that social media influencers play a role in shaping digital entrepreneurship for women but they went on to confirm the various other factors that play their part in the entrepreneurial motivation for women in Pakistan. Even though financial constraints were still the primary motivational factor when it came to boosting levels of digital women entrepreneurship, the study found that SMIs played a significant role in encouraging women to take up entrepreneurial ventures. By normalizing the use of social media and social media entrepreneurship, the SMIs have been able to change the perceptions of their followers and have shown them through their own journeys that it is entirely possible to start down this path and make a living off of it. SMIs whose followers can draw parallels and relate to them are more likely to follow their advice and recommendations. SMIs use their platforms to show their lived experiences as well as use storytelling to take their followers around with them, thus building a relationship and coming off as trustworthy, making the followers more susceptible to their influence.

The study also highlights that these SMIs can be considered change agents. Most of the respondents of the study were hearing the term "change agents" for the first time and needed clarification on what that meant. Once they understood, they began to look at

themselves and their platforms in a new light and really began to comprehend the ramifications and the actual power they held being public figures which such strong following. The SMIs that were studied, understood that there is always two sides of the coin and the power that they wield on their platforms over their followers is immense. They need to be careful while expressing their opinion or endorsing or rejecting something because it will have a ripple down effect on their followers.

The analysis also showed that the findings are consistent with other studies published on entrepreneurial motivation. The findings also provided insight into things that have previously not been studied before: the influence of SMIs on digital women entrepreneurship and SMIs as change agents. Previous studies done on influencers as change agents have been on corporate influencers. This study has found that even social media influencers acting as change agents can alter followers' behaviours and habits. The study was able to find that many SMIs turn to social media entrepreneurship instead of traditional avenues (physical or even websites). This is because since they are well versed in the use of social media, it is just easier for them to take the next step and start a business on the same platform as well.

However, more research needs to be conducted on social media entrepreneurship and how SMIs become SMEs (social media entrepreneurs). The classification has been made (Ouvrein et al., 2021) but in-depth exploration is needed to understand the journey from SMI to SME.

The practical implications of this study will benefit not only aspiring women entrepreneurs but also companies, NGOs (non-government organisations) and the government itself. Companies can leverage the influencers' ability to mould and shape their followers' habits and behaviors. Companies like Proctor and Gamble have used influencer marketing in the past to cut through negative reviews and bad press by using well known influencers to promote their product because they are credible and well renowned in the social media space. There is always two ways of making use of something. Across the border, in India Paree sanitary napkins used influencers to change public perceptions as well regarding the social taboo attached to mensuration (Medda, Sharma, Sunam & Tawte 2021). Both these campaigns led to the followers of the influencers who participated in them to speak out on adopting or rejecting the

product. NGOs who work toward women empowerment and entrepreneurship can use influencers to try and encourage these women to come forward and start their own digital ventures.

A Global Economy Report (2018) by the World Bank ranked Pakistan at the 165th position worldwide in terms of women participation in the working force. The government of Pakistan, did take the initiative to engage social media influencers across all platforms to spread awareness about many topics, including women entrepreneurship. This can be furthered and other institutions and bodies can leverage SMIs acting as change agents to bring about their desired outcome. The COVID 19 pandemic coupled with the rising inflation has hit the country hard, an increase in income by encouraging the rise of digital women entrepreneurship via social media will help households generate more income and result in a positive effect on the economy. As far as this study goes, the participants all credit social media and influencers, to varying degrees, as their motivation behind joining the space. They also accept and acknowledge their roles and responsibilities as change agents that shape the realm of digital entrepreneurship for other women. At present this study has its limitations in that it is representative of social media influencers in Pakistan. The study revealed another dimension that needs more research on the area: influencers who have turned into digital entrepreneurs.

5.2 Limitations

The data that was collected sheds some light on the research questions that were posed. The aim of the research was to explore entrepreneurial motivation, the impact of SMIs and SMIs as change agents, all in relation to digital women entrepreneurship in Pakistan. The themes that emerged all had sub themes that were briefly touched upon. It is understood that this study was limited by time and resources. Though careful effort was put into selecting respondents and making the group as diverse as possible so multiple viewpoints could be collected. SMIs are generally harder to interviews as they mostly charge for their time and services and also have their schedule booked for most of the year. Additionally, from the perspective of literature, there is not a lot of resources out there for reference as SMIs and research on them is a relatively newer marketing field.

However, this study found that not only do SMIs have a clear impact on the motivation levels of women entrepreneurs, but they are also vital in changing the thinking and mindset of these women and making them think about how they too can step into the digital entrepreneurship arena. This third dimension that has emerged during the analysis, however will need more research conducted on it. It came to light as a by-product of the conversation that was taking place during the data collection phase. Further research could be conducted on the journey of influencers who turn towards entrepreneurial ventures, and their motivations and journeys that lead to that point.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Interview guide/prompts for interviewees:

- How did you get started in the business? (Origin story)
- What, in your opinion, are key characteristics that influencers should possess? (What makes a person an influencer? Who in your mind can be categorized as one?)
- What do you think the implications of your platform are, especially on other aspiring entrepreneurs? (What do you think your impact is on your audience? Do you think about the negative aspects of your work/platform?)
- Do you think you, or influencers in general, are capable of bringing about change (in behaviours, habits and thinking)? (What do you think your platform is capable of? Do you realize the potential/power/hold you have?)

Appendix 2: Categories and Emergent Themes

Category	Themes	Sub themes	Codes
Factors influencing digital entrepreneurial motivation	Surrounding attitudes	Supportive	Supportive family
			supportive parents
			supportive significant other
			motivation from friends
			motivation from family
			motivation from parents
			normalized by SMIs on social media
		Non supportive	cultural restrictions
			familial restrictions
			societal restrictions
	Personal reasons	Pull factors	Hobbies
			Trying something new
			"If they can do it, so can I" – motivated by other people's success
			Desire to be one's own boss
			Motivated by seeing SMIs who started from nothing
		Push factors	Financial circumstances
			Need outlet to express one's self
			Crave independent means of finance

	External reasons	Growing popularity	Witnessed the rise of many SMIs
			Know a lot of SMIs personally - rags to riches situation
			Want what they (SMIs) have
			Popularity and reach of social media and influencers
Influencers as change agents	Conscious effort	Paid	Brands pay to have SMIs influence audience behaviour
			Can disagree with the premise, but will do it for the money
		Unpaid	Genuinely want to see others succeed
			Want the public to benefit from their experience
			Want to make a difference
			Want to give back to others
			Want to help lift up other women
	Unconscious effort	Positive	bring about positive "change" as a result of content produced
			inadvertently influence behaviour
			inadvertently influence motivational levels
		Negative	behaviour online is off-putting
			discourages adoption and modelling
			demotivates and hinders entrepreneurial intention
Influencers turned entrepreneurs	Planned	Forward thinking	Entrepreneurial road map
	Unplanned	Next logical step	Gained experience and contacts, equipped to start own venture