



Women's Entrepreneurship in the UAE: Exploring Cultural, Societal, and Structural Challenges through a Conceptual Lens

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper examines the complex influence of cultural, societal, and structural factors on women's entrepreneurship in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Drawing on existing literature, it develops a conceptual framework that captures how gender norms, social expectations, and institutional arrangements collectively shape the entrepreneurial pathways available to women. The paper contributes to the literature by moving beyond general accounts of barriers, focusing instead on the layered interactions between cultural systems and institutional support mechanisms. In addition to its theoretical contribution, the study outlines actionable strategies, including legal reforms, culturally responsive public messaging, and gender-sensitive financial and educational programs. These interventions aim to foster a more inclusive entrepreneurial environment that reflects the lived realities of women in the UAE and offers direction for future research and policy development.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Entrepreneurship, Cultural Norms, Socio-Economic, UAE, Financial Support

JEL Classifications: A10, A13, L26, J16

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is growing steadily in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with a strong focus on sustainable business practices, especially among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Nuseir and Aljumah, 2022). As people become more aware of environmental and social issues, entrepreneurs in the UAE are expected to meet these changing expectations. One important area gaining attention is women's entrepreneurship, which is now seen around the world to support economic growth, innovation, and positive social change (Al Naqbi and Vidhyasri, 2023). In the UAE, the government has introduced several initiatives to support women entrepreneurs, aiming to encourage equality and help diversify the economy (Alnassai, 2023). However, despite these efforts, women in the UAE still face many challenges when starting or growing a business (Al-Rawahi, 2024). These challenges are often linked to cultural traditions, social expectations, and structural barriers. In many cases, women are still expected to focus on family responsibilities, which can limit

the time and freedom they must pursue business goals (Bullough et al., 2022).

The study provides a comprehensive background on the state of women's entrepreneurship in the UAE, highlighting how cultural and social norms continue to influence women's participation in the business sector. It outlines the societal and traditional expectations that shape women's entrepreneurial experiences and acknowledges the government's progressive efforts through education, funding initiatives, and legal reforms (Smith et al., 2021). In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has further reshaped this landscape. While it introduced new opportunities—particularly through digital entrepreneurship and remote work—it also intensified existing challenges, such as increased family responsibilities and reduced access to informal support systems. This dual impact underscores the urgency of re-examining women's entrepreneurial journeys in the UAE, making the current study both timely and necessary (Tahir and Raza, 2020).

These expectations also affect women's ability to access funding, business networks, and decision-making opportunities. At the same time, new types of entrepreneurship, such as social, green, and digital entrepreneurship are becoming more common. These areas offer new chances for women to build businesses that respond to current needs (Veleva, 2021; Soltanifar et al., 2021). But to succeed, entrepreneurs often need to make quick decisions, take risks, and stay confident in uncertain situations skills that can be harder to develop when support systems are limited (Van Ness et al., 2020). Furthermore, cultural values and gender roles continue to hold women back in many developing countries, including the UAE. Long-standing stereotypes about what women should or should not do often limit their chances to take part in business (Adom and Anambane, 2020). On top of that, women are often left out of important business networks, which are usually led by men. These networks help entrepreneurs find resources, partners, and investors, and without access to them, many women miss out on key opportunities (Al Boinin, 2023). These problems became even worse during the COVID-19 pandemic, which increased the burden on women, especially with added responsibilities at home. Still, many women showed creativity and resilience by using digital tools and adapting their businesses to new challenges (Aggarwal and Sindakis, 2022).

While existing research has documented the structural and cultural barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in the UAE, much of this work tends to generalize women's experiences without fully exploring how they personally navigate these challenges within their specific cultural and social contexts. Studies have often focused on identifying external constraints such as limited access to finance, legal restrictions, or societal expectations. However, there is limited insight into the strategies women develop from within their lived environments to respond to these barriers (Abdelwahed and Alshaikhmubarak, 2023; Al Boinin, 2023). This study aims to address this gap by examining how women in the UAE actively negotiate, adapt, and resist within the framework of their cultural and societal settings. By focusing on these individual strategies, the research moves beyond descriptive accounts and contributes a more nuanced understanding of women's entrepreneurship in the region.

Although progress is being made through government programs, training centers, and women's business networks, many cultural and structural barriers still exist. To create real change, we need a better understanding of how these issues affect women entrepreneurs in the UAE. This paper aims to explore these challenges by reviewing existing research. It proposes a framework to show the main barriers women face and suggest ways to support them more effectively with proposed guidelines, key action and expected outcomes within different strategic areas. By doing so, the paper hopes to help build a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in the UAE's entrepreneurship.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Women's Entrepreneurship in the UAE

Despite ongoing national reforms aimed at promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment, the entrepreneurial

journey for Emirati and expatriate women remains constrained by socio-cultural norms, limited access to financial capital, restricted mobility, and male-dominated networks (Naguib and Jamali, 2015). These challenges are further compounded by a broader patriarchal framework that defines women's roles primarily within domestic spheres.

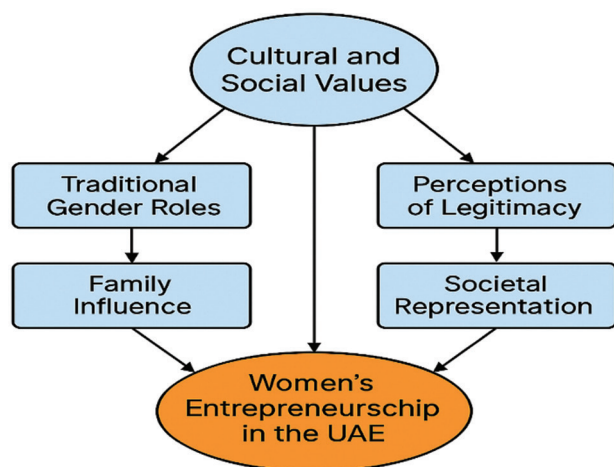
One of the most significant impediments lies in deeply rooted cultural expectations that prioritize women's family responsibilities over their professional aspirations. In many cases, societal norms position women primarily as caregivers, creating an internal and external conflict between entrepreneurial ambition and familial obligations (Tlaiss, 2014). These expectations not only restrict the time and resources women can devote to entrepreneurial activities but also influence societal perceptions of female entrepreneurs as less committed or competent compared to their male counterparts (Naguib and Jamali, 2015). Women who attempt to challenge these cultural roles often face subtle forms of social exclusion or skepticism, which can undermine their confidence and discourage sustained business engagement. Badghish et al. (2023) demonstrate that family income, family business, and background as demographic factors have a significant impact on entrepreneurship.

Access to financial capital represents another persistent challenge for women entrepreneurs in the UAE. Multiple studies confirm that women-owned enterprises are systematically underfunded compared to those owned by men, receiving fewer loans and often under more restrictive terms (Al Matroushi et al., 2021). Gender biases embedded in lending institutions contribute to this disparity, with women often perceived as higher-risk borrowers. Additionally, the underrepresentation of women in influential business networks limits their opportunities to pitch ideas, attract investors, and form strategic partnerships. This marginalization from mainstream financial and business ecosystems reinforces structural inequities and stalls the growth potential of women-led ventures (Tlaiss, 2014).

The male-dominated nature of business networks in the UAE further exacerbates women's marginalization. These informal networks serve as crucial channels for information exchange, mentorship, and opportunity sharing. However, cultural and gender norms often restrict women's access to such spaces, limiting their ability to build social capital necessary for entrepreneurial success (Tlaiss et al., 2014). Women frequently find themselves navigating business environments where interaction with male counterparts is culturally sensitive, especially in conservative emirates, which adds another layer of complexity to forming professional relationships and closing business deals.

Legal and regulatory barriers, while progressively improving, still present notable obstacles for women entrepreneurs. Historically, bureaucratic procedures in the UAE have been cumbersome, with licensing and registration processes often perceived as complex and opaque. For first-time women entrepreneurs, particularly those without male sponsors or familial support, the legal intricacies can be discouraging (Tlaiss et al., 2014). Societal constraints on women's mobility and engagement with legal authorities

Figure 1: Cultural and social framework for women entrepreneurs in UAE (author's design)



further complicate these challenges, making it difficult for many to navigate regulatory frameworks effectively (Naguib and Jamali, 2015) (Figure 1).

Nonetheless, recent government-led initiatives signal a shift toward more inclusive economic policies. Programs and organizations such as the Dubai Business Women Council (DBWC) and the Abu Dhabi Businesswomen Council (ADWBC) offer platforms for mentorship, professional development, and policy advocacy. These councils provide women with the tools and networks needed to succeed in a competitive business environment. The launch of the Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak Women's Entrepreneurship and Innovation Award further demonstrates the government's commitment to recognizing and financially supporting female-led enterprises (Al Matroushi et al., 2021).

This research acknowledges the UAE's institutional support for women entrepreneurs, highlighting initiatives such as the Dubai Business Women Council (DBWC) and Abu Dhabi Businesswomen Council (ADWBC). These organizations offer mentorship, networking, and resources that are important for female entrepreneurial success. However, their reach may be limited. For instance, DBWC's programs—while valuable—may primarily benefit women in urban centers or those with greater access to resources. Challenges such as cultural resistance, limited scalability, and the exclusion of expatriate women from some programs also suggest that the impact of these initiatives may not be equally felt across all segments. Including these reflections offers a more balanced and realistic understanding of institutional support.

In parallel, educational initiatives aimed at equipping women with entrepreneurial knowledge and skills have also played a transformative role. Structured training in areas such as financial planning, digital marketing, and strategic leadership helps bridge the knowledge gap and boosts women's confidence in their business competencies. (Al Matroushi et al., 2021) emphasize that such educational interventions are not only empowering but also necessary for long-term sustainability and scalability of women-owned businesses.

2.2. Cultural and Social Norms as Barriers

Research on women's entrepreneurship in the MENA region reveals a broader "culture of inequality" that constrains entrepreneurial activity among women and men alike, though the effects are particularly acute for women (Bastian et al., 2019). In the UAE, cultural conservatism continues to shape societal expectations about gender roles, contributing to the marginalization of women in the entrepreneurial sphere. These cultural expectations often reinforce the idea that entrepreneurship is a male-dominated endeavor, thereby discouraging women from fully engaging in the business sector.

While national reforms and educational advancements have expanded opportunities for Emirati women, lingering societal norms continue to frame women's economic activities as secondary to domestic responsibilities. Comparative studies from other developing contexts, such as Qatar, India, Saudia, China, UAE, Rusia and Ghana, highlight similar patterns, where entrepreneurship is socially constructed as inconsistent with idealized femininity (Alteneiji, 2023; Bulsara, et al. 2014). These insights suggest that addressing cultural resistance is not merely about institutional reform but also about transforming deeply embedded societal attitudes.

Cultural beliefs in the UAE continue to restrict women's participation in decision-making spaces, particularly those related to business and leadership. Traditional gender hierarchies often result in limited representation of women in boardrooms and executive roles. This underrepresentation perpetuates a cycle where younger women lack visible role models, which can inhibit their entrepreneurial aspirations. Studies have shown that societal endorsement of women in leadership roles is essential to normalize their presence in the business ecosystem and to promote more equitable perceptions of entrepreneurial capability (Langevang et al., 2015; Bastian et al., 2019).

Moreover, legal systems have historically reflected these cultural hierarchies, with some laws limiting women's agencies in financial and contractual matters. Although reforms have been introduced, residual regulatory practices still restrict women's full participation in entrepreneurship. For example, limitations on women's ability to access funding, sign contracts, or register businesses without male consent, while formally dismantled in many emirates may still inform informal practices and perceptions among business stakeholders (Tahir et al., 2019). Such legal legacies contribute to an environment where women's entrepreneurial initiatives are often undervalued or dismissed.

In summary, the literature underscores that cultural, legal, and institutional factors in the UAE create a layered and interrelated set of barriers for women entrepreneurs. While positive shifts are occurring, particularly in terms of policy support and public initiatives, more sustained efforts are needed to address the root causes of gender disparity in entrepreneurship. These include challenging patriarchal norms, expanding access to capital and networks, and fostering inclusive business ecosystems that recognize and support women's entrepreneurial contributions.

3. THE EFFECTS OF CULTURAL AND SOCIAL VALUES ON UAE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Cultural and social values play a pivotal role in shaping the entrepreneurial behavior of women in the UAE. These values, rooted in long-standing traditions and religious beliefs, influence women's career choices, social expectations, and personal ambitions. Although the UAE has made considerable strides toward gender inclusion and economic diversification, cultural norms continue to impose implicit constraints on women's participation in entrepreneurship.

In Emirati society, traditional gender roles often define women's primary responsibilities as caretakers within the family. This social positioning can limit their entrepreneurial ambitions by restricting time, mobility, and independence-critical elements for managing and expanding a business (Naguib and Jamali, 2015). Even when women express entrepreneurial intent, cultural expectations may lead them to pursue ventures that are home-based or limited in scale to maintain compliance with social norms (Tlaiss, 2014).

Social attitudes also shape perceptions of legitimacy regarding women in leadership roles. Entrepreneurship, often associated with risk-taking and assertiveness, may conflict with societal ideals of femininity and modesty in the UAE context (Tlaiss, 2014). As a result, women entrepreneurs may experience diminished credibility, making it more difficult to secure support from stakeholders, investors, and customers. Family influence remains a double-edged sword. On one hand, strong familial support can be instrumental in enabling women to launch and sustain business ventures. On the other, family expectations may discourage women from pursuing entrepreneurship altogether, especially in conservative households where business ownership is viewed as incompatible with female roles (Al Matroushi et al., 2021).

Additionally, social acceptance of women's success in business is often contingent on their ability to balance entrepreneurial engagement with traditional domestic duties. Furthermore, limited public representation of successful Emirati women entrepreneurs reinforces a narrow image of what is socially acceptable, thereby perpetuating a cycle of underrepresentation and restricted role models (Naguib and Jamali, 2015). This scarcity of visible female leaders in business contributes to a lack of inspiration and guidance for aspiring entrepreneurs.

However, cultural values are not static. The UAE's Vision 2030 and other national strategies are progressively redefining gender roles by encouraging women's economic participation. Public campaigns, institutional reforms, and the elevation of women into leadership positions are gradually shifting societal perceptions, making entrepreneurship a more viable and accepted path for women. The intersection of tradition and transformation presents both challenges and opportunities. Understanding how cultural and social values influence women's entrepreneurial decisions is essential for designing effective support mechanisms. Interventions must be culturally sensitive yet progressive,

addressing barriers without alienating the values that shape the Emirati identity.

4. STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS FOR EMPOWERING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN THE UAE

Despite the cultural and societal challenges facing women entrepreneurs in the UAE, several strategic interventions can mitigate these barriers and foster a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem. One of the most effective strategies to empower women entrepreneurs is the implementation of legislative reforms that ensure equitable access to resources, financing, and business ownership rights. The UAE has made progress in revising discriminatory laws; however, further efforts are required to eliminate residual legal constraints that impede women's ability to independently own property, enter contracts, or secure financing. Enacting and enforcing legislation that guarantees women the same legal rights as men in business is critical for leveling the entrepreneurial playing field (Mahmood, 2023; Tahir et al., 2019). In parallel, financial institutions should develop tailored funding mechanisms, such as low-interest loans, grants, and women-focused venture capital, that specifically support women-led enterprises.

Changing deep-seated cultural attitudes remains a cornerstone of advancing women's entrepreneurship. Public awareness initiatives that highlight the successes of female entrepreneurs and advocate for gender parity in business leadership are essential. Such campaigns can help challenge prevailing stereotypes and reshape societal narratives around women's roles in the economy. Media recognition of accomplished female leaders and the incorporation of their stories into public discourse can inspire broader participation. Furthermore, integrating gender-inclusive entrepreneurship education into school curricula can normalize female entrepreneurial aspirations from an early age, thus contesting traditional gender roles (Abdelwahed et al., 2023).

The absence of strong professional support systems continues to hinder many aspiring women entrepreneurs. To address this, the development of mentorship programs and women-focused business networks is vital. These platforms can connect women with experienced mentors, industry experts, and successful peers who provide guidance, encouragement, and practical knowledge. Dedicated networking events and women-only forums offer safe spaces for women to build professional relationships, access business resources, and cultivate entrepreneurial confidence. Moreover, engaging male allies in these networks can further reinforce inclusive values and expand support for gender-balanced entrepreneurship.

Given the ongoing expectation that women prioritize family responsibilities, adopting flexible business practices and supportive infrastructure is essential. Policymakers and private sector actors can facilitate this by introducing policies such as paid family leave, flexible work schedules, and affordable childcare services. These measures can enable women to manage entrepreneurial

pursuits alongside familial duties without compromising either. Fostering family-friendly work environments not only supports work-life balance but also promotes sustained female engagement in entrepreneurial activities.

Additionally, targeted training and development programs are fundamental to enhancing women’s entrepreneurial capabilities. These programs should focus on essential business competencies such as strategic planning, financial literacy, marketing, and negotiation. In addition, initiatives that foster leadership skills, self-confidence, and personal resilience can help women overcome internalized limitations and societal expectations. These capacity-building efforts can be delivered through government-sponsored initiatives, business incubators, and academic institutions, ensuring wide accessibility and long-term impact. Despite cultural and societal constraints, several strategic interventions can help address the barriers faced by women entrepreneurs and contribute to a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem in the UAE.

While the strategic interventions outlined in Table 1 offer a comprehensive roadmap for empowering women entrepreneurs, their success may be influenced by real-world constraints. Cultural resistance—particularly from conservative or traditional segments—can hinder reforms related to gender equality and public visibility of women in business. Additionally, institutional challenges such as uneven enforcement of policies, limited outreach to non-urban areas, and resource disparities may affect the scalability and impact of these initiatives. Acknowledging these challenges helps present a more realistic view of policy implementation and reinforces the need for context-sensitive strategies. Table 1 presents a summary of the key strategies derived

from the literature, outlining their core actions and anticipated outcomes.

These strategies underscore the need for a comprehensive, multi-layered approach that not only addresses external institutional barriers but also tackles internalized limitations shaped by socio-cultural norms. To be effective, such interventions must be both progressive and culturally sensitive, aligning with the UAE’s broader goals of gender equality and sustainable development.

5. IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Theoretical Implications: Building a Cultural Framework for Women Entrepreneurs

The increasing engagement of women in entrepreneurship across the UAE offers a unique opportunity to refine theoretical understandings at the intersection of gender, culture, and enterprise. Conventional entrepreneurial models often marginalize or underemphasize the socio-cultural dynamics that shape women’s experiences, especially within conservative, patriarchal societies (Nziku et. al, 2024). The UAE context underscores the importance of integrating cultural and gendered perspectives into entrepreneurship theory, allowing for a more holistic view of how societal norms affect women’s entrepreneurial intentions, resource access, and long-term sustainability (Küçükaltan, 2021).

A significant theoretical contribution involves the integration of gendered innovation theory, social capital theory, and institutional theory. Social capital theory, which highlights the role of networks and relationships in entrepreneurial success, must be reconceptualized in contexts where women face restricted

Table 1: Strategic interventions to empower women entrepreneurs in the UAE

Strategic area	Key actions	Expected outcomes	Potential implementation challenges
1. Legislative reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Remove residual legal barriers to business ownership and financingEnforce equal rights in property, contracts, and finance	Improved legal autonomy and access to resources	Resistance from traditional groups; slow legislative alignment across emirates
2. Gender-sensitive financial support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Develop women-focused funding tools (e.g., low-interest loans, grants, venture capital)Encourage banks to tailor services for women	Increased financial inclusion and capital for women-led enterprises	Conservative lending norms; limited reach to women in remote or lower-income communities
3. Cultural sensitization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Launch public awareness campaignsHighlight successful women entrepreneurs in mediaPromote female role models	Shift in societal attitudes; greater acceptance of women in entrepreneurship	Pushback from conservative media or social groups; limited impact in rural communities
4. Gender-inclusive education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Integrate gender-sensitive entrepreneurship education in schoolsEncourage aspirations from a young age	Early normalization of women in business; breakdown of gender stereotypes	Curriculum resistance in conservative schools; shortage of trained gender-aware educators
5. Mentorship and business networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Create women-specific mentoring platformsEngage successful entrepreneurs and male alliesHost women-only networking events	Stronger support systems and confidence through mentorship	Urban-centric reach; limited participation from older or traditional business sectors
6. Flexible business environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Implement family-friendly policies (e.g., childcare, flexible hours)Encourage private sector adoption	Greater work-life balance and sustained female participation in entrepreneurship	Cost concerns for SMEs; inconsistent adoption by private firms
7. Training and capacity building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Provide training in finance, marketing, negotiationPromote leadership and resilience	Enhanced skills and psychological readiness	Low awareness or access in underserved areas; potential mismatch with actual business environment needs

access to male-dominated professional circles (Mishra, 2023; Abdelwahed et al., 2023). A culturally adaptive approach to social capital theory can reveal how gendered social boundaries impact women's ability to mobilize resources, secure partnerships, and engage with investors (Nuseir and Aljumah, 2022).

Likewise, institutional theory which emphasizes the influence of formal laws and informal norms offers a useful lens to examine how legal and regulatory systems are shaped by prevailing cultural beliefs. In the UAE, women continue to encounter structural limitations in areas such as property ownership and access to credit (Mathafena and Msimango-Galawe, 2023; Tahir et al., 2019). By incorporating gender-sensitive considerations into institutional theory, scholars can better address how these formal and informal institutions reinforce barriers to women's entrepreneurial participation.

Furthermore, existing models of entrepreneurship frequently neglect how cultural narratives and gender expectations mold entrepreneurial identity. For instance, women in the UAE are often expected to prioritize caregiving roles, which complicates their ability to pursue business ventures (Naguib, 2023). Embedding cultural and gender constructs into entrepreneurial theories would contribute to a richer, more inclusive framework that captures the complexities women face when navigating conservative socio-economic landscapes. These revised models would provide greater analytical precision in understanding how women entrepreneurs operate in culturally embedded systems like that of the UAE.

5.2. Practical Implications: Empowering Women through Socio-Cultural Transformation

This conceptual paper underscores the importance of addressing the socio-cultural structures that influence women's entrepreneurial participation in the UAE. While individual agency plays a role, it is the broader societal context, comprising legal, financial, educational, and cultural domains, that must evolve to facilitate meaningful and sustainable engagement of women in entrepreneurship. Practical efforts should therefore target the interdependent systems that shape how women experience business ownership, access resources, and assert leadership.

Legal reform stands as a critical entry point for structural change. Although the UAE has taken commendable steps toward enhancing women's rights, remaining legal and procedural constraints continue to restrict women's autonomy in business affairs. Policy measures must ensure that women have unequivocal rights to own assets, access funding independently, and engage in contractual obligations. A gender-sensitive regulatory framework that actively removes barriers to women's economic participation can serve as the foundation for broader socio-cultural transformation.

Changing entrenched cultural narratives around gender and leadership is equally vital. Societal perceptions that frame entrepreneurship as a male-dominated domain limit the aspirations and legitimacy of women's entrepreneurial pursuits. Public awareness initiatives that highlight successful Emirati businesswomen, alongside media campaigns and school programs, can help recalibrate these perceptions. Incorporating gender-

inclusive education in schools and universities fosters a generation that values women's contributions to the economy and leadership, challenging conventional gender roles from a young age.

Practical support structures must also be adapted to meet the unique needs of women. The lack of mentorship and limited access to influential networks remain pressing issues. Structured mentorship programs and women-focused networking platforms can address this gap by providing access to guidance, encouragement, and professional development. These initiatives should include both women mentors and male advocates who actively contribute to dismantling structural barriers and reshaping the cultural expectations around female entrepreneurship.

Addressing financial exclusion is another imperative. Women entrepreneurs often face difficulty obtaining loans or investments due to gendered assumptions about creditworthiness and risk. Financial institutions should respond by designing funding instruments that are both accessible and tailored to women's needs, such as microloans, interest-free financing, and investment funds specifically for women-led ventures. Parallel to this, capacity-building efforts focused on financial literacy and strategic business planning can strengthen women's ability to navigate these systems and sustain business growth.

Work-life integration must also be prioritized. Given the societal expectation for women to assume caregiving responsibilities, policies that promote flexibility are essential. These may include remote work opportunities, adaptable business hours, paid parental leave, and access to affordable childcare. Creating professional environments that acknowledge and support women's dual roles enables broader and more equitable participation in entrepreneurial activities.

In essence, the practical advancement of women entrepreneurs in the UAE depends not only on economic access but on the transformation of the socio-cultural structures that define their opportunities. A multi-faceted approach that includes legal equality, cultural reorientation, financial inclusion, mentorship, and family support can lay the groundwork for a more inclusive and dynamic future.

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Women's entrepreneurship in the UAE has gained visibility in recent years, supported by evolving legal frameworks and national initiatives aimed at enhancing gender equity. However, this progress exists alongside deeply rooted socio-cultural norms that continue to shape and often constrain women's full participation in entrepreneurial activities. This conceptual paper has highlighted how cultural expectations, traditional gender roles, and institutional limitations intersect to form persistent barriers that affect women's access to resources, leadership opportunities, and professional networks.

Through a review of existing literature and the integration of relevant theories, this paper emphasizes the necessity of reframing

women's entrepreneurship beyond economic participation to include the broader cultural, social, and institutional dynamics at play. Theoretical contributions include the adaptation of social capital theory, institutional theory, and gendered innovation theory to account for the UAE's unique socio-cultural setting. By doing so, this study underscores the importance of recognizing how gendered norms embedded in society influence entrepreneurial behavior, choices, and success rates among women.

Practically, a multidimensional strategy requires one that targets legal reform, cultural awareness, financial inclusiveness, mentorship access, and family support mechanisms. These interventions must not be viewed in isolation but as interdependent levers for enabling socio-cultural change. Empowering women entrepreneurs is not simply a matter of increasing participation numbers; it is about transforming the structures that define who is seen as capable of succeeding in business. Advancing this goal necessitates collaborative efforts between government institutions, private sector actors, educational systems, and civil society.

Future research direction should seek to develop empirical frameworks that capture the complexity of women's entrepreneurial journeys within conservative cultural environments. Longitudinal studies could track how legal and cultural reforms impact women's entrepreneurial experiences over time, while qualitative research might explore the lived realities of women navigating social expectations alongside business ambitions. Additionally, comparative studies between the UAE and other Gulf or Middle Eastern countries could provide further insight into how regional variations in culture and policy affect outcomes. Exploring how emerging sectors particularly in digital and green entrepreneurship offer new entry points for women could also shed light on evolving opportunities within more inclusive economic models.

In sum, empowering women entrepreneurs in the UAE requires a deliberate shift toward dismantling socio-cultural constraints while building systems that recognize and elevate women's potential. The path forward must be grounded in equity, inclusion, and an unwavering commitment to social transformation, only then can women's entrepreneurship serve as a genuine catalyst for sustainable development and gender parity in the region.

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