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WOMEN STARTUP ENTREPRENEURS' CHALLENGES IN SITUATION ANALYSIS, OBJECTIVES, STRATEGY, TACTICS, ACTION, AND CONTROL PLANNING: INSIGHTS INTO MARKETING PLAN CAPABILITY

Mia R. Degala *

College of Management, Capiz State University, Roxas City, Capiz, Philippines.

* Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the marketing planning practices of women startup entrepreneurs using the SOSTAC Planning Model: situation analysis, objectives, strategy, tactics, action, and control. Its main objective was to explore how women apply the model and the challenges they faced in doing so. Findings show that their planning is adaptive and context-driven, shaped by experiential learning, customer focus, and institutional support. Key challenges include limited capital, gender bias, skill gaps, and resource constraints, while opportunities can be addressed, such as mentorship, digital tools, community engagement, and government trade fairs, to enhance resilience. The study concluded that sustaining women-led entrepreneurship requires creativity, adaptability, and inclusive institutional support, and urged universities, local government units, and policymakers to provide mentorship, access to finance, and training to foster innovation and long-term viability. The results indicated that marketing planning among women entrepreneurs is adaptive and context-driven rather than strictly linear, shaped by experiential learning, customer orientation, and institutional support. Recommendations such as mentorship programs, digital tools, community engagement, and government-supported trade fairs arose. Universities, local government units, and policymakers should provide structured mentorship, access to finance, and training programs to align entrepreneurial practice with market realities. Strengthening these support systems will enhance innovation, resilience, and long-term viability of women-led ventures.

Keywords: Adaptability, Innovation, Marketing Capability, Resilience, Sustainability, Sostac Planning Model

1 INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship drives economic growth, social innovation, jobs, competitiveness, and resilience, with women entrepreneurs fostering inclusive, sustainable change. Albattat and Abdulla (2023) state that women's involvement promotes gender equality and innovation, yet women remain underrepresented due to social, financial, and institutional barriers [1]. Women-led startups face challenges such as limited access to credit, limited market knowledge, and discrimination [2,3]. Systemic inequalities hinder women in marketing and capability development. Marketing capability—opportunity recognition, strategy, and customer value delivery—is crucial to success, but many women entrepreneurs lack systematic frameworks and instead rely on intuition. This highlights the need for models such as SOSTAC, developed by Smith (1999), which guide strategic marketing planning through Situation Analysis,

Objectives, Strategy, Tactics, Action, and Control. Originally for marketing communications, SOSTAC is now a universal strategic tool. Chaffey and Smith (2017) note its importance in digital and traditional marketing due to its flexibility [4]. Yet, use among women entrepreneurs remains limited due to factors such as insufficient marketing education, gender bias, and a lack of mentorship. Albattat and Abdulla (2023) add that socio-economic conditions hinder systematic planning among women [1].

This study explored women startup entrepreneurs' experiences with SOSTAC to improve business performance, focusing on how they perceive and use the model, as well as the factors affecting their strategic marketing capabilities or the challenges they face in applying the framework.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This study adopts a constructivist epistemology, viewing knowledge as created through human experience and social interaction. Creswell and Poth (2018) note that constructivism emphasizes individual meanings shaped by cultural, social, and historical contexts [5]. Unlike positivism's objective measurement, constructivist inquiry explores how people interpret realities and how these meanings influence behavior. The research uses a Deductive Marketing Strategies Framework with the SOSTAC Planning Model by Smith (1999). This deductive approach tests whether structured models improve performance, using women startup entrepreneurs' experiences to assess their relevance. The framework's components are dynamic and shaped by entrepreneurs' experiences, resources, and cultural contexts, illustrating how women perceive, adapt, and apply SOSTAC to their realities.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodological Perspectives

This research, grounded in a constructivist worldview that views reality as socially constructed through participants' perspectives, uses a phenomenological approach to explore the challenges women startup entrepreneurs face in developing the SOSTAC Planning Model for marketing [5].

It employs a deductive approach, building on existing theories of SOSTAC and Barney's Strategic Capability Theory (2016) to verify their relevance for women-led startups. This epistemology, combined with deductive logic, allows interpretation of participants' experiences while testing the applicability of Silverman's (2020) framework. The study balances interpretive depth with theoretical grounding, ensuring that the findings reflect women's subjective meanings of their marketing challenges within a structured model.

3.2 Participants of the Study

This research included women entrepreneurs and startup owners currently running or who managed businesses in the past three (3) years. Participants involved in marketing, business planning, and dealing with the SOSTAC Planning Model Situations. The study aimed to provide female entrepreneurs across sectors such as food, retail, services, and digital with a broad view of marketing challenges. Participants had to be owners, co-founders, or managers of registered micro, small, or medium enterprises.

3.3 Data Gathering Procedures and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were the main data collection method, allowing participants to freely share their perspectives and enabling follow-up questions. A consent letter was given before the interviews to ensure ethical participation. Conducted in Hiligaynon with recordings and notes on tone, emotion, and environment, interviews lasted 30-40 minutes.

Topics included sustainable harvesting, practices, marketing, value addition, and community empowerment. Data were transcribed, translated, and member-checked for accuracy. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in the participants' passages.

Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's 2019 six-phase framework, identifying patterns related to the SOSTAC model and marketing challenges. Coding was done manually, deductively from theory (Smith, 1999; Kotler et al., 2022) and inductively from themes. Validation involved peer debriefing, member checks, and reflexivity notes to minimize bias and ensure credibility.

The researchers adhered to ethical principles to protect participants, who provided informed consent after receiving details on risks, benefits, and confidentiality. Participation was voluntary, with the option to withdraw without consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and the final report was anonymous and secret.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Challenges Experienced by Women in Startup Entrepreneurship Using the Situation Analysis, Objectives, Strategy, Tactics, Action, Control Planning Model

Women entrepreneurs faced interconnected challenges across the SOSTAC framework, as shown in Table 1. The following challenges surfaced: resource limitations, socio-cultural expectations, operational constraints, unpredictable supply conditions, and market pressures that affected their ability to systematically plan, implement, and monitor their business strategies.

4.2 Unpredictable supply and market pressure hindered systematic situation analysis

Participant 1 explained: “The reason is that we do run out of stock, since it can take months before production is complete, and we have had to deal with issues that are unpredictable, making it extremely difficult to plan promotions or how much needs to be prepared.” Participant 2 added: “Competitors that can offer lower price sometimes force me to reconsider my packaging or promotional efforts of my products.” Participant 3 noted: “Natural phenomena may destroy supply, restricting production.” Participant 4 observed: “During the time off of classes, my daily earnings reduce significantly, and I am not always able to meet the expenses.” Participant 8 reflected: “There are customers who are not convinced of authenticity and I therefore make time to explain the story behind every product. The more people know about the way they make products, the more they trust, and our identity gets stronger.”

Women entrepreneurs often rely on reactive, informal approaches to situational analysis due to systemic barriers such as limited access to finance and technology. And it is as noted by studies conducted by Kamberidou (2020) and De Guzman (2023) [6,7]. Nguyen (2020) states that small businesses lack tools for formal analysis. Institutional support and accessible tools are needed to shift from reactive to proactive market evaluation [8].

4.3 Time, labor, and personal responsibilities limit the ability to set measurable objectives

Participant 1 admitted: “I did not know much about the marketing strategies and goal setting in the beginning. I did not know how to keep track of sales and how to manage finances accordingly.” Participant 2 clarified: “My goals are usually determined by the number of events that I can attend and the quantity of what I can create.” Participant 4 said: “My pay varies according to schedules, and it is hard to establish long-term or fixed goals.” Participant 6 explained: “I can only perform light duties at this time because I am old and weak.”

These accounts show women entrepreneurs often prioritize short-term, survival goals over long-term ones. Household and business burdens limit their ability to set formal objectives. Ventura (2021) and Reyes (2020) note Filipino women juggle domestic and entrepreneurial roles, restricting long-term planning [9,10]. Albattat and Abdulla (2023) add that, despite strong intentions, systemic barriers prevent the translation of these intentions into formal goals [1]. Gender-sensitive support, like flexible training, is needed to help women formalize their objectives.

4.4 Competition and positioning pose significant challenges. Participant 1 described

“The largest challenge is limited stock. We may not even have enough, even with high demand.” Participant 2 noted: “My problem is that I need to reach the customers that are not part of the events that I attend.” Participant 4 stressed: “The location and the low cost of the product are the key to my strategy.” Participant 8 added: “It is time-consuming to explain the meaning behind products, although it makes customers feel the authenticity and supports our identity.”

Women entrepreneurs use relational marketing and authenticity to build trust, but scaling beyond local markets is tough. Kelley et al. (2021) support authenticity as a strength of brand loyalty, but expanding strategies beyond local markets remains difficult. Though authenticity differentiates, women entrepreneurs need branding, segmentation, and digital strategies to grow and compete [2].

4.5 Poor training and limited resources hindered execution. Participant 1 explained

“We chat with the help of Messenger and Facebook group chat, as it is cheap, yet it is hard to cope with numerous questions at the same time.” Participant 2 added: “I am not online, so I rely on word-of-mouth and physical advertisements.” Participant 4 said: “I do not use social media or other digital tools, and I use word of mouth or signs.” Participant 8 pointed out: “Digital tools such as Messenger and Facebook are affordable and help me update and share photos and promote products with ease. Putting photos and their stories can make the customers understand the price attached to them.”

These testimonies suggest that women entrepreneurs equate marketing with promotion, relying on inexpensive tools and informal tactics rather than structured segmentation or positioning. Crittenden (2019) and Bahoo (2020) support

this, noting that women entrepreneurs often lack tactical execution frameworks [11,12]. Torres (2018) further observes that female-led MSMEs blur the distinction between marketing and promotion. The implication is that training in tactical planning, digital literacy, and channel diversification is necessary to strengthen execution [13].

4.6 Operational issues limited execution.

Participant 1 reasoned: “It may be hard to deliver to far-off consumers and sometimes, it is impossible to meet all the orders due to a lack of products.” Participant 2 continued: “The process of transporting products to events, inventory control, and preparation can be tiring when the business is being operated by me alone.” Participant 3 observed: “In case calamities decrease supply, then it becomes difficult to attend fairs or fulfill orders regularly.” Participant 4 said: “I need to keep on changing my everyday goals and how much to prepare to not make too much waste.” Participant 8 added: “Event partnerships help us reach a larger number of people and promote items to more people. Trade fairs will aid in highlighting uniqueness and aid in linking with even more buyers.”

These accounts suggest women entrepreneurs face vulnerabilities in logistics, supply chains, and workload management. Ahl (2006) and Marlow & McAdam (2013) confirm this by highlighting operational weaknesses of female-led businesses in resource-strained settings. Resilient supply chains, reliable transportation, and institutional support for disaster preparedness are key to strengthening the Action component [14,15].

4.7 Few tools and limited expertise weakened monitoring

Participant 1 stated: “It was initially not easy to understand what numbers to be particularly concerned with, either sales, repeat customers, or engagement.” Participant 2 replied: “Because I do not keep track of both online sales and analytics, it is difficult to determine which strategies lead to the most successful outcomes.” Participant 3 observed: “It is a challenge to track performance in case of inconsistent supply.” Participant 5 emphasized: “Repeat buyers give stable revenues, they decrease marketing expenses, and they act as living testimonials.” Participant 8 added: “Online tools such as Facebook analytics, Messenger, and spreadsheets give me access to sales and engagement. Reviews and feedback of customers at events contribute to refining designs and making better presentations.”

These testimonies suggest that women entrepreneurs depend on informal feedback and basic tools rather than systematic monitoring. Alford (2018) notes micro-enterprises rarely use structured systems [16]. And Kwok & Jones (2018) attribute reactive strategies to poor marketing skills [17]. Thus, accessible monitoring tools and training are vital to shift from reactive to proactive, evidence-based practices.

Table 1: Level of Consumer Preference on Foreign Clothing Brands as a Whole

Categories	Themes	Emerging Themes	Description	Participant
Situation Analysis	Systemic and Market Constraints	Financial Constraints	Women entrepreneurs struggled to secure sufficient capital for production scale-up, packaging, and marketing. Limited resources forced them to prioritize immediate needs over long-term investments, restricting participation in trade fairs, acquisition of better equipment, and experimentation with new strategies.	P1, 2, 5, 6, 7 & 8
		Supply & Stock Shortages	Perishable or seasonal goods faced frequent disruptions due to livestock illness, typhoons, or raw material shortages. These fluctuations made it difficult to maintain inventory, meet customer demand, and plan marketing activities, often resulting in canceled orders or delayed deliveries	P1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 & 8
		Price Sensitivity	Competitors offering lower prices pressured entrepreneurs to justify the higher costs of organic or handmade products. Since competing on price was not viable, they had to emphasize quality, sustainability, or authenticity, which required skills and resources they often lacked.	P1, 2, 5, 6 & 8
		Limited Market Access	The Sayaw was understood as an embodied form of prayer where synchronized movements express gratitude, devotion, and protection. The ritual nature	P1, 2 & 3

			of the dance transforms bodily movement into spiritual expression.	
		Regulatory Barriers	Meeting government requirements, permits, or compliance standards consumed time and resources. Without guidance, entrepreneurs felt excluded from formal markets or unable to expand legally.	P2 & 4
		Limited Market Research Skills	Entrepreneurs lacked formal tools or training to analyze customer trends, relying instead on intuition or anecdotal feedback. This limited their ability to anticipate demand or adjust strategies proactively.	P1, 2 & 5
Objectives	Personal and Resource Pressures in Goal-Setting	Time & Labor Shortages	Entrepreneurs managed production, sales, and customer service alone while also handling household duties. This led to exhaustion and inconsistent marketing efforts, slowing growth.	P1, 2, 5, 6, 7 & 8
		Short-Term Survival Focus	Goals were centered on immediate survival, such as covering daily expenses, rather than long-term growth. This reactive approach limited strategic planning and innovation.	P1, 2 & 5
		Unclear Performance Metrics	Without measurable indicators, entrepreneurs struggled to track progress or evaluate success. Goals were often vague, making it difficult to assess effectiveness.	P2, 5 & 7
Strategy	Strategic Positioning Limitations	Limited Reach	Reliance on word-of-mouth and physical presence restricted visibility beyond local areas, limiting expansion.	P2, 3, 4, 7 & 8
		Messaging Challenges	Entrepreneurs struggled to craft persuasive messages that conveyed product value while remaining authentic. They wanted to emphasize health benefits, quality, and sustainability, but lacked confidence and skills.	P1, 2, 5, 6, 7 & 8
		Lack of Branding	Inconsistent logos, packaging, and messaging weakened recognition and trust, especially against polished competitors.	P2, 5 & 8
		Weak Differentiation	Products lacked clear unique selling points compared to competitors, making it difficult to stand out in crowded markets.	P2, 3 & 5
		Limited Competitive Analysis	Few entrepreneurs conducted structured competitor research, relying instead on informal comparisons. This limited their ability to anticipate market shifts or respond strategically.	P1, 2 & 4
Tactics	Knowledge and Execution Gaps in Marketing	Skills & Knowledge Gaps	Lack of formal training made it difficult to set goals, identify target markets, or evaluate performance. Entrepreneurs relied heavily on intuition or informal advice.	P1, 2, 5, 7 & 8
		Limited Technology Access	Poor internet connectivity and lack of devices restricted online promotion, limiting reach compared to digitally savvy competitors.	P1, 2, 3 & 4

		Low Digital Literacy	Limited familiarity with online tools hindered the effective use of social media and e-commerce platforms.	P1, 2 & 5
		Minimal Advertising Budgets	Entrepreneurs lacked funds for paid advertising, relying on free methods such as word-of-mouth or organic social media posts.	P2, 3 & 5
		Limited Channel Diversification	Heavy reliance on Facebook and TikTok restricted exposure to other potential markets.	P1, 2 & 3
Action	Operational and Personal Execution Challenges	Production & Consistency	Maintaining consistent product quality and meeting customer expectations was a major concern. Unexpected events—like livestock illness, equipment breakdowns, or personal emergencies—often disrupted production schedules, affecting customer satisfaction and brand reliability.	P1, 3, 5, 6, 7 & 8
		Logistics & Distribution	Transporting goods to trade fairs or distant customers was costly and time-consuming. Without reliable transportation, entrepreneurs managed distribution themselves, which was physically demanding.	P2, 3, 5 & 6
		Balancing Household & Business Duties	Caregiving and domestic tasks limited time for business operations, forcing entrepreneurs to prioritize family over growth.	P1, 2, 5 & 7
		Unreliable Supplier Relationships	Dependence on unstable suppliers disrupted production schedules and created uncertainty in meeting demand.	P2, 3 & 5
		Limited Workforce Capacity	Lack of staff forced entrepreneurs to handle multiple roles alone, reducing efficiency and scalability.	P1, 2, & 5
		Health and Well-being Constraints	Physical exhaustion and stress affected productivity, decision-making, and long-term sustainability.	P1, 2 & 6
Control	Monitoring and Recognition Limitations	Seasonal Demand	Businesses experienced sharp drops in sales during holidays or off-peak seasons, making planning difficult and income unpredictable.	P4, P6
		Limited Recognition	Women felt overlooked in trade events and networks compared to male entrepreneurs, which reduced their confidence and access to opportunities.	P2, 3 & 7
		Weak Data Collection Practices	Few entrepreneurs systematically tracked sales or customer data, limiting their ability to evaluate performance.	P1, 2 & 5
		Dependence on Informal Feedback	Repeat customers and word-of-mouth served as the main evaluation tools, which lacked systematic rigor.	P1, 2 & 3

		Lack of Benchmarking Against Competitors	Entrepreneurs rarely compare performance with competitors, limiting opportunities for improvement and innovation.	P2, 3 & 5
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Legend: Mean: 4.21 – 5.00 = Highly Preferred; 3.41 – 4.20 = Preferred; 2.61 – 3.40 = Moderately Preferred; 1.81 – 2.60 = Less Preferred; 1.00–1.80 = Least Preferred; SD: 0.00 – 0.49 = Very Consistent; 0.50 – 0.99 = Consistent; 1.00 – 1.49 = Moderately Consistent; 1.50 – 1.99 = Less Consistent; 2.00 and above = Least Consistent; *Source:* Data from Researchers

4.8 Insights Drawn on Marketing Plan Capability

Women entrepreneurs faced interconnected challenges across the SOSTAC framework. These limitations hindered the structured implementation of the SOSTAC Planning Model, leading entrepreneurs to rely on intuition, experiential learning, informal networks, and community-based trust. Marketing objectives were often short-term and survival-oriented, with limited use of SMART objectives and formal monitoring tools. Their strategies emphasized authenticity, relationships, flexibility, and niche orientation, while tactical application was constrained by **limited training, digital literacy, and analytical tools**. Logistical disruptions, workload imbalances, and informal control systems further challenged business continuity, performance assessment, and long-term growth.

5 CONCLUSION

Women startup entrepreneurs' perceived marketing skills are more influenced by their business environments than by motivation. Ongoing resource shortages, such as limited finances, manpower, supply chains, and logistics, hinder organized marketing planning. These conditions cause entrepreneurs to focus on immediate needs, leading to reactive marketing based on personal judgment, customer contact, and trial and error. While flexible, this limits formal goals, documented strategies, and performance evaluation. Such practices are survival responses, not a lack of interest in planning.

Time constraints and multiple roles further limit systematic marketing planning. Women juggle business, household chores, caregiving, and personal obligations, resulting in fragmented, energy-driven campaigns. Market uncertainties, like demand shifts and consumer skepticism, discourage long-term planning and promote short-term tactics. Reassuring customers about product quality adds to their workload, hindering structured marketing. Despite challenges, women excel through authenticity, customer interaction, storytelling, and relationship marketing, building trust and loyalty.

Digital platforms like Facebook and Messenger support visibility, communication, engagement, and basic tracking, aiding core marketing activities and controlled growth as digital literacy improves. Institutional support through training, mentorship, trade fairs, and government events enhances capabilities, enabling clearer goals and market expansion. Resilient and adaptable, women depend on relational and digital tools for short-term survival. Lack of systematic planning limits long-term competitiveness. The SOSTAC Planning Model fits women-led startups but needs adaptation. With proper tools and support, formal marketing planning can shift from survival to sustainable growth.

RECOMMENDATION

Women startup entrepreneurs face financial, manpower, supply chain, and literacy challenges but show strength, flexibility, and talents in authenticity, storytelling, and relationship marketing. Capacity-building programs should be affordable, modular, and practical, with a focus on lean strategies. Simplifying the SOSTAC Model into step-by-step instructions helps entrepreneurs incorporate systematic planning—using community input for situation analysis, short-term goals, and manual or free tools for control. Improving digital literacy shifts women from general social media promotion to data-driven marketing. Branding should incorporate authenticity and storytelling, turning relationship strength into an organized marketing strategy that fosters loyalty and market differentiation.

Local governments should support women-led startups by addressing logistical, market, and support challenges. Programs to improve finance, mentoring, and logistics, along with market linkages and trade fairs, boost visibility. Policies must acknowledge women's dual roles and offer flexible training. Linking interventions to women's experiences enhances sustainability. Business agencies and NGOs should formalize informal practices, establishing mentorship and peer learning. User-friendly tools based on SOSTAC and basic market monitoring help women systematize marketing, be proactive, and adapt, making their businesses resilient and competitive.

This study offers lessons for marketing and business students, highlighting theory-practice links in gendered entrepreneurship. Despite models like SOSTAC, practical use is hindered by resource and cultural issues. Students

should develop simplified marketing tools or digital supports for women-run startups. Promoting structured planning and storytelling can scale these concepts.

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