



Digitalisation and female cultural entrepreneurship in the Colombian craft sector

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ABSTRACT. Cultural entrepreneurship led by women, particularly in the craft sector, has shown a remarkable ability to adapt to economic and social challenges, preserving traditions while seeking new forms of competitiveness. Traditionally, craft business models have been rooted in local production and direct marketing, but in recent years, women entrepreneurs in the sector have begun to integrate digital tools to improve the visibility of their products, access new markets, and optimise their management and marketing processes. The objective of this article is to describe the adoption of new information technologies by women entrepreneurs in the craft sector in Cundinamarca, Colombia, as an integral part of their business models. Using a quantitative and descriptive approach, a group of 512 entrepreneurs was characterised using secondary data provided by the Departmental Institute of Culture and Tourism of Cundinamarca (IDECUT) from 2023. The results reveal that female entrepreneurs, mostly adult women with education ranging from secondary to professional level, have managed to evolve from traditional business models to hybrid models that combine traditional craft techniques with the incorporation of digital tools. Digitisation has not only enabled market expansion, but has also modernised business practices, allowing for the creation of networks and the optimisation of customer relations. Although their ventures are in a mature stage, many of these entrepreneurs remain committed to preserving their cultural knowledge, balancing artisanal tradition with digital innovation. In conclusion, women-led cultural

enterprises in the craft sector in Cundinamarca demonstrate how traditional business models can be transformed through the adoption of digital tools, achieving greater competitiveness without losing their cultural identity. This transition to hybrid business models offers valuable lessons that could be applied in other sectors of the economy to promote sustainability and innovation.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, women, culture, sociodemographic, technological and operational characteristics.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, women's participation in business processes has grown significantly in recent years, reaching levels higher than those of men in terms of business creation during the first years of entrepreneurial activity. However, although this increase is notable, women continue to be at a disadvantage compared to men in terms of access to resources and institutional support (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor [GEM], 2022). The motivations for entrepreneurship among women vary, with the need to generate income or lack of access to education and resources being common. Despite the barriers they face, such as illiteracy, belonging to low-income communities and a lack of resources, entrepreneurship offers them the possibility of generating employment and improving their living conditions (Ascher, 2012; Hechavarría & Brieger, 2020).

Female cultural entrepreneurship, in particular, plays a key role in preserving cultural traditions, strengthening local identity, and empowering women economically. This form of entrepreneurship not only links cultural preservation with income generation, but also contributes to local economic development by integrating the principles of the creative economy (Araque Geney & Álvarez Contreras, 2023). Despite challenges such as scarce resources and market competition, women entrepreneurs in the craft sector strengthen local economies, protect cultural heritage, and promote social values through craft practices passed down from generation to generation (Álvarez et al., 2012).

Cultural entrepreneurship, especially when led by women, transcends the simple commercialisation of products; it becomes a vehicle for the transmission of cultural values through the goods offered. In Latin America, many women entrepreneurs start their projects out of necessity, often without prior business training (Hechavarría & Brieger, 2020). In addition, they tend to integrate their commercial activities with their personal lives, which implies a lesser separation between work and social life. In this context, digitalisation has begun to play a fundamental role, allowing women

entrepreneurs in the craft sector not only to expand their markets, but also to optimise their marketing processes and increase their competitiveness.

In Colombia, specifically in the department of Cundinamarca, cultural enterprises based on craft resources represent a significant opportunity for income generation and the preservation of cultural heritage (Mendivil-Hernández, 2025). The adoption of digital tools in these enterprises has allowed many women entrepreneurs to balance tradition with innovation. It is therefore essential to characterise these women-led enterprises in the region in order to gain a clearer picture of their characteristics and challenges. This analysis will provide a better understanding of the impact of these enterprises on local economies and their contribution to cultural preservation, especially in a context of digital transformation.

The objective of this article is to describe the adoption of new information technologies by women entrepreneurs in the craft sector in Cundinamarca, Colombia, as an integral part of their business models. It is important to note that the results presented are part of the research project for the Doctorate in Regional and Local Development at the Universidad Tecnológica de Bolívar, under the project entitled: 'Women, Entrepreneurship and Skills: A study on the socio-economic, technological and innovation barriers and opportunities in the craft sector in the department of Cundinamarca (Colombia)'.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Cultural entrepreneurship refers to the creation, production, distribution, and circulation of cultural goods and services closely related to the symbolic values and traditions of a community (Cuellar Chaves, 2024). This type of entrepreneurship not only seeks to generate wealth and employment but also to harness the cultural potential of a region through innovation and creativity. In this sense, it focuses both on cultural and creative industries and on projects that seek to protect cultural identity through the production of goods and services (Drucker, 2014).

In current trends, cultural entrepreneurship is positioned as a viable option for social and economic development, allowing individuals to express their creativity through cultural manifestations. Entrepreneurs in this field have a deep understanding of the cultural practices of their community, which allows them to put their experience and skills into practice to create products that respond to both local needs and global market demands (Timarán Rivera et al., 2022).

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Women's participation in cultural activities in Latin America continues to be significantly lower than that of men. According to data from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), women represent only 32% of participants in cultural activities, compared to 68% for men. In Colombia, the gap is equally evident, with a female participation rate of 33.2% in cultural activities and 28.5% in culture-related employment (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, International Labour Organisation, 2023). This disparity reflects the urgent need to promote the inclusion of women in the cultural sector, not only as a means of reducing gender gaps, but also to strengthen the economic and social impact of this sector in the region. Despite these inequalities, artistic and recreational activities accounted for 10.3% of Cundinamarca's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022 (Gobernación de Cundinamarca, 2024), underscoring the economic potential of this sector and the importance of including more women in its development.

In the specific context of cultural entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs face various structural barriers that hinder both the consolidation and sustainability of their businesses. Lack of access to financial resources is one of the main difficulties, as many of these entrepreneurs depend on self-financing or informal support, which limits their possibilities for expansion (Henao, 2020). In addition, the lack of training in business management and innovation is combined with limited access to technologies and markets, which restricts their competitiveness in a globalised environment. Women cultural entrepreneurs are affected by the lack of adequate institutional support and by obstacles that hinder their entry into international markets, limiting their visibility and expansion (Cataño, 2015; Martínez Gámez, 2016; Mendivil Hernández, 2017).

In Cundinamarca, female cultural entrepreneurship faces additional challenges stemming from structural factors that affect the sustainability and growth of these initiatives (Mendivil-Hernández, 2025). The 2020-2024 Departmental Development Plan notes that there is a high business mortality rate, reflecting the difficulty many cultural enterprises, especially those led by women, have in establishing themselves in the market (Gobernación de Cundinamarca, 2020). This high business mortality rate is exacerbated by informality and a lack of adequate training in key areas such as business management and innovation. Cultural entrepreneurs, who in many cases operate in informal conditions, lack the tools and resources to structure their businesses more solidly, which limits their competitiveness and long-term sustainability.

Business informality is also a recurring challenge in the cultural sector, which is affected by the lack of adequate spaces for entrepreneurship and the circulation of cultural products. Women entrepreneurs face serious difficulties in promoting and distributing their products within local markets, which negatively impacts their visibility and opportunities for expansion (Gobernación de Cundinamarca, 2020; Mendivil-Hernández, 2025). This situation has highlighted the urgent need to strengthen cultural infrastructure in the region, providing adequate spaces for the promotion and marketing of cultural products, especially those produced by women entrepreneurs. However, the lack of an institutional framework that effectively supports women cultural entrepreneurs and the poor infrastructure for formalising their businesses are key obstacles preventing these enterprises from thriving.

Digitalisation is essential in overcoming these challenges, as it allows cultural entrepreneurs to access online sales platforms and social networks, expanding their reach and facilitating their entry into broader markets, both nationally and internationally. The use of digital tools has enabled many women entrepreneurs in the craft sector in Cundinamarca to diversify their marketing channels without losing the authenticity of their cultural products. The incorporation of digital technologies not only improves the competitiveness of cultural enterprises, but also contributes to the visibility of women-led ventures, facilitating their inclusion in global markets (Vaca & Buitrago, 2012).

DIGITALISATION AND FEMALE CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In the context of the craft sector, cultural entrepreneurship led by women has proven to be particularly significant. Female entrepreneurs, many of whom come from rural or low-income communities, often resort to self-financing, either through support from family members or by using their own savings, to offer their products in small-scale local markets. This low-cost strategy is driven by a lack of working capital and a scarcity of marketing channels that would allow for wider distribution of their products (Riascos et al., 2020). However, globalisation and digitalisation have begun to offer new opportunities, broadening these entrepreneurs' horizons to international markets and making it easier to overcome economic and logistical barriers.

Despite generally operating in informal conditions and sometimes performing multiple jobs to meet their basic needs, these entrepreneurs continue to play a crucial role in preserving their cultural traditions through their handcrafted products. This type of entrepreneurship not only contributes to economic prosperity, but also acts as a driver of social and cultural innovation, as it fosters social change, artistic diversity and the

growth of local and global institutions. In an increasingly globalised world, cultural entrepreneurs can access digital platforms that allow them to share their work with a wider audience, integrating into global markets without losing touch with their cultural roots (Albinsson, 2017).

One of the main goals of cultural entrepreneurs in the craft sector is to start and maintain independent micro-enterprises, in many cases seeking to formalise their activities to improve their competitiveness. In this context, digital platforms have become key tools for strengthening their businesses. However, the nature of these businesses, which are mostly small and family-owned, means that cultural entrepreneurs take on multiple roles simultaneously, from the creation and production of cultural goods and services to administrative management and product promotion (Riascos et al., 2020). Digitisation offers the possibility of simplifying and optimising these processes, allowing entrepreneurs to manage business operations more efficiently and reach a wider audience.

It is important to note that cultural micro-enterprises in this sector do not follow a traditional hierarchical structure, but operate under a model of collaboration and co-creation among colleagues, which allows for the integration of diverse ideas and skills towards a common goal. With digitalisation, these collaborative networks are expanding, connecting women entrepreneurs from different regions and broadening the impact of their products on the global market. Through online sales platforms, social media and other digital media, women entrepreneurs are not only expanding their markets, but also improving their competitiveness in a globalised environment, all while maintaining the essence and authenticity of their cultural traditions.

THE APPLICATION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN THE ECONOMY AND CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Information and comunicación technology [ICT] has revolutionised various areas of society, including the economy and entrepreneurship, providing opportunities for growth and development for traditional and emerging sectors. In the context of cultural entrepreneurship, especially in the craft sector, ICT offers a range of possibilities for overcoming barriers to market access, improving resource management and increasing the visibility of products on global platforms. In the specific case of cultural entrepreneurs, the incorporation of digital tools allows for the integration of traditional business models with new commercial practices, promoting greater competitiveness and sustainability. According to Cataño (2015), access to

digital platforms amplifies the possibilities for expansion of enterprises, allowing them to reach broader and more global markets.

The use of ICTs in cultural enterprises also allows entrepreneurs to overcome one of the main barriers they face in the Colombian context: access to financing and resources. Digital platforms not only serve as marketing channels, but also as spaces for raising funds, either through crowdfunding or by establishing strategic alliances. Vaca and Buitrago (2012) point out that the lack of infrastructure and institutional support is one of the main difficulties in the cultural sector, but the use of ICT can partially bridge this gap by providing tools that facilitate contact with sources of financing and international collaborations.

ICTs also facilitate business management and innovation in business models. Cultural entrepreneurs can use digital tools to efficiently control inventory, manage supplier and customer relationships, and optimise their production processes. This translates into improved operational efficiency, allowing cultural micro-enterprises to be more competitive. Henao (2020) argues that a lack of knowledge in business management is one of the biggest challenges facing cultural entrepreneurs, but the use of accessible technologies can level the playing field, giving entrepreneurs the ability to operate more strategically and effectively in a globalised market.

Furthermore, digitisation provides a unique opportunity for the preservation and dissemination of culture. Through ICT, entrepreneurs can share the cultural value of their products with wider audiences, not only locally but also globally. Albinsson (2017) highlights that cultural enterprises contribute not only to economic growth but also to social progress and the strengthening of cultural identities. Digital tools allow for greater visibility and access to these products, which can translate into greater recognition of cultural heritage in a global context, promoting both the preservation and appreciation of traditional knowledge.

Globalisation and digitalisation offer cultural entrepreneurs the possibility of integrating their businesses into a global ecosystem of trade and collaboration. Social networks, e-commerce platforms and digital marketing tools allow entrepreneurs to connect with customers and suppliers from around the world, creating international markets for their handcrafted products. Martínez Gámez (2016) points out that, in the context of globalisation, ICTs play a fundamental role in reducing geographical and economic barriers, facilitating access to global markets and contributing to the sustainability of enterprises. In this way, digitalisation is presented not only as a tool for improving competitiveness, but also as a catalyst for innovation and sustainability in cultural enterprises.

METHODOLOGY

The research took a positivist approach, characterised by its quantitative method, which focuses on obtaining objective knowledge through the collection and analysis of numerical data. This approach allows for a precise understanding of the characteristics and conditions of the phenomenon under study (Hernández et al., 2014). In this sense, the research design was descriptive, which involved a detailed analysis of the characteristics, trends, and particularities of cultural entrepreneurs, without direct intervention in the phenomenon. The main objective was to offer a clear view of the current landscape of cultural entrepreneurship in the craft sector, providing a solid basis for future research without seeking to establish causal relationships.

The target population consisted of women entrepreneurs in the craft sector in Cundinamarca, with a sample of 512 participants. Data collection was based on a secondary source, namely the database of women entrepreneurs in the craft sector in Cundinamarca provided by the Departmental Institute of Culture and Tourism of Cundinamarca (IDECUT) for the year 2023. This source provided valuable information about the entrepreneurs, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of their socioeconomic, labour and cultural characteristics. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the context in which cultural entrepreneurs operate in the region.

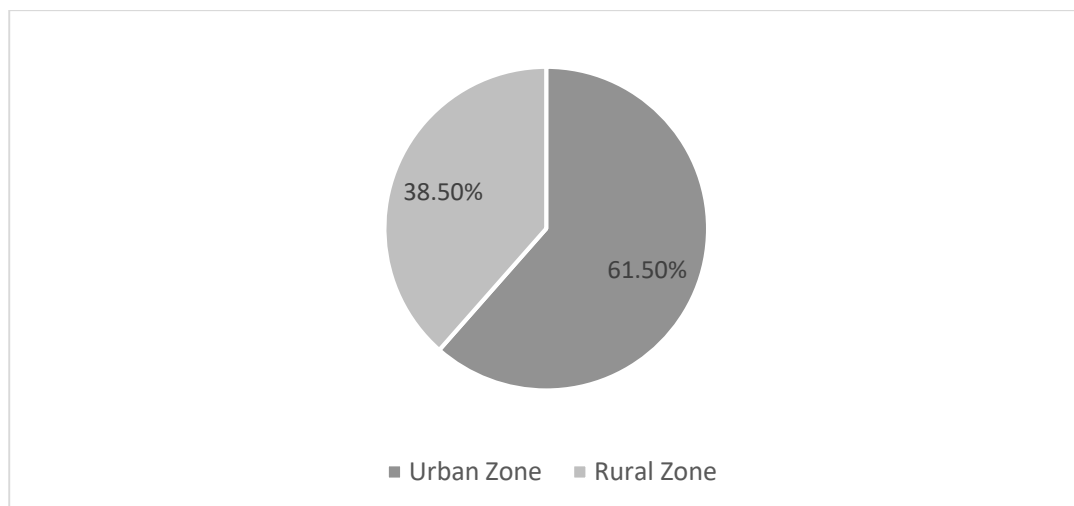
The data was analysed using SPSS statistical software, a tool commonly used in quantitative research for processing large volumes of information. First, the data was cleaned and organised to ensure its reliability. Descriptive analyses were then carried out, allowing for the identification of predominant patterns and trends among women cultural entrepreneurs in the craft sector in Cundinamarca, which facilitated the identification of key characteristics of the phenomenon under study.

RESULTS

According to data obtained on the sociodemographic characteristics of women entrepreneurs in the craft sector in Cundinamarca, Colombia, the age of participants ranged from 18 to 86 years, reflecting a wide age diversity within the group studied. In terms of geographical location, it was observed that 61.5% of the women entrepreneurs reside in urban areas, while 38.5% live in rural areas, which shows a greater concentration of artisanal entrepreneurial activity in urban contexts.

Figure N1.

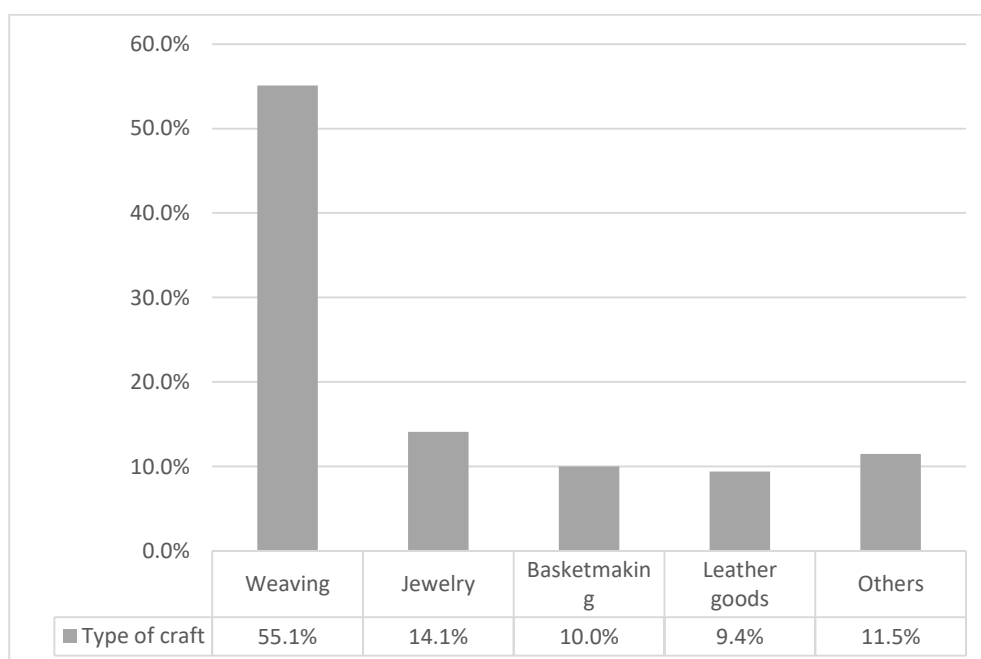
Geographical Location



28.7% of female entrepreneurs have completed secondary education, while 26.8% have attained technical qualifications, which facilitates the acquisition of both technical and business skills. 20.1% have primary education, and only 24.4% have vocational training. In terms of craft activities, Figure 1 shows that 55.1% are engaged in weaving, followed by jewellery making with 14.1%. To a lesser extent, there is basket weaving (10%) and leather goods (9.4%), activities that correspond to specific niche markets. The remaining 11.5% are engaged in other forms of craftsmanship, reflecting a diversity of production within the sector, favouring both traditional techniques and diversification in supply.

Figure N2.

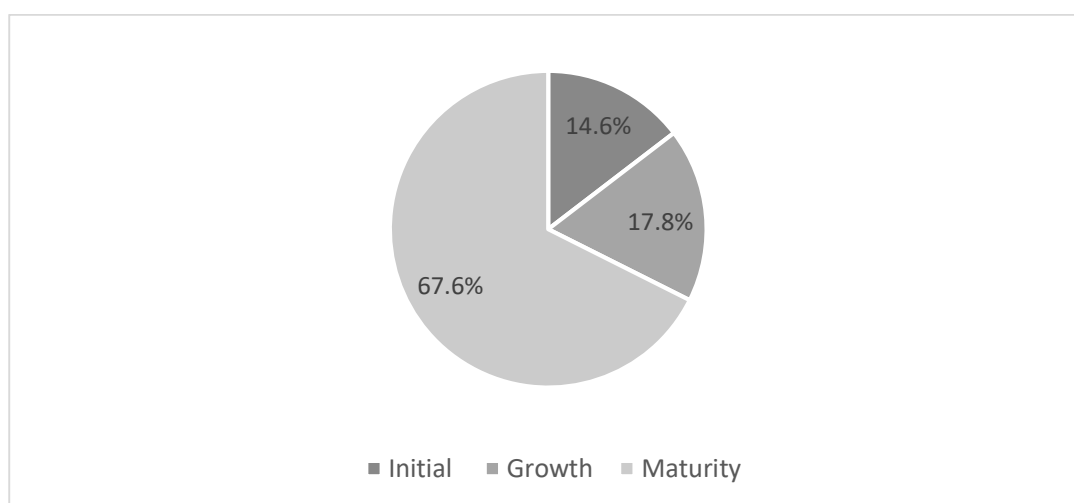
Type of craft



In terms of the operational characteristics of women entrepreneurs in the craft sector in Cundinamarca, 67.6% are in the maturity stage of their ventures. This suggests that most have managed to consolidate their businesses, overcoming initial challenges and keeping them active for more than ten years. Some 17.8% are in the growth phase, while 14.6% are in the initial stage. This picture shows that, although new ventures continue to emerge, most craftswomen already have a solid track record, which indicates a stable and constantly evolving entrepreneurial culture.

Figure N3.

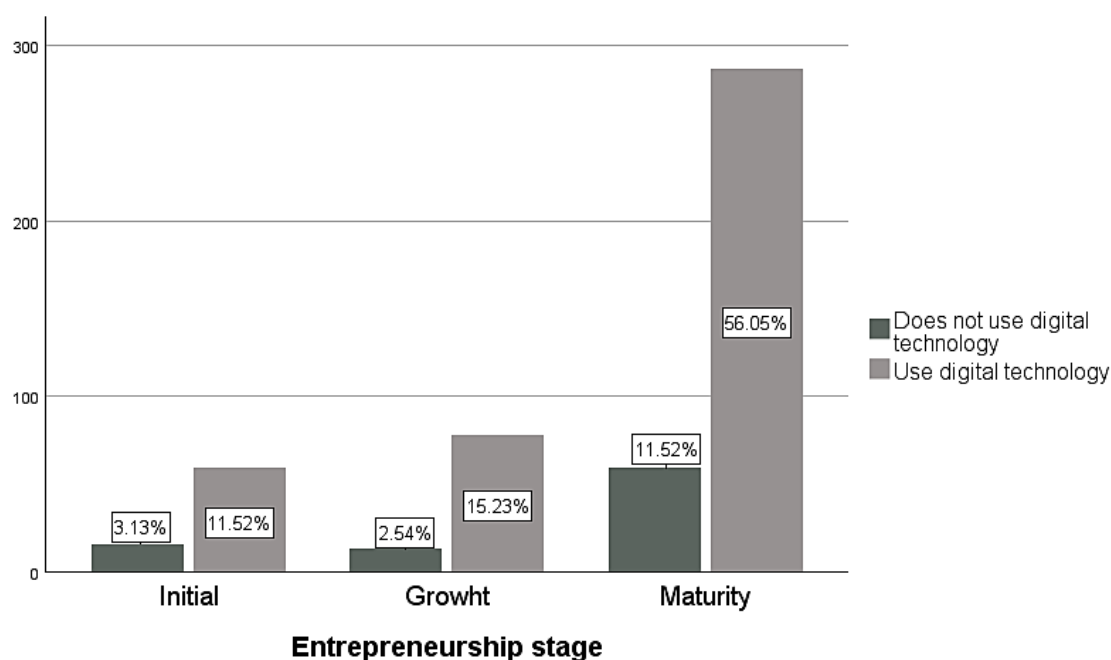
Entrepreneurship stage



The graph shows the distribution of digital technology use among women entrepreneurs in the craft sector, segmented according to the stage of their venture. In the Initial phase, 3.13% do not use digital technology, while 11.52% do. In the Growth stage, 2.54% do not use technology, and 15.23% adopt it in their business. In the Maturity stage, 11.52% do not use digital technology, but a high percentage do use it (56.05%). This reflects a clear trend in which, as women entrepreneurs consolidate their businesses and reach maturity, there is a significant increase in the adoption of digital tools, allowing them to optimise their processes and make themselves known in the local, national and international markets.

Figure N4.

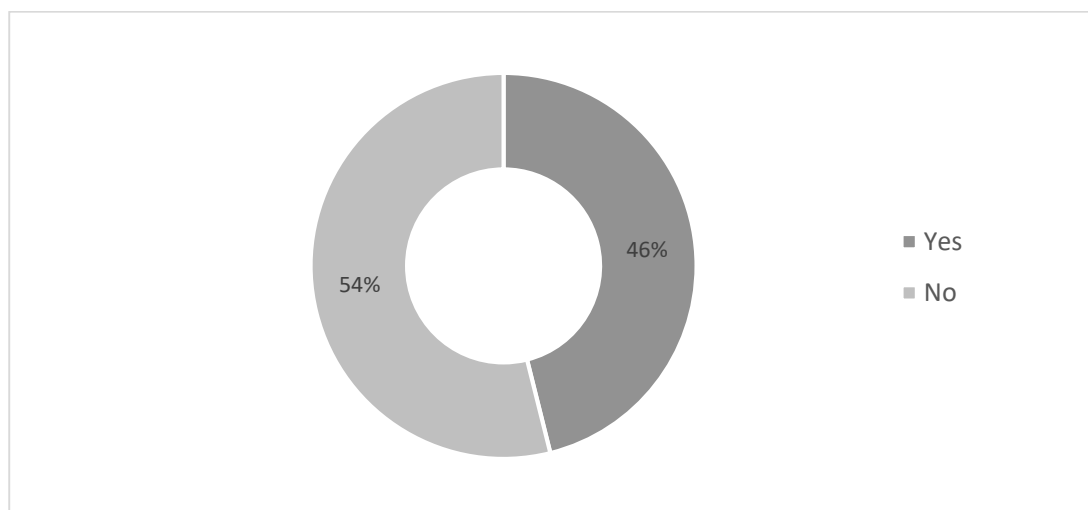
Use of technology and stage of entrepreneurship



In terms of associativity, it was found that 54% of women entrepreneurs belong to an organisation or association, suggesting a positive inclination towards collaborative work. Participation in networks offers various advantages, such as access to broader markets, financing opportunities and training options, all of which strengthen the business skills of women artisans. However, the remaining 46% are not affiliated with any association, which could reflect the existence of barriers to joining these networks or a preference for maintaining independent management of their enterprises.

Figure N5.

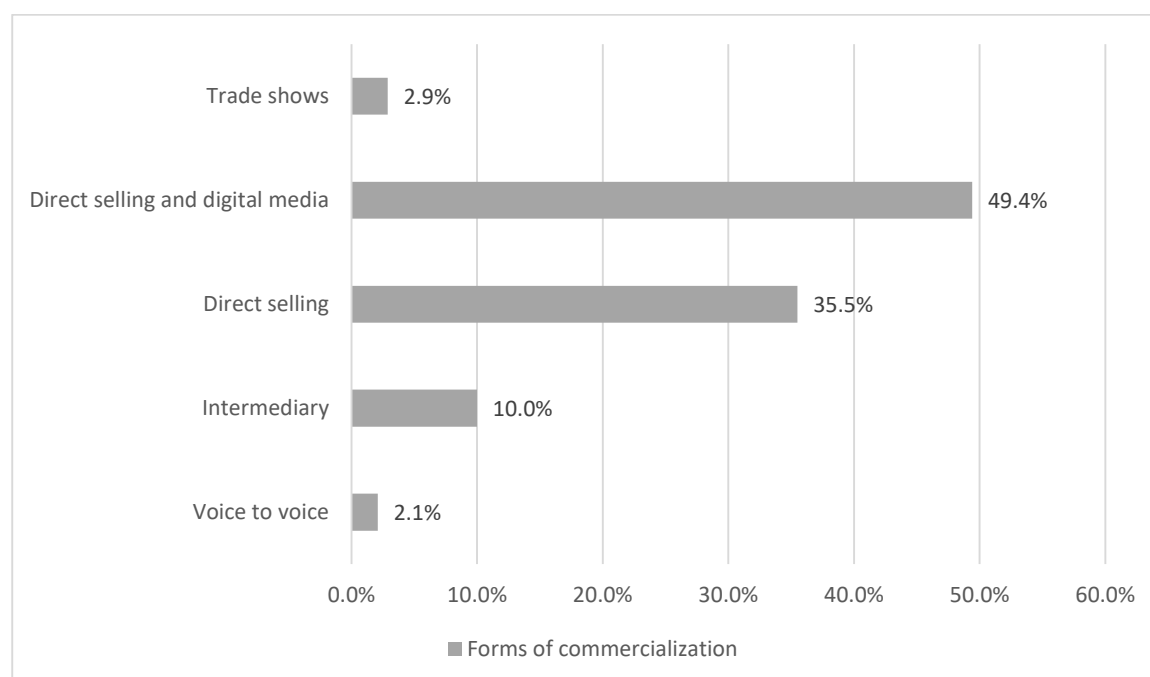
Associativity of women entrepreneurs



35.7% of female entrepreneurs learned their trade through family tradition, 27.1% were self-taught, 19.7% through formal training, and 17.4% combined both approaches. In terms of technology use, 82.8% know how to use a device for their work and 17.2% claim to have knowledge in this area. With regard to marketing, 49.4% use both direct sales and digital media, showing adaptation to current trends. Some 35.5% prefer direct sales, while the use of intermediaries (10%) and participation in trade fairs (2.9%) are less common.

Figure N6.

Forms of commercialization



DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results obtained in this research paint an interesting picture of the sociodemographic and operational characteristics of women entrepreneurs in the craft sector in Cundinamarca, Colombia. In terms of the geographical location of the entrepreneurs, a significant proportion (61.5%) live in urban areas, which contrasts with the usual tendency to associate craft entrepreneurship with rural areas. This distribution could be linked to greater accessibility to markets and resources in urban areas, which is in line with findings in the literature that indicate that urbanisation facilitates access to networks and technologies for entrepreneurs (Cataño, 2015). However, 38.5% of women entrepreneurs are still located in rural areas, suggesting that cultural craft entrepreneurship continues to be an activity linked to the

preservation of traditions in more remote areas, where women find in craftsmanship a way to improve their living conditions.

In terms of the educational level of women entrepreneurs, the results show that most of them have attained at least secondary education (28.7%) or technical education (26.8%), which favours the acquisition of both technical and business knowledge. These results are in line with the literature that argues that educational attainment is a key factor in the development of entrepreneurial skills, as it provides women with tools for management and innovation (Henao, 2020). However, the significant presence of entrepreneurs with only primary education (20.1%) or limited vocational training (24.4%) reveals that there are barriers to access to higher education and continuing training, which limits the ability of entrepreneurs to implement more sophisticated and competitive business strategies in a globalised and digitalised environment.

Analysis of the stages of development of the enterprises shows that a large proportion of women entrepreneurs (67.6%) are in the maturity stage, indicating a consolidation of their businesses over time. This finding suggests that, despite the initial barriers faced by many women entrepreneurs, such as lack of capital and informal employment, the craft sector shows strong resilience and permanence. This trend is in line with studies that highlight the importance of perseverance and experience gained during the early years of business as key factors for the sustainability of cultural enterprises (Vaca & Buitrago, 2012). However, the presence of 14.6% in the initial stage indicates that, although many ventures have managed to consolidate themselves, the sector continues to receive new participants seeking to make their way in a challenging context.

In terms of associativity, it was observed that more than half of the female entrepreneurs (53.9%) belong to an association, reflecting a positive trend towards collaboration and networking. This association could facilitate access to broader markets, financial support and training, as suggested by the theory on the importance of networks for the sustainability of cultural enterprises (Riascos et al., 2020). However, 46.1% of women entrepreneurs do not belong to any network, which could be related to a lack of access to support organisations or a preference for self-employment. This phenomenon highlights the need to promote public policies that encourage the creation and strengthening of institutional and business support networks for women entrepreneurs in the cultural sector.

The learning of women entrepreneurs is another relevant aspect that stands out in the results. The fact that 35.7% learned their trade through family tradition underscores the importance of intergenerational knowledge transfer practices, which have been essential in the preservation of craft and

cultural techniques (Álvarez et al., 2012; Mendivil-Hernández, 2025). In turn, 27.1% of women entrepreneurs who consider themselves self-taught demonstrate a high degree of autonomy and resilience, characteristics that are essential in the context of entrepreneurship, which in many cases does not involve formal business training. This trend is in line with studies that highlight the ability of women entrepreneurs in Latin America to innovate and develop their businesses independently, often without the necessary infrastructure (Hechavarría & Brieger, 2020).

In terms of technological characteristics, it was noted that 82.8% of women entrepreneurs know how to use some type of technological device for their work, reflecting a gradual incorporation of technology into their craft activities. However, the remaining 17.2% who do not have technological knowledge could be at a disadvantage in the face of increasing market digitalisation. Previous studies agree that the adoption of digital technologies in the craft sector has been key to market expansion and improved competitiveness (Cataño, 2015). In fact, 49.4% of women entrepreneurs who combine direct sales with digital media show a clear adaptation to online marketing trends, which allows them to reach a wider audience and diversify their sales channels, reducing their dependence on the local market.

On the other hand, 35.5% of women entrepreneurs still prefer direct sales, suggesting that personal contact remains a crucial component in the marketing of craft products. This finding is consistent with the literature indicating that, in the handicraft sector, direct relationships with customers can contribute to customer loyalty and product appreciation, especially in a context where cultural products are often linked to local identities and traditions (Timarán Rivera et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the combination of direct and digital sales highlights the sector's flexibility in adapting to new market dynamics.

Women entrepreneurs in the handicraft sector in Cundinamarca have demonstrated a remarkable ability to combine tradition with innovation, which is reflected in their product diversification and gradual adoption of digital technologies. Despite the difficulties they face, such as a lack of institutional support and poor infrastructure for the formalisation and promotion of cultural enterprises, women entrepreneurs in the sector are positioning themselves to take advantage of the opportunities offered by digitalisation and globalisation. This process of technological adaptation is a positive indicator of the evolution of women's cultural entrepreneurship in Cundinamarca, opening up new prospects for the future of the sector in the region.

CONCLUSION

The results of this research show that women entrepreneurs in the craft sector in Cundinamarca are managing to consolidate their businesses despite the economic and social barriers they face. Most of them are already at an advanced stage in their ventures, reflecting their ability to adapt, persevere and keep their businesses active for many years. This demonstrates that, even in a challenging context, women-led cultural entrepreneurship has considerable potential to generate economic and social impact in the region.

One of the most notable trends is the growing use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Women entrepreneurs have begun to incorporate digital tools into their daily lives, allowing them to reach more customers and expand their markets. Combining direct sales with online platforms not only helps them remain competitive, but also opens up new opportunities for growth. However, there is still significant room for improvement in terms of access to and knowledge of these technologies among a percentage of women entrepreneurs, which could further boost their ventures if they are provided with adequate training.

Despite the progress made, some gaps remain, especially in terms of training in digital tools and business management. Many enterprises continue to struggle to access specialised training in these fields, which limits the impact of ICTs on their development. It is therefore essential to continue promoting digital inclusion and offering training programmes tailored to the needs of women entrepreneurs in order to enhance their competitiveness and sustainability in the long term.

In terms of associativity, women entrepreneurs who form networks have significant advantages, such as access to larger markets, training and mutual support. However, there are a considerable number of women entrepreneurs who prefer to work independently. This reflects the diversity of approaches in the sector, but also the need to strengthen support networks, both in person and online, so that women entrepreneurs can share resources and knowledge and access joint opportunities. The landscape for women cultural entrepreneurs in Cundinamarca reflects a sector with great potential. Through the integration of ICT and improved training in key areas such as business management, women entrepreneurs could overcome current barriers and take full advantage of the opportunities offered by digitalisation. The key is to accompany them in this process, providing them with the necessary tools to grow, connect with the global market and continue to preserve their cultural traditions while modernising.

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