

Business Growth and Development for Women Entrepreneurs in the Organic Food Sector – A Structural Equation Modelling Approach

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Abstract— Women in contemporary times have excelled in many ventures, including the growing organic food sector. The cross-sectional quantitative survey seeks to understand how work and life balance, access to resources, business challenges and support, and market opportunities impact the participation and development of women in organic commerce. This study investigated the association between the determinants (market opportunities, support, challenges, work-life balance and resources) of business growth among organic women entrepreneurs using a quantitative and causal research methodology. A survey was used to collect information from 317 women in Northern India who were involved in various organic food enterprises. The analysis was carried out using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 25.0 using regression analysis. The regression analysis used in the work is SEM (structural equation modelling). Results show that market opportunities, support systems, and access to resources are vital to the success and growth of Women Entrepreneurs in this sector. On the other hand, business challenges show that challenges affecting women's entrepreneurship are likely to hinder business development. These findings support the need for support systems to address these hurdles and improve women's promotion in the organic foods sector. The general implications of the results from research on the global organic food sector and women's contributions are potentially far-reaching for all categories of stakeholders, from governmental and policymaker levels to community leaders and financial institutions. The findings show the overall net positive effects of market opportunities on business growth, indicating that when women entrepreneurs enjoy better access to these markets and resources, their businesses grow.

Keywords— business growth; business development; women entrepreneurs; organic food sector; growth factors.

I. INTRODUCTION

Women in contemporary times have excelled in many ventures, including the growing organic food sector (Nagpal, 2024). Such a change is not solely related to enhancing the customer interest in purchasing organic products, and the interest has been escalating because of the rising consumer consciousness about health and environmental issues (Milojevic et al., 2021; (Nagpal, 2024). It is also about the new generation of businessmen and businesswomen, a new generation of entrepreneurs who are totally different and completely gender-neutral, a new generation of entrepreneurs who are bringing new ideas and concepts and, above all, are very keen on the ethical business outlook and on the ideals which are at the base of the concept of organic farming (D'Silva & Bhat, 2022). The organic market, which is rapidly emerging, therefore, offers an exciting research focus point for understanding the intersection between gender relations, entrepreneurialism, and sustainability. This research was deemed necessary because of the acknowledgement that women entrepreneurs play a significant, yet not without controversy, role in the growth of the organic sector. Yet, the growth of this market is far from suggesting greater freedom or creativity; on the contrary, it opens a network of specifications that women have to face (D'Silva & Bhat, 2022; Ghosh & Cheruvalath, 2007; Nagpal, 2024). Some of these barriers include concerns that persist as longstanding obstacles such as the acquisition of finances and networks; other challenges can be described as the density of operational complexities, the challenges of managing an

organic business while managing family needs and other commitments within an organizational structure. The requirement for studying such experiences must be balanced, as it can help realize the gender-specific challenges and strengths and enhance women's entrepreneurship development to strengthen the organic segment (D'Silva & Bhat, 2022; Ghosh & Cheruvalath, 2007; Nagpal, 2024).

However, the literature reveals that different variables influence business growth in this sector. Market opportunities and the perception of prospects displayed by women entrepreneurs demonstrate their confidence and strategic vision of the sector. It is also about their ability to secure the financial, physical, and educational resources, that can be the driving force to their business initiatives (D'Silva & Bhat, 2022; Ghose et al., 2021). Maintaining a proper work-life balance is also crucial and affects not only these business owners and their lives but also the well-being of their companies (Kajtazi, 2021). Additionally, the details of women in the sector, particularly business constraints like extremely involved organic certification procedures and stiff market competition, warrant examination to uncover the tenacity and flexibility needed to prosper in this segment (Ghose et al., 2021; Mamun et al., 2021). Support systems are a powerful influence behind these triggers and are defined to range from bureaucratic governmental support structures to acquaintances' support systems. These support structures could be influential and easily reachable in determining the direction of entrepreneurship for women in the organic sector (Petridou & Glaveli, 2008). Lastly, the unambiguous performance indicators for these ventures are the growth and sustainability – factors that not only signify the financial profitability of the ventures but also speak of their contribution to realizing the cardinal objective of sustainable development and social justice (Abdullah et al., 2014; Fallah & Soori, 2023). The cross-sectional quantitative survey seeks to understand how work and life balance, access to resources, business challenges and support, and market perceptions impact the participation and development of women in organic commerce and how they can determine the industry's future.

1.1 Research Gap:

As the organic sector evolves, more women are at the helm of this growing sector, and with them, it is bringing in the positive changes necessary for the ongoing evolution of the world's diets and the health consciousness behind them (Muthulingam & Madhuwanthi, 2020). Their advancement within this sphere is evidence of a growing change in the societal attitude towards engendering the entrepreneurship sphere, largely noticed in India and now exhibited in organic food sector. These women embody a balance of creativity, dedication, and management, coupled with imposed principles of sustainability, which are revolutionizing the market (Dsouza & Panakaje, 2023). However, it is equally important to note that some barriers exist to women's access to organic products. It faces a range of issues, such as uncertainty in financing, which is a complex process, lack of adequate support from the government and low consumer and stakeholder awareness of the matter. These challenges are further challenged by culture and economic baseline, where women will likely have limited chances of accessing the much-needed raw materials and connections that help businesses thrive (Ndlovu, 2022). However, there is a correlation between the challenges described and women entrepreneurs currently operating in the organic sector. They are positioning themselves to provide the market, which is becoming more sensitive to the issue of ethical consumption, with products from their unique perspectives and vantage viewpoints (Maity & Sahu, 2020). This often entails a strategic-thinking process that is macros, planning and executing processes that make financial and socio-ecological sense in the long term for their organizations and the markets, societies and ecosystems that host them. The above resilience is also strengthened by the networks developed – these are groups of like-minded people who can foster mentorship, encourage, and offer other support as well as business links (D'Silva & Bhat, 2022; Ghosh & Cheruvalath, 2007; Kothari, 2017). Such networks are beneficial, providing a source of group wisdom and support which assists women in overcoming the issues and barriers within the natural organic economy. Still, there is a requirement for specific consideration of the issues that women entrepreneurs in the organic industry experience. They also itemized a definite reduction in gender-specific research and concomitant policies that could offer a more penetrating distinction between genders that may aid in understanding their distinctive trials and tribulations (D'Silva & Bhat, 2022; Ghosh & Cheruvalath, 2007; Nagpal, 2024; Ndlovu, 2022). Therefore, bridging these gaps is a significant step in the right direction to foster an environment that will nurture and acknowledge the efforts of these women and enable positive progression for

them. Therefore, it could be said that women entrepreneurs face various barriers when doing business in the organic sector but are still very strong and creative. Amid their success in the expansion of the organic food sector, their progress exposes the need to prepare the conditions for these women, as well as the general organic initiative, to grow and thrive to the extent that the ideals of equity and sustainability, which the women represent, will promote as well.

II. LITERATURE

The research on female entrepreneurs in the organic sector is diverse and combines several essential factors. This literature review also compiles findings in a way that builds from prior studies to give a solid foundation to these variables and uses.

2.1 Perceived Marketing opportunities:

While there may be some form of likeness in how women generally view opportunities in the organic sector, it is essential to consider the particular position or perspective of women business owners. This perception can, therefore, profoundly impact their operations, business models and investment strategies (Anthopoulou, 2010; Farnworth & Hutchings, 2009). Investigate shows that women entrepreneurs would display positive or negative mannerisms while approaching the market: positive perception being optimism and vice-versa.

2.2 Resource Access:

The mechanism of this perception stems from a number of factors like market forces, consumer attitude and the nature of competition. For example, a favourable view of the target market will likely prompt higher growth rates and exploitative strategies, whereas mistrust may lead to conservative decision-making. One of the significant challenges affecting women in business is limited access to these resources, which hinders them from excessively developing their businesses (Hobe, 2021; Nagpal, 2024). Financial-related limitations are strongly felt, where female entrepreneurs experience enormous challenges when engaging lenders as most of the lending institutions still have ingrained bias, and most times, these women lack any form of collateral to offer to the lending institutions (Otoo et al., 2012). Also, the availability of educational materials and training in business management and organization can improve their knowledge of the business and increase efficiency, yet such a chance is only sometimes given.

2.3 Work-Life Balance:

This is one of the most critical issues that women entrepreneurs must consider, especially since they must consider work and home responsibilities. This balance can confer potential benefits on their well-being and the stability of their businesses. Women can also be encumbered with household chores in most cases, which significantly shortens the time they can spend running their ventures (Pareek & Bagrecha, 2017). It is crucial to recognize best practices in work-life balance to sustain the bosses' well-being and guarantee the future stability of their businesses (Finlay, 2008).

2.4 Business Challenges:

Real-life business issues affecting female players in the organic industry Women who participate in the organic market experience several issues that affect their growth. These are the accuracy or rigorous certification criteria that must be met, market conditions, and people's demands (Ghouse et al., 2021; Mamun et al., 2021).

2.5 Support system:

Compliance with organic product certifications can be lengthy and expensive, which may be a big problem, especially for women with small businesses. Furthermore, market forces by influential and better-established players stifle women-owned businesses from finding suitable niches (Anthopoulou, 2010). The government and non-governmental organizations and the availability and quality of social networks constitute an essential factor in the sustainability and success of women-owned businesses (Petridou & Glaveli, 2008). The suitable support structures will enable women entrepreneurs to gain the required inputs and connections to succeed (Anthopoulou, 2010; Nagpal, 2024).

2.6 Business growth:

Women entrepreneurs in the organic food value chain sector achieved their goals and objectives in sustaining and expanding their business ventures. This variable is the endurance of their operations and the economic effect they will have on their businesses. It has revealed that sustainable business activities are vital in the organic products industry due to the significant focus on environmental and social factors. The enduring attribute for success is the capacity to attain business growth besides retaining an organic perspective (Abdullah et al., 2014; Kothari, 2017).

III. METHODS

This study investigated the association between the determinants (opportunities, support, challenges, work-life balance and resources) of business growth among women entrepreneurs in organic food sector using a quantitative and causal research methodology. A survey was used to collect information from 317 women in Northern India who were involved in various organic food enterprises.

3.1 Measures:

Market opportunities, support systems, business challenges, work-life balance resource access and business growth, were measured using three items each on a 5-point Likert scale.

3.2 Objectives:

- To study the influence of market opportunities on business growth concerning women entrepreneurs in the organic food sector.
- To study the influence of support systems on business growth concerning women entrepreneurs in the organic food sector.
- To study the influence of business challenges on business growth concerning women entrepreneurs in the organic food sector.
- To study the influence of resource access on business growth concerning women entrepreneurs in the organic food sector.
- To study the influence of work-life balance on business growth in the organic food sector concerning women entrepreneurs.

IV. ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

The analysis was carried out using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 25.0 using regression analysis. The regression analysis used in the work is SEM (structural equation modelling).

4.1 Participants' Profile:

Concerning 317 respondents (Table 1), 53.63% of the respondents, or the majority of women entrepreneurs in the organic industry, are older than 35. Just 10.41% of people are younger than 25, compared to 35.96% who are between the ages of 25 and 35. 48.26% are married, 38.17% are single, and 13.56% are in the "other" group. 49.84 per cent of female entrepreneurs have been in business for over five years. 29.02% of those with two to five years' experience and 21.14% with one to two years' experience come next. A sizable fraction of female entrepreneurs—65.93%—work full-time in their companies, compared to 34.07% who work part-time. According to the educational distribution, 42.90% of female entrepreneurs have a bachelor's degree, followed by a master's degree (27.34%), an intermediate degree (16.09%), and a category labelled "Others" (13.56%). Of women entrepreneurs, 36.28% have more than thirty employees, 35.65% have up to fifteen employees, and 28.08% have between fifteen and thirty employees.

TABLE 1
PARTICIPANT'S PROFILE

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Below 25 years	33	10.41%
	25–35 years	114	35.96%
	Above 35 years	170	53.63%
Marital Status	Married	153	48.26%
	Unmarried	121	38.17%
	Other	43	13.56%
Involvement in Business	1–2 years	67	21.14%
	2–5 years	92	29.02%
	More than five years	158	49.84%
Work Status	Full-time	209	65.93%
	Part-time	108	34.07%
Education	Intermediate and less	51	16.09%
	Bachelor	136	42.90%
	Master	87	27.44%
	Others	43	13.56%
Business Size	Up to 15 employees	113	35.65%
	15–30 employees	89	28.08%
	More than 30 employees	115	36.28%

4.2 Measurement Model:

The measurement model was constructed using a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in AMOS 25.0, as illustrated in Figure 1. The model's fit indices suggest that the results are favourable: CMIN/DF= 3.22; CFI = 0.927; GFI= 0.904; NFI = 0.928; and RMSEA=0.061 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). C.R. (composite reliability) ratings were employed to assess the instrument's reliability, and they exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.60. To evaluate convergent validity, the study implemented AVE (average variance extracted) scores to establish a criterion of at least 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and standard loadings that exceed

0.40. The analysis corroborated the discriminant validity, which demonstrated that the correlation coefficients were less than the square root of the AVE scores (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Consequently, the components were clearly distinguished (Table 2).

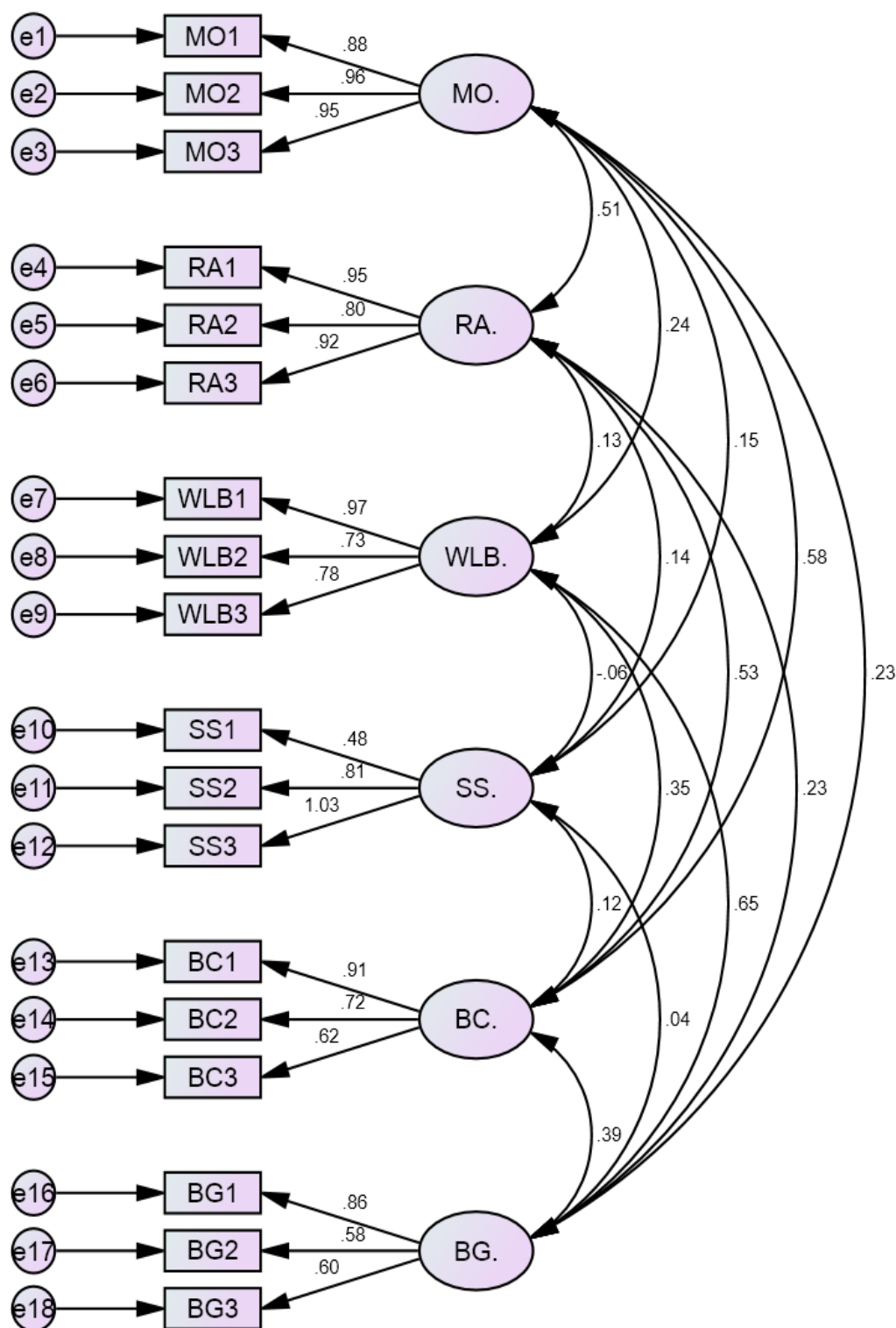


FIGURE 1: Measurement Model

Source: Author's Own

TABLE 2
VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Factors	CR	AVE	BC.	MO.	RA.	WLB.	SS.	BG.
BC.	0.799	0.576	0.759					
MO.	0.949	0.862	0.581	0.929				
RA.	0.92	0.794	0.534	0.514	0.891			
WLB.	0.871	0.695	0.346	0.242	0.13	0.834		
SS.	0.838	0.651	0.119	0.147	0.142	-0.055	0.807	
BG.	0.725	0.516	0.392	0.226	0.235	0.652	0.043	0.69

Source: Author's Own

Note: BC-business challenges; marketing opportunities; WLB-Work work-life balance; resource systems; resource access; BG-business growth.

4.3 Structural Model

Using the structural model, this work examined the relationship between predictor and outcome variables.

CMIN/df=4.25, GFI=0.908, CFI=0.921, RMSEA=.062, NFI=0.934.

4.4 Market opportunities and the growth of businesses

The results drawn from the regression analysis showed that market opportunities have a strong positive relationship with the growth of businesses in the organic food sector for women entrepreneurs, evidenced by a beta coefficient of (0.38, $p < 0.05$). This is an indication that there is consistency in the growth of business opportunities amongst women in this kind of business as the market expands.

4.5 Support systems and the growth of businesses

Functioning support systems have a net positive influence on the growth of women business entrepreneurs in the organic food industry, and the beta coefficient of the research shows a moderate association between the two ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$). This, therefore, suggests that there is a strong potential for supportive policies and programs to contribute to the success of women-owned business ventures.

4.6 Business challenges and the growth of businesses

Indeed, business challenges can be statistically identified as having a negative association with business growth by calculating the beta coefficient whereby businesses with high challenges have a negative beta coefficient of $\beta = -0.24$, $t = 2.62$, $p < 0.05$). From the above relationship, it is inferred that the higher the level of threats that come with being a woman entrepreneur, the slower rate of business evolution in the organic food industry.

4.7 Resource Access and the growth of businesses

Resource access also has a positive relationship with business growth, and more specifically, there is a significant positive beta coefficient of resource access, which is equal to 0.37, and this is a very significant value (< 0.01). This means it is possible to bring change in the fortunes of women entrepreneurs in the organic segment by making available better access of resources including funding, land, technologies, and many more.

4.8 Work-life balance and the growth of businesses

There is evidence of the significance of the predictor, work-life balance, with the beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.05$) demonstrating a positive impact on business growth. This implies that women business people can develop a balance between home and office demands as a strategy for enhancing the growth of the business in the organic food sector.

V. CONCLUSION

A statistical perspective suggests that many factors at work affect business growth in one way or another. Market opportunities, support systems, and access to resources are vital to the success and growth of Women Entrepreneurs in this sector. On the

other hand, business challenges show that challenges affecting women's entrepreneurship are likely to hinder business development. These findings support the need for support systems to address these hurdles and improve women's promotion in the organic foods sector.

VI. DISCUSSION

The findings state that where there are more excellent market opportunities, there is enhanced business growth, which underlines the need for market access among women entrepreneurs. This implies that when women have optimum access to customers, they will be able to serve the customers in their target markets, hence promoting their businesses' success. Increasing market orientation entails marketing human capital development, market information, and marketing events, particularly for convergence with the targeted buyers and suppliers by women entrepreneurs. The moderate positive results reported in support systems about business growth are essential to stress the contribution of extra organizational support in evolving entrepreneurial success. Education, sponsorship, support and encouragement from the government and the community in terms of resources and from the experienced successful women entrepreneurs, respectively, can enable the women emblem to create their businesses. Measures that were taken and are still being taken to eliminate or even discrimination against women can also enhance the available wall for women. The highly positive and significant relationship between resource availability and business expansion supports the notion that the requisite financial, human, and physical resources are sine qua non for business growth and longevity. Proposed solutions that might become catalysts for developing women's businesses include providing increased autonomy over capital, including microfinancing, grants for female-owned businesses, and targeted training in financial management. The evidence confirming a positive link between work-life balance and business development means that an effective balance of work and personal responsibilities may improve business performance. This reveals the necessity of official and organizational measures that would allow women entrepreneurs to have a flexible schedule, childcare, and societal expectations that accept them working both for their companies and in their households. This correlation shows that the level of challenges faced in business, such as gender bias, network limitations, and regulation, all reduce the level of growth. Mitigating these challenges through unique initiatives and training, for instance, gender-sensitivity training and diversity in business networking events and receptions for business, and the simplification of business laws to be more friendly to women will go a long way to ensuring that women entrepreneurs get equal chances of survival as their male counterparts. Lastly, it is crucial to highlight that some environmental conditions determine the probability of success among women entrepreneurs in the organic food sector; those conditions involve increasing market opportunities for the targeted business segment, improving support structures and resources available for this segment, addressing the risks and obstacles of doing business, and providing women business owners with a work-life balance. This requires cooperation among stakeholders, including policymakers, financial institutions, and community heads, to ensure that women girls experience an enabling environment in their operation of organic food value chain ventures for sustainable income generation.

6.1 Implications

The general implications of the results from research on the global organic food sector and women's contributions are potentially far-reaching for all categories of stakeholders, from governmental and policymaker levels to community leaders and financial institutions. The findings show the overall net positive effects of market opportunities on business growth, indicating that when women entrepreneurs enjoy better access to these critical markets, their businesses grow. This suggests the need for activities to boost the marketing of women entrepreneurs' products. This can be in the form of training and mentoring, especially in the area of marketing and promotions and linking them to more significant markets. The role of support systems in business is critical when it comes to the growth of a business. According to these factors, it would be seen that the majority received some external help for mentorship, subsidies, and supportive policies. The need, therefore, arises to sustain and expand funding for governmental and non-governmental organizations and agencies, as well as to assist and offer various forms of support to women within the organic food sector. The availability of resources became a fundamental concern, and financial, human, and physical resources were vital for expanding and continuing businesses. These findings indicated that financial institutions and investors must develop specific services for women business owners and that training initiatives should tackle how these firms can manage their resources and run their operations effectively. Work-life balance with overall well-being correlates to new business performance and shows that employee satisfaction is essential to corporate success. According to this, there is a necessity to develop more work-life balance policies and business schedules for appropriate working hours and flexible leaves, including parental and child care services. Measures of that nature would not only help promote the continuance of women in business but also promote the productivity of business women and the growth of businesses.

On the other hand, the 'negative' correlation between challenges faced by business and growth emphasizes that women continue to face limitations and discrimination as entrepreneurs. This requires continued revamped efforts to alter these barriers through education, gender sensitivity training, policies that will embrace women, and push for women's networks that embrace all these women. These findings together signify a need for a policy framework that holistically addresses all the requirements of women entrepreneurs. This entails improving market access, strengthening support structures empowering women, improving resources, and attending to the particularities of women and their ability to balance work and family. Doing so would not only benefit women entrepreneurs but also help the overall growth and sustenance of the organic foods industry and hence have a domino effect on communities as well as those key to economic empowerment.

6.2 Future Research

It is essential to prioritize longitudinal research to investigate how these variables and their relationships to company success evolve. As a result, the sustainability of entrepreneurial success becomes more straightforward. Additionally, to provide a more accurate understanding of how businesses operate, scholars should examine and draw attention to additional elements that could have an impact on the prosperity and expansion of firms, such as ideas unrelated to entrepreneurship, like markets, innovation, and technology. Finally, the study highlights the need for a more all-encompassing strategy when supporting female entrepreneurs, taking into account the variables at play and realizing the importance of the outcomes in the form of community and family support to help address the need to enhance the environmental conditions for successful growth and development in organic-food entrepreneurship.

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