



Food Truck Enterprises as a Platform for Women Entrepreneurship: Opportunities and Challenges

Dr. Jaisree Anand¹, H Hasna²

¹Professor School of Hotel & Catering Management, Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, Pallavaram, Chennai, India.

²Student School of Hotel & Catering Management, Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, Pallavaram, Chennai, India.

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ABSTRACT

The food truck business has emerged as an innovative and rapidly expanding segment of the food service industry in India, offering a flexible, low-investment, and scalable alternative to conventional restaurant models. In recent years, this sector has gained particular importance as a viable entrepreneurial avenue for women, especially in urban and semi-urban regions where access to formal employment and large-scale business opportunities remains limited. The objective of this article is to examine the essential elements required for establishing and sustaining a successful food truck business, with special emphasis on women entrepreneurship. Key areas discussed include business planning and concept development, regulatory and food safety compliance, financial management and access to capital, branding and marketing strategies, operational challenges, and mechanisms for customer engagement. The article highlights how food truck enterprises help to reduce traditional barriers faced by women entrepreneurs, such as high startup costs, limited access to commercial infrastructure, and rigid working conditions. The article concludes that food trucks represent not only a sustainable business opportunity but also a powerful platform for women's economic and social empowerment.

Keywords: Food truck business, women entrepreneurship, small enterprises, economic empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

The global food service industry has witnessed a significant transformation in recent years, driven by changing consumer preferences, urbanization, and the demand for affordable yet high-quality food options. Among the emerging business models, food trucks have gained remarkable popularity due to their mobility, lower startup costs, and ability to serve diverse cuisines directly to consumers. Food trucks bridge the gap between informal street food vending and formal restaurant establishments, combining culinary creativity with entrepreneurial innovation. For women entrepreneurs, particularly in developing and transitional economies, the food truck business represents an attractive pathway into entrepreneurship. Traditional barriers such as high capital investment, rigid operating hours, and limited access to commercial spaces often discourage women from entering the food service sector. Food trucks, by contrast, offer a more flexible and scalable business model that allows women to balance professional responsibilities with family and social commitments. Additionally, food-related enterprises align well with existing skills, cultural knowledge, and community networks, further encouraging women's participation. Women entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in inclusive economic growth, poverty reduction, and social development. When women own and manage businesses, they contribute not only to household income but also to job creation, local food security, and community well-being. Understanding the essential components of a food truck business is therefore vital to support aspiring women entrepreneurs and enable them to build sustainable and resilient enterprises.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The quality attributes that influence customer satisfaction with food truck services vary across contexts. However, consistent customer concerns regarding food safety and service reliability have been identified as key drivers of dissatisfaction. Qualitative thematic analysis demonstrated that entrepreneurs adopt diverse strategies for customer satisfaction and retention, tailoring their approaches to the specific contexts of their target markets. Although the food truck segment evolved differently in the two countries, a partial alignment was found between entrepreneurs' and customers' views. Originality/value Women entrepreneurs in the street food industry embody resilience, creativity, and determination. Their strategic approaches ranging from sourcing locally and flexible pricing to product diversification

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and technological adoption highlight their ability to navigate the complexities of informal markets [1]. These strategies not only ensure the viability of their businesses but also contribute significantly to urban economies and community well-being. Despite their successes, women in this sector continue to face formidable challenges. Regulatory barriers, limited access to credit, societal biases, and health risks pose significant obstacles to their growth. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach involving policymakers, financial institutions, and community organizations. Simplifying licensing processes, expanding access to microcredit, and providing skills training are essential steps toward creating an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs. The broader implications of their entrepreneurial activities extend to social and cultural domains. By breaking gender stereotypes and serving as economic contributors, women food vendors play a pivotal role in fostering gender equity and empowerment [2].

Their focus on affordability and inclusivity underscores the importance of informal food sectors in addressing urban food security challenges. To build on their contributions, systemic reforms and targeted interventions are necessary. Policymakers should prioritize the integration of informal vendors into urban planning processes, ensuring access to resources and infrastructure that enhance their productivity and safety. Financial institutions must develop innovative credit solutions tailored to the unique needs of women entrepreneurs, while community organizations can provide platforms for collaboration and knowledge-sharing [3]. Future research should delve deeper into the evolving landscape of the street food industry, particularly in the context of digital transformation and changing consumer behaviors. Understanding how women entrepreneurs adapt to these trends will provide valuable insights for designing policies and programs that support their long-term success. In conclusion, women entrepreneurs in the street food sector are not merely economic actors but also agents of social change. Their innovative strategies, combined with their resilience and determination, underscore the transformative potential of entrepreneurship in the informal economy. By addressing the challenges, they face and leveraging their strengths, we can unlock new opportunities for growth, sustainability, and gender empowerment in urban economies [4].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the essential aspects of the food truck business with special reference to women entrepreneurship. The methodology is primarily based on secondary data sources, supported by conceptual analysis and review-based interpretation. Secondary data were collected from a wide range of published literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government reports, policy documents, entrepreneurship development program publications, and reports from international organizations related to women entrepreneurship and small food enterprises. Relevant information was also gathered from official websites of food safety authorities, small business development agencies, and women entrepreneurship support institutions.

The collected data were systematically reviewed and categorized into thematic areas, namely planning and concept development, legal and safety requirements, financial management and access to capital, branding and marketing, operational challenges. A qualitative content analysis approach was employed to interpret trends, challenges, and opportunities discussed in the literature. The findings were synthesized to develop an integrated understanding of how food truck businesses function as an entrepreneurial platform for women.

Planning and Concept Development

A strong business plan is the foundation of any successful food truck venture. For women entrepreneurs, careful planning helps minimize risk and ensures efficient use of limited resources. The process begins with defining a clear food concept, such as regional cuisine, healthy meals, fusion food, or specialty snacks that aligns with personal skills and market demand. Understanding the target customer base office workers, students, tourists, or families is equally important for menu design and pricing strategy. Location strategy is another critical element of planning. Unlike fixed restaurants, food trucks rely on high-footfall areas, events, and strategic parking locations to attract customers. Women entrepreneurs must evaluate local regulations governing parking, vending zones, and operating hours to avoid legal complications [5]. A detailed business plan should also include startup costs, projected revenues, sourcing strategies, staffing requirements, and contingency plans. Such structured planning empowers women to approach financial institutions, self-help groups, or government agencies with confidence. Effective planning and concept development form the cornerstone of a successful food truck business, particularly for women entrepreneurs who often operate with limited financial and operational margins [6].

A clearly defined business concept helps transform a culinary idea into a market-ready enterprise by aligning personal skills, cultural knowledge, and consumer demand. Concept development begins with identifying a unique food offering—such as regional cuisine, healthy or organic foods, specialty beverages, or fusion menus—that differentiates the food truck from competitors while remaining feasible within resource constraints. Understanding the target customer segment, including preferences, spending capacity, and consumption patterns, is essential for menu design, portion sizing, and pricing strategy. Careful planning also involves evaluating suitable locations, peak operating hours, and participation in events or festivals, as footfall and visibility directly influence sales performance. For women

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entrepreneurs, structured planning reduces uncertainty and builds confidence by clarifying startup costs, expected revenues, sourcing of raw materials, staffing needs, and risk management strategies. Additionally, a well-prepared business plan enables women to access institutional support, government schemes, microfinance, and training programs by demonstrating business viability and long-term sustainability. Overall, thoughtful planning and a strong, customer-oriented concept not only enhance operational efficiency but also empower women entrepreneurs to establish resilient, competitive, and scalable food truck ventures [7].

Legal, Regulatory, and Safety Requirements

Compliance with legal, regulatory, and food safety requirements is a fundamental prerequisite for the successful and sustainable operation of food truck businesses. For women entrepreneurs, awareness and adherence to these requirements are particularly important, as regulatory non-compliance can lead to penalties, business interruptions, and loss of consumer trust. Legal obligations typically include business registration, trade licensing, vehicle permits, zoning or vending permissions, and compliance with local municipal regulations governing mobile food operations. In addition, food safety certification and adherence to established hygiene standards are essential to ensure public health and product quality. Food trucks must follow safe food handling practices, proper storage of raw and cooked foods, temperature control, sanitation of equipment, waste management, and personal hygiene protocols for food handlers [8].

While regulatory procedures may appear complex and time-consuming, proper compliance enhances business credibility and facilitates access to institutional support, government schemes, and formal financing. Training programs offered by food safety authorities, entrepreneurship development agencies, and non-governmental organizations play a crucial role in equipping women entrepreneurs with the knowledge and skills required to meet regulatory and safety standards. Ultimately, strong legal and food safety compliance not only minimizes operational risks but also strengthens brand reputation, customer confidence, and the long-term viability of women-owned food truck enterprises.

Management of Finance and Capital

Financial planning and management are critical challenges for women entrepreneurs entering the food truck sector. Startup costs typically include vehicle purchase or modification, kitchen equipment, raw materials, licenses, and initial marketing expenses. While food trucks require significantly lower investment compared to restaurants, access to capital remains a constraint for many women due to limited collateral or financial literacy. Effective financial management and access to adequate capital are critical determinants of success in the food truck business, particularly for women entrepreneurs who often face structural and socio-economic constraints in securing financial resources. Although food trucks require relatively lower startup investment compared to conventional restaurants, initial expenses such as vehicle acquisition or modification, kitchen equipment, licensing fees, raw materials, and marketing can still pose significant challenges. Sound financial management involves careful budgeting, cost control, pricing strategies, and systematic record keeping to ensure profitability and cash flow stability.

Women entrepreneurs must monitor daily sales and operating expenses to evaluate performance, plan inventory purchases, and avoid unnecessary financial losses. Access to capital remains a major barrier due to limited collateral, lack of credit history, and restricted financial literacy. In this context, microfinance institutions, self-help groups, cooperative lending models, government subsidy schemes, and women-focused startup programs play a vital role in supporting women-owned food truck ventures [9]. Financial training and mentoring further empower women to make informed investment decisions, manage debt responsibly, and plan for business expansion. Strengthening financial capabilities and improving access to institutional finance not only enhance business sustainability but also promote long-term economic independence and confidence among women entrepreneurs.

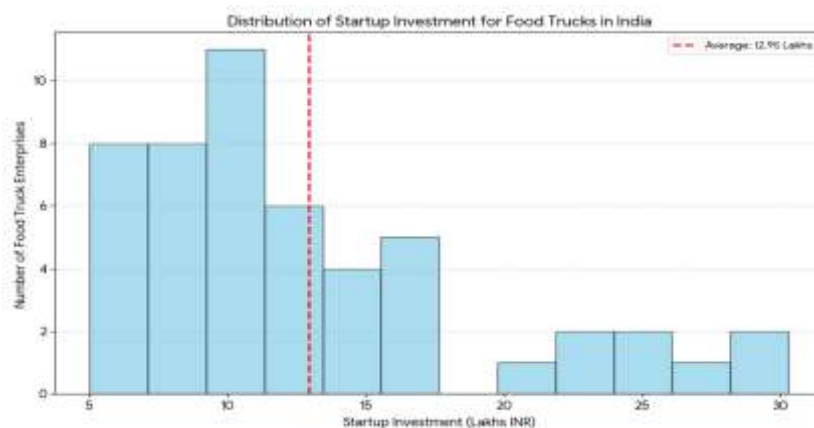


Figure1. Start-up Investment for Food Trucks in India

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Customer Engagement through Branding

Branding, marketing, and customer engagement are critical success factors in the highly competitive food truck industry, where visibility and customer loyalty directly influence business sustainability. For women entrepreneurs, effective branding provides an opportunity to express creativity, cultural identity, and values through a distinctive food concept, truck design, menu presentation, and service style. A strong brand identity supported by a memorable name, logo, and consistent visual theme helps differentiate the food truck from competitors and enhances consumer recognition. Marketing strategies increasingly rely on digital platforms, including social media, online food delivery applications, and location-based promotions, which allow women entrepreneurs to reach wider audiences with relatively low investment. Customer engagement plays a vital role in building trust and repeat patronage, as food truck success is often driven by personal interaction, service quality, and emotional connection with consumers [10]. Women entrepreneurs often excel in relationship-building, responsiveness to customer feedback, and community-based marketing, which can be leveraged to strengthen brand loyalty. Participation in food festivals, local events, and collaborations with community organizations further enhances visibility and market reach. Consistent product quality, cleanliness, transparent pricing, and friendly service collectively reinforce positive customer experiences, transforming first-time buyers into long-term supporters. Overall, strategic branding and customer-centric marketing enable women-owned food truck businesses to establish a strong market presence, sustain competitive advantage, and achieve long-term growth.

Challenges and Opportunities in Food Truck Enterprises

Operating a food truck involves a range of operational challenges that require continuous physical effort, multitasking, and adaptability, which can be particularly demanding for women entrepreneurs. Daily operations include food preparation, inventory management, customer service, cleaning, and compliance with safety standards, often performed within limited space and under time pressure. Irregular working hours, dependence on weather conditions, and the need to operate during peak periods such as evenings, weekends, or special events further intensify workload demands. Women entrepreneurs may also face additional challenges related to personal safety, mobility, and social expectations, especially when operating in public spaces or during late hours. Balancing these operational responsibilities with household duties and caregiving roles can create significant stress and limit business growth. Effective time management, task delegation, and process standardization are therefore essential to maintain operational efficiency and personal well-being. Support systems such as family cooperation, trained staff, peer networks, and women entrepreneur associations play a crucial role in reducing operational strain. By adopting flexible schedules, leveraging technology for order management and payments, and prioritizing self-care, women entrepreneurs can achieve a healthier work-life balance. Addressing operational challenges in a structured manner not only improves business performance but also ensures long-term sustainability and personal fulfillment in women-led food truck enterprises.

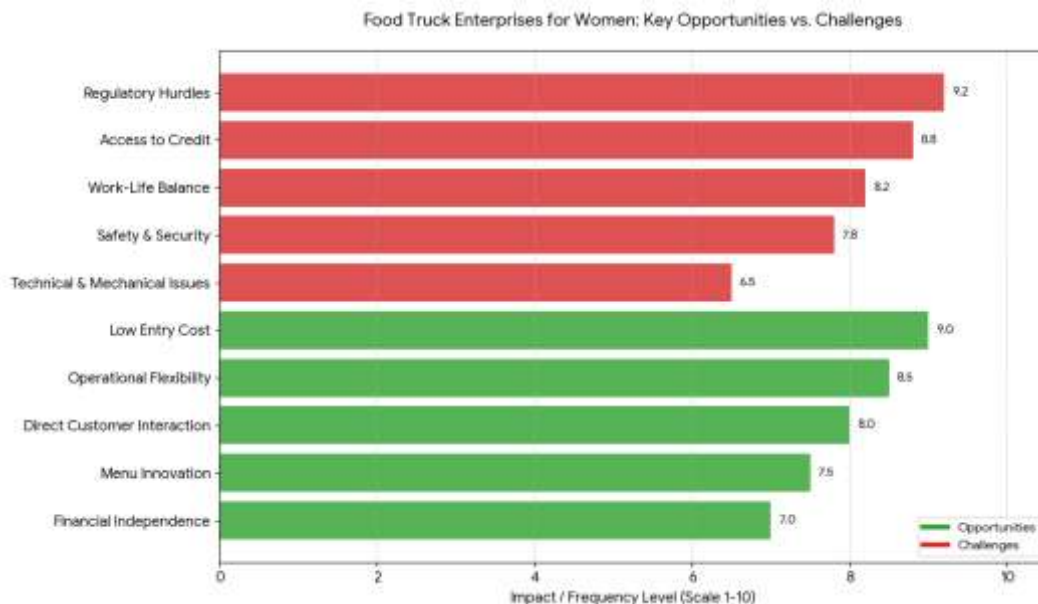


Figure 2. Challenges in Food Truck Business for Women

Figure 2. Shows a comparative analysis of key opportunities and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in food truck enterprises, measured on an impact and frequency scale between 1 to 10. The discussion highlights a nuanced balance between enabling factors and persistent barriers. The findings indicate that opportunities in food truck enterprises are relatively strong and attractive, with low entry cost (9.0) emerging as the most significant advantage.

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This article suggests that compared to traditional brick-and-mortar restaurants, food trucks provide a more accessible entry point for women entrepreneurs, requiring less initial capital investment. Closely following this, operational flexibility (8.5) and direct customer interaction (8.0) reflect the dynamic and customer-centric nature of the business, allowing women to manage time efficiently and build strong customer relationships. Additionally, menu innovation (7.5) highlights creative freedom, enabling entrepreneurs to experiment with diverse cuisines and respond to changing consumer preferences. Financial independence (7.0), though slightly lower, still signifies a critical empowerment outcome associated with this sector. The challenges appear equally significant and, in some cases, more intense than the opportunities. The most critical barrier is regulatory hurdles (9.2), indicating that complex licensing, permits, and compliance requirements significantly hinder women's entry and sustainability in this sector. Access to credit (8.8) is another major constraint, reflecting systemic financial barriers, including lack of collateral, limited financial literacy, or institutional biases. Furthermore, work-life balance (8.2) and safety & security concerns (7.8) underline gender-specific challenges. These factors are particularly relevant in the Indian context, where societal expectations and safety issues can restrict mobility and operational hours. Technical and mechanical issues (6.5), though comparatively lower, still represent a notable operational challenge, especially for those lacking technical expertise in vehicle maintenance.

CONCLUSION

The food truck business has emerged as a promising and inclusive entrepreneurial model that effectively combines low capital requirements, operational flexibility, and creative independence, making it particularly suitable for women entrepreneurs. As discussed in this article, food trucks offer women a viable entry point into the food service sector by reducing traditional barriers such as high startup costs, limited access to commercial infrastructure, and rigid working arrangements. Through careful planning and concept development, compliance with legal and food safety regulations, effective financial management, and strategic branding and marketing, women entrepreneurs can build sustainable and competitive food truck enterprises. Beyond economic viability, women-owned food truck businesses contribute significantly to social empowerment by promoting self-employment, enhancing household income, creating local employment opportunities, and challenging conventional gender roles in entrepreneurship. However, women entrepreneurs continue to face operational challenges related to access to finance, regulatory complexity, safety concerns, and balancing professional responsibilities with family and caregiving roles. The integration of entrepreneurial innovation will have social impact, the food truck sector has the potential to play a vital role in advancing women entrepreneurship, fostering economic resilience, and contributing to broader goals of sustainable and inclusive growth.

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