

Women's informal entrepreneurship through the lens of institutional voids and institutional logics

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Abstract

In this conceptual paper, we respond to the calls for broader theoretical approaches that can coherently demonstrate a high degree of conceptual sensitivity to multiple combinations of institutional factors influencing women's informal entrepreneurship (WIE) and related agency. We do so by integrating constructs of gender and gender inequality with those of institutional logics and institutional voids. We find that a refined understanding of institutional voids is required to pave the way for a meaningful theoretical integration and empirical application of the related conceptualizations. We offer such a revised definition by placing formal and informal logics (rather than institutions) at the heart of it. In our theorizing, we propose that gender interplaying with formal and informal institutional logics create varying degrees of obscure and unique institutional voids that shape WIE prevalence. The proposed harmonized theoretical lens provides researchers with flexible yet consistent guidance for conducting context-specific empirical work that can coherently advance understanding of underlying logics shaping WIE and related agency.

KEYWORDS

gender, institutional logics, institutional voids, women's informal entrepreneurship

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Women's informal entrepreneurship (WIE) has recently attracted increasing scholarly attention (de Groot et al., 2017; Thapa Karki & Xheneti, 2018; Williams & Gurtoo, 2011). While it has been dichotomously claimed that women informal entrepreneurs represent a necessity-driven phenomenon (Sarreal, 2019), or often viewed as a voluntary and creative choice of women seeking flexible hours, economic independence, and opportunities to test new business ideas, combined with no need to pay taxes and comply with the excessive red tape (Maloney, 2004; Williams & Martinez, 2014), these necessity and opportunity perspectives have led to oversimplified interpretations of the phenomenon (Welter et al., 2017; Williams & Williams, 2014). These reduce the scope for developing an inclusive and coherent conceptualization of WIE and contribute to creating intellectual lock-ins and stifling developments in the conceptualization of WIE as a global phenomenon (de Groot et al., 2017; Williams & Gurtoo, 2011).

Shortcomings of the necessity versus opportunity approach in explaining WIE have been exposed by the institutional theory scholars (Marlow et al., 2017). These emphasize the criticality of the contextual influences of culture, traditions, behaviors, and beliefs on how informal entrepreneurship unfolds, especially for women (Maloney, 2004). The respective literature argues that entrepreneurship in the informal sector represents the people's "spontaneous and creative response" to government over-regulation (Williams & Gurtoo, 2011). This literature identifies asymmetry between formal and informal institutions as the reason for (in)formalization in an economy (Williams & Shahid, 2016). Bringing the role of institutions to the fore of the WIE discourse has also generated valuable insights into the identity of women entrepreneurs in the informal sector and the challenges and constraints they face when establishing and developing their business (Jennings & Brush, 2013).

While there is increasing acknowledgment of the institutional embeddedness of the WIE phenomenon, the existing discourse tends to overlook relevant insights provided by the literature on institutional voids. The latter focuses on the failure or absence of institutions enabling efficient and stable transactions (Khoury & Prasad, 2016; Webb et al., 2020), prescribing boundaries for informal entrepreneurial behavior, and directing ways in which navigation occurs through uncertainty. Conversely, studies on institutional voids have not sufficiently engaged with the discourse on the gendered nature of institutions (Acker, 1992). Key constructs describing challenges of institutional voids (such as institutional variations in efficiency levels to guide enterprise) can be highly influenced by gendered beliefs and relations (Webb et al., 2020). Yet, gender remains a taken-for-granted construct in this literature, defying the calls to develop a discourse that can appreciate the diversity and complexity of gendered experiences, performances, and generalize multiplicity of gender effects across entrepreneurial activities (Ogundana et al., 2021).

Hence, the aim of this conceptual paper is to advance the problematization of WIE with the view of providing a harmonized framework capable of embracing and guiding context-sensitive studies. We argue that the institutional voids perspective (IVP) enriched with theoretical tools from institutional logics perspective (ILP) and underpinned by constructs of gender inequality and bias can be highly instrumental for conceptualizing WIE. While previous studies have implicitly acknowledged the value and complementarity of IVP and ILP (see Hedberg & Lounsbury, 2021; Mair et al., 2012), they stop short of explicitly integrating these streams of scholarship to arrive at a viable and context-sensitive problematization of WIE. As we address this shortcoming, we find that, first, the existing ambiguity of the institutional voids definition (Von der Heyde, 2020) needs to be addressed. We refine this definition by placing formal and informal institutional logics (rather than institutions) at the heart of it; and, second, a widespread perception that institutional voids are non-Western phenomenon only (Bothello et al., 2019) becomes invalid once institutional logics are viewed as interplaying with gender and associated biases and inequalities. We, therefore, theorize that gendered institutional voids are observed globally.

When introducing the construct of gender interacting with institutional logics, we draw on conceptualizations of gender and inequality by Acker (2012, 2006, 1992) and Ridgeway (2011; 2014). Acker (2006) is known for her intersectional approach to inequality as it is presented in her inequality regimes. These are seen as "loosely inter-related practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities" (p. 443) within organizations, but linked to societal inequality (e.g., in politics, history, and culture). Similar to Acker,

Ridgeway theorizes how gender, race, and class intersect in social relational contexts to perpetuate inequalities (Ridgeway, 2011; Ridgeway & Kricheli-Katz, 2013). Acker and Ridgeway's conceptualizations naturally lend themselves to the institutional logics theory focusing on broader belief systems that shape cognition, practices, and actions of social actors (Thornton et al., 2012). As such, they equip us with analytical tools to theorize about how institutional voids are experienced by women entrepreneurs and explain their prevalence in the informal economy.

Harmonizing gender, institutional logics, and institutional voids perspectives enables us to propose that (i) it is the interplay between gender and formal and informal logics that shapes distinct configurations of institutional voids for women and explains the prevalence of WIE; and (ii) it is the institutional complexity created by the interplay of gender and formal and informal logics that creates space for agency of women informal entrepreneurs to bridge and navigate voids. Our contributions are, therefore, as follows. We address the calls for broader theoretical approaches that can coherently demonstrate a high degree of conceptual and contextual sensitivity to multiple combinations of institutional factors influencing WIE (Williams & Gurtoo, 2011; Williams & Nadin, 2012). We also extend prior work on institutional complexity viewed through the institutional voids lens and agency exercised by women informal entrepreneurs to navigate their ventures under the conditions of institutional voids (Langevang et al., 2018; Smith & Tracey, 2016). The proposed theoretical lens offers an avenue for further theory development and empirical inter-rogation of propositions related to inter-institutional influences involved in WIE and associated individual strategies, agentically devised and applied. Finally, we locate the need for and provide conceptual clarity to the role of gender, logics, and institutions in shaping voids.

The rest of our paper is structured as follows. Section 2 defines the theoretical scope of the study and discusses the constructs that form the basis of our theoretical model. Section 3 represents a theory elaboration, making a case for refining the definition of institutional voids and presenting a series of propositions underlying the proposed theoretical approach to WIE. Section 4 provides the concluding discussion of the theoretical insights generated and related contributions of this paper.

2 | THEORETICAL SCOPE

2.1 | Women's informal entrepreneurship

Informal entrepreneurship originates from, exists in, and evolves within the domain of the informal economy, which is not protected or regulated by the institution of the state (Sarreal, 2019; Webb et al., 2013) yet acknowledged and tolerated by society (Webb et al., 2013; Welter et al., 2015). Individual informal entrepreneurs exploit opportunities and create ventures in a socially accepted manner, while not complying with the legal setting of a given country (Salvi et al., 2022). Until recently, the literature on WIE has been dominated by the necessity versus opportunity debate. This has been criticized for being dichotomous, simplistic (de Groot et al., 2017; Williams & Williams, 2014), overlooking gendered institutional embeddedness (Hughes & Jennings, 2020), and having limited implications for WIE. The literature by institutional theory scholars has started addressing this critique by providing a more nuanced understanding of institutional contexts, their complexities (Marlow et al., 2017), pressures, and gendered effects (Oppedal Berge & Garcia Pires, 2020), and how these may shape responses, choices, motivations, and strategies of women informal entrepreneurs (Amine & Staub, 2009; Langevang et al., 2018).

Several studies explore formal and informal influences such as traditions, religious beliefs, patriarchal systems, and governance structures on the performance of women entrepreneurs. For example, women are often found to be less likely to have access to formal business networks than men and are more likely to be charged higher interest rates, since banks perceive a female-led business as having a greater risk than one led by a man (Mair & Marti, 2009). The lack of support, fear of failure, and the lack of competency and experience due to male-dominated hierarchies and gender-related discrimination are shown to have adverse effects on the confidence and success of women-run businesses (Brush et al., 2019; De Vita et al., 2014).

Similarly, normative influences of gender biases are found to result in a gender-based sectoral segregation and limited women participation in high growth entrepreneurial sectors (e.g., see Rugina (2018) in relation to Baltic states). Verheul et al. (2012) identify gender-based obstacles responsible for lower rates of formal sector self-employment and entrepreneurship in 25 EU Member States, United States, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein. Other studies reveal similar constraints in regions such as Asia, Africa, and South America (Karim, 2008; Venkataraman et al., 2016), implying that WIE is a global phenomenon. More recent research explores how social construction of gender influences women entrepreneurs' decisions and choices (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Marlow & Martinez Dy, 2018). Studies find an inverse relation between public spending on childcare and women entrepreneurship (Elam & Terjesen, 2010). In contexts where the government provides little provision for childcare, the rate of women's entrepreneurship tends to be higher compared to those where public childcares is easily available (Thébaud, 2015). These suggests that gendered expectations and their socioeconomic implications may explain the choice of formal and/or informal entrepreneurship.

Informal entrepreneurship has a distinct gender profile with women entrepreneurs dominating the informal sector of the economy (Kwami, 2015). Assuming the socially constructed nature of gender, this indicates that gendered contexts of informal entrepreneurship reproduce through societal norms, professional practices, family expectations, and cultural beliefs (Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2010). The guidelines or prescriptions of different institutions are argued to implicitly and explicitly imbibe gendered expectations to create and legitimate social relations (McCarthy & Moon, 2018). Notably, the fluidity and deep-rooted presence of gendered beliefs, prescriptions, categories, patterns, and actions make gender intersect strongly with different institutions, including family (Boeri, 2018), religion (Cazarin & Griera, 2018), and profession (Galea et al., 2020). The salience of gendered beliefs and their institutional embeddedness forms rules of the game or logics that guide behavior, social interactions, performances, and evaluations (Acker, 1992; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Zhao & Yang, 2021). It is this recognition of the omnipresence and salience of gender, embedded in established institutions that opens an opportunity to consistently conceptualize the origins and prevalence of WIE.

2.2 | What theoretical constructs matter?

2.2.1 | Institutional orders and logics

The phenomenon of WIE is deeply embedded in institutional contexts and ILP provides theoretical tools for understanding this embeddedness (Thornton et al., 2012). It posits that a society represents an inter-institutional system composed of simultaneously existing institutional orders. Categorized by ILP as family, religion, state, market, profession, corporation, and community, institutional orders are viewed as established systems of governance, guiding the behavior, choices, and sense-making of social actors in their own domains (Thornton et al., 2012). As such, institutional orders are effectively inseparable from respective institutions as they are commonly defined by institutional theory scholars (Johansen & Waldorff, 2017).

Each institutional order is argued to have its own set of behavioral prescriptions or guidelines that are called institutional logics. Institutional logics are "*socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols, material practices, assumptions, values, and beliefs by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their daily activity*" (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999 in Thornton et al., 2012, p. 51). Institutional logics can be viewed as organizing principles that shape preferences, interests, and behaviors of individuals and organizations by which legitimacy, identity, norms, authority, attention, and root metaphors are attained. Institutional logics, therefore, "*provide formal and informal rules of action, interaction, and interpretation that guide and constrain decision makers*" (Ocasio, 1997 in Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804). For example, family logics may shape responsibilities and commitment toward family members, religious logics may be concerned with the alignment of moralities and values with religious beliefs; market logics can guide business activities and market operations; state logics may deal with the establishment and implementation of policies, procedure, rules, and regulations; and community logics guide

TABLE 1 Institutional orders and examples of associated formal and informal logics.

| Institutional order | Formal logics | Informal logics | Selected references |
|---------------------|--|--|----------------------------|
| Family | Marriage contract that legally binds two people in a marital union, civil unions; <i>household membership forming basis of norm</i> | Unconditional and reciprocal obligations of trust between family members, live-in relationships; expectations around mutual respect, love, and support; <i>unconditional loyalty as a source of legitimacy</i> | Wynn (2008) |
| State | Policies and procedures laid out to support entrepreneurs and business; <i>redistributive mechanism as root metaphor</i> | Conventions/traditions influencing participation and/or accessibility; <i>backroom politics as informal control mechanism</i> | Ikenberry (2007) |
| Market | Mechanisms of operations laid down to govern codes of conduct for market sellers and buyers; <i>transactions as root metaphors</i> | Relationship based transactions between buyers and sellers; <i>status as basis of attention</i> | Mair et al. (2012) |
| Community | Guidelines and rules for membership to be a part of a community or club; <i>commitment to community values and ideology as a source of authority</i> | Shared beliefs and values by members of a community; <i>unity of belief, trust and reciprocity as basis of legitimacy</i> | Venkataraman et al. (2016) |
| Religion | Scriptures as word of God; <i>root metaphor</i> | Charisma and power of religious elites; <i>source of authority</i> | Cazarin and Grier (2018) |
| Profession | Certifications, specialized degrees; <i>increased personal reputation as a basis of strategy</i> | Pursuance of certain professions based on gender, class, ethnicity, etc.; <i>associations as a Basis of identity</i> | Bobbitt-Zeher (2011) |
| Corporation | Corporate policies (mission; strategy, governance structure; human resource management); <i>basis of norms</i> | Organizational culture and conventions as <i>Informal control mechanism</i> | Crilly and Sloan (2012) |

communal values, for example, reciprocity, fairness, obligation, and loyalty (see Table 1 for further examples). This is not to say that logics from different domains do not overlap, though.

Logics are contextual and malleable. There is acknowledgment that the salience of a given logic can change over time, for instance, Berman's (2012) study on academic sciences observes the shift in the salience of a historically strong scientific logic toward a market logic of economic value. Logics are instilled with values. They provide meaning and are created through meaning, that is, they can be enacted differently because they are differently understood and believed (Gümüşay et al., 2020; Thornton et al., 2012). For example, formal (codified) and informal (non-codified) community logics may have different meanings as they are influenced by membership, personal relationships, shared values, and loyalty (Mair & Marti, 2009). Institutional orders may encompass more informal institutional logics than formal ones and vice versa, for example, community as an institutional order is more likely to be associated with informal logics than institutional orders of market or profession.

As social actors have to operate across different institutional orders, they are inevitably subject to simultaneous influences of logics from different orders (family, market, community etc.). For example, a woman entrepreneur can be an employer, a wife, mother, daughter, friend, mentor, or role model. Co-existing institutional orders including global institutional orders (Zulfiqar, 2022a) may concurrently impose a different set of expectations for social interactions. This overlap may create conflict between logics from different orders and lead to institutional complexity. For instance, Venkataraman et al. (2016) reveal conflicts between market and community logics

and gendered local customs in rural India. Institutional complexity is believed to be a result of opposing logics from two or more institutional orders that results in tensions and ambiguities influencing social action (Spedale & Watson, 2014). Gaining legitimacy of action under one institutional order, in such cases, is typically at the risk of losing legitimacy under others—hence a source of tension for individuals (Smets et al., 2015; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008).

Social actors when faced with such institutional complexity tend to exercise agency to resolve tensions between competing logics (Thornton et al., 2012). Here, agency is defined as an actor's ability to have some effect on the social world, via altering rules, relational ties, or distribution of resources (Scott, 2008 in Thornton et al., 2012). This is a result of an actors' engagement with institutional logics, through which they may reproduce or transform an institutional order enabling decision-making, troubleshooting, and planning in difficult and dangerous situations (Cardinale, 2018; Thornton et al., 2012, p. 89). Several studies discuss institutional complexity and how enterprises are able to further their operations by reflexively engaging with logics to develop practices in response to the prevailing institutional environment (Greenwood et al., 2011; Smith & Tracey, 2016).

2.2.2 | Institutional voids

Access to resources, transaction costs, survival, growth trajectories, and scope of women enterprises are affected by the quality and efficiency of institutions. In this regard, the IVP with its emphasis on institutional inefficiencies is particularly relevant (Jennings & Brush, 2013). Institutional voids are often understood as institutional inefficiencies manifested in absent or inadequate law enforcement mechanisms, specialized intermediaries, and regulatory systems by management and economic scholars. These are linked to an increase in cost of starting and doing business, reduced economic growth, and limited range of entrepreneurial activities (Mair et al., 2012; Mair & Marti, 2009; Palepu & Khanna, 1998; Von der Heydte, 2020). Mair et al. (2012) approach institutional voids as spaces that occur at the interface of multiple and conflicting institutional logics, making "rules of the game" unpredictable. This view is shared by several other studies, arguing that these spaces can be filled by an innovative bridging of viable logics from different institutional orders that facilitates interactions and reduces costs of logics' unpredictability (Greenwood et al., 2011; Hedberg & Lounsbury, 2021; Luiz et al., 2019).

The institutional voids literature tends to distinguish between formal and informal voids (Khoury & Prasad, 2016; Webb et al., 2020). Formal institutional voids are interpreted as the lack of or a failure of formal institutions (e.g., laws, regulations, and infrastructures) to support efficient and effective transactions. Several studies have explored the compensatory role of informal institutions such as traditions, culture, and norms to provide critical guidance to entrepreneurs on relational conventions and habitual practices and help them develop navigational mechanisms in contexts of formal institutional voids (Mair et al., 2012; Puffer et al., 2010; Webb et al., 2020). However, compensating relational conventions may not be free of voids either, failing to substitute for an inefficient regulatory system and provide a stable and consistent institutional environment for entrepreneurship (Khoury & Prasad, 2016). This creates conditions where informal institutions are also void, and their instability acts as a hindrance to further entrepreneurship. Informal institutional voids are interpreted as incapacity of norms, values, and beliefs to facilitate stable, efficient, and effective exchanges. These occur when the use of relational mechanisms, access to factor and product markets, and means to secure investments can be unjustly manipulated or unavailable to individuals (Webb et al., 2020).

Contexts with simultaneously void formal and informal institutions are labeled in the literature as concurrent institutional voids or constraints. These are where both "formal and informal institutions" are inefficient and create difficult operating conditions for entrepreneurs (Khoury & Prasad, 2016). In their extreme manifestation, concurrent institutional voids can be observed during times of political and social conflicts, wars, and natural disasters, among other events, with the institutional environment becoming completely dysfunctional (Al-Dajani et al., 2015).

3 | THEORY DEVELOPMENT

3.1 | Refining the understanding of institutional voids

The combination of theoretical advances in relation to understanding institutional influences on women entrepreneurship (Giménez & Calabrò, 2018; Zhao & Yang, 2021), its gender embeddedness (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Marlow & Martinez Dy, 2018), and institutional voids (Khoury & Prasad, 2016; Webb et al., 2020) opens an opportunity for developing an integrated theoretical model capable of explaining underlying triggers of WIE. To successfully take advantage of this opportunity, however, we have to bring together the fragmented understanding of institutional voids across ILP and IVP discourses. This is related to the interrelationship between the constructs of formal and informal institutions and logics, and their role in shaping voids. The institutional voids literature distinguishes between formal and informal institutional voids and effectively implies a distinction between deficiencies of codified regulations and those of non-codified norms and beliefs (Khoury & Prasad, 2016; Webb et al., 2020); whereas ILP implies that it is conflicting logics from simultaneously existing institutional orders that create institutional voids (Mair et al., 2012; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). This elucidates a scattered understanding of institutional voids and the need to reduce the fuzziness surrounding the construct (Bothello et al., 2019; Von der Heydte, 2020). Importantly, it indicates that a meaningful integration of ILP and IVP is conceptually desirable and viable.

To achieve this integration, we propose that institutional voids occur when institutional logics, formal or/and informal, are either inefficient or unpredictable or both. We, therefore, first, conceptually clarify that voids should be defined by logics originating from several institutional orders rather than institutions themselves as implied by IVP. Second, we integrate insights from IVP and ILP on inefficient institutions and conflicting logics, respectively. We define inefficiency as a failure of a given logic to minimize transaction costs, and unpredictability as a state of conflict between logics from different orders making actions, transactions, planning, and outcomes unpredictable and ambiguous for entrepreneurs. Third, keeping with both IVP and ILP, we maintain the distinction between formal (codified) and informal (non-codified). This provides conceptual sensitivity and a balanced view on the role of institutions in shaping entrepreneurship. It allows us to account for contextuality, temporality, and value-ladenness of institutional dimensions (Gümüşay et al., 2020; Hedberg & Lounsbury, 2021) and enables to integrate gender embeddedness as theorized below.

3.2 | An interplay of gender and institutional logics as institutional voids

Caused by inefficient and unpredictable logics, institutional voids thus far are presented as gender neutral. Yet, experiences are gendered. Gender is a foundational principle of social structures and seen as a building block of social relations and hierarchies (Acker, 1992; Ridgeway, 2011). It is a primary and immediately recognizable categorization for sense making of another. It brings common knowledge and acceptable parameters of social interaction and translates into a wide range of experience and learning differences between men and women (Fisk & Ridgeway, 2018). Relevant research tends to render gendered experiences of preference and/or exclusion invisible while men and women continue to be stereotyped at institutional, structural, and interpersonal levels (Saguy et al., 2021).

Gender is an institutionalized system for organizing gender inequality in social relations and practices. Gender inequality can be attributed to a gender status inequality (Ridgeway, 2011). This is rooted in shared cultural beliefs about gender and associated assumptions about respect, social esteem, honor, and competence. Gender status inequality is embedded in all societies, whether they position themselves as patriarchal or not. Even contexts that seem to have a high state of gender equality often value masculinity over femininity, and women have to adapt to organizations and workplaces that reflect a masculine norm (Britton, 2017). For instance, Huppertz et al. (2019) in their study of academics in Scotland and Australia demonstrate that in the contexts of academic departments, which tend to be gender balanced (e.g., social sciences and humanities), women continue to suffer from tensions between organizational policies on maternity leave, flexible work, and academic outputs shaped by a masculine

norm. Ridgeway (2014) refers to examples of new types of work created by innovative start-ups, where there is no organizational history of gender division, but decisions about who does what are still shaped by gender biased beliefs.

Gender bias enacts gender inequality. Gender bias can be defined as evaluative and responsive decision-making in relation to others and oneself along gender-consistent directions (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; UNICEF, 2017). Gender bias can be automatic, conscious and/or unconscious, stemming from cultural traditions, norms, and values that define the specific characteristics of men and women¹ and how they are expected to act. Men viewed as more competent than women can contribute to them possessing more resources and power, on average, than women. However, such positional inequality may not be solely caused by the gender bias and gender status inequality (Ridgeway, 2011). According to Acker (2006) it is shaped by other categorical forms, for example, class, race, and their intersection with gender. Among relevant examples are hiring practices via social networks where the race and gender of both the applicant and decision makers can affect the selection, with males considered more competent and suited for the job. Similarly, in the context of ongoing projects in professionally homogeneous firms (such as Law), gendered and racialized interactions are shown to shape class relations (e.g., African American women are more likely to be allocated subordinated roles [Ibid]); and when reaching top positions, Black women managers are more likely to face more complex and more negative situations in the workplace than white women managers (Acker, 2009).

In a broader sense, gender inequality represents an ordinal hierarchy between the average man and woman in relation to status, power, and resources (Ridgeway, 2011). Gender is salient for actors in interactions and implicated in institutions, always lurking in the background shaping decisions, behaviors, and evaluations. Gender is a fundamental part of the law, religion, politics, communities, and organizations (Acker, 1992). These institutions have been structured around hierarchical lines and status differences between genders; for example, institutional policies may have written and unwritten rules mandating practices. Hence, gender bias and gender status inequality permeate formal and informal institutional logics (state, family, religion, profession, community etc) in variable strength and scope. This process is reflected and reinforced through socioeconomic outcomes such as positional inequalities in relation to power and resources. For example, women entrepreneurs are known to raise lower levels of funding than men, and this gap mostly originates as investors unfavorably evaluate women-led start-ups driven by gender bias against them (Kanze et al., 2018). In the literature, this is attributed to the taste as a function of prejudice, homophily (i.e., male-to-male bonds in a male dominated entrepreneurial environment), and stereotypical perceptions of women striving for less ambitious entrepreneurial goals or being incapable of achieving entrepreneurial success (Brush et al., 2019; Greenberg & Mollick, 2017). Gender-based division of labor (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011), gender-related wage gaps and leadership positions (Blau & Kahn, 2017), and unequal division of labor at home (Yavorsky et al., 2015) represent further examples of perpetuating gender bias and inequalities in relation to status, power, and resources.

Keeping with the above argument, we now conceptualize that institutional voids are shaped by an interplay between the salient provisions of gender bias and gender inequality with formal and/or informal logics. This leads to inefficiency and/or unpredictability that is to be experienced differently by the average woman compared to the average man (see Figure 1).

There are many examples that illustrate gender differences in experiencing institutional voids (Table 2). For instance, in relation to formal state logics, regulations, and laws can prop up positional inequalities, reinforce the gender gap, and directly discriminate against women by imposing gender-based restrictions in relation to inheritance and ownership of property and land (De Vita et al., 2014; Mair et al., 2012). An interplay between gender biases and formal market logic is manifested in banks' decision-making models. Women entrepreneurs encountering transaction-based lending (which dominates formal banking) are shown to face more demanding credit terms than men in relation to interest, duration, and collateral terms (Eddleston et al., 2016). The origins of this bias are linked to stereotypical perceptions of the limited ambition, ability, and potential of women entrepreneurs to deliver aggressive growth and fund their ventures (Malmström & Wincent, 2018).

Similarly, Forrester and Neville's (2021) study of US small businesses finds that women entrepreneurs exhibit gender-based borrowing discouragement due to male-typed business logic in entrepreneurship. The latter is shown to be a combination of two mechanisms, such as (i) lenders scrutinizing women-owned enterprises more harshly in

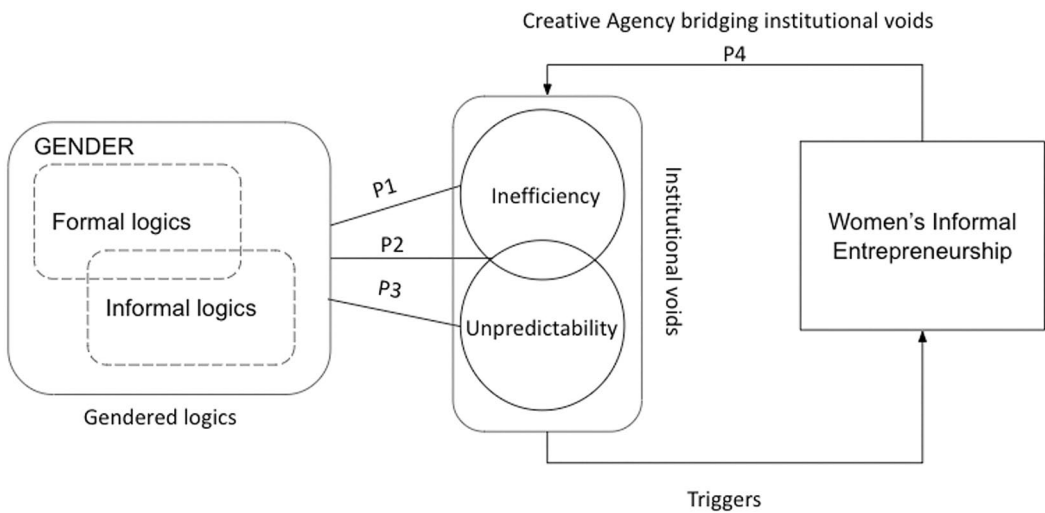


FIGURE 1 Conceptual framework: institutional voids, logics and women's informal entrepreneurship.

TABLE 2 Combinations of gendered formal/informal logics.

| Combinations of gendered logics | Implications for WIE |
|---|---|
| Formal state; informal market | Relative strength of formal policies, rules and regulations affect the functioning and extent of the informal market |
| Informal family; state and market | Informal family logic provides legitimacy and support to women entrepreneurs even in the context of state and market logics creating unpredictability |
| Informal religion, and formal and informal family | Cultural-cognitive elements of religion, and formal and informal family logics perpetuate predefined roles assignment |
| Informal community, formal and informal market and digitalization logic | Shared beliefs, understandings and responsibilities shaping women's responses to start up new enterprises or grow their new enterprises by utilizing digitalization logic |

relation to business tasks that are typically perceived as masculine and involve agency, self-interest, assertiveness, competitiveness, dominance, and growth; and (ii) women entrepreneurs presuming that they will be discriminated against when undertaking "male-typed" tasks (e.g., seeking capital) and viewing the related efforts too costly psychologically and inefficient materially. In such contexts, women may resort to alternative logics to obtain guidance and legitimacy for their entrepreneurial activities. Women entrepreneurs, for instance, can seek liquidity from informal arrangements with loan sharks or from friends and family (Zinyemba & Changamire, 2014; Naegels et al., 2018).

Furthermore, a study of US small business by Ongena and Popov (2016) finds that expectations of gender-associated discriminations make women entrepreneurs opt for informal financing even when banks do not actively discriminate against them, illustrating a strong interplay between gender and formal and informal logics for women entrepreneurs, that lead to inefficient outcomes in the formal economy. This interplay systematically shapes interactions and becomes a lasting characteristic of women's career choices and entrepreneurship outcomes (Guzman & Kacperczyk, 2019). As we shift the analytical focus of IVP to integrate the interplay of gender with logics in entrepreneurship, we propose:

Proposition 1. *An interplay between gendered formal and/or informal logics creates inefficiency and causes women to experience institutional voids differently than men; this represents a significant factor explaining the prevalence of women's informal entrepreneurship.*

There are also many examples that illustrate an interplay of gendered formal and informal logics causing unpredictability (Allison, 2016). Both men and women entrepreneurs can experience the effects of conflicts between different logics, which define unpredictability (see Section 3.1). Conflicting logics introduce uncertainty and ambiguity when it comes to taking a course of action or making an entrepreneurial decision. In the case of women entrepreneurs, these conflicts may arise when, for example, the family order provides necessary protection and resources for enterprises led by women; but reinforces and reproduces gender stereotypes about women's role and identity (see, e.g., Meliou (2020) in relation to Greece). Women working from home can experience conflict between obligations from their workplace and home chores and family responsibilities (see Nordman and Vaillant [2014] in relation to Madagascar). Working from home or operating outside of home can become a dilemma, where one logic guides women toward market engagement, while the other expects women to remain in the domestic domain (Ennis, 2019). Women may have reduced chances to be in charge if they co-found businesses with their husbands, and family conditions further modify women's choices, such as exit from business, exit from business, husbands' employment, and the presence of children (Oppedal Berge & Garcia Pires, 2020). Tracing a restructuring of a high-tech US start up, Mickey (2019) finds that the transition creates conflicting gendered logics that disadvantage women by relegating a lower status to them and narrowing their activities. These could motivate women to pursue informal entrepreneurship to navigate away from structural disadvantages existing in formal organizations, and seek informal spaces where they feel they may experience more equality in terms of decision-making power and resources (Naegels et al., 2018).

In some contexts, informal logics from religion tend to embed strong gender effects that may negatively translate into restrictions for women's mobility, autonomy, and outreach and create tensions with market logics (e.g., the norms of *purdah* [veil] restrict women's mobility and enforce their seclusion from the market economy [Roomi, 2013; Zulfiqar, 2022b]). These informal logics emanating from different socio-cultural interpretations of a religion lead to different expectations of practices on social segregation of sexes and their interactions (Saleem et al., 2022). They may conflict with norms of formal entrepreneurship with its emphasis on interpersonal relationships with investors (e.g., venture capitalists, business angels), banks, potential partners, suppliers, and clients, often involving public pitches of a business idea and business plan. As such options may not always be available, women are more likely to embark on a "home-based" informal entrepreneurship route (De Vita et al., 2014). This may prescribe women to follow paths that align their entrepreneurial aspirations and ventures with women's roles and domestic functions as viewed by respective socio-cultural interpretations of a religion (Mari et al., 2016). Informal entrepreneurship in such unpredictable and conflicting contexts allows women to position and establish their ventures as an extension of their widely acknowledged domestic responsibilities. Hence,

Proposition 2. *An interplay between gendered formal and/or informal logics creates unpredictability and causes women to experience institutional voids differently than men; this represents a significant factor explaining the prevalence of women's informal entrepreneurship.*

In certain contexts, "genderedness" of formal and informal logics can occur simultaneously and result in the concurrence of inefficiency and unpredictability. An example provided by Karim's (2008) ethnographic study on loan practices of four micro-finance institutions (MFIs) (including the Grameen Bank) where women are found to be the primary carriers of micro-credit loans, yet they are not their end users, with MFI being fully aware of this inefficiency and conflict with their declared mission. Similarly, in the context of US women's technology entrepreneurship Ozkazanc-Pan & Muntean (2018), observe the paradoxical ways in which a genuine recognizing of "gender issues" by organizations when they relate to women entrepreneurs may perpetuate rather than challenge pre-existing societal gender hierarchies and associated unpredictability and inefficiency. A simultaneous interplay between gendered

formal and informal logics can develop and sustain over time and can be traced back to the history of asymmetric justice systems and societal divisions driven by gender, family characteristics, and religion (Venkataraman et al., 2016; Vossenbergh, 2013). Deep rooted socio-cultural beliefs and misinterpretations of religious prescriptions inhibit opportunities for women entrepreneurs, as evidenced by some comparative studies conducted in a similar confessional context (see, for instance, Junaid et al., 2019 contrasting women's entrepreneurial opportunities in Pakistan with those in Malaysia). Under such conditions, it is reasonable to suggest:

Proposition 3. *An interplay between gendered formal and/or informal logics creates inefficiency and unpredictability and causes women to experience institutional voids differently than men; this represents a significant factor explaining the prevalence of women's informal entrepreneurship.*

3.3 | Agentic responses to institutional voids

Women informal entrepreneurs have to navigate the gendered formal and informal logics and the associated challenges posed by institutional voids. These can trigger creativity and improvisation as a response (Mair & Marti, 2009; McCarthy & Puffer, 2016). Ambiguity and unpredictability give more flexibility to women entrepreneurs for exercising agency. Creative agency can manifest in strategic segmentation practices where individuals may enact selected logics separately in appropriate contexts (Greenwood et al., 2011). Strategies based on bridging, boundary spanning, and networking are shown to be effective in enacting a broader repertoire of practices (Smets et al., 2015) to maximize access to vital resources, supply chains, and consumers, all foundationally depending on an actor's engagement with existing institutional logics as well as defying and manipulating established cultural-cognitive conceptions of an entrepreneur. For example, gendered family logics can deliberately and consciously be leveraged by women informal entrepreneurs to enable a wide range of navigational responses to institutional voids. These may include not only disguising non-conformity (Barragan et al., 2018) by accommodating and balancing between different expectations, but also directly defying and influencing them. In the latter, agency can be observed when women informal entrepreneurs ignore gender-based skepticism and hostile attitudes, and tenaciously and resiliently continue with their entrepreneurial endeavors, and eventually gain status and recognition in their entrepreneurial careers (Tlaiss, 2019) within their family and community. This may potentially lead to WIE's agency building alternative logics to navigate institutional voids.

Women entrepreneurs have shown a tendency to be proactive in negotiating access to key resources (such as land, property, and finance accounts) belonging to their husbands and other male relatives (Meliou, 2020; Xheneti et al., 2019). Following Martin et al. (2017), critics argue, however, that what may be perceived as women negotiating access to resources may just as well be perceived as husbands and other male family members being supportive, that is, family logics can work in favor, and reward women who are proactive in their individual entrepreneurial endeavors. Developing supportive networks through leveraging gender and/or religious identity and shared experience becomes an effective mechanism of operation used by women informal entrepreneurs. For instance, in Uganda's context a deep embeddedness with religious, spiritual family, and personal networks is shown to noticeably influence behavior of women entrepreneurs and enable the proliferation of informal entrepreneurial activities (Namatovu et al., 2018). Informal marketplaces and associated networks can become an arena for women entrepreneurs to articulate the rationale for their engagement in the informal economy and position themselves and their entrepreneurial activities as supporting economic growth rather than undermining it (Sowatey et al., 2018). Furthermore, this allows them not only to create opportunities for growth and diversification of businesses, but also to provide access to entrepreneurial knowledge sharing and training (Thapa Karki & Xheneti, 2018). The latter are considered critical for shaping the cognitive dimension of entrepreneurship via the enhancing of women's self-belief in challenging the established gendered stereotypes and constructing their distinct entrepreneurial identity (Amine & Staub, 2009; Welter & Smallbone, 2010).

Entrepreneurial strategies to bridge and navigate institutional voids can also involve reflective engagement with logics (Cardinale, 2018; Vasileva, 2018). As argued by Martin et al. (2017), this type of agency, involving active interpretation and application of institutional logics, normally by “lower-profile” actors often remains neglected. For instance, Nordman and Vaillant (2014) imply that women choose sectors where they can combine gender prescriptions with market and family logics. Women may actively devise unique mechanisms of operations to steer their businesses in and around institutional voids (de Groot et al., 2017). Klyver et al. (2013) in their multi-country study, indicate that women entrepreneurs can creatively break away from gendered institutional discourse and processes. Such agency can be demonstrated by applying viable formal and informal logics to further enterprise (Langevang et al., 2018; Venkataraman et al., 2016). Hence,

Proposition 4. *Varying degrees of gendered formal and/or informal logics create inefficiency and unpredictability and causes women to experience institutional voids differently than men; this makes space for creative agency by women to devise and apply bridging and navigation strategies for informal entrepreneurship.*

4 | CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In this paper, we highlight the shortcomings of the extant literature on manifestations of WIE, which constrain the transferability of respective empirical findings and theory development. We propose to critically shift away from the opportunity versus necessity discourse by developing a refined theoretical approach for understanding WIE based on discourses on gender, institutional logics, and institutional voids. By doing so, we contribute to research on WIE in several ways. First, we respond to calls for broader perspectives that can coherently explain the underlying forces of WIE across different contexts (Xheneti et al., 2019). Our conceptualization (Section 3 and Figure 1) demonstrates a high degree of sensitivity to multiple combinations of gendered formal and informal institutional logics. It maintains the consistency of the proposed theoretical lens at the core of which is the refined conceptualization of institutional voids enriched with gendered institutional logics. This allows us to account for both gender biases and inequalities in cultural cognitive and socioeconomic dimensions as manifestations of institutional voids and explain the varying prevalence of WIE in different institutional contexts. Economic and societal factors are explicitly captured by the constructs of gendered formal and informal institutional logics, creating obscure institutional voids. These present as a disadvantage of experiences, opportunity, choice, outcome, and evaluations for women entrepreneurs as they carry out their day-to-day activities.

Second, by integrating insights from the institutional voids and institutional logics perspectives, we also extend prior work on complexity of the institutional environment and how that influences the experiences, agency, and response strategies of women entrepreneurs in the informal sector. While a growing body of studies is exploring gendered institutional contexts for WIE (Brush et al., 2019; Langevang et al., 2018; Xheneti et al., 2019), the institutional complexity facing women informal entrepreneurs tends to be theorized without reference to institutional voids, thereby limiting understanding of the phenomenon. Our propositions imply that the institutional complexity for women informal entrepreneurs is most likely to arise from institutional voids shaped by different combinations of gendered formal and informal logics. While the literature on institutional voids has developed important theoretical insights into failures of inter-institutional compensatory systems (Khoury & Prasad, 2016; Webb et al., 2020), it does not extend this theorizing to integrate gendered contexts. Again, our propositions are explicitly concerned with ambiguous and complex implications of gendered compensatory systems for women informal entrepreneurs.

Third, as we build up our theorizing based on the institutional voids, we locate the need to provide conceptual clarity to the role of institutions and logics in shaping voids as it arises due to its scattered understanding across the relevant literature (Bothello et al., 2019). We address this need in three ways: (i) We anchor the origins of institutional voids to the construct of logics rather than institutions. This helps to reduce the fuzziness of the institutional voids construct and seamlessly integrate different perspectives; (ii) We adapt underlying concepts of inefficiency

and unpredictability to establish a meaningful link across existing interpretations of causes of institutional voids; and (iii) We highlight the value of keeping the formal/informal distinction as a theoretical tool to understand multiplicity of institutional contexts, and in our particular case, gendered institutions. Combined, these guide us to develop a holistic conceptualization of WIE. Besides, our revised definition of institutional voids has wider implications for the field and future research. It provides a foundation for exploring the richness and power of formal and informal logics using contextually grounded research approaches. It makes it appealing to scholars who are concerned with presumed association of institutional voids with the non-Western world only and want to overcome it (Bothello et al., 2019). It helps fully realize the analytical potential of the IVP as applicable in both non-Western and Western contexts. While the non-Western scholarship already acknowledges the institutional voids lens, we encourage the non-Western scholarship to also appreciate the value of this framing for exploring institutional deficiencies when it comes to seemingly well-functioning and well established inter-institutional systems.

Finally, related to the above, our propositions provide a platform for further theory development and serve as a theoretical precursor for empirical studies across several underexplored research avenues related to WIE and institutional complexity. These are related to invisible voids or varying degrees of institutional voids that may be experienced even within the same country across different rural and urban settlements (Zulfiqar, 2022b), and a repertoire of viable strategic responses that can be exercised by women informal entrepreneurs in such contexts (Langevang et al., 2018; Xheneti & Thapa Karki, 2018). Our propositions call for advancing research on how women entrepreneurs are able to leverage the way in which gendered formal and informal institutional logics blend, couple, deflect, transmit, and refract (Martin et al., 2017; Spedale & Watson, 2014). Given that we argue that institutional voids as a result of inefficiency and/or unpredictability caused by gendered formal and/or informal institutional logics, of particular relevance will be research on agency by women informal entrepreneurs to alter norms and establish alternative logics to counter biases, stereotypes, and reduce inequality. Our primary audience are researchers motivated to generate fuller, more heterogeneous, and more broadly valuable insights in the phenomenon of entrepreneurship (Welter et al., 2017) including those from the intersectional feminist perspective. The configuration of our framework and its empirical applications makes it also convenient to develop practical insights for policymakers in different possibilities of an interplay between gender and institutions, their implications for entrepreneurial value creation, and potential policy interventions.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

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ENDNOTE

¹ We acknowledge that gender bias concerns not only with women and men but all genders, such as non-binary and trans gender.

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