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"Dig Your Heels in the Ground and Get What You Deserve." - An Exploratory Corpus-Assisted Study of Women Entrepreneurs' Blogs.

Abstract

Throughout history, entrepreneurial contributions of women have been largely disregarded and undervalued in the business sector. However, recent decades have witnessed increased visibility of women entrepreneurs striving to challenge gender-based inequities and systemic biases in the workplace. Those who have achieved success are increasingly willing to share their experiences and insights, providing guidance to aspiring women seeking to establish, develop, or advance their enterprises and careers. One notable channel to convey their messages is through women entrepreneurs' blogs. This paper explores how female entrepreneurs perceive themselves as businesswomen and examines how they construct the position of women in the current business realm. Using a Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis approach, a detailed examination of concordances related to selected keywords and key expressions associated with the perception of women entrepreneurs, along with business and societal challenges, unveils typical collocations and contextual usage. The analysis is based on the Women Entrepreneurs' Blog Corpus, a dataset comprising 329,896 words from 318 unique blog entries in English published between 2019 and 2023. The findings reveal that blogs serve as empowering platforms where women challenge traditional narratives, reshape perceptions of entrepreneurship, and redefine their roles in the business world. The usage of frequently occurring keywords such as *female*, *women*, and *mompreneur(s)*, emphasises themes of resilience, motivation, and identity alongside issues like inferiority, lack of confidence, and systemic disadvantages, particularly for *women of color*. Moreover, keywords like *imposter syndrome*, *self-doubt*, *glass ceiling*, and *male-dominated* often appear in contexts that underscore overcoming obstacles and the benefits of female entrepreneurship.

Keywords

blogs; businesswomen; business communication; corpus linguistics; female entrepreneurs; keywords; women entrepreneurs; women entrepreneurs' blogs

1. Introduction

It is imperative to acknowledge the historical marginalisation and undervaluation of women entrepreneurs within the business sphere, traditionally dominated by men (Carter et al., 2006; Meyer, 2018). This discrimination is evident in the portrayal of entrepreneurship through strictly masculine terms (Bird & Brush, 2002; De Bruin et al., 2006), defining an entrepreneur as an "active businessman" (Scranton, 2010) a "captain of industry" (Scranton, 2010), "hero who perceives the gaps and connects markets" (Bird & Bush, 2002), and a "key man" (Herbet & Link, 1982). Such terms contribute to a gendered discourse surrounding entrepreneurship, emphasising masculine qualities that exclude women from the entrepreneurial narrative. A turning point came with the first study on women's entrepreneurship in business, published in 1976 by Eleanor Schwartz in her work titled *Entrepreneurship: A New Female Frontier* (Green et al., 2003; McAdam, 2013; Meyer, 2018), which sparked scholarly interest in this new research direction. Nevertheless, the discourse surrounding entrepreneurship remains predominantly male-oriented, highlighting the need to explore alternative representations, particularly those constructed by women entrepreneurs themselves (Yadav & Unni, 2016).

In portraying and characterising women entrepreneurs, it is essential to consider diverse perspectives elucidated in the literature. Adhikari (2008) argues that "women entrepreneurs" can be

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defined as a woman or a collective of women who establish, manage, and operate a business enterprise. Additionally, the OECD 2004 notes that "[w]omen entrepreneurs create new jobs for themselves and others and can provide society with different perspectives and approaches to management organisation and business issues". Interestingly, the Indian government stipulates that a woman must meet certain conditions to be considered a female entrepreneur. For example, she must own at least 51% of a business and ensure that at least 51% of employed individuals are female (Ambrish, 2014). These definitions not only reflect the criteria for identifying women entrepreneurs but also underscore their broader contributions, including economic growth, innovation, and gross national product (GNP) (Allen et al., 2007). This aligns with the insight shared by LegaMart (2023), who, in their news bulletin *Legal Help Abroad,* published an article on LinkedIn, designating women as "the largest untapped reservoir of talent in the world." Despite these advances, defining women entrepreneurs remains complex. *The Financial Express* underscores this challenge, emphasising that "it is difficult to clearly define women entrepreneurs in view of diverse criteria and within a country, there is an imperative to find a single, universal definition in order to collect and compare data of women entrepreneurs".

In recent decades, a discernible surge in the presence of female entrepreneurs within the realm of business across the world has been observed (Georgeta, 2012; Nedelcheva, 2012). For instance, in the United States, the count of female entrepreneurs skyrocketed to 12.3 million by 2023, marking a substantial increase from 402,000 in 1972 (Beckman, 2023). Additionally, women are estimated to comprise 43% of entrepreneurs worldwide. Motivated by a desire to challenge the prevailing narrative of male dominance in executive positions, female business leaders are actively striving to effect change and draw attention to various instances of gender-based injustice in professional environments. In this context, successful female entrepreneurs serve as inspirational figures, employing a diverse range of communication strategies, including the cultivation of blogs, to motivate and share their expertise.

Although the terms "blog" and "weblog" were officially recognised in 2003 by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, their potential has continued to evolve over the years. Since then, various definitions have emerged, with the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* describing a blog as "a website that contains online personal reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks, videos, and photographs provided by the writer" and as "a regular feature appearing as part of an online publication that typically relates to a particular topic and consists of articles and personal commentary by one or more authors".

While blogs typically feature personal reflections or topical commentary, they differ from other digital platforms such as discussion forums, microblogs, and social media. Discussion forums are structured around user-generated threads and conversations rather than individual authorship. Similarly, microblogging platforms like Twitter offer shorter, more immediate updates but lack the extended narrative structure of traditional blogs (Scheidies, 2013; Dryl, 2016). Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram blend personal sharing with multimedia content but are primarily designed for social networking rather than sustained, authored content (Frassinelli, 2015; Dryl, 2016).

The blogs considered in this study are distinct from these platforms due to their emphasis on longer, narrative-driven posts authored by individuals, often with a clear thematic focus. This distinction is important because blogs, in their traditional form, provide a richer, more comprehensive medium for exploring topics, allowing for deeper engagement with the subject matter—especially in the context of female entrepreneurship which is central to this study. Additionally, blogs have established a permanent presence in the digital landscape, serving both personal and professional purposes.

On the personal side, blogs allow individuals to, for example, express their thoughts, document daily activities, share hobbies and interests, and recount travel experiences. Furthermore, their affordability, accessibility, and enduring popularity have led to their adoption by businesses as

effective tools for promotion and engagement (Wood et al., 2006; Ahuja & Medury, 2010; Sinha et al., 2011; Fronczak, 2021).

The range of blogs is vast, encompassing personal blogs that focus on the author's emotions, experiences, or reflections, as well as more specialised types such as health blogs, food blogs, travel blogs, cooking blogs, fashion blogs, and political blogs (Fronczak, 2021, p. 67). Moreover, the diversity of blogs, their wide-ranging topics, and their communicative potential have been highlighted in numerous studies. For instance, Kopytowska (2013) examines political blogs, Rains & Keating (2011) analyse health blogs, Duffy & Hund (2015) explore fashion blogs and Anesa (2019) investigates travel blogs.

Both the personal and professional dimensions of blogs have been effectively leveraged by businesswomen, who have successfully adopted them as a channel for engaging with a broader audience. Blogs offer female entrepreneurs a distinctive and independent platform to share their experiences, articulate challenges, and celebrate successes. Unlike traditional media, which often reinforces gendered stereotypes, blogs enable women to take control of their narratives, fostering authentic self-representation and community building. This aligns with the findings of Hammad & El Naggar (2023, pp. 10-11) who highlight the significant role of digital platforms in empowering female entrepreneurs by providing alternative avenues to expand their reach and influence. Moreover, by challenging the traditionally male-dominated discourse of entrepreneurship, blogs offer a space for women to reshape perceptions and redefine their roles in the business world. In parallel, these digital platforms offer fertile ground for scholarly exploration, warranting thorough examination and analysis.

While the role of women entrepreneurs and the phenomenon of blogging have received significant academic attention, there remains a noticeable lack of studies in the literature dedicated to a systematic and detailed analysis of the linguistic discourse found on women entrepreneurs' blogs (Bhowmick & Shahi, 2024). Addressing this research gap is essential for broadening our understanding of entrepreneurship. By analysing the linguistic patterns and word associations in women entrepreneurs' blogs, this study provides deeper insights into how language constructs and challenges traditional gender norms in the context of entrepreneurship. This approach sheds light on how women entrepreneurs use language to position themselves within a predominantly male-dominated field and create alternative narratives. These findings contribute to a broader discussion on gender, language, and entrepreneurship, particularly regarding how language can reshape perceptions of women in professional and business environments.

In this context, the overarching aim of this research initiative is to investigate the self-perception of female entrepreneurs in the business domain and their role in shaping the representation of women in the contemporary business landscape. The study also examines how female authors of entrepreneurial blogs articulate and navigate obstacles encountered in their professional journeys. Employing a Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis methodology (Partington et al., 2013), the research conducts a comprehensive examination of concordances[1] pertaining to specific keywords and expressions relevant to the portrayal of women entrepreneurs, as well as the challenges posed by the business and societal context. Through this analysis, typical collocations and contextual usage patterns are revealed, providing insights into the linguistic construction of female entrepreneurship and its associated challenges.

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[1] Also called concordance lines, refer to a format commonly employed in corpus linguistics to display instances of a keyword or key phrase along with its surrounding context within a text corpus. This format enables researchers to analyse the usage patterns of a given word or expression across different sentences and linguistic environments (Sinclair 1991; Biber et al. 1998; Stubbs 2001; Baker 2006; McEnery & Hardie 2012).

2. Research material and methodology

The data for this paper come from the *Women Entrepreneurs' Blog Corpus* (*WEBC*) compiled by the author, which encompasses a curated collection of 318 blog entries authored by distinguished female entrepreneurs. This compilation follows a thorough examination of prominent blogs[2] within the entrepreneurial domain, with a specific focus on three notable sources: *Leaders in Heels*, *Women on Business*, and *Women Entrepreneurs*. These selected blogs are recognised for their contemporaneous and relevant content, specifically tailored for women who aspire to embark on entrepreneurial ventures or seek inspiration, guidance, and insights to advance in the business landscape. Notably, these platforms feature contributions from a diverse array of female writers.

The corpus was compiled through a meticulous selection process, using manual procedures to ensure the inclusion of relevant data. Specifically, approximately 100 posts were chosen from each of the three blogs, focusing on entries published between 2019 and 2024, which were selected at random. Importantly, only posts authored by women were included, despite the occasional presence of male-authored posts on the analysed blogs; such entries were therefore excluded. This exclusion criterion guarantees that the corpus reflects the study's focus on amplifying women's voices in the entrepreneurial field. Furthermore, to ensure diversity and prevent overrepresentation of individual authors, no more than three posts from a single female author were included. As a result, the final corpus consists of 318 blog entries, distributed as follows: 110 posts from *Leaders in Heels*, 104 from *Women on Business*, and 104 from *Women Entrepreneurs*. This distribution allows for a comparable word count across the three sources, as presented in Table 1:

Women Entrepreneurs' Blogs	# of Blog Posts	# of Words
Leaders in Heels	110	109,092
Women on Business	104	104.296
Women Entrepreneurs	104	115,508
TOTAL CORPUS	318	329,896

Table 1. Composition of the Women Entrepreneurs' Blog Corpus

The Women Entrepreneurs' Blog Corpus (WEBC) serves not only as a valuable resource for examining the textual features and thematic content of women's entrepreneurial discourse, but also provides a robust foundation for a wide range of linguistic and sociolinguistic analyses.

It is important to note that the WEBC, created by the author as part of an ongoing research project, currently contains approximately 330,000 words, with plans to expand to around one million words over time. As it is still under development, the WEBC is not yet accessible online. The corpus will continue to grow as new blog entries are identified and incorporated. Therefore, the analysis presented here should be considered as a preliminary investigation, laying the foundation for future, more extensive studies.

Although the corpus may not appear large in comparison to some well-known, extensive corpora, such as the British National Corpus (BNC) with 100 million words or the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) with over 560 million words, the number of texts (women entrepreneurs' blog posts) included and the diversity of authors contribute to its representativeness. Furthermore, Partington (1996, p. 4) argues that there is no "standard size" for corpora and that "much important work has used far smaller corpora". In addition, Biber (1993, cited in Goźdź-Roszkowski, 2011, p.

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[2] See https://feedly.com/i/top/women-in-business-blogs; https://blog.feedspot.com/women_entrepreneur_blogs Retrieved June 4, 2023.

28) underscores that the number of texts is crucial in studies where the text itself is the "basic unit of analysis".

The research employed a methodological framework rooted in Corpus Linguistics (Sinclair, 1991; Partington, 2004; Baker, 2006; McEnery & Hardie, 2012; Partington et al., 2013), with a particular emphasis on Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis (CADS) (Partington et al., 2013). CADS, a term introduced by Partington in 2004, was created to address the need for a concept that not only describes the study of discourse types using quantitative methods but also highlights the "eclectic nature of the approach" (Partington et al., 2013, p. 10). While CADS incorporates corpus techniques as part of its methodology, it goes beyond this by blending these corpus-based methods with traditional qualitative discourse analysis. In the current study, CADS is applied to conduct an in-depth examination of concordances related to specific keywords and expressions connected to the portrayal of women entrepreneurs, as well as the challenges posed by the business and societal context. This analysis uncovers typical collocations and patterns of contextual usage, offering valuable insights into the linguistic construction of female entrepreneurship and its associated challenges.

For the analytical procedures, the study employed advanced corpus analysis software, "Sketch Engine"[3] (Kilgarriff et al., 2004). This tool enabled comprehensive statistical analyses, including generating lists of keywords, identifying key collocations, and key expressions distinctive to the discourse of women in business, as well as checking concordance lines. The first step was to generate the lists of keywords and key collocations from the WEBC. This computational program enables one to generate such lists by comparing the frequency list from the WEBC with the larger reference corpus selected from the list of available ones—in the present study, this was the English Web Corpus (enTenTen).[4] As a result, the lists of overused keywords and key collocations, which are unusually frequent in the target corpus (the WEBC) in comparison with the reference corpus (the enTenTen), was obtained. After a manual analysis, the list of 20 keywords and key collocations was created (see Table 2). It is important to note that proper names and other terms irrelevant to the current study were excluded. The focus was on those referring to women entrepreneurs (and their portrayal) as well as the challenges they face in the business world.

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[3] See https://www.sketchengine.eu/

[4] This corpus was selected as the reference corpus for the current analysis because it is a large-scale, 52 billion-word English-language corpus that includes a wide range of online communication types, such as blogs, news, and social media. Its diverse content makes it particularly suited for examining contemporary language use and comparing linguistic patterns in entrepreneurial discourse.

Item	Frequency (focus)	Frequency (reference)	Relative frequency (focus)	Relative frequency (reference)	Score[5]
female entrepreneur	62	2186	168,36754	0,32688	127,64
mompreneur	46	173	124,91785	0,02587	122,743
women entrepreneur	65	3212	176,51436	0,4803	119,92
women-owned business	43	1308	116,77103	0,19559	98,505
imposter syndrome	61	4675	165,65193	0,69907	98,084
women-own	47	2657	127,63346	0,39731	92,058
female founder	35	1754	95,0462	0,26228	76,089
self-doubt	54	7386	146,6427	1,10445	70,157
woman in business	24	1269	65,17453	0,18976	55,62
female leaders	23	2416	62,45893	0,36127	46,617
women leader	23	2431	62,45893	0,36352	46,541
woman in leadership	20	1342	54,31211	0,20067	46,068
woman entrepreneur	16	203	43,44969	0,03036	43,14
women business owner	16	295	43,44969	0,04411	42,572
male-dominated	29	7388	78,75256	1,10475	37,892
woman in the workplace	14	992	38,01848	0,14834	33,978
glass ceiling	19	3760	51,5965	0,56225	33,667
women of color	24	7881	65,17453	1,17847	30,377
successful woman	12	1526	32,58727	0,22819	27,347
businesswoman	17	10751	46,16529	1,60763	18,087

Table 2. Keywords and key collocations generated from the WEBC

3. Results and Discussion

The compilation of keywords indicates that women entrepreneurs, in their blog posts, employ diverse references to women in the business domain. Notably, the highest-ranking terms on the list include *women* (1556)/*woman* (227) and *female* (218), utilise in various collocations that denote specific roles or positions within the business sector. Additionally, pivotal term such as *momprenuer(s)* emerges as a significant keyword, shedding light on the perceptions and role attributed to women engaged in business activities.

Starting with the keyword *female*, it is noticeable that its predominant collocations: *female entrepreneur(s)* (27/35), *female founder(s)* (10/25), and *female leader(s)* (2/21), emphasise the portrayal of diverse categories of businesswomen. Specifically, the analysis of the concordances reveals that the authors of entrepreneurial blogs depict women as somewhat inferior in 24% of cases (see Example 1), portraying them as reticent, and lacking confidence regarding business matters (see Example 2).

(1) What It Takes To Be A Female Entrepreneur In A Male-Dominated Industry? Believe in yourself, and don't let anyone tell you that you can't do something because of your gender.

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[5] Also called the keyness score. In the present study, the focus is on the keywords which are overused in the WEBC and whose score value is equal or higher than 15.13 (p < 0.0001; 99.99% confidence level) (Rayson et al. 2004).

(2) Unfortunately, in a number of cultures around the world, many *female founders* are not so confident presenting and answering tough questions.

This suggests a deeper, cultural reflection on how women are conditioned to downplay their abilities in male-dominated professional environments, often internalising societal stereotypes about leadership and assertiveness. This portrayal implies an acknowledgment of the obstacles faced by women in the business sphere, accompanied by a deliberate endeavour to inspire, convince, and offer guidance on the requisite behaviours for achieving success. Interestingly, this dual portrayal—of recognising limitations while encouraging empowerment—may reflect the tension women experience in balancing societal expectations with self-promotion and professional advancement (Sarfaraz et al., 2014). It is noteworthy that the discourse extends beyond the exposition of weaknesses, delving into the enumeration of advantages associated with female entrepreneurship (see Examples 3 and 4).

(3) As a *female entrepreneur*, you can shape your destiny by strategically developing your personal brand.

(4) Also, since the teams often consider *female leaders* more approachable, members of the workforce are also able to freely communicate the challenges they face, and the support they require from the leadership to overcome them.

This shift in focus underscores a recognition of the unique strengths women bring to the entrepreneurial space, including empathy, collaboration, and resilience, often overlooked in traditional business narratives (Kamberidou, 2013). This nuanced approach suggests a comprehensive consideration of both the challenges and merits inherent in the entrepreneurial endeavours of women. It also signals a growing desire to redefine the narrative around female entrepreneurship, moving away from merely overcoming adversity to highlighting the distinct value women contribute to the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The keywords *women* and *woman* with their predominant occurrences are found in the collocations: *women entrepreneur* (65)/*woman entrepreneur(s)* (16/12), *women-own* (47), *women leader* (23), *successful woman/women* (6/9), *woman founder(s)* (5/8), *businesswoman* (13)/*businesswomen* (4). Additionally, multi-words expressions such as *women-owned business* (43), *woman in business* (24), *women of color* (24), *woman in leadership* (20), *women business owner* (16), *woman in the workplace* (14) contribute to the frequent usage of these keywords.

Upon analysing the concordance lines, it becomes apparent that the contexts in which the above-mentioned collocations and expressions occur share similarities with those described in the case of the keyword *female* and its collocates. Due to space constraints in this paper, the focus will be directed towards one specific collocation, namely, *women of color*[6], which holds particular significance. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, "woman of color" is defined as both "a woman whose skin pigmentation is other than and especially darker than what is considered characteristic of people typically defined as white" and also as "a woman who is of a race other than white or who is of mixed race".[7] The authors of women entrepreneurs' blogs frequently emphasise the inferior position of women of color (see Examples 5-9), highlighting their disadvantaged status.

(5) According to the US Census Bureau, *women of color* are in an even more disadvantageous situation.

(6) For *women of color*, lower economic status or disabilities, the situation is even more dire.

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[6] This paper is written in British English; however, the collocation *women of color* is retained in its American English form, as it originally appeared in this way in the analysed corpus.

[7] Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Woman of color. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved November 24, 2023, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/woman%20of%20color

(7) Although there has been some progress over the past eight years, the representation of women, particularly *women of color*, is still lacking.

(8) However, the situation is even more alarming for *women of color*, as only 1 in 20 hold a senior leadership position.

(9) Older women and *women of color* suffered even more.

Moreover, the analysed Examples highlight a key issue of intersectionality[8]: the compounded disadvantages that women of color face compared to their white counterparts. According to Crenshaw (1989, p. 149), intersectionality is a framework for understanding how multiple forms of social stratification, such as race, class, and gender, overlap and create unique experiences of discrimination. In the context of entrepreneurship, women of color are often at a disadvantage not only because of their gender but also due to their race. In this context, phrases like *even more disadvantageous situation* (from Example 5), *the situation is even more dire* (from Example 6), *the situation is even more alarming* (from Example 8), and *suffered even more* (from Example 9) underscore the multilayered nature of the struggles faced by these women.

Additionally, the unfair treatment of women of color is noticeable, particularly concerning their access to leadership positions. Example 8 starkly emphasises the marginalisation of women of color in senior leadership. Such disparity in leadership roles between women of color and their white counterparts is well-documented. As, for example, Catalyst (2020) identifies that women of color are underrepresented in leadership positions and have fewer resources to succeed in entrepreneurship. Moreover, the *1 in 20* statistic emphasises the gravity of this issue and suggests that even when women of color enter entrepreneurship, the systemic exclusion from top-tier leadership roles persists, which affects their ability to make decisions, access funding, and grow their businesses. This corresponds with findings from McKinsey's *Women in the Workplace 2019* report which underscores that black women face significant barriers in securing leadership positions due to the compounded effects of racism, sexism, and classism, ultimately hindering their professional growth and success in both corporate and entrepreneurial environments (Hunt et al., 2020, p.19). Furthermore, as the analysis reveals, an additional layer of discrimination for women of color constitutes ageism (see Example 9). Older women in business often face stigma about their competence and relevance in the workforce, and for women of color, this stigma is compounded by racial biases.

While analysing Example 7, it is noticeable that, on the one hand, female authors of entrepreneurs' blogs recognise that the situation of women of color has been improving recently, however, they also emphasise the slow pace of progress despite efforts to increase diversity in leadership. In fact, progress in gender equality and representation is often surface level, with structural inequalities remaining unchanged beneath the surface. While there have been incremental increases in diversity, these changes have not translated into meaningful shifts in representation at the top levels of leadership (Hunt et al., 2020, pp. 3-4). This lack of representation for women of color reflects the continued barriers to their advancement and the need for more sustained efforts to dismantle these obstacles.

While the term "women of color" underscores the intersectional challenges faced by women who experience both racial and gender-based discrimination, a related but distinct category of women entrepreneurs is that of *mompreneurs*—a keyword that warrants further attention. Like women of color, mompreneurs face the dual pressures of balancing business and family responsibilities. However, they also navigate the additional societal expectations surrounding motherhood that can further complicate their entrepreneurial journey. The term "mompreneur", as described by Weidhass (2020), is crafted with the intention of encapsulating the amalgamation of maternal responsibilities and engagement in entrepreneurship or business ownership. Furthermore, she highlights that the term

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[8] A term coined by Crenshaw in 1989.

underscores the significance of motherhood by preceding it with "mom" in relation to the business role. While the term emphasises the primacy of motherhood by placing "mom" before the business role, it also reinforces traditional gendered expectations that women must prioritise caregiving, even when pursuing economic ventures. However, Duberley & Carrigan (2012) caution that this framing can mask the challenges women face in balancing both spheres.

Analysing the concordance, it is evident that the context in which *mompreneur(s)* is used suggests that combining the roles of a mother and a businesswoman is advantageous, despite potential obstacles (see Examples 10-12 and 15). For instance, Example 10 suggests that entrepreneurship offers a way to combat the *mom penalty*, framing individual action as a solution to systemic inequities in the labour market. However, this rhetoric shifts the responsibility for addressing wage disparities onto women, rather than advocating for structural changes. Similarly, Example 11 positions entrepreneurship as a way to alleviate "mom guilt", implying that women can overcome feelings of inadequacy by successfully balancing both roles. This narrative reinforces the idea that women must excel in both spheres to achieve fulfilment.

Nevertheless, the phenomenon of "mompreneurship" is portrayed as being in a favourable position and is projected to become increasingly popular (see Example 13). It appears that women entrepreneurs aim to motivate and encourage mothers to embark on a business adventure, emphasising the potential benefits in their blog posts. Ekinsmyth (2013) and Sarfaraz et al. (2014) similarly argue that entrepreneurship is often seen as a way for mothers to manage both roles, offering flexibility that traditional employment may not provide. However, this emphasis on flexibility can obscure the significant challenges and emotional labour involved in balancing motherhood and entrepreneurship.

In order to persuade women, whose primary role is motherhood to become businesswomen, they strive to address and understand their unique position and concerns as mothers (see Example 14). In this context, Joshua Peterson-Reid (2018) discusses the psychology behind blogging, emphasising how personal expression, authenticity, and relatability contribute to audience engagement. Moreover, he highlights how bloggers can foster trust and build communities through shared experiences, emotional resonance, and storytelling. This aligns with the current analysis, which points out that women entrepreneurs also recognise the significant role of authentic storytelling and successfully use this method in their blogs to strengthen credibility and engagement with the audience.

On the other hand, it is important to critically examine whether this framing truly empowers women or perpetuates unrealistic expectations. The phrase *[t]he future is female* (Example 13) aligns mompreneurship with feminist ideals, yet it risks a co-opting feminist language without addressing deeper systemic barriers. Furthermore, not all mothers have equal access to entrepreneurship, as the concept often assumes certain privileges, such as financial resources and social support.

(10) As a mompreneur, you have the potential to achieve an income well beyond the "mom penalty" many women face.

(11) So, becoming a *mompreneur* will help you to assuage your 'mom guilt' and will also help you identify different streams of earning income.

(12) While being a *mompreneur* certainly has its challenges, the benefits of entrepreneurship are compelling.

(13) The future is female, *mompreneurs* are on the rise, and there's no stopping us now!

(14) As a *mompreneur* myself for almost 30 years, I understand where you are coming from.

(15) For other mothers, *mompreneurs* serve as role models, demonstrating that entrepreneurship is possible and the seemingly impossible can be achieved with passion, determination, and the courage to forge your own way.

A further analysis of the keyword and key collocation lists (see Table 2) reveals that female entrepreneurs are acutely aware of the obstacles women often encounter in their careers. Specifically, they recognise challenges like "imposter syndrome", "self-doubt" and the "glass ceiling". Additionally, the topic of "male-dominated" working environment is crucial in the discourse of female entrepreneurs.

In line with this findings, *Harvard Business Review* describes "imposter syndrome" as a common feeling of self-doubt and fraudulence at work, often experienced by women.[9] Similarly, *Forbes* asserts that "these feelings of self-doubt can often be more pronounced for female entrepreneurs, as they may perceive themselves as being less qualified or as having more to prove than their male counterparts."[10] Therefore, with regard to the aforementioned information, the frequent use of the keyword expression *imposter syndrome* suggests that female entrepreneurs actively explore this phenomenon, recognising it as a challenge that may disproportionately impact women in comparison to men. This assertion is substantiated by instances cited from the WEBC, exemplifying the prevalence and relevance of imposter syndrome in the context of female entrepreneurship:

(16) *Imposter syndrome* was first recognized in a 1978 and remains as prominent as ever in the workplace for women!

(17) We need more women in leadership, but the burden of *imposter syndrome* adds new barriers and threatens their success.

(18) Don't allow your feelings of *imposter syndrome* stop you from seeking improvement and growth.

(19) Ultimately, there is no one way to stop feelings of *imposter syndrome*, but there are ways to train your brain and focus on the positives rather than the negatives.

(20) But with more tools and knowledge to break through the extra glass ceilings of *imposter syndrome*, we have a better chance of achieving that reality.

The examples provided above emphasise the emotional and cognitive impact of imposter syndrome, with references to it as a *burden* (Example 17) that can *threaten success*, yet also convey messages of hope and agency, indicating that overcoming it is possible with the right mindset and tools (Examples 18–20). Additionally, from a linguistic perspective, the use of verbs such as *stop*, *add*, *train*, and *break through* conveys the actionable nature of the advice being offered. The imperative mood in the sentence *Don't allow your feelings of imposter syndrome stop you (...)* directs the reader to take action, suggesting that female entrepreneurs have some level of control over their emotions and can take steps toward overcoming the syndrome. The focus on brain training (Example 19) reflects a cognitive-behavioural approach to overcoming imposter syndrome, suggesting that such feelings are not permanent or inherent but can be managed through self-reflection and positive thinking. Moreover, the repeated mention of *glass ceilings* (Example 20) reinforces the intersection between imposter syndrome and the structural barriers that women often face in entrepreneurship.

It is noticeable that the linguistic patterns in the examples provided not only reinforce the significance of imposter syndrome as a key challenge for female entrepreneurs but also reveal a broader narrative of empowerment and resilience. The strategic use of language underscores the dual role of acknowledging the difficulties women face while offering actionable advice to overcome them. This aligns with findings from different studies (e.g. Kamberidou, 2013; Sanford et al., 2015, p. 34) which suggest addressing imposter syndrome through mentorship, cognitive reframing, and

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[9] See https://hbr.org/2021/02/stop-telling-women-they-have-imposter-syndrome Retrieved November 14, 2023.
[10] See https://www.forbes.com/sites/roncarucci/2024/03/04/leaders-your-self-doubt-is-normal-heres-how-to-engage-it/
Retrieved June 14, 2024.

community support can help mitigate its impact and facilitate women's advancement in entrepreneurship.

In addition to addressing *imposter syndrome*, the authors of women entrepreneurs' blogs highlight *self-doubt* as another obstacle that many women encounter in the business environment. From a linguistic perspective, the way *self-doubt* is framed in the blog posts demonstrates a shift from personal acknowledgment of the issue to offering practical solutions. The context in which the keyword *self-doubt* (54) is discussed suggests that female entrepreneurs not only acknowledge personally grappling with this detrimental feeling (see Example 21-23), but also provide various pieces of advice aimed at overcoming it. For example, the use of direct questions: *How do I stay empowered in the face of challenges or self-doubt?* (Example 21) and *How do you overcome self-doubt and believe in yourself?* (Example 22)—encourages engagement and invites readers to reflect on their own experiences. This strategy aligns with the findings of Goźdź-Roszkowski & Fronczak (2020, p. 79) who note that the frequent occurrence of personal pronouns in direct questions is a key strategy for engaging readers and provoking reflection. By posing such questions, the authors of blogs aim to draw readers into a dialogue, prompting them to think critically about their personal challenges and responses, thus creating an interactive space for reflection and connection.

In addition, practical strategies, such as applying the Japanese "concept of ikigai"[11] or taking particular steps, are offered as ways to combat self-doubt. Furthermore, the authors adopt a rhetorical strategy that fosters two-way communication, motivating and persuading readers by asserting that self-doubt can be surmounted through the strength and power inherent in women (as illustrated in Examples 24 and 25).

(21) How do I stay empowered in the face of challenges or *self-doubt*? Remember your ikigai. Let your passion and purpose motivate you.

(22) How do you overcome *self-doubt* and believe in yourself? Here are five key steps you can take: 1. Increase Your Knowledge and Skills (…)

(23) In addition to the five steps you can take to overcome *self-doubt* discussed above, below are more tips to help you gain confidence, reach your goals, and be a successful business woman.

(24) Don't let *self-doubt* hold you back from living on your own terms. You have everything within you already to be a successful freelancer.

(25) You deserve to achieve your goals, and with a little bit of effort, you can get rid of the *self-doubt* that's holding you back. You have the power to change your thinking and improve your life, so don't wait any longer.

Within the landscape of women entrepreneurship, a salient challenge highlighted in discourse is the barrier known as the "glass ceiling". Business Insider defines the "glass ceiling" as the metaphorical barriers hindering the career advancement of women and people of color in the workplace.[12] Similarly, in the WEBC, the *glass ceiling* is contextualised as an imperative hurdle to overcome for achieving success, as evident in Examples 26-28. Notably, the prevalent use of this term underscores a strong nexus between the "glass ceiling" phenomenon and environments characterised by male dominance, as exemplified in Examples 29 and 30. Therefore, it can be inferred that men are, in some way, responsible for the existence of this invisible barrier. Women entrepreneurs conscientiously draw attention to this issue, recognizing it as a substantive impediment hindering women's success

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[11] Understood as "a term that embodies the idea of happiness in living. Essentially, ikigai is the reason why you get up in the morning. https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20170807-ikigai-a-japanese-concept-to-improve-work-and-life Retrieved November 14, 2023.

[12] See https://www.businessinsider.com/personal-finance/glass-ceiling?IR=T Retrieved November 14, 2023.

in the business realm, as demonstrated in Example 31. Yet, they also emphasise the importance of combating such obstacles and provide advice on how to do so (see Examples 27 and 30).

Moreover, it is noticeable that the use of metaphorical expressions such as *shattering* and *smashing* along with the phrase *glass ceiling* conveys a sense of action and urgency. These dynamic verbs reflect the intense effort required to overcome barriers like the *glass ceiling*, underscoring the persistent struggle women face in male-dominated industries. Additionally, phrases like *push the dial* and *smashes the patriarchy* introduce a sense of a progressive change, suggesting that breaking the glass ceiling involves not only individual efforts but also structural shifts in how society views gender roles. The use of inclusive language, such as *it's important that women include men*, serves as a call for male allyship, implying that both men and women must collaborate to break down gendered barriers.

Furthermore, the social implications of these linguistic choices emphasise the need for systemic change in both organisational structures and societal attitudes toward gender.

(26) As such, for us to push the dial, it's important that women in breaking the *glass ceiling* includes men, seeing as it involves them.

(27) (…) we shall explore some of the key strategies that women can follow to break through the *glass ceiling* and become professionally stronger in male-centric fields.

(28) (…) women still face significant hurdles in accessing venture capital, securing loans and breaking the *glass ceiling* in leadership positions.

(29) To sum up, for women in male-dominated industries, shattering the *glass ceiling* is a major concern.

(30) Top 3 ways remote work shatters the *glass ceiling* and smashes the patriarchy.

(31) You've probably heard of the *glass ceiling* when it comes to women in the workplace, but the „glass cliff" is just as harmful.

Building on the analysis of the glass ceiling as an invisible barrier to women's advancement, the concept of "male-dominated" environments further illuminates the structural challenges women face, as these industries and spaces often perpetuate the limitations and inequalities embodied by the glass ceiling. As the findings reveal, the keyword *male-dominated* appears 29 times in the WEBC, frequently collocating with *industry/industries* (13 occurrences), *world* (3 occurrences), and *environment(s)* (2 occurrences), as well as *culture*, *fields* and *societies* (each occurring ones) which suggests that the experiences of women entrepreneurs are often framed within the context of broader structural gender inequalities. Furthermore, the negative connotations linked with the term *male-dominated*, as identified through the concordance analysis, indicate that the contexts in which this keyword is used are generally unfavourable. Nouns like *damage*, *frustrations*, and *doubt* (e.g. Examples 32 and 33) suggest that women are often confronted with systemic discrimination or biases in male-dominated environments. Moreover, this reflects a negative semantic prosody[13] (Sinclair's 1987 and Louw's 1993), from a linguistic perspective.

(32) For ages, women's ability to lead has remained under constant doubt, as the *male-dominated* world continued to deem them 'too empathetic and soft' while necessitating the presence of a 'strong' man at the helm.

(33) Our *male-dominated* world and male-dominated culture damage both men and women.

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[13] Certain words and phrases, when repeatedly used in negative contexts, come to evoke unfavourable or harmful meanings.

(34) She knows the frustrations of working in a *male-dominated* environment (…)

(35) In A *Male-Dominated* Industry Believe in yourself, and don't let anyone tell you that you can't do something because of your gender.

On the other hand, the tone of Examples 36-38 shifts from describing male-dominated environments as hostile or restrictive to framing them as spaces where women can not only survive but excel. By focusing on resilience, confidence, and collaboration, the authors encourage a mindset that views these challenges as opportunities for personal and professional growth. This rhetorical strategy seeks to inspire women to embrace the evolving dynamics of these industries (see Example 36), rather than shy away from them, fostering a sense of agency and empowerment (see Examples 37 and 38).

(36) Things are steadily improving in these formally *male-dominated* industries as employers begin to see the benefit of a diverse workforce.

(37) Women working in *male-dominated* industries shouldn't be afraid to challenge the norm and work together.

(38) Building confidence and resilience are essential to shine in workplaces, especially *male-dominated* ones.

4. Conclusions, limitations, and future work

To conclude, the analysis of women entrepreneurs' blogs in the WEBC reveals a nuanced discourse that acknowledges challenges, opportunities, celebrates successes, and encourages women to navigate and contribute to the evolving business environment.

One of the key findings is that women employ various techniques to convey both their accomplishments and vulnerabilities, reflecting the challenges they encounter in navigating entrepreneurial spaces that often favour male counterparts. Additionally, women entrepreneurs strive to balance the presentation of a professional identity with the need to manage societal expectations. As the analysis demonstrates, they frequently present themselves as both competent entrepreneurs and relatable individuals, carefully curating their digital personas. Furthermore, the analysed discourse indicates that women entrepreneurs increasingly use their blogs not only to assert their identities but also to challenge traditional gender roles, creating spaces for empowerment and advocacy.

The Women Entrepreneurs' Blog Corpus (WEBC) significantly advances the study of entrepreneurial discourse from a gendered perspective. Specifically, it provides a valuable dataset for exploring how female entrepreneurs express their experiences, challenges, and successes, thereby deepening our understanding of women's roles in business. Furthermore, the use of Corpus Linguistics (CL) offers an empirical, data-driven approach, which enhances objectivity and replicability. In addition, Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis (CADA) enables the systematic identification of language patterns and keywords, thus providing insights beyond those captured in smaller-scale or qualitative studies. Moreover, the methodology facilitates the exploration of various linguistic patterns, including syntactical, lexical, and discursive features, offering rich insights into how women entrepreneurs frame their experiences, position themselves, and navigate business and societal challenges through language. It is also important to note that one key benefit of the current study is that the WEBC is a living corpus, continuously updated as new blog posts are added. As a result, this ensures that the corpus remains a dynamic resource for ongoing research and an ever-expanding tool for future studies. Thus, it contributes to the growing field of corpus-based gender and entrepreneurship research.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. The corpus, while extensive, is still in its early stages and represents a preliminary investigation into the landscape of women entrepreneurs' blogs. The time-intensive nature of the data collection process, coupled with the

relatively small sample size, means that the findings should be regarded as a starting point for more comprehensive future studies. Moreover, the focus of the current research on linguistic features of the blog posts may limit the understanding of other factors influencing women entrepreneurs' narratives, such as the cultural context or socio-economic backgrounds. To address these limitations, future research could benefit from incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives from sociology, psychology, and cultural studies, which would broaden the scope of the analysis.

Another limitation of this study is the dynamic nature of blogs and other online platforms. As a rapidly evolving medium, blogs are subject to frequent changes in content, style, and format, which can affect the consistency of the data over time. This fast-paced evolution poses challenges for capturing a stable, long-term representation of women's entrepreneurial discourse. Since blogs are often updated or modified with new entries, the corpus can become outdated quickly, limiting the ability to generalize findings to future trends in online discourse. Given this, future research could explore changes in language use over time by extending the analysis to include earlier years or additional recent years. A longitudinal approach could reveal evolving trends and shifting linguistic dynamics in women entrepreneurs' discourse, offering valuable insights into how language evolves in this context.

Furthermore, a comparative analysis between blogs authored by women and those with contributions from men could provide insights into potential linguistic differences, stereotypes, and variations in the portrayal of women in entrepreneurship across gender-authored blogs. Such a comparative lens may deepen our understanding of how different perspectives influence the linguistic landscape in discussions about women in business.

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