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**Business Growth and Sustainability Strategies among Young Women Entrepreneurs in
Goma Division, Mukono Municipality, Mukono District, Uganda**

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Purpose: This study examined the practices and strategies employed by young women entrepreneurs in growing and sustaining their businesses in Goma Division, Mukono Municipality, Mukono District. Specifically, it sought to explore how these young women initiate, manage, adapt, and expand their enterprises within a dynamic socio-economic environment, while identifying the personal, social, and institutional factors that facilitate business sustainability and growth.

Methodology: This study employed an interpretive phenomenological design. Six young women entrepreneurs operating small and medium enterprises with demonstrated business continuity were purposively selected as information-rich participants. Data were collected through open-ended interviews and analyzed inductively using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns related to business growth and sustainability.

Findings: Findings demonstrate the reciprocal interaction proposed by Bandura (1986). Personal factors such as confidence, perseverance, financial discipline, and commitment to learning influenced the decisions entrepreneurs made. Environmental influences including access to loans, social networks, market competition, business regulations, and regional background created opportunities and constraints that shaped entrepreneurial choices. These two components interacted to produce behavioural outcomes such as borrowing, saving, reinvesting profits, advertising, branding, opening businesses early, researching, keeping records, complying with legal requirements, and networking. However, the findings also reveal that broader structural and socio-cultural realities significantly influence entrepreneurial outcomes among young women in Mukono Municipality.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: This study contributes theoretically to social cognitive theory by extending its application to the context of young women entrepreneurship in Uganda. While the theory emphasizes self-efficacy, observational learning, and environmental interaction in shaping behavior, the findings demonstrate that entrepreneurial growth and sustainability are also influenced by broader socio-cultural, structural, and contextual realities including tribal identity, regional origin, social capital, informal financial systems, and gendered experiences. We therefore suggest that entrepreneurial behavior among young women in developing economies is socially and culturally embedded, requiring a more context-sensitive interpretation of Social Cognitive Theory. We also recommend improving young women entrepreneurs' access to affordable finance, entrepreneurial training, mentorship, networks, and market opportunities through gender-sensitive policies and simplified regulatory processes. It further proposes developing a resilience framework and encourages future research on gender norms, contextual influences, and the long-term sustainability of women-owned enterprises in Uganda.

Keywords: *Young Women Entrepreneurs, Business Growth, Business Sustainability, Entrepreneurial Strategies, Mukono Municipality*

JEL Codes: *J16, L26, M13, O12*

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INTRODUCTION

Young women's entrepreneurship has increasingly emerged as a critical driver of economic growth, employment creation, poverty reduction, and sustainable development, particularly in contexts characterized by rising unemployment and limited formal employment opportunities. Globally, women entrepreneurs are demonstrating resilience, innovation, and adaptability in navigating entrepreneurial environments despite operating within restrictive socio-cultural and regulatory contexts (Alshibani et al., 2025; Goncalves et al., 2025). Yet in Uganda, entrepreneurship has increasingly become a viable pathway through which young women pursue economic empowerment, employment, and improved livelihoods amid persistent unemployment and limited formal employment opportunities (Ajeigbe & Kibukamusoke, 2024). To promote women's participation in business, government empowerment programmes, entrepreneurship initiatives, and financial inclusion efforts have been implemented to strengthen women-owned enterprises and enhance their contribution to socio-economic development. However, while existing studies have largely focused on entrepreneurial determinants, barriers, and policy environments. Limited attention has been paid to understanding the lived experiences and the specific practices and strategies that young women entrepreneurs employ to grow and sustain their businesses.

Statement of the Problem

Young women entrepreneurs in Uganda continue to encounter challenges such as limited access to affordable finance, inadequate entrepreneurial competencies, restricted market opportunities, competing family responsibilities, socio-cultural expectations, and insufficient institutional support, which threaten the growth and sustainability of their businesses (Achandi et al., 2021; Nakalembe et al., 2024). Yet available empirical evidence has mainly focused on determinants, barriers, and business outcomes, with limited attention to the day-to-day practices and strategies that enable young women entrepreneurs to establish, grow, and sustain their enterprises. It fails to identify the specific factors associated with entrepreneurial sustainability, resilience, and success at the granular level of the individual entrepreneur. "Without an in-depth understanding of how young women navigate challenges, mobilize resources, and build business resilience, entrepreneurship interventions may fail to address their practical needs. Therefore, this study explored the lived experiences of young women entrepreneurs in Goma Division, Mukono Municipality, Uganda, to understand the practices and strategies they employ to grow and sustain their businesses, thereby generating evidence to inform policy, practice, and future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Young entrepreneurship has increasingly emerged as a critical driver of economic growth, employment creation, poverty reduction, and sustainable development. In response to rising unemployment levels and limited formal employment opportunities, many young people, particularly women, have turned to entrepreneurship as a means of generating income and improving their livelihoods. Globally, recent studies like that of Alshibani et al. (2025) and Goncalves et al. (2025) indicate that women entrepreneurs are increasingly demonstrating resilience and innovation in navigating entrepreneurial environments. Moreover, Alshibani et al. (2025) found that women operating micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are becoming important contributors to economic development despite operating within traditionally conservative environments. Using a grounded theory approach, the study revealed that women entrepreneurs employ various growth-oriented approaches that align with business expansion and transformational leadership principles. These findings suggest that women

entrepreneurs actively develop strategies that enable them to overcome barriers and achieve business growth.

Similarly, Goncalves et al. (2025) explored the experiences of women entrepreneurs in Iran and found that entrepreneurial success often depends on resilience, adaptability, creativity, and the ability to navigate restrictive social and regulatory environments. The study revealed that women entrepreneurs adopt incremental growth strategies, utilize digital platforms to expand market access, cultivate informal networks, and creatively integrate family responsibilities into their business operations. Furthermore, entrepreneurs developed adaptive mechanisms to comply with regulatory requirements while maintaining business growth. These findings demonstrate that women entrepreneurs often rely on a combination of personal resilience, social networks, and innovative business practices to sustain their enterprises.

Part of Goncalves et al.'s (2025) findings conquer with Tahir's (2025) work that intended to examine women entrepreneurs in the United Arab Emirates, and found that achieving work-life balance contributes positively to business performance, customer satisfaction, productivity, and entrepreneurial well-being. Conversely, poor work-life balance for women resulted in stress, burnout, and reduced business performance. The study highlights the importance of strategies that enable women entrepreneurs to effectively manage both family and business responsibilities while maintaining business growth and sustainability.

Additionally, Hifzhan and Mochammad (2023) established that managerial skills, family support, government assistance, and entrepreneurial knowledge are critical factors influencing women's entrepreneurial success. These findings suggest that women entrepreneurs use both individual competencies and supportive social environments to achieve sustainable business outcomes. Furthermore, Inkumsah (2024) examined female entrepreneurship across ten countries and found that women entrepreneurs across contexts emphasized the importance of inclusiveness, equal opportunities, and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystems for their business growth.

The reviewed global literature demonstrates that women entrepreneurs employ diverse strategies including resilience, networking, digital technology adoption, leadership development, work-life balance management, family support systems, and adaptive business practices to sustain and grow their enterprises. The studies further highlight the influence of social, cultural, institutional, and economic factors on entrepreneurial success. However, despite these contributions, several important gaps remain.

Consequently, this literature indicates several gaps; First, there is a knowledge gap because much of the global literature focuses on entrepreneurial challenges, motivations, policy issues, resilience, and broad success factors while providing limited understanding of the specific day-to-day practices and strategies that young women entrepreneurs employ to grow and sustain their businesses. Second, there is a methodological gap because several studies emphasize theoretical models, systematic reviews, policy analyses, and broad qualitative explorations, with limited in-depth investigation of young women's lived entrepreneurial experiences within specific local contexts. Third, there is an age-specific gap because many studies focus on women entrepreneurs generally, without specifically examining young women entrepreneurs as a distinct category whose entrepreneurial experiences may differ from those of older women. Fourth, there is a contextual gap because most global studies have been conducted in countries such as Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and other developed or emerging economies whose socio-economic and cultural environments differ significantly from those of Uganda.

Consequently, the transferability of their findings to young women entrepreneurs in Mukono Central Division remains uncertain.

Studies conducted across Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrate that entrepreneurial success among women is influenced by a combination of social, cultural, technological, financial, and institutional factors. The role of technology in supporting entrepreneurship has also received considerable attention. Ongare et al. (2021) found that internet usage positively influences the sustainability of women-owned small businesses by improving communication, access to information, networking opportunities, and market access. Similarly, Cesaroni et al. (2017) observed that social media platforms provide women entrepreneurs in emerging economies with opportunities for marketing, networking, information sharing, and business expansion. These studies demonstrate that digital technologies have become important tools through which women entrepreneurs can enhance business performance and competitiveness in increasingly dynamic markets.

Entrepreneurial motivation and capacity development have equally been identified as critical factors that boost entrepreneurial engagement. Scholars like Chauke and Obadire (2020), in a study among both female and male youth entrepreneurs in South Africa, found that entrepreneurship education, self-efficacy, creativity, and individual talents motivate young people to engage in business activities as a means of economic survival. However, the study also revealed persistent gender disparities, with male participation in entrepreneurship remaining significantly higher than that of females. The authors argued that supportive environments and entrepreneurship education are necessary to encourage greater participation among young women entrepreneurs.

Other studies have focused on the institutional and policy environment within which women entrepreneurs operate. A study by Okeke-Uzodike et al. (2018) found that although governments have implemented various empowerment programs aimed at supporting women entrepreneurs, their participation in entrepreneurial activities often remains inadequately integrated into mainstream policy frameworks. Likewise, Nziku and Henry (2021) established that entrepreneurship policies in Tanzania tend to be gender-neutral and insufficiently responsive to the unique needs and realities of women entrepreneurs. The study emphasized the importance of contextualized policies that consider the specific social, cultural, and economic circumstances affecting women entrepreneurs within particular settings.

Although the reviewed studies provide valuable insights into the factors boosting women entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa, they predominantly focus on entrepreneurial barriers, policy environments, empowerment outcomes, technological adoption, and institutional support mechanisms. Consequently, they provide limited understanding of the actual practices and strategies that young women entrepreneurs employ in their day-to-day efforts to grow and sustain their businesses. Additionally, many studies adopt quantitative, policy-oriented, or broad thematic approaches that offer limited insight into the lived experiences and entrepreneurial journeys of young women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, most studies examine women entrepreneurs generally or youth entrepreneurs broadly, without specifically focusing on young women entrepreneurs as a distinct group facing unique entrepreneurial opportunities and challenges.

Available literature in Uganda indicate that entrepreneurship in Uganda is boosted by a combination of financial, institutional, technological, and socio-cultural factors. Literature from Ajeigbe and Kibukamusoke (2024) observe that entrepreneurship in Uganda has increasingly evolved in response to globalization, technological advancement, and the growing

need for innovative business solutions. The authors highlight government initiatives such as the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) and Youth Livelihood Fund (YLF), which seek to empower young (female and male) entrepreneurs through grants, training, and financial support. They further note that digitalization has created new opportunities for entrepreneurship by enabling access to markets, information, and innovative business models.

Similarly, Kimuli et al. (2021) examined sustainable entrepreneurship among small businesses in Uganda and identified key dimensions that contribute to entrepreneurial sustainability, including production management, people and skills, ecosystem management, stakeholder engagement, finance, strategy, marketing, and sales. Their findings suggest that business sustainability depends on the entrepreneur's ability to effectively manage both internal and external business resources. In a related study, Kimuli et al. (2022) explored sustainable entrepreneurship practices among women-owned businesses in Uganda. The findings revealed that women entrepreneurs engage in social, environmental, and economic sustainability practices within their businesses. To enhance sustainability, the women indicated plans to adopt digital technologies, energy-efficient equipment, and skilled labor.

Furthermore, Orobia et al. (2020) investigated the relationship between entrepreneurial framework conditions and business sustainability among youth and women entrepreneurs in Uganda. The study found that education, government policies, information technology infrastructure, market openness, and finance significantly influence business sustainability, with finance and information technology emerging as the strongest predictors. These findings highlight the importance of a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem.

In Uganda, Achandi et al. (2021) found that changing social attitudes, government empowerment initiatives, and increasing economic pressures have enabled some women to venture into traditionally male-dominated enterprises. These findings suggest that women entrepreneurs continuously navigate complex social environments in order to sustain their businesses.

Overall, the empirical literature demonstrates that women entrepreneurs employ a variety of strategies, including resilience, networking, digital technology adoption, innovation, effective work-life balance, managerial competence, and leveraging family and institutional support to grow and sustain their enterprises. However, several gaps remain evident. First, much of the existing literature focuses on entrepreneurial barriers, policy issues, success factors, and broad sustainability determinants, with limited attention to the specific day-to-day practices and strategies employed by young women entrepreneurs. Second, many studies utilize quantitative designs, policy analyses, or broad thematic approaches, providing limited understanding of the lived experiences through which entrepreneurial strategies are developed and enacted. Third, most studies examine women entrepreneurs as a homogeneous group or youth entrepreneurs more generally, without isolating the unique experiences of young women entrepreneurs. Finally, there remains a contextual gap, as evidence from countries outside Uganda may not adequately capture the socio-cultural realities influencing entrepreneurial practices among young women entrepreneurs in Mukono Municipality. Therefore, this study seeks to address these knowledge, methodological, age-specific, and contextual gaps by exploring the lived experiences of young women entrepreneurs and the practices and strategies they employ to grow and sustain their businesses in Mukono Municipality, Uganda.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the social cognitive theory developed by Albert Bandura in 1986. The theory explains that human behavior is shaped through the reciprocal interaction between

personal factors, environmental influences, and behavior (Bandura, 1986). According to the theory, individuals are not only influenced by their environment, but they also actively influence and shape their surroundings through their actions, decisions, and experiences. The social cognitive theory emphasizes the importance of learning through observation, social interaction, experience, motivation, and self-belief in achieving desired outcomes (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2023).

A central concept in the theory is self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform tasks and achieve goals. Albert Bandura argues that people with high self-efficacy are more likely to persevere through challenges, adopt innovative strategies, and remain committed to their goals despite obstacles. In the context of entrepreneurship, self-efficacy influences how entrepreneurs make decisions, manage risks, solve problems, and sustain their businesses (Virgen, 2026).

The theory further highlights observational learning, where individuals learn behaviors and strategies by observing peers and role models within their social environment (Fryling et al., 2012). In this study, SCT provides the lens to analyze how participants leverage peer-based observational learning to refine business practices.

Social cognitive theory was therefore relevant to this study because it provided a framework for understanding how young women entrepreneurs develop and apply various business growth strategies through personal motivation, social learning, environmental support, and behavioral practices.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an interpretive phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of young women entrepreneurs regarding the practices and strategies they employ to grow and sustain their businesses in Mukono Municipality. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenological research seeks to describe and interpret the meanings individuals attach to their lived experiences of a particular phenomenon. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled an in-depth exploration of how young women entrepreneurs perceive, experience, and make sense of the opportunities, challenges, practices, and strategies that contribute to business growth and sustainability.

The study specifically sought to understand the experiences, practices, and strategies employed by young women entrepreneurs in growing and sustaining their businesses in Goma Division, Mukono Municipality, Mukono District, Uganda. The target population comprised young women entrepreneurs operating small and medium enterprises (SMEs) within Goma Division. From this population, six young women entrepreneurs whose businesses had demonstrated continuity and active operation over time were purposively selected to participate in the study. Purposive sampling was employed because it enabled the selection of information-rich participants with direct experience of business growth and sustainability, thereby providing valuable insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Campbell et al., 2020).

Data were collected using open-ended interviews guided by a two-item interview guide developed in line with the study purpose and research question. Open-ended interviews are particularly suitable for qualitative research because they allow participants to freely express their experiences, provide detailed accounts, and present diverse perspectives regarding the phenomenon being studied (Ruslin et al., 2022). The interview guide enabled participants to share their experiences regarding business management practices, entrepreneurial skills, financial management strategies, customer relations, networking, innovation, and other

approaches used to promote business growth and sustainability while allowing the researcher flexibility to probe for clarification and deeper understanding where necessary.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study adhered to the qualitative criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017). Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants and the use of verbatim quotations to accurately represent their experiences. Dependability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail and systematically documenting all data collection, coding, and analytical procedures. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive journaling, whereby the researcher-maintained records of methodological decisions and reflections throughout the research process, as well as through peer review of the coding process to minimize researcher bias and ensure that findings remained grounded in participants' accounts. Transferability was promoted through the provision of rich and detailed descriptions of the study context, participants, and research procedures, thereby enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar contexts.

The data collected from the field were analyzed inductively using thematic analysis (Creswell, 2018). The analysis followed the procedures outlined by Creswell (2018), beginning with the organization and transcription of interview recordings and field notes. We then engaged in repeated reading and familiarization with the data to identify meaningful patterns and significant statements. Data were subsequently coded and grouped into categories from which themes and sub-themes were developed. Initial codes emerged from participants' narratives and insights, while additional codes were informed by the study's conceptual framework and research objectives (Creswell, 2014). The resulting themes were reviewed, refined, and interpreted to generate a comprehensive understanding of the experiences, practices, and strategies that contribute to business growth and sustainability among young women entrepreneurs.

The study was conducted in accordance with national and international ethical standards for research, including the guidelines of the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST, 2014, 2016). Ethical practice was guided by the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and non-maleficence. Key ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, protecting participants' dignity, and preventing plagiarism. Prior to participation, all respondents were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and the potential benefits of the research. Participants were assured that their participation was voluntary and that all information provided would be treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes.

RESULTS

This study aimed at understanding the lived experiences and the specific practices and strategies that young women entrepreneurs employ to grow and sustain their businesses. The findings were interpreted through Bandura's social cognitive theory, particularly the principle of reciprocal determinism, which explains that human functioning results from the continuous interaction between personal factors, environmental influences, and behaviour. Study results show that the entrepreneurial strategies employed by young women in Goma Division demonstrate how individual beliefs and capabilities interact with social and economic conditions to shape business practices and sustainability outcomes. Three themes were generated from the participants' narratives; financial growth and capital management, marketing and business visibility strategies, and business management and professionalization.

Financial Growth and Capital Management

Financial growth and capital management emerged as a key theme in understanding how women entrepreneurs expand and sustain their businesses. The findings indicate that participants' decisions regarding capital acquisition, investment, and financial management were influenced by the dynamic interaction of personal confidence, environmental opportunities, and business practices.

Personal Confidence

The participants demonstrated different levels of confidence, risk tolerance, and financial self-efficacy. Older entrepreneurs appeared more willing to pursue external financing, suggesting stronger confidence in their ability to manage business growth. For instance, Participant A (30 years, an Alur, Anglican, engaged in Agri-Food value addition), explained how she grows her business saying, "Growing capital through loans", while Participant C (30 years, an Acholi Catholic involved in selling Matooke and Sweet Potatoes), observed that "Some acquire loans to develop their businesses." In contrast, younger entrepreneurs preferred cautious financial management. Participant E (a 22-year-old Muganda Protestant engaged in selling clothes) placed greater emphasis on saving, reinvestment, and preserving business capital when she stated that, "You keep saving small money and put the rest back into the business," while Participant B (a 25-year-old Musoga Catholic and saloon proprietor), preferred minimizing financial risk by "Safeguarding myself from acquiring loans." These statements reflect differences in confidence, experience, and attitudes toward financial risk.

Environmental Opportunities

The business environment also shaped financial choices. Participants from Northern and Western Uganda operating in Central Uganda appeared to have fewer dependable local support systems, which may have increased reliance on loans. Access to savings groups, financial institutions, family networks, and community support influenced the strategies these entrepreneurs adopted for capital accumulation. For example, Participant A (30 years, an Alur, Anglican, engaged in Agri-Food value addition), explained how she grows her business saying, "Growing capital through loans", while Participant C (30 years, an Acholi Catholic involved in selling Matooke and Sweet Potatoes), observed that "Some acquire loans to develop their businesses." Similarly, Participant F (a 24-year-old Mufumbira Muslim operating within the creative industry as a movie writer, photographer, and actress), identified "loan taking" as an important strategy.

Business Practices

The behavioural responses on young women business practices took form of: taking loans, participating in savings groups, saving profits, reinvesting earnings, and avoiding debt. Participant F for example, identified "loan taking" as an important business strategy, while Participant D emphasized "Saving for the business." These actions demonstrate how personal beliefs and environmental conditions translated into concrete financial practices.

Marketing and Business Visibility Strategies

Marketing and business visibility strategies also emerged as another important theme in this study, illustrating how women entrepreneurs attract customers, remain competitive, and sustain business growth. The findings suggest that effective marketing is shaped by the reciprocal interaction of personal attributes, environmental and location conditions, and entrepreneurial behaviours

Personal Attributes

Entrepreneurs displayed varying levels of confidence, creativity, and marketing awareness. Participant A (30 years, an Alur, Anglican, engaged in Agri-Food value addition) demonstrated a proactive marketing orientation through “marketing widely,” “branding,” and participating in exhibitions. Participant E, a 22-year-old Muganda Protestant engaged in selling clothes, similarly recognized the importance of promotion, stating “Advertising the business” and noting that successful entrepreneurs “Keep marketing their businesses.”

Environmental and Location Conditions

The competitive urban market of Mukono Municipality required entrepreneurs to remain visible to customers. Business location, customer movement, and market familiarity influenced marketing decisions. Participant D, a 29-year-old Muganda Seventh Day Adventist selling food stuffs, explained that entrepreneurs “Place their businesses in the first place,” highlighting the importance of strategic positioning within the local business environment.

Entrepreneurial Behaviours

The young women entrepreneurs for this study including Participant A, D and E explained their business behaviours emphasizing: advertising, branding products, participating in exhibitions, marketing widely, and choosing strategic business locations. These behaviours represented adaptive responses to competitive market conditions.

The findings further suggest that tribal and regional backgrounds may influence business visibility strategies. Participant A, being an Alur from Northern Uganda operating in the Central region, may have adopted more aggressive marketing, branding, and exhibition participation as adaptive mechanisms for penetrating unfamiliar markets and establishing business recognition within a socially and culturally different environment. In contrast, participants originating from Central Uganda, such as Participants D and E who are Baganda, may benefit from greater familiarity with the local market environment, language, customer behavior, and social networks, which can support customer attraction even through localized visibility strategies such as strategic business placement and continuous advertising.

Hard Work and Personal Commitment

Hard work and personal commitment emerged as another theme in explaining how women entrepreneurs sustain and grow their businesses despite the challenges of operating in a competitive business environment. The findings illustrate that entrepreneurial success is influenced by the reciprocal interaction of personal attributes, environmental influences and continuous behaviours.

Personal Attributes

This subtheme strongly reflected personal discipline, persistence, motivation, and self-regulation. Participant D, a 29-year-old Muganda Seventh Day Adventist selling food stuffs at a stall, emphasized, “I am so hardworking,” and added that “Successful entrepreneurs work hard.” She also highlighted time management through “Opening early in the morning.” Being a Muganda from the Central region may also provide Participant D with familiarity regarding local customer behavior, business routines, and market operations, thereby reinforcing disciplined work practices within her business environment. Similarly, Participant F, a 24-year-old Mufumbira Muslim, involved in the creative industry as a movie writer, photographer, and actress, demonstrated commitment to continuous learning, explaining, “I always do research to make my skills better.” As a person originating from Western Uganda but operating in

Central Uganda, Participant F may rely more on skill enhancement and professional competence as mechanisms for establishing credibility, attracting clients, and sustaining her business within a socially competitive setting.

Environmental Influences

Intense competition, changing customer demands, and the need to survive in the urban marketplace encouraged entrepreneurs to work harder and improve their skills. This portrayed in the responses of participant D, a 29-year-old Muganda Seventh Day Adventist selling food stuffs at a stall, when she said, “I am so hardworking,” and that “Successful entrepreneurs work hard.” Operating within the busy commercial environment of Mukono Municipality, where small-scale retail businesses face intense competition and fluctuating customer demand, hard work and commitment may become necessary survival strategies. Her emphasis on “Opening early in the morning,” further reflects the importance of time management and maximizing customer access within food vending businesses that depend heavily on daily customer flow and convenience. Additionally, Participant F, a 24-year-old Mufumbira Muslim, involved in the creative industry as a movie writer, photographer, and actress exclaimed, “I always do research to make my skills better.” These narratives suggest that younger entrepreneurs engaged in creative and talent-based businesses recognize the need for innovation, adaptability, and continuous self-improvement to remain competitive within the evolving urban market environment of Mukono Municipality.

Continuous Behaviours

Participants (A, B, d and F) identified their observable behaviours that contributed to their business growth and sustainability as opening businesses early, working long hours, conducting research, improving skills, and continuously learning. These actions reflected how personal determination interacted with environmental pressures to sustain business performance.

Business Management and Professionalization

Business management and professionalization emerged as a significant theme demonstrating how women entrepreneurs strengthen the sustainability and credibility of their enterprises through effective management practices. The findings indicate that entrepreneurial success is shaped by the reciprocal interaction of personal attribute factors, environmental influences, and behaviour business skills.

Personal Attribute Factors

The participants demonstrated self-monitoring, planning, organizational skills, and confidence in managing their enterprises. Participant F, a 24-year-old Mufumbira Muslim engaged in the creative industry as a movie writer, photographer, and actress, explained, “I always keep records that help me know where I am declining, thus helping to improve in my business.” This reflects self-regulation and a desire for continuous improvement. Additionally, as a person originating from Western Uganda but operating in Central Uganda, Participant F may also rely on professionalism and organized management practices to establish credibility and competitiveness within an unfamiliar urban market setting.

Environmental Influences

Regulatory requirements, customer expectations, and access to social networks shaped business management practices. Participant A emphasized “Meeting business legalities,” indicating responsiveness to formal business regulations. Participant D, a 29-year-old Muganda

Seventh Day Adventist selling food stuffs at a stall, highlighted the importance of social networks, stating that successful entrepreneurs “Have social capital.” Being indigenous to the Central region may provide easier access to community networks, social relationships, and informal support systems that facilitate access to customers, business information, and opportunities within Goma Division.

Behaviour Business Skills

Young women entrepreneurs (F, A, D) that participated in this study indicated engaging in record keeping, complying with legal requirements, networking, and using social capital to access business opportunities. These behaviours illustrate how environmental demands and personal capabilities combined to promote professional business management. These results therefore explain that business management and professionalization practices among young women entrepreneurs are influenced by individual confidence, environmental demands, and social learning processes within the socio-economic context of Mukono Municipality which in turn elicit positive behavioural skills and responses from young women that necessitate business sustainability and success.

All put together, this study findings demonstrate the reciprocal interaction proposed by Bandura (1986). Personal factors such as confidence, perseverance, financial discipline, and commitment to learning influenced the decisions entrepreneurs made. Environmental influences including access to loans, social networks, market competition, business regulations, and regional background created opportunities and constraints that shaped entrepreneurial choices. These two components interacted to produce behavioural outcomes such as borrowing, saving, reinvesting profits, advertising, branding, opening businesses early, researching, keeping records, complying with legal requirements, and networking. For example, Participant A’s confidence in business expansion (personal factor), combined with access to financial opportunities and exhibitions (environmental influences), resulted in behaviours such as “Growing capital through loans,” “marketing widely,” and participating in exhibitions. Similarly, Participant D’s belief in hard work (personal factor), together with the competitive food-vending environment (environmental influence), produced behaviours such as “Opening early in the morning” and maintaining strong customer visibility.

Consistent with Social Cognitive Theory, the study therefore shows that business growth among young women entrepreneurs in Goma Division emerges not from personal characteristics, environmental conditions, or entrepreneurial actions alone, but from the continuous reciprocal interaction between these three components.

Discussion

This study findings revealed that young women entrepreneurs employed diverse financial strategies including taking loans, saving profits, reinvesting earnings, participating in savings groups, and avoiding unnecessary debt to grow and sustain their businesses. These strategies were influenced by entrepreneurs' financial confidence, perceived ability to manage risk, and the availability of financial opportunities within their environment. This finding supports Bandura's (1986) Social cognitive theory, which argues that entrepreneurial behaviour results from the reciprocal interaction between personal beliefs, environmental opportunities, and behavioural responses. Entrepreneurs with higher financial self-efficacy demonstrated greater willingness to utilize external financing, whereas those with lower confidence preferred gradual capital accumulation through savings and reinvestment.

These findings are consistent with Alshibani et al. (2025), who found that women entrepreneurs adopt growth-oriented financial strategies to expand their enterprises despite operating within constrained environments. Similarly, Goncalves et al. (2025) reported that women entrepreneurs employ adaptive financial approaches and creatively utilize available resources to sustain business growth. The current study extends these findings by demonstrating that financial growth strategies are not uniform among young women entrepreneurs but vary according to individual confidence, experience, and perceptions of financial risk. The findings also complement Orobia et al. (2020), who identified finance as one of the strongest predictors of business sustainability among youth and women entrepreneurs in Uganda. However, whereas Orobia et al. emphasized the availability of financial resources, this study demonstrates that entrepreneurs' confidence in utilizing those resources is equally important. Consequently, the findings contribute to the literature by showing that access to finance alone may not guarantee business growth unless entrepreneurs possess sufficient self-efficacy to utilize financial opportunities effectively.

Additionally, this study findings also indicate that young women entrepreneurs actively promoted their businesses through advertising, branding, participating in exhibitions, and selecting strategic business locations to improve visibility and attract customers. These behaviours emerged from the interaction between entrepreneurs' creativity and marketing awareness, and the competitive business environment within Mukono Municipality. In accordance with the social cognitive theory, personal capabilities and environmental conditions jointly shaped entrepreneurs' marketing behaviours. These findings corroborate Kimuli et al. (2021), who identified marketing and sales as central dimensions of sustainable entrepreneurship among Ugandan businesses. Similarly, Cesaroni et al. (2017) and Ongare et al. (2021) found that women entrepreneurs increasingly utilize marketing platforms and communication channels to improve customer access and business competitiveness. However, while these studies largely emphasize digital marketing and social media, the present study demonstrates that Ugandan young women entrepreneurs also rely heavily on traditional marketing approaches such as branding, exhibitions, word-of-mouth promotion, and strategic business location.

The findings further support Goncalves et al. (2025), who observed that women entrepreneurs creatively adapt their marketing approaches to fit their operating environments. However, the present study contributes additional contextual evidence by illustrating how regional background and market familiarity may influence marketing strategies. For example, entrepreneurs operating outside their regions of origin appeared to engage in more intensive branding and exhibition participation to establish legitimacy and visibility within unfamiliar markets.

In addition, this study established that hard work, persistence, self-discipline, time management, continuous learning, and commitment to improving entrepreneurial skills were important strategies used by young women entrepreneurs to sustain their businesses. Entrepreneurs responded to intense market competition by opening businesses early, conducting research, improving their skills, and working long hours. These findings strongly support Bandura's proposition that behaviour is continuously shaped by personal motivation and environmental demands. These findings concur with Goncalves et al. (2025), who found that resilience, adaptability, and creativity enable women entrepreneurs to navigate challenging business environments successfully. Similarly, Hifzhan and Mochammad (2023) identified entrepreneurial knowledge and managerial competence as important contributors to women's business success. The present study extends this literature by demonstrating that continuous

learning is not merely an outcome of entrepreneurship training but constitutes an ongoing behavioural strategy that entrepreneurs intentionally employ to remain competitive.

The findings also resonate with Chauke and Obadire (2020), who reported that self-efficacy, creativity, and entrepreneurship education motivate youth participation in business. However, whereas their study focused primarily on entrepreneurial motivation, the current findings provide a richer understanding of how motivation translates into everyday entrepreneurial practices such as disciplined work routines, continuous research, and deliberate skill enhancement. This provides valuable insight into the lived entrepreneurial experiences of young women operating within Uganda's urban informal economy.

Lastly, the findings demonstrated that young women entrepreneurs promoted business sustainability through record keeping, planning, networking, compliance with legal requirements, and utilizing social capital to access business opportunities. These management practices reflected entrepreneurs' confidence in organizing their businesses while responding to customer expectations, regulatory requirements, and market demands. Consistent with social cognitive theory, professional business management emerged from the reciprocal interaction between personal competencies and environmental expectations. These findings support Hifzhan and Mochammad (2023), who established that managerial competence significantly contributes to women's entrepreneurial success. Likewise, Kimuli et al. (2021) emphasized that sustainable entrepreneurship requires effective management of business resources, finance, marketing, stakeholder engagement, and organizational processes. However, this study complements these findings by providing practical examples of how young women entrepreneurs operationalize professional management through record keeping, legal compliance, networking, and continuous self-monitoring.

The findings also agree with Inkumsah (2024), who emphasized the importance of supportive entrepreneurial ecosystems and inclusive business environments for women's entrepreneurship. Similarly, Achandi et al. (2021) observed that Ugandan women entrepreneurs increasingly rely on changing social networks and supportive environments to sustain their businesses. However, the current study contributes new evidence by demonstrating that social capital is not merely an external resource but is actively cultivated through entrepreneurs' networking behaviours and professional management practices. This illustrates the reciprocal relationship between entrepreneurs and their business environments, a central principle of Bandura's social cognitive theory.

All in all, the findings of this study address the knowledge, methodological, age-specific, and contextual gaps identified in the literature by providing an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of young women entrepreneurs in Mukono Municipality, Uganda. It highlights that business sustainability is not solely dependent on external support or individual characteristics, but rather on the continuous interaction between entrepreneurs' beliefs, their operating environments, and the adaptive behaviours they employ in response to changing business conditions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study explored the entrepreneurial strategies employed by young women entrepreneurs to grow and sustain their businesses in Mukono Municipality, Uganda. Guided by Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, the findings demonstrate that business sustainability is shaped through the reciprocal interaction between personal factors, environmental influences, and

entrepreneurial behaviours. Young women entrepreneurs relied on a combination of financial growth and capital management, marketing and business visibility strategies, hard work and personal commitment, and business management and professionalization to navigate the dynamic challenges of entrepreneurship.

The study established that entrepreneurs' confidence, financial self-efficacy, persistence, creativity, organizational skills, and commitment to continuous learning influenced their entrepreneurial decisions and behaviours. These personal attributes interacted with environmental factors such as access to finance, competitive market conditions, regulatory requirements, customer expectations, and social networks to shape business practices including saving and reinvesting profits, prudent borrowing, branding, advertising, networking, record keeping, legal compliance, and continuous skills development. The findings further reveal that entrepreneurial success among young women is not determined by personal characteristics or external support alone but by the continuous interaction between the entrepreneur and the surrounding business environment. Consequently, the study contributes contextual evidence demonstrating that sustainable entrepreneurship among young women in Mukono Municipality depends on adaptive strategies that combine individual agency with supportive environmental conditions.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The findings generate several practical implications for government, development partners, financial institutions, business development organizations, and entrepreneurs themselves.

Government and Policy Makers

The Government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives, and local governments, should strengthen entrepreneurship support programmes specifically targeting young women entrepreneurs. Such programmes should extend beyond financial assistance to include mentorship, business management training, financial literacy, digital marketing, record keeping, legal compliance, and business networking. Policy interventions should also simplify business registration processes and improve access to affordable financing for young women operating micro and small enterprises.

Financial Institutions

Banks, SACCOs, Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), and microfinance institutions should develop flexible financial products tailored to the needs of young women entrepreneurs. Loan products should be accompanied by financial literacy, investment planning, and debt management training to enhance entrepreneurs' confidence in utilizing financial resources effectively while minimizing financial risk.

Business Development Organizations

Organizations supporting entrepreneurship should invest in practical capacity-building programmes focusing on marketing, branding, customer relationship management, digital business promotion, innovation, and business professionalization. Business incubation centres and mentorship programmes linking experienced entrepreneurs with emerging young women entrepreneurs would strengthen entrepreneurial competencies and improve business sustainability.

Young Women Entrepreneurs

Young women entrepreneurs should continue strengthening entrepreneurial competencies by embracing continuous learning, maintaining proper business records, complying with legal requirements, building professional networks, investing in business visibility strategies, and developing sound financial management practices. Participation in entrepreneurial associations and business networking platforms may further enhance access to information, markets, and growth opportunities.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should examine the influence of gender norms and family responsibilities on the growth and sustainability of women-owned enterprises in Uganda. Comparative studies between urban and rural women entrepreneurs should also be conducted to understand how geographical and socio-economic contexts shape entrepreneurial practices and sustainability strategies. In addition, future researchers may adopt mixed-methods or longitudinal approaches to examine the long-term effects of entrepreneurial strategies on business performance and sustainability. More studies are also needed to explore how social capital, ethnicity, and migration status influence entrepreneurial opportunities and business resilience among women entrepreneurs in Uganda.

Theoretical Contribution and Recommendations

This study contributes theoretically to social cognitive theory by extending its application to the context of young women entrepreneurship in Uganda. While the theory emphasizes self-efficacy, observational learning, and environmental interaction in shaping behavior, the findings demonstrate that entrepreneurial growth and sustainability are also influenced by broader socio-cultural, structural, and contextual realities including tribal identity, regional origin, social capital, informal financial systems, and gendered experiences. The study therefore suggests that entrepreneurial behavior among young women in developing economies is socially and culturally embedded, requiring a more context-sensitive interpretation of Social Cognitive Theory.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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