

## Exploring Challenge-based Outcomes for Disadvantaged Individuals to launch an Entrepreneurial Venture

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### Abstract

*Grounded in the theoretical model of challenge-based entrepreneurship, this study interprets transgender individuals as disadvantaged individuals in the socio-cultural context of Pakistan. The study aims to explore challenge-based outcomes that help them to launch an entrepreneurial venture. Based on the interpretative phenomenological study, twelve transgender entrepreneurs were identified through purposive and snowball sampling. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Following an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the study revealed that stigma associated with non-binary gender identity causes multiple challenges and resulted in connecting with the community, sense of resilience, demonstrating a healthy attitude towards society and true self-esteem. These outcomes are crucial for them to launch an entrepreneurial venture. The results provide a self-help mechanism on the individual level to cope with the disadvantage associated with the challenge(s) that may lead to the launch of an entrepreneurial venture. The study is limited to non-confirming gender as a disadvantaged group; however, challenge-based entrepreneurship can be explored in other disadvantaged groups that may unveil different results.*

**Keywords:** challenge-based entrepreneurship, disadvantaged individuals, interpretative phenomenological research (IPA), transgender individuals

### Introduction

Entrepreneurship is becoming a significant foundation for inclusive economic growth (Stoica, Roman, & Rusu, 2020) that enhances the engagement of disadvantaged segments in society (Maalaoui et al., 2020). In entrepreneurial research, much attention was given to the advantaged group of people where the disadvantaged have little prominence (Wiklund, Wright, & Zahra, 2019). In contemporary literature, different groups are examined as disadvantaged in the reflection of opting entrepreneurship. For instance, necessity, disable, mentally ill, immigrants, and ethnic minorities.

Wiklund, Wright, and Zahra (2019) encouraged future research in entrepreneurship, focusing on the disadvantaged groups, promising with a change sample. They viewed such groups “outside of the norm, who often lack a voice”. Pathak (2019) considered transgender entrepreneurs as disadvantaged individuals. Correspondingly,

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entrepreneurship research is predominated with a binary gender. Surprisingly, very little work has been found on transgender entrepreneurs (e.g., Suraiya, 2017; Oosterhoff & Hoang, 2018). Marlow and Martinez Dy (2018) asserted that the potential of non-conforming gender and their growing visibility creates tension in the socio-economic strata when collides with the transphobic discrimination. Such tension is significant to the entrepreneurship studies if driven by the motivation to pursue entrepreneurship (Marlow, & Martinez Dy, 2018).

Previous studies highlighted the significant role of challenges in launching an entrepreneurial venture (Gilad & Levine, 1986; Shapero & Sokol, 1982). Recent research on challenge-based entrepreneurship further strengthens its significance concerning numerous challenges (i.e., economic, socio-cultural, cognitive, physical & emotional) (Miller & Breton-Miller, 2017). However, the model overlooked gender as a disadvantage. Previously, women were considered as a disadvantaged group, relative to men, because they were deprived of entrepreneurial education and experience (Marlow & Patton, 2005). It indicated that gender influences the way one can access certain resources. However, there is a lack of understanding of challenge-based entrepreneurship for non-conforming gender.

The present study explores the lived experiences of transgender individuals to understand their entrepreneurial motivation, driven by challenges causing dissatisfaction of the status quo in society, resulting in the entrepreneurial decision. It addresses the following questions: How do transgender individuals make sense of their gender-based challenges helpful to launch an entrepreneurial venture? To address this question, first, we contextualized the study into the socio-cultural context of Pakistan then we interpret the disadvantage of transgender individuals in the reflection of the model of challenge-based entrepreneurship. Following the IPA, we analyzed the lived experiences of twelve transgender entrepreneurs and present the results, accompanied by discussion, implications, future direction and conclusion.

### **Theoretical background**

*Experiences of Transgender individuals in the socio-cultural context of Pakistan*

Transgender is an umbrella term, applied to, whose gender identity or expression varies from the culturally-bound gender norms associated with one's assigned gender on birth (Valentine, 2007). Being a non-conforming gender is being different, consequently, discriminated and marginalized in society (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011).

In Pakistan, this community has been getting massive rejection in every field of life where they face personal, social, economic, cultural and psychological issues which lead them to the higher state of isolation and social exclusion (Punjab Social Protection Authority, 2018). They depict a deviant gender role that makes them get rejected by their biological families due to the deviance at the time of their birth or gender identity disorder (GID) that is observed afterwards in their growing age. Such a distressing rejection connects them to the socially-constructed family. Among 65.5% of transgender individuals earn less than PKR. 10,000 per month (Shah et al., 2018). Almost 90% of transgender individuals live under such a family structure in the leadership of their gurus where some of their gurus abuse them sexually and force them to beg on the streets (Shah et al., 2018). On the other side, the repression of civil-society pushed them to live at the margin of the society which limits them to access educational, occupational, legal and health facilities. As they have limited access to respectable jobs, they are left only to beg, sing, dance and prostitute themselves. Such activities may influence the youth and adults negatively which results in drastic adverse outcomes. For instance, acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) and Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) are one of them (Ahmed, Hashmi, & Khan, 2019).

Such an alarming situation took the government's attention to the plight of transgender individuals in Pakistan. For this concern, the National Assembly of Pakistan has passed the TG Persons (Protection of Rights) act which guarantees their rights to inherit, education, health, employment, and others (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2018). Islam (2020) asserted that this act only limited to the prohibition of discrimination where there is room to adopt massive measures like quotas for transgender individuals in different domains that can change the repressive attitude of society.

The model states that life challenges expose an individual to the adverse *conditions and experiences* that become an opportunity to make them open to the *adaptive requirements* that construct some specific behavior and abilities so that they opt for entrepreneurship (Miller & Breton-Le Miller, 2017).

For transgender individuals, the incapacity and lack of career opportunities are limited across Pakistan. We took incapacity as non-conformity of gender that is beyond their control. Such non-conformity restricted them to get an education and if they take, they are inevitable to discrimination, mocking, and impudence. Lack of job opportunities pushed them to the abject ways of livelihood as explained earlier.

**Research Methodology**

This study is based on the interpretative phenomenological inquiry. Such an inquiry gives a meaningful insight into the entrepreneurial phenomenon embracing a specific context where the recent literature lacks its understanding from different perspectives (Abebrese, 2014). Correspondingly, phenomenology is the most substantial way to explore the meaningful experiences and strategies; explain underlying reasons for decision-making e.g., deciding to start a venture (Berglund, 2007).

We identified transgender entrepreneurs through secondary sources i.e., local newspapers, social media and non-government organizations (NGOs). Participants were selected purposively. As they are few so snowball sampling assisted to access other entrepreneurs. IPA studies are normally based on a small sample, aims to conduct a detailed case-by-case analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Thus, semi-structured interviews have conducted from twelve transgender entrepreneurs. We used pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants. Table 1 provides the details of the sample that we interviewed.

Table 1  
*Sample details*

<b>Entrepreneur</b>	<b>Industry</b>
Chambeli	Personal Care Services
Heera	Community Development
Kanwal	Clothing

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Marjaan	Handicrafts
Meera	Community Development
Mehak	Theatre
Mona	Fashion Designing
Rani	Trading
Sangeeta	Clothing
Sapna	Community Development
Sehar	Personal Care Services
Sonam	Retail Food Delivery

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*Analysis*

Based on the model of challenged based entrepreneurship, we provided super-ordinate themes that emerged from the lived experiences of participants.

*Condition and Experience*

Society is predominated with the gender binary. They have a distinct gender identity which makes them arduous to move in society. All transgender individuals face similar experiences of gender-based stigmatization which lead to their social exclusion. In response to a question, “how do you experience your social interaction with people?” the majority of answers depicted discrimination, mocking, negative stereotyping, physical and sexual abuse. Two super-ordinate themes have emerged that depicted their condition and experience of being different in society.

*Combat with gender-identity*

Some of the transgender individuals recognized their gender identity at the early age of their lives where they brutally rejected socially and humiliated by their family members. Some other transgender individuals battle with their gender identity to recognize, learn and accept their gender identity. They face stigmatization due to lack of awareness of their gender identity and ill social treatment. As one participant put in, “In my childhood, I did not know about my gender identity. I couldn’t able to understand why people hate me. What is different in me? Why children do not play with me outside? (Sangeeta). Such questions make them disturb and pushes them to know about their gender identity. In

quest of their gender identity, they put so much effort, as one participant shared, “people used to call me chakra, hijra and khusra. I did not know the meaning of these words but later I realized that people used these terms to made fun of trans-identity” (Heera). It was the case with almost all those participants who did not recognize their gender identity in their early life. As another participant put in, “in my school, I faced sarcasm equally from boys and girls, who used to make a stereotypical transgender clap as I passed by. I could not understand why to tease me in such a way” (Rani).

#### *Consequences of being different*

In society, non-binary gender is massively stigmatized and its consequences are inevitable. Based on being different, this theme relied on numerous consequences. As one participant shared, “Due to the constant repressive attitude of my family, I abandon my home” (Heera). The negative attitude is not only restricted to their biological family but it also restricts them to get and/or sustain any job. As one participant shared, “I lost my job based on trans-phobia which shattered me into pieces” (Meera). In the same pattern of rejection, another participant put in, “Where ever I go, I used to face massive stigmatization which restricted me to my apartment. Over time, I went into severe depression and started taking drugs” (Mona). Massive stigmatization restricted them to participate in any social gathering. To illustrate, one participant put in, “People used to stare and mock at me which made me uncomfortable in different social gatherings at home or outside” (Sangeeta). The consistent stigma resulted in rejection to accept them as a person.

#### *Adaptive Requirements*

Following the exploratory process of recognizing their gender identity, two themes that emerged from our data that depicts adaptive requirements: self-awareness, and self-help and self-motivation. These themes characterized the adoption of new behaviors that resulted in some productive outcomes that might help them to start an entrepreneurial venture.

#### *Self-awareness*

Our findings revealed that recognizing one's gender identity is a self-exploratory process that helped them to know themselves. It has noted that all participants have high self-awareness. Their self-awareness protects them from social rejection. We interpret self-awareness as a conscious understanding of an individual to one's gender identity, skills, and abilities and have confidence in one's abilities to achieve the desired goal.

To illustrate, one participant put in, "it was not an easy phase but I accepted my identity and transform myself into what I am from inside" (Mona). Another participant shared, "I did not get any job. Later, I realized my skills of handicrafts and I started thinking why not to start something on my own. Despite the stigmatization, I believed in me that I can do this" (Marjaan).

#### *Self-help and Self-motivation*

Other requirements that transgender individuals adopted during the process of self-exploration and owning oneself as a worthy person are self-help and self-motivation. Being socially isolated, they are unable to get any support from society so they rely on learning by doing as a self-help approach. As one participant put in, "It was a time, when I found no one to help me. I helped myself, relying only on ALLAH. I tried to develop new skills, learn from rejection and bounce back with the same force" (Heera). Another participant shared, "I feel that being different is an evolving process of learning, adaptability and growth. No one can help you to learn, it is your job only!" (Mona).

One cannot achieve goals without motivation. It has observed that transgender individuals mostly rely on self-motivation. They have a restricted support network that helps them to lift emotionally. In most of the cases, they push themselves to work and achieve their goals. As one participant shared, "I have no emotional support. In the time of distress, I motivated myself to work hard because no one can do it for me" (Sehar). In a similar pattern, another participant put in, "at times, I found no one who can listen to my problems and see my misery. I push myself to work hard and find new avenues that can work for me (Rani).

*Outcomes*

Non-binary gender identity causes numerous consequences that push transgender individuals to adapt some requirements that resulted in numerous outcomes. Four themes emerged from our data that depicted the creative approaches as outcomes which are useful to launch an entrepreneurial venture.

*Network Building*

It has noticed that based on mentioned-above adaptive behavior, transgender individuals start building a network within the community and in society. To illustrate one participant put in, “after the transformation process, I started meeting with people within the community and outside. I feel when you own yourself then no one can make you feel inferior” (Kanwal). Realization of one’s worth helping them to come out of their veil of fear and start meeting people. Owning oneself increases self-esteem that overcomes the negative attitude of people in social interaction and opens new avenues to get emotional and other kinds of support. To illustrate, one participant put in, “when I started meeting with community members, I have not only got emotional support but they also helped me to access entrepreneurial resources” (Sapna). Another participant shared, “today I am running a salon, and it is because I was connected with a resourceful network of the transgender community who helped me to get the investment” (Chambeli).

*Demonstrating a good attitude that can change the repressive attitude of society*

It has noted that almost all participants experienced ill-treatment of society where they realized demonstrating a good attitude may change their repressive attitude. To illustrate their positive attitude, one participant put in, “I used to be quite against the witty comments of people because I wanted to prove myself with my work. I know that my aggressive attitude will make them more violent towards me so I chose to be calm and focused” (Sapna). Another participant shared, “People in my residential area has been observing me like 24/7. Who is coming to my home, where am I going, how I dressed up and how I talk to people? Over



time they realize that we can also live a normal life” (Chambeli). People avoid talking to them on account of their behaviour which is perceived to be odd and mischievous. Participants realized that demonstrating a good attitude towards society may assist them to gain social acceptance.

### *Resilience*

Almost all participants have gone through experiences of social rejection, discrimination, physical and sexual abuse that resulted in social isolation, economic and psychological problems. These difficulties develop a sense of resilience. We refer resilience to bounce back and recover instantly from adversities. To illustrate their resilient behaviour, one participant put in, “While interacting and building a network with cisgender, the only thing that can help me to survive is my tolerance. If we don’t fight back so we cannot move forward in society” (Meera). Another participant shared, “When people mock at me and tried to harm me, I used to bounce back with the same force just to make them realize that we are humans just like you but I never had any intentions to harm them later same people praise me and my work in front of many other people” (Heera). It has noticed that resilient behaviour helped them to take a stand for oneself as a worthy person. As one participant put in, “I quit all the abject ways of earning but it was so hard for me to get some respectable job. It was a time when I had lost any hope for life. It took my so much effort to recollect my energies to think differently about life and I started work for myself” (Sonam). Another participant shared, “consistent stigma pushed me in the isolation where I battled with myself to overcome the rejection. I realized if I will not fight for my identity so no one else does it for me.” (Mehak).

### *True Self-esteem*

Awareness of oneself and knowing what to actualize in life depicts true self-esteem. Almost all participants reflected true self-esteem. It works as a gauge to protect them from stigmatization and negative stereotyping. To illustrate, one participant put in, “ALLAH has given this gender identity to me, why should I ashamed of it? The more people disown me, the more I feel strong insider prove them wrong” (Rani). Another participant shared, “I like myself the way I’m”. I do not care what

people think about me” (Sehar). Self-awareness helps them to own themselves otherwise they are highly vulnerable to massive stigmatization and social rejection. Knowing oneself also help them to actualize their skills. To illustrate, one participant put in, “I am a passionate fashion designer. I know that I can create an impact. I started working on establishing my business because I know that I have a skill and I can do it” (Mona). Another participant shared, “everyone criticized me that I am a transwoman and I should not earn other than abject way. But I know that I am worth of respectable professional. I know that I have a skill and I can do a business better than cisgender” (Sangeeta).

### **Discussion**

At a time when scholars started recognizing that challenges pull individuals towards entrepreneurship (Gilad & Levine, 1986), it is important to realize that how little we know about how challenge-based outcomes influence disadvantaged individuals (Miller & Breton-Le Miller, 2017). Despite the progress has made in research, very limited work has found in the domain of challenge-based entrepreneurship.

Miller and Breton-Le Miller (2017) presented need to work harder, need to do things differently and need to seek help as an adaptive requirement whereas Saxena and Pandya (2018) found resilience and network building as an adaptive requirement. However, we assert that these are the outcome of the challenge-based process that an individual has gone through after opting for some adaptive requirements like self-awareness, self-motivation and self-help. Moreover, we found demonstrating a good attitude and true-self-esteem as different challenge-based outcomes as previously found.

We argue that one cannot be resilient until they do not accept themselves as an individual and motivate oneself to achieve their goals. Bernard and Barbosa (2016) considered the development of resilience as a process that transforms an individual into an entrepreneur. We found that achieving this state of resilience needs an inner vision knowing oneself and negating the discrimination from society.

However, our work contributed to the entrepreneurial literature in different aspects. First, our work contributed to understanding the challenge-based entrepreneurship for non-conforming gender. Second,

we found self-awareness, and self-motivation as new adaptive requirements and true self-esteem as a different building block (outcome) that helps to create a venture. Third, self-esteem serves as a gauge; enabling a person to regulate behaviours or maintain them in a certain desirable way in a social setting. Therefore, higher awareness of oneself helps to maintain high self-esteem and sustain a healthy relationship with others.

### *Implications and Future direction*

The study contributed to present numerous implications at the individual level as a self-help mechanism that assists them to overcome their particular disadvantage(s) and shift their career pathway to entrepreneurship. We suggest them to accept their disadvantage. Their ownership of their disadvantage allows them to gain resilience and true-self-esteem that encourage them to interact in their community. They need to analyze their strengths that could set the foundation of their entrepreneurial venture. Disadvantaged individuals only survive in society if they understand that to learn new things by doing, to motivate themselves because they hardly get any emotional support. The one who failed to opt these strategies would be vulnerable to stigma in society.

Our findings are derived from a particular context that results in different outcomes. We suggest that exploration of different marginalized communities may unveil different challenge-based outcomes that would be significant to understand their needs differently.

### **Conclusion:**

Not every member of a marginalized community can become an entrepreneur. It is the tendency that allows an individual to accept one's disadvantage and own oneself. The ownership to self, assist them to motivate themselves, gain a sense of resilience, true self-esteem and develop a network and demonstrate a different behaviour that may shift the repressive attitude of society. Ultimately, these outcomes help them to create an entrepreneurial venture.

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