

Identification of Research Gaps in The Context of Women's Entrepreneurship in The Arab World

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Abstract

This study aims to systematically map the development of research on women's entrepreneurship in the Arab world and identify key research gaps through a combined systematic literature review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis. Using publications indexed in Scopus, Google Scholar, and Publish or Perish databases from 2015 to 2025, a total of 47 selected articles were analyzed using Biblioshiny and VOSviewer. The findings reveal a significant growth in scholarly attention to women's entrepreneurship, with research clusters concentrated on socio-economic, political economy, finance, digital entrepreneurship, family and education, and cultural-religious values. However, the literature remains heavily focused on structural barriers such as access to finance, gender norms, and institutional constraints, while strategic dimensions of empowerment, digital resilience, Islamic finance, and sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship remain under-explored. The results also show a geographical concentration in GCC countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, with limited representation from non-GCC Arab nations. Furthermore, empirical studies integrating Islamic values, maqasid al-shariah, gender-sensitive financial inclusion, and digital transformation are still scarce. This study contributes by providing a comprehensive mapping of research trends and formulating a structured future research agenda to advance a more inclusive, ethical, and context-sensitive framework of women's entrepreneurship in the Arab world.

Keywords: Identification of Research Gaps; Context of Women's Entrepreneurship; Arab World.

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is a key driver of a country's economic growth, as it fosters economic development, social inclusion, and employment (Sabri & Thomas, 2019; Eyaa et al., 2010; Coy et al., 2007; Rose et al., 2006). Entrepreneurship is a crucial instrument in building empowerment and enhancing the quality of life, including women's entrepreneurship (Prabha et al., 2025; Ingalagi et al., 2021). Although women entrepreneurs around the world experience many disadvantages such as discrimination, lack of business experience and limited access to funding, the challenges for women entrepreneurs may be more severe in Muslim-dominated countries and Islamic countries where religion, ethical values, cultural factors are additional inhibiting factors (Gul et al., 2021; Musammatt Naieema Akhter, 2015). Women's entrepreneurship in the Arab world has emerged as a crucial dimension in broader discussions about economic development and gender empowerment in the region. Despite facing cultural, social, and legal barriers, women entrepreneurs are increasingly recognized for their potential to drive economic growth and innovation (Beninger et al., 2016). The intersection of gender and entrepreneurship is significantly shaped by local contexts, including the dominant religious and cultural frameworks in Arab societies (Tlaiss & McAdam, 2021).

In Arab countries, women entrepreneurs leverage their unique identities and experiences to negotiate and redefine their roles within a framework often constrained by traditional gender norms (Alshibani et al., 2024). For example, Tlaiss and McAdam argue that the concept of "halal" serves not only as a business guideline but also as a source of information for women entrepreneurs. It also inspires women entrepreneurs to integrate ethical considerations into their entrepreneurial practices, thus fostering a socially responsible business environment and establishing a unique identity (Tlaiss & McAdam, 2021). This aligns with Kemp's findings, which emphasize the importance of agency among women in the Arab world, highlighting how women navigate educational and employment pathways to leadership roles in business (Aji et al., 2025; Susanto et al., 2025; Waoma, Izmuddin, et al., 2024; Waoma, Judijanto, et al., 2024).

Women's entrepreneurship in the Arab world has become a growing area of interest among researchers and practitioners. While numerous studies have addressed various aspects of women's entrepreneurship in the region, significant research gaps remain that require further exploration. This paper aims to identify these gaps by analyzing existing studies and providing recommendations for future research.

1.1. Urgency of research

Research on women's entrepreneurship in the Arab region holds significant academic and practical significance (Mouazen & Hern, 2023). Economically, women engaged in entrepreneurship play a crucial role in expanding the economic base, creating new jobs, and driving innovation in regions facing economic diversification challenges (Sajjad et al., 2020). Socially and culturally, this study is crucial for understanding how gender norms, religious teachings, and local values shape women's entrepreneurial experiences.

Despite the increasing trend of women becoming entrepreneurs, they still face complex structural barriers, including gender-based discrimination, limited access to funding sources, and a lack of support from institutions that should assist (Turley et al., 2025). By investigating these dynamics, research can identify effective strategies for empowering women through entrepreneurship and formulate more inclusive and context-specific policies. Moreover, this research contributes to the growing body of literature that crosses multiple disciplines, integrating economic, gender, cultural, and religious perspectives. This is crucial for filling the existing scientific gap in the study of women's entrepreneurship. Therefore, this research is crucial not only for broadening the theoretical understanding of women's entrepreneurship but also for providing a strong empirical basis for more effective and equitable policy interventions in the Arab region. Research on the literature review of women's entrepreneurship in this region is crucial for understanding existing dynamics, identifying knowledge gaps, and providing recommendations for improved policies and practices. Thus, this study provides a solid foundation for understanding the complexities faced by women entrepreneurs, while also providing valuable insights for policymakers, academics, and practitioners in the field. This research is expected to drive positive changes that benefit women and society as a whole, while also supporting sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the region.

2. Research Method Data

2.1. Data source

A bibliometric study was conducted to investigate the relationship between entrepreneurship and women in Arab countries. Secondary data related to publications on women's entrepreneurship in the Arab region were sourced from the Scopus database, a leading resource for researchers, recognized as the largest, with over 94 million entries.

2.2. Research methods

Articles about female entrepreneurs in the Arab world were collected using specific keywords, employing Boolean operators such as "AND" and "OR". The terms used to collect data included "Women Arab and Entrepreneurship," "Women and Entrepreneurs," "Female Arab and Entrepreneurship," and "Women's Status." The literature collection strategy involved checking the presence of these keywords in the title, abstract, and specific keywords of each article. The publication process was limited to a specific time period, namely from 2015 to 2025, resulting in a total of 100 documents. The authors' selection of publications is based on several specific criteria within the database. First, selected articles must be in English. Second, only open-access articles are considered, with a focus on the limited subject areas of business, management, social sciences, and economics. Third, articles deemed irrelevant and duplicated will be removed to ensure better research quality. Finally, articles published in conference proceedings and book chapters will also be excluded from the selection process.

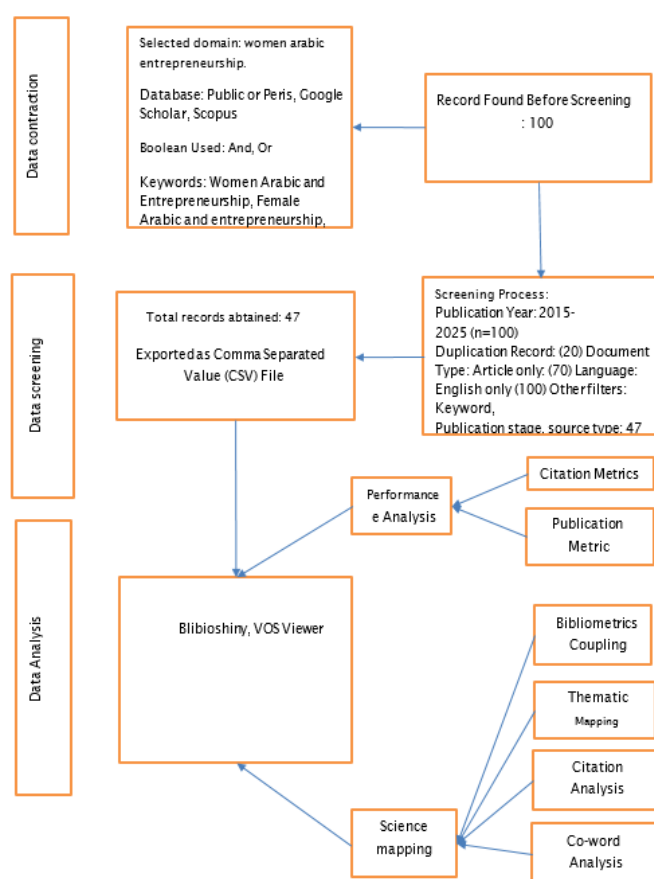


Fig. 1: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) Framework on Bibliometric Analysis of Women's Entrepreneurship Research Studies.

3. Results and Discussion

Research on women's entrepreneurship in the Arab region shows a clear and significant increase in recent years (2015-2025). Notably, the growth was particularly striking in 2019, when the number of studies conducted doubled. This highlights the significant role of women's entrepreneurship in both economic and social contexts over recent years. Annual research production levels related to the topic of women's entrepreneurship. The concept of entrepreneurship involving women has undergone significant development in recent years, introducing innovative ideas into business practices. The table below presents annual scientific output data, indicating that over the past decade (2015-2025), the number of articles published on women's entrepreneurship has increased, reaching a peak of 48 articles with an average citation rate of 5.46. 2019 recorded the highest number of citations, reaching approximately 14 citations per article. The increase in publications related to women's entrepreneurship indicates that the importance of this topic is being increasingly recognized.

Table 1: Annual Scientific Production and Its Average Citations

Year	Article	Average citation	The	A year that can be quoted
2015	2	1.84		11
2016	3	0.29		10
2017	1	1.8		9
2018	3	1.2		8
2019	8	0.75		7
2020	5	0.54		6
2021	7	0.59		5
2022	7	0.7		4
2023	5	1.04		3
2024	5	2.56		2
2025	1	0.5		1

3.1. Most contributing authors and institutions

Two key authors have made significant contributions to women's entrepreneurship research in the Scopus database: Tlas HA, affiliated with the University of New Brunswick Saint John in Canada, and Ghouse, from the Department of Marketing and Entrepreneurship at Dhofar University, Salalah, Oman. Both are prominent contributors to the study of women's entrepreneurship in the Arab region.

Table 2: Relevant Affiliations in the Field of Arab Women Entrepreneurship

NO	Affiliation	Number of Articles
1	University of New Brunswick Saint John, Canada	2
2	Department of Marketing and Entrepreneurship at Dhofar University, Salalah	2

3.2. Most relevant source according to Bradford's law

Selecting articles from reputable journals is crucial for significantly enriching your knowledge. Amidst the abundance of information available, finding appropriate and informative sources to stay up-to-date on developments in a field can be challenging. Therefore, identifying key journals within a discipline is crucial for obtaining the latest information on topics of interest. Bradford's Law explains the distribution pattern of scientific articles, where publications are divided into zones based on their relevance. The core zone includes the most frequently cited journals, while other zones have lower citation frequencies. Thus, Bradford's Law plays a role in identifying key journals in a given field.

This table outlines the most relevant sources on women's entrepreneurship in the Arab region based on Bradford's law. The primary sources of focus are the International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research, the International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship, and the Journal of Business Ethics. Over the past decade, an average of four articles were published in the International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research, four in the International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship, and two in the Journal of Business Ethics, all of which are indexed in the Scopus database. These sources fall into Zone 1, reflecting the importance and quality of their contributions to the field of women's entrepreneurship.

Identifying these important sources will be very useful for publishing future research on women's entrepreneurship in the Arab region. Additionally, among the journals mentioned, only a few are directly related to business management and psychology. These important sources indicate that articles on women's entrepreneurship receive increased attention in these journals, which can help future researchers adapt various models and identify key issues raised in the research published in these journals.

Table 3: Relevant Sources on Bradford's Law

NO	Source	Amount Article	Bradford's Law Ranking	Zone
1	International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship	4	1	1
2	International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research	4	2	1
3	Journal of Business Ethics	2	3	2
4	Sage Open	2	4	2
5	Sustainability (Switzerland)	2	5	2
6	Gender in Management	2	6	2
7	Arab Economic and Business Journal	2	7	2

3.3. Countries with the most article production

The number of authors contributing to the study of women's entrepreneurship in the Arab region, from various countries, shows interesting variation. Authors from Saudi Arabia dominate with a total of twelve articles, followed by authors from the United States with ten. Next, Oman presents seven articles, while the United Kingdom contributes five. On the other hand, authors from Jordan contribute three articles, Qatar contributes two articles, and countries such as Lebanon, Egypt, Malaysia, Bahrain, and France each contribute one article.

Authors from Saudi Arabia contributed the most with a total of 12 articles, indicating that: (1) The issue of women's entrepreneurship in the Arab region is a significant focus domestically. (2) Saudi Arabia serves as a central hub for developing knowledge on this issue, in line with socio-economic changes that support women's empowerment within the Vision 2030 framework—United States Engagement: External Views and Cooperation. Through ten articles, authors from the United States show that (1) there is significant academic interest globally in gender and entrepreneurship issues in the Arab region. (2) This is likely to involve cross-cultural studies, comparative analysis, or international collaboration. (3) This situation reflects the influence and capacity of US global research in contributing to discussions on gender in non-Western contexts.

Regional Contributions: Oman and Jordan. Oman (7 articles) and Jordan (3 articles) exemplify the growing involvement of other Arab countries in shaping local narratives. This demonstrates that the study of women's entrepreneurship is not limited to large countries, but is also attracting attention from other Arab countries with diverse social contexts. The UK, through the five articles presented, demonstrates its significant role as an academic partner outside the Arab region. Furthermore, it can be speculated that these articles may stem from research related to the Arab diaspora or collaborations between UK universities and educational institutions in Arab countries.

Bahrain, Lebanon, Malaysia, and Egypt reflect very limited or inconsistent representation. This situation provides an opportunity to: Increase the involvement of academics from these countries. Encourage the application of comparative approaches among Arab countries. Expand the scope of social and cultural contexts in research.

Table 4: Local Impact of Relevant Authors

NO	Author's Country	Number of Articles
1	Saudi Arabia	12
2	American	10
3	Oman	7
4	English	5
5	Jordan	3
6	Qatar	2
7	Bahrain	1
8	Lebanon	1
9	Malaysia	1
10	Egypt	1
11	Prancis	1

3.4. Most Influential Documents

Information about documents cited both locally and globally provides insight into research trends over a specific time period. Generally, global citations refer to the number of citations an article receives across all databases without any processing. Screening. On the other hand, local citations refer to citations received by articles through screening, where globally cited documents indicate impact across multiple fields. In contrast, locally cited documents indicate impact within a specific field. Thus, evaluating locally and globally cited documents can improve understanding of the actual impact of research. Therefore, global citations will typically outnumber local citations. The table below shows the most influential documents on women's entrepreneurship during the study period.

The most cited paper on female entrepreneurship globally was written by Tlaiss, HA, which has 316 global citations and 31 local citations published in the *Journal of Business Ethics* in 2014. Tlaiss found that entrepreneurial motivation among Emirati women emerges through a complex interaction between pull and push factors, within a patriarchal framework influenced by Arab culture and Islamic teachings. This provides support for the theory of post-materialism, as well as aspects of legitimacy and dissatisfaction, which overall contribute to explaining the reasons behind female entrepreneurship in that context (Tlaiss, 2014).

The second document, written by Namrata Gupta, which has 251 global citations and 12 local citations, was published by the *Management Decision Journal* in 2017. Gupta, in her research, found that personal factors, environment, and government support have a positive and significant influence on the success of women-owned SMEs in the UAE (Namrata Gupta, Anita Mirchandani, 2018). These two articles are widely cited by various researchers in their work, both at the global and local levels, thanks to the recognition they have received. The most influential documents encompass research in various fields, as well as those that are more specific to certain fields, which enables a deeper understanding of the topics discussed. These two influential documents provide clear insights into the position of women in the context of entrepreneurship policies and the implications of these policies for women's entrepreneurship research in the Arab region from a gender perspective. This demonstrates that this paper has made a significant contribution to the field of women's entrepreneurship literature in the Arab region.

Table 5: Most Global and Local Cited Documents

No	Author(s)	Journal	DOI	Year	Local Citations	Global Citations
1	Tlaiss, H. A.	<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	10.1007/s10551-014-2138-3	2014	31	316
2	Gupta, N.	<i>Management Decision</i>	10.1108/MD-04-2017-0411	2017	12	251
3	Ghouse, S.	<i>International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research</i>	10.1108/IJEBR-02-2017-0070	2017	4	198
4	Naguib, R., & Jamali, D.	<i>Gender in Management</i>	10.1108/GM-12-2013-0142	2015	4	174
5	Ghouse, S. M., McElwee, G., Durrah, O., & McElwee, G.	<i>International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research</i>	10.1108/IJEBR-10-2018-0691	2019	4	135
6	Beninger, S.	<i>International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business</i>	10.1504/IJESB.2016.073987	2016	12	129
7	Erogul, M. S., & Barragan, R. M.	<i>Culture and Organization</i>	10.1080/14759551.2016.1244824	2019	5	102
8	Tlaiss, H. A., & McAdam, M.	<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	10.1007/s10551-020-04437-0	2020	4	96
9	Banihani, M.	<i>Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship</i>	10.1108/JRME-10-2017-0047	2020	8	87

3.5. Main topics

In the 47 studies examined, the main topics were found to be concentrated in six areas: socio-cultural, socio-economic, political economy, family, and digital. Socioeconomic topics were the most discussed, with 10 articles. Research conducted by Gonzales and colleagues revealed various

socioeconomic barriers faced by female entrepreneurs in Lebanon. The study identified significant obstacles, including limited access to financial resources, persistent gender bias, and various cultural stereotypes, which hinder their development (Goncalves et al., 2024). (Ng & Hamilton, 2024) Furthermore, other research has highlighted the importance of institutional and social contexts in shaping the situational opportunities and constraints that influence women's entrepreneurship, as well as how these expressions of entrepreneurship may vary across societies (Naguib & Jamali, 2015). In the context of entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs report slightly higher growth-oriented attitudes compared to their male counterparts (Sabri & Thomas, 2019).

However, there are also drawbacks in research analyzing women's entrepreneurship within specific ethnic groups, as well as research that recognizes the region's complex social, cultural, and religious diversity. This has resulted in a lack of attention to specific experiences at the regional level, such as the impact of the refugee crisis and emerging trends within the community (Bastian et al., 2018). On the other hand, research indicates that female entrepreneurs in Jordan continue to face several significant challenges, particularly those related to family responsibilities, access to business networks, and limited physical mobility (Banihani, 2020). The potential of women to contribute socially and economically remains hampered or unrecognized, mainly due to several existing socio-economic factors (Al-Qahtani et al., 2022).

Furthermore, motivational factors, various obstacles faced, and factors contributing to the success of female and aspiring entrepreneurs in Oman have also been the focus of research attention (Chavali, 2016). Furthermore, the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Kuwait has also been highlighted, including a focus on opportunity-oriented entrepreneurs and the legal, economic, and socio-cultural frameworks in which they operate (Langworthy et al., 2020). Concepts such as entrepreneurial value creation theory and social role theory are also crucial in understanding the challenges and obstacles faced by female entrepreneurs. All these theories and ideas have a significant role in providing an overview of the life experiences and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Khartoum, Sudan (Said & Enslin, 2020)

Table 6: Arab Women's Entrepreneurship Topic Socio-Economic

NO	Author	Journal	Country Context
1	Goncalves	Cogent Business and Management	Lebanon
2	Naguib R, Jamali D	Gender in Management	UAE
3	Sabri MS, Thomas K	International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship	Saudi Arabia
4	Bastian BL, Sidani YM, El Amine Y	Gender in Management	Middle East
5	Banihani M	Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship	Jordan
6	M. Al-Qatani	Sustainability (Switzerland)	Qatar
7	Chavali K Langworthy	International Review of Management and Marketing	Oman
8	M. Warnecke T Warnecke T	Journal of Economic Issues	Kuwait

The next topic is Political Economy, which comprises eight articles discussing related issues. First, Tlais argues that entrepreneurship and business ethics can be seen through the entrepreneurial practices of Arab women and how they embody their beliefs in their businesses. There is increasing strategic interest in the political and economic aspects of the region (Tlaiss, 2015). Second, Langworthy (2023) presents a constructivist political economy approach that aims to understand women's contributions to business development in modern times (Langworthy, 2023). Third, Sultan emphasizes that political instability, especially that occurring in Palestine, not only negatively impacts women's position in society but also threatens the stability of families and communities as a whole (Sultan, 2016). Fourth, Beninger et al. (2016) argue that male dominance in the social, political, and religious sectors in the Middle East region results in women facing significant challenges in running a business (Beninger et al., 2016).

Fifth, Ghouse et al. state that women face several significant challenges in running businesses. These challenges include difficulties in accessing government support that can help meet business needs, difficulties in finding the right suppliers to maintain competitiveness, and high costs for raw materials. Although marketing is an essential aspect, it often does not receive the attention it deserves. (Ghouse et al., 2019) Ismaeel emphasized the importance of empowering women so that they have control over social, cultural, political, and economic resources, thereby increasing their confidence and ability to take an active role in problem-solving and self-development. (Ismaeel et al., 2023). Abdul found that Omani society is at a crossroads between the need to adapt to the modern world to survive economically and politically, and the desire to maintain traditional values. (Abdul et al., 2015) Meanwhile, Alshebami & Alzain put forward several policy recommendations and suggested the establishment of an entrepreneurial ecosystem to support women entrepreneurs in Yemen. (Alshebami & Alzain, 2022). It is understandable that existing research on women's entrepreneurship in Arab countries, particularly in political-economic studies, still lacks studies that explore how progressive Islamic values or gender reinterpretations in Islam are utilized as a tool for the advocacy or political-economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs.

Table 7: Arab Entrepreneurship Topic Political Economy

NO	Author	Journal	Country Context
1	Tlaiss HA	Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	Arab
2	Langworthy M	Arab Economic and Business Journal	Saudi Arabian
3	Sultan SS	World Review of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sustainable Development	Palestine
4	Beninger, Stefanie	Int. J. Entrepreneurship and Small Business	Egypt
5	Ghouse SM, McElwee G, Durrah O, McElwee G	International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research	Oman
6	Ishmael R, Hamdan A, Binsaddig R, Right MA	International Journal of Innovation Studies	Bahrain
7	Abdul, Mohammed,	International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship	MENA
8	Alshebami AS, Alzain E	Frontier	Yamen

The next topic is women's entrepreneurship, which is related to financial aspects. In this context, six articles address the topic. Rizwan Tahir stated that several women hesitated to lend to them due to these institutions' doubts about women's ability to manage their businesses. (Tahir, 2018) Tahir's research was supported by Hasan, who stated that difficulties in borrowing and obtaining loans from commercial banks and other financial institutions result from the perception that women are considered high-risk. This results in them facing very high interest rates, low minimum loan approval amounts, strict collateral requirements, especially for those operating in the informal market, as well as burdensome government protocols and compliance costs. (Hassan & Zaharia, 2021) Burham elaborated on women's decisions to borrow from financial

institutions. He found that limited financial management skills lead many women entrepreneurs to doubt their ability to handle economic issues, including borrowing from banks. (Boshmaf, 2023).

Alexandre emphasized that financing and lack of experience are key challenges, especially for individuals seeking to establish online businesses (Alexandre & Kharabsheh, 2019). This contrasts with research conducted by Altarawneh, which suggests that establishing or supporting microfinance institutions can contribute to increased entrepreneurship among women. Microfinance institutions play a role in improving women's career development, and the microcredit services they offer can help mitigate the risks of vulnerability they face (Altarawneh & Albloush, 2023). Research conducted by al-Tarawneh, supported by Namrata, suggests that access to business ideas and the ability to obtain initial capital are crucial elements contributing to the success of female entrepreneurs in the United Arab Emirates (Namrata Gupta, Anita Mirchandani, 2018). In the context of Arab countries and Muslim-majority populations, the Islamic financial system has the potential to serve as a fair and inclusive tool. However, research linking Islamic economic principles to gender-focused aspects of financial inclusion remains very limited.

Table 8: Arab Women's Entrepreneurship Topic Finance

NO	Author	Journal	Country Context
1	Rizwan Tahir	Int. J. Entrepreneurial Venturing	UAE
2	Hassan H, Zaharia RM	European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies	Egypt
3	Boshmaf H	Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences	Jordan
4	Alexandre L, Kharabsheh R	International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship	Bahrain
5	Altarawneh, Sincere Albloush, Ahmad	Journal of Systems and Management Sciences	Arab
6	Namrata	Management Decision	UAE

The next topic to be discussed is Digital. Advances in digital technology have opened up new opportunities for women to contribute actively to the world of entrepreneurship. Various studies show that digitalization is crucial in empowering women entrepreneurs, particularly in overcoming traditional challenges such as limited mobility, market access, and social capital. With digital platforms like social media, e-commerce, and financial applications, women can start and manage businesses from home, expand their market reach internationally, and build business networks more flexibly. This also applies to women entrepreneurs in the Arab world. Research conducted by Nisreen A Ameen and Rob Willis (2016) shows that technology in Arab countries (mobile phones) helps reduce gender gaps and empower women in those countries. The findings of this study contribute to the economic well-being of women, their families, telecommunications companies, and the Arab countries in which they operate. Enhancing women's entrepreneurship through mobile phone use can help boost the economic development of those countries.

The social capital of female entrepreneurs in Egypt can be enhanced by expanding their exposure and reach to customers, suppliers, and relevant knowledge. Utilizing social media to run a business offers these women opportunities to market and sell their products to consumers throughout Egypt and beyond. (Beninger et al., 2016) This study offers an in-depth examination of female entrepreneurs' utilization of social media platforms. The findings indicate that sharing marketing information about their products, such as uploading photos of product offerings, and making sales, are key points that enable potential consumers to contact entrepreneurs and place orders.

The economic entrepreneurship opportunities available to women are primarily shaped by culture and tradition, education, and access to land and resources (Connell, 2011), and there may be a backlash against changes in women's traditional gender roles. (Boshmaf, 2023) This study found supporting evidence for the role of digitalization in enhancing the resilience of microenterprises owned by women in Saudi Arabia. These findings support the expansion and development theory, which suggests that reducing stress and negativity enhances individual resilience, thereby increasing business resilience. This study has important implications, demonstrating how Saudi women entrepreneurs navigated the COVID-19 pandemic with positive emotions, including interest, joy, pride, and gratitude, to sustain their businesses. Women's entrepreneurship has become increasingly popular, as evidenced by the emergence of new terms such as social media, economic development, Qatar, resilience, and religion.

- **Future Research Directions**

Bibliometric analysis and a systematic literature review suggest that research on women's entrepreneurship in the Arab world has made significant progress over the past decade. However, several vital areas remain underexplored. Therefore, this section proposes several future research directions that could enrich scientific knowledge and broaden understanding of the dynamics of women's entrepreneurship in Arab countries.

- **Integration of Islamic Values in the Women's Entrepreneurship Model**

Most previous research has focused on the cultural, social, and structural barriers women entrepreneurs face. In contrast, studies examining Islamic values as a source of business ethics and social innovation are minimal. Future research is expected to explore how a progressive reinterpretation of Islamic teachings and the concept of *maqasid al-shariah* can provide a normative basis for ethical, equitable, and sustainable women's entrepreneurship practices in the Arab region.

- **Political Economic Dimensions of Women's Entrepreneurship**

Studies on the relationship between public policy, power structures, and women's agency in the Arab world's political economy are still limited. Future research could investigate how economic reform programs, such as Saudi Vision 2030 or post-conflict development policies in Palestine, impact women's opportunities and participation in business. A feminist political economy approach or institutional theory could be used to understand the complex interactions between the state, religion, and gender.

In the context of women's entrepreneurship in the Arab world, the Sharia standards set by AAOIFI play a crucial role as the primary foundation in creating a fair, safe, and sustainable ecosystem for women's entrepreneurship. Many women entrepreneurs in the MENA region continue to face limited access to formal financing due to structural barriers, social norms, and inadequate asset guarantees. Through contract arrangements, transaction transparency, and prohibitions on usury, *gharar*, and *maysir*, AAOIFI provides a compliance framework that strengthens the legitimacy of sharia fintech-based financing for women micro and small business actors (AAOIFI, 2023). Thus, sharia standards not only serve as religious normative guidelines but also as a trust-building instrument that encourages financial inclusion and women's participation in the digital entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Furthermore, strengthening digital governance and accountability, as emphasized in the AAOIFI standard (2024), has direct implications for increasing the bankability of women entrepreneurs. Digital transformation in financial reporting, real-time auditing, and technology-based recording systems allows women MSME actors to build a more transparent and verified financial track record. This is especially important in the Arab region, where limited asset ownership among women often hinders access to formal credit. With a sharia-compliant digital reporting system, women entrepreneurs have the opportunity to gain wider access to financing, strengthen business sustainability, and encourage their integration into the formal economic sector (AAOIFI, 2024).

Meanwhile, the findings of Abdullah and Ashraf (2024) regarding the adoption of blockchain in Islamic finance open up strategic opportunities for empowering women entrepreneurs. Blockchain has the potential to improve transparency, data security, and transaction

efficiency through innovative contract mechanisms that can minimize gender bias in the financing assessment process. In the context of women's entrepreneurship, this technology also has the potential to accelerate the distribution of microfinance, productive zakat, and community-based waqf in a more targeted manner. However, challenges in the form of regulatory gaps, low digital literacy, and the lack of harmonization of global Sharia standards remain the primary obstacles that have the most significant impact on vulnerable groups, including entrepreneurial women (Abdullah & Ashraf, 2024). Therefore, the integration of technological innovation, Sharia accounting standards, and inclusive policies is the primary prerequisite for Sharia fintech to drive genuine economic transformation based on women's entrepreneurship in the Arab world.

- **Financial Inclusion and the Role of Islamic Finance**

There is a research gap in the connection between the Islamic financial system and women's economic empowerment. Future research could examine how Islamic financial principles, such as distributive justice and social empowerment, can promote gender-based financial inclusion. Furthermore, an empirical evaluation of the effectiveness of Islamic microfinance institutions in increasing women's economic independence is needed.

- **Digital Transformation and Women's Business Resilience**

Advances in digital technology have opened up new opportunities for women to participate in the global economy; however, research on the impact of digital resilience and well-being is lacking. The effect of emotional and online social capital on women's entrepreneurial success in the Arab world remains limited. Future studies could analyze how the use of social media, e-commerce platforms, and digital financial technology shapes new patterns of women's entrepreneurship across countries and generations.

- **Education and Formation of Entrepreneurial Intentions**

Longitudinal research is needed to examine the relationship between entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial intentions, and business success among women. Future studies could focus on the role of universities, business incubators, and the family environment in shaping women's entrepreneurial mindsets. This research could also examine the relationship between emotional intelligence, social norms, and perceived behavioral control on entrepreneurial tendencies among female university students in Arab countries.

- **Regional and Cross-Cultural Comparative Studies**

Most research focuses on specific countries, such as Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates, which limits our understanding of regional contextual variations. Cross-country research in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) can reveal the structural, social, and cultural differences that shape patterns of female entrepreneurship. A comparative institutional analysis approach is highly relevant for developing contextual theoretical models.

- **Social Impact and Business Sustainability**

Few studies have measured the social impact and contribution of women's entrepreneurship to sustainable development. Future research could focus on developing gender-based socio-economic performance indicators and linking entrepreneurial activity to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

- **Interdisciplinary Approach and Mixed Methodology**

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of women's entrepreneurship in the Arab world, future research should employ an interdisciplinary approach that combines perspectives from Islamic economics, gender studies, sociology, and technology. Furthermore, applying mixed methods can strengthen the validity of findings by combining quantitative empirical evidence and qualitative narratives of women entrepreneurs' experiences. Based on the discussion above, the author tries to map how each variable is interrelated as follows:

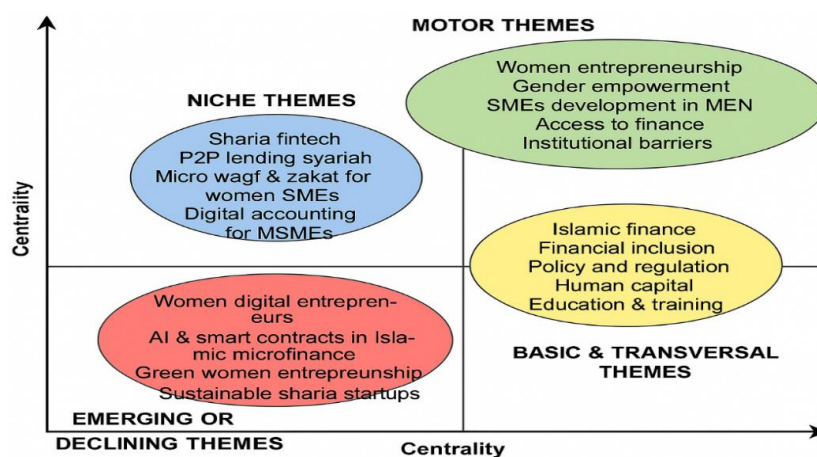


Fig. 1: Thematic Map.

The thematic map reveals that motor themes with a high level of centrality and density are primarily dominated by women's entrepreneurship, gender empowerment, SME development in the MENA region, access to finance, and institutional barriers. This confirms that the core of women's entrepreneurship research in the Arab world still focuses on structural issues, especially institutional barriers and access to financing for women MSMEs. The position of these themes as the motor themes indicates that the topic has matured academically and, at the same time, has a central role in shaping the main direction of scientific discourse. Meanwhile, in the basic and transversal themes quadrant, the dominance of themes such as Islamic finance, financial inclusion, policy and regulation, human capital, and education and training is seen. These themes have a high level of importance in the women's entrepreneurship system, but still require empirical deepening and strengthening of methodological approaches so that they do not stop at the normative and policy levels alone.

On the other hand, the niche themes quadrant features topics that have developed technically but have not been firmly integrated into the mainstream of gender research and entrepreneurship, such as sharia fintech, sharia P2P lending, micro waqf and zakat for women SMEs, and digital accounting for MSMEs. These themes demonstrate great potential as an instrument for women's economic empowerment based on Islamic technology and finance, but they remain segmented. The emerging or declining themes quadrant highlights new themes, including women digital entrepreneurs, AI and smart contracts in Islamic microfinance, green women's entrepreneurship, and sustainable Sharia startups. The low centrality and density of these themes suggest that these topics are still relatively new and have not been extensively explored, but instead represent the strategic direction of future research in building a sustainable, digital, and Sharia-compliant ecosystem of women's entrepreneurship in the Arab world.

4. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive mapping of the development of literature on women's entrepreneurship in the Arab world between 2015 and 2025, using a systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis. The results show that this issue has experienced significant growth in the number of publications and the diversity of topics. There are six main research clusters: socio-economic, political-economic, financial, digital, family/education, and cultural and religious values. However, existing studies focus on identifying the barriers women entrepreneurs face, while exploring their strategic potential for economic and social development remains limited. Several essential aspects, including the role of the Islamic financial system, digital transformation, and the integration of Islamic values into entrepreneurial practices, remain under-researched both empirically and conceptually. Furthermore, the involvement of researchers from non-GCC Arab countries remains relatively low, highlighting the need for cross-border and cross-disciplinary collaboration to enrich regional perspectives.

Recommendation

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be put forward. First, future research should expand interdisciplinary approaches that combine Islamic economics, gender studies, and digital innovation to understand the complexities of women's entrepreneurship in the Arab world. Second, entrepreneurship models based on progressive Islamic values should be developed to strengthen the ethical and sustainable dimensions of women's businesses. Third, public policies should encourage women's access to Islamic financing, digital business training, and social protection for micro and small entrepreneurs. Fourth, cross-national and comparative research in the MENA and GCC regions must be enhanced to understand the socio-cultural and policy variations that influence the dynamics of women's entrepreneurship. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the development of entrepreneurship theory within Islamic and Arabic contexts, while also providing an empirical basis for creating fairer, more inclusive, and sustainable policies that empower women entrepreneurs in the region.

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