

A Systematic Review on Entrepreneurial Competencies, Challenges, and Opportunities Among Women-Owned Manufacturing Enterprises

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Abstract

Women-owned manufacturing enterprises significantly contribute to industrial development, employment generation, innovation, and inclusive economic growth. Despite their growing impact on the manufacturing sector, female entrepreneurs encounter substantial challenges that hinder enterprise growth and sustainability. Although extensive research has been conducted on women's entrepreneurship, studies specifically addressing women-owned manufacturing enterprises are fragmented, with limited integration of entrepreneurial competencies, challenges, and opportunities. This systematic review seeks to synthesise existing literature to identify the entrepreneurial competencies that enhance enterprise performance, examine the primary challenges affecting women-owned manufacturing enterprises, explore emerging opportunities for business growth, and identify gaps for future research. The review is based on a systematic analysis of peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and other scholarly publications on women-owned manufacturing enterprises. The findings indicate that entrepreneurial competencies- such as leadership, strategic planning, innovation, financial management, networking, marketing capability, opportunity recognition, and technological adaptability- significantly influence enterprise performance and sustainability. Major challenges include restricted access to finance, technological constraints, inadequate institutional support, gender-based discrimination, regulatory obstacles, and work-family conflicts. Concurrently, opportunities arising from digital transformation, government support schemes, entrepreneurship development programs, financial inclusion, business incubation, and expanded market access have increased the growth potential of women-owned manufacturing enterprises. These findings offer valuable insights for researchers, policymakers, financial institutions, and entrepreneurship development agencies to formulate evidence-based strategies that enhance the competitiveness, resilience, and sustainable growth of women-owned manufacturing enterprises.

Keywords: Women-owned manufacturing enterprises, entrepreneurial competencies, challenges, opportunities, enterprise performance, women entrepreneurship.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women's entrepreneurship has become a crucial driver of economic growth, generating employment, fostering industrial development, and facilitating social transformation across both developed and developing economies. In recent decades, women's involvement in entrepreneurial activities has increased significantly, driven by globalisation, technological advancements, improved educational attainment, and supportive government policies. The manufacturing sector occupies a strategic position primarily due to its significant contribution to value addition, industrial productivity, innovation, export promotion, and sustainable economic development. Women-owned businesses in this sector not only generate employment but also foster regional development, poverty alleviation, and inclusive economic growth. Nevertheless, despite this growing engagement, female entrepreneurs in manufacturing face multifaceted challenges that impede enterprise growth and competitiveness. Unlike service-sector businesses, manufacturing enterprises demand substantial capital investment, advanced technological capabilities, skilled labour, production infrastructure, regulatory compliance, and efficient supply chain management. Consequently, these entrepreneurs frequently encounter heightened

barriers regarding access to finance, technology acquisition, market intelligence, property rights, the negotiation of work-family balance, and mitigation of gender-based discrimination.

Entrepreneurial competencies- such as leadership, marketing expertise, and innovation capability-are critical determinants of the success and sustainability of women-owned manufacturing enterprises. Simultaneously, emerging opportunities, including e-commerce platforms, government support schemes, and entrepreneurship development programmes, are reshaping the entrepreneurial landscape. However, the ability of women entrepreneurs to capitalise on these opportunities is largely dependent on their individual competencies and the surrounding institutional framework.

Objectives:

1. To systematically review and synthesise the entrepreneurial competencies exhibited by women-owned manufacturing enterprises.
2. To identify the primary obstacles encountered by women entrepreneurs in the manufacturing industry.
3. To explore the opportunities available to women-owned manufacturing enterprises for growth and sustainability.
4. To highlight research gaps in the existing literature concerning women's entrepreneurship in manufacturing.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A systematic review of the existing literature has been conducted to synthesise current knowledge, identify gaps, and inform policies and practices that can empower women entrepreneurs in the manufacturing sector. This review aims to comprehensively explore the specific competencies required, the challenges faced, and the opportunities available to women entrepreneurs in manufacturing. The practice of entrepreneurship in India has ancient roots, tracing back to the organised trade, guilds, and shipping networks of the Indus Valley Civilisation. The modern concept of structured entrepreneurship was introduced in the late 18th and 19th centuries. [Swetha, T., & Rao, K. V. \(2013\)](#). Following independence, the government formally integrated entrepreneurship development into the First Five-Year Plan (1951). The 1970s marked the initial emergence of urban, educated women entering the business world. In 1972, the "Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)" was established by Ela Bhatt, revolutionising self-reliance for low-income women workers. Women's entrepreneurship was officially recognised as a distinct economic category by the Government of India during the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-1985).

The government defines a women's enterprise as "an enterprise owned and controlled by a woman, with a minimum financial interest of 51% of the capital, and providing at least 51% of the employment generated in the enterprise to women." The entry of women into the manufacturing sector as business owners signifies a significant structural shift in India. In economic and academic studies, this transition is often characterised as a move away from the "3 Ps" (Powder, Papad, Pickles) towards the "4 Es" (Electricity, Electronics, Energy, Engineering) (Batra & Singh, 2013). Manufacturing has emerged as one of the strongest sectors for female business owners outside of agriculture. Among all non-agricultural businesses owned by women in India, nearly 45% are engaged in manufacturing activities (NSSO & Ministry of MSME).

Despite their growing presence, women-owned manufacturing enterprises frequently face unique challenges stemming from gender bias, limited access to resources, and sociocultural constraints. Entrepreneurial competencies, such as leadership, strategic planning, financial management, and innovation, are essential for overcoming these barriers and achieving sustainable growth.

2.1 Review on Women Entrepreneurs

[Sharma \(2013\)](#) aimed to create awareness about the importance of women entrepreneurship, identify factors influencing entrepreneurial development, and examine the problems and government initiatives supporting women entrepreneurs. The study found that economic motivation, education, institutional support, social recognition, and government assistance positively influence women's entrepreneurial participation. However, low literacy levels, financial limitations, social constraints, limited opportunities, and the challenge of balancing family and business responsibilities continue to hinder entrepreneurial growth. Strengthening government policies, improving entrepreneurial education, and increasing financial accessibility are essential for promoting women's entrepreneurship in India.

[Foster, D. D. \(2016\)](#) explored the factors contributing to the long-term sustainability of women-owned businesses in the United States. Through interviews with women entrepreneurs and business consultants, the study found that entrepreneurial motivation, education, business skills, innovation, customer satisfaction, and effective financial management significantly influence business survival beyond five years. Strategic planning and continuous skill development were identified as essential determinants of long-term business success.

[Sangalogi. K & Alagawadi.M \(2016\)](#) examined the growth and development of women entrepreneurs in Kalaburagi (Gulbarga), Karnataka, particularly women engaged in roti-making enterprises. The researchers found that women's entrepreneurship has enhanced economic independence and improved the socio-economic status of women. Family support, government assistance, financial access, education, and awareness were identified as major factors promoting entrepreneurial growth. However, financial constraints, limited awareness, and inadequate institutional support continued to hinder enterprise development. Strengthening government initiatives, improving financial accessibility, and increasing entrepreneurial awareness are required to encourage women's participation in business.

[Allen and Truman \(2016\)](#) presented a comprehensive work on women's entrepreneurship by integrating perspectives from sociology, gender studies, and entrepreneurship. The study examined how gender relations shape entrepreneurial participation, business development, and enterprise success. The study emphasised the importance of recognising women's unpaid and family-linked economic contributions. Gender-inclusive policies, improved access to finance and training, and stronger entrepreneurial ecosystems are recommended to promote women's business growth.

[Priyadarshini S & Basariya S.R \(2018\)](#) reviewed the status of women entrepreneurs in India and highlighted their growing contribution to economic development and social transformation. The study found that education, entrepreneurial skills, government support, adaptability, and social awareness positively influence women's entrepreneurial success. Despite increasing participation, women continue to face financial, social, and cultural barriers. Effective government policies and entrepreneurship development programmes are essential for promoting women's entrepreneurship.

[Lepeley et al. \(2019\)](#) examined women entrepreneurs' wellbeing from a multidisciplinary and global perspective. Using mixed methods, including surveys, case studies, comparative analyses, narratives, and meta-synthesis, the study found that women entrepreneurs make substantial contributions to employment generation and economic growth. Researchers further demonstrated that entrepreneurial wellbeing is closely associated with work-life balance, job satisfaction, productivity, and business sustainability. Work-life balance is a critical determinant of entrepreneurial success, and wellbeing is a development imperative, not just a gender issue.

[Sajjad et al. \(2020\)](#) examined the significant positive impact of women's participation on family income and national GDP. The study used regression analysis on secondary data from 69 countries and found that women's entrepreneurship is a key driver for global human development.

[Nguyen, T. B., et al. \(2025\)](#) analysed research on women entrepreneurs in micro and small enterprises. The study highlighted the untapped potential of women entrepreneurs, particularly in emerging economies and identified major themes including financial access, digital platforms, government policies, social barriers, regional disparities, and MSME growth.

[Nahar, M. R. \(2025\)](#) identified socio-cultural barriers, financial limitations, institutional constraints, family responsibilities, and gender discrimination as the major factors influencing entrepreneurial development. Improving education, financial inclusion, policy support, and entrepreneurial ecosystems is essential for enhancing women's business participation and long-term success in India.

2.2 Review on Women Manufacturing Enterprises

[Narendra Jena \(2012\)](#) examined the growth of women entrepreneurship and employment in India's unorganised manufacturing sector using data from the National Sample Survey (NSS) 51st, 56th and 62nd rounds. He observed that most women-owned enterprises remained concentrated in labour-intensive, low-productivity sectors, and productivity

was generally lower than that of male-owned enterprises except in a few larger establishments. Targeted policy support, skill development, and MSME promotion are necessary to improve productivity and strengthen women-owned manufacturing enterprises.

[Singh \(2013\)](#) investigated the role of women entrepreneurs in manufacturing industries in Kanpur by identifying the motivating and demotivating factors influencing entrepreneurial development. The study adopted a questionnaire-based survey and factor ranking analysis. The study revealed that although women entrepreneurs contribute significantly to industrial and economic development, reducing institutional and socio-economic barriers through policy support and training programmes is essential for enhancing their participation in manufacturing enterprises.

[Uloko \(2014\)](#) examined the dynamics of women-owned micro manufacturing enterprises in Kaduna Metropolis, Nigeria, using an explanatory survey design involving 384 women-owned manufacturing enterprises. Descriptive statistics and Likert-scale analysis revealed that fear of risk, inadequate motivation, and insufficient entrepreneurial training were the major barriers during the start-up stage, while lack of credit, poor infrastructure, and limited government support constrained enterprise growth. Community associations were found to provide stronger support than government agencies.

[Wawire & Tsuma \(2025\)](#) tackle the critical intersection of property rights and economic performance. Using regression analysis, the study proved a positive correlation between land ownership and profit. Researchers argue that land serves not just as physical space but as crucial collateral, and its lack remains a structural "glass ceiling" for women in manufacturing.

[Majumdar & Mittal \(2025\)](#) identify "limited funding" as the paramount challenge but add a nuanced layer: the lack of "finance-related skills." The researchers suggest that financial literacy is as critical as financial access for microenterprise sustainability.

[Gochhayat & Rout \(2025\)](#) evaluate the effectiveness of government interventions. Using log-linear regression, the study found that while government support significantly boosts sales for female-led firms, these firms often face higher corruption and tax burdens ("informal payments").

2.3 Review on Women Entrepreneurial Competencies

[Zizile and Chimucheka \(2017\)](#) analysed the relationship between entrepreneurial competencies and the performance of women-owned small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) in East London, South Africa. Using questionnaire-based quantitative analysis of 144 women entrepreneurs, the study found a strong positive relationship between entrepreneurial competencies and enterprise performance. Innovation skills, opportunity recognition, managerial capability, and strategic vision significantly enhanced venture performance and survival. Competency-building programmes and entrepreneurship training are essential for improving business performance and long-term sustainability among women entrepreneurs.

[Schneider \(2017\)](#) analysed six first-order competency dimensions, including managerial competence, self-efficacy, innovation, risk-taking, competitive orientation, and entrepreneurial identity. The findings indicated that entrepreneurial competencies significantly influence business success and enterprise performance. Functional, psychological, and identity-based competencies were identified as key determinants of entrepreneurial effectiveness. The study recommended competency-based entrepreneurship education and training programmes to strengthen women's entrepreneurial capabilities and improve enterprise sustainability.

[Ogundana et al. \(2021\)](#) argued that while resources like money and management drive growth, factors like motherhood and cultural context often inhibit access and action. A qualitative study aimed at developing a unique growth model for women entrepreneurs in developing contexts

[Shakeel, Yaokuang and Gohar \(2020\)](#) investigated the factors influencing the performance of women-owned businesses and examined the moderating role of national culture. The study found that entrepreneurial characteristics, supportive external environments, and institutional support systems positively influence business performance. National culture moderated several of these relationships, indicating that entrepreneurial success depends not only on individual

capabilities but also on the surrounding socio-cultural environment. The study emphasised the importance of supportive entrepreneurial ecosystems and context-specific policy interventions to improve women's business performance.

[Ghosh and Mitra \(2020\)](#) examined the condition, performance, and challenges of women-owned enterprises in India using the National Sample Survey (NSSO 73rd Round) microdata. The study found that most women-owned enterprises are home-based, own-account enterprises with limited growth potential. Enterprise performance was measured using gross value added, and the results showed that accounting practices, enterprise location, labour composition, and non-contract work positively influenced performance. Conversely, credit constraints and low market demand restricted enterprise growth. Improving financial access, business management practices, and market opportunities is essential for enhancing the performance of women-owned enterprises in India.

[Masiko et al. \(2024\)](#) demonstrate that a woman's ability to identify and act on market opportunities is the most significant factor in achieving entrepreneurial success in the Ugandan context. The study suggests "opportunity recognition competence" (creativity, risk-taking, networks) as a central driver of firm performance.

[Akther et al. \(2024\)](#) investigated that management capabilities significantly enhance performance, with conceptual competency acting as a full mediator. The study explores how management capabilities and conceptual competencies influence the long-term sustainability of women-owned SMEs.

[Srivastava & Pandita \(2025\)](#) examined that social and cultural conditions are the most influential external factors. Internally, leadership roles and innovativeness are the primary performance drivers. The study proposes an inclusive conceptual framework for future researchers.

[Hisni et al. \(2025\)](#) argue that digital adaptation is no longer optional; digital leadership combined with adaptive resilience is the new prerequisite for women's business success in the post-pandemic era. The study proposes a model where digital leadership influences business success through the mediating role of entrepreneurial resilience.

2.4 Review on Challenges and Opportunities

[Mandishaya, Inderpal and Karodia \(2015\)](#) evaluated the challenges affecting women-owned SMEs at the Katutura Incubation Centre in Namibia and examined their impact on organisational performance. Using a questionnaire-based empirical survey of 18 women-owned SMEs, the study found that financial constraints, management deficiencies, market competition, technological adaptation issues, and limited access to business support services significantly reduced organisational performance and business growth. The study recommended strengthening financial assistance, entrepreneurial training, business incubation services, and institutional support mechanisms to improve the performance and sustainability of women-owned SMEs.

[Rathna, Badrinath and Anushan \(2016\)](#) investigated the motivational factors and challenges experienced by women entrepreneurs. The study revealed that financial independence, family encouragement, social status, employment opportunities, and income generation were the primary motivational factors influencing women to establish businesses. However, women entrepreneurs encountered several obstacles, including unfavourable market conditions, legal regulations, inadequate information, and difficulties in balancing work and family responsibilities. Entrepreneurship development programmes, financial support, and policy initiatives are essential for improving women's entrepreneurial performance and empowerment.

[Zhu and Kuriyama \(2016\)](#) examined the gender-specific constraints affecting women-owned small and medium enterprises (SMEs) across APEC economies. The major constraints include limited access to finance, inadequate managerial and technical skills, weak business networks, regulatory barriers, legal discrimination, and socio-cultural norms. These barriers significantly reduce business growth and export participation. The study recommended entrepreneurship training, improved childcare support, equal access to finance, and policy reforms to strengthen women-owned SMEs and promote inclusive economic development.

[Zainuddin, A. et al. \(2017\)](#) examined emerging challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the modern business environment. The researchers identified inadequate funding, limited family support, technological adaptation, globalisation, and social media as the major factors affecting entrepreneurial success. While technology and globalisation created new business opportunities, financial barriers and insufficient institutional support remained significant obstacles.

[Divya, S., & Lakshmi, G. \(2023\)](#) investigated the socio-economic status and business challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Madurai District. The study showed that women entrepreneurs contribute substantially to local economic development but continue to face financial problems, marketing difficulties, work–life imbalance, inadequate institutional support, and limited business opportunities. The study emphasised the importance of financial assistance, entrepreneurship training, and government support for improving women's business performance.

[Neetu & Singh, N. K. \(2024\)](#) examined the status of women's entrepreneurship in India using secondary data. The study concluded that women possess significant entrepreneurial potential but continue to face barriers related to limited opportunities, inadequate information, socio-cultural restrictions, and poor implementation of government programmes. The study recommended expanding awareness, improving access to information, and strengthening entrepreneurship support policies, particularly for small-scale entrepreneurs.

[Mounika, M. S. N., et al. \(2024\)](#) identified inadequate working capital, dual family responsibilities, shortage of skilled labour, poor financial management knowledge, and high labour costs as the major constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in Andhra Pradesh. The researchers recommended improving access to credit, entrepreneurship training, subsidies, personality development programmes, and exposure visits to strengthen entrepreneurial capabilities.

[Patir, M. et al. \(2024\)](#) compared the challenges experienced by registered and non-registered women entrepreneurs in Assam. Financial constraints emerged as the most serious challenge for both groups. Registered entrepreneurs primarily struggled with increasing market competition, whereas non-registered entrepreneurs faced greater difficulties related to marketing, managerial skills, exposure, and networking. The study recommended targeted policy support based on enterprise registration status.

[Rahman, M. M., et al. \(2024\)](#) synthesised previous studies on women entrepreneurship in developing countries. The study identified five major categories of challenges: financial constraints, socio-cultural barriers, educational and skill deficiencies, networking and marketing limitations, and political and legal obstacles. Comprehensive policy interventions are necessary to improve entrepreneurial opportunities and enterprise performance among women entrepreneurs.

[Sucharita, S. \(2024\)](#) examined that male domination, high interest rates, and lack of family support are the most pressing sociocultural and financial barriers.

[Aravik, Hamzani, & Khasanah \(2025\)](#) examined the post-pandemic "digital transformation." The study found that digital platforms have lowered entry barriers, and "digital literacy" has emerged as a new form of gendered exclusion. The study advocates for Islamic banking and Sharia-compliant strategies as culturally relevant tools for empowering Indonesian women.

[Karpagam & Jothi \(2025\)](#) identified the socio-economic backgrounds and operational problems of urban women entrepreneurs. Labour issues are the primary concern during business commencement, while marketing and high loan interest rates dominate operational challenges.

[Mwesigwa et al. \(2025\)](#) examined three dimensions of institutional support: financial support, government policies, and government programs. All three dimensions of institutional support have a positive and significant relationship with business sustainability. The study suggests that structured government intervention is essential for the continuity of female-owned firms.

[Asah & Hove-Sibanda \(2025\)](#) analysed the lending behaviour and perceptions of banks toward women entrepreneurs. Banks are willing to fund women-owned SMEs, but only when "hard" criteria are met: adequate collateral, equity contribution, and proven business experience. The lack of these assets remains the primary barrier to credit access.

[Hlatshwayo & Mamokhere \(2025\)](#) found that discrimination and deep-seated cultural biases continue to undermine the sustainability of these businesses. The study calls for localised policy support that addresses the specific structural inequality of rural environments.

3. RESEARCH GAPS

The existing literature offers valuable insights into women's entrepreneurship; however, there is a significant lack of systematic, sector-specific studies focusing on manufacturing. Research predominantly aggregates women entrepreneurs across various industries, thereby obscuring the distinct challenges and competencies pertinent to manufacturing. The literature frequently neglects the intersection of gender-specific entrepreneurial competencies with sector-specific challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, there is a deficiency in the exploration of longitudinal outcomes, which impedes the understanding of how competencies and challenges evolve. Additionally, there is inadequate examination of the unique impact of socio-cultural, financial, and institutional factors on women manufacturing entrepreneurs. The review identifies significant research gaps, including the limited availability of manufacturing-specific studies, insufficient integration of competencies, challenges, and opportunities within a unified framework, and a lack of longitudinal and region-specific research. Addressing these research gaps will enhance academic discourse and practical frameworks, enabling more effective empowerment strategies.

4. FINDINGS

The analysis indicates that women entrepreneurs are more likely to succeed when they exhibit strong competencies, including leadership, decision-making, innovation, adaptability, and resource management. It also identifies significant challenges such as limited access to finance, skill gaps, gender bias, work-life balance pressures, and restricted access to networks and markets. Concurrently, opportunities are arising through digital adoption, business support programs, policy interventions, and increased market participation. The prevailing message from the current literature is that women entrepreneurs encounter persistent structural barriers; however, their performance improves with enhanced competencies and greater access to support systems. Overall, the literature suggests that competencies and support systems are intricately linked to business sustainability and growth.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Although women entrepreneurs make a substantial contribution to economic growth, their expansion is heavily dependent on support systems, such as finance, education, policy, familial support, and access to opportunities. Research indicates that while barriers vary across regions, a consistent pattern emerges; increased support correlates with enhanced entrepreneurial outcomes, whereas obstacles impede progress. Acknowledging and nurturing the distinct strengths of women entrepreneurs in the manufacturing sector is promising for promoting gender equity and economic development within this vital industry. Further research and policy initiatives should focus on developing tailored support systems that address both the enhancement of entrepreneurial skills and the structural barriers encountered by these enterprises. This study is particularly pertinent to entrepreneurship policy and the understanding of the barriers and facilitators affecting women-led businesses.

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