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WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA: DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION THROUGH BUSINESS MODEL EVOLUTION (SUMMARY)

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≈ SUMMARY ≈

**WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN THE MIDDLE EAST
AND NORTH AFRICA: DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION
THROUGH BUSINESS MODEL EVOLUTION**

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Principal Topics

This paper is among the first to examine the interplay between deinstitutionalization and the rollout of novel business models by women entrepreneurs in developing countries. Extant scholarship has largely focused on the capacity and resolve of existing institutions to enhance or inhibit women's entrepreneurship. Implicit in this approach is a presumption that institutional change is the key driver of entrepreneurial activity and novel organizational forms among women. This, in turn, suggests that the fate of women entrepreneurs is tied to, and emanates from, deinstitutionalization efforts (Oliver 1992). While this premise is intuitively enticing, we believe that the "institutional cascading" model (e.g. Thornton & Ocasio 2008) may actually be constructed upside down. Unstudied to date is an alternative perspective in which novel business models developed by women entrepreneurs may instead lead to deinstitutionalization. Our central argument is that women entrepreneurs bring to market radicalizing business models for the sake of profiting from market success, but in so doing unintentionally trigger a reassessment of institutional structures and aims.

Method

We tested our re-conceptualization through detailed case studies of 90 women entrepreneurs in seven MENA countries (Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Algeria, Tunisia, UAE and Oman), each collected over a period of one to five days, through interviews with the entrepreneurs and associates, focusing on the evolution of: (i) firm-level business models from the time of market entry until the sale or closure of the business; (ii) business models over time across the full population of case histories; (iii) market entry business models over time.

Results and Implications

Of the 90 case histories included in our study, 82 involved women entrepreneurs using business models in a fashion that did not strictly subscribe to the prevailing legal, social, cultural or economic conventions at the time of the firm's founding, but nonetheless achieved profitability, acceptance and longevity as institutions morphed to accommodate consumer-driven, market-based outcomes. Our findings provide support for our central argument: Evolving business models developed and promulgated by women entrepreneurs in developing countries simultaneously create new sources of customer value and, in an unintended fashion, contribute to the deinstitutionalization of barriers to entrepreneurial activity by women.

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