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"SURVIVAL IS NOT A CHOICE, BUT A NECESSITY FOR GROWTH": EXPLORING WOMENPRENEUR ADAPTATION STRATEGIES IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY WHEN FACING CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore womenpreneur adaptation strategies in facing crisis situations using a phenomenological approach. Data was obtained through in-depth interviews and then analyzed to reveal subjective experiences, adaptation patterns, and meanings constructed in their entrepreneurial journey. Research results show that womenpreneurs develop multidimensional adaptive strategies, including business innovation based on sustainability values, utilization of social networks and communities, and psychological resilience in managing dual-role pressures. These findings confirm that womenpreneurs not only survive, but make crises a momentum to grow and strengthen their entrepreneurial identity. The research contribution lies in enriching womenpreneurship literature through in-depth qualitative perspectives, as well as practical implications for formulating women empowerment policies, entrepreneurship training programs, and economic inclusion strategies that are more sensitive to the real needs and challenges of women business owners.

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INTRODUCTIONS

Women's role in global economic development has undergone significant shifts. Women are no longer solely positioned as complements in household economic structures, but also as main actors in creating economic value through entrepreneurial activities. This phenomenon has given birth to the term "womenpreneur," which refers to women who independently run entrepreneurial activities and actively contribute to creating employment, product innovation, and driving local and national economic growth (Yadav & Unni, 2016).

Amid increasingly complex social and economic dynamics whether due to technological advances, globalization, or uncertainty resulting from crises, the presence of womenpreneurs actually shows an increasing trend (Hidayah et al., 2022). According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report in 2023, women's

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participation in entrepreneurial activities shows significant growth in developing countries, including Indonesia. This indicates a paradigm shift in gender roles in the economy, where women are no longer limited to the informal household sector, but also participate as strategic decision-makers in the business world (X. Wang et al., 2022).

However, this strategic role is not free from distinctive structural and cultural challenges. Many womenpreneurs still face obstacles in the form of limited access to capital, lack of digital literacy, low participation in entrepreneurship training, and dual burdens as housewives and business owners (Syahnur & Syarif, 2024). These challenges become more complex in societies still heavily influenced by patriarchal values, where women often must negotiate between domestic roles and their economic aspirations. In this context, womenpreneurs not only perform economic functions, but also play a symbolic role in challenging and reconstructing established gender norms (Jennings & Brush, 2013).

Nevertheless, many studies show that womenpreneurs have high adaptive capacity. Their adaptation strategies are not merely economic, but also social and emotional. Women business owners tend to build community-based networks, adopt sustainability values in their business models (Sittah et al., 2025), and demonstrate strong psychological resilience in facing uncertainty (Woldesenbet Beta, 2025). Additionally, the value-based and social relationship approaches adopted by many womenpreneurs become distinctive advantages in building customer loyalty and business sustainability.

Although research on womenpreneurship has been extensively conducted, most previous studies focus more on quantitative and economic aspects, such as women's contributions to MSME growth, capital constraints, and participation in the entrepreneurship sector (Palasari et al., 2023). However, in-depth studies on the subjective experiences and adaptation strategies of women business owners in facing uncertainty and crises remain very limited, especially in the Indonesian sociocultural context that is laden with patriarchal values and women's dual roles. Previous research also tends to focus on external factors such as government support and digitalization (Rahayu & Ellyanawati, 2023; Setiawati & Hidayat, 2023), without thoroughly exploring how womenpreneurs build psychological resilience, manage role conflicts, and interpret spirituality in maintaining their businesses. Therefore, this research attempts to fill this gap with a phenomenological approach to deeply understand the authentic experiences, personal values, and adaptive strategies developed by womenpreneurs in facing periods of economic, social, and personal uncertainty. The results of this research are expected to enrich women's entrepreneurship literature in Indonesia and provide practical contributions to empowerment programs and entrepreneurship training based on women's resilience.

This research aims to explore the meaning and adaptation strategies of womenpreneurs in facing uncertainty, both in economic, social, and personal contexts. The main focus lies on how women business owners build resilience, respond to changes, and develop strategies aligned with the values and dual roles they carry. Using a phenomenological approach, this research attempts to capture the subjective reality and authentic experiences of womenpreneurs, which have been underrepresented in mainstream academic discourse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The phenomenon of womenpreneurship or women's entrepreneurship has become an important focus in modern entrepreneurship literature. Womenpreneurship is understood as entrepreneurial activities carried out by women, where they play roles not only as economic actors, but also as agents of social and cultural change. De Bruin et al. (2007) explain that women business owners have dual roles which is driving economic growth while changing social perceptions of women's roles in the public sphere. Jennings & Brush (2013) also affirm that womenpreneurs tend to present value-based entrepreneurship approaches, emphasizing balance between economic profit, social sustainability, and family roles. Bazán Valque et al. (2025) and Salman et al. (2025) add that women entrepreneurs often must face structural obstacles such as limited capital, low digital literacy, and social pressure due to still-strong

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patriarchal values. Therefore, womenpreneurs not only serve as economic drivers, but also symbols of resilience, independence, and women's empowerment amid challenging social dynamics.

The grand theory underlying this research is the Theory of Social and Psychological Adaptation by Roy R. Grinker and John Spiegel (1945), which explains that adaptation is a dynamic process of individuals adjusting to environmental changes through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. In the entrepreneurship context, adaptation is interpreted as the ability of business owners to change business strategies, organizational structures, or mindsets to survive facing external changes (Edelia & Aslami, 2022). Furthermore, adaptation theory in business management is also explained by Miles et al. (1978) in the Strategic Adaptation Theory model, which outlines four types of organizational adaptation strategies: prospector, defender, analyzer, and reactor. This model describes how business owners choose strategies most appropriate to their environmental change levels. In the womenpreneur context, adaptation is not only rational-economic, but also emotional and social, as they must balance domestic and professional roles. In line with this, Tiwari & Shastri (2023) explain that womenpreneur adaptation strategies are multidimensional including product innovation, business diversification, social network strengthening, and psychological resilience. These strategies are not only aimed at survival, but also at creating new growth opportunities amid crises.

The concept of uncertainty was first introduced by Knight (1921) in his classical theory Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit. Knight distinguished between measurable risk and unpredictable uncertainty. In the entrepreneurial world, uncertainty becomes an inherent condition, where business decisions often must be made without complete information. In modern context, uncertainty theory was also developed by Milliken (1987) who grouped uncertainty into three forms: state uncertainty (uncertainty about environmental situations), effect uncertainty (uncertainty about change impacts), and response uncertainty (uncertainty about individual or organizational ability to respond). For womenpreneurs, uncertainty does not only stem from market and economy, but also from social, psychological, and cultural conditions. Women business owners are often faced with dual-role ambiguity, social pressure, and limited structural support (Theresia et al., 2025). However, on the other hand, their ability to manage uncertainty actually demonstrates high resilience and creativity in building business sustainability.

Based on these three theories, it can be concluded that womenpreneurs carry out complex adaptation processes amid economic and social uncertainty conditions. Grand adaptation theory explains how individuals adjust to changes; womenpreneur theory describes unique characteristics, values, and challenges of women in entrepreneurship; while uncertainty theory emphasizes external contexts requiring flexibility and innovation. These three theoretical frameworks become the conceptual foundation of research in understanding the meaning and adaptation strategies of womenpreneurs during crises, not only as forms of survival, but also as transformation processes toward sustainable growth.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological method, aimed at understanding subjective experiences and adaptation strategies carried out by womenpreneurs in facing periods of uncertainty and crisis. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it can deeply explore the meaning of participants' life experiences and provide space to reflectively explore their perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The research subject is a married woman who simultaneously runs various types of businesses, one of which is a building materials and electronics store. Participant selection was conducted through purposive sampling, as this profile was considered representative in illustrating the complexity of womenpreneur roles who must balance domestic and professional responsibilities, while facing diverse market dynamics. Data was collected through in-depth interviews using semi-structured guidelines. Interviews were conducted directly to explore participants' experiences regarding business adaptation strategies, dual-role management, and utilization of digital technology in expanding business networks. All conversations were recorded with participants' consent.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This research reveals how a womenpreneur with dual roles as a housewife and entrepreneur is able to adapt during periods of uncertainty and crisis. Based on in-depth interview results, five main adaptation strategy themes were found, namely: innovation and business diversification, time and dual-role management, flexible financial management, digital technology utilization, and spiritual strength and family social support.

Innovation and Business Diversification

In the interview, researchers asked how the participant responded to market changes during crises and what strategies were implemented to keep the business running stably. The participant explained that when electronics store sales declined, she shifted some capital to other fields. She said that when sales decreased, she began developing boarding house and store rental businesses to maintain income stability. She stated, "When sales at the electronics store started to decline, I shifted some capital to boarding house and rental businesses. From there I could cover daily expenses without depending on one source only."

From these interview results, it can be concluded that innovation and diversification are main strategies in maintaining business continuity. This strategy demonstrates strategic thinking ability and high flexibility aligned with adaptive entrepreneur characteristics (Vedy et al., 2025).

Time Management and Dual Roles

When researchers asked how the participant divided time between household responsibilities and business, the participant conveyed that discipline and time planning became key to ensuring all responsibilities could be carried out well. She mentioned that mornings were used for household matters, while afternoons to evenings were focused on business activities. She explained, "In the morning I focus on taking care of the house and my husband first, after that I go to the store. Afternoon until night I handle other work that still needs attention. Everything must be scheduled so nothing gets missed." From these results it is evident that the participant has high awareness of time management and dual roles. This strategy reinforces the work-life integration concept commonly found in womenpreneurs (Jennings & Brush, 2013).

Adaptive Financial Management

Researchers then asked how the participant managed finances to keep the business surviving amid economic fluctuations. The participant explained that she implemented flexible spending patterns by reducing large raw material purchases and adjusting capital to keep it circulating. She stated that, "In the past, I used to stock up a lot, but now I only buy what's necessary. That way, if prices change or sales drop, my finances stay secure." This finding shows that financial adaptability strategy becomes an important factor in maintaining business sustainability during crises. This pattern also illustrates high financial awareness supporting long-term stability of women-owned MSMEs.

Digital Technology Utilization

When asked how the participant utilized technology during crises, she conveyed that social media became the main means of retaining customers and expanding market reach. She actively used WhatsApp Business, Instagram, and TikTok for promotion. The participant explained, "Now, many customers find me through Instagram. I also make simple, random content on YouTube for entertainment and to let people know about my products and services. From there, my content gained traction, and I even started earning income from YouTube."

From these interview results, it is evident that the participant was able to adapt to digital technology developments. Digital transformation is not only used as a marketing tool, but also as a means to strengthen customer relationships. This finding supports research by Laksmanawati & Yuniawan (2021) which emphasizes the importance of digitalization for women's business sustainability.

Spiritual Strength and Social Support

Researchers also asked about the source of strength that kept the participant persevering through pressure and difficulties in running business amid crises. The participant revealed that family support and spiritual faith became

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major sources of encouragement and motivation. She stated, "I once felt tired and almost gave up, but prayers and encouragement from family made me strong again. I believe every difficulty will have a solution if we keep trying."

This quote shows that spirituality and social support become important parts of psychological resilience. Religious values and family relationships play major roles in maintaining womenpreneurs' emotional balance in facing economic and social pressure.

Discussion

This research results show that womenpreneur adaptation strategies are multidimensional, encompassing economic, social, and emotional aspects. In the context of uncertainty and crisis, women business owners not only attempt to survive, but also transform and develop through creativity, innovation, and strong mental resilience.

- 1) Innovation and business diversification demonstrates women's ability to read opportunities and manage business risks. This aligns with findings by Tahir et al. (2025) affirming that women business owners have high adaptive tendencies in facing market changes.
- 2) Time and dual-role management reflects integration strategies for domestic and professional roles. This strategy supports research by Jennings & Brush (2013) stating that women entrepreneurs build work models aligned with family responsibilities.
- 3) Adaptive financial management becomes evidence of women's ability to maintain business continuity through efficiency and realistic planning.
- 4) Digital technology utilization demonstrates women's transformation capability toward modern business ecosystems. Digitalization opens wider market access and becomes a means to strengthen business sustainability.
- 5) Social support and spiritual strength reinforces psychological resilience. This factor becomes a distinctive characteristic of womenpreneur adaptation strategies in Indonesia that not only rely on technical capabilities, but also emotional strength and religious values (Gusniarti, 2025).

Women entrepreneurs' adaptation strategies are multidimensional, encompassing economic, social, and emotional aspects, which enable them not only to survive but also to leverage crises as opportunities for transformation through creativity, innovation, and strong mental resilience. The innovation and business diversification strategies implemented by womenpreneurs reflect the ability to identify opportunities and manage business risks adaptively. This aligns with Bandura's concept of entrepreneurial self-efficacy, which states that individuals with high confidence in their capabilities will be more active in facing challenges and seeking creative solutions. The effectuation approach developed by Sarasvathy is also relevant because womenpreneurs utilize available resources, measure acceptable losses, and view unexpected events as opportunities, so that innovative strategies are not merely reactions but reflections of adaptive logic under conditions of uncertainty (Madawala et al., 2025; Woldesenbet Beta, 2025).

Time management and dual role strategies demonstrate harmonious integration between domestic and professional responsibilities. In the context of women's entrepreneurship literature, this reflects unique socio-cultural challenges for womenpreneurs, where they leverage family and community support to balance dual burdens. The resilience theory framework emphasizes the ability to mobilize social relationship resources as part of adaptation, so that time management is not merely a pragmatic practice but part of an adaptive strategy that supports business sustainability and personal well-being (Gusniarti, 2025; Shamieh & Bastian, 2025).

Adaptive financial management confirms womenpreneurs' ability to maintain business sustainability through efficiency, realistic planning, and utilization of informal networks. From a resource-based view perspective, adaptive financial management becomes an internal capability that enables businesses to survive external pressures. Additionally, self-efficacy also plays a role because confidence in financial management capabilities encourages proactive decision-making. Literature highlights that barriers to formal financing access drive women entrepreneurs to use adaptive strategies to maintain economic stability and business sustainability (Husein & Arumsari, 2025).

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Digital technology utilization becomes a manifestation of womenpreneurs' transformation toward a modern business ecosystem. The use of digital platforms for marketing and distribution expands market access and strengthens business sustainability. Absorptive capacity theory is relevant because womenpreneurs leverage new knowledge and technology to adapt quickly to changes in the business environment. This also aligns with the concept of resilience that emphasizes strategic transformation capability as part of long-term adaptation (Rahayu & Ellyanawati, 2023; Setyaningrum et al., 2023).

Social support and spiritual strength reinforce the psychological and emotional resilience of womenpreneurs. Religious values, community solidarity, and social networks become important resources in facing pressure and maintaining business sustainability. Gender-sensitive approaches in resilience theory emphasize that women entrepreneurs' resilience stems not only from technical capabilities but also from social and spiritual capital that shapes holistic adaptation strategies. This shows that womenpreneurs' adaptation strategies are not only practical but also culturally and emotionally valuable (Shamieh & Bastian, 2025).

Overall, womenpreneurs view crises not merely as threats but as learning spaces and moments of change. The strategies they implement reflect a holistic understanding of business and personal life, enabling them to build economic, social, and spiritual resilience and sustainability simultaneously. This aligns with the notion that resilience in entrepreneurship is not only the ability to return to the original state but to develop and adapt toward a more robust and innovative condition (Acevedo-Duque et al., 2021).

The implementation of adaptation strategies containing elements of innovation and diversification reflects the concrete manifestation of entrepreneurial self-efficacy theory, where self-confidence in personal capabilities becomes a key factor driving proactive action and measured risk-taking in the context of uncertainty. This conviction strengthens women entrepreneurs' capacity to experiment and develop new approaches in maintaining business sustainability. Meanwhile, the effectuation approach explains how entrepreneurs focus on available resources rather than predetermined goals, so that decisions made are adaptive and responsive to situational changes. In this context, womenpreneurs not only rely on long-term plans but also build cognitive flexibility to interpret challenges as opportunities for learning and innovation. These two theories complement each other in explaining why women entrepreneurs' adaptive strategies amid market dynamics and crises can produce resilience models based on creativity and real experience.

The finding that women entrepreneurs (womenpreneurs) implement multidimensional adaptation strategies encompassing economic, social, and emotional aspects shows that they do not merely survive during crises but undergo transformation through creativity, innovation, and strong mental resilience. Their innovation and business diversification aspects can be explained through the Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) framework, which affirms that individuals with high confidence in their capabilities will be more active in facing challenges and seeking creative solutions. Research by Madawala et al. (2025) highlights that ESE plays an important role in enhancing entrepreneurial innovation and resilience.

Womenpreneurs' strategies of utilizing available resources, measuring acceptable losses, and viewing unexpected events as opportunities are consistent with the principles of Effectuation developed by Sarasvathy (2001). This approach explains that entrepreneurs do not always act based on long-term planning but rather optimize available resources to create new opportunities. Research findings Theresia et al. (2025) reinforce that women entrepreneurs use effectual logic to survive and innovate amid economic uncertainty.

Time management and dual roles performed by women entrepreneurs demonstrate the ability to balance domestic and professional responsibilities through family and community support. This pattern aligns with the Resilience framework, which emphasizes individuals' ability to mobilize social and emotional resources as part of adaptation. In the context of women's entrepreneurship, resilience encompasses not only technical capabilities but also psychological and spiritual strength that sustains business resilience. Research of Hernández et al. (2024) shows that socio-emotional resilience becomes key for women in maintaining motivation and business sustainability.

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Adaptive financial management implemented by women entrepreneurs confirms the importance of Resource-Based View (RBV) in understanding small business competitiveness. RBV explains that internal capabilities such as financial efficiency, informal networks, and realistic planning become sources of competitive advantage that are difficult to imitate. In the context of crisis, the ability to strategically manage limited resources strengthens business stability and sustainability. This finding aligns with the argument by Wang & Gao (2021) that unique and integrated resources are the foundation of sustainable competitive advantage.

Digital technology utilization by womenpreneurs reflects transformation toward a modern business ecosystem based on innovation and knowledge. The Absorptive Capacity concept explains this phenomenon, as women entrepreneurs demonstrate the ability to recognize, absorb, and apply new knowledge to strengthen their business position. Batsenko & Halenin (2023) confirms that absorptive capacity for digital technology accelerates adaptation and expands market access for women micro-entrepreneurs.

The integration of these various theories shows that womenpreneurs' adaptation strategies are not only practical but also reflections of a combination of personal, social, and structural strengths. Women entrepreneurs' resilience amid crises reflects a continuous learning process that enables them to develop toward a more robust and innovative condition. Thus, the theories of ESE, Effectuation, Resilience, RBV, and Absorptive Capacity provide a strong conceptual foundation for understanding how womenpreneurs transform challenges into opportunities and build business sustainability amid uncertainty.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that womenpreneurs have strong adaptive capabilities in facing periods of uncertainty and crisis. The strategies developed are multidimensional, encompassing economic, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects. In running their businesses, women entrepreneurs are not only oriented toward economic sustainability but also strive to create balance between domestic, professional responsibilities, and life values.

Research findings show that there are five main forms of adaptation strategies. First, innovation and business diversification become strategic steps to face market changes and maintain business sustainability. Second, time management and dual roles are carried out disciplinedly as a form of integration between family and work roles. Third, adaptive financial management reflects womenpreneurs' ability to maintain business stability amid economic fluctuations. Fourth, digital technology utilization plays an important role in expanding market reach and retaining customers in the modern era. Fifth, spiritual strength and social support become sources of psychological resilience that maintain spirit and motivation in facing pressure.

Overall, research findings confirm that womenpreneurs not only survive due to circumstances but make crises opportunities to grow and develop. Resilience, creativity, and spiritual values become the main foundation in building women's business sustainability in a business world full of uncertainty.

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