Institutional Fragmentation and Creative Entrepreneurship in Pakistan: Recontextualizing the Triple Helix Model

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Abstract

The study explores the entrepreneurial landscape of Pakistan's creative industries to understand how creative entrepreneurs engage with academic institutions, industry, and government. Institutional fragmentation ought to be an issue in Pakistan, as regulatory fragmentation and weak synergy among academia, industry, and government impede the growth of Creative entrepreneurs. This study applies the Triple Helix Model to the creative sector of Pakistan using a qualitative research method, generating a rare cross-helix dataset (N=34 In-depth Interviews). To ensure interpretative rigor, the study systematically codes data by incorporating grounded theory and thematic analysis. The results highlight various barriers hindering the growth of creative entrepreneurship in Pakistan, including the sector's informality, policy fragmentation, insufficient institutional-level support mechanisms, an obsolete curriculum, and gender exclusion. Moreover, these results reveal how these barriers act. Academic reports on theory-practice gaps; entrepreneurs report a lack of formal incubators, legal strategies, and capital. Government officials admit to fewer interactions in the sector and in government, and to insufficient inter-departmental collaboration. The theoretical contribution of the study is to contextualize the model for better collaboration in Pakistan's creative sector, and the practical contribution is to recommend synergistic reforms through the creation of co-designed curriculum reform units, innovation liaison offices, gender inclusion councils, and creative incubators. Recognizing institutional voids and the consequences ascribed gaps, the study provides ways to re-adjust the local institutional space to promote inclusive, deepened THM ecosystems for the advancement of innovation, equity, and sustainable creative entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Creative Economy, Creative Entrepreneurs, Creative Industries, Contextual Triple Helix Model, Triangular Synergy.

Introduction

The creative economy, which merges invention, cultural production, and entrepreneurial activity, has emerged as an innovative segment in the global growth debate over the last decade. It implies human ingenuity, intellectual property (Ochoa & Ramírez, 2018; Wanga et al., 2024), and cultural capital, including audiovisual media, digital content, fashion design, and performing arts (UNCTAD, 2010; Suciu et al., 2018; Snowball et al., 2021; UNCTAD, 2023), to generate a wider range of knowledge-based activities, including social and economic values. To achieve this, one

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must be a creative entrepreneur, combining artistic vision and business acumen to turn concepts into consumer goods (Varotsis, 2022). Thus, in the pursuit of creating economic opportunity and social impact, creative entrepreneurs are finding their way into unregulated marketplaces, fragmented rules, and volatile demand, which serve as drivers of innovation (Gouvea et al., 2020; Bujor & Avasilcai, 2014).

Despite the global recognition as a driver of economic growth and development, the creative industry of Pakistan remains extremely underdeveloped owing to institutional incoherence, outdated learning practices, and the absence of public-private collaboration (Klein & Spychalska-Wojtkiewicz, 2020; Ullah & Asghar, 2024; Ullah et al., 2023; Tu, 2024; Bhutto & Lohana, 2018). Since Pakistan has a diverse cultural tradition and a vibrant pool of creative talent, the transition of this talent into measurable entrepreneurial ventures has been hindered by inadequate infrastructure for innovation, organized support networks, and appropriate enabling policies (Khan & Khan, 2020). Creative firms frequently have limited access to funding, mentoring, and innovation ecosystems due to their unstructured nature and separation from policy networks and academic knowledge systems. The study addresses the gaps by contextualizing the Triple Helix model (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Ranga & Etzkowitz, 2013) to Pakistan's creative industries, where its application is scarce (Wanga et al., 2024).

The rationale for the study lies in contextualizing the Triple Helix model to Pakistan's institutional settings characterized by gender exclusion and informality, which serves as the justification for this study. This research makes three contributions. First, it proposes a multi-stakeholder, qualitative application of the Triple Helix Model to Pakistan's creative and cultural industries - a sector where applications of THM are less well documented (Tu, 2024; Puangpronpitag, 2019; Klein & Spychalska-Wojtkiewicz, 2020). Second, it proposes a Contextualized Triple Helix (CTH) framework that adapts the 'classic' THM modalities (incubators, liaison offices) to the realities of informality, policy silos, and gendered exclusion that characterize Pakistan's institutional setting. Third, it operates gender-sensitive institutional nodes (gender equity councils, IP/start-up clinics) to promote CCIs. These contributions respond to calls to extend THM beyond high-tech, Global-North cases (Ranga & Etzkowitz, 2013; Malisiova & Kostopoulou, 2024; Wanga, Hearn, Mathews, & Hou, 2024) and to establish a gendered perspective on innovation (Schiebinger, 2014).

The triple helix model (THM) has become one of the most widely used models for innovation in recent years, but there are still many gaps in its use worldwide. THM research primarily focuses on the high-tech sectors of developed economies, where the roles of institutions are clear, with formalized collaboration practices and mechanisms that are concretely established (Ranga & Etzkowitz, 2013; Malisiova & Kostopoulou, 2024; Paramita et al., 2012). As a result, the triple helix literature assumes that three helices/actors are operating in a coherent way. Moreover, their policies align with one another, and gender-neutral participation is encouraged within those helices. These assumptions are still not incorporated in the creative economies of developing countries of the Global South, especially in Pakistan. Researchers who focus on creating entrepreneurial ventures within creative industries have mainly concentrated their studies on the informality of these industries; the nature of cultural work within the industries; and the precarity that entrepreneurs face within the industries, without comprehensively addressing how the cultural production and institutional collaboration within these industries constitute a single holistic innovation system. In addition, researchers have identified that, in Pakistan, the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) are among the least researched areas of potential development; and that the CCIs' economic development is hindered because of the lack of linkages between Research & Development (R&D) and government policies that relate to CCIs (Siddiqa, 2022).

Furthermore, while there does not exist any empirical evidence to illustrate any occurrences of Triple Helix processes or dynamics within the CCI's of Pakistan, this lack of research/empirical data is compounded by ongoing neglect by government policy; persistent forms of informality; and vicious forms of gendered exclusion, which each negatively affect the entrepreneurial outcomes of women and men alike. If we take a closer look at THM's limitations in describing or interpreting innovation outside the West, several important areas need greater clarity about how THM applies to non-Western, creative, and gendered contexts of innovation. This study fills these gaps by using the lens of THM to understand institutional fragmentation across Pakistan's creative sector, and by offering a Contextualized Triple Helix (CTH) framework that integrates informality and gender inclusion. The research is framed by a primary question: How can a collaborative mechanism facilitate the development of creative entrepreneurial ecosystems in Pakistan? To answer this question, the present study pursues two sub-questions. First, this study investigates the structural challenges across the three helices of academia, industry, and government in the creative sectors. Secondly, the study examines the institutional changes needed to build a synergistic and inclusive innovation ecosystem, with Pakistan's creative entrepreneurship landscape in mind.

Literature Review

In contemporary times, the creative economy has been a major center of innovation in cultural production and economic development. It includes cultural and creative industries (CCIs), which are knowledge-driven businesses. Intellectual property (IP) and artistic production add discrete value in the economy and society (UNCTAD, 2023). It helps in identity creation, giving it global recognition as a cultural diplomacy tool and making it not only an economic engine (Sica, Palazzo, Micozzi, & Ferri, 2024) but a soft power resource (Mbira, 2024; Sani & Fatima, 2024). Furthermore, the sector that turns creative input into marketable products and services is referred to as the creative industries (Henry & Bruin, 2011; Peris-Ortiz et al., 2018). Additionally, the ways in which business insights are combined with artistic vision to create long-lasting businesses in the creative sector are referred to as creative entrepreneurship (Gouvea et al., 2020; Comunian, 2010). Beyond cultural expressions, this type of entrepreneurship generates economic value through job creation (Judijanto et al., 2024), attracting investments, and expanding the supply chain. Despite international recognition of the potential of the creative economy, academic research continues to keep culture and economics in separate spheres. This points to the absence of policies; as a result, creative ventures often remain unsupported by institutions.

Entrepreneurs working within creative industries set themselves apart from those in other industries by leveraging their specialized skills and originality to turn new ideas into profitable products (Gouvea et al., 2020; Bujor & Avasilcai, 2014). According to Rodhiah and Hidayah (2021), creative entrepreneurs operate within an informal market structure that offers minimal institutional support and operates within a heavily regulated environment. They are expected to be the primary drivers of urban renewal, social innovation, and development at all levels. Nonetheless, in the absence of tailored, bespoke, strategic mentoring or sector-specific support systems, their impact is likely to be limited and unsustainable. As Khan and Ahmad (2020) note, Creative industries continue to experience substantial institutional impediments to supporting creative businesses in developing nations, such as Pakistan. These include disjointed public policy, as said by Alam et al. (2024); obsolete educational curriculum; traditional informal practices in businesses; and limited or no innovation infrastructure gaps altogether, which create systemic challenges that prevent collaboration to build strong innovation ecosystems that support creative entrepreneurship and development of companies (Ullah & Asghar, 2024). Since no institution takes

ownership of the expansion of the creative sector, this fragmented environment frequently leads to policy paralysis. Similar institutional impediments are observed in nations such as Nigeria and Indonesia, which experience weak regulatory systems and University-Industry synergies that hinder the diffusion of innovation across creative industries (Oyeyinka, 2017; Rosyad et al., 2021). CCIs are highly segmented, with heterogeneous subsectors that differ in terms of incentives, goal lines, and approaches to creativity. Many sectors operate on different bases; for example, the craft sector comprises SMEs (small and medium enterprises), while the media sector involves high levels of technology and investment (Kuttim et al., 2011). Moreover, the sector is dominated by small enterprises, which comprise 90% of businesses (Barker, 2018). Additionally, CCI is divided into creative service providers and creative content providers (HKU, 2010; Nuccio & Mogno, 2023). Globally, SMEs in CCIs are embedded in local contexts and benefit from local knowledge transfer (Ochoa & Ramírez, 2018). Creativity has emerged as a key tool for economic and innovation development, as innovation within CCIs depends on the creation of value (Snowball et al., 2021). Furthermore, in CCIs, creativity, entrepreneurial motivation, and attitude are required for human capital (UNIDO, 2010). Incubators, labs, and co-working spaces are examples of local ecosystems that serve as essential bridges for formalizing and scaling creative endeavors (Garcia & Tuesta, 2025). The United Kingdom is an example of the need for a structured framework for the growth of this sector (Benzoni et al., 2014).

Gendered leadership and excellence in engagement in creative economies are indispensable topics, yet they are commonly overlooked in the literature on creative entrepreneurship. Major challenges encountered by entrepreneurs, by gender, include leadership, ownership of intellectual property, access to funding, and gaining recognition in high-value markets, which create structural barriers to women's employment prospects in the creative economy (Rouse, 2025; Gill, 2014). Women's informal work structures, gendered gatekeeping, and the diminished value of creative work, which has historically been stigmatized as women's work, typically exacerbate these asymmetries (Conor, Gill, & Taylor, 2015). Accordingly, an application of the Triple Helix Model (THM) to creative entrepreneurship must take account of such gendered asymmetries. Gender-sensitive THM frameworks are critical because they can redefine institutional relationships, namely industry, government, and university relationships, to create balanced pipelines for female-owned creative enterprises and ensure that innovation systems do not perpetuate existing inequalities (Calás et al., 2009; Schiebinger & Schraudner, 2011; Lindberg et al., 2012). Despite its theoretical promise, there remains a lack of research on operationalizing gender-equitable THM in academic and policy implementation strategies, particularly in Global South contexts where institutional neglect and gendered informal economies intersect (Henry & Bruin, 2011).

The current study employs the Triple Helix framework to understand collaboration and interaction among academia, creative industries, and government in the development of the innovation and entrepreneurial landscape (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Garcia & Tuesta, 2025). Universities are increasingly and actively participating in the creation and commercialization of new knowledge and technology (Rippa & Secundo, 2018; Garcia & Tuesta, 2025). However, in weak or unstructured innovation systems, these assumptions may not always hold true. Its linear application usually assumes that institutions are operational and have a high absorption capacity (Colapinto & Porlezza, 2011; Haller et al., 2025). The paradigm finds little application in the cultural and creative sectors, especially in developing nations, where institutional synergy remains fragile or inconsistent (UNCTAD, 2022; Malisiova & Kostopoulou, 2024). Particularly in the Global South, creative businesses need more flexible, culturally grounded models than high-tech industries, where THM is linear and institutionalized. For example, pilot initiatives in Ghana's

creative hubs illustrate how bottom-up experimentation can produce adaptive THM configurations, and despite policy gaps, cross-sectoral knowledge mobilization is demonstrated by Indonesia's university-based creative labs (Malisiova & Kostopoulou, 2024; Sanda et al., 2024).
The configuration of THM in Pakistan is still considered to be at a statist stage, as it is mostly dominated by the government. These sectors operate in the absence of sector-specific incubators or trust-based governance, and there is a lack of intermediary frameworks and aligned curricula that reflect market realities (Bhutto & Lohana, 2018; Ullah & Asghar, 2024). Creative firms are often relegated to the informal sector and, as a result, are excluded from policy and academic networks, which diminishes their legitimacy (Yang, 2024). In this context, there is a need for more localized and inclusive THM adaptation that integrates and fosters a more inclusive cultural context, innovation, and gender equity in Pakistan's creative entrepreneurship. The essence of current THM literature primarily concerns high-tech industries and developed economies. There is no study of government-academia-industry partnerships in the creative economy of Pakistan. CCIs are mostly dispersed, but with very high potential for sustainable development if supported by cooperative formats and gender-sensitive frameworks. To fill this gap, this study presents a Contextualized Triple Helix (CTH) model for CCIs in Pakistan that integrates gender inclusion and informality into innovation processes.

Methodology

To investigate institutional fragmentations to creative entrepreneurship in Pakistan through the lens of the Triple Helix model, the study employed a qualitative research design. This research design best suited the research questions to address the under-theorized and context-specific nature of creative entrepreneurship, as it is embedded in cultural, social (Gill & Pratt, 2008), and institutional dynamics, and a quantitative approach would not be able to capture it accordingly (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative methods enable researchers to closely examine social phenomena in natural settings, making them well-suited for uncovering layered synergies among industry, academia, and government. The targeted population comprises three institutional domains of the Triple Helix Model: academic experts, the creative industry, government officials in relevant ministries, and organizations working in Pakistan's creative sectors. In this study, Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure the desired sample, as the study requires participants with expertise and involvement in Pakistan’s creative industries. The sampling focused on four major creative cities in Pakistan for cultural and creative industries, i.e., Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad/Rawalpindi, and Multan (Taylor et al., 2014; Nordicity & Council, 2016). Furthermore, the potential respondents were reached through the Snowball sampling technique in niche or informal sectors due to the non-availability of a sampling frame.
A total of 34 semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted. The sample size was determined by thematic saturation, as no new insights emerged from additional data after the 29th interview. The size is sufficient for the qualitative research design, balancing diversity across three institutions; it also ensures depth for interpretive analysis. Participants were a good mix of genders, professional occupations, and institutional affiliations within the creative industry, ensuring diverse perspectives. Data were collected between April 2022 and March 2025. Depending on the respondent's availability and pandemic conditions, interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes and were conducted either in person or online. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed with participants' consent. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and provided voluntary consent prior to participation.

A semi-structured interview guide was developed as part of the research instrument to explore the helices. In the research, validity and reliability of instruments and data are addressed through triangulation and inter-coder strategies. The instrument's questions were adapted from previous studies. To ensure content validity, expert feedback was collected and incorporated. The data analysis was conducted through open coding to generate major concepts; axial coding to investigate the interconnectedness among codes; and selective coding to create core themes aligned with the institutional domains of THM. The unit of analysis was the individual participant. The participants and the researcher co-created meaning through a constructive research approach. In this way, the study remained associated with participants' language. This method enabled the identification of trends, leading to a contextualized, fact-based examination of how THM could be used to encourage creative entrepreneurship in Pakistan.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Interview Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Sectoral Affiliation	Academia	14	41.2
	Creative Entrepreneurship	14	41.2
	Government	6	17.6
Gender (Creative Sector only)	Female	9	64.3
	Male	5	35.7
Role Type	Founders/CEOs (Creative Sector)	14	100.0
	Assistant Professors / Department Heads (Academia)	14	100.0
	Government Representatives (Ministries)	6	100.0
Institutional Affiliation	NUST, NCA, Indus Valley, University of Karachi, SZABITS Karachi, Information Technology University (Academia)	14	—
	Ministries of Education, Industries, IPC (Govt.)	6	—
Interview Mode	Zoom / Telephone	24	70.6
	Email / Skype / Google Meet / In-person	10	29.4

Note: (N = 34) Percentages for demographics are based on the creative entrepreneur subgroup (n = 14). All respondents in each sector held the designated roles. IPC = Inter-Provincial Coordination.

Results and Discussion

Using thematic analysis, this section examines the systematic barriers preventing interactions and synergy across Triple Helix domain, academia, industry and government. It also presents the major results derived from qualitative in-depth interviews with 34 individuals from the academic, governmental, and creative industry sectors. The themes were organized in the preview of triple helix model highlighting the interrelations among the three institutional spheres and their implications for creative entrepreneurship which impedes innovation and entrepreneurial development. Furthermore, according to the respondents' demographics, of the thirty-four (34) participants, fourteen (14) were academicians, fourteen (14) were creative entrepreneurs, and six

(6) were government officials. The interviews were held in-person, over Zoom, via telephone, and through email. The diverse data collection method ensures accessibility and comfortability of respondents across professional sectors.

Disarticulated Entrepreneurial Ecosystems and Informality

A persistent pattern among creative entrepreneurs reveals misalignment and disarticulation among Pakistan's creative entrepreneurial ecosystem, which is lack of platforms for market access and fundings, cross-sector partnership, government recognition and Intellectually Property (IP) protection support. Respondents often stress the negligence of the system, and absence of certified platforms to recognize or promote their work. As one of the respondents from creative domain noted:

Humein har cheez khud build karni parti hai, na funding milti hai na distribution ka system. Sarkar ko lagta hai yeh sirf shauq hai. (We have to build everything ourselves, with no funding, no distribution system. The state sees this as a hobby.)

Another respondent said:

Hum sirf survive kar rahe hain, grow nahe kar sakte. (No IP registration, no platform to scale. We are just surviving without IP support; growth is not possible.)

This ongoing neglect describes why innovative entrepreneurs continue to operate in 'survival' mode rather than scaling. The absence of Intellectual property protection system (IP) and systematic absence of industry associations illustrate the systemic devaluation of cultural products discouraging much needed long-term investment. These narratives reflect what Snowball et al (2021) described as structural exclusion of cultural artefact within the realm of economic development. The same phenomenon has been observed in the other emerging economies; the unstructured and often unpredictable landscape of creative entrepreneurship in Pakistan is becoming more commonplace (Gouvea et al., 2020). In Pakistan, this form of institutional neglect is compounded by a weak institutional support, which renders creative entrepreneurs exposed to sector's informality. In Pakistan, this form of institutional neglect is compounded by a lack of institutional support, which renders creative entrepreneurs exposed to the informality of the sector. In the absence of any formal system to support to sustain protection and growth, Varotsis (2022) argues, Pakistan creative entrepreneurs remain, at best, unacknowledged to the contours of the national innovation strategy. They continue to operate within the frameworks of innovation which Varotsis (2022) deems as unacknowledged within the formal innovation system.

Outdated Curricula and Weak Academia-Industry Links

Academic participants stress the mislinkage of academia and industry as industry demands and needs of specific skills which points towards curriculum reform and practical learning implication in education programs. As one of the academic respondents put it, "it has been ten years since we last updated our syllabus." Few respondents said:

Theory tou bohat parhate hain, lekin koi lab ya bridge nahi jahan students apni ideas ko business bana sakein. (We teach a lot of theory, but there's no lab or bridge where students can turn ideas into businesses.)

Industry ko ready-made banda chaye hota hai, hum universities sy run-of-the-mill graduates de rahe hain. (The industry wants job-ready people; we produce generic graduates.)

The findings reveals academic holes similar to what Antonova and Pchelintsev (2023) and Moreno-Casas, (2024) claim as institutional lock-in, where the system is reluctant to engage with market realisms due to policy limitations. Furthermore, educational programs in creative fields

lack industry partnerships, absence of labs, and incubators, as persistent patterns in Global south. Universities are rewarded for creating profit, in this case publications, and not entrepreneurs. This explains why there is 'theory without practice' and why collaboration is not incentivized and why graduates are unprepared for industry. Additionally, one of the respondents confirms structural barriers:

Collaboration ka koi reward nahi hai. Promotion aur funding sab papers pe depend on karti hai. (There's no reward for collaboration. Promotions and funding depend only on papers.)

Educational stratum is one of the major reasons hindering transdisciplinary innovation essential to creative entrepreneurship (Ullah & Asghar, 2024). This stratification restricts academia to knowledge provision rather than creative co-creation, which diminishes academia's role as innovation hub in THM (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). To function as entrepreneurial innovation hub, higher education institutions need structural reforms by incorporating entrepreneurial training into curriculum and provision research through industry-connected grants and incubators

Transactional Engagement, Policy segregation, and Limited Outreach

Fragmentation persists in a significant manner. Government representatives acknowledge the potential of creative economy in economic development but emphasizing the lack of inter-ministerial synchronization. One respondent put it as: "We see the value, but we work in silos. There is no comprehensive national strategy." This aligns with the results of research conducted by Alam et al. (2024), asserting that the major deterrent toward THM innovative ecosystem is policy fragmentations and policy silos.

In addition to this, respondents emphasize regulatory misperception among ministries and acknowledge the lack of long-term planning for creative sectors. One such quote is: *Creative industry kabhi culture mein daal dete hain, kabhi commerce mein, Koi ek zimmedari nahi lena chahta.* (Sometimes the creative industry is put under culture, sometimes commerce. No one wants to take responsibility.). Without a central leading institution, initiatives are fragmented, dispersed and lack central ownership. This is why policies are still segmented, as creative industries sit uncomfortably between ministerial departments.

Another respondent from academia added: *Meetings hoti hain par creative log nahi hote, sara focus business pe hota hai.* (Meetings happen, but no creative voices are included focus is only on business.). Some respondents lamented about the project based funding and short termism culture in creative sector, as one of the officials said: *Projects aik saal ke hotay hain, uske baad sab khatam.* (Projects last one year, then everything ends). In addition to highlighting the lack of strategic policy coherence (Oyeyinka, 2017; UNCTAD, 2023), this statement also criticizes the fragmented and ad hoc nature of Pakistan's CCI management (Bhutto & Lohana, 2018). These orientations of government towards creative projects hinder the implications of THM led innovation environment, halting the culture of scalability and consistency in creative entrepreneurship. The collaboration between government representatives and creative enterprises is often "event-based" or "project-specific" rather than policy-inbuilt, leaving entrepreneurs estrange from formal engagements in regulations, like intellectual property protection, registration, and taxation. Isolated government initiatives need to be evolved into a system having appropriate policy framework with dedicated units for innovation liaison to preserve ties for THM.

Gendered Barriers to Participation

The domain of gendered exclusion in all three institutional actors of society is the major finding. Women work from their homes and excluded informal networks, making them invisible in any of the high-value sectors of a creative economy. Academicians emphasize gender neutral courses and training, while government officials also confirmed that recent policies are not inclusive of gender equity in entrepreneurship.

Respondents voiced these barriers openly: If you're a woman, investors assume it's just a hobby. Another respondent said: There is no space for women creatives in policy meetings—zero visibility. The absence of gender responsive policy actively sustains women's oppression, meaning further erasure or lack of visibility. Women entrepreneurs are further concealed in informal and undervalued positions. One of the respondents summarized as: Gender barriers exist, but no one in government wants to acknowledge them.

It would also confirm Gill (2014) and Schiebinger and Schraudner (2011), who claim that implementation of gender-sensitive THM are critical to interruption in gender disparities. THM partnerships may unintentionally uphold conventional values rather than challenge them in the absence of deliberate gender-responsive policies. Gender-specific funding initiatives, inclusive curricula, and secure innovation spaces for female entrepreneurs are essential components of any THM-enhanced plan.

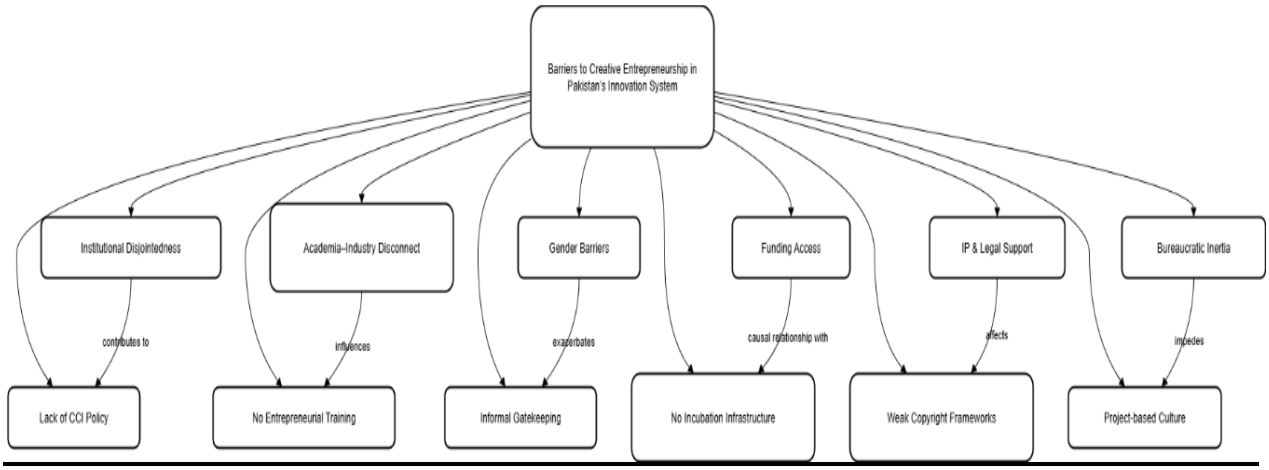
A summary of these institutional dysfunctions and their representative quotes is presented in Table 1 and the cumulative effect on Pakistan's creative business ecosystem is depicted Visually in Figure 1, which shows these interconnected impediments.

Table 2: Sub-Theme Matrix of Institutional Barriers across Triple Helix Sectors

Theme	Sub-Theme	Sample Quote (Original + Translation)	Helix
Institutional Disjointedness	Lack of CCI Policy	"Creative industry kabhi culture mein daal dete hain…" / "Creative industries fall between ministries."	Government
Academia–Industry Disconnect	No entrepreneurial training	"Theory tou bohat parhate hain, lekin koi business bridge nahi." / "We teach a lot of theory but no business link."	Academia
Gender Barriers	Informal Gatekeeping	"Aurat ho tou investors nahi sunte." / "If you're a woman, investors ignore you."	Industry
Funding Access	No Incubation Infrastructure	"Infrastructure ya funding nahi jo scale-up mein help kare." / "No support structure to scale ideas."	Industry
IP & Legal Support	Weak Copyright Frameworks	"Copyright ka system koi samajhta hi nahi." / "Even lawyers are confused about IP rights."	Industry
Bureaucratic Inertia	Project-based Culture	"Projects aik saal ke hotay hain, phir sab bhool jate hain." / "Projects run one year, then disappear."	Government

Note: Themes and demonstrative quotations from Interviews with members of the government, academic institutions, and creative businesses.

Figure 1: Barriers to Creative Entrepreneurship in Pakistan's innovation system



Note: Created by the Author based on Interviews Data and Thematic Coding

Toward a Synergistic THM for Creative Entrepreneurship in Pakistan

This study indicates that the creative industries in Pakistan are currently utilizing the Triple Helix Model (THM). Three characteristics define it: institutional disarray, cultural disconnections, and policy incoherence. These factors fragment Pakistan's innovative landscape limiting the sectors' potential.

A primary pathway is Brokage Platform that can act as intermediaries among three helices. Industry respondents frequently brought up the absence of planned opportunities for communication, networking, and collaborative growth. As one of the entrepreneurs put it as "There's no platform where I can bump into someone from a university or government to talk about financing or scale-up" (T3). To promote multisectoral collaboration and joint opportunity ventures, these platforms must serve as a rich channel connecting individuals, information, and policy. According to Klein & Spychalska-Wojtkiewicz (2020), these platforms can provide co-working spaces, idea incubation procedures, or cross-sector projects that facilitate knowledge sharing and policy feedback loops.

A second reform required is the embedding of curriculum reform units within higher education institutions. Researchers found that the creative arts institutions did not adequately prepare students for entrepreneurship: *Theory tou bohat parhate hain, lekin koi lab ya bridge nahi jahan students apni ideas ko business bana sakein* (We are teaching creative theory but not training for the business side) (T18). Both industry and academic participants agreed on practical based entrepreneurial training is the need of the hour through the collaboration of industry. This is consistent with the entrepreneurial university model (Etzkowitz et al., 2000), where educational programs balance commercial viability and creative autonomy. Through this reform, universities can transform into an entrepreneurial role to innovation and economic growth instead of merely passive repositories of knowledge.

Third, one official frequently complained about the fragmentation of regional government: "Sometimes a proposal dies because we don't know which ministry should handle it" (T34). This call for innovation liaison units in ministries that actively facilitate inter-agency collaboration and reconciling national economic plans with HEI and creative sector objectives. According to Ranga and Etzkowitz (2013), these offices would be able to

streamline application processes, combine assistance programs, and link governmental initiatives to innovation in creative industries.

Finally, a major issue was institutionalizing gender discrimination. Female respondents report frequently point towards informal gatekeeping and a lack of confidence among investors. The statement "As a woman in design, investors assume it's just a hobby" (T10) exemplifies how identity-based presumptions can stifle the creative prospect. Research participants describe exclusion culture within the organizations of decision maker and funders, which resulted in the neglect and absence of recognition of innovation pursuits by women. Promotion of active engagement of women in funding, policy and training, development as well as the advocacy of equitable multi-stakeholder representation, would support the formation of helix structure committees. According to Schiebinger & Schraudner (2011) inclusion of gender sensitive implication tools in initiative framework is crucial to foster inclusive innovation spaces.

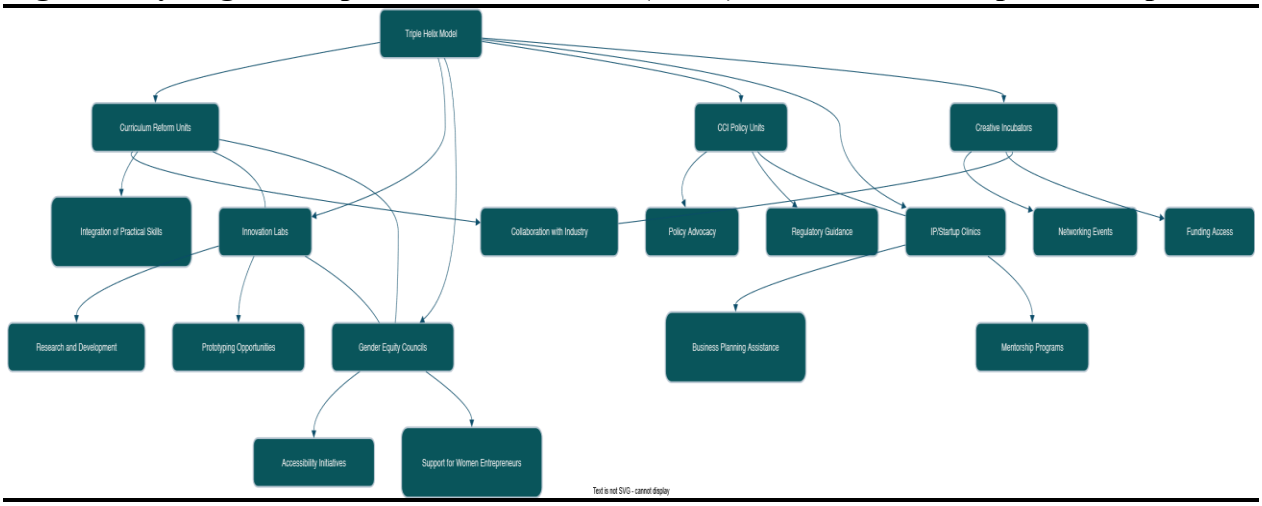
To align THM contextually to Pakistan's innovation ecosystem and convert it into a prosperous and co-evolving ecosystem, this study proposes four major strategic interventions of the explicitly gendered innovation governance councils, curriculum reform units, brokerage platforms, and liaison offices. Incorporating these interventions into current system helps in creating a comprehensive and cohesive policy framework approach that will have the potential to dismantle institutional silos and foster collaborative innovation. The innovation of the proposed synergy nodes is not in the fact that they are new institutions, but rather their combinations and co-designing intent for the creative economy of Pakistan, for example, brokerages that emphasize integration of formal and informal sectors, IP clinics integrated with academic incubators, and cross-ministries liaison offices for innovation aligned with the complexities of provincial governance (Malisiova & Kostopoulou, 2024; Sanda et al., 2024; Rosyadi et al., 2021; Bhutto & Lohana, 2018; Ranga & Etzkowitz, 2013). The synergy channels that have been delineated (as seen in Figure 4.2) are feasible ports of access for institutional coordination, which may open new doors for equitable and sustainable creative entrepreneurship in Pakistan.

Table 3: Synergy Nodes and their Functions

Proposed Node	Function
Curriculum Reform Units	Joint university–industry–policy working groups to design market-relevant programs
Innovation Labs	Physical/virtual hubs for idea testing, IP training, and incubation
Gender Equity Councils	Platforms to co-design gender-sensitive innovation and entrepreneurial policy
CCI Policy Units	Central bodies coordinating CCI development across ministries
IP/Startup Clinics	Legal-aid centers embedded in universities for creative entrepreneurs
Creative Incubators	Co-funded by state/industry, focused on long-term creative enterprise growth

Note: The institutional synergy nodes suggested for boosting creative entrepreneurship within the context of the Triple Helix Model are shown in this table.

Figure 2: Synergistic Triple Helix Framework (THM) for Creative Entrepreneurship



Note: An updated THM framework with suggested synergy nodes to improve cooperation between actors in the creative industry, government, and academia is depicted in the image. For inclusive innovation ecosystems, the approach places a strong emphasis on integration points including curriculum reform, gender equity, and policy coordination.

Conclusion

To investigate institutional barriers impeding the growth of the creative entrepreneurial landscape in Pakistan through the Triple Helix lens, understanding how academia, industry, and government intersect or fail to intersect in creative sectors. The study is directed towards a sternly fragmented innovation landscape based on the data collected from 34 participants from triple helix spheres, namely academia, industry, and government. The findings indicate a misaligned innovation ecosystem, outdated pedagogies, a dispersed policy structure, unregulated market institutions, and the absence of inter-sectoral synchronization. Furthermore, a dearth of resources hinders this sector from reaching its full innovative potential. The first significant finding indicates fragmented entrepreneurial ecosystems without effective intellectual property (IP) protections, suitable regulatory and infrastructural frameworks, and institutional financing channels. Unstable conditions and informal frameworks impede entrepreneurs' ability to expand and scale sustainably. Second, there was a lack of cooperation between universities and industry, accompanied by rigid, stagnant curricula. To investigate institutional barriers impeding the growth of the creative entrepreneurial landscape in Pakistan through the Triple Helix lens, it is necessary to understand how academia, industry, and government intersect or fail to intersect in creative sectors. Third, segmented, short-term, and transactional policy frameworks predominate in the landscape. Without ongoing dialogues, cross-cutting collaboration, or strategic frameworks, each ministry operates independently and engages with academics or industry. Finally, gender discrepancies are found on all fronts, from the contributions made by women to official innovation initiatives to their continuous exclusion from funding and leadership roles. The absence of emerging, informal, and asymmetrically unequal contexts that inform innovation poses a challenge to the THM; therefore, the model further supports the alternative of a Contextualized Triple Helix (CTH) by incorporating four critical synergy nodes that would better position creative entrepreneurship within Pakistan’s institution. This study presents an adaptation of the THM into a hybrid, synergistic structure better suited to Pakistan's socioeconomic environment to frame solutions for these issues. The establishment of brokerage platforms to promote cross-sector collaboration, curriculum reform

units that integrate entrepreneurship education in universities and creative domains, innovation liaison offices to streamline policy deployment within creative sectors, launch IP clinics to offer low-cost and free support for IP registrations, protections, and scale-up strategies in the creative sector, and gender equity councils to institutionalize inclusive innovation are some of the main recommendations. These measures tactically respond to the fragmented structure of Pakistan's innovation ecosystem while satisfying the THM's need to evolve the roles of different institutions. HEIs provide a pathway to diversify involvement, adopt innovative teaching approaches, and engage in academic-industry interactions, while curriculum reform and gender equity mechanisms, along with the Commerce Education and Culture ministries, receive tools to eliminate interministerial silos through innovation and brokerage platforms. These strategies re-contextualize THM in low-resource, high-creativity settings by combining policy design with bottom-up institutional transformation. transformation.

Future Recommendations

Future research should examine regional creative clusters and longer-term impacts of institutional reform. Mixed-methods research may be useful for further qualitative impact assessment. Further pilot and evaluation studies are required for innovation centers, incubators, and university-industry linkages in CCIs, in the view of THM. Comparative studies in South Asia and other Global South contexts may enable knowledge transference and identify shared structural features. Conditions for THM-based infrastructure would need to be established based on funding sources, legal frameworks, and inter-ministerial cooperation to support sustainable creative entrepreneurship and innovation in the arts.

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