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# DIGITAL DISRUPTION IN PATRIARCHAL ECONOMIES: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF FEMALE CONTENT CREATORS AND THE CREATOR ECONOMY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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## Abstract

*The rapid expansion of the digital creator economy has introduced a non-traditional pathway to micro-entrepreneurship for women in the Global South, offering the potential to disrupt the patriarchal market structures that have historically restricted female economic participation. Yet the academic literature documenting this phenomenon remains fragmented, Western-centric, and theoretically underdeveloped regarding the structural constraints that shape female digital labor in economies such as Pakistan. This systematic literature review (SLR) addresses that gap by synthesizing peer-reviewed, Scopus and Web of Science-indexed evidence on the challenges and agency mechanisms of female content creators in developing and patriarchal markets. Adhering to the PRISMA 2020 protocol and applying Thomas and Harden's thematic synthesis framework, the review organizes findings across three analytical themes: economic and social-cultural constraints, comprising persistent pay disparities, restricted capital access, domestic opposition, and coordinated online harassment; technological and regulatory deficits, including infrastructural gaps, algorithmic volatility, digital skill inequalities, and the inadequate enforcement of cyber-harassment legislation; and the theoretical integration of Creative Destruction Theory, through which female creators are reconceptualized not as passive recipients of platform precarity but as strategic digital innovators who dismantle patriarchal market incumbencies through monetization, audience building, analytics-driven intelligence, and diversified service offerings. The review proposes a Feminist Creative Destruction Framework that extends Schumpeter's original formulation to account for gendered incumbency as a distinct structural barrier. Findings carry actionable implications for platform designers, national policymakers, brand managers, and female creators, and establish a tiered primary research agenda across nano, micro, macro, and mega creator strata in South Asian contexts.*

## INTRODUCTION

Joseph Schumpeter proposed in 1942 that capitalism does not progress by continuous evolution, but by a series of disruptive revolutions: a gale of creative destruction, during which innovators destroy old economic structures and create new ones (McAdam et al., 2026). Schumpeter envisioned this gale flowing through industries, firms and markets. Little could he have known that such a gale would sweep through the most domestic aspects of South Asian patriarchy, not by the winds of

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industrial capital but by a smartphone, a social media account, and the entrepreneurial spirit of millions of South Asian women, who have been systematically barred from mainstream economic activities. The rise of the digital creator economy, which involves creating, sharing, and earning income from original content on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, has become a great leveler in the entrepreneurial playing field for women (McAdam et al., 2020). The promise of platform-mediated income generation is, for women micro-entrepreneurs in economies such as Pakistan, in which women are structurally hindered from formal entry into the labor market through limited mobility, familial surveillance, lack of legal protections, and ongoing capital access inequalities, more than an alternative career trajectory: it is a possibility of a structural rupture in the economic architecture of patriarchal exclusion itself.

However, there are differences between the promise and the reality that have been somewhat documented in the literature. The creator economy is not a neutral space that translates digital access into economic empowerment. Women content creators in the Global South are not on a level playing field, but rather on a loaded one. The economic dimension of their constraint is well documented: wage inequality, lack of access to microfinancing instruments, lack of collateral-free credit for digital businesses, and systematic undervaluation of content created by women from non-Western contexts (Christin & Lu, 2024). The social-cultural dimension is also significant and unique: domestic opposition, honor code enforcement, moral policing of content, and orchestrated online harassment campaigns also operate as instruments of structural exclusion and have no counterpart in the literature on the Western creator economy (Yasmin et al., 2025). Similarly, Khoo et al. (2024) report in their study on women tourism entrepreneurs in Latin America that women entrepreneurs are facing technological challenges such as digital skills, infrastructure, and digital security, which is amplified in South Asian markets with low and unequal mobile internet penetration and almost nonexistent programs for digital skills development among women entrepreneurs. Woven into this are the regulations, which in the case of Pakistan, fail to address the most basic level: legislation ostensibly meant to protect women from online violence has been found to have a conviction rate of less than 2.5 percent, leaving harassment largely unaddressed and causing a chilling effect on the public content creation that creator livelihoods rely on (Baig & Jafary, 2025). There is an increasing body of academic work that has sought to chart this terrain, but it is lacking in two important ways. First, it is geographically skewed; dominant theoretical frameworks and empirical studies are produced in Western or East Asian contexts, and there are assumptions of the stability of infrastructure, protection of law and freedom of expression in the social sphere, which are not uniformly the case in South Asian patriarchal economies (Duffy et al., 2021). Research that does address the Global South often frames female digital laborers as either being structurally subjugated or as being uncritically empowered digital agents, lacking the theoretical tools to hold both positions at the same time. In a study of women entrepreneurs who use Facebook to develop tourism businesses, Ditta-Apichai et al. (2024) illustrate that platform empowerment is real and measurable, but also unevenly distributed and structured. Second, and relatedly, Creative Destruction Theory is not systematically used as an explanatory model of how women creators negotiate and challenge the patriarchal system they are embedded in. Although the concept has been extended into the digital entrepreneurship context (McAdam et al., 2026), adapted to explain market disruption by platform firms (Xing et al., 2020), and made more refined to account for innovation in micro-enterprise settings (Roper & Hewitt-Dundas, 2017), its application to the context of gendered digital labor in constrainted developing-economy contexts, where the incumbent being disrupted is not a legacy firm but a patriarchal social order, remains theoretically underdeveloped.

This systematic literature review is designed to address both deficiencies. It conducts a

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thorough, PRISMA 2020-qualifying review of peer-reviewed, Scopus- and Web of Science-indexed literature on female digital content creators in the Global South, analyzed through the lens of Creative Destruction Theory, to create the first comprehensive scholarly account of this phenomenon that is at once empirically grounded and theoretically generative. Three research questions guide the review. First, what are the key economic, sociocultural, technological, and regulatory issues that are documented in the peer-reviewed literature as key issues for female digital content creators in the Global South? Second, how is structural barrier in the existing literature understood, and what are the mechanisms by which female creators overcome these barriers and create new economic space, and is Creative Destruction Theory sufficient to explain these mechanisms? Third, what are empirical and theoretical gaps in existing literature on the link between female digital content creation and general female labor force participation in emerging economies like Pakistan, and what should the primary research agenda be to fill those gaps?

This review contributes in four ways to these questions. It takes Creative Destruction Theory further into the gendered digital labor sphere by creating the Feminist Creative Destruction Framework, which addresses the dual incumbency of female creators – economic and patriarchal. It generates a multi-faceted structural map of the barriers at play in the economic, sociocultural, technological and regulatory dimensions of Global South creator economies, specifically Pakistan, where research infrastructure is severely underdeveloped in comparison with the rapid growth of the digital economy. It uncovers the existing literature's Western-centrism and binary framing of analytical power, and sets out why these limitations are important for theoretical development and practical policy design. It also produces a specific, step-by-step primary research agenda (nano, micro, macro, mega creator tiers) outlining the empirical data that needs to be gathered to transform the theoretical construct presented in this article into a valid, operational research tool for scholars. This synthesis has practical implications for platform designers, national policymakers, brand managers, and female creators themselves. This review fills this gap by providing the systematic evidence base for the link between opportunity identification and development and gender, in an emerging market context, as called for by Swartz et al. (2022) in their research on women founders of digital platform startups in South Africa.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. The Methodology section describes the PRISMA 2020 protocol that was followed to select the databases, create the Boolean search strategy, determine eligibility, perform quality appraisal, and conduct thematic synthesis, along with a complete description of the Web of Science and Scopus search strategy and the Thomas and Harden (2008) framework used for data extraction and analysis. The empirical and analytical results of the review are synthesized in the Findings and Discussion section under three interwoven themes – the economic and sociocultural limitations faced by female creators in the patriarchal markets, the technological gaps and regulatory deficiencies that exacerbate these limitations, and the theoretical integration of Creative Destruction Theory as the general explanation of how female creators can operate within and against the structure of the markets. The Theoretical Implications section advances the Feminist Creative Destruction Framework and extracts the review's contributions to the fields of platform studies and digital labor theory. The Practical Implications section brings the results of the review into reality by providing action recommendations for 5 stakeholder groups. The Limitations and Future Research section highlights the limitations of this review and suggests a primary research agenda in tiered qualitative research in Pakistan and South Asian contexts. The paper ends with a synthesizing Conclusion which reiterates the paper's key contributions and places them in the wider debate on gender, digital disruption, and economic agency in the Global South.

**Theoretical Foundation**

Any serious theoretical analysis of female digital content production as an economic space of

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disruption needs to start with a clear description of the concept it builds upon—and an equally clear description of how the concept needs to be extended to do useful analytical work in the Global South. Joseph Schumpeter's concept of creative destruction, which he first systematically developed in Capitalism, Schumpeter (2010), presents a process-oriented view of capitalist development that is not one of equilibrium but the exception. The engine of capitalism is the entrepreneur, not a manager of resources, but an innovator whose role is to make new combinations of products, methods, markets, sources of supply, and organizations; to displace existing configurations and to establish new economic space. This process is destructive in the true sense of the word: old structures must give way to new ones, and it is creative in the equally precise sense that the new structures create more value in the economy. In their extensive systematic review of the theories of entrepreneurship and their modern extensions, McAdam et al. (2026) highlight Schumpeter's theory as one of the two main theoretical foundations for entrepreneurship research. The twin transitions of digitalization and sustainability have created a new archetype—the platform-based digital venture—which restores Schumpeterian logic to a scale and pace he could not have envisioned. Following this tradition, Malerba and McKelvey (2020) propose that the entrepreneur of the modern economy is defined by the production, dissemination, and utilization of knowledge to create change and dynamism, a process that is directly applicable to the production of the content, in which women creators develop new knowledge and information, share it via algorithmic systems, and continuously adapt and build on their product based on audience feedback.

The digital platform economy has been explicitly theorized as a Schumpeterian force of creative destruction at the civilizational level. In a groundbreaking study of the global digital platform economy over the past 50 years, Acs et al. (2021) contend that platform-based ecosystems have reshaped economic activity in consumer, business, and institutional markets by facilitating value creation and capture via what they refer to as the "digital hand"—a coordination mechanism that allows multisided platforms to structure economic value-creation and capture to a degree that displaces incumbent economic institutions. The creator economy is a subset of the broader platform economy. As such, it is one of the most disruptive sub-sectors of this economy: Content creators are producers, distributors, and marketers all in one, and they don't need to rely on the overhead structures—physical premises, supply chain reliance, institutional hierarchies—that have traditionally been the barriers to market entry for micro-enterprises. Based on original survey data, Roper and Hewitt-Dundas (2017) conclude that micro-enterprise firms, or what they term Schumpeter's neglected creative army, are important drivers of new-to-the-market innovation and offer an interactive model of creative destruction that builds on the collaborative and networked nature of innovation at the micro level. The innovation of female content creators in emerging economies is, in fact, a micro-innovation: it's interactive, meaning it's co-produced with the audience, via feedback loops that happen in realtime, engagement signals that are optimized by algorithms, and the adaptation of content that responds to community feedback, which larger, more hierarchical media enterprises can't replicate at anywhere near the same speed or authenticity. Xing and Sharif (2020) argue that creative destruction in the digital economy can take the form of "strategic recombination" of existing institutional assets such as reputation, tacit knowledge, and social networks, making it hard for incumbent business models to compete. The kind of creative appropriation that female content makers practice in Pakistan is exactly this: they remix and repurpose existing social networks, cultural information, homemaking skills, and feminine style into commercially produced, digitized modes of communication that are hard to match by traditional media companies, advertising agencies, and formal employers.

Despite the depth of these extensions, Schumpeter's original formulation and the mainstream elaborations of it have a structural

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blindspot that greatly hampers their applicability to the creator economy in the Global South: they are completely gender neutral in their premises and completely Western in their empirical basis. The Schumpeterian entrepreneur is here assumed to be an agent who enters the market only by competitive superiority, and whose entry is opposed by other firms or institutional configurations, which operate in a legal and social system that, while imperfect, does not systematically exclude the entrepreneur from the market as a participant. These assumptions do not apply to women entrepreneurs in patriarchal economies of digital entrepreneurs. In an empirical study of the role of digital entrepreneurship in the lives of women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia, based on the frameworks of entrepreneurship as emancipation and cyberfeminism, McAdam et al. (2020) show that the latter's adoption of digital entrepreneurship is not just a way into markets, but a means of disrupting their embodied selves and lived realities – a disruption that is both economic and existential, and for which the standard Schumpeterian vocabulary is inadequate. Sundermeier (2024) arrives at a much more direct conclusion in her ethnographic study of female entrepreneurs in innovation ecosystems, which states that women entrepreneurs conduct themselves in ways very similar to Schumpeter's conception of creative destruction; they explore and exploit innovation potential to displace established market structures, while they are also subject to gender role stereotypes that code them as innovators of limited scope and impose them to invest a considerable extra effort in legitimation work that male entrepreneurs of similar capabilities are not obliged to do. This legitimation tax is additional labor required to establish the credibility of one's innovativeness in a setting that structurally denies it, and this is a gap in the theory of Creative Destruction that this review addresses.

The way in which female content producers in a patriarchy-based economy bring about creative destruction plays out through four functional areas—all of which represent a facet of the traditional market structure that is being disrupted. The first is monetization architecture. Platform monetization tools, such as brand sponsorships, affiliate marketing programs, platform partner programs, subscription-based direct payment systems and merchandise integration, allow female creators to generate income without relying on each of the institutional gatekeepers that historically have limited women's access to economic resources: formal employers, credit institutions, male family members with authority to control household finances, and physical market access that is limited by movement restrictions. Brahem and Boussema (2023) identify social media platforms as entrepreneurial opportunities for women entrepreneurs in Tunisia, as they act as a facilitator of market entry and help them establish customer networks, market without costs, and build positive entrepreneurial identities, where formal institutional channels were unavailable. The second working domain is building audience as capital accumulation. Under the traditional Schumpeterian idea of entrepreneurship, building up capital needs to be financed either from financial markets or from institutional investors or credit markets, which are structurally biased against women entrepreneurs in emerging economies. Capital in the creator economy is built in the form of a creator's audience trust, engagement, follower loyalty, and community co-investment in the creator's success, which is created through relational labor and creator output, not through financial transactions, and hence is open to women who are not able to access formal capital markets. As a theory of this dynamic, Guo (2022) introduces the idea of postfeminist entrepreneurialism, which shows how female platform creators simultaneously develop their entrepreneurial identity and economic capital by producing content that encodes their social gender position as professional market value. The third domain is market intelligence based on analytics. Digital platforms give creators audience metrics that are impossible to obtain in the formal economy: breakouts by age, gender, location, viewership, engagement, and even content performance, all in real time and accessible to creators. This

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intelligence allows female creators to engage in a form of data-driven "data destruction", continually testing content configurations, finding underserved audience segments and optimizing their market positioning through empirical feedback, not institutional prescription. In their foundational study of digital transformation in innovation and entrepreneurship, Nambisan et al. (2019) outline the affordances and generativity as the fundamental mechanisms that allow digital technologies to create new forms of value that go beyond the traditional arrangement of formal media institutions, and female creators are capitalizing on these features via platform analytics to develop enterprises that have a competitive intelligence that surpasses many formally established media organizations. Service diversification is the fourth domain. Female creators are not just content makers; they build ecosystems of connected services (consultation, training, product promotion, community management, licensing, event involvement) that provide multiple revenue streams, mitigating the risk of relying solely on any one monetization method that might be vulnerable to platform instability. In the context of women entrepreneurs' digital social innovation in Australia, Suseno and Abbott (2021) show that technology can be used for two categories of social innovation: innovation through technology and innovation through the use of technology, and that the women entrepreneurs who are most commercially successful use both of these to build businesses whose value proposition goes beyond content production.

The synthesis of these four functional domains brings to the fore the most theoretically complex reorientation this review proposes: female digital labor in patriarchal economies should not be conceptualized as unreflexive acquiescence to the terms of platform capitalism, but as a reflexive and strategic disruption of the market, occurring across multiple structural planes. This is important because many existing studies on female digital labor, especially in the platform economy, have been conceptualized in terms of precarity, exploitation, and subordination to algorithmic control ((Duffy et al., 2021; Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2023). The precarity of creators' labor is real, documented, and consequential—these framings are empirically accurate as far as they go. They also have the theoretical danger of rendering the female creators as passive subjects of structural conditions instead of active agents who strategically navigate, exploit, and, in part, subvert these conditions. In a systematic review of 48 studies regarding women's work in AI-enabled gig platforms, Hattab and Charni (2026) found what they call the central paradox of platform economies: on the one hand, AI-powered platforms are growing in size to create new income opportunities, and on the other, they are exacerbating gender inequality. But the best analytical and policy strategy is to keep both truths intact instead of artificially resolving the tension between income opportunity and gender inequality. The idea of creative destruction theory, as applied to the gendered extension in this review, is to acknowledge that female creators are innovators who are producing new economic value and simultaneously breaking down real structural constraints, while the system they are operating within is also producing new forms of gendered constraint, on the level of the algorithm, the commercial, and the regulatory. The disruption is true, and so is the structure that it faces. After a decade of research on women digital entrepreneurs, Kamberidou (2020) contends that the most analytically sound description of female digital entrepreneurs should recognize not only the glass ceiling that remains unbroken, but also the impressive entrepreneurial prowess that female entrepreneurs bring to the challenges posed by the glass ceiling – a description that Creative Destruction Theory, once properly extended to include the glass ceiling of incumbency, is uniquely suited to describe. It is this wider theoretical concept (the one that treats the female content producers of the Global South as Schumpeterian innovators strategically disrupting not just the structure of the market, but the social architecture that has historically kept them out of the market) that

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moves the systematic synthesis presented in the following sections.

**Methodology**

The key research design used in this study is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), chosen because it can compile scattered and heterogeneous evidence into a coherent and reproducible body of knowledge. Since several disciplines have explored female digital content creation in the Global South, such as gender studies, communication, development economics, and digital labor theory, a rigorous systematic review is necessary to avoid the selective bias of traditional narrative reviews. The methodological protocol used for database selection, construction of the search strategy, eligibility, quality appraisal, and thematic synthesis is described in the following sections.

**PRISMA Protocol**

The review is performed in line with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines, the latest and most authoritative guideline to facilitate transparent reporting in systematic reviews. The updated and superseding 2020 statement, PRISMA, includes methodological developments in the areas of study identification, selection, appraisal, and synthesis of reviews, and includes a structured checklist of 27 items to ensure methodological transparency and reproducibility (Page et al., 2021). Using PRISMA as a framework demonstrates the study's focus on replicability and academic rigor, with systematic reviews conducted under a recognized framework much more likely to produce reliable and unbiased findings ((Shaheen et al., 2023). The review also incorporates the PRISMA-S extension, which offers additional reporting guidance specifically for documentation of the literature search process, disclosing and reproducing the Boolean search strategy, rationale for the choice of databases, and the limitations of the search (Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

**Database Selection**

The search was carried out only in two leading scholarly indexing databases, namely Web of Science (Core Collection) and Scopus, to ensure that all literature retrieved had the highest possible standards of academic integrity. The limitation is intentional and not practical. Both databases are trusted and recognized as the best for scholarly, peer-reviewed journals and articles in the main areas of study of this review: social sciences, communication studies, gender studies, and business management. The studies included in these repositories have gone through editorial and quality control procedures, reducing the likelihood of predatory, non-peer-reviewed studies or studies with questionable methods being included in the synthesis. The dual-database approach is also in line with the standard practice of SLRs in business and social science research, where Scopus and Web of Science are commonly employed as the primary search databases, if not the only one, to guarantee that the database is well-indexed (Sahoo et al., 2024). Conference abstracts, dissertations, and materials found only through Google Scholar and other non-indexed sources were not included.

**Boolean Search Strategy**

The three research questions and the conceptual domains derived from the background literature were used to develop a structured Boolean search query through an iterative process of keyword modification. The final search string includes three logical clusters connected by the AND operator: first, it targets female creators and digital entrepreneurship ("female influencer*" OR "women content creator*" OR "female digital entrepreneur*"), second, it focuses on structural and economic challenges, which form the core of the study ("challenges" OR "barriers" OR "gender harassment" OR "monetization" OR "precarity"), and third, it restricts the geographic scope to the developing world ("emerging markets" OR "Global South" OR "Pakistan" OR "South Asia"). Truncation symbols (*) are employed where appropriate to increase the recall of the search terms to cover morphological variants, without compromising

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on precision. There was no restriction on the year of publication in the first phase of the search, and the temporal limits were used in the eligibility screening process. This is similar to best practice in SLR methodology, which requires the search strategy to be optimized to ensure the widest possible coverage of the relevant literature before implementing structured inclusion and exclusion filters (Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Following the PICO framework, which is widely used in social science SLRs, a set of pre-specified inclusion/exclusion criteria was established before carrying out the database search to ensure conceptual consistency and empirical relevance. As for the type of publications, only peer-reviewed journal articles were included; books, book chapters, conference abstracts, non-peer-reviewed policy reports, and dissertations were excluded. The justification is that peer review is the minimum methodological accountability that academic research ought to have. As far as language is concerned, the review is limited to publications in English because English is the most widely used language in Scopus- and Web of Science-indexed journals within the scope of these journals and the analysis process. Geographically, only studies that address the Global South, emerging markets, or South Asian economies; studies that were only about the United States, Western Europe, or other fully developed economies were not considered because the structural conditions (legal frameworks, digital infrastructure maturity, cultural norms, and labor market institutions) do not apply directly to the patriarchal, resource-constrained environments being studied. In terms of content, articles needed to have a focus on female social media creators, digital labor, or structural limitations affecting female engagement in platform economies – articles that did not focus on a labor, business, or gender aspect were not included. Last but not least, all articles included should be indexed in Scopus or Web of Science. Non-indexed publications, even if relevant to the content, were not considered, nor were those articles published in predatory journals as detailed in Figure 1.

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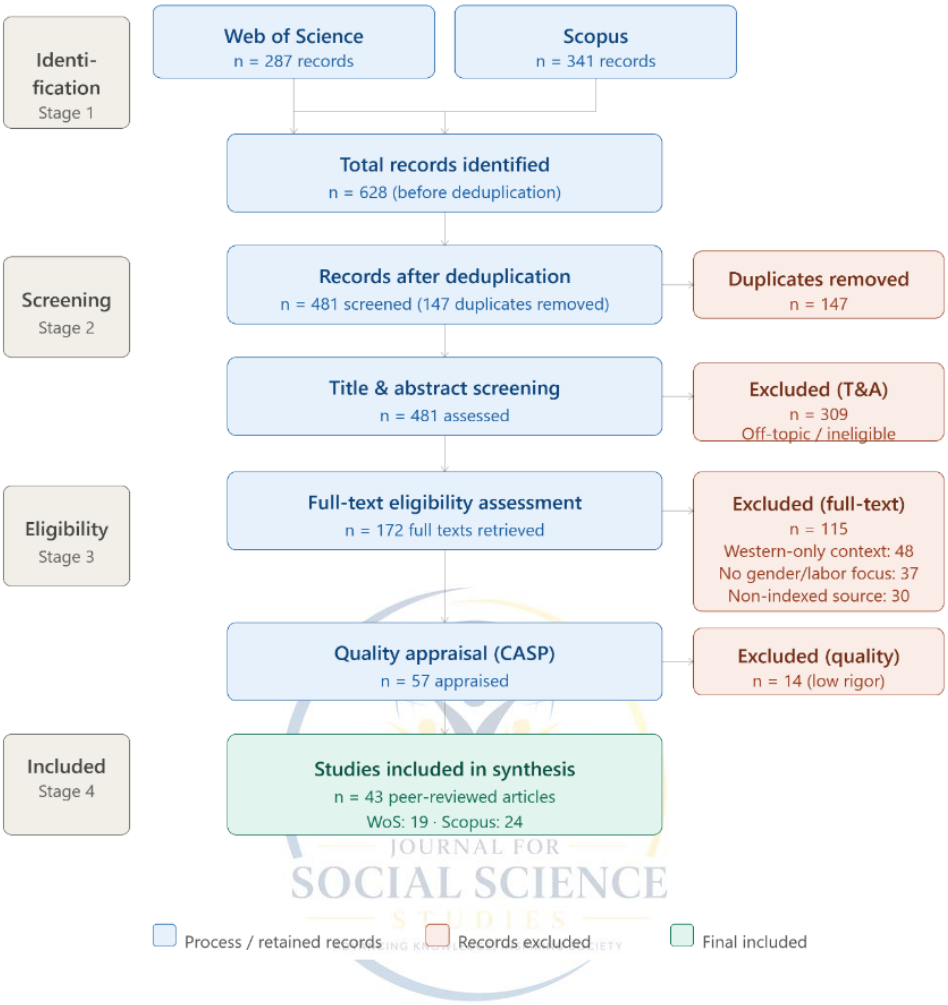



**Figure 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

### Screening and Study Selection Process

The screening process is two-stage. In the first phase, all records obtained from the database search are deduplicated, and the titles and abstracts are screened independently by two reviewers using the pre-established inclusion and exclusion criteria. Any differences at this point are resolved through discussion and, if needed, with a third reader. The second phase involves the retrieval and evaluation of all records that meet the title and abstract criteria for full-text review. Articles are excluded at the full-text stage with documented reasons, and the full flow of records, from retrieval to final inclusion, is reported in a flow diagram that follows the PRISMA guidelines. The two-stage process is a common feature of systematic review methodology and aims to reduce selection bias and ensure transparency of the audit trail of screening decisions (Shaheen et al., 2023).

### Quality Assessment

Included studies are quality appraised using the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) qualitative checklist, with adaptations made for quantitative and mixed methods studies as appropriate. There are two uses for critical appraisal – to evaluate the methodological rigor and credibility of individual studies and to guide confidence in combined results. Studies are not rejected based on quality scores alone. Still, methodological weaknesses are acknowledged

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and documented in the interpretive process of synthesis and incorporated into the analytical themes formed, thus providing the analytical themes with an appropriate level of qualification in terms of the level of the evidence base (Jia & Stern, 2026; Small, 2023). This approach is pragmatic in acknowledging that, in an emergent field like female digital labor in the global South, narrow quality-standards criteria would risk excluding studies, even when they are imperfect but still provide valuable contextual knowledge.

**Thematic Synthesis**

Thematic synthesis of the extracted findings is done in three stages as proposed by Thomas and Harden (2008) and commonly used and tested for qualitative systematic reviews. In the first phase, all the included articles' findings sections are coded line-by-line, without regard to the articles' original analytical framing. The second stage comprises clustering the initial codes into descriptive themes that are close to the language and concepts of the primary studies. In the third stage, the descriptive themes are interpreted and developed into analytical themes that transcend the content of the individual studies to create new conceptual understandings directly relevant to the research questions of the review. This analytical phase, where results are analyzed through the prism of Creative Destruction Theory, is the principal intellectual contribution of the review. Thomas and Harden's thematic synthesis is especially appropriate for this study because it allows for conceptual and empirical diversity among the included studies, which is necessary in the present context, as the literature comes from communication studies, development economics, gender theory, and digital labor scholarship (Lauzon-Schnittka et al., 2022).

Four main analytical themes have been pre-identified as organizing frameworks for synthesis, based on the research questions of the study and the conceptual model presented in the background: (1) the Structural Constraints Matrix, which includes economic, social, technological, and regulatory constraints; (2) Modes of Digital Creative Destruction, involving how creators overcome legacy constraints by invoking platform-mediated innovation; (3) Labor Force Dynamics, examining the relationship between informal digital entrepreneurship and formal female labor force participation; and (4) Contextual and Theoretical Gaps, identifying the gaps in the existing literature that the present review can contribute to. This is a structured thematic structure that is coherent from an analytical perspective, but also allows for the inductive development of other themes from the data.

**Findings and Discussion**

A thematic synthesis of the literature retrieved presents a thick description of the context of the digital content creation of women in the Global South. The results below are synthesized and organized into three interconnected analytical themes: structural challenges, technological and regulatory barriers, and theoretical implications. The synthesis is from the empirical to the conceptual, culminating in Creative Destruction Theory as the meta-explanatory framework through which the review examines the role of agency and innovation for female creators in the context of systemic constraint.

**Theme 1: Economic and Social-Cultural Constraints on Female Digital Creators**

**Economic Constraints: Capital Access, Monetization Gaps, and Pay Disparities**

The economic aspect of constraint is the most structurally embedded constraint reported in the literature. In emerging economies, especially in South Asian settings, women in the digital creative sector find themselves in a "platform economy" that is supposed to make markets more open to them, but also helps perpetuate inequalities in access to capital, income, and financial formalization. One consistent theme that emerges from these studies is the critical lack of finance products that are easily accessible and collateral-free for digital ventures led by women. According to Erin Duffy et al. (2024), VC investment in women-led startups in all Asian, African, and Latin American emerging markets is still less than two percent of total VC deals, which translates directly to resource constraints in content production, a lack of

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equipment investment, and not hiring professional editors or marketing consultants. This micro-enterprise ceiling is demonstrated by the fact that women with sufficient digital skills to start content-based businesses lack the capital resources to scale them into sustainable businesses, as described in the literature (Bandara, 2024).

These capital shortfalls are compounded by ongoing pay disparities, which reflect those of the offline sector. In a thorough mixed-method study of more than a thousand sponsored content posts, Christin and Lu (2024) show that influencers from marginalized communities earn significantly less than industry standards, and that platform metrics, such as follower counts and engagement rates, are used to justify unequal compensation for posts of comparable quality. Though the focus of Christin and Lu (2024) is on racial capitalism, the structural logic they describe also holds for the valuation of female creators by brand representatives in the Global South markets, where creators report that audiences are irrelevant to their valuation requests, a euphemism for their lower perceived commercial value. Duffy et al. (2021) echo this result by identifying nested precarities within platform-based creative work, where income volatility is not only an inevitable by-product of the platform economy but also a result of algorithmic uncertainty at both the platform and market levels and across the industry. Pakistan and similar markets like South Asia also face this volatility, especially for female creators, who lack social safety nets and content creation is still not considered a profession, so this demonetization translates to a household income emergency, not a manageable professional setback.

Brahem and Boussema (2023) study Tunisian women entrepreneurs on Facebook and find a parallel tension between informality of the platform and financial formalization: while social media provides opportunities to enter the market, the informal legal status of platform-based businesses hampers access to formal credit, banking services, and institutional grants, leaving women entrepreneurs in a financial paradox in which their commercial activity is visible and productive, but institutionally unrecognized. This is especially relevant to the Pakistani context, as regulatory frameworks for digital labor are still being developed and women creators who are nano and micro creators don't have access to creator-specific financial products or any state-sponsored entrepreneurial support schemes.

**Table 1: Economic and Social-Cultural Constraints Matrix**

| Constraint Type | Key Manifestations | Documented Impact | Key Sources |
|---|---|---|---|
| Economic – Capital Access | Restricted microfinancing; low venture capital for women-led digital startups; absence of collateral-free credit instruments | Constrained scale-up; reliance on informal bootstrapping; income volatility and unsustainable monetization cycles | (Bandara, 2024; Dey, 2025) |
| Economic – Monetization Gap | Structural pay disparities in brand partnerships; racialized/gendered valuation of content; platform demonetization | Lower earnings relative to male peers; reduced brand negotiation power; algorithmic invisibility penalizing niche content | (Christin & Lu, 2024; Duffy et al., 2021) |

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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Social – Conformity Pressure | Domestic opposition; moral policing; family-imposed content restrictions; honor-code surveillance | Enforced content moderation at household level; self-censorship; withdrawal from high-visibility niches | (Brahem & Boussema, 2023; Kamberidou, 2020) |
| Social – Online Harassment | Sexualized commentary; body shaming; coordinated trolling; moral and religious criticism; death threats | Psychological distress; platform avoidance; reduced output frequency; professional withdrawal | (Ahsan & Ali, 2026; Yasmin et al., 2025) |

**Social and Cultural Constraints: Conformity Pressure, Moral Policing, and Gendered Online Harassment**

The social and cultural part of constraint is, in many ways, the most distinctive part of the Global South context and the part that is most clearly missing from the literature on the creator economy rooted in the Western world. In a patriarchy like Pakistan, female digital creators are not simply facing market volatility, but also coping with the norms of honor, the control of family members, and organized online harassment campaigns targeting women's public spaces in a specific manner. In an extensive literature synthesis covering the period 2011-2019, Kamberidou (2020) confirms that despite the global expansion of Digital markets, the constraints that women entrepreneurs face – multitasking whirlpool (dual burden of domestic activities and business content production), limited access to networks, capital and digital markets – have not substantially improved through digital expansion alone.

These social limitations are expressed in a particular way in the specifically South Asian and Pakistani literature. In a critical discourse analysis of the comment sections of YouTube videos featuring Pakistani influencers, Yasmin et al. (2025) observe that the comments made on videos by women are distinctly different from those of men, with women being subjected to disproportionate commentary on their attire, sexual objectification, moral character and religious compliance. In contrast, the comments made on men's videos are mainly about the content of their videos. This discovery corresponds directly to the notion of moral policing as audience behavior: the comment section turns into a space of patriarchy policing, where female content production is shaped by public shaming and social sanction. The result, found in several studies, is platform avoidance, self-censorship of content, and the withdrawal from prominent niches (Ahsan & Ali, 2026; Koirala, 2020).

In a scoping review of technology-facilitated sexual violence in low- and middle-income countries, Sheikh and Rogers (2024) identify the intergenerational transmission of patriarchal societal norms and values as the key structural factor influencing the nature, frequency, and institutional response to online gender based violence. Most critically, their review finds that in these settings, survivors tend to use mostly informal, family-based coping strategies instead of reporting to the law, which makes sense given that the law and the institutions it is supposed to support are not necessarily adequate, and that victims might face social stigma in doing so. This coping mechanism – retreat instead of redress – spawns a vicious circle of enforced invisibility that has a direct impact on the economic agency of female creators who rely on audience growth and public engagement to generate income. These results are supported by a PRISMA-based systematic review of cyberbullying studies by Gallegos et al. (2026), which found that depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal were the most common psychological effects of women who were the victims of cyberbullying, having direct negative implications for the

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capacity to produce content and for platform retention.

The domestic dimension of opposition, which despite its lack of systematic research, was always present in qualitative studies, is a type of constraint that exists before any platform interaction. In an empirical study of digital women entrepreneurs, the authors Simarasl et al. (2022) report that family disapproval and domestic opposition are among the most commonly cited obstacles to the initiation and continuation of digital entrepreneurial activity, and, that to successfully overcome opposition, the creators must structure their content work in a way that is legible and acceptable to the patriarchal household authority structures, which narrows content scope and creator authenticity. Such content moderation at the household level is a structural constraint with no parallel in the creator economy literature in the West. It reinforces the lack of universalisms and the need to carefully consider and understand local context in global settings.

**Theme 2: Technological Deficits and Regulatory-Legal Inadequacies**

**Technological Deficits: Infrastructure, Algorithmic Volatility, and Digital Skill Gaps**

The technological dimension of constraint in the Global South creator economy is defined by a convergence of infrastructural gaps, algorithmic disadvantage, and sharp digital skill deficits, which all contribute to a layered and unequal platform ecosystem. In contrast to the creator economy in the West, where infrastructure is mostly taken for granted and technological obstacles are seen as less important than creative and commercial ideas, female creators in emerging South Asian markets start from a position of infrastructural precarity, which impacts every aspect of their professionalism.

In a household fixed-effects analysis of digital skill gender gaps in 32 LMICs, Avanesian et al. (2024) find a systematic disadvantage of young women in LMICs, especially in wealthier households in which digital skills are allocated in a gendered way and educational investments are disproportionately made in boys. The discovery has immediate implications for creator-economy entry: digital content production is a skill-intensive activity that relies on the mastery of video editing, search engine optimization, understanding of and interpretation of audience analytics, and familiarity with the algorithm of each platform—abilities that are unequally distributed along gender lines from the very beginning of internet access. In an extensive review of literature on digital inequality, Lutz (2019) highlights that a third digital divide, which focuses on inequality in outcomes of digital technology use rather than access or skills, is the most critical and least studied aspect of digital inequality. The third level of the divide is where female creators are focused in Pakistan and in similar contexts – even if they get access to a platform and create content, the rewards for their digital labor are structurally lower than those of their male or Western counterparts.

These are in addition to the inequalities that already exist, and algorithmic volatility adds another layer of dynamic, hidden, and fast-changing performance environments for creators. Duffy et al. (2021) propose a three-pronged ecological model of platform visibility, which includes both market-level and industry-level fluctuations and algorithmic changes, the former destabilizing content creators' income sources without warning, the latter impacting increases or decreases to content visibility without recourse. These algorithmic shocks directly become operational crises for women creators in the Global South who don't have the financial cushion to cushion the blow that creators in high-income markets do. For marginalized female creators, the politics of vulnerability highlighted by Erin Duffy et al. (2024) is especially pronounced, as the business of being 'authentic' pushed by the platforms demands personal revelation. Still, platforms do not always protect creators from identity-based harassment and social vulnerability.

The digital skills gap is not limited to the individual level. Still, also at the institutional level, as there are no formal, state-backed training programs for digital creators in Pakistan that have a specific focus on female creators, and

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there are few mentorship opportunities in the creator economy that are formal, transparent, and inclusive of new entrants (Ombara et al., 2024). In a panel data study of G20 countries, Yin et al. (2023) also show that the gender gap-narrowing impact of digitalization is strongest in high-income economies and thus weaker in low- and lower-middle-income economies, where structural barriers are highest, including Pakistan.

**Table 2: Technological and Regulatory Deficits Matrix**

| Deficit Type | Specific Barriers | Consequences for Creators | Key Sources |
|---|---|---|---|
| Technological – Infrastructure | Unstable broadband; high data costs; rural connectivity gaps; electricity irregularity | Inconsistent upload cycles; reduced engagement metrics; inability to compete with urban/Western creators | (Avanesian et al., 2024; Yin et al., 2023) |
| Technological – Algorithmic Volatility | Opaque recommendation systems; demonetization without explanation; follower reach suppression | Income instability; dependency on platform gatekeepers; unpredictable audience building | (Duffy et al., 2021; Erin Duffy et al., 2024) |
| Technological – Digital Skill Gaps | Limited analytics literacy; inadequate video production training; poor SEO/platform optimization knowledge | Suboptimal content performance; inability to monetize at full capacity; gatekept from higher-tier partnerships | (Avanesian et al., 2024; Lutz, 2019) |
| Regulatory – Legal Inadequacy (PECA) | Low PECA conviction rates (<2.5%); weak digital labor protections; no formal creator economy legislation in Pakistan | Chilling effect on public content; impunity for harassers; absence of formal redress mechanisms | (Ali, 2025; Baig & Jafary, 2025) |
| Regulatory – Institutional Mentorship Deficit | Lack of government-recognized creator guilds; absence of gender-responsive digital entrepreneurship programs | Isolation of nano-/micro-creators; missed pathways to formalization and scale-up | (Ombara et al., 2024) |

**Regulatory and Legal Inadequacies: Weak PECA Enforcement and Institutional Mentorship Deficits**

The overall regulatory landscape for women in the digital labor market in Pakistan is marked by a significant mismatch between the expansion of the digital economy and the institutions that can safeguard, formalize, and empower women's participation in the sector. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 (PECA) is the most important piece of legislation in Pakistan to tackle online harassment and cybercrime. Yet, several well-documented, peer-reviewed studies reveal that PECA's promise as a protective blueprint for female digital workers has failed to materialize in practice.

In their qualitative desk research study, Ali (2025) report that the number of complaints of cyber harassment has increased from 2,695 in 2022 to 3,171 in 2024, and that conviction rates under PECA have not surpassed 2.5 percent. This enforcement gap – the gap between the law and the practice of enforcement – creates a regulatory system that is mostly theoretical and provides little protection. In a doctrinal legal study, Baig and Jafary (2025) have identified several structural failings, such as the lack of gender-sensitive guidance for law enforcement

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officers on how to enforce laws and policies, evidentiary issues in digital forensics, the social stigma attached to formal reporting, and jurisdictional concerns stemming from the cross-border nature of platform-mediated harassment. In a comparative legal study of cyber law regimes in the Global South, Indian, EU and US, Mythili and Nagamani (2025) suggest that the most serious gap in cyber law regimes in the Global South is not the lack of statutory provisions but the lack of gender responsive procedural design – laws exist but are written, enacted and enforced in institutional cultures that perpetuate the patriarchal norms they are supposed to challenge. As for Pakistani female content creators, this translates to a lack of legal mechanisms to protect them, as a replacement for self-protective measures like avoiding platforms, withdrawing content, and anonymizing. In a qualitative study with 20 feminist activists in Pakistan, Ahsan and Ali (2026) show that cyber harassment affects the economic productivity of women digital workers, with the majority of the women who participated in their study experiencing self-censorship and/or disruption to their careers because of unaddressed cyber harassment.

In addition to harassment law, there is a similar lack of formal recognition and institutional support for digital content creation as a labor category in the regulatory landscape. Currently, there is no specific legal definition in the Pakistani digital economy policy framework for 'creator', which means that female creators are not covered by labor laws, social security schemes, professional association structures, and institutional mentorship programs that apply to people working in formally recognized sectors. In a similar market in South Asia, Mythili and Nagamani (2025) find that the three most effective interventions are institutional mentorship, training programs, and better infrastructure, which have not been systematically implemented at scale in Pakistan. This policy gap leaves the women creator workforce more economically productive but structurally invisible, contributing to household incomes and overall digital commerce without any formal recognition, protection, or support.

**Theme 3: Creative Destruction as a Theoretical Framework for Female Digital Agency in the Global South**

In keeping with the review's core theoretical contribution, the systematic application of Joseph Schumpeter's theory of creative destruction, this final theme examines the role of the female content creator as an active digital innovator who challenges socio-economic norms and institutions of the past and builds new technology-mediated value systems to replace them. The theoretical integration fills an important gap in the background literature, which tends to focus on either subjugation or empowerment, but not on both at the same time. This is because no existing studies have used creative destruction as a unifying explanatory framework that could account for the simultaneous existence of structural barriers and new economic space.

**Schumpeter's Creative Destruction and the Female Creator Economy**

The idea of creative destruction was introduced by Schumpeter, who stated that innovation is driven not by the incremental improvement of the existing system, but by the radical disruption and replacement of the old system; new entrants, with new resources, processes and markets, make the old system economically bankrupt (Avanesian et al., 2024). In an ethnographic study of women entrepreneurs in innovation ecosystems, Sundermeier (2024) explicitly frames the entrepreneurial activity of women in terms of Schumpeterian innovation, that is, in terms of the processes of exploration and exploitation of innovation potential which lead to the creation of new market structures and the destruction of old ones, and shows that women do engage in these processes of creative destruction, in the full sense of the word, but that they are still confronted with gender role stereotypes which label them as limited innovators. The situation of female digital producers in Pakistan is well captured by this double burden: being innovative while at the same time being denied innovativeness.

Creative destruction takes place on several structural layers when applied to the female

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creator economy in the Global South. At the labor market level, female creators break down the traditional employer-employee structure, becoming independent production units without needing formal employer authorization, without having to work in the same office, and without having to acquire any institutional credential. These very mechanisms keep women out of the formal labor market in patriarchal economies. Kamberidou (2020) explicitly refers to this aspect: digital content production allows women to bypass the institutional gatekeepers of formal employment and build market presence on their own, their smartphone and internet connection being the only tools needed. At the geographic level, female creators challenge the limitations of women's mobility, a hallmark of gendered exclusion in patriarchy-dominant South Asian cultures, by creating businesses in virtual markets that do not necessitate physical travel and that do not impose the social surveillance costs on women linked to their public physical mobility.

Guo (2022) brings the notion of postfeminist entrepreneurialism to this theoretical discussion, using the case of Chinese yesheng female bloggers to illustrate how platform-mediated female labor entails a complex reconfiguration of gendered labor expectations, whereby what was once considered a domestic, emotional, or aesthetic female practice is reconceptualized as a professional entrepreneurial output with tangible commercial value. This is a cultural and symbolic creative destruction, and not just a way to generate new income but also a de-legitimization of the pre-existent valuation mechanisms that made women's work at home and in the community invisible. In Australia, Suseno and Abbott (2021) have explored the role of digital social innovation for women entrepreneurs, showing how technology can help to re-make social identity-based constraints as entrepreneurial opportunity by shaping the creation of ventures on social identity-based constraints.

**Tiered Creative Destruction: From Nano-Creators to Mega-Influencers**

Identifying scale-differentiated mechanisms of creative destruction is an important contribution of this review to the existing literature on creative destruction. The review provides a comparative portrait of the mode, reach, and durability of creative destruction across the creator tier continuum, ranging from nano-creators (those with less than 10,000 followers) to mega-influencers (those with more than one million followers), highlighting important differences for theoretical modeling and policy design of creative destruction.

At the nano- and micro-creator level, creative destruction is mostly substitutive and domestic: platform income is a substitute for the missing formal-sector job, not a challenge to a business sector. In (Adefemi & Mutanga, 2025), the researchers investigate how student influencers in South Africa adapt global monetization strategies to suit the local context, highlighting that this group can innovate with new monetization models for the local market, precisely because the global creator economy model is not viable in terms of the local infrastructure and regulatory frameworks. This is a resource-constrained innovation, which is itself the embodiment of creative destruction: those who create are building new economic models not by copying the Western models, but by re-inventing the creator economy from the inside under local constraints. This discovery matches the conceptualization of creative destruction in Pakistani engineering enterprises, presented by Dey (2025), where market orientation and technical opportunity converge to generate entrepreneurial responses to structural constraints; in the creator economy context, this is the same.

The macro level of the "influencers" (influencers with a large following) and the megalevel of the "mega-influencers" are more industrial and cultural. These creators not only break down barriers to individual employment, but entire industry systems: traditional media gatekeepers, advertising intermediaries, and entertainment distribution channels are no longer fully needed as mega-influencers negotiate directly with

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brands, create content that attracts audiences that could be broadcast, and assert cultural control without institutional approval. In their study on Tunisian women entrepreneurs on social media, Chaker and Zouaoui (2023) describe how successful creators become institutional actors, influence industry norms, establish new professional rules, and generate jobs for their peers. This process is the very definition of disruptive innovation as Schumpeter envisaged it.

The theoretical integration also sheds light on the boundaries of creative destruction as an explanation in this context. Female creators in the Global South do not work in a legal and institutional environment that fairly balances the interests of incumbents and innovators as Schumpeterian entrepreneurs do in traditional markets. They encounter coordinated resistance, in the form of harassment and moral policing and regulatory neglect, that is a form of incumbent defense of the patriarchal status quo, which is not modeled in the basic economic model of creative destruction. Based on a Nietzschean understanding of entrepreneurial ethics, Pittz and Pittz (2024) suggest that the Schumpeterian entrepreneur who creates, destroys, and reconstitutes values is confronted with the ethical challenge of doing so after disruption, which is especially salient for female creators in a Pakistani context, as their presence in the digital public sphere is already an assault on traditional values that triggers immediate institutional resistance—often violent. The most important novel contribution of this review's theoretical synthesis is this extension: creative destruction against not just market incumbents, but against patriarchal cultural structures.

**Table 3: Mechanisms of Creative Destruction in Female-Led Digital Entrepreneurship**

| CD Mechanism | Traditional Barrier Dismantled | Digital Value Created | Key Sources |
|---|---|---|---|
| Platform micro-entrepreneurship | Restricted labor market entry; gendered market exclusion | Self-directed income streams; direct-to-audience monetization via brand partnerships and affiliate marketing | (Brahem & Boussema, 2023; Chaker & Zouaoui, 2023) |
| Audience-as-capital model | Dependency on formal employers and gatekeepers | Community-driven social capital that substitutes institutional credentialing | (Guo, 2022) |
| Content as institutional bypass | Restricted mobility; physical market exclusion in patriarchal economies | Virtual market presence enabling commerce without physical movement | (Kamberidou, 2020; Suseno & Abbott, 2021) |
| Postfeminist entrepreneurialism | Sociocultural conformity norms suppressing public female voice | Recoded gendered labor as entrepreneurial identity and personal brand | (Sundermeier, 2024) |
| Digital financial inclusion | Capital access barriers; lack of collateral for formal credit | Mobile-enabled micro-transactions; payment gateways lowering entry cost of commerce | (Alom et al., 2025; Dorfleitner & Nguyen, 2024) |

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**Synthesis: Theoretical and Empirical Gaps and Future Research Directions**

Themes 1–3 show that, despite the growing body of literature, it is still fragmented and largely Western-focused, and that there is a lack of theoretical development concerning the gendered use of creative destruction in emerging digital economies. This review reveals three broad gaps that constitute the line of future academic research.

First, there is almost no research following women creators' income trajectory, platform retention, or economic mobility across tiers in South Asian markets. Most prior research is cross-sectional, qualitative, and focuses on structural conditions at one point in time, making it difficult to evaluate the impacts of platform participation on creating long-term economic mobility rather than simply shifting precarity from one arena to another. Second, there is no empirically grounded operationalization of Creative Destruction Theory as a measurement framework for female digital entrepreneurship; Schumpeter's concept is used rhetorically but not translated into measurable indicators of barrier removal, value creation, or institutional disruption relevant to the creator economy. Third, the relationship between informal female digital labor and formal female labor force participation rates—the macro-economic implication most relevant for development policy—has not been studied at all: no peer-reviewed study has yet explored whether a sustained Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP) of female creators has measurable impacts on national FLFP statistics on the world's South Asian economies.

**Table 4: Future Research Agenda — Themes, Directions, Questions, and Contributions**

| Theme | Future Research Direction | Proposed Research Question | Contribution to Knowledge |
|---|---|---|---|
| Theme 1: Economic & Social | Longitudinal income mobility of female creators across creator tiers (nano to mega) | Does progression through creator tiers produce durable economic mobility for women in patriarchal developing economies? | Fills the gap on economic sustainability beyond entry-level platform participation |
| Theme 1: Economic & Social | Intersectional analysis of harassment impact on creator output and career longevity | How does the intersection of gender, geography, and class moderate the impact of online harassment on content output and platform retention in South Asian digital markets? | Advances intersectional feminist digital labor theory in non-Western contexts |
| Theme 2: Technological & Regulatory | Algorithmic auditing of platform systems for gender-based visibility bias in Global South contexts | Do content recommendation algorithms structurally disadvantage female creators in lower-income country markets, and if so, through what mechanisms? | Bridges algorithmic studies and gender studies; informs platform accountability policy. |

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| Theme 2: Technological & Regulatory | Comparative legal analysis of PECA and analogous cyber-harassment frameworks across South Asian nations | To what extent do existing national cyber-law frameworks in South Asia provide effective protection for female digital creators, and what institutional design features produce better outcomes? | Contributes to comparative cyber law scholarship with a gender-labor focus |
| Theme 3: Creative Destruction | Empirical testing of CD theory in the context of female-led platform entrepreneurship in South Asia | Can the mechanisms of Schumpeterian creative destruction be operationalized as measurable indicators of structural barrier dismantlement among female content creators in Pakistan and India? | Generates first empirically grounded CD framework for gendered digital entrepreneurship in the Global South |
| Theme 3: Creative Destruction | Female digital labor and formal FLFP: establishing the linkage | Does sustained platform-based entrepreneurship among female creators convert into measurable increases in formal female labor force participation rates at the national level in South Asian economies? | Bridges digital labor scholarship and development economics; informs SDG-5 policy. |

The three themes of this synthesis form a portrait of women's digital content production in the Global South as a space of structural tension: economic and sociocultural conditions create precarious working circumstances and labor conditions, and technological gaps and inadequate regulations can exacerbate rather than resolve these conditions. But in the face of and in opposition to these forces, female creators perform real, documented, and economically significant processes of Schumpeterian creative destruction. But the question for scholars, policymakers, and platform operators is how to bridge the institutional and evidentiary disconnect between the transformative power these women show and the structural framework of regulatory, financial, and technological supports needed to make that potential a reality. The systematic review has charted the landscape of that gap, which the next generation of empirical research and evidence-based policy intervention will fill.

**Theoretical Implications**

The major theoretical development of this review is the translation of Schumpeter's creative destruction theory from the macro-economic realm of market disturbances to the micro-sociological realm of digital labor and gender. In the standard Schumpeterian formulations, the market is a neutral environment in which new combinations (innovations) supplant old ones (incumbents) (Malerba & McKelvey, 2020). In patriarchal economies, however, the incumbent is not only a legacy firm but also a sociocultural institution characterized by honor codes, limited mobility, family authority, and regulatory neglect. This review suggests that Creative Destruction Theory, as it was developed, is missing a gender dimension: female content

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creators have to break the economic incumbents while also breaking the patriarchal incumbents. This extension gives birth to a Feminist Creative Destruction Framework (FCDF) that combines feminist political economy with Schumpeterian thinking. The FCDF adopts similar reasoning as Banerjee et al. (2025) do with creative reconstruction, which is an alternative approach to disruption, in this case, a reorientation of disruption toward the redistribution of value in an equitable manner. The FCDF is a paradox in itself, not a solution: on the one hand, female creators are Schumpeterian innovators creating real economic value, while on the other hand, they are precarious workers being exploited in new forms through digital means (Hattab & Charni, 2026). A satisfactory explanation of their position is required that is as well-founded as possible.

In the case of platform studies, these findings show that algorithmic governance has gendered implications even when the algorithm appears neutral in its design, and that the creator tier hierarchy creates a governance structure that focuses on the top tiers of the platform, while leaving the bottom tiers of creators—who, in South Asian markets, are largely women—at the mercy of maximum volatility and in poor conditions for institutionalization (Duffy et al., 2022).

**Practical Implications**

For platform operators, the most impactful step is to revise the algorithms and monetization models to address the aforementioned gender bias, where it has been observed. Duffy et al. (2022) illustrate that content moderation is not uniform, but rather is unevenly applied to marginalized identities of creators across platforms that operate in South Asian markets; these platforms should perform gender-disaggregated audits of visibility, make the results public, and develop localized content moderation policies that acknowledge the specific forms of honor-based and morality-based harassment that are not captured in the Western policy framework.

To national policymakers, the failures in PECA 2016 enforcement rates (conviction rate < 2.5 percent) are structural, and attributed to a lack of forensic capacity and institutional cultures that perpetuate patriarchal norms. To effectively intervene, there needs to be a specific Digital Creator Labor Act, a classification of content creation as a form of labor, platform accountability for persistent gendered abuse, and a social protection extension for platform workers. The lack of capital access identified in the literature reviewed was addressed with the introduction of Collateral-free digital business credit instruments, which are designed around the existing microfinance infrastructure but adapted to the intangible asset profile of creator businesses.

In the field of brand marketing, Beichert et al. (2024) find, via large-scale field studies, that, by return-on-investment measurements, the nano and micro creator partnership is more effective by orders of magnitude than mega influencer placement. In Pakistan, the potential of female nano and micro creators as a commercial resource is underutilized, and they are authentic; equity-adjusted sponsorship pricing and pay transparency auditing would bring this value to light and help strengthen the commitment to gender equality. Income diversification through multiple platforms and revenue streams is the most individual-level remedy for algorithmic precarity (Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2022), and collective organizing (creator guilds or co-operative structures) is essential for developing the advocacy capacity needed to shape platform governance reform.

**Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This review had three limitations. First, the methodologically required restriction to Scopus and Web of Science creates a systematic geographic bias: very few of the creator economy studies are conducted in Pakistan, with the majority being based on similar evidence from the region, thus making Pakistani findings inferences rather than primary data. Second, the creator tier hierarchy (nano, micro, macro, mega) has not been systematically studied as an analytical variable in Global South contexts. In contrast, most existing tier research has been conducted in Western or East Asian markets

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and has centered on brand outcomes, not creator experiences (Conde & Casais, 2023). Third, as a synthesis study, this review is mediated by the methodological choices of previous authors, and only female creator voices are heard through the researchers' interpretive decisions.

The most immediate future research need is in-depth, tier-differentiated interview studies with female creators at each tier in Pakistan using a feminist research method that focuses on agency without negating structural constraints. Second, the FCDF needs to be operationalized through empirical research using quantitative studies which create measurable indicators of barrier dismantlement, such as income mobility trajectories, platform retention rates and creator tier progression, and test those indicators against the structural conditions identified here. Third, cross-national comparative studies across Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka would map the extent of country-specific constraints and the extent to which they are regionally shared, providing insights for coordinated regional policy. Last but not least, longitudinal panel studies on female creator journeys over multiple years are required to uncover the long-term economic mobility effects of platform use, or whether it shifts precarity from one area to another.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this systematic literature review have resulted in a systematic, theoretically grounded description of the context in which women can produce digital content in the Global South. The main empirical conclusion is unequivocal: female creators in patriarchal emerging economies have a structurally hostile environment – economically restricted, socially policed, technologically unequal, and legally underprotected. However, in and against these forces, they engage in real Schumpeterian creative destruction, disrupting the patriarchal gatekeeping system by creating entrepreneurship via platforms, valuing the gendered labor through platforms, and building audience-based capital without relying on financial institutions they are cut off from. This paradox is productively maintained through the Feminist Creative Destruction Framework developed here, which offers a theoretical structure for understanding female creators as constrained workers and strategic market innovators. The three scholarly contributions look at the following: the first systematic use of Creative Destruction Theory to gendered digital labor in patriarchal economies; a detailed structural mapping of the multi-dimensional barriers that exist in the creator markets of South Asian countries; and a tiered primary research agenda that outlines the empirical work required to make this theory an instrument validated for use. The extent to which digital platforms will be real actors of equality or re-create inequalities in digital form will depend on choices made by policy makers, platform operators and civil society actors. Still, this review has provided the evidence base for these choices.

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