



From Resilience to Revolution: Women in the Startup Ecosystem

Smriti Habil^a

^a Assistant Professor, Department of English, Danielson Degree College, Chhindwara (M.P)

Email: Smritihabil24@mail.com

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ABSTRACT:

A revolutionary change in the global startup ecosystem, the growth of female entrepreneurs is upending established conventions and spurring innovation in a wide range of sectors. The dynamic travels of women-led companies are examined in this research, along with the reasons for their success, challenges they encounter, and wider societal and economic effects. Women entrepreneurs offer distinct viewpoints to the business world, frequently placing equal emphasis on social responsibility, sustainability, and diversity as well as profitability. This study addresses important issues such as funding discrepancies, gender bias, and limited access to mentorship, as well as the tactics used by female entrepreneurs to overcome them, through in-depth case studies and analysis. It explores how supportive policies like Mudra Yojana and Stand-Up India, women-focused networks, and alternative finance mechanisms might help women succeed. Inspiring examples of Indian and international female founders who have upended sectors and motivated future generations are also featured in the article, such as Reshma Saujani, Falguni Nayar, and Upasana Taku. This study highlights the vital role that female entrepreneurs play in developing novel solutions and transforming industries by looking at these experiences. In order to further empower women-led enterprises and ensure a more inclusive and sustainable entrepreneurial future, it urges ongoing investment in mentorship, finance, and supporting ecosystems.

Keywords: *Women Entrepreneurs; Women-Led Startup; Women-Focused Policies; Start-Up Ecosystem; Barriers to Women Founders.*

1. Introduction

In recent decades, women have bravely risen to the forefront of innovation and corporate leadership, bringing about a dramatic transition in the entrepreneurial scene. Due to ingrained social standards, limited educational opportunities, and structural obstacles, women have historically been marginalized in the male-dominated field of entrepreneurship. However, a new generation of female entrepreneurs is revolutionizing the startup scene today, demonstrating the value of their viewpoints, abilities, and fortitude in promoting creativity and advancing the economy. Women-led startups are changing the business landscape rather than just being involved in it. These business owners contribute new concepts, original methods of problem-solving, and a keen sense of where long-underserved markets need to be filled. Women entrepreneurs are developing goods and services that appeal to a wide range of consumers by focusing on solving urgent social and environmental issues and demonstrating a dedication to inclusivity. A significant change is taking place in sectors like technology, healthcare, education, and sustainability as female leaders support creative yet profoundly effective solutions.

What makes this movement particularly compelling is the contrast between the immense contributions of women entrepreneurs and the barriers they continue to face. Gender bias remains deeply entrenched, particularly in investment decisions, where women-led startups receive a disproportionately small share of venture capital funding. Structural inequities, limited representation in leadership roles, and the dual burden of balancing personal and professional responsibilities often create additional hurdles. Yet, these challenges have spurred women entrepreneurs to develop creative strategies for success, such as leveraging crowdfunding platforms, building women-focused investment networks, and participating in mentorship and peer-support initiatives. The international community has started to pay attention, which is encouraging. In an effort to level the playing field and realize women's full potential, governments, organizations, and private companies are starting programs to assist women in entrepreneurship. In order to enable women to achieve their goals and grow their enterprises, targeted programs are closing the funding gap, increasing access to STEM education, and establishing mentorship opportunities. Because of this, women entrepreneurs are not only making money but also promoting equality, changing society, and motivating the next generation of creative thinkers.

This paper offers a comprehensive exploration of the dynamic journeys of women-led startups, examining the key factors driving their rise, the challenges they have faced, and their transformative impact on industries and communities. By spotlighting their stories, we aim to uncover the critical role women entrepreneurs play in reshaping the entrepreneurial landscape, fostering innovation, and creating inclusive growth. From overcoming systemic barriers to leveraging unique perspectives, women entrepreneurs demonstrate unparalleled resilience, creativity, and leadership. These qualities not only enable them to excel in competitive markets but also position them as changemakers who challenge traditional business norms.

Through case studies and analyses, this chapter celebrates trailblazing women who are rewriting the rules of entrepreneurship and inspiring others to follow in their footsteps.

2.Challenges and Opportunities

Understanding the unique dynamics that women contribute to the entrepreneurial scene is essential before delving into the particular opportunities and constraints. In addition to changing industries, female entrepreneurs are also changing the principles of business. They frequently take an inventive, inclusive approach to leadership, emphasizing fixes that close gaps that conventional models miss. They are able to establish significant niches in cutthroat markets by fusing strategic vision with empathy. However, this is by no means an easy journey. Women innovators encounter several structural obstacles that put their fortitude to the test, but they also seize special chances that increase their influence.

2.1 Challenges Faced by Women Founders

- **Funding Gap:** The ongoing discrepancy in venture capital allocation is one of the biggest obstacles. Even while there are more and more women-led businesses, they still only get a small portion of venture capital funding worldwide. Unconscious biases in the investment community, where male-dominated decision-making roles frequently favour well-known networks and viewpoints, are the cause of this funding discrepancy. Additionally, women founders are often questioned about their capacity to scale firms and are subjected to a greater burden of proof to support their claims.
- **Gender Bias and Stereotypes:** Social prejudices still hinder female entrepreneurs by reiterating antiquated preconceptions that cast doubt on their capacity for creativity and leadership. These biases might show up in subtle but significant ways, such being passed over for high-level networking events or encountering doubt during investor presentations. Women frequently have to put in more effort to establish their knowledge and authority, which can impede their ability to launch profitable businesses.
- **Limited Access to Mentorship:** A key element of successful entrepreneurship is mentoring, which provides direction, business insights, and network access. But a lot of female founders have trouble finding mentors who can relate to their particular struggles or have the necessary experience. They may feel alone and less prepared to handle the challenges of growing their companies as a result of this lack of access.
- **Balancing Responsibilities:** Managing both domestic commitments, such caregiving duties, and work expectations is a common task for female entrepreneurs. Their capacity to completely concentrate on expanding their businesses may be hampered by this dual responsibility, which may also result in time limits and affect work-life balance. The societal expectation for women to excel in both spheres only adds to the pressure.

2.2 Opportunities for Women Founders

- **Alternative Funding Models:** Women entrepreneurs are increasingly using alternative fundraising approaches, such as angel investing and crowdfunding, to get past conventional funding obstacles. In particular, crowdfunding has become a potent instrument that allows women to establish direct connections with audiences who share their goals and objectives. Because they circumvent conventional gatekeepers and enable founders to truly convey their ideas, these platforms level the playing field.
- **Tapping into Niche Markets:** Women entrepreneurs are particularly skilled at spotting and filling gaps in specialized markets. Through their distinct viewpoints and ideas, they develop customized solutions—whether in the form of goods, services, or creative business models—for marginalized communities. These markets frequently provide unexplored development prospects, enabling female entrepreneurs to become industry leaders.
- **Building Supportive Networks:** A vibrant network of support for female entrepreneurs has been established by the growth of professional associations, mentorship programs, and investment groups dedicated to women. These networks offer vital resources like access to knowledgeable advisors, funding possibilities, and skill development. More significantly, they create a feeling of belonging and a common goal, enabling women to work together, exchange ideas, and increase their combined influence.
- **Driving Inclusive Solutions:** When it comes to developing inclusive solutions for social, environmental, and economic issues, women-led enterprises are leading the way. By emphasizing inclusivity and diversity, these companies connect with larger markets and cultivate devoted clientele. In addition to addressing important gaps in current sectors, their work helps build more sustainable and egalitarian society.

2.3 Turning Challenges into Catalysts for Innovation

Despite being daunting, the challenges experienced by female entrepreneurs frequently serve as stimulants for creativity and perseverance. The lack of funding, for example, has pushed women to pursue unorthodox avenues, such using social media to raise awareness and land direct-to-consumer sales. In a similar vein, the absence of mentorship has prompted the development of networks and mentorship programs run by women with the goal of

empowering upcoming generations of business owners. Women founders are changing the entrepreneurial environment by turning hardship into opportunity. A new generation of entrepreneurs is motivated to tear down boundaries and redefine success by their capacity to innovate under pressure, challenge conventions, and create inclusive ecosystems. They are creating a more inclusive and equitable corporate environment in addition to stimulating economic growth.

3. Innovation and Impact

Across a wide range of industries, women-led businesses are reshaping the entrepreneurial environment by fostering innovation and upending established business structures. These businesses represent a special fusion of profit and purpose since they are founded on a thorough awareness of societal issues and driven by a dedication to making a significant effect. The dual-focus approach that female entrepreneurs frequently take—financial success combined with social responsibility—produces revolutionary results and long-lasting impact.

3.1 Driving Innovation

Women entrepreneurs are well known for their ability to identify and solve unmet needs, frequently concentrating on issues that have received less attention in the past. Their creative, pragmatic, and forward-thinking ideas cut across industries.

- **Girls Who Code:** Reshma Saujani started Girls Who Code to help young women learn the fundamentals of coding in order to bridge the gender gap in technology. The organization has challenged preconceptions and transformed the workforce by motivating and educating millions of girls throughout the world, thereby creating a pipeline of future female digital pioneers.
- **Jennifer Hyman – Rent the Runway:** With its subscription-based apparel rental concept, Rent the Runway, which she co-founded, transformed the fashion business. In addition to upending traditional retail, the platform has brought forth a more ecologically conscientious approach to fashion by encouraging sustainable consumption and minimizing fashion waste.
- **Falguni Nayar-Nykaa (India):** A former investment banker, Falguni Nayar recognized the need for an e-commerce platform specifically focused on beauty and health in India. Alongside Nykaa, disrupting traditional models.
- **Jessica O. Matthews-Uncharted Power:** Uncharted Power, Jessica O. Matthews' business, is a pioneer in the development of renewable energy. Her initiatives involve transforming energy access in marginalized groups and closing gaps in global electrification, such as energy-generating soccer balls and sustainable infrastructure systems.
- **MobiKwik (India):** Upasana Taku is a co-founder of MobiKwik, one of the country's top digital payment platforms. Millions of people now have easy access to digital financial services because to her efforts, which upended the conventional cash economy. Her story demonstrates how female entrepreneurs are revolutionizing fintech in developing nations.

3.2 Addressing Societal Challenges

Women-led companies are distinguished by their dedication to addressing urgent social, economic, and environmental challenges, which frequently positions them as change agents in their respective communities and sectors.

- **23andMe's Anne Wojcicki:** 23andMe, which Anne Wojcicki co-founded, has made genetic information more accessible to all. The business has revolutionized preventative healthcare by enabling people to comprehend their genetic health and promoting proactive methods to wellbeing.
- **Jewel Burks Solomon-Partpic:** Jewel Burks Solomon's Partpic addresses supply chain bottlenecks and boosts efficiency across industries by using artificial intelligence to make it easier to identify and buy industrial parts.
- **Neha Arora-Planet Able (India):** Neha Arora established the travel website Planet Able, which serves individuals with disabilities. By addressing accessibility issues in the travel industry, her creative approach to inclusive tourism has given underprivileged groups access to distinctive travel experiences.

3.3 Creating Ripple Effects

Beyond their immediate business endeavors, women entrepreneurs have a significant impact. Their accomplishments affect the larger entrepreneurial environment, inspire others, and question social conventions.

- **Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, Biocon (India):** One of the top biopharmaceutical firms in India was formed by biotechnology pioneer Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw. In addition to improving healthcare, her innovative work opened doors for more women to pursue careers in STEM.
- **Vineeta Singh-Sugar Cosmetics (India):** For young, urban women, Vineeta Singh's Sugar Cosmetics has emerged as a top beauty brand in India. She demonstrates how female entrepreneurs are changing consumer industries with her journey from bootstrapping to creating a multimillion-dollar company.

Women-led startups often serve as catalysts for systemic change, paving the way for inclusive funding practices, diverse leadership, and equitable opportunities. Their stories inspire the next generation of innovators and redefine what is possible in entrepreneurship.

4. Leadership and Resilience

Women entrepreneurs are also bringing unique approaches, strategic decision-making, and unparalleled tenacity to the startup industry, redefining leadership. They are positioned as transformative leaders who create vibrant organizations and promote broad change because of these attributes.

4.1 Distinctive Leadership Styles

Women leaders are known for their inclusion, empathy, and teamwork. These characteristics promote creative problem-solving and positive team chemistry.

- **Sara Blakely, founder of Spanx:** By emphasizing consumer feedback and fostering a positive work environment, Sara Blakely created her billion-dollar company. She is an inspiration to prospective business owners because of her leadership style, which prioritizes listening and flexibility.
- **Richa Kar of Zivame, India:** By tackling social taboos and establishing a platform centered on women's needs, Richa Kar upended the country's intimate apparel market. In addition to financial success, her leadership has sparked cultural changes in attitudes around self-care and body positivity.

4.2 Strategic Decision-Making

Women entrepreneurs excel at navigating complex challenges and making calculated decisions under pressure, often with a focus on long-term, sustainable growth.

- **Sophia Amoruso – Nasty Gal and Girlboss:** Sophia Amoruso scaled *Nasty Gal* with her keen eye for branding and customer-centric strategies. Though she faced setbacks, her resilience and ability to pivot led her to build *Girlboss*, a platform empowering woman professionally.

4.3 Resilience in Overcoming Barriers

The entrepreneurial journey is fraught with obstacles, yet women founder consistently showcases remarkable resilience.

- **Lisa Skeete Tatum – Landit:** Despite facing funding challenges, Lisa Skeete Tatum founded Landit, a career platform for women, turning setbacks into opportunities to empower others.
- **Namita Thapar – Emcure Pharmaceuticals (India):** Namita Thapar, Executive Director of *Emcure Pharmaceuticals*, overcame numerous challenges to lead a global company. Her journey exemplifies the resilience required to thrive in male-dominated industries.

5. Support Systems

Comprehensive support networks that offer crucial resources, opportunities, and mentorship are the driving force behind the impressive expansion of women-led enterprises. These frameworks, which include government laws, networks, accelerators, and incubators, are essential in creating conditions that allow female entrepreneurs to not only survive but also prosper. These support networks enable female entrepreneurs to build their businesses, motivate others, and boost the economy by removing systemic obstacles and opening doors for creativity.

5.1 Mentorship and Networking

Networking and mentoring are essential facilitators of entrepreneurial success, providing women with the connections, advice, and understanding they require to grow their companies. Women who have access to seasoned mentors are better able to handle the challenges of leadership, market entry, and funding.

- **The Female Founders Alliance (Global):** This network gives female entrepreneurs access to funding, mentorship, and a community of support to help them grow their businesses. Women can learn from seasoned leaders and industry professionals through the alliance's promotion of collaboration and knowledge-sharing.
- **SheEO (Global):** SheEO is a radically inclusive community of women-identifying entrepreneurs that brings together female investors to fund and coach social impact-focused enterprises. This innovative approach creates enduring peer relationships while democratizing financial access.
- **SHEROES (India):** In India, SHEROES is a women-only social network that links business owners with investors, mentors, and a helpful peer group. Additionally, it offers training programs customized to the particular difficulties faced by women, business leads, and employment prospects.

5.2 Role of Incubators and Accelerators

Startups can improve their concepts, create business plans, and draw in investors with the support of incubators and accelerators, which provide organized programs that combine capital, coaching, and skill development.

- **Techstars and Y Combinator (Global):** These well-known accelerators have helped many women-led businesses get off the ground by providing funding, coaching, and a stage on which to present their ideas to potential investors. Additionally, they encourage female businesses through diversity-focused initiatives.
- **WE Hub (India):** A dedicated platform for women entrepreneurs, WE Hub, based in Hyderabad, supports startups through funding assistance, workshops, and industry mentorship. It focuses on fostering women-led ventures in diverse sectors, from technology to handicrafts.
- **Google for Startups Accelerator – Women Founders (Global):** Through access to international networks, product and business strategy advice, and mentorship from Google specialists, this initiative provides customized help to female entrepreneurs.
- **Atal Incubation Centres (India):** These centers support entrepreneurship and innovation under India's Atal Innovation Mission, offering tools and programs tailored to empowering women to launch and grow their enterprises.

5.3 Government Policies and Incentives

The significance of encouraging gender inclusion in entrepreneurship is becoming more widely acknowledged by governments across the globe. Reducing the gender gap and encouraging more women to start and grow their businesses are the goals of policies, grants, and incentives.

- **Canada's Women Entrepreneurship Strategy (WES):** This program provides more than \$6 billion in finance, mentorship, and market access programs to help women entrepreneurs. Women-led startups around the world are now more competitive because to WES.
- **Mudra Yojana (India):** With a particular emphasis on female entrepreneurs, India's Mudra Loan Scheme offers small enterprises loans without collateral. Numerous women in both rural and urban regions have been empowered to launch micro and small businesses thanks to this project.
- **Stand-Up India Scheme (India):** This initiative facilitates bank loans between ₹10 lakh and ₹1 crore to help new companies and is intended to encourage entrepreneurship among women and underprivileged communities.
- **StartHER (France):** This program helps close the gap in male-dominated industries by providing grants and financial opportunities only to women-led technology firms.

5.4 Community and Peer Support

Women can now share challenges, celebrate victories, and promote group development in secure and empowering environments thanks to the growth of women-focused entrepreneurial networks. These groups are essential in lessening the loneliness that many female business owners experience.

- **Ellevest Network (Global):** Ellevest Network is a community of professional women that empowers female entrepreneurs through networking events, leadership training, and peer mentorship programs. Its goal is to promote women in business by working together and exchanging expertise.
- **SAHA Fund (India):** The SAHA Fund, India's first venture capital fund exclusively for female entrepreneurs, provides finance and mentorship to firms while promoting gender diversity in leadership positions.
- **Lean In Circles (Global):** These circles, which are modeled after Sheryl Sandberg's Lean In movement, encourage female entrepreneurs to work together and develop as a team by offering peer support and mentorship.
- **FICCI FLO (India):** Through legislative lobbying, training initiatives, and networking, FLO, a branch of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, works to empower women entrepreneurs.

5.5 Tech-Enabled Platforms for Women Entrepreneurs

Digital technologies and platforms have become revolutionary in helping women entrepreneurs close the gaps in their access to resources, finance, and mentorship.

- **Crowdfunding Platforms:** Women entrepreneurs may now interact directly with audiences who share their vision and circumvent traditional funding obstacles thanks to platforms like Kickstarter, Ketto (India), and Milaap.
- **Virtual Mentorship Programs:** Programs such as the virtual mentorship program offered by the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women pair female entrepreneurs in poor nations with mentors worldwide who offer specialized advice and assistance.

5.6 Impact of Support Systems

Strong support networks have an impact that goes well beyond individual endeavors. These structures:

- **Bridge Funding Gaps:** They lessen the gaps in venture capital funding for women-led firms by facilitating access to resources and generating a variety of investment options.
- **Foster Leadership:** Programs for training and mentoring give female entrepreneurs the abilities and self-assurance they need to assume leadership positions in fields that are dominated by males.
- **Build Inclusive Ecosystems:** Diverse viewpoints in business and creativity are ensured by peer support groups and women-focused policies that promote cooperation and inclusivity. Initiatives like WE Hub in India and WES in Canada, for example, have not only aided the success of female entrepreneurs but have also sparked structural reforms in the entrepreneurial ecosystem that have improved its accessibility and equity. Women entrepreneurs are better able to overcome obstacles, scale their businesses, and promote long-term growth by utilizing these support networks. In addition to meeting current demands, these frameworks set the stage for a future in entrepreneurship that is more inventive, inclusive, and egalitarian.

6. Conclusion

The entrepreneurial environment is being redefined by women-led firms, proving that inclusive and influential leadership is possible. Women entrepreneurs have demonstrated their capacity for innovation, leadership, and inspiration in the face of structural obstacles like financial disparities and societal prejudices. From Nykaa to Girls Who Code, their endeavors demonstrate not only financial success but also significant contributions to environmental sustainability and societal advancement. Support systems, including mentorship networks, incubators, accelerators, and progressive government initiatives, have played a pivotal role in empowering women entrepreneurs to navigate obstacles and thrive. In order to guarantee equal chances and resources for female founders, these frameworks must keep changing. Dismantling systemic hurdles and fostering an entrepreneurial culture in which gender does not limit potential are also shared responsibilities of the global community. The strength of fortitude, inventiveness, and teamwork is demonstrated by the female entrepreneurs' examples. We promote innovation and create a more diverse, just, and successful global economy by funding the expansion and visibility of women-led enterprises. In addition to shattering stereotypes, female entrepreneurs are establishing new benchmarks and laying the groundwork for a time when entrepreneurship has no limits.

7. References

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