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Empowerment typologies of female entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe: overcoming socio-economic challenges

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Abstract

Purpose: Female entrepreneurs in tourism are increasingly asserting themselves, yet there is a need to examine the psychological empowerment dimensions of their entrepreneurial journeys. This study addresses this gap by defining psychological empowerment typologies of female entrepreneurs operating in challenging socio-economic contexts in urban Zimbabwe.

Design/methodology/approach: This research utilised data from face-to-face and online interviews with 20 female entrepreneurs in urban Zimbabwe.

Findings: The study identified four distinct typologies of psychologically empowered entrepreneurs: resilient, collaborative, social change, and authentic entrepreneurs. These typologies show unique patterns of intrapersonal, interactional, behavioural, and relational empowerment dimensions, highlighting the multidimensional nature of psychological empowerment among female entrepreneurs.

Originality/value: This research makes an original contribution by exploring psychological empowerment typologies among female entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe. It examines the intersection of socio-economic challenges and empowerment dynamics and identifies distinct typologies. These insights provide valuable guidance for policymakers, support organisations, and female entrepreneurs to design targeted interventions that enhance entrepreneurial empowerment and promote gender equality.

Keywords: female entrepreneurs; tourism entrepreneurship; psychological empowerment; empowerment typology; SDG 5: gender equality; Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

Women engage in entrepreneurship to improve their social status, quality of life, and contribute to poverty reduction (Ahmed *et al.*, 2022; Corrêa *et al.,* 2024). Entrepreneurship is critical for economic development, particularly in struggling economies where it is viewed as empowering (Bruton *et al.*, 2013; Madongwe and Jaravaza, 2020; Sutter *et al*., 2019). Female entrepreneurs play a critical role in these spatial contexts (Amine and Staub, 2009) as they prioritise social objectives than men (Minniti and Naudé, 2010) by directing their earnings toward necessities like food, clothing, and education, unlike men who prioritise luxuries (Dowing, 1990; Nichter and Goldmark, 2009). Entrepreneurship offers marginalised groups, particularly women in poor countries opportunities to empowerment and socio-economic advancement (Alkhaled and Berglund, 2018). However, promoting entrepreneurship as empowerment has been criticised for perpetuating neo-colonial agendas that further

marginalises women (Imas and Garcia-Lorenzo, 2023; Naudé and Havenga, 2005). Thus, a critical perspective is essential to understand the complex dynamics between empowerment and women's entrepreneurship.

Empowerment, defined by Zimmerman (1995) as gaining mastery over issues of concern, enables women in entrepreneurship to achieve agency and control, allowing them to drive change. This multi-dimensional concept is measured differently across disciplines using economic, psychological, social, political, and educational dimensions (Arroyo *et al.*, 2019; Boley and McGehee, 2014; Boley *et al.*, 2015; Su *et al.*, 2023). In tourism literature, women's empowerment is associated with employment, gender equality (Duffy et al., 2015; Zhang and Zhang, 2020), business performance (Ribeiro *et al.*, 2021), strategic decision-making (Tajeddini *et al.*, 2017), antecedents (Altinay *et al.*, 2012;) and the economic benefits of entrepreneurship (Hallak and Assaker, 2013). Nearly half of the studies on female entrepreneurship in developing countries focus on challenges, entrepreneurial performance, and gender (Corrêa et al., 2022).

Entrepreneurship is recognised as socially situated and place-specific with unique local dynamics influencing its impact (Cope, 2005; Steyaert and Katz, 2004). While entrepreneurship has traditionally been promoted for its economic empowerment potential for women, this emphasis neglects the social and psychological dimensions of empowerment (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2021; Figueroa-Domecq *et al.,* 2020; Martinez Caparros, 2018; Vujko et al., 2019; Watson, 2013). Expanding the focus to include these broader aspects is essential, as economic empowerment alone offers a limited view, leaving psychological empowerment particularly underexplored (Cole, 2018). This research is critical in addressing these theoretical gaps, especially within the context of female tourism entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe, where entrepreneurship enhances individual agency, promotes social cohesion, drives social change, and supports community growth. Situating the importance of supportive networks, adaptability, and innovation, this study provides actionable insights to enhance policies and support systems tailored to the needs of female entrepreneurs. Such policies, focused on socio-economic impact, and community development, are especially needed in emerging economies where female entrepreneurship, though rising in Asia, remains limited in Latin America and Africa (Corrêa *et al.,* 2024; Nguyen, 2022). Thus, our work emphasises the value of empowering female entrepreneurs in tourism, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of their role in socio-economic development and offering a framework to design sustainable support for female-led enterprises.

Psychological empowerment, consisting of intrapersonal, interactional, behavioural, and relational dimensions (Christens, 2012; Zimmerman, 1995), play a significant role in women's empowerment. Yet, its examination in place and entrepreneurship studies remains limited. While tourism research has applied these dimensions to understand employee empowerment (Kanjanakan *et al.*, 2023; Meng, and Han, 2014), there is a lack of insight into how female entrepreneurs specifically become empowered. Given the inconclusive evidence on how entrepreneurship enhances women's empowerment (Ibáñez and Guerrero, 2022; Ojediran and Anderson, 2020), investigating psychological empowerment in this context is crucial for advancing empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 1995). This study addresses these gaps by examining the typologies of psychologically empowered female entrepreneurs. Grounded in psychological empowerment theory (Christens, 2012; Zimmerman, 1995) and supported by qualitative data, it provides valuable insights (Scheyvens, 1999; Zimmerman, 1990) of how entrepreneurship empowers women in places with socio-economic challenges. Specifically, we examine experiences of psychologically empowered

female entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe, shedding light into how they perceive and navigate the opportunities and constraints of enterprise ownership and management. These findings enhance our understanding of empowerment by transcending traditional, capitalist, globalised, and gendered narratives (Figueroa-Domecq *et al.*, 2020), offering a detailed examination of the multifaceted empowerment experiences of female entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe. Our work thus contributes critical insights to the discourse on empowerment and place, with implications for policy and support tailored to the psychological dimensions of female entrepreneurship.

2. Literature review
2.1. Empowerment theory
Empowerment has been investigated as both a process—how individuals gain control over their lives—and as an outcome—the results of these processes. However, most scholars view it primarily a process (Carr, 2003). From a developmental psychological perspective, empowerment is a multi-level construct that describes gaining mastery or control at three different levels: "individual, organizational, and community levels" (Zimmerman, 2000, p.44). At each level, the processes and outcomes of empowerment can vary, highlighting its dual nature (Zimmerman, 2000). Originally theorised in psychology, empowerment focused on the individual level of analysis (Zimmerman, 1995). Over time, its theorisation evolved into a dynamic concept, adapting to the people and contexts involved. This psychological perspective remains central in empowerment literature and serves as the foundation for understanding empowerment at organisational and community levels of analysis (Zimmerman, 1995).

Zimmerman (1995) proposed that psychological empowerment consists of three components: intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral empowerment. The intrapersonal component involves self-perception, including motivation to control, perceived competence, and self-efficacy. For individuals to feel empowered, they must believe in their capacity to influence decision-making through participation (Christens *et al.,* 2014, p.1768). Therefore, empowered female entrepreneurs should possess self-confidence, self-efficacy, and the skills to manage their businesses effectively. Initiatives aimed at empowering women should prioritize building confidence, developing transferrable skills, and enhancing self-belief. The interactional component of psychological empowerment refers to knowledge, social capital, and resources needed to drive positive change in one's environment (Messman *et al.,* 2022). Political engagement is critical in this dimension, as understanding political systems and institutions strengthen an individual's belief in one's ability to initiate change and participate effectively. This is particularly relevant for female entrepreneurs who must navigating the complex operating environments and socio-cultural dynamics, as seen in places like Zimbabwe. Enhancing interactional empowerment in entrepreneurship involves bridging the gap between perceived control and actionable steps (Zimmerman, 1995, p.589).

The behavioural component focuses on actions taken to manage stress, adapt to change, and exert control (Zimmerman, 1995). It involves engaging in behaviours that contribute to positive environmental change (Messman *et al.,* 2022). However, this dimension is sometimes debated, as it may reflect empowerment outcomes that the empowerment process itself (Christens, 2012; Christens *et al.,* 2014). Christens (2012) expanded the psychological empowerment framework with a fourth component: the relational component. This aspect, grounded in a sense of place, focuses on the skills, abilities, and inclinations needed to form interpersonal relationships, thus, emphasizing collective empowerment processes (Christens, 2012). Previous research suggests that entrepreneurship, through social bonds and sense of

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place, plays a critical role in shaping identity and purpose of a place (McKeever *et al.,* 2015). This perspective highlights entrepreneurship's role in individual and community empowerment, as well as regeneration and redefinition of place identity. This approach represents a shift from earlier, more individualistic empowerment theories (Riger, 1993), allowing for a broader understanding of how enterprises impact women's psychological empowerment within their specific social and environmental contexts. Rocha (1997) further conceptualized empowerment as a progression, starting from individual empowerment and advancing to collective or community levels, with political action as the ultimate outcomes. This framework emphasises the potential of entrepreneurship to driven both individual and communal empowerment through layered and interconnected ways.

In tourism literature, empowerment has primarily been studied in terms of its impacts on local communities and residents (Aghazamani and Hunt, 2017). However, focusing on the empowerment of female tourism entrepreneurs provides a unique perspective on individual agency and development. Tourism does not only support local communities but also empowers female entrepreneurs, thus, promoting sustainable development goals (Cole, 2006). Scheyvens (1999) identified four dimensions of empowerment—economic, social, psychological, and political—to explain ecotourism's impacts on local communities and this framework has been widely applied in tourism studies (e.g., Aleshinloye *et al.*, 2022; Boley and McGehee, 2014; Boley *et al.*, 2014; Strzelecka *et al.*, 2017). This study focuses on female tourism entrepreneurs, examining how they navigate and enhance psychological empowerment, thus contributing to sustainable development and gender equity in tourism and place. Boley and McGehee (2014) further advanced this field with the tourism resident empowerment scale, which highlights the psychological, social, and political dimensions that influence residents' support for tourism (Boley et al., 2014). Psychological empowerment, in particular, plays a critical role in fostering residents' attachment to place, quality of life (Aleshinloye et al., 2022), and support for tourism initiatives (Strzelecka et al., 2017). Yet, these components remain underexplored in tourism entrepreneurship, place, and women's empowerment. This study intends to fill these gaps by exploring these aspects through a qualitative study in Zimbabwe.

2.2. Female entrepreneurs in tourism

Hanson (2009) argues that the unequal power relations influencing gender stratification labour market also affect women's opportunities in business ownership. The tourism industry, with its low startup costs and entry barriers, is ideal for cultivating entrepreneurial initiatives (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020). According to Welter *et al.* (2014), entrepreneurial behaviour is shaped by gendered places where local institutions and norms influence women's participation in specific industries. Given its female-dominated workforce, tourism presents significant entrepreneurial opportunities for women (Khoo et al., 2024). Over the past decade, scholarly interest in female entrepreneurs in tourism has expanded, focusing on their motivations, barriers, and skill sets (Filimonau et al., 2024). Although entrepreneurship has traditionally been male dominated (Bird and Brush, 2002), women's business ownership has risen rapidly (Hanson, 2015). Female entrepreneurs are driven not only by economic gain but also by desires for self-control, independence, social status, and community well-being (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020). By entering entrepreneurship, women challenges established gender norms (Hanson, 2003). However, female tourism entrepreneurs still face challenges, including institutional and sociocultural contexts (Khoo et al., 2024; Panta and Thapa, 2018). Key barriers include limited access to resources (Moswete and Lacey, 2015), lack of collaborative networks (Kimbu *et al.*, 2019), low confidence and self-efficacy (Hallak *et al.*,

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2015; Madawala *et al.*, 2023), and inadequate business skills and knowledge (Khoo et al., 2024; Panta and Thapa, 2018).

To overcome these barriers, scholars have identified three key skill categories for female entrepreneurs: personal, technical, and management skills (Makandwa *et al.*, 2023). Studies show that women in tourism display very good personal skills, such as resilience, innovation, and communication, along with management skills like product development, planning, and marketing (Makandwa et al., 2023; Tajeddini et al., 2017). However, technical skills, particularly in tourism legislation and digital competencies remain as areas of improvement (Khoo et al., 2024; Makandwa et al., 2023). To develop these skills, scholars recommend education, training, and policy initiatives (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020). Women's entrepreneurial skills are critical for firm performance (Ribeiro et al., 2021), and successful ventures provides economic benefits that enhance self-esteem (Tajeddini et al., 2017) and empowerment (Khoo et al., 2024). This study's focus on connecting female tourism entrepreneurs to their empowerment journey offers a fresh theoretical perspective that moves beyond traditional analyses of barriers and competencies in tourism entrepreneurship.

2.3 Situating tourism entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe
Hanson (2009) examined studies in Botswana, India, Peru, and the United States focusing on female entrepreneurs and the connections among entrepreneurship, women's empowerment, and place. Previous research emphasises that entrepreneurship relies on local and distant resources (Hanson, 2009; Müller and Korsgaard, 2018). Scholars increasingly recognise the importance of place and spatial context in entrepreneurship (Kilber *et al.,* 2015; Korsgaard, Müller, and Tanvig, 2015). In Zimbabwe, where political instability, economic hardship, high unemployment, and inadequate infrastructure (Woyo 2022), these socio-economic and political challenges have driven women to establish small-scale enterprises for survival (Derera *et al.*, 2020). Here, entrepreneurship is closely linked with empowerment (Chitsike, 2000) and place (Hanson, 2009), with women's entrepreneurial efforts tracing back to the colonial era (Portes and Haller, 2005; Manjokoto and Ranga, 2017).

While female entrepreneurs across Africa can sustain their livelihoods through enterprise, Zimbabwean women face unique challenges that are shaped by colonial legacies and entrenched patriarchal norms that restrict innovation and self-organisation (Imas and Garcia-Lorenzo, 2023; Mashapure *et al.,* 2023). Despite active involvement in entrepreneurship, Zimbabwean women struggle with economic constraints and limited growth prospects (Mandongwe and Jaravaza, 2020). Within this post-colonial, gendered economic and societal framework (Manjokoto and Ranga, 2017), women in tourism sector demonstrate resilience, working to shape entrepreneurial identities amid these constraints (Imas and Garcia-Lorenzo, 2023; Musavengane *et al.,* 2023). This study, therefore, critically examines the psychological empowerment of women in this specific Zimbabwean context.

The context in Zimbabwe, characterised by institutional limitations and a challenging socio-economic environment, directly affects entrepreneurial development and sustainability (Musavengane *et al.,* 2023; Welter, 2011; Woyo, 2022). Female entrepreneurs face additional barriers including discrimination and a lack of formal institutional support and entrenched gender inequalities (Maunganidze, 2020; Mashapure *et al.,* 2022; Simba and Nziku, 2022). Despite these challenges, there is limited research on how entrepreneurship psychologically empowers women in Zimbabwe and similar emerging economies, leaving a critical theoretical gap in understanding the role of entrepreneurship in enhancing sustainable development. This study addresses this gap by examining the typologies of psychological

empowerment experienced by women-led ventures in Zimbabwe, offering new insights into how entrepreneurship empowers women within a complex socio-economic environment.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

Informed by feminist epistemologies (Brush *et al.*, 2006; Marshall and Rossman, 2014; Sprague, 2016), our study explored the nuanced experiences of female entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe, challenging biases, and patriarchal norms (Imas and Garcia-Lorenzo, 2023). Using a feminist interpretivist framework, we acknowledged the multifaceted realities shaped by gendered contexts (Berger and Luckman, 1967), responding to calls for more feminist perspectives in entrepreneurship research (Figueroa-Domecq *et al.*, 2020). Through qualitative methodologies, particularly in-depth semi-structured interviews, we examined gender-related issues, allowing us to understand psychological empowerment within Zimbabwe's challenging socio-economic context (Woyo and Slabbert, 2023). This context of place highlighted feelings of "powerlessness and helplessness" among female entrepreneurs (Conger and Kanungo, 1988, p. 474). Understanding psychological empowerment required reflective interactions between researchers and interviewees to understand nuanced experiences in challenging socio-economic contexts. Our research questions were guided by this conceptual framework, aiming to understand how gendered contexts influence psychological empowerment among female entrepreneurs.

The study was informed by the direct experiences and perspectives of the first and second authors, who have intimate connections to Zimbabwe (Lafrance and Wigginton, 2019). To address potential biases, we engaged in reflexivity and sought input from the third author and external experts. Despite insider perspectives, our primary objective was to maintain objectivity and impartiality. In-depth interviews yielded diverse perspectives (Granot *et al.,* 2012), and prolonged engagement with participants enhanced credibility (Kornbluh, 2015). To ensure transferability, we provided detailed methodological descriptions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Patton, 2014) and maintained systematic documentation to uphold credibility (Czernek-Marszalek and McCabe, 2022).

3.2 Data collection

A purposive sample of 20 female entrepreneurs with at least 3 years operational experience in urban areas in Zimbabwe was selected for the study (Table 1). This sample size was considered sufficient for qualitative research, emphasising information richness (Glense, 2011; Patton, 2002). Initial participant recruitment relied on personal contacts and entrepreneurship-related social media groups, acknowledging the potential bias in this method (Sharma, 2017). Subsequently, snowball sampling was employed for further participant recruitment. Data collection occurred from November 2022 to April 2023. Semi-structured interviews, lasting 30 to 90 minutes, were conducted using a combination of face-to-face and online methods. While face-to-face interactions are optimal, video calls were used to approximate this experience (Hanna, 2012).

Insert Table 1: Sample Characteristics here

An interview guide (in English) with open-ended questions was used, organised in line with the research's premises (see Appendix 1). Questions were developed based on a comprehensive literature review and empowerment theory (Christens, 2012; Zimmerman, 1995). The first section aimed at rapport-building and gathered information about the nature

of businesses, owner motivations, location, inception and marital status. Second section focused on women's psychological empowerment. Interviews were conducted with participants' consent and audio recorded. Transcriptions were done by first and second authors to ensure accuracy. Data saturation was reached when consistent patterns emerged across the dataset.

3.3 Data analysis

We employed a reflexive approach to thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2019) method for active knowledge generation. The first and second authors collaboratively analysed the data to achieve richer interpretations of meaning and patterns (Byrne, 2022, p. 1393) using the psychological empowerment theory (Christens, 2012; Zimmerman, 1995). Our deductive, theory-driven coding aimed to capture entrepreneurial motivations, typologies, and participants' perceptions of psychological empowerment (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 1994). We prioritised participants' voices to preserve their narratives and to prevent reductionist interpretations of their experiences, especially in impoverished spatial contexts such as the global South.

Adhering to thematic analysis steps, we emphasised participants' narrative experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2019). An iterative no-linear process was employed. Initially, we reviewed all transcripts to identify meanings and recurring patterns before formal coding (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Initial codes were guided by the psychological empowerment theory (Christens, 2012; Zimmerman, 1995) and research questions. Codes were then sorted into five overarching themes representing the typologies of psychologically empowered female entrepreneurs, opportunities and challenges faced in the context under investigation. Thematic analyses were underpinned by key issues (see Table 2) derived through iterative and comparative methods (Silverman, 2005).

Insert Table 2: Data Structure here

4. Findings

We first examined the challenges and opportunities faced by female entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe, such as newness, small-scale operations, gender biases, and socio-economic factors, niche markets, community support, and innovative resource solutions. Despite significant barriers, we identified four typologies of psychologically empowered female entrepreneurs. These findings are discussed in the following sections and summarised in Fig. 1.

4.1 Contextual constraints and opportunities

Despite facing significant challenges, data showed that female entrepreneurs in this study demonstrated various levels and forms of psychological empowerment. These challenges, presented in Fig. 1 included newness to the market, small-scale operations, gender biases, and navigating Zimbabwe's complex economic environment characterised by economic instability, inadequate infrastructure, and corruption (Woyo and Slabbert, 2023). These issues, especially smallness and newness (Clausen, 2020), exacerbated feelings of marginalisation, reduced confidence, and hindered women's psychological empowerment, suggesting the gendered nature of entrepreneurship in this spatial context.

For example, Tsitsi shared her struggle with client trust, stating "*I struggled to build trust with clients, it seemed like everyone preferred to work with more established ones*", suggesting the liability of newness and the importance of competence for psychological

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empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995). Challenge of newness evoke feelings of inadequacy and impedes the development of competence. Martha, a sculpting entrepreneur, expressed the strain of being a sole proprietor: "*As a one-woman operation, I wear many hats and juggle multiple responsibilities. It is exhausting doing everything myself*". This undermines the intrapersonal dimension of psychological empowerment, potentially leading to stress and lack of control. Additionally, Grace reflected on balancing business responsibilities with family obligations: "*Balancing my business responsibilities with family obligations is challenging*", indicating gendered expectations that constrain agency and empowerment. These constraints intersect with intrapersonal and interactional dimensions, showing female entrepreneurs' struggle to maintain self-efficacy and autonomy amidst societal norms, significantly compromising their psychological empowerment.

Contextual factors play a critical role in the psychological empowerment of female entrepreneurs (Hartmann *et al.,* 2022) by enabling to gain a sense of control within the business environment. Angela summed up these challenges and their impact by expressing that: "*Hyperinflation, currency instability, and government policies create uncertainty and hinder business growth. Accessing basic infrastructure and utilities, such as reliable electricity and internet connectivity, is a constant struggle*". Understanding this interplay between psychological empowerment and contextual factors is critical in developing interventions to support and empower women in challenging socio-economic contexts.

However, opportunities such as niche markets, community support, and innovative resource solutions emerged, positively impacting various dimensions of psychological empowerment. Specialising in niche tourism markets allowed women to differentiate their businesses and build confidence in their unique offerings, enhancing their intrapersonal empowerment. For instance, Jennifer noted, "*I found a unique market in eco-friendly tourism packages, which not only appeals to a specific clientele but also gives me a competitive edge.*" This specialisation boosted her self-efficacy and perceived competence. Additionally, community support played a critical role in fostering interactional empowerment of the women interviewed in this study. Angela shared, "*our local women's tourism group has been instrumental in providing emotional and financial support. We share resources and advice, which helps us overcome many hurdles.*" This collective support network enhanced women's ability to navigate social and business environments effectively.

Data also revealed that women utilised innovative resource solutions positively, thus, impacting their behavioural empowerment. Rose explained, "*by leveraging solar energy for my guesthouse, I managed to reduce costs and avoid the frequent power outages that plague our area.*" This innovation allowed her to take control of operational challenges, demonstrating adaptive and proactive behaviours. These opportunities helped counteract challenges, fostering psychological empowerment by enhancing women's self-efficacy, interactional capabilities, and proactive behaviors within the tourism industry.

4.2 Motivations

The study analysed the motivations driving female entrepreneurs to start tourism enterprises in Zimbabwe amid socio-economic challenges. Women in this study are starting these businesses out of necessity (12) (Bastian *et al.,* 2018) while 8 were opportunity entrepreneurs (Fairlie and Fossen, 2020). Necessity entrepreneurs came about because of the prevailing hopelessness induced by the country's ongoing socio-economic challenges including job losses and unemployment, death of the spouses. This sense of powerlessness led to heightened awareness among empowered entrepreneurs, who identified unmet needs (Fig.1)

and sought to influence their livelihood outcomes through entrepreneurship. Participant demonstrated agency, defined as the capacity to act upon one's values and goals (Binder, 2019), in navigating their circumstances. For instance, Chipo said, *"For me, it was not by choice to start this (tourism) business, it was based on my economic circumstances. I had to change things"*. Similarly, Gogo shared, "*I am not educated and when my husband died, I was left with no choice except kuita (starting) business to survive and educate my children"*. These narratives show how women embraced entrepreneurship to address their socio-economic challenges, showing empowerment through proactive efforts.

However, some women (8) saw these challenges as opportunities (Farlie and Fossen, 2020). The environment of pessimism led to a proactive mindset among these entrepreneurs. They recognised emerging markets (Fig. 1) and sought to enhance their livelihoods and contribute to economic growth through entrepreneurship, thus, demonstrating their agency (Binder, 2019), by actively seeking and exploiting business opportunities even in challenging contexts. For example, Gloria stated, "*I saw a gap in the market and realised that with the current challenges, it was time to start a business and be part of the country's development"*. Similarly, Gladys shared, "*having a stable job was not enough, I wanted to create some legacy for myself and children"*. This implies that women, even in the face of challenges, leveraged the circumstances to pursue entrepreneurship ventures.

4.3 **Typologies of psychologically empowered entrepreneurs**

4.3.1 *Resilient entrepreneurs*
This typology reveals high levels of intrapersonal and behavioural empowerment, characterised by self-confidence and efficacy, proactive problem solving, and resilience. Key characteristics for this typology include *resilience, resourcefulness,* and *growth mindset* (Fig. 1). This emphasises the importance of coping strategies for entrepreneurial success (Marcazzan *et al.,* 2022), particularly in socio-economically challenged places like Zimbabwe. The uncertain business environment acts a conduit for empowerment among female entrepreneurs. As Tsitsi reflects, *"every challenge has been an opportunity for growth. I learned to be resourceful, and Zimbabwe teaches you to be resilient",* aligning with the concept transforming adversity into positive outcomes (Ahmed *et al.,* 2022).

Within this typology, female entrepreneurs exhibit a strong belief in their ability to overcome obstacles and thrive despite challenging socio-economic contexts. Grace, for instance, emphasises how navigating hurdles in Zimbabwe has honed her adaptability, agility, creativity, and innovation. She states,

"Doing business in Zimbabwe is very uncertain. I have learned to embrace uncertainty, use it as a source of innovation and creativity. It is about being agile".

This resonates with previous research indicating that psychological empowerment among female entrepreneurs involves resourcefulness and proactive crisis management (Chadwick and Raver, 2018), suggesting that innovative and flexible approaches contribute to their empowerment and success in difficult socio-economic environments.

The study show how adversity, particularly uncertainty, shapes the psychological empowerment of female entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe. While responses to diversity differ (Franco, *et al.,* 2021), embracing uncertainty stimulates women's innovation and creativity, enhancing psychological resilience and interactional empowerment. This proactive approach

allows women to control of their responses to Zimbabwe's unpredictable environment, leading to positive change and growth. Additionally, data reveals that economic instability and social norms significantly shape women's psychological empowerment experiences, with resourcefulness emerging as a key outcome. Extending previous research (Ayala and Manzano, 2014, Tian and Fan, 2014), the findings show that giving up is not an option for these entrepreneurs. Instead, self-confidence, creative problem solving, resource leveraging, and resilience are crucial for psychological empowerment.

4.3.2 Collaborative entrepreneurs

Tourism, historically reliant on networking (Cooper, 2008), emphasises collaboration, networks, and knowledge sharing among female entrepreneurs (Hjalager, 2010). Women in this typology exhibit all four dimensions of psychological empowerment, emphasising *strong networks, seeking opportunities, amplifying voices, and sharing resources* (Fig.1). Gloria stresses the transformative power of networking, stating, "*networking has been a game-changer. I am always on the lookout for opportunities to connect with other female entrepreneurs, mentors, and supporters*". Gloria's emphasis on networking as a "game-changer" illustrates how connecting with mentors and peers has provided crucial support and resources. Additionally, Tsitsi and Teurai demonstrate the diverse skill set required in gendered entrepreneurship, emphasising adaptability and creativity as key drivers of psychological empowerment and importance in navigating challenges:

> "*You need to be a handyman… I am using tools which I have never used to use… I have been a driver, you need to be able to drive different vehicles, from a lorry to a bike.*" [Tsitsi].

> "*One needs to be very creative*" [Teurai].

The development of new skills enhances interactional empowerment and agency in dealing with gendered constraints (Castellanza, 2022; Siba, 2019). By mastering diverse skills, women in challenging socio-economic contexts reduce their reliance on men in managing enterprises, thus, improving their self-efficacy, and empowerment outcomes. Collaborative entrepreneurship further amplifies interactional empowerment. Charity, for instance, notes, "*I have found strength in numbers…*" (Zimmerman, 1995). This suggests that entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe enhances not only interactional empowerment but also behavioural empowerment through assertiveness and proactive networking efforts.

Data reveals that female entrepreneurs in this typology actively challenge stereotypes, empower themselves, and advocate for their communities by sharing their experiences and resources (Mansfield, 2014). This approach is critical for community building and improving quality of life (Karge, 2018). Sharon's sentiment captures this ethos, suggesting the importance of mutual support within their culture. Collaborative efforts extend internally, as women involve family members in business roles, thereby strengthening familial bonds and distributing responsibilities:

> "*I often speak about my experiences, successes and struggles hoping that it will inspire another woman and challenge stereotypes. It is our culture really – we have to support one another to grow – sharing of resources with our communities*" [Sharon].

Gladys exemplifies this internal collective empowerment, stating "*…my husband is one of the directors, so we work together. My brother is the one who does transport, and the*

children are all involved in the business". Externally, collaborative female entrepreneurs actively network with others in the sector to share ideas and improve operations, thereby enhancing professional growth and self-confidence, as noted by Cecilia. Additionally, celebrating milestones within businesses serves as a critical antecedent of behavioural empowerment for collaborative entrepreneurs, motivating further success and resilience in challenging spatial contexts, as highlighted by Teurai. This recognition and success empower collaborative female entrepreneurs psychologically, driving them to strive for further accomplishments.

> *"I am able to network with other chefs, and through that, I was made the deputy Chef for the network. I simply network, share ideas, and this shapes my business"* [Cecilia].

> *"I am very happy and blessed to have this business…. I have got an award. The best entrepreneur in 25 years Award"* [Teurai].

The significance of social capital in counterbalancing cultural challenges and strengthening family bonds amidst socio-economic constraints is critical among collaborative entrepreneurs. Female entrepreneurs benefit personally from supportive relationships and contribute to their communities by fostering community relations, leading to successful relational empowerment. Data stresses the multifaceted nature of psychological empowerment among these women, emphasising the importance of collaboration and supportive networks for success and resilience in challenging spatial contexts. Collaborative entrepreneurs show high levels of agency, demonstrating that an empowering environment requires collaboration, skill acquisition, and the willingness to pursue opportunities in challenging contexts like Zimbabwe.

4.3.3 Social changers

Female entrepreneurs in this typology exhibit multifaceted psychological empowerment, including intrapersonal, behavioural, and relational dimensions (Christens, 2012; Zimmerman, 1995). Their empowerment transcends individual agency, contributing to broader social change. This is evident in their commitment to challenging gender norms (Bianco *et al.,* 2017) and driving change within families. For example, Tsitsi attributes her psychological empowerment to her upbringing in a household of girls and her mother's influential role, highlighting intrapersonal empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995). This upbringing nurtured her self-confidence and self-efficacy, shaping her entrepreneurial efforts and instilling in her a sense of empowerment that she now seeks to pass on to others:

> "*I suppose I was empowered from a young age. I grew up in a in a household of girls only. Let's say she (my mum) empowered us from day one*" [Tsitsi].

Similarly, Dorothy expresses her desire to drive change in her family and community, reflecting a commitment to behavioural empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995). She perceives her business as a platform for catalysing social change and empowering future generations, stating that "*I grew up in Zimbabwe and have witnessed firsthand the challenges facing our society, and that is why my business should help to drive change in my family and community*". Additionally, Joyce views entrepreneurship as a means of creating a legacy for her children, further demonstrating behavioural empowerment as she challenges traditional employment limitations:

> *"To me, entrepreneurship is living a legacy for my children to follow because once you are employed somewhere, you can't leave your job for your children, so for me it's creating a legacy for my children so that they can they have something to fall back on"* [Joyce].

Female entrepreneurs in this typology challenge conventional gender roles and expectations within their families, altering attitudes towards women's autonomy and contributions to household income. Through defying traditional norms and succeeding in their ventures, they challenge entrenched beliefs about women's capabilities and roles in society. Their transformative actions transcend individuals, influencing broader societal attitudes towards gender discrimination. These entrepreneurs view entrepreneurship as a catalyst for social change, providing tangible opportunities for women to thrive while challenging outdated gender norms that perpetuate inequality and limit women's freedom of action. For example, Grace emphasises the critical role of family support in her entrepreneurial journey, implying the value her family places on women taking control of their destinies and contributing to household income:

> *"My family has always been supportive of my journey. They see value in women taking charge of their own destinies and contributing to household income. It is not just about financial independence; it is about reshaping perceptions of what women can achieve"* [Grace].

Angela overcame community skepticism to become a role model for young women, while Martha uses entrepreneurship to challenge stereotypes and create a more inclusive future for future generations:

> *"When I started my business, I faced skepticism from some members of my community who believed that women should focus solely on domestic duties. But as my business grew and I became financially independent, attitudes started to shift. Now, I'm seen as a role model for other young women in my village"* [Angela].

> *"Being a woman entrepreneur in a male-dominated industry has its challenges, but it also presents an opportunity to challenge stereotypes and pave the way for future generations. I want my daughters to grow up in a world where their gender doesn't limit their potential."* – [Martha].

These narratives suggest that female entrepreneurs in this typology prioritise relational empowerment (Christens, 2012), with supportive family networks being crucial. Psychologically empowered female entrepreneurs feel responsible for empowering others, furthering relational empowerment. Thus, entrepreneurship drives social change and enhances gender equality. By empowering women at intrapersonal, behavioural, and relational levels (Christens, 2012; Zimmerman, 1995), entrepreneurship challenges societal norms and creating a more equitable society, which essential for experiencing psychological empowerment.

4.3.4 Authentic entrepreneurs
Authentic entrepreneurship emerges as a defining typology among female entrepreneurs, reflecting their commitment to maintaining authenticity amidst challenging socio-economic conditions. These women embody all dimensions of psychological empowerment—interactional, intrapersonal, behavioural, and relational—indicating a holistic approach. Their commitment to authenticity sets them apart in a competitive market, prioritising genuine

expression and core values. For instance, Rose's remark, "*I believe that being true to myself and my vision is what sets me apart in a crowded marketplace*", suggests the significance of authenticity in navigating entrepreneurial journeys. This commitment to authenticity also implies relational empowerment (Christen, 2012), as it shows a dedication to empowering others and developing a supportive ecosystem. Such relational dynamics strengthen social bonds and networks, leading to collective empowerment and positive social change.

Embracing vulnerability as a source of strength and authenticity, rather than weakness, is a key characteristic of female entrepreneurs in this typology. Through sharing their challenges and uncertainties, these women enhance trust and connection with stakeholders, thus, deepening relationships and fostering interactional empowerment. Tinotenda's sentiment, "*I am not afraid to admit when I don't have all the answers or when I'm struggling in my business*," suggests the importance of vulnerability in building enterprises in challenging spatial contexts.

Navigating the complexities of running an enterprise in challenging environments like Zimbabwe has instilled in these entrepreneurs a mindset of embracing uncertainty with courage and determination. Despite economic stability (Woyo & Slabbert, 2023), they demonstrate resilience and adaptability, continuously seeking innovative solutions for success, thereby contributing to their psychological empowerment. Gogo's reflection, "*running a business in Zimbabwe taught me to embrace uncertainty*", illustrates behavioural empowerment, as it showcases proactive behaviour in confronting challenges and seizing opportunities for growth and innovation. For example, Grace transitioned her guesthouse into an eco-friendly lodge to attract international tourists, differentiating her business and catering to market demand while Angela utilised social media and online platforms to expand her customer base and increase revenues. Other innovative aspects that were discussed by another interviewee, Tsitsi, who diversified her tour company's services to include cultural and adventure tourism, enhancing customer satisfaction and resilience:

"*The eco-friendly approach helped us to stand out and attract a niche clientele who appreciate our commitment to sustainability*" [Grace]

"*I have been using social media and online platforms to reach a wider audience and attract international tourists to my eco-friendly lodge*" [Angela]

"*By offering a range of activities, we have been able to attract different types of tourists, making our business more resilient to market fluctuations*" [Tsitsi].

Authentic female entrepreneurs believe in uplifting others, suggesting the critical importance of empowering individuals throughout their entrepreneurial journey. Charity's statement, "*I believe in the power of lifting others as we climb*," demonstrates this ethos of mutual support and empowerment. This perspective reflects intrapersonal empowerment, indicating self-awareness and confidence in navigating challenges with resilience and determination. Central to this typology are authenticity, vulnerability, resilience, and a commitment to empowering others. These characteristics distinguish these entrepreneurs in the marketplace and drive meaningful impact within their communities.

5. Conclusion and implications and further research

5.1 Conclusion

The study investigates typologies of psychologically empowered female entrepreneurs in challenging socio-economic contexts, offering insights into their motivations, challenges, and opportunities. By responding to the call for research in the global South and advocating for a reframed conceptualisation of entrepreneurship (Cole, 2018; Corrêa *et al.*, 2023; Figueroa-Domecq *et al.,* 2020), we highlight necessity-driven entrepreneurship as the primary motivation (Movono and Dahles, 2017), contrary to some findings that emphasise intrinsic motivation (Ngoasong and Kimbu, 2019). Employing psychological empowerment theory (Christens, 2012; Zimmerman, 1995), we shift the focus from economic to psychological empowerment among female entrepreneurs. This with calls for research to examine the dimensions, conditions, or processes of empowerment (Efthymiadou and Farmaki, 2023). Psychological empowerment is an overlooked aspects of women empowerment in entrepreneurship, and our work contributes to existing literature by revealing how women in this study over-came place based barriers through innovation, resilience, and collaboration. This shows that female entrepreneurs can significantly contribute to regional socio-economic development by creating jobs and fostering community development despite socio-economic challenges. The need for supportive networks, targeted policies, and resource access are therefore critical to further empower these entrepreneurs.

Our findings, summarised in Fig. 1, reveal the contextual constraints and opportunities influencing these entrepreneurs, their motivations, and the four identified typologies: resilient, collaborative, social changers, and authentic entrepreneurs. Each typology embodies specific traits and behaviours that contribute to their psychological empowerment in challenging socio-economic spatial contexts. The typologies presented in the study are not mutually exclusive; some entrepreneurs may fit into multiple categories. This reflects the complex and multifaceted nature of entrepreneurial experiences, particularly among women in challenging socio-economic contexts. The overlap among categories shows that the characteristics and behaviours of successful entrepreneurs are interrelated and can span multiple dimensions of psychological empowerment. For example, an entrepreneur may simultaneously exhibit resilience and innovation while also being actively involved in collaborative efforts and driving social change. This interconnection underlines the holistic approach many female entrepreneurs take, leveraging personal strengths and external support systems to achieve success. Thus, while the typologies help to categorise specific aspects of entrepreneurial behaviour and empowerment, they should be understood as part of a broader, interconnected framework rather than isolated, mutually exclusive categories.

INSERT FIG 1 HERE

5.2 Theoretical implications
Findings showed women in Zimbabwe become entrepreneurs in tourism out of necessity, directly responding to the intricate socio-economic challenges. Despite the varied methods through which these enterprises were established, findings demonstrate entrepreneurship significantly contributes to women's psychological empowerment across the identified typologies (Fig. 1). This study shows the multidimensional nature of psychological empowerment among these entrepreneurs, emphasising the importance of intrapersonal belief systems, interactional networks, behavioural strategies, and relational dynamics. These insights advance theoretical discussions on the complex interplay between individual agency, socio-economic factors, place, tourism, and entrepreneurial empowerment processes. Using psychological empowerment theory, the study shows its applicability in entrepreneurship within challenging socio-economic spatial contexts, thus extending the literature on women's empowerment and place by showing how individual empowerment can drive local

development and resilience and is helpful in fostering sustainable economic growth and community well-being in disadvantaged places. Additionally, we offer valuable contributions to understanding how women experience empowerment places where socio-economic challenges are the source of hopelessness.

Empowerment has traditionally been examined through psychological, political, social, and economic lenses (Boley *et al.,* 2014; Boley *et al.,* 2015; Boley and McGehee, 2014). We extend these studies by focusing on psychological empowerment in challenging socio-economic contexts, addressing Efthymiadou and Farmaki's (2023) call for deeper exploration. We demonstrate how economic instability, gender biases, and societal norms shape the psychological empowerment of female entrepreneurs, providing new insights beyond the income generation focus on existing literature (Martinez Caparros, 2018). This approach enriches theoretical discussions on place management and tourism by demonstrating the impact of contextual constraints and opportunities on entrepreneurial empowerment of women.

While not the first to investigate women's empowerment, this study uniquely conceptualises psychological empowerment among women tourism entrepreneurs in challenging socio-economic contexts using the four psychological dimensions (Christens, 2012; Zimmerman, 1995). Our typological analysis reveals diverse pathways to empowerment through resilience, collaboration, social change, and authenticity, demonstrating the complex interplay between individual agency (Christens, 2012) and contextual factors. This research enriches understanding of how women navigate entrepreneuring in Zimbabwe, transcending conventional perspectives rooted in globalisation and capitalism (Cole, 2018; Figueroa-Domecq *et al.,* 2020) and extending the geographical scope of entrepreneurship and gender studies (Figueroa-Domecq *et al.,* 2020; Imas and Garcia-Lorenzo, 2023). Through providing insights from a global South perspective, we show how entrepreneurship empowers women in socio-economically challenging environments, contributing valuable knowledge to place management and tourism

Prior research suggested that women's involvement in entrepreneurship conflicts with traditional gender roles, weakening family relationships and impacting well-being (Duffy et al., 2015). Contrary to this, our study finds that female entrepreneurs in tourism positively impact family relationships, strengthening familial bonds. This study enriches theoretical frameworks of psychological empowerment by examining the nuanced experiences of female entrepreneurs in challenging socio-economic environments, demonstrating how entrepreneurship can harmonise with traditional roles and contribute to family cohesion.

5.3 Practical implications
The tourism sector in Zimbabwe offers significant opportunities due to its natural and cultural attractions (Tapfuma *et al.*, 2024), community-based tourism and government support (Gohori and van der Merwe, 2022). Female tourism entrepreneurs are crucial for this sector, creating jobs (Mashapure *et al.*, 2022), supporting community development, and enhancing regional stability (Gohori and van der Merwe, 2022). Their success demonstrates the importance of supportive networks, adaptability, and innovation. The findings of this study provide valuable insights for place and tourism policymakers, support organisations, and female entrepreneurs in enhancing entrepreneurial empowerment in socio-economic contexts like Zimbabwe. By understanding the different typologies of psychologically empowered entrepreneurs, tailored support programmes can be designed for resilient entrepreneurs, and networking events and collaborative platforms can be created for collaborative entrepreneurs.

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Initiatives to enhance entrepreneurial skills such as leadership, negotiation, and networking can empower women to navigate socio-economic challenges more effectively. Training programmes should target specific skills aligned with identified typologies, ensuring accessibility and relevance. Thus, tourism and place policymakers can foster a supportive environment that promotes the success and empowerment of female entrepreneurs in the tourism sector, contributing to sustainable economic growth and community well-being. Providing targeted support to female tourism entrepreneurs can maximise their potential for economic and social benefits, ultimately driving social cohesion and economic growth.

Policymakers can use insights from this study to design policies that create an enabling environment for female entrepreneurship. This includes initiatives to reduce gender biases, improve access to finance and infrastructure, and promote inclusive business practices. Raising awareness about the challenges and opportunities female entrepreneurs face is critical for advocating policy changes and shifting societal attitudes. Advocacy campaigns aimed at challenging gender norms and promoting women's economic empowerment can further support this goal. Additionally, building supportive networks and fostering community engagement are critical for empowering female entrepreneurs by promoting collaboration, knowledge-based sharing, and mutual support. Through addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by female entrepreneurs, stakeholders can create a more inclusive and supportive ecosystem for entrepreneurship development.

5.4 Limitations and future research

Despite its contribution, this study has limitations that suggests further research directions for place management and tourism. First, qualitative data collected to understand women's experiences of psychological empowerment are specific to Zimbabwe, limiting the generalisability of the findings to other socio-cultural, economic, or political contexts. Future research could investigate the transferability of these findings across diverse settings and explore how place contextual factors influence the dynamics of psychological empowerment among female entrepreneurs. We encourage future place and tourism studies to consider longitudinal effects of psychological empowerment interventions and initiatives on sustained empowerment and business success. This approach could identify trends, growth factors, and potential setbacks in psychological empowerment over time. Additionally, the study's focus on women in a single African country with ongoing socio-economic challenges may overlook the experiences of marginalised groups, such as those from minority ethnicities or disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Psychological empowerment theory could benefit from other contexts (Figueroa-Domecq *et al.*, 2020). Future research should incorporate an intersectional approach to examine how multiple dimensions of identity intersect to shape psychological empowerment among female entrepreneurs. This approach can address the unique challenges faced by marginalised groups and provide more nuanced understanding of psychological empowerment experiences. By expanding the scope of research to include various spatial contexts and adopting intersectional methodologies, scholars can offer deeper insights into the complexities of psychological empowerment and its implications for place management and tourism.

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