

Exploring the Role of Women in Entrepreneurship: An Analysis of the Motivations and Challenges of Female Entrepreneurs in Greater Malang

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Abstract

This study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of female entrepreneurs in Greater Malang, focusing on their motivations for starting a business and the challenges they face in sustaining it. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with women business owners and analysed through three stages: first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions. The results reveal five main motivational dimensions: altruism, cultural heritage, economic orientation, pleasure, and self-empowerment. On the other hand, challenges are classified into internal and external categories, including work-life balance, lack of technical skills, health concerns, limited funding, role conflict, and lack of public recognition. This research highlights the unique lived experiences of women entrepreneurs, particularly the way they navigate social expectations and resource limitations while pursuing business sustainability. The findings contribute to the broader understanding of women's entrepreneurship and provide insights for supportive policy development.

Keywords: women entrepreneurship, motivation, challenges, qualitative research, Gioia method

JEL Classification: J10, L26, M13

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Introduction

Globalization has opened up new opportunities for women, thereby promoting the feminization of employment through global production networks and flexible work arrangements (Ullah et al., 2023). This is supported by findings that show globalization and its key components are associated with increased participation of women in the economically active labor force (Roll et al., 2024). Moreover, women can make a significant contribution to entrepreneurship and economic development by creating new jobs and increasing Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with a positive impact on reducing poverty and social exclusion (Cardella et al. 2020). Thus, globalization has increased women's access to economic opportunities.

The global momentum of women's rising economic participation, driven by globalization and growing gender inclusion, is also evident in Indonesia, where greater access to opportunities has enabled women to move beyond traditional roles as consumers or employees and increasingly take on active roles as entrepreneurs and business owners. The growing awareness and discussions about gender equality and inclusion are also opening up more chances for women to start their own businesses (Rita et al., 2019). Businesses owned by women make a significant contribution to economic growth, both nationally and globally (Agussani, 2020). Given the increasing participation of women in the workforce, it is essential to ensure they are provided with equal opportunities and supportive environments to continue developing and advancing in their career (Rita et al., 2019).

Indonesia, in particular, holds substantial potential driven by its demographic bonus, which presents a window of opportunity between 2020 and 2030 (BPS, 2022). Among the world's 30 largest economies, Indonesia has emerged as one of the fastest-growing, though challenges remain. (The Economist, 2023). By 2050, Indonesia is projected to become the fourth-largest global economy (World Bank, 2017). This economic trajectory presents both opportunities and obstacles, particularly in entrepreneurship, where only 3.4% of the population is engaged in entrepreneurial activities, far below the 12 to 14% needed for a country to achieve developed status (CNBC Indonesia, 2022).

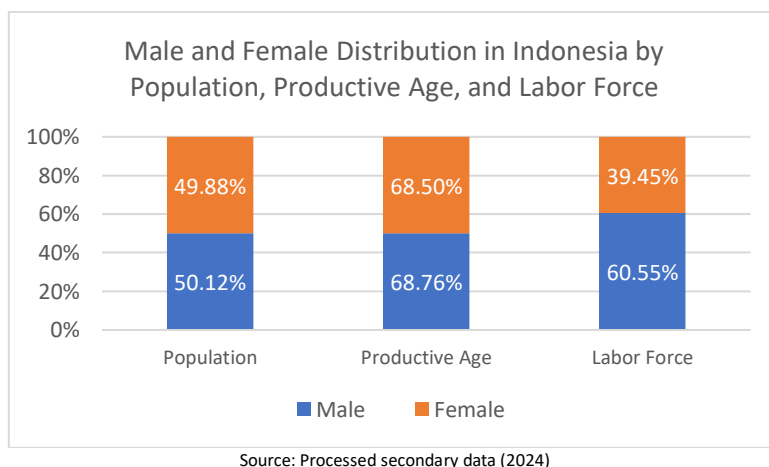


Figure 1. Male and Female Distribution in Indonesia by Population, Productive Age, and Labor Force

Indonesia's population of 282,477,584 people is nearly evenly split between men (50.12%) and women (49.88%) (BPS, 2024b), with 68.5% of women in the productive age group (15–64 years), similar to the 68.76% of the men's group (BPS, 2024e). This demographic shift signals a growing presence of women in the workforce, as evidenced by their 34.44% share of the total labor force (BPS, 2024c). These numbers show that women are now more involved in economic and professional fields, playing an important role in Indonesia's development, especially during the demographic bonus era.

In Indonesia, the level of female participation in entrepreneurship has seen a significant improvement. According to data, around 49% of women in Indonesia have their own businesses (Bayu, 2020). This figure makes Indonesia one of the countries with the highest levels of female entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia. Moreover, women's contribution to the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector has also increased. This shows that women own 53.76% of MSMEs in Indonesia, and 97% of the employees working in these MSMEs are also women (Bank Indonesia, 2021). The contribution of the MSME sector led by women to the economy is substantial, reaching 61%. The success of Indonesian women in contributing to the economy serves as clear evidence that gender equality is not only a matter of fairness but also a valuable investment for Indonesia's economic growth and social progress.

While women's participation in entrepreneurship has increased, the underlying drivers behind their decision to start a business remain less explored, especially in the local context. In building a business, Indonesian women have various reasons, ranging from retirement plans to self-actualization motives Rita et. al., (2019). Furthermore, while they are struggling in build their business, they also carry an altruistic motive. It is found that women are more likely to exhibit altruistic behavior and attitudes, which can serve as a strong motivation to achieve life goals (Xi et al., 2022). Another motivation is related to traditional gender roles, where the imbalance between work and personal life creates barriers for women starting and running businesses. However, it is through these businesses that women find ways to combine their personal lives and work (Bullough et al., 2022). Thus, in addition to seeking personal success, many women are driven by the desire to make a positive contribution to society and improve conditions for other women.

Women entrepreneurs continue to face significant challenges that hinder their business growth and sustainability, despite diverse motivations behind their ventures. One of these challenges is work-life balance, due to traditional gender roles that burden women with the responsibility of managing both family and business (Cardella et al., 2020). Another challenge is the lack of technical capability and difficulty in accessing funding, as many women do not have access to knowledge and face limited financial resources (Arvind & Ranjith, 2023). The lack of family support is also a challenge, especially for women who do not receive encouragement from their partner or other relatives (Ahmetaj et al., 2023), as it may undermine their emotional well-being and reduce their confidence in managing both business and domestic responsibilities. The next challenge is the low level of public recognition, as society often undermines women's abilities as professional entrepreneurs. This can hinder them from building networks and gaining the support they need for their businesses (Shastri et al., 2019) Thus, due to these challenges, women require more effort than men in build and sustain a business.

Greater Malang has a female productive-age population of 344,983, while the male productive-age population is 335,684 (BPS, 2024d). This indicates that women make up a larger proportion. Additionally, Greater Malang has experienced a steady increase in the Gender Empowerment Index (GEI) every year, reaching 88,91 (BPS, 2024a) This indicates an increase in women's participation in various sectors, including the economy. With steady growth in the Gender Empowerment Index (GEI), it is hoped that greater support will continue to be given to women's entrepreneurial efforts to continue contributing to inclusive economic growth in Greater Malang.

Although Indonesia has a promising economic potential, the level of entrepreneurial involvement is still far from what is needed to achieve developed country status. Globalization opens up opportunities for women, who are increasingly playing an active role as entrepreneurs and business owners. In Indonesia, there has been a significant increase in women's participation in entrepreneurship in Greater Malang. Given the increasing involvement of women in entrepreneurship and the diverse motivations and challenges they experience, a deeper understanding of their lived experiences is needed. While previous studies have acknowledged the role of women in business,

there remains a gap in capturing their personal drivers and obstacles within specific local contexts. Despite growing interest in women's entrepreneurship, few studies have explored the nuanced, locally grounded motivations and barriers faced by female entrepreneurs in mid-sized urban regions like Greater Malang. For this reason, this study aims to explore two central questions:

1. What motivates women to become entrepreneurs?
2. What challenges do they face in their entrepreneurial journeys?

These questions guide this study aims to explore the motivations and challenges faced by female entrepreneurs in Greater Malang, with the goal of supporting inclusive economic growth. Therefore, the researcher is conducting a study entitled **"Exploring the Role of Women in Entrepreneurship: An Analysis of the Motivations and Challenges of Female Entrepreneurs in Greater Malang."**

1. Literature Review

2.1 Entrepreneurship: Definition and Components

Entrepreneurship is defined as the process of planning, initiating, and managing new business ventures, often starting small but with the potential for growth (Sevilla-Bernardo et al., 2022). It is seen not only as an economic activity but also as a natural phenomenon within the business ecosystem, vital for innovation, income generation, and the creation of new opportunities (Diandra & Azmy, 2020). Entrepreneurial values also play a key role in shaping knowledge, skills, attitudes, and business sustainability (Gearey et al., 2023).

Entrepreneurship is multidimensional, involving innovation, opportunity recognition, creativity, risk management, and responsiveness to the environment. At its core, innovation drives new products, services, or models (Schumpeter, 1934) but its success relies on understanding emerging needs and providing value-driven solutions (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Entrepreneurs must also navigate risk and uncertainty with adaptability (Hisrich & Ramadan, 2017), using effectuation to build ventures from available resources (Sarasvathy, 2008). Moreover, external factors like regulations, infrastructure, and business culture play a crucial role in shaping outcomes (Gartner, 1985).

2.2 Gender and Entrepreneurship

Gender disparities remain persistent in the workforce, as reflected by the higher proportion of women in vulnerable employment (43.3%) compared to men (22.7%) and the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles (Yuliani, 2021). These disparities also extend to the entrepreneurial sector.

Gender differences in motivations for starting or running businesses reflect distinct characteristics between male and female entrepreneurs. Existing literature categorizes female entrepreneurial motivations through the "push" and "pull" framework. Push factors refer to necessities that compel individuals to pursue entrepreneurship, such as job dissatisfaction or economic survival, whereas pull factors involve aspirations or desires, such as autonomy or innovation (Shastri et al., 2019). Studies indicate that men are predominantly motivated by "pull" factors tied to financial opportunities (Bosma et al., 2020; Kirkwood, 2009), while women are more frequently driven by "push" factors, such as balancing family responsibilities or escaping workplace discrimination (Kirkwood, 2009).

In developing countries, women are also motivated by aspirations for autonomy, societal recognition, and self-determination (Modarresi et al., 2016). Research emphasizes that women's decisions to start businesses are rarely influenced by a single factor but rather by a complex interplay of motivations (Marques et al., 2018). Female entrepreneurs contribute not only to job creation but also to economic and social development globally (Bullough et al., 2022; Ahmetaj, Kruja and Hysa, 2023).

2.3 Theories of Motivation and Entrepreneurial Drive

Motivation is a psychological process that starts and maintains actions toward achieving a goal (Cook & Artino, 2016). This definition is reinforced by Simpson and Balsam (2015), who state that motivation is the process that drives individuals to engage in behavior aimed at achieving a goal, and is a fundamental element in all consciously performed actions. Furthermore, motivation can also be understood as a function of the expectation of success and the perceived value of the goal (Urhahne & Wijnia, 2023). From these definitions, motivation is the process that encourages individuals to start and maintain activities in pursuit of specific goals.

Entrepreneurial motivation refers to the drive to establish and manage a business, which can be internally or externally derived (Yuliani, 2021). Key internal motivators include the pursuit of success, financial rewards, autonomy, and self-actualization (Ismail, 2022). Personal factors such as age, gender, education, and family support play a vital role (Lin, 2020). Religious beliefs also help foster trust and social capital within entrepreneurial networks (Ozasir Kacar, 2024).

Character traits further shape entrepreneurial motivation. These include creativity, which fuels innovation (Shastri et al., 2019). Autonomy, which enables decision-making, and self-efficacy build confidence. Social connections and cultural norms often steer women toward entrepreneurship as a flexible career (Panday & Sharma, 2022; Vo et al., 2022). Self-actualization, passion, and altruism also emerge as significant drivers, pushing women to contribute meaningfully to society (Guzman et al., 2020; Solesvik et al., 2019). Additionally, future orientation, including goals like retirement preparation and financial independence, plays a role in shaping their entrepreneurial decisions. (Rita et al., 2019)

External factors, such as the “glass ceiling” effect, push women toward entrepreneurship as an alternative to corporate barriers (Martínez-Fierro & Lechuga Sancho, 2021). National economic conditions, job scarcity, and family business environments also serve as external motivators (Ahmetaj et al., 2023; Kraja & Berberi, 2023).

This study draws on Goal Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 1991) to understand how specific and challenging goals regulate behavior and sustain entrepreneurial drive. As Locke & Latham, (1991) According to this theory, “goals serve as immediate regulators of behavior” by helping people focus, work harder, and keep going when facing obstacles. In the context of women entrepreneurs, this theory helps explain how clearly defined personal or professional goals, such as achieving autonomy, financial stability, or social impact, motivate them to initiate and maintain their business ventures.

2.4 Challenges in Entrepreneurship

Women entrepreneurs face both internal and external challenges. Internal challenges refer to factors originating within the individual, such as limited skills, psychological barriers, and lack of personal capital. External challenges stem from the environment, including inadequate social support and limited access to resources.

A major issue in internal challenge is balancing work and family responsibilities due to traditional gender roles (Cardella et al., 2020). The lack of technical competence and reliance on self-financing due to poor access to capital are also seen as major hurdles (Arvind & Ranjith, 2023). Other internal issues, such as role conflict, health limitations, and aging, reduce their entrepreneurial capacity (Rita, Rabiah and Fahlevi, 2019; Lin, 2020).

Externally, funding remains one of the most significant constraints. Women often face limited access to loans and credit facilities (Rita et al., 2019). Lack of family support, especially from partners, adds

to the strain (Ahmetaj et al., 2023). Societal underestimation of women's abilities creates obstacles to building networks and obtaining professional recognition (Shastri et al., 2019). Consequently, women frequently need to exert more effort than men to start and sustain a business.

2. Data and Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a phenomenological qualitative approach, which aims to explore and describe individuals lived experiences as they perceive and interpret them (Creswell, 2014). Phenomenology is particularly effective for understanding complex social phenomena that require deep insight into personal thoughts, emotions, and experiences (Dovetail, 2023). The phenomenological method involves two key aspects: textural description, which captures objective events and factual experiences, and structural description, which explores how participants subjectively interpret and make meaning of those experiences (Hasbiansyah, 2008).

3.2 Informants and Sampling Technique

The informants in this study were selected based on specific criteria: They are female entrepreneurs residing in Greater Malang who have been operating their businesses for at least five years, consistently demonstrate stable business performance, have earned trust and credibility from their customers and the surrounding business environment, and are willing to share their experiences through in-depth interviews.

The informants were selected from three key sectors: culinary, fashion, and property. Culinary and fashion were chosen because they are among the five largest sectors for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Indonesia (BPS, 2023). These sectors show strong female participation and are crucial in creating jobs and fulfilling consumer needs. The property sector was included to explore women's roles in industries historically dominated by men, which are now experiencing increasing female involvement (Bisnis.com, 2022). The inclusion of diverse sectors allows the research to capture a broad spectrum of motivations, strategies, and constraints faced by women entrepreneurs.

To reach these informants, the study employed a snowball sampling technique, which is commonly used when the target population is difficult to access directly (Naderifar et al., 2017). This technique begins with initial informants who then recommend other qualified participants. The process continues until data saturation is achieved, when no new or relevant information emerges from additional interviews.

Table 1. Demographic and Entrepreneurial Backgrounds of Informants

No	Name	Age	Sector	Education & Background	Business Motivation & Entry	Unique Aspects/Strengths
1	Rieke Fransisca	45	Fashion	D3 Banking	Started during husband's illness; had an early passion for designing clothes.	Runs fashion school, wardrobe rental, and custom design; strong family business background.
2	Indah Puspaningtyas	37	Culinary	High school, some midwifery & psychology training	Self-taught baking; turned hobby into business; grew during the pandemic.	Focus on health-based, allergy-friendly bakery products; strong R&D orientation.
3	Novanita Rahmanita	41	Fashion & Property	Urban Planning Degree	Passion for fashion and real estate; inspired by a sibling entrepreneur.	Strong design sense; combines aesthetics and business strategy
4	Ratna Kusmiyati	43	Culinary	Bachelor's in Biology	Took over family business (3rd gen); no formal culinary background.	Prioritizes product quality; preserves heritage business legacy.
5	Devi Novita	29	Culinary	Master's in Strategic Management (UB)	Passion for cooking; influenced by a family of entrepreneurs.	Uses consulting, designs concepts from scratch, and conducts market research in Jakarta.
6	Desi Remora	31	Fashion	BA in Educational Psychology	Started as a reseller; moved into custom leather shoes with environmental concerns.	Promotes slow fashion; uses plastic-free, natural materials.
7	Ismi Wahid	40	Culinary	Forestry (UGM)	Started cafe with husband; driven by environmental values and community ties.	Operates a green business; 5R practice; local empowerment and sustainability focus

Source: Iffah Nur Kharisma (2025).

3.4 Data Processing Method

In qualitative research, data analysis follows three key stages: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In the first stage, researchers select relevant data, remove unnecessary and redundant information, and code meaningful segments into key concepts. These codes are then grouped into broader categories that reflect patterns or theoretical themes. In the second stage, data is visually organized, such as in tables or charts, to highlight relationships and trends. Finally, in conclusion, researchers interpret the findings to answer research questions and provide deeper insights into the topic.

3. Results and Discussion

The gathered data were examined and interpreted using the three-step analytical approach proposed by (Corley and Gioia, 2004; Gioia et al., 2013) which involves identifying first-order concepts (drawn from the informants' own words), second-order themes (researcher-led interpretation), and aggregate dimensions (higher-level constructs). This process enabled the researcher to maintain a strong connection to the participants' lived experiences while also identifying emerging theoretical patterns. The final data structure visualized in the figure demonstrates how raw interview data were systematically transformed into conceptual themes and overarching categories.

4.1 Motivational Dimensions of Women Entrepreneurship

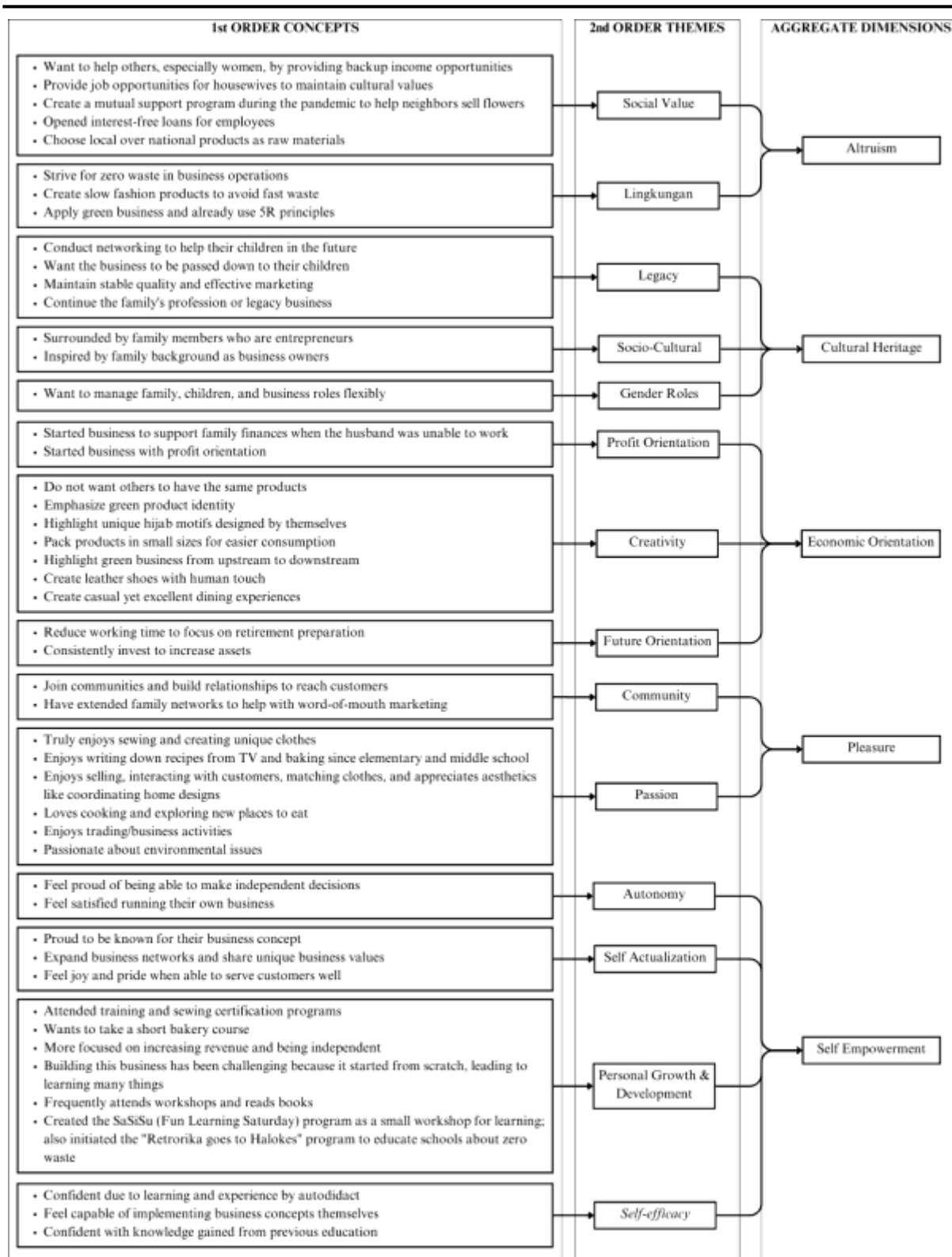
Based on the interviews conducted with the informants, which were subsequently summarized and analyzed, the motivations of women entrepreneurs can be classified into five categories: Altruism, Cultural Heritage, Economic Orientation, Pleasure, and Self-Empowerment.

4.1.1 Altruism: Social and Environmental Contribution

Altruism is an attitude or behavior that prioritizes the interests and well-being of others without expecting anything in return. It reflects actions based on empathy, concern, and a strong desire to help others, even when it involves personal sacrifice (Guzman et al., 2020; Xi et al., 2022). Altruism reflects a strong concern for both people and the environment, driven by a desire to contribute positively to society at large.

First-order concepts reveal that many informants were driven to build businesses with social impact. For example, one participant stated, *"I wanted to help women by providing job opportunities so they could have additional income."* At the same time, another emphasized, *"I employ local housewives to preserve our cultural values. Also, I offered interest-free loans to employees."* During the pandemic, an informant initiated *"a mutual support program to help neighbors sell their flower harvest."* Moreover, prioritized local materials, noting, *"I choose local over national products to support our economy."* This is aligned with Shastri et al. (2019), who found that women entrepreneurs are often motivated by social concerns rather than profit alone.

Environmental concern was also a key component of the informants' altruistic motivations, because awareness of the ecological crisis and altruistic values pushed individuals to take part in environmental preservation for the benefit of society, not just personal gain (Xu et al., 2021). Several informants made active efforts to implement sustainability principles in their businesses. As one participant explained, *"We aim for zero waste at every production stage,"* while another highlighted, *"My slow fashion brand extends product life cycles to reduce overconsumption."* Several entrepreneurs adopted green practices, such as *"I am already applying the 5R principles: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Replace, Redesign."* Their motivation also showed through in their commitment to building environmentally friendly businesses while simultaneously educating surrounding communities about the importance of environmental preservation.



Source: Iffah Nur Kharisma (2025)

Figure 2. Data Structure of Women's Entrepreneurial Motivation

Their efforts, driven by altruistic motivation, made their businesses not only profit-oriented but also grounded in strong social and environmental values. These findings align with (Guzman et al., 2020), who observed that women entrepreneurs are often driven by the aspiration to contribute to their communities. (Shastri et al., 2019) also emphasized that female entrepreneurs frequently build businesses not just for income but to foster social progress, while Xu et al. (2021) argued that

environmental altruism reflects concern for shared societal well-being, reinforcing the motivations presented by informants in this study.

4.1.2 Cultural Heritage: Family Legacy, Social Traditions, and Gendered Roles

Cultural heritage is the accumulation of values, traditions, and memories passed down from generation to generation, reflecting both individual and collective identities within a community (Chan et al., 2023). In the family context, cultural heritage is passed down through parenting, work ethics, and traditions that shape one's sense of responsibility. For women entrepreneurs, it becomes a source of inspiration through inherited skills (such as sewing or cooking traditional family recipes) or values that encourage them to follow in their family's entrepreneurial footsteps.

Aggregately, cultural heritage dimension encompasses three elements: the desire to build a legacy for the next generation; a sociocultural background influenced by family business traditions; and gender roles that encourage women to balance multiple identities and responsibilities.

The first element, legacy, is reflected in the strong desire of many women to leave a business legacy for future generations. First-order concepts include aspirations to build networks and pass down businesses to their children: "I hope my children will take over this business; *it would be a shame to let go of what we have built.*" The informant also emphasized the importance of ensuring business sustainability through consistent quality and effective marketing strategies. "*I focus on maintaining quality and marketing strategies to ensure the business stays sustainable.*" Some explicitly stated that they wanted to continue the professions and businesses built by their parents, driven by a strong sense of responsibility to preserve family values and contribute long-term benefits not only for themselves but also for their extended families.

The second element, sociocultural influence, is rooted in the close relationship between business and cultural or family traditions. Many female entrepreneurs were surrounded by family members who were business owners themselves, which provided inspiration and motivation to pursue entrepreneurship. One informant shared, "*My parents were entrepreneurs; they inspired me to become like them and continue our family's business.*" Family members who were entrepreneurs served as role models and offered moral support, encouraging them to start and manage their own businesses. These cultural values embedded in the larger family played a significant role in building confidence and motivation to engage in business. These findings resonate with Ahmetaj et al. (2023), who assert that family environment and cultural values often influence women's motivation to become entrepreneurs.

The final element is gender roles, specifically the ability of women to integrate their identities as mothers, wives, and business owners. First-order concepts show that these women expressed a strong desire to carry out their roles in the family and in business simultaneously and flexibly. Their motivation was based on the need to balance dual responsibilities without sacrificing either aspect of life, family, or career. This flexibility served as a core driver that strengthened their belief in their ability to succeed in business while fulfilling their family responsibilities. These findings are also supported by (Panday & Sharma, 2022), who emphasized how traditional gender roles often shape women's motivations to choose entrepreneurship over formal employment.

Overall, cultural heritage strongly motivates women to pursue entrepreneurship, as inherited values, identity, and gender flexibility provide not only a solid foundation but also the privilege of early exposure, embedded knowledge, and a sense of legacy to be sustained for future generations.

4.1.3 Economic Orientation

Economic orientation is one of the main motivations for women to become entrepreneurs. This dimension focuses on the need to create financial stability, utilize creativity to produce superior products, and design a more secure future. Economic motivation consists of three key aspects: profit orientation, creativity, and future orientation.

The profit orientation dimension highlights the importance of profit in running a business, both to support personal and family needs. Some informants were profit-oriented from the start, meaning their businesses were immediately focused on economic outcomes: *"Yes, I aim to pursue profit."* Moreover, when it is needed to support family finances, such as in situations where husbands are unable to work, this indicates that profitability is a priority and a tool to maintain family economic balance, directly encouraging women to take an active role in business. This is in line with Shastri et al (2019), who emphasize that profit motivation is a key driver for female entrepreneurs to pursue financial independence and success.

Creativity is also a critical dimension within economic orientation, evident in efforts to create unique products and concepts. First-order concept reveals various innovations, such as producing hijabs with distinctive motifs, packaging food in small portions for convenience, and emphasizing sustainable green business concepts from upstream to downstream. Other innovations include personalized leather shoes and the creation of casual dining venues that still prioritize service quality. These examples show that women entrepreneurs are not only profit-focused but also have a vision to add value to consumers through innovation. These innovations help women entrepreneurs attract more customers, grow their markets, and boost revenue, making creativity a key driver of business stability and sustainability. This reinforces the view of Shastri et al. (2019), who argue that creativity plays a vital role in enabling female entrepreneurs to stand out in competitive markets.

Future orientation complements this dimension by focusing on financial sustainability and asset accumulation over time. Participants reveal efforts among women entrepreneurs to invest in assets and prepare for retirement funds. This shows they are not only concerned with current needs but also possess a clear long-term vision. Business sustainability becomes a priority to ensure their enterprises provide lasting benefits to family and community. This supports Rita et al. (2019) observation that long-term planning and future security are significant motivators for women entrepreneurs, especially in the context of small and medium enterprises.

Overall, economic orientation through profit focus, creativity, and future planning drives women to pursue financial stability, innovate, and sustain their businesses, enabling them to face challenges confidently while creating a positive impact.

4.1.4 Pleasure

The pleasure dimension reflects happiness, satisfaction, and fulfillment when women run businesses aligned with their interests or personal values. It provides intrinsic motivation, fosters creativity, and turns business into a medium of self-expression through products, services, or relationships. When women enjoy their work, they become more committed and persistent. Ultimately, pleasure helps balance economic goals with personal well-being, making business a meaningful and joyful pursuit.

Pleasure in this context includes two main aspects: community and passion. Overall, this dimension reflects how feelings of enjoyment, interest, and social relationships become a strong foundation for building a business. This is consistent with findings by Solesvik et al. (2019), who highlight the role of intrinsic motivation and passion in sustaining entrepreneurial commitment.

First, from the community aspect, women entrepreneurs show a desire to connect with many people and build strategic relationships. Participant revealed that joining various communities provides opportunities to form relationships that open paths to new customers. Additionally, support from extended families with wide networks helps in marketing through word-of-mouth. This is reinforced by participants' statements such as, *"I join communities to build relationships with new customers"* and *"My family's network helps me market my products,"* illustrating how women entrepreneurs actively engage in communities or networks to build customer relationships and gain collaborative opportunities. These activities provide satisfaction and help build economically beneficial networks. This echoes findings by Vo et al. (2022), who emphasize the importance of social connectedness and community engagement as motivators for female entrepreneurs.

Second, passion is an important aspect within the pleasure dimension. First-order concepts such as *"I truly enjoy sewing and creating unique clothes"* and *"I have loved writing down recipes from TV and baking since elementary school"* indicate that love for certain activities is a primary driver for starting and running a business. Direct quotes from participants show various personal interests, such as making unique clothes, noting recipes from television since childhood, selling while interacting with customers, and exploring new dining places. There is also interest in aesthetics, such as coordinating home design, and attention to environmental issues. This passion not only brings satisfaction but also drives intrinsic motivation, fostering persistence, creativity, and commitment in producing quality products or services. This supports Rita et al. (2019), who found passion to be a critical sustaining factor in female entrepreneurship. Thus, pleasure, through community and passion, not only offers emotional motivation but also becomes a strong foundation for women entrepreneurs to stay engaged, form meaningful social connections, and grow in the business world.

4.1.5 Self-Empowerment

The self-empowerment dimension is a key aspect motivating women to become entrepreneurs. This dimension includes four main elements: autonomy, self-actualization, growth and development, and self-efficacy. All these elements play roles in building confidence, providing a sense of achievement, and encouraging women entrepreneurs to continue learning and developing.

Autonomy is the first element providing satisfaction to women entrepreneurs. First-order concepts like *"I feel proud of being able to make independent decisions"* reveal that autonomy offers the ability to self-govern, which becomes a source of pride. This is supported by statements such as *"Running my own business gives me satisfaction and confidence."* Having full control over their businesses allows women entrepreneurs to design visions and strategies aligned with their personal values, increasing their sense of responsibility and motivation to keep moving forward. Research by Solesvik et al. (2019) confirms the significance of autonomy as a source of satisfaction for entrepreneurs.

Next, self-actualization is the second element within self-empowerment. Women entrepreneurs show enthusiasm for building networks and introducing their business values to a wider audience. According to first-order concepts, self-actualization manifests in efforts like *"expanding business networks to promote our green business values"* and *"feeling proud to be known for my unique business concept."* Participants emphasized achievements, such as *"the joy I feel when customers appreciate my services"* and *"fulfilling my vision of a zero-waste brand."* This process not only provides personal pride but also enhances their confidence in presenting themselves as part of the business community. Their desire to achieve personal goals through ventures they perceive as important and meaningful reflects the element of self-actualization within self-empowerment, as also highlighted by Solesvik et al. (2019).

The third element is growth and development, which includes learning and skill enhancement. First-order concepts illustrate active learning efforts: *"I attended sewing certification programs"* and *"I initiated the SaSiSu program to teach others through small workshops."* Participants highlighted activities like reading business books, joining workshops, and building educational programs like SaSiSu (Sabtu Sinau Seru). This demonstrates their enthusiasm for learning through a learning-by-doing approach, aimed at enhancing their skills and personal value to navigate business challenges better. They are driven to prove their capabilities and overcome daily business challenges, which fosters their personal growth and skill development, an idea also supported by Shastri, Shastri and Pareek, (2019).

Finally, self-efficacy plays an important role in building women entrepreneurs' confidence in managing their businesses. This confidence is gained through self-directed learning and small successes achieved in running their businesses. Interview data highlighted that women entrepreneurs often rely on autodidactic learning processes, *"I learned everything on my own,"* and apply knowledge acquired through formal and informal education, *"I used my college background and passion to build from scratch"*. Participants also confirm that they are accustomed to learning by doing, *"I learned by doing, practice through managing this business,"* which allows them to adapt and develop business skills directly in the field continuously. The confidence formed through these experiences encourages them to take risks, try innovations, and persist in facing various business challenges. This aligns with the concept of self-efficacy within self-empowerment, as having competence allows women entrepreneurs to feel capable and confident in facing challenges and achieving their business goals (Vo et al., 2022).

Overall, the self-empowerment dimension significantly contributes to motivating women to become entrepreneurs. Through autonomy, they experience satisfaction and control over decisions made. Self-actualization allows them to feel proud of their achievements. Growth and development ensure they continuously learn and adapt to changes, while self-efficacy builds their confidence in facing business challenges.

4.2 Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurship

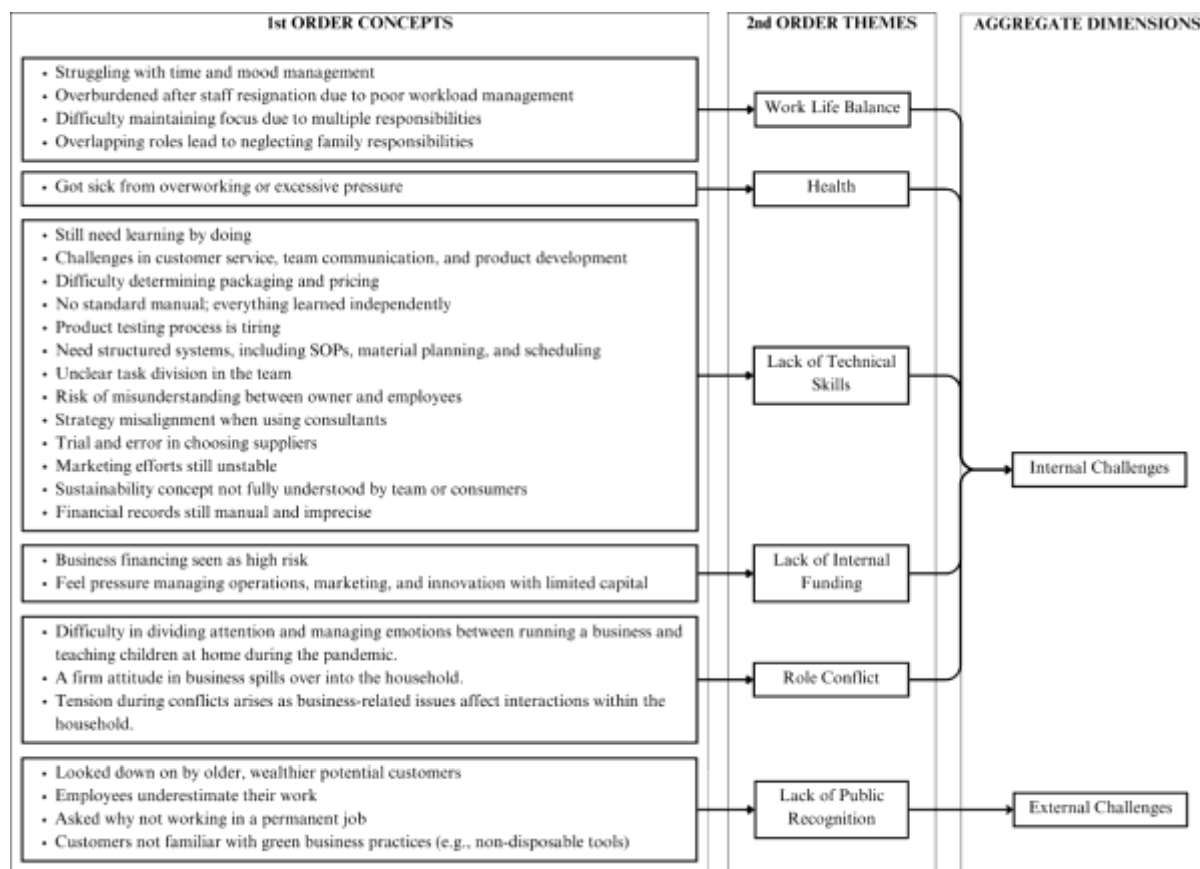
Based on the interviews conducted with participants, and following the summary and analysis, these challenges can be classified into two main categories: internal challenges and external challenges. Internal challenges are related to factors originating within the individual, such as skills and personal capital. In contrast, external challenges involve obstacles from the environment, such as social support and access to resources.

4.2.1 Internal Challenges

Interview results identified internal challenges, categorized under five themes: work-life balance, health, lack of technical skills, internal financing constraints, and role conflict. This classification is based on internal challenges that were categorized based on data sourced directly from participants' experiences, originating from within the individual or the entrepreneur's business environment, rather than from external, uncontrollable factors.

An internal challenge identified in this study is the difficulty in maintaining a balance between professional and personal life (work-life balance). This challenge arises from the dual roles that women entrepreneurs must manage, both as business owners and as caregivers in their households. According to Cardella et al. (2020), women often struggle to balance work responsibilities with household life, and informants describe their struggle with managing time and mood, especially when handling

multiple responsibilities simultaneously. After the COVID-19 pandemic, employee resignations left the entrepreneur handling all operations alone. Poor work management, multiple roles, and a lack of delegation caused scattered focus and neglect of family duties like childcare. These internal factors, especially time and role management, make work-life balance a key internal challenge. This is further supported by Ahmetaj et al. (2023), who explain that one of the greatest challenges faced by female entrepreneurs is maintaining a balance between managing the home and caring for their families.



Source: Iffah Nur Kharisma (2025)

Figure 3. Data Structure of Women's Entrepreneurial Challenge

Health-related challenges, for instance, stem from personal decisions and work habits, such as working without breaks, poor time management, and difficulty setting boundaries between work and personal life. First-order concept shows many women entrepreneurs experience physical and mental fatigue due to overexertion in sustaining their businesses. This pressure often leads them to neglect rest, resulting in chronic stress and deteriorating physical health. Additionally, women are biologically more vulnerable to fatigue and stress due to hormonal factors and dual responsibilities. In light of these pressures, health-related challenges become more prominent. As Lin (2020) suggests, developing support systems for women entrepreneurs is essential, especially since such support can enhance their motivation and help them cope with the physical and emotional demands of running a business.

The challenge of lacking technical skills reflects operational and managerial obstacles stemming from internal limitations. Participants highlighted gaps between theory and practice: *"In real life, there is so much variety in materials different from what we learn through the internet, also the marketing is tricky, what works in theory does not always apply."* In the food and beverage sector, technical tasks like ingredient preparation require ongoing trial and error. Efforts to apply sustainability, such as zero waste, also posed challenges: *"Being consistent with zero waste is hard, especially with new customers."*

Furthermore, our staff sometimes forgets to sort waste, and with different team backgrounds, communication becomes a real challenge.” Beyond that, bookkeeping was another issue: “Even our bookkeeping is very basic or customized, we are still learning.” Another problem is human resource limitations, which further reflect technical gaps, particularly in recruitment and team management. “Our HR is not always qualified, so we have to be more detailed in recruitment, manage working hours, balance employee expectations, and even adjust to the preferences of external consultants,” shared one informant. This internal limitation is consistent with findings from Ahmetaj et al. (2023), who emphasize that a lack of technical skills remains one of the most significant barriers preventing women from starting and running their businesses effectively.

Additionally, entrepreneurs shared that business funding poses a high-risk pressure, requiring cautious budget allocation for business growth. These constraints are caused by the challenging decision-making process involved in allocating funds, where every choice carries significant risk for the business’s continuity and growth. One participant expressed this concern, “For funding, I often face obstacles, especially in financing business needs. This is quite common because the risk in this business is quite high.” This challenge is further compounded by financial constraints, as Arvind and Ranjith (2023) note that limited access to personal funding is a persistent obstacle for many women entrepreneurs, making it difficult to allocate resources for growth and innovation.

Role conflict reflects the tension women face in balancing business responsibilities and domestic roles. However, it is triggered and intensified by external factors such as social norms and the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants reveal situations where business stress carries over into home life. One informant shared, “During the COVID period, we had to teach our children online at home. The learning burden of kindergarten was so high. Meanwhile, as parents, we do not have the same psychological teaching skills as real teachers. That often led to clashes with my child.” Another described the pressure of working with her husband: “Yes, definitely. I had many clashes with my husband. It is normal as husband and wife, but the tension gets worse because we run the business together. Work issues come home, and the kids get affected too; it all starts to pile up.” Although social expectations and external conditions influence role conflict, the core of this challenge lies within the individual’s effort to balance multiple roles. Therefore, it is categorized as an internal challenge. This internal struggle reflects the findings of Rita et al. (2019), who explain that many Indonesian women feel conflicted between fulfilling traditional roles as mothers and wives and pursuing their entrepreneurial aspirations.

These internal challenges are interconnected, showing the complexity of obstacles female entrepreneurs face. Women’s biological vulnerability to fatigue and stress, worsened by overwork and poor stress management, intensifies these challenges. Also, the lack of technical and managerial skills impacts customer satisfaction and overall brand perception, while funding challenges hinder investments in capacity building. Altogether, these internal challenges underscore the critical need for continuous support to help women entrepreneurs strengthen their capabilities and sustain their businesses.

4.2.2 External Challenges

Based on the interviews, external challenges were identified and grouped into one aggregate dimension: lack of public recognition. This first-order concept stems from factors beyond the entrepreneurs’ direct control, such as social, economic, and cultural environments.

Lack of public recognition describes the challenge of external perceptions from customers, employees, and society at large. These biases often question women’s capabilities in business, compelling them to work harder for validation and respect. First-order concepts illustrate these struggles: one entrepreneur recalled being “Once, I was dismissed by a wealthy older customer due to perceived lower

social status." Another noted that *"Some employees underestimate my leadership just because I am a woman,"* highlighting the constant need to prove their competence. Several informants shared being asked, *"Why did I choose entrepreneurship over becoming a regular employee,"* reflecting external misconceptions about women's career choices. This aligns with (Shastri et al., 2019), who highlight that one of the most common challenges faced by women entrepreneurs is the lack of recognition for their capabilities as professional business owners. Additional challenges emerge in efforts to *"I need to educate customers unfamiliar with sustainable practices about our services,"* which adds to the burden of external skepticism. These conditions show how societal bias can undermine women's roles as business leaders. (Arvind & Ranjith, 2023) further support this by noting that society often fails to take women entrepreneurs seriously, with many women feeling underappreciated by their families, communities, or peers. The lack of public recognition persists as a barrier impacting business operations and women entrepreneurs' resilience, necessitating self-confidence and supportive ecosystems to counteract societal bias.

4. Conclusion

The entrepreneurial journey of women in Greater Malang is driven by values such as social contribution, cultural identity, financial independence, and self-fulfillment, rooted in personal and socio-cultural contexts. However, women entrepreneurs also face significant internal and external challenges. Internally, they struggle with maintaining work-life balance, developing technical competencies, and managing limited funding. Externally, they experience role conflicts and insufficient public recognition.

The findings underscore the need for continuous support through gender-sensitive entrepreneurship programs, financial inclusion initiatives, and skill-building workshops tailored to women's needs. This study also contributes to the growing literature on women entrepreneurship by offering a context-specific perspective that enriches theoretical discussions around gender and enterprise.

Limitations of the study include its limited geographic scope and qualitative nature, which may not fully capture the diversity of women's entrepreneurial experiences across Indonesia. Future research should consider comparative studies across regions or include intersectional lenses such as education level or marital status.

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