



Role of women as social entrepreneur in VUCA World

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Abstract:

The study explores the role of women social entrepreneurs in the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) world, by focusing on how they perceive and navigate the VUCA situation while involving in the social-oriented business. This study has used qualitative research design, in depth, semi-structured interviews with five women social entrepreneurs that are operating in diverse sectors such as water, sustainable fashion, healthcare, hygiene innovation and handicrafts across different Indian states. The thematic analysis from the findings revealed the six major domains and that are: motivation, contributions towards the society, perception on VUCA, challenges they face in the business, strategies they are using to solve those challenges and opportunities. The paper also offers implications for policymakers, the ecosystems enablers, to strengthen support structures for women led social enterprises in this VUCA world.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurship, Women Social Entrepreneurship, VUCA world, Women Challenges & Strategies

Introduction:

In contrast to conventional business, social enterprises place equal importance on financial viability, social and environmental aims rather than solely focusing on making profits through their business (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010; Powell et al., 2019). Driven by a dedication to social impact, these businesses create solutions for underserved communities by innovating across a range of industries which includes healthcare, education, financial inclusion, and environmental protection (Doherty et al., 2014). Entrepreneurship in development economics isn't about starting a business only, it is also about how it interacts with important factors (Hessels, 2019). Higher economic growth leads to increased production of goods and services, lower unemployment and ultimately enhances the economic welfare of the society (Galindo-Martín et al., 2021). It has been seen that entrepreneurship plays a vital role for social stability and economic progress in numerous developed countries (Munyo et al 2024; Velusamy 2014; Kasseeah, H. (2016). Additionally, they can also promote inclusive economic growth, decrease poverty, create jobs, and eventually empower communities by reinvesting their revenues into social programs (Nicholls, 2010). Kuratko (2005). Women's active involvement in innovation is crucial for unlocking economic potential and achieving global leadership (OECD,2025). Women entrepreneurship also contributes significantly to social well-being (Sajjad et al., 2020). It also fosters their social as well as economic empowerment, particularly in contexts of pronounced gender inequality (Olaewaju, T., & Fernando 2020; Charantimath (2013);(Coughlin & Thomas, 2002; (Buttner& Moore, 1997). Hence, there has been increasing emphasis on policy aims and initiatives with the aim of raising both the awareness of the issue and the capacity of societies for entrepreneurial activities.

Due to entrepreneurship's importance, academics and professionals have stepped up their efforts to encourage an entrepreneurial mindset among the general public. It has been established that education is a crucial factor in the formation and growth of entrepreneurial attitudes (Gorman, 1997). Higher education students are likely

to want to start their businesses (İlhanErtuna et al., 2011). It makes sense in this perspective to view students as the primary source of potential entrepreneurs. Therefore, there is a growing demand for graduates with entrepreneurial potential.

One of the main contributions that these social enterprises make is their ability to promote economic empowerment by generating job possibilities for underprivileged groups, such as rural women, people with some disabilities, and those with low incomes (Kerlin, 2013). These businesses provide alternative work models, which are defined by fair compensation, flexible work arrangements, and skill- building initiatives, in locations where traditional employment systems are inadequate (Kajiita, 2021). Additionally, they also support as well as practice ethical sourcing, circular economy initiatives, and environmentally conscious behaviors, making them essential to the sustainable development goals (Diaz-Sarachaga, 2022).

The importance of women in the social entrepreneurship area is becoming more widely acknowledged, both as its beneficiaries and as its entrepreneurs. Specifically, women-led social enterprises—those started, managed, or heavily impacted by women—show a strong ability to address gender inequality, encourage economic inclusion, and advance sustainable development (Bullough et al., 2014). According to the research, these businesses frequently place a higher priority on long-term sustainability, community involvement, and ethical governance than do businesses operated by males (Teasdale, 2012). Women's leadership in social businesses tremendously contributes to social mobility, financial independence, as well as the development of gender-inclusive innovations (Hobler et al., 2018). According to Cook et al. (2012), women- led social enterprises exhibit greater levels of corporate social responsibility and ethical practices, which have a substantial impact on business ethics and corporate governance. These businesses frequently use the community-driven models that put an emphasis on fair trade practices, sustainability as well as inclusive hiring (Marlow & Swail, 2014), that also promotes economic growth, social cohesion and ethical business (Pathak, Goltz, & Buche, 2013). The important role that these women-led social enterprises play in promoting gender equality, economic progress, and community is recognized by the governments around the whole world. To support these enterprises, they have put in place a variety of funding schemes, capacity- building projects and other policies and initiatives. One essential element is financial assistance, which includes different subsidies, tax breaks and low interest loans (Raman et al., 2022). For instance, the Stand-Up India Scheme and Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) in India offer different types of support which includes mentoring programs, networking opportunities and other financial assistance (Kaur, 2022). With addition to this, African countries have also started programs such as the Women Empowerment Fund (WEF), which provides workshops for capacity-building and finance in women entrepreneurs over there (Ndwiga et al., 2017). However, apart from various contribution and initiative in order to support women social enterprise by government they still face significant obstacles that limit their scaling, such as restricted social and cultural norms (Roomi & Harrison, 2010) also restricted access to financing (Ahl & Nelson, 2015). A multi-stakeholder strategy including government policies, mentorship programs and other financial incentives is required to overcome these problems (Terjesen, Bosma, & Stam, 2016). Apart from these encouraging elements, women social entrepreneurs nevertheless encounter major challenges that impede their advancement. Women have more challenges to entrepreneurial success than men due to a variety of factors, including limited access to finance, cultural and social problems, gender bias, complex regulations, fear of their own safety and hindrance in accessing the markets. Finding a balance between work life and personal life makes these difficulties even worse, since women frequently have to balance traditional duties with their professional objectives (Hasan et al., 2016; Kamberidou, 2020; Afshan et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2023; Emon et al., 2024). In light of the above discussion, it become evident that women social entrepreneurs play a very transformative role in addressing the social economic and societal issues. But there is very limited study that describes the intersection of these two terms, Women social entrepreneurs and VUCA world . Therefore this present study wants to explore the role of women social entrepreneurs in the VUCA world.

Literature Review:

Women as Social Entrepreneurs: Unique Contributions:

The emerging literature describes that major significant role that women play in the area of entrepreneurship (Noguera et al., 2013) as well as in the economic development of the nation (Hechavarria et al., 2019; Kelley et al., 2017). The efforts they put in helping in creating the new jobs and increase in the GDP of the country (Ayogu and Agu 2015; Bahmani- Oskooee et al., 2012).

Additionally, women act as an important catalyst in promoting social entrepreneurial intentions (Cardella et al., 2021) and are instrumental in reducing poverty and social exclusion (Langowitz and Minniti 2007; Rae 2015). The study Mair & Marti (2006) explains the process of social entrepreneurship includes the creative resource blending and utilization to look for opportunities to ignite social change. According to a study by Alvord et al (2004) of seven social entrepreneurship ventures internationally, the phrase "social entrepreneurship" refers to a process "that develops innovative solutions to specific social problems and also mobilizes the concepts, social circumstances, and resources essential for long- term, sustainable social transformations. The study by Zahra et al (2009) demonstrates the high level of interest in social entrepreneurship in literature. Due to its importance in tackling social concerns and improving society and communities, this is the result. Another study by Prabhu (1999) reveals that in addition to their social contributions, social entrepreneurial organizations also generate value by empowering their customers, maximizing the use of development money, and creating jobs, all of which contribute to economic growth. Rosca et al (2020) explains that social entrepreneurship and women's entrepreneurship are the two emerging areas of entrepreneurship studies in recent years by using a multiple case study approach with four enterprises from two emerging economies that are- India and Colombia. Findings reveal that socially concerned women entrepreneurs are extremely motivated. Using the idea of entrepreneurship as emancipation, the study by Roy (2022) examines the social aspects of the process of women's entrepreneurship in India. The significant findings indicate that entrepreneurship is a transitional process in which the entrepreneur's social surroundings and change in her have been seen over time. The study by Datta & Gailey (2012) seeks to understand social entrepreneurship and empowerment of women in the context of India. The study sheds light on yet another group of women social entrepreneurs who work to "alter behavior patterns and perceptions" in their communities. The study by Cicek (2019) investigates the contribution of women to Social Entrepreneurship in Turkey's development economy. By examining four successful Women Entrepreneurs, it draws attention to the difficulties they encounter as well as the life stories that show that they had an impact on others. Women live by raising their economic and social standing through their business. There is another study by Rofiah (2022) the determination of what success means to the Female community through the use of social businesses to address issues of economic and nutritional difficulties. The findings of the study reveals that creating a woman's social business and maintaining its focus community, identification, women's leadership styles, and Networking plays a huge important role. Another study by Belasen & Angiello (2018) indicates that women are ideally suited to take the lead in social entrepreneurship, which uses courageous and valiant action to solve societal issues. Agrawal et al (2023) investigates the ways in which social entrepreneurship influences the empowerment of women as well as the gender-based Intersectionality that currently exist in society. Women in a small village but assisted by a social entrepreneurship project named "Pahal" to launch a food delivery service. The finding of the study reveals that it raised their social standing and level of economic independence and also helped in gaining confidence and respect for the woman. But once the project ended, Women's social, standing and economic pursuits returned to the pre-initiative levels. According to Agarwal et al. (2021) in the developing nations, social women entrepreneurs are very motivated, and they use fair methods to advertise or promote advancement in society. Yitshaki et al. (2016) observed that social entrepreneurs accept possibilities based on their lived experience, they are motivated by pull factors such as helping others and push factors such as job dissatisfaction that leads to solving society gaps through social business. Another study discovers that family to work support as a mediator to look into how positive motivation affects social entrepreneurship by innovation, and the result shows that the connection is entirely controlled by creativity and boosted by family support (Wijewardena et al., 2023). Humbert et al. (2018) described that women social entrepreneurs balance their personal goals with a desire to benefit the society, but they also prioritise their self- interest detracts from their economic achievements. In Meleka, Addi, (2019) reveals that a strong drive achievement for them is a moderate inclination towards power as well as a balanced need for affiliation. Meanwhile in the case of India Agarwal et al. (2020) describes that the entrepreneurial learning and competencies among them is significantly shaped by a confluence of social, personal and environmental factors.

The study by Imron et al (2019) shows that women in Ulubelu. Lampung, perceive the coffee cultivation and how they are using social entrepreneurship to create different forms of actions to address their problems that are associated with it. The results of the study discovered a variety of reflections as Women's awareness in contributing to the value chain and cultivation of the coffee. These are the coffee as a source of ideal sustainability, as a livelihood for farmers and as a cooperative entrepreneurship for doing action to make a positive change which helps in to solve the issue. The study Mair & Marti (2006) explains the process of social entrepreneurship includes the creative resource blending and utilization to look for opportunities to ignite social change. According to a study by Alvord et al (2004) of seven social entrepreneurship ventures internationally, the phrase "social entrepreneurship" refers to a process "that develops innovative solutions to specific social problems and also mobilizes the concepts, social circumstances, and resources essential for long term, sustainable social transformations. The study by Zahra et al (2009) demonstrates the high level of interest in social entrepreneurship in literature. Due to its importance in tackling social concerns and improving society and communities, this is the result. Another study by Prabhu (1999) reveals that in addition to their social contributions, social entrepreneurial organizations also generate value by empowering their customers, maximizing the use of development money, and creating jobs, all of which contribute to economic growth. Rosca et al (2020) explains that social entrepreneurship and women's entrepreneurship are the two emerging areas of entrepreneurship studies in recent years by using a multiple case study approach with four enterprises from two emerging economies that are- India and Colombia. Findings reveal that socially concerned women entrepreneurs are extremely motivated. Using the idea of entrepreneurship as emancipation, the study by Roy (2022) examines the social aspects of the process of women's entrepreneurship in India. The significant findings indicate that entrepreneurship is a transitional process in which the entrepreneur's social surroundings and change in her have been seen over time. The study by Datta & Gailey (2012) seeks to understand social entrepreneurship and empowerment of women in the context of India. The study sheds light on yet another group of women social entrepreneurs who work to "alter behavior patterns and perceptions" in their communities.

The VUCA Concept:

The United States Army War College was the first who used this acronym VUCA to characterize the post-Cold War multilateral environment that was becoming more and more volatile, unpredictable, complex, and ambiguous (Kinsinger & Walch, 2012). The U.S. Army is where the word "VUCA" originated, but it has since spread throughout the military and into the business sector as well. In context of entrepreneurship, Thomas Friedman, New York Times columnist introduced this VUCA term by analyzing the high tech companies in which he concluded that the companies that fail are often the result of their being overtaken by the potential presented by technology. Successful companies like Apple, Google, 3 M, and Amazon appear to be able to quickly adopt new technologies and adjust to changing conditions (Nandaram, 2017). The world is different now than it was earlier. Since the financial crisis, there has been a greater understanding of the entanglement and sustainability of the globally integrated business world. Some people think that because situations are unexpected and they change quickly, it makes it impossible for current models to keep up with complexity and ambiguity. Some refer to the current environment as "VUCA" (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) While the business environment is continuously changing, the business tools and frameworks are falling behind (Mack & Khare, 2016). This acronym "VUCA" is becoming more and more common in describing dynamic changes in the external environment that affect an enterprise's ability to operate (Šimková & Hoffmannová, 2021).

Research Methodology:

This study adopted a qualitative, exploratory research design to understand the role that is playing in this VUCA world. The primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling. To analyse the data Nvivo 14 software has been used by conducting thematic analysis of the data in order to get the in-depth insights of women social entrepreneurs.

Data analysis & Interpretation:

1) Core Motivations Behind Women's Social Entrepreneurship:

The diverse factors—both push and pull—drive entrepreneurial motivation, an individual's financial background and status often serve as a vital, foundational element that facilitates or constrains the pursuit of a business venture. The analysis revealed that the WSEs' decision to launch a social enterprise was profoundly rooted in purpose, driven by a powerful confluence of personal fulfillment and societal necessity, rather than purely economic ambition. The most significant finding was the consistent emergence of a **moral imperative** to address observed flaws in society. The representation of theme has been mentioned in the table 1. This was manifested in two key ways: the astute **Identification of a Market Gap** that necessitated a social solution as WSE 1 stated that *"Over the past decade, I've worked in the water sector and identified significant gaps, particularly in the representation of women".*, with addition to that WSE3 also states that *"During the COVID-19 pandemic, my husband and I realized that a significant issue in our country was public spitting, which could worsen the spread of the virus. We decided to create a product that would provide people with a safe and hygienic way to dispose of their oral waste".* and an overriding concern for **Environmental Sustainability** for that WSE 2 mentioned that *"I realized that the consumption-driven nature of fast fashion was causing significant environmental harm and that many customers were unknowingly contributing to it. I wanted to create a more transparent process".* Apart from that WSE 4 stated that *"my journey took a turn when I became concerned about the rise of lifestyle disorders. I realized there was a critical need for a more preventive approach to healthcare. This led me to join a healthcare innovation venture".* Furthermore, the WSEs frequently cited **Personal Fulfillment** as a catalyst, viewing their venture as a conscious rejection of unfulfilling corporate careers in favor of work that directly contributed to women's empowerment and grassroots community upliftment as WSE 5 stated that *"I started my career at a firm dealing with electricity laws in Delhi. But I quickly felt unfulfilled. Sitting in my cubicle, I'd wonder if I was doing anything meaningful with my life. I've always had this innate desire to work with and for women's empowerment".*

2) Contributions of Women-Led Social Enterprises:

The contributions of women-led social enterprises are deeply rooted in a blend of technical ingenuity and social responsibility, focusing on creating sustainable value for both people and the planet. In terms of **product and technology innovation**, entrepreneurs are pushing boundaries with specialized solutions, such as WSE4 using *"vocal biomarker technology to provide non-invasive and personalized health monitoring"* and WSE3 creating a *"biospittoon where people can spit, and the oral waste is converted into clean water"* that is recycled for maintenance. Similarly, WSE5 innovated by transforming bamboo into *"contemporary fashion jewellery that meets a specific medical need"* for lightweight earrings, while WSE2 mastered *"ecoprinting"* to transfer leaf prints to fabric via steam. This commitment extends to **environmental conservation**, where WSE2 advocates for the circular economy because *"the consumption-driven nature of fast fashion was causing significant environmental harm,"* and WSE3 focuses on reducing the waste and cost of public hygiene, noting that *"the Indian Railways spends over 1,200 crore rupees every year to clean the red stains from spitting."* **Economic empowerment** is achieved through inclusive employment models; for instance, WSE5 ensures economic benefits are *"rooted in the rural community"* by treating tribal artisans as *"partners in our growth,"* rather than mere beneficiaries, and WSE2 preserves *"indigenous knowledge and botany"* by teaching local women about sustainable production. Ultimately, these ventures strive for the **collective welfare of society** by addressing systemic gaps, with WSE1 pushing for *"genuine, grassroots representation"* of women in global water governance and WSE4 aiming to *"reduce the burden on healthcare systems"* through a proactive, preventive approach to medicine.

3) Perception of women social entrepreneur on VUCA world

The perception of women social entrepreneurs toward the VUCA world is characterized by a resilient mindset that transforms systemic instability into a catalyst for growth, where WSE1 views the volatility of the pandemic as a transformative period because *"the COVID-19 pandemic opened up a world of possibilities for everyone. It showed us that we can do impactful work remotely... many small initiatives like ours have been empowered by this realization, and it has given us a very good opportunity to connect and collaborate."* While some see it as a "spark of hope," others experience VUCA as a persistent operational hurdle, as WSE5 explains that *"in a small social enterprise like mine, VUCA isn't just a concept; it's a daily reality. It's about navigating complex supply chains between remote villages and urban centers... and the constant uncertainty of consumer demand,"* a sentiment echoed by WSE4 who notes the daily volatility in *"rapid advancements and shifting regulatory environments, such as data privacy."* To navigate these complexities,

these entrepreneurs prioritize extreme adaptability and agility; for instance, WSE4 maintains success by building *“a flexible technology stack that can quickly adapt to change,”* and WSE5 ensured survival by being a *“quick decision-maker”* who ***“pivoted from a wholesale model to a direct-to-consumer model via Instagram and Facebook”*** when markets stalled. This agility is further demonstrated by WSE3, who turned a supply chain crisis into a localization success after realizing that ***“some products we needed were imported from China and were unavailable,”*** forcing her to find domestic manufacturing solutions to maintain her mission. Collectively, these experiences suggest that for women in social enterprise, the VUCA world is a testing ground where empathy and rapid innovation allow them to bridge gaps in traditional systems while staying true to their social missions.

4) **Challenges they face in this VUCA world**

The challenges faced by women social entrepreneurs are multifaceted, ranging from rigid policy frameworks to deep-seated societal stigmas. Operational and systemic challenges are a significant barrier, as WSE5 points out that ***“a major policy hurdle is that sole proprietorships are not recognized as 'start-ups' under the current policy... which often blocks us from accessing government seed funding,”*** while WSE4 notes a systemic bias in her field where *“the healthcare industry is heavily biased toward curative rather than preventive solutions,”* making it difficult to gain traction for innovation. This struggle for legitimacy is compounded by a lack of credibility, often manifesting as *“general apathy and a lack of awareness”* regarding social issues, which WSE4 identifies as a primary obstacle to proactive health management. Gender-specific challenges also persist, particularly in male-dominated industries; WSE3 recalls that ***“I was the only woman entrepreneur in my area, and it was difficult... you have to prove yourself twice as much to be taken seriously,”*** a sentiment echoed by WSE2 who observes the *“double burden”* her female employees face in balancing domestic duties with work. The unavailability of mentorship remains a critical gap for leadership development, with WSE1 noting a ***“profound lack of senior women leaders in the water sector who can mentor younger women,”*** leaving many to rely on trial and error. Furthermore, talking on taboo subjects presents a unique marketing hurdle, as WSE3 explains that her ***“biggest challenge is changing people's behavior”*** and convincing them to use a spittoon in a culture where discussing oral waste is uncomfortable. Finally, the funding and scaling challenge is driven by a mismatch in values; WSE2 finds that ***“traditional investors are still focused on profit-only models”*** and struggle to appreciate the ***“triple bottom line approach of people, planet, and profit,”*** while WSE5 struggles with the logistical and financial complexities of maintaining a production unit in a remote tribal district while trying to reach urban markets.

5) **Strategies they are adopting to solve the VUCA issues:**

The strategies employed by women social entrepreneurs to overcome systemic barriers focus on leveraging digital connectivity, iterative learning, and deep-rooted community trust. A primary strategy is the **use of social media for awareness** and direct market access, which WSE5 utilized during the pandemic by pivoting to a ***“B2C model... using social media platforms to tell our story directly to customers,”*** while WSE4 employs digital tools to ***“build a community that understands the importance of proactive health”*** through consistent content that bypasses traditional marketing gatekeepers. When faced with a lack of formal guidance or blueprints, these entrepreneurs frequently rely on a **trial and error method**; WSE1 describes her approach as *“a lot of hit-and-trial”* because there are ***“no set rules or blueprints for what we're doing,”*** and WSE2 similarly spent six years *“experimenting on my own”* to master sustainable production techniques when specialized training was inaccessible. **Community engagement and empathy** serve as the emotional and operational foundation for these ventures, as WSE5 spent years living within the tribal community to move ***“beyond a purely charitable approach”*** and treat artisans as *“partners in our growth,”* while WSE3 utilizes feminine empathy as a tool for social engineering, stating that ***“we can empathize with people more and convince them in a better way”*** to change long-standing unhygienic behaviors. Finally, **building networks and collaborations** is essential for scaling their missions, as seen with WSE1 who organized a regional collective to push for ***“genuine, grassroots representation”*** in water governance and WSE4 who focuses on creating ***“collaborative partnerships with healthcare providers and governments”*** to integrate her innovations into the broader public healthcare infrastructure.

6) **Opportunities they see in this VUCA world:**

The opportunities for women social entrepreneurs are increasingly defined by a synergy between their innate strengths and a rapidly evolving global support structure. A significant advantage is identified in **empathy**

and nurturing as an advantage, with WSE2 asserting that “*women are natural nurturers with a high degree of empathy*” and are therefore “*ready to lead the social entrepreneurship movement*” due to their inclination toward kindness and environmental preservation; this is echoed by WSE3, who believes that in the challenging task of behavioral change, being a woman allows one to “*empathize with people more and convince them in a better way.*” This internal **resilience and strength** is further supported by a **growing ecosystem**, as WSE4 highlights the “*huge number of opportunities*” emerging from “*government initiatives and women-focused funding programs,*” as well as more accessible mentorships and networks that challenge traditional business norms. Furthermore, **digital platforms as an equalizer** have fundamentally transformed the landscape, enabling entrepreneurs like WSE5 to build a brand from a “*home town through Instagram and Facebook, telling your story directly to your customers*” without the need for traditional retail spaces. This digital shift is corroborated by WSE1, who notes that the pandemic “*opened up a world of possibilities*” by proving that “*we can do impactful work remotely*” and providing “*a very good opportunity to connect and collaborate*” across borders. Collectively, these opportunities provide women with the technological and systemic tools to amplify their impact while leveraging their unique perspectives to solve complex social issues.

Table 1:

Role of Women Social Entrepreneur in VUCA World			
Code	Theme	Sub-Theme	Description
Motivation	Environment Sustainability		The motivation of women social entrepreneurs emerges from a strong sense of purpose, empathy, and a desire to solve social, environmental, or community-level problems. Their motivation is not only economic; instead, it is rooted in lived experiences, personal values, and a commitment to creating positive change. Women are inspired to start ventures when they observe societal gaps—such as lack of hygiene awareness, water governance issues, environmental degradation, or limited livelihood opportunities for
	Identification of Market Gap		
	Personal Fulfilment		

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			marginalized groups.
Contribution	Economic Empowerment		Women social entrepreneurs contribute significantly to society through innovation, community upliftment, environmental sustainability, and social transformation. Their contributions extend beyond business outputs—reflecting deeper societal value. They provide employment, especially to underprivileged groups like tribal women, artisans, and rural communities. They introduce sustainable solutions. Their ventures also contribute to behavioural change by educating communities about cleanliness, preventive health, and sustainable practices.
	Environmental Conservation		
	Collective welfare of society		
	Product & Technology Innovation		
VUCA Perception	VUCA as Opportunity		Women perceive the VUCA environment—volatility, uncertainty,
	Adaptability & Agility		

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	VUCA as daily reality		complexity, and ambiguity—as both a challenge and an opportunity. They recognize constant change in market conditions, fluctuating raw material prices, unpredictable customer behaviour, and complex regulatory norms. Rather than fearing uncertainty, they view it as a space that demands agility, innovation, and continuous learning. For many, VUCA conditions became the catalyst for starting their ventures, especially during COVID-19. They acknowledge that uncertainty is the new normal and believe that adaptability is essential for survival. Women also believe that their resilience, patience, and empathy give them an advantage in navigating ambiguity.
Challenges	Operational & Systematic		Women face numerous structural, social, emotional, and operational challenges. These include funding limitations, lack of mentorship,
	Gender & Specific	Unavailability of Mentorship	
		Talking on Taboo Subjects	

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		Lack of Credibility	difficulty in convincing people to adopt new behaviours, and biases in male-dominated industries. Many encounter resistance when promoting taboo topics (spitting, hygiene, preventive health) or when working in manufacturing and technology.
	Funding & Scaling		Operational challenges include sourcing raw materials, managing tribal or rural communities with differing mindsets, navigating policy hurdles, and dealing with uncertain supply chains—especially in unstable VUCA conditions.
Strategies	Use of Social Media for awareness		Women social entrepreneurs adopt flexible, multi-layered strategies to deal with VUCA challenges. Their most prominent strategy is adaptability—using trial-and-error methods, pivoting business models, and staying open to continuous learning. They heavily use social media for visibility, education, and engagement because it offers low-cost access to
	Trial & Error Method		
	Community Engagement & Empathy		
	Building Networks & Collaboration		

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			audiences in uncertain environments. Networking is another key strategy. Women build collaborations with government incubators, NGOs, academic experts, digital communities, and mentorship groups. They rely on emotional intelligence—engaging communities with empathy, understanding local needs, and creating trust-based relationships.
Opportunities	Resilience & Strength		Women see numerous opportunities emerging from social needs, digital platforms, and shifting societal attitudes. Increasing government schemes, women-focused funding, startup incubators, and digital marketplaces create new spaces for women-led ventures. VUCA conditions, particularly after COVID-19, opened opportunities for virtual collaboration, low-cost digital expansion, and innovation-driven social solutions. Women recognize opportunities in
	Growing Ecosystem		
	Digital Platforms as an Equalizer		
	Empathy and Nurturing as an Advantage		

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			unmet needs—healthcare gaps, sustainability demands, hygiene challenges, livelihood creation, and environmental protection. They also see opportunities in rising global interest in sustainability, green products, and social impact models.
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Hierarchy Chart representation of the theme from Nvivo 14:

The hierarchy chart categorizes the entrepreneurial journey into six primary domains: Motivation, Challenges and Barriers, Contributions, Strategies, Perception on VUCA, and Opportunities. **Motivation** is depicted as the foundational layer, driven by “*an innate desire to work with and for women's empowerment*” and the “*Identification of a Market Gap*” where participants realized “*there was a critical need for a more preventive approach to healthcare*”. The **Challenges and Barriers** section highlights a significant weight on “*Funding & Scaling*,” noting that investors often favor “*conventional 'profit-only' business models*”, and **Operational & Systemic** hurdles such as the fact that “*a sole proprietorship isn't recognized as a 'start-up' under the Start-Up India policy*”. Under **Contribution**, the chart balances technical and social output, from **Product & Tech** innovation like “*vocal biomarker technology*” to **Collective Welfare**, aiming to “*provide a regular source of income to tribal women artisans*”. **Strategies** emphasize **Building Networks** and **Use of Social Media**, with entrepreneurs choosing to “*immediately pivot to selling directly to consumers (B2C) through Instagram and Facebook*”. The **Perception on VUCA** reflects a dual reality where volatility is an **Opportunity** to “*prove their resilience*” but also a **Daily Reality** involving “*navigating complex supply chains*”. Finally, the **Opportunities** domain identifies **Digital Platforms** and **Empathy** as key equalizers, with participants noting that “*women are natural nurturers with a high degree of empathy*”.



Figure 1: Role of social women entrepreneurs Hierarchy Chart

Source: Authors own representation

The word cloud representation of the prominent words:

The word cloud serves as a linguistic map of the participants' priorities, where the size of each word reflects its frequency and significance across the interviews. The central, largest term is **"WOMEN,"** anchoring the entire discourse in the gendered nature of their work and their target beneficiaries. Surrounding this are the terms **"communities"** and **"individuals,"** highlighting that these ventures are deeply *"community-driven"* and focused on empowering those who have *"lived the issues"*. The prominence of **"changes"** and **"challenge"** underscores the active, transformative nature of their work as they strive for *"behavioral change"* while navigating a *"Herculean task"* of mindset shifts. Technical and operational keywords like **"products," "materials," "process,"** and **"knowledge"** reflect their focus on innovation and sustainability, such as the *"ecoprinting"* process that *"eliminates the need for extensive water use"* and the use of *"locally sourced Manvel bamboo"*. Terms like **"active," "significant,"** and **"provide"** emphasize the agency of these entrepreneurs, who are *"ready to lead the social entrepreneurship movement"* by building *"commercially viable business that creates profound social impact"*.



Figure 2: Women entrepreneur in social sector Wordcloud

Source: Authors own representation

Conclusion & Recommendation:

Women social entrepreneurs transform the VUCA disruptions into opportunities for their inclusive developments through purpose-driven motivations, also innovative contributions. By adopting the strategies they are showcasing a way for other women entrepreneurs to tackle this VUCA world. To amplify their impact, policymakers should focus on enhancing their business. They Start-Up India to recognize sole proprietorships as eligible startups, investors must develop hybrid funding blending grants and patient capital valuing triple-bottom-line metrics, mentorship ecosystems need women-only cohorts connecting juniors with sector seniors, digital skilling hubs should teach e-commerce and AI for tier-2/3 social ventures, and SDG frameworks must integrate KPIs tracking marginalized women's job creation and environmental innovations—strengthening these support structures to enable scaling of their transformative role in resilient societies.

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