

‘Being a woman’ in the gastronomy industry: entrepreneurial experiences of women from a cultural tourism destination

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While women’s entrepreneurship has garnered increasing attention in tourism research, its heritage-based gastronomy contexts remain underexplored. This study addresses this gap by adopting a gender-sensitive and sustainability-oriented lens, grounded in gender theory and aligned with key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to examine the entrepreneurial trajectories of women in culturally significant destinations. Focusing on Safranbolu – a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Cittaslow member city in Türkiye – this research employs an embedded single case study design to investigate how gendered power relations, socio-cultural expectations, and place-based dynamics shape entrepreneurial engagement in the gastronomy sector. Semi-structured interviews with seven female entrepreneurs were analyzed through inductive content analysis. The findings reveal a complex interplay of motivations, barriers, and enablers: women’s entrepreneurial initiatives are predominantly driven by financial necessity and a quest for autonomy, yet are constrained by persistent gender norms, institutional difficulties, and skill deficits. Nevertheless, informal support networks, cultural capital, and the locality’s slow tourism ethos serve as sources of resilience. The study contributes to the literature by theorizing women’s gastronomic entrepreneurship as both an economic practice and a mechanism for cultural preservation, social inclusion, and sustainable local development.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship, Women entrepreneurship, Gastronomy industry, Tourism*

1 INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, the Industrial Revolution marked a significant turning point in enabling women to take a more active role in the workforce. Since then, the increasing participation of women in professional fields and entrepreneurial activities has been influenced by a variety of structural and societal factors. Among these are urbanization, rising education levels, improved childcare services, expanded legal protections, and the removal of bureaucratic barriers (Bensemann and Hall, 2010; Moswete and Lacey, 2015; Laudano et al., 2019).

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Female entrepreneurship is generally defined as the process by which women initiate, manage, and grow business ventures (Jennings and Brush, 2013; Adom and Asare-Yeboah, 2016). The motivations behind women's entrepreneurial activities are diverse. These range from a desire for independence and self-fulfillment to responses to unemployment, gender-based discrimination, and the need for additional household income (Chen and Elston, 2013; Dahiya et al., 2021; Gangwani and Shousha, 2021). Among the various factors that influence entrepreneurial decisions, gender remains a key determinant (Gonzalez-Alvarez and Solis-Rodriguez, 2011; Vujko et al., 2019; Rytönen, Oghazi and Mostaghel, 2023). Although entrepreneurship has traditionally been associated with men (Bullough et al., 2015; Gupta and Mirchandani, 2018), recent studies report growing entrepreneurial intentions and tendencies among women (Raghuvanshi, Agrawal and Ghosh, 2017; Agarwal and Lenka, 2018).

Within the tourism sector, and particularly in gastronomy entrepreneurship, women are increasingly recognized not only as economic actors but also as agents of cultural preservation and sustainable development. This aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 11), as women's entrepreneurship contributes to gender equality, decent work, and the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. Therefore, rather than focusing on statistical comparisons between countries, this research foregrounds the role of place-based dynamics, particularly in historically and gastronomically significant locations.

Despite increasing participation, women continue to face greater challenges than men in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, especially in the tourism sector (Ghouse, Durrah and McElwee, 2021; García-Henche and Cuesta-Valiño, 2022). These challenges differ across contexts and are shaped by institutional support, cultural expectations, and local governance. However, existing studies have not sufficiently explored how these dynamics are experienced by women entrepreneurs in heritage tourism economies, particularly in relation to culinary traditions and sustainability frameworks. The intersection of gender, gastronomy, and entrepreneurship in heritage cities remains under-explored, despite the growing relevance of food tourism and the central role women play in preserving culinary heritage. Examining this intersection through the lens of gender theory and sustainability frameworks offers deeper insights into how institutional gender norms and socio-cultural expectations influence women's entrepreneurial pathways. Given this conceptual gap, the current study examines how these dynamics are manifested in a real-world heritage tourism setting. Safranbolu provides a rich case for understanding how gendered entrepreneurship intersects with cultural identity, sustainability discourse, and institutional frameworks.

This study aims to explore the entrepreneurial experiences of women operating in the food and beverage sector in Safranbolu, a culturally significant destination that represents broader patterns found in heritage tourism economies. In particular, it seeks to answer the following research question:

RQ1: What are the motivations, challenges, and socio-cultural dynamics shaping the entrepreneurial experiences of women in the gastronomy sector in Safranbolu?

By addressing this gap, the study contributes to the understanding of gendered entrepreneurship in cultural and gastronomic tourism destinations. It also offers practical implications for policymakers and local stakeholders aiming to empower women and support sustainable, inclusive tourism development.

This paper is structured as follows: first, the theoretical framework is presented to contextualize the study. Next, the methodology section outlines the study site, research design, sampling strategy, and data collection and analysis procedures. The findings

and discussion section reports and interprets the main themes that emerged from the data. Finally, the conclusion summarizes key insights and discusses both practical and theoretical implications.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Female entrepreneurship and tourism

Entrepreneurship is the process of creating something new and valuable by investing time and effort, while also accepting financial, psychological, and social risks. It plays a crucial role in the social and economic development of countries (Yábar and García-Machado, 2025). According to the literature, women often choose to become entrepreneurs in pursuit of independence, empowerment, and additional household income in short, a better quality of life (Belwal, Belwal and Saidi, 2014). Solesvik, Iakovleva and Trifilova (2019) emphasize that many women are motivated by social fulfillment rather than financial gain when seeking employment opportunities.

In the context of tourism and hospitality, the literature reveals that women play an increasingly active role in several subfields, including cultural tourism (Moswete and Lacey, 2015), rural tourism (Bensemman and Hall, 2010; Ghouse, Durrah and McElwee, 2021), sustainable tourism (Ertac and Tanova, 2020), and agrotourism (Aggelopoulos, Kamenidou and Pavlouti, 2008). In rural communities, where patriarchal structures often prevail, tourism can serve as a viable avenue for women to earn income and attain economic independence (Tovmasyan, 2022). For example, Radović and Radović-Marković (2016) argue that rural tourism activities in the Republic of Serbia have the potential to empower women and promote local economic development. Similarly, Ertac and Tanova (2020) highlight that ecotourism contributes positively to women's well-being and economic participation in Northern Cyprus. Moreover, women can contribute to the long-term sustainability of the tourism industry by promoting responsible travel and implementing environmentally conscious practices (Chauhan, 2025). Through tourism entrepreneurship, women not only improve their own socio-economic status but also drive inclusive and sustainable growth in local communities.

Tourism policies play a critical role in shaping the entrepreneurial environment for women. These policies can either enable or hinder women's participation in tourism-related entrepreneurship, depending on their inclusiveness and level of support. Recent research (International Finance Corporation, 2020; OECD, 2021) indicates that developed countries such as the United States, Germany, Japan, Canada, and Australia offer women entrepreneurs access to funding, training programs, networking opportunities, and digital tools. In contrast, developing countries like India, Brazil, Indonesia, and Türkiye focus on providing training, improving access to financial resources, and implementing gender-sensitive practices to foster women's entrepreneurship.

2.2 Female entrepreneurship in the gastronomy industry

Women's entrepreneurship is prominent in tourism, especially in restaurants (Presenza and Iocca, 2012; Chen and Elston, 2013), fast food (Ahmed et al., 2019), and street food (Hiemstra, Kooy and Frese, 2006; Karsavuran, 2018), as the gastronomy sector provides women with significant employment opportunities. In the food sector, female entrepreneurs can work from home or close to home with flexible schedules, depending on their preferences. However, factors such as insufficient entrepreneurial capital,

lack of technological knowledge, and various food law regulations present challenges and disadvantages for women entrepreneurs (D'Silva and Bhat, 2022).

In the context of the gastronomy sector and the restaurant industry, entrepreneurship requires skills and experience in short, human capital characterized by a high level of knowledge, education, and work abilities (Yábar and García-Machado, 2025). Ibnouf (2012) reveals that women's indigenous knowledge in food processing in Sudan contributes to the effective management of limited resources. According to research in West Africa, the success of women entrepreneurs engaged in cowpea processing increases in line with their levels of expertise (D'Silva and Bhat, 2022). At the same time, women still face gender-based barriers to entrepreneurship in some cultures due to the traditional roles and responsibilities attributed to them, such as childcare and housework. Moreover, they are often perceived as incompatible with business due to being viewed as too emotional to make rational decisions (Hapsari and Soeditianingrum, 2018). The most common problems faced by women entrepreneurs, as reported in the relevant literature, include social pressure (Ahmed et al., 2019), gender-based discrimination (Rytönen, Oghazi and Mostaghel, 2023), role conflict, sexual and emotional harassment (Berhanu Hundera et al., 2024), lack of market access (Kapinga and Montero, 2017), limited access to tourism education (Chowdhury, Audretsch and Belitski, 2019), work–life balance difficulties (Gangwani and Shousha, 2021), and inadequate government support (Dahiya et al., 2021).

Research conducted on women entrepreneurs and employees in the food industry in Türkiye mainly focuses on the factors that drive women into entrepreneurship and the challenges they face (Ersöz, 2023). In Balıkesir, it has been observed that women entrepreneurs in the food and beverage sector, even with credit support, encounter problems such as securing a workplace, bureaucratic obstacles, finding qualified personnel, and work–family role conflict (Gül and Gül, 2018). Temizkan and Uslu (2023) point out that women face gender discrimination in the food industry, particularly during the hiring process. Pregnancy, perceived mental and physical incompetence, and a negative professional image of women are among the cited reasons. A study conducted among university students reveals that women in the culinary profession face challenges such as unequal pay, limited promotion opportunities, poor working conditions, harassment, lack of recognition for female chefs, and the impact of patriarchal norms stemming from gender discrimination (Türkmenadağ and Karaman, 2024).

2.3 Gender theory, sustainability, and place-based entrepreneurship

This study examines the experiences of women entrepreneurs operating in the food and beverage industry in Safranbolu, a city recognized both as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a certified Cittaslow destination through the lens of gender theory. Gender theory serves as a critical framework for understanding how institutional, social, and cultural power relations shape women's participation in entrepreneurship. While the number of women entrepreneurs has increased globally, entrepreneurship remains culturally framed as a masculine domain, especially in sectors such as gastronomy and tourism where patriarchal norms persist (Ahl and Nelson, 2015; Figueroa-Domecq, de Jong and Williams, 2020).

In the tourism or gastronomy industry where women constitute a significant proportion of the workforce, women's entrepreneurship plays a crucial role not only in achieving economic goals but also in fostering social inclusion and environmental awareness (UNWTO, 2019; Henry, Foss and Ahl, 2016). Women's entrepreneurial activities are thus not only economically motivated but also inherently linked to broader Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). As the United Nations (2024) highlights, women across all societies still face occupational discrimination, wage inequality, and underrepresentation in decision-making roles.

Despite their growing presence in the tourism and gastronomy sectors, women entrepreneurs often encounter multiple structural barriers, including gaps in skills and knowledge (Panta and Thapa, 2018), limited access to financial resources (Ngoasong and Kimbu, 2019), and a lack of self-confidence and collaborative networks (Hallak, Assaker and Lee, 2015; Kimbu, Ngoasong and de Jong, 2024). These challenges stem not from individual shortcomings but from entrenched institutional and socio-cultural gender discrimination (Khoo et al., 2023). Moreover, women are frequently expected to balance entrepreneurship with domestic responsibilities such as cooking, childcare, and caregiving, resulting in additional role strain and slower business growth compared to men (Halabisky, 2018).

The Cittaslow movement provides a unique institutional context for analyzing gendered entrepreneurship in Safranbolu. As an approach that promotes local development, cultural preservation, and social well-being, Cittaslow supports women's participation in the local economy, especially in small and rural areas where traditional gender roles are more dominant (Brodziński and Kurowska, 2021; Alp, 2024). The alignment between Cittaslow principles and the Sustainable Development Goals (Cittaslow International, 2023) creates fertile ground for inclusive, sustainable tourism initiatives that empower women. Within this framework, entrepreneurship becomes not only a livelihood strategy but also a form of social participation and cultural stewardship.

In heritage cities like Safranbolu, women play a key role in preserving and transmitting intangible cultural heritage, including local cuisine, crafts, music, and oral traditions. Their contributions help sustain destination authenticity while also enhancing visitor experience (Aleshinloye, 2023; Ezeuduji, Deen and Nzama, 2025). Therefore, women's entrepreneurship intersects with sustainability in multifaceted ways: economically through job creation and income generation, socially through inclusion and empowerment, and culturally through heritage preservation and innovation. This theoretical framework thus connects gender theory with sustainability principles and place-based development, offering a multidimensional lens through which to understand the motivations, challenges, and impacts of women entrepreneurs in heritage-based gastronomy tourism.

3 METHOD

3.1 Study site: Safranbolu

Safranbolu is a historically significant and well-preserved town located in the Karabük Province of Türkiye's Western Black Sea region (see Figure 1a). Its strategic position along a historic caravan route connecting Asia and Europe, coupled with its intact Ottoman urban fabric (see Figure 1b), led to its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1994 (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2024). From a gastronomic perspective, Safranbolu is renowned for cultivating high-quality saffron, one of the world's most expensive spices for which the region is named (Türkiye Kültür Portalı, 2024). The area is further distinguished by a range of geographically indicated products, including Safranbolu Turkish Delight, Kıtır (a type of baked good), Maniye Tomato, and Çavuş Grape (Turkish Patent and Trademark Office, 2024). Moreover, the local

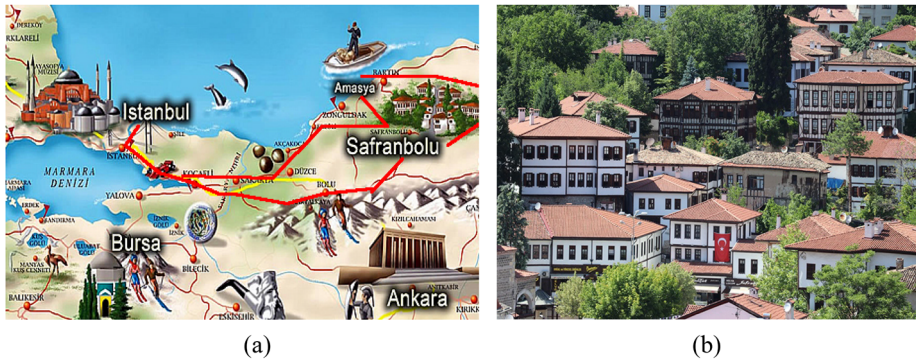


Figure 1 (a) Safranbolu map. (b) Safranbolu mansions/houses

cuisine features traditional street delicacies such as saffron tea, vineyard soda, and kiren sherbet (Uslu, Ayyıldız and Yumuk, 2022), complemented by various restaurants and food festivals that showcase local products. The restaurant and food service sector in Safranbolu comprises 229 enterprises spanning categories including street vendors (offering items such as simit, kokoreç, and chickpea pilaf), soup establishments, ice cream parlors, vendors specializing in döner and pide, dessert shops, restaurants, and so on. Among these, 17 restaurants serve both alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages and provide table service (Safranbolu Chamber of Trades, 2024). Safranbolu attracts a substantial number of tourists annually due to museums that illustrate its historical and gastronomic heritage such as the Coffee Museum and the Turkish Delight and Saffron Museum and its Historic Bazaar, which features a variety of traditional shops (Governorship of Karabük, 2024; Safranbolu Municipality, 2024). In 2023, approximately 1.2 million tourists visited the town (Anadolu Agency, 2024). Given its rich culinary heritage, diverse restaurants, and dynamic tourism sector, Safranbolu was selected as the focus of this research.

3.2 Research design

The study employs a qualitative research design to examine the evolution of women's entrepreneurial activities in the gastronomy industry at a tourist destination and to identify the factors influencing women throughout this developmental process. This approach aligns with previous studies (McGowan et al., 2012; Shastri, Shastri and Pareek, 2019) that have argued that qualitative methods contribute to a deeper understanding of women's entrepreneurship. Given the study's aim to provide a holistic perspective on the experiences of women entrepreneurs in the gastronomy industry, a case study design was adopted within the qualitative framework, specifically utilizing an embedded single case study method. An interview technique was selected to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of the participants' thoughts, emotions, and experiences (Kim, Eves and Scarles, 2009), thereby enabling an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. To ensure a certain degree of consistency across interviews, to collect comparable data from different participants, and to cover all major topics relevant to the study, a semi-structured interview form was employed.

Based on the extant literature, potential interview questions were developed covering key themes such as perceptions (Liñán, Santos and Fernández, 2011; Arafat et al.,

2020), motivations (McGowan et al., 2012; Madawala, Foroudi and Palazzo, 2023; Mkini Lugalla, Jacobs and Westerman, 2024), barriers and challenges (Akehurst, Simarro and Mas-Tur, 2012; Shastri, Shastri and Pareek, 2019; Ghouse, Durrah and McElwee, 2021), and success factors and opportunities (Nguyen et al., 2020; Tiwari and Goel, 2020) of women entrepreneurship. The final interview form was shaped not only by the literature but also by the study's theoretical framework. Questions related to gender roles, institutional barriers, and socio-cultural expectations were shaped by gender theory, particularly its emphasis on how power and norms shape women's access to entrepreneurial opportunities (Ahl and Nelson, 2015; Figueroa-Domecq, de Jong and Williams, 2020). Likewise, items exploring local food culture, place identity, and sustainability motivations reflect the study's grounding in place-based entrepreneurship and sustainable development discourses (UNWTO, 2019; Brodziński and Kurowska, 2021; Alp, 2024). This integration ensured conceptual alignment between the interview guide and the theoretical underpinnings of the study.

To ensure clarity and validity, the interview questions were reviewed by two researchers specializing in gastronomy and culinary arts, and a draft interview form was subsequently prepared in accordance with their recommendations. This draft was then forwarded to two academic staff members with expertise in gastronomy, tourism, and entrepreneurship for further expert evaluation (Creswell, 2013), leading to the revision of several questions based on the feedback received.

The final interview form is divided into two sections with open-ended questions. The first section consists of seven primary questions, each accompanied by sub-questions. These questions aim to (a) outline the profile of tourists visiting Safranbolu, (b) gather information about the local gastronomy industry, (c) explore perceptions of entrepreneurship and women's entrepreneurship, (d) identify the motivations driving women to pursue entrepreneurial ventures, (e) recognize challenges faced in this process, (f) clarify the challenges specific to women entrepreneurs in the gastronomy industry, and (g) collect recommendations for women aspiring to enter this field. The second section gathers demographic information about the women entrepreneurs and details about their businesses.

3.3 Sampling and data collection

In Safranbolu, there are 295 registered women entrepreneurs across various sectors, including personal care, hospitality, food production, culture, education, and textiles, accounting for 21.4% of the district's tradespeople (Hacıbebekoğlu et al., 2014). However, only about 25 women entrepreneurs operate specifically within the tourism and gastronomy sectors (Karakaş and Gökmen, 2016). According to recent statistics, nine restaurants owned by women entrepreneurs serve tourists in the Safranbolu Old Bazaar, the designated research site (Safranbolu Chamber of Trades, 2024). The study group comprised these nine women entrepreneurs. Contact information for five of them was obtained, and they were informed by phone about the study's objectives, scope, and the researchers involved. Subsequently, appointments were scheduled for in-person interviews with those who agreed to participate. One of the researchers conducted the interviews and, at the end of each session, sought recommendations for contacting the remaining participants. At this stage, the snowball sampling method was employed, allowing the researchers to reach four additional entrepreneurs. Among them, two agreed to participate, while one declined due to seasonal closure, and another opted out of the study. During snowball sampling, the same inclusion criteria

(ownership, sector, experience, and voluntary participation) were applied to ensure consistency in participant selection. Finally, a total of seven women entrepreneurs in the gastronomy industry participated in this study.

To identify women entrepreneurs, a combination of purposive sampling (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Neuman, 2014) and snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013) was employed. The selection criteria included (i) defining entrepreneurship strictly in terms of ownership, (ii) owning a restaurant, (iii) at least five years of experience in the gastronomy industry, and (iv) voluntary participation. To prevent any potential participants from being overlooked, interviewees were also asked whether they knew of other women entrepreneurs in the gastronomy sector (Denzin, Lincoln and Smith, 2008). By integrating these complementary sampling strategies, the study ensured a diverse representation of experiences among women entrepreneurs in the gastronomy industry (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016).

Data saturation was reached by the sixth and seventh interviews, as no novel insights emerged (Malterud, Siersma and Guassora, 2016; Saunders et al., 2018). Similar sample sizes have been used in previous studies, such as research on the challenges faced by 8 women entrepreneurs in rural Oman (Ghouse, Durrah and McElwee, 2021), the motivations of 12 women entrepreneurs in Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2020), and the success stories of 8 women entrepreneurs in India (Ilahi, 2023). Since qualitative research sample sizes generally range from 5 to 20 participants, depending on the study's objectives, participants' experiences, and the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006; Creswell, 2013), the sample size in this study is considered adequate to provide a nuanced understanding of women's entrepreneurship in the gastronomy industry.

Between 2 and 10 February 2024, semi-structured interviews with women entrepreneurs were conducted face-to-face in their restaurants in Turkish. Before each interview, participants received an informed consent form, and necessary permissions were obtained (Flick et al., 2025). With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded. Interview durations ranged from 20 to 35 minutes, depending on participants' expertise, experience, and workload. This duration is considered optimal for qualitative research, as it ensures the collection of sufficient data for robust analysis (Creswell and Poth, 2016; Hennink and Kaiser, 2022). After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim in Turkish. Each participant was assigned a unique identifier (WE1–WE7) to ensure anonymity.

3.4 Data analysis

Before conducting the analysis, it is essential to define both the unit of analysis and the methodological approach. In this study, the unit of analysis was identified as the interview transcripts of each participant (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). To systematically examine discrete segments and construct a comprehensive understanding, an inductive approach was employed (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Given the objective of categorizing and interpreting similar data within specific themes, content analysis was performed (Neuman, 2014). The analysis was conducted manually rather than using computer-assisted software (Burnard et al., 2008). Following this methodological framework, the text analysis adhered to the model proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), which encompasses the processes of coding, identifying categories, naming categories, and defining their characteristics. During the coding phase, one researcher read the transcripts multiple times and developed a data-driven coding scheme (inductive coding) (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This scheme included explicitly defined codes.

Subsequently, two independent researchers applied the coding scheme to the texts and conducted the coding process separately (Creswell and Poth, 2016). The coded data were then compared to identify common themes (Saldaña, 2009). These themes were systematically interrelated and categorized to preserve semantic integrity (Elo et al., 2014). The constructed categories were then compared, and discrepancies were iteratively resolved through a consensus-driven approach until full alignment was achieved. Finally, the categories were named in reference to literature, ensuring a clear and comprehensive conceptual definition of the main categories.

In this study, several steps were taken to ensure validity, reliability, and credibility. First, comprehensive information about both the research and data analysis process was provided (Elo et al., 2014). Second, direct quotations from the analyzed texts were included to illustrate the relationship between the data and findings (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Third, a coding scheme developed by one researcher was applied to the texts and independently coded by two additional researchers (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004; Walsh, 2012). Fourth, comparisons were conducted at the end of each phase and continued until consensus was reached among the researchers (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008; Elo et al., 2014). Finally, Cohen's kappa coefficient (Cohen, 1960) was calculated to assess inter-theme reliability. A kappa coefficient exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.80 confirmed the reliability of the analysis.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic characteristics of the interviewees are presented in Table 1. The women entrepreneurs range in age from 39 to 65, with most having completed secondary education. Only one participant (WE5) reported having received vocational training. Their duration of employment within the business spans from 10 to 21 years. The participant with the longest total work experience (WE6) has been employed in various tourism-related sectors for a cumulative period of 30 years.

As a result of the content analysis, seven main themes emerged from the findings: economic, cultural and societal, individual, work-related, environmental, social support-related, and bureaucratic and legal factors. Table 2 provides a detailed representation of the coding phase conducted during the content analysis process.

The following section discusses each theme with clear reference to the theoretical framework and supporting literature. It highlights the influence of gender norms, sustainable development goals, and local dynamics on women's entrepreneurial experiences in Safranbolu.

Table 1 Demographic information of women entrepreneurs

| Participant | Age | Level of education | Years of experience | | Vocational education |
|-------------|-----|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| | | | in the tourism business | Total years of employment | |
| WE1 | 47 | High school | 18 | 18 | |
| WE2 | 46 | High school | 10 | 10 | |
| WE3 | 56 | High school | 21 | 21 | |
| WE4 | 60 | Elementary school | 12 | 17 | |
| WE5 | 39 | Bachelor's degree | 10 | 15 | ✓ |
| WE6 | 65 | High school | 15 | 30 | |
| WE7 | 51 | Secondary school | 20 | 20 | |

4.1 Economic factors

The participants' statements indicate that economic hardships within the family play a decisive role in women's decision to engage in entrepreneurship. For instance, the WE1 participant was prompted to take action and generate income when her husband's

Table 2 Example of the coding process

| Themes | Categories | Initial codes (some examples) |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Economic factors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Contributing to the household budget ✗ Generating additional income ✗ Economic independence ✗ Role of unemployment and economic crises | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Earning income ☑ Financial crises ☑ Pursuit of freedom ☑ Women's role in family businesses ☑ House production ☑ Income generation ☑ Bankruptcy ☑ Alternative employment ☑ Escape from poverty |
| Cultural and societal factors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Gender discrimination ✗ Emotional harassment and lack of familial support ✗ Interplay of role conflict ✗ Societal pressure and cultural norms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Discrimination ☑ Harassment ☑ Pressure ☑ Gender roles ☑ Emotional burden ☑ Double shift ☑ Judgment ☑ Isolation ☑ Mindset ☑ Respect Struggle ☑ Leadership |
| Individual factors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Family life ✗ Perceptions of success and failure ✗ Pursuit of self-actualization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Family life ☑ Time allocated ☑ Lack of time ☑ Failure ☑ Goal orientation ☑ Success ☑ Independence ☑ Productivity |
| Work-related factors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Workload ✗ Working hours ✗ Experience ✗ Education ✗ Innovation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Workload ☑ Withdrawal from life ☑ Social life ☑ Education ☑ Professional knowledge ☑ Lack of experience ☑ Weekend ☑ Working hours ☑ Innovation ☑ Creativity ☑ Research and development |

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

| Themes | Categories | Initial codes (some examples) | | |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| Environmental factors | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Insecurity | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Anxiety | | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Intense competition | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concern | | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Obstruction by rivals | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lack of familiarity | | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Imitation entrepreneurial environments | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Competition | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Similar restaurants | |
| | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Envy | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complaining | |
| | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Identical menu | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Imitation | |
| | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rivals | | |
| | | Social support-related factors | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Spousal and family support | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Husband |
| | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Peer support | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Father |
| | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Media influence | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Child |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Women's solidarity networks | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social media | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Television | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other women | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Solidarity | | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Friends | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Radio | | |
| | Bureaucratic and legal | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Incentives | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local government | |
| | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Barriers | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Municipality | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Financial support |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bureaucracy | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Legal procedures | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Central government | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cultural Heritage Preservation Board | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Small and Medium Enterprises | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Development Organization (KOSGEB) | |

business failed, resulting in financial difficulties for the household. This situation highlights how, in societies where men are traditionally seen as the primary breadwinners, economic shocks can trigger women's labor force participation and entrepreneurial initiatives.

My husband was a tradesman. However, his business suddenly collapsed. He was running a bakery that had been passed down from father to son. During that period, we experienced a time of great financial hardship because his business was failing and we had no money. It was a very difficult time economically, and I said to myself, 'I have to do something for my home and family. I need to contribute'. (WE1)

Similarly, it is frequently emphasized in the literature that women are drawn to entrepreneurship for reasons such as supporting the household budget, meeting the needs of their children, and increasing the overall income of the family (Ramos-Rodríguez, Medina-Garrido and Ruiz-Navarro, 2012; Chen and Elston, 2013; Solesvik, Iakovleva and Trifilova, 2019; Rytönen, Oghazi and Mostaghel, 2023). The statement of participant WE4 – '*My aim was both to earn money and to generate*

additional income’ – reveals that women entrepreneurs are capable of making strategic decisions not only to meet basic household needs but also to achieve income diversification. More specifically, this suggests that women’s participation in economic life is driven not only by temporary or crisis-related factors but also by motivations to ensure sustainable and long-term economic contributions. As highlighted in the literature, women engage in entrepreneurial activities both to contribute to the family economy and to gain financial autonomy, with the goal of generating additional income serving as a strong motivational factor (Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009; Ahmad, Jabeen and Khan, 2014; Chernbumroong, Skokic and Lockwood, 2021).

The findings also reveal that women’s entrepreneurship is closely linked to the desire for economic independence and autonomy. Although women’s participation in economic activities has traditionally been limited in patriarchal societies, this barrier is increasingly being overcome with the development of the tourism sector (Getz and Petersen, 2005; Rimmington, Williams and Morrison, 2009). This reflects women’s aspiration to escape financial dependence within traditional family structures and demonstrates how entrepreneurship can function as a tool for empowerment (Jennings and Brush, 2013). In this sense, women’s entrepreneurial activity supports SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by expanding female labor force participation in the highly prominent food and beverage sector of Türkiye (Chen and Elston, 2013). Participant WE6 also emphasized that she became an entrepreneur in the gastronomy industry in order to achieve her own economic freedom, stating:

I have always wanted to have my own economic independence. I never said, ‘Let things happen on their own, I’ll just stay aside’. As a woman, I wanted to be able to support myself financially. (WE6)

As seen below, the statement of participant WE3 illustrates how macroeconomic crises and unemployment have made entrepreneurship a necessary path for many women. Similarly, several studies (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013; Maliva et al., 2024; Mashingaidze, Phiri and Bomani, 2024; Sawangchai et al., 2025) argue that women’s entrepreneurship tends to increase during periods of economic downturn and crisis. In fact, this phenomenon is often framed as a survival strategy (Saridakis, Marlow and Storey, 2014). Particularly in economies such as Türkiye, where the tourism and gastronomy industries are highly prominent (Ghouse, Durrah and McElwee, 2021; Temizkan and Uslu, 2023), this situation reveals that women develop resilience against crises by starting their own businesses.

Primarily due to economic reasons, the collapse my husband experienced as a tradesman during a time of crisis pushed me to open a restaurant. (WE3)

4.2 Cultural and societal factors

The research findings reveal that female entrepreneurs operating within the male-dominated structure of the gastronomy sector are frequently subjected to gender-based discrimination (Hapsari and Soeditaningrum, 2018; García-Henche and Cuesta-Valiño, 2022). Participants’ experiences demonstrate that women’s competencies, particularly in leadership and managerial roles, are often questioned, and they encounter both overt and covert resistance from male colleagues or employees. This dynamic compels women to constantly prove their worth in professional environments. As Nwosu (2014) emphasizes, the capabilities of female leaders are more frequently scrutinized due to prevailing societal biases. Similarly, studies (Cave and Kilic, 2010; Noguera, Alvarez and Urbano,

2013; Temizkan and Uslu, 2023) highlight the widespread issue of resistance from male employees toward female managers. A female participant in the study, identified as WE6, articulates these discriminatory attitudes with the following statement:

Male employees often dislike taking orders from a woman. No matter how good you are, you can sense that they're thinking 'what could she possibly know?' Even your son or husband may expect you to take a step back. I've experienced this many times but I refuse to yield. (WE6)

Moreover, the findings show that women entrepreneurs are not only restricted by challenges stemming from the sector itself but also face limitations rooted in familial relationships. Emotional pressures and moral judgments, especially from extended family members, pose serious obstacles to women's economic independence. Additionally, women's entrepreneurial efforts were sometimes met with disapproval from family members, revealing how traditional gender roles remain embedded in domestic expectations. Such moral scrutiny not only delegitimizes women's economic agency but also reinforces patriarchal norms. These findings affirm the need to address gendered power structures at both societal and household levels to achieve SDG 5 (Gender Equality) (Debnath et al., 2019; D'Allura and Floris, 2025). Participants also suggest that entrepreneurial activities such as opening a restaurant are sometimes interpreted through traditional gender norms, provoking disapproval from family members. This is clearly exemplified by the participant WE3:

Before I opened the shop, something my mother-in-law said really affected me. She asked: 'Is my son's income not enough for you?' It felt as though I were doing something wrong like opening a place of ill repute. (WE3)

This remark illustrates how a woman's desire for economic freedom is often morally questioned within the framework of traditional values. Dewitt et al. (2023) note that women's entrepreneurial efforts are commonly perceived as disruptive to familial harmony, which weakens their motivation to engage in business. Similarly, Ojo (2024) and Adula et al. (2025) report that emotional pressure can cause women to feel inadequate in their decision-making processes. In addition, women are often subjected to explicit or implicit pressure to maintain traditional roles within the household (Kimbu and Ngoasong, 2016; Dewitt et al., 2023).

Another notable aspect is the role conflict experienced by female entrepreneurs, particularly those with young children. Women frequently face greater expectations for multitasking compared to their male counterparts, which imposes additional emotional and physical burdens (Jennings and McDougald, 2007). Mothers often must adopt flexible work arrangements to stay active in the business world (Santero-Sanchez et al., 2015), but this flexibility can increase the risk of burnout (Shelton, 2006; Costa et al., 2016; Sun et al., 2020). The testimony of participant WE2 captures this struggle between caregiving responsibilities and professional duties:

My children were still young. That was the most exhausting part. When I opened this place, my daughter was only 1.5 years old. ... I had many breakdowns because of the exhaustion, but I didn't give up. My husband was supportive. At that time, my sister's husband had cancer. She warned me: 'Think carefully I won't be able to help much with the kids'. I said, 'No worries, I'll hire a worker, hire a waiter, I'll go and come back'. But it didn't work out that way she had to take care of my daughter for two years. And business was extremely demanding. (WE2)

This narrative underscores that caregiving responsibilities are borne by women, not only in their own households but also within extended family contexts. The struggle to

balance work and family life can negatively impact both professional performance and psychological well-being (Mauno, Kinnunen and Ruokolainen, 2006; Ferguson et al., 2012; Cesaroni, Pediconi and Sentuti, 2018). Lastly, the severity of societal barriers faced by female entrepreneurs is closely linked to the cultural norms and spatial characteristics of the region in which they live. In rural or conservative areas, public participation by women, especially in professional settings, is often met with disapproval, thus creating an additional layer of restriction (Yousafzai et al., 2018; Tlaiss and McAdam, 2021). In this regard, societal pressure is shaped not only by gender-based expectations but also by contextual factors such as regional culture, development level, and tourism intensity. As Henry, Foss and Ahl (2016) argue, women's entrepreneurial initiatives in the gastronomy industry are not solely driven by individual motivation but are highly contingent on spatial and cultural conditions. Participant WE7 illustrates the importance of local context in shaping societal attitudes toward working women:

I didn't feel any societal pressure for being a woman. In my hometown, both men and women work. There's no external pressure here. Of course, location plays a role too. In Oldtown, you see many women around. Maybe if I were in a different location, things could have been different I don't really know.

4.3 Individual factors

The statement by participant coded WE2:

Maybe I will quit in 5–10 years. My son does not like it here at all. We used to be a family who went on holidays just like everyone else. Even my daughter grew up here. It feels like we no longer have much of a family life. Now, I cannot spare enough time for my family, nor can I go on vacation. The restaurant business inevitably affects family life. (WE2)

Highlights the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in balancing family life and business responsibilities. This situation aligns with the concept of work–family conflict (Kirkwood and Tootell, 2008; Liu, Wei and Lee, 2022), revealing how women in the gastronomy industry are often caught between professional obligations and domestic roles (Medina-Garrido, Biedma-Ferrer and Bogren, 2023; Filimonau et al., 2024). Especially in labor-intensive sectors such as gastronomy and tourism, which demand long and irregular working hours, women tend to struggle with allocating time to their family members, which in turn affects their entrepreneurial motivation (Brown, 2007; Pearlman and Schaffer, 2013).

Women entrepreneurs often experience doubt regarding their potential for success, largely influenced by prevailing gender stereotypes (Manolova et al., 2007). In male-dominated sectors such as the gastronomy industry, they may even experience feelings of inadequacy (Ladge, Eddleston and Sugiyama, 2019). Since the sense of success is closely related to self-confidence and personal fulfillment, many women perceive the entrepreneurial journey as a process of personal transformation (Gupta et al., 2009; Górány and Mura, 2021). The participant coded WE1 articulated that the fear of failure was a significant source of anxiety at the beginning, but over time, the feeling of achievement turned into a source of happiness.

I often thought that I would fail. When I opened the restaurant years ago, I kept asking myself how I could succeed as a woman. But now, I feel that I have succeeded, and I am happy. (WE1)

One of the fundamental components of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is self-actualization. For women, entrepreneurship is not merely a source of income but also

plays a vital role in achieving personal fulfillment and constructing a sense of identity (Chasserio, Pailot and Poroli, 2014; Bredvold and Skålen, 2016). Particularly for women who marry at a young age and live in economic dependency on their spouses, entrepreneurship signifies not only financial independence but also psychological empowerment (Drencheva, 2019). This situation is clearly illustrated as follows:

As a woman, the sense of self-actualization and independence developed in me later. I got married at the age of 17. I had become used to being financially dependent on my husband, always taking allowance from him. But today, I stand on my own feet and say, 'I have succeeded'.

4.4 Work-related factors

Long working hours in the tourism and gastronomy industry constitute a significant challenge for women entrepreneurs (Zampoukos and Ioannides, 2011; Karatepe, 2013). Similarly, extended and irregular working conditions including weekends and public holidays can diminish the motivation of women entrepreneurs (Brush et al., 2009; Sörensson and Dalborg, 2017). These challenges tend to be more demanding for women compared to men, although they can also bring about professional satisfaction (Hsu et al., 2019). For instance, the experiences of the participant coded WE2 illustrate this situation:

May 1st was incredibly busy. Everyone said, 'Well done, Sister Atiye, you didn't show any sign of inexperience'. Honestly, I appreciated myself too. We rushed out of the shop around a quarter past midnight. (WE2)

On the other hand, the lack of technical knowledge and experience in restaurant management exerts pressure on women entrepreneurs and leads to various managerial problems (Getz and Carlsen, 2005; McGowan et al., 2012). In the gastronomy industry, previous work experience, accumulated knowledge, and professional networks significantly influence decision-making processes during the course of restaurant entrepreneurship (Chen and Elston, 2013; Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós and García-Segovia, 2017). For instance, this situation directly shapes operational procedures such as the production, preparation, and presentation of food and beverages. The woman entrepreneur coded as WE1 emphasizes the importance of industry-specific experience with the following statement:

My biggest deficiency was myself. I didn't encounter any external deficiencies As I said, I lacked experience. There were moments when I tried to serve manti on a flat plate. (WE1)

Similarly, both general trainings, such as business and marketing, technology use, financial literacy, and customer relations, and vocational trainings, such as food production and service, play a crucial role in fostering women's entrepreneurship (Petridou, Sarri and Kyrgidou, 2009; Westhead and Solesvik, 2016; Surangi, 2018). In the gastronomy industry, the lack of vocational training and foreign language skills is clearly stated by the woman entrepreneur:

The main deficiency of the local people here is a lack of education. For example, no one is familiar with foreign countries. There's a significant lack of foreign language skills – so yes, there's a professional deficiency as well. Once, a foreign customer asked whether the meat was from small livestock or large livestock. And our staff? They responded with hand gestures – tucking their hands under their armpits, clucking like a chicken, or mimicking the gallop of a cow. Can you imagine? (WE5)

Finally, women entrepreneurs in the field of gastronomy actively follow and implement innovative practices such as developing new menus, applying alternative presentation techniques, modernizing local products, designing dining ambiances, and integrating digital ordering systems (Tajeddini, Ratten and Denisa, 2017; Corrêa et al., 2022; Pécot et al., 2024). Considering that successful women entrepreneurs in the gastronomy sector are often associated with innovative approaches (Ottenbacher and Harrington, 2007; Hjalager, 2010), it becomes evident that women operating restaurants in Safranbolu also develop innovative, locally focused menus and adopt new presentation techniques. This is reflected in the following statement by participant WE2:

I brought in many innovations. There was another place across the street that also served local food, but they did nothing just sat around waiting for customers. I, on the other hand, make changes every year. I redesign the exterior concept – flowers, decorations, something new. Even the neighboring shop owners tell me, 'Sister Tülin, you get us to spend money every single year!' (WE2)

These findings highlight the importance of vocational education and lifelong learning for women entrepreneurs, particularly in sectors like gastronomy that require both managerial acumen and cultural sensitivity (Rudhumbu, du Plessis and Maphosa, 2020; Raman et al., 2022). Insufficient technical skills continue to constrain women's entrepreneurial capacity and confidence, reinforcing the importance of specialized training programs that align with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

4.5 Environmental factors

Women's entrepreneurship in the gastronomy industry is not solely shaped by individual motivations or intrinsic factors; it is also significantly influenced by the surrounding environmental factors. According to the findings, elements such as distrust, competition, obstruction by rivals, and imitation emerge as critical components that shape women's entrepreneurial activities. The fact that a woman entrepreneur initiates a business in the restaurant or food and beverage sector without any prior connections or acquaintances contributes to a profound sense of insecurity, particularly during the early stages of the venture (Alserhan et al., 2021). This insecurity is closely linked to a lack of social capital, including limited access to supplier networks, weak customer relations, and insufficient access to industry knowledge and information flow (Farr-Wharton and Brunetto, 2009; Neumeyer et al., 2019). Entrepreneur WE6 describes how the lack of sectoral knowledge has triggered feelings of insecurity with the following statement:

I was worried about whether I could sustain this business without knowing anyone or having any close acquaintances here. I often wondered what I would do if I encountered a problem, but somehow, I kept going. At the beginning, most of the restaurants around me were already well-known to customers. Since I had no one in the industry, I lacked trust in the sector. By 'no one', I mean I didn't know any suppliers, I didn't know any vendors, and I had no connection with the customers. (WE6)

These findings underscore how environmental challenges such as limited access to supplier networks, unethical competition, and the appropriation of ideas can systematically disadvantage women entrepreneurs (D'Allura and Floris, 2025). They highlight the urgent need for support mechanisms that not only level the competitive playing field but also protect women's creative contributions within the local business ecosystem.

Addressing these external pressures through inclusive regulations and institutional support is essential for advancing SDG 5 (Gender Equality). Intense competition, which is commonly observed in both the tourism and gastronomy industries, is a frequent challenge faced by women entrepreneurs (de Clercq, Kaciak and Thongpapanl, 2022; Kawai and Sibunruang, 2023). This competitive environment often makes it difficult for women to establish themselves or gain acceptance in the sector. While this poses a significant problem, especially during the initial phase when women entrepreneurs have yet to prove themselves, some eventually overcome this barrier, as described by entrepreneur WE1:

There is competition only among those who do the same work as you. There are many restaurants and hotels, both in the old bazaar and in the city center. In the food and beverage sector, there are numerous competing businesses. Although this offers tourists visiting Safranbolu a variety of options, it initially made it harder for us to secure a share of the market. However, now both the locals and the tourists know who we are. (WE1)

As in other sectors, women in the gastronomy industry are also subjected to obstruction and interference by fellow entrepreneurs and colleagues (Costa et al., 2016; Bazazo et al., 2017). This situation, also referred to as unethical competition (Ahl and Marlow, 2012), is especially common in traditional societies or rural areas, where female entrepreneurs frequently face such challenges. For instance, participant WE2 clearly expresses how she was obstructed by her colleagues with the following statement:

My project was to take over the Asmazlar Mansion, establish a professional kitchen, and host larger groups. In fact, I entered the tender and won it, but they filed complaints. The other restaurant owners did not want me to get that place; they blocked me. (WE2)

The gastronomy industry is inherently linked to innovation and creativity (Ottenbacher and Harrington, 2007). However, the unique presentations, products, and ambience elements (such as plate selection, menu items, décor, and lighting) created by women entrepreneurs in their restaurants are often quickly adopted by competing businesses (Sharma, Quadri-Felitti and Huang, 2023). This leads to a loss of competitive advantage for these restaurants, which typically emerge as small-scale enterprises (Costa et al., 2016; Fagertun, 2017). The statement by participant WE3 reflects not only a general problem of imitation but also highlights how innovative ideas introduced by women entrepreneurs are appropriated by male counterparts in the sector. What stands out here is the woman entrepreneur's role as a creative originator, while her ideas are later adopted, claimed, and standardized by male entrepreneurs.

I never compared myself to a male business owner. I never said, 'He can do it, but I can't'. On the contrary, it was the male entrepreneur who copied me. I bought glasses from Madam Coco he went and bought the same. I chose white plates – he did the same. We started offering kadayif, and he added it to his menu too. Honestly, I didn't react at all. In this region, when one business succeeds at something, others always imitate it. That's why you end up seeing similar dishes or products in almost every restaurant. (WE3)

4.6 Social support related factors

The findings derived within the scope of women's entrepreneurship highlight the critical role of social support networks throughout the entrepreneurial process. These networks are grouped into four principal sub-themes: spousal and familial support, peer support, media influence, and inter-women solidarity. Among these, support from

spouses and family members emerges as a key motivational factor for women entrepreneurs. Financial and emotional assistance from family not only helps women transcend traditional gender roles but also enables their active participation in the restaurant and gastronomy sectors. In Türkiye, familial support has been shown to play a decisive role in the business establishment processes of women entrepreneurs in both the restaurant (Bayram, 2018) and tourism industries (Konaklıoğlu and Kaleözü, 2023). This pattern is also evident in Safranbolu, where the significance of both spousal (WE2) and family (WE7) support was emphasized in the following participant statements:

I started my business with my husband's support. He has always been there for me, both financially and emotionally. (WE2)

My greatest supporters were my children and my father. I always overcame my struggles with their help. (WE7)

Several participants emphasized that encouragement and guidance from their circle of friends had a direct influence on their decision to embark on entrepreneurial ventures. Peer support functions not only as a source of emotional motivation but also as an external voice of encouragement that reinforces the decision-making process in entrepreneurship (Greve and Salaff, 2003; Rutashobya, Allan and Nilsson, 2009; Neumeyer et al., 2019). The woman entrepreneur coded as WE2 described friend support as a key driving force behind her entry into the gastronomy sector, stating that she opened her restaurant as a result of their persistent encouragement:

I already had cooking skills, and my friends kept telling me that I should open a place. So, with their support, I eventually opened this restaurant. That's how I got into the restaurant business.

In contemporary settings, both traditional and social media have emerged as significant factors influencing women's entrepreneurship (Cesaroni, Demartini and Paoloni, 2017; Ughetto et al., 2020). Within this context, women entrepreneurs who prepare region-specific dishes are able to reach broader audiences of customers and visitors through media exposure. This finding aligns with previous studies emphasizing the role of media in supporting women's entrepreneurial journeys (Ruth Eikhof, Summers and Carter, 2013). Similarly, a recent study focusing on the contribution of women entrepreneurs to the development of gastronomy tourism in Türkiye underlines the crucial role of social media (Akkil, Kale and Kadam, 2024). Particularly through social media, media increases the visibility of women entrepreneurs while also reducing their marketing and promotional costs. The impact of media support on women's entrepreneurial endeavors is clearly reflected in the following statement:

In 2004, TV producers started coming. I cooked for them and introduced local dishes. Those were beautiful days. With media support, both customers and domestic tourists discovered me – some even came after seeing me in the media. (WE3)

Women encounter a range of challenges in their entrepreneurial pursuits due to societal norms, economic constraints, and environmental factors. In navigating these obstacles, solidarity among women plays a pivotal role. The creation of support networks facilitating knowledge exchange, providing emotional or moral support, and fostering opportunities for collaboration serves to ease the entrepreneurial journey (Bruni, Gherardi and Poggio, 2004; Kimbu, Ngoasong and de Jong, 2024). Similarly, in the gastronomy and tourism industries, which are marked by intense competition and labor-intensive demands, solidarity among women not only enhances their courage but also offers guidance through the sharing of lived experiences (Alkhaled, 2021;

Yousafzai and Aljanova, 2025). At this point, it is essential to frame women's solidarity not merely as economic cooperation but as a form of moral support. Studies with women entrepreneurs in Türkiye also point to this solidarity as a vital and sustainable driving force (Yılmaz and Karaçelebi, 2020; İrmiş and Boz, 2023). In this regard, participant WE5 emphasized that she has been able to sustain her presence in the gastronomy sector thanks to the support of other women:

The governor's wife and her friends were supposed to visit even today and she always says, 'Ms. ABC, you should expand this place'. With the support of other women, I have gradually grown my business. (WE5)

4.7 Bureaucratic and legal factors

Some participants stated that KOSGEB (Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization) supports played a significant role in their entrepreneurial activities. In particular, the statement by WE1:

I received support from KOSGEB. There are certain requirements, you know. As long as you run a proper business, the government would already provide support, and they did for us too. (WE1)

This indicates that publicly funded entrepreneurship programs are effective in enhancing women's economic participation. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Gül and Gül, 2018; Ozasir Kacar, Essers and Benschop, 2023), which also concluded that state support in the gastronomy industry helps reduce financial barriers for women entrepreneurs and encourages them to start their own businesses. In addition, although local governments do not provide direct financial assistance, their indirect contributions such as promotional support function as a form of encouragement. As WE3 stated,

We didn't receive any financial support from local authorities, but they did help promote my business. Mayors used to bring or refer their special guests to me. (WE3)

This kind of support is particularly valuable for small-scale women entrepreneurs in terms of increasing visibility and attracting potential customers (Chen and Elston, 2013; Iwu and Nxopo, 2015; Sharma, Quadri-Feliti and Huang, 2023). Moreover, such programs reduce financial barriers and increase women's access to the formal economy important for achieving SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and ensuring equitable access to public resources.

Participants' statements reveal that bureaucratic institutions such as the Cultural Heritage Protection Board (commonly referred to as the Monuments Board) and local governments' licensing procedures pose serious obstacles to entrepreneurial activities. The experiences shared by WE3 and WE4 demonstrate that women entrepreneurs face prolonged difficulties not only due to economic constraints but also because of spatial and structural regulations. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Nxopo and Iwu, 2015; Ivasciuc and Ispas, 2023).

Regarding legal bureaucratic obstacles, it wasn't when I opened the shop, but I had an upper terrace floor. I had it renovated. I faced strict sanctions from the Monuments Board. I covered the upper floor with a canopy. They said it didn't fit the landscape, someone complained, and I was fined. (WE3)

I've faced many legal and bureaucratic hurdles. This place was shut down for a year because they didn't issue a license. They interfered with the interior and exterior decoration, even the woodwork. For the license, approval was required from both the Monuments Board and the municipality. (WE4)

These quotes illustrate the extent to which legal–bureaucratic barriers can delay or hinder women’s entrepreneurial progress, especially when heritage site regulations and multi-level approvals are involved.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the multifaceted experiences of women entrepreneurs in the gastronomy industry, with a specific focus on a traditionally structured and culturally rich region of Türkiye. Findings revealed that economic motivations, such as the need for financial independence and income diversification, were crucial in shaping women’s entrepreneurial decisions. However, beyond economic triggers, cultural and societal expectations, gender-based discrimination, work–family conflict, individual aspirations for self-actualization, lack of sectoral experience, and environmental challenges also shaped their entrepreneurial journeys. Despite these obstacles, social support systems including familial encouragement, peer motivation, and media visibility played a significant role in women’s ability to sustain their businesses. The role of bureaucratic support and legal barriers was also found to be pivotal in either facilitating or hindering entrepreneurial progress. Ultimately, this study underscores that women’s entrepreneurship in gastronomy is not only an economic act but also a deeply social, emotional, and political phenomenon shaped by intersecting personal, institutional, and cultural dimensions.

This study proposes a comprehensive conceptual framework (see Figure 2) that synthesizes empirical findings with theoretical insights from gender theory and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The framework presents a multidimensional understanding of women’s entrepreneurial experiences in the context of the

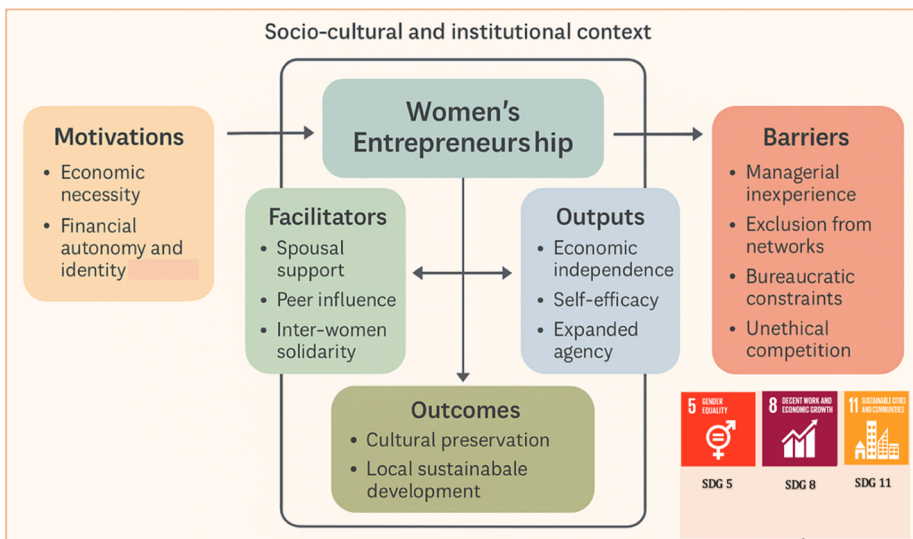


Figure 2 Conceptual framework of women’s entrepreneurship in the gastronomy industry

gastronomy industry, capturing the interplay between structural constraints, individual agency, and socio-cultural dynamics. The model begins with a multi-causal motivational structure. Consistent with existing literature, participants' entry into entrepreneurship was primarily driven by economic necessity often in response to household financial instability or spousal job loss (WE1, WE3). This aligns with findings by studies (Ramos-Rodríguez, Medina-Garrido and Ruiz-Navarro, 2012; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013, Saridakis, Marlow and Storey, 2014), who describe necessity-based entrepreneurship among women as a response to external economic conditions. However, motivations were not purely reactive. Many women also expressed a desire for long-term financial autonomy and personal identity formation, reflecting findings from previous studies (Jennings and Brush, 2013; Ahmad, Jabeen and Khan, 2014), which conceptualize women's entrepreneurship as both a survival strategy and a path to self-realization.

These motivations are embedded within a broader gendered institutional context, as described by previous studies (Brush et al., 2009; Ahl and Nelson, 2015), where entrepreneurship is normatively structured by male-centric expectations, symbolic authority, and access to resources. In findings, this is reflected in women's struggles for recognition, self-confidence, and credibility within a sector still widely perceived as male-dominated (e.g., WE2, WE6) (Hapsari and Soeditaningrum, 2018; Ghouse, Durrah and McElwee, 2021). The framework incorporates this structural critique to contextualize the systemic disadvantages women face not only in accessing entrepreneurship, but in sustaining it. The framework highlights a set of environmental and institutional facilitators and barriers. On one side, factors such as the lack of managerial experience, exclusion from informal supplier networks, bureaucratic constraints, and unethical competition from male entrepreneurs severely hinder women's entrepreneurial progression (WE1, WE3, WE4, WE6). These findings echo previous research (Ivasciuc and Ispas, 2023; Ozasir Kacar, Essers and Benschop, 2023; Sharma, Quadri-Feliti and Huang, 2023) that links bureaucratic complexity and male dominance to slowdowns in women-led business scalability, particularly in culturally regulated sectors such as tourism and gastronomy.

On the other hand, interpersonal and community-level support structures were found to play a crucial role in overcoming these constraints. Emotional and financial support from spouses (WE2), peer influence (WE5), inter-women solidarity, and visibility via traditional and digital media (WE3) emerged as key facilitators. This supports the work of those who emphasize the value of gendered social capital, informal mentorship, and collaborative networks for women's business resilience (Brush et al., 2009; Farr-Wharton and Brunetto, 2009; Górány and Mura, 2021). At the outcome, the framework identifies not only individual-level achievements economic independence, self-efficacy, and expanded agency but also collective contributions to cultural preservation and local sustainable development. Participants' efforts to revive regional cuisine and cultural heritage through gastronomy directly align with SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), while their increased visibility and economic participation contribute to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

The model does not suggest a linear path from motivation to outcome. Rather, it conceptualizes the entrepreneurial process as recursive and context-dependent, where women continually navigate institutional barriers, gender norms, and social opportunities. In doing so, they transform not only their economic roles but also the socio-cultural meaning of entrepreneurship itself. Thus, the conceptual framework offers both an analytical contribution by institutional theories with empirical findings and a

practical roadmap for designing inclusive, context-sensitive interventions. It emphasizes that fostering women's entrepreneurship in heritage destination contexts requires more than financial support; it demands policy reforms, community engagement, and institutional awareness of the gendered dimensions of entrepreneurial ecosystems.

5.1 Theoretical implications

This study offers several important theoretical contributions to the intersecting literatures on gender, entrepreneurship, and gastronomy within the field of tourism. First, it presents a multidimensional conceptual framework derived from rich empirical data, synthesizing seven interrelated themes: economic, socio-cultural, individual, work-related, environmental, social support-related, and bureaucratic/legal factors. Unlike previous studies that often analyze women's entrepreneurship through singular lenses such as economic necessity, gender discrimination, or social capital (Caputo et al., 2017; Ilie et al., 2021; Al-Qahtani et al., 2022; Babajide et al., 2022), this research adopts an integrative perspective that captures the complexity and interplay of diverse factors shaping entrepreneurial experiences in the gastronomy sector. Second, the study addresses a critical gap in the existing literature by situating women's entrepreneurship in the specific context of gastronomy within conservative, semi-rural, and culturally significant tourism regions. While women's entrepreneurship has been widely studied in domains such as general business, technology, or rural development, less attention has been paid to how it manifests in place-bound sectors like food tourism. By focusing on Safranbolu, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and member of the Cittaslow movement, the study foregrounds how local cultural norms, gender roles, and spatial characteristics influence entrepreneurial dynamics. This place-based perspective introduces a novel spatial and cultural dimension to the theory of gendered entrepreneurship.

Third, the research explicitly connects gender theory with the broader discourse on sustainability. It demonstrates that women's entrepreneurship is not limited to economic outcomes but contributes to Sustainable Development Goals, particularly gender equality (SDG 5), inclusive and sustainable economic growth (SDG 8), and the safeguarding of cultural heritage (SDG 11). Drawing on gender theory, the study shows that female entrepreneurs negotiate systemic constraints in male-dominated sectors, transforming entrepreneurship into a site of empowerment, self-actualization, and resistance. These findings enrich the evolving theory of gendered entrepreneurship (Brush et al., 2009; Jennings and Brush, 2013), emphasizing how women actively challenge institutional and social limitations while navigating multiple burdens, including unpaid care work and emotional labor. Lastly, the study introduces the concept of horizontal solidarity networks such as peer collaboration, women-to-women support, and informal mentorship as a critical yet often overlooked mechanism of entrepreneurial resilience. While much of the literature highlights family or spousal support, this research reveals the empowering role of gender-based community cooperation in navigating institutional and cultural barriers. Such findings invite future theorization on intersectional and grassroots support systems in the context of gendered tourism entrepreneurship.

5.2 Practical implications

The findings of this study take several multidimensional implications that are particularly relevant for policymakers, local authorities, civil society actors, and development

practitioners seeking to promote women's entrepreneurship in the gastronomy sector, especially within culturally and historically sensitive tourism destinations such as Safranbolu. First, the research highlights that economic motivations often driven by financial crises, unemployment, or the need for income diversification serve as critical entry points for women into entrepreneurship. In this context, the design of targeted micro-financing schemes and accessible credit programs should prioritize women who enter business not by choice but out of economic necessity. These financial instruments must be complemented by structured training in budgeting, financial literacy, and enterprise sustainability to mitigate early-stage failure.

Second, the study identifies persistent gaps in technical capacity, particularly in restaurant management, culinary skills, and foreign language proficiency that hinder women's operational effectiveness and confidence. Locally tailored capacity-building initiatives, developed through public-private partnerships, should therefore provide access to professional education or development in areas such as food hygiene, menu innovation, digital ordering systems, and service quality standards. Regional training hubs in tourism-intensive towns could serve as effective platforms for delivering such programs. Third, a significant finding is the role of entrepreneurship in enabling women's self-actualization and social empowerment. However, deeply ingrained gender norms and prevailing societal skepticism continue to undermine the visibility and legitimacy of women entrepreneurs. Accordingly, policy frameworks should incorporate awareness campaigns that actively challenge gender-based assumptions and promote female leadership, particularly in sectors traditionally coded as male-dominated. Utilizing media platforms to highlight the success stories of women entrepreneurs may help normalize their presence and encourage future participation.

Fourth, the research emphasizes the strategic function of informal solidarity networks among women including emotional support, knowledge sharing, and collaborative practices as vital coping mechanisms in navigating institutional and environmental constraints. Institutionalizing such horizontal, gender-based networks through cooperatives, mentorship programs, or women-led business associations could significantly enhance social capital and reduce entrepreneurial isolation. Lastly, in a competitive and tourism-dependent marketplace, visibility remains a key determinant of business sustainability. Collaboration among local governments, tourism boards, and digital marketing platforms is essential to enhance the visibility of women-owned gastronomy enterprises through promotional campaigns, online directories, and destination branding efforts that explicitly integrate female entrepreneurship into cultural and culinary narratives.

5.3 Limitations and future research

The study provides valuable insights, though some limitations must be noted. The research is geographically bounded, focusing exclusively on Safranbolu, a culturally and historically rich tourism destination with a distinctive socio-cultural fabric. Although this place-based approach offers in-depth content, it also limits the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should adopt a comparative design across multiple regions with varying levels of urbanization, tourism development, and cultural conservatism to assess the transferability of results. Second, the qualitative methodology although well-suited to capturing lived experiences inevitably limits the breadth and statistical generalizability of the findings. The sample size, selected through purposive and snowball sampling, may also have introduced selection bias. Future research could employ mixed-methods approaches that combine in-depth interviews with large-scale survey

data to enhance both analytical depth and empirical scope. Similarly, although the research identified seven interrelated thematic domains influencing women's entrepreneurship, it did not explore the dynamic interactions among these dimensions. Future studies might adopt theory-driven, model-based approaches such as structural equation modeling or network analysis to examine how these themes intersect and reinforce one another over time. Finally, the study did not incorporate the perspectives of other key stakeholders, such as local policymakers, male industry counterparts, or customers. Including these stakeholders could enrich the understanding of institutional dynamics and market interactions. Multi-stakeholder analyses would provide a more holistic view of the ecosystem within which women entrepreneurs operate. In light of these limitations, several directions for future research emerge: conducting comparative case studies across urban and rural contexts to examine spatial influences on women's entrepreneurship, investigating the role of digitalization and online platforms in shaping entrepreneurial practices in the gastronomy sector, and exploring intergenerational differences in entrepreneurial motivation, digital literacy, and innovation orientation.

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