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Women entrepreneurs in Tunisia within the context of the covid-19: Constraints, dilemmas and resilience behavior

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Abstract
This study examines the resilience behaviors of women entrepreneurs (WE) in Tunisia during the covid-19 crisis. We explore this question through the life stories of nine WE. An in-depth interview attempted to identify the repercussions of the crisis on WE and their businesses. The field study showed that this pandemic has imposed several constraints. The results obtained made it possible to identify the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities experienced by the interviewed WE in the management of their businesses. They faced the following dilemmas: Audacity Vs Caution, Stability Vs Flexibility, Effectiveness Vs Efficiency and Individual Vs Collective.

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1. Introduction
Since 2020, the world has moved from a health pandemic to a global economic crisis. As the rest of the world, Tunisia was hit hard by the recession, with an unprecedented impact on the health of businesses and their ability to cope with the crisis. In Tunisia, the socio-economic problems were already deepened by the immediate negative impacts of the 2011 revolution, characterized by a long period of uncertainty and political instability.

The year 2020 was particularly complex following the covid-19 pandemic, whose direct and indirect consequences have a devastating impact on the world in terms of health, economy and society. Covid-19 is moving from a public health pandemic to an economic crisis [1]. As a global disaster, the covid-19 crisis, has a negative impact on the development of the global economy [2]. Given the magnitude of this pandemic, this global disaster has caused a huge crisis for businesses in most countries around the world. According to the 2020 National Bureau of
Statistics of China data, although the Chinese government took measures to prevent the spread of the virus in China, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the first quarter of 2020 decreased by 6.8% compared to an increase of 6.1% in 2019 [2].

The health crisis caused by the covid-19 has affected a large part of the already weakened Tunisian economy. According to T. Cherif, “Tunisian economic businesses suffer in particular because it is mostly made up of very small and medium-sized enterprises [micro and SMEs represent nearly 98% of total enterprises] already fragile and struggling to get back on their feet since the revolution.” [3]. E. Saidane considers that Tunisian companies, whether in the public or private sectors, which were experiencing difficulties long before the coronavirus, found themselves facing an extremely serious situation and "the flow of income has either completely disappeared or decreased drastically", adding to these companies’ increasing expenses [4].

Although the effects of this health crisis on the economy were quickly obvious to the entrepreneurs, there is little information on the impact of covid-19 on WE, particularly in the Tunisian context. The number of women engaged in entrepreneurial activities amounts to 163 million in the 74 countries surveyed by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, women's report (GEM) relating to the years 2016 and 2017. This participation changed by 7% compared to the previous assessment of the same report. Women often rank second when it comes to entrepreneurship compared to their male counterparts. They often own businesses that are small in terms of employees and revenues.

In women entrepreneurship concerns, there is little research that studies the female population exclusively. According to Jenning and Brush, only 5% of studies are devoted to female entrepreneurship in journals with high scientific reputation [5]. This is because research findings take a comparative approach and insist that there are no differences in gender in entrepreneurship.

In the literature on female entrepreneurship, several researchers such as Brush & al. and Santoni highlight the barriers that WE face while running their businesses [6] and specifically, the barriers that hinder their access to basic resources to start and grow their businesses [7]. Like many countries, Tunisia has seen the entry of women into the entrepreneurial environment in recent decades. According to the United Nations Development Program, Tunisias is considered a "youthful nation" [8] as more than half of the Tunisian population is under the age of 30 [8]. The constraints to a better investing in youth and human capital have worsened with the advent of the 2011 revolution. Since then, all figures related to economic competitiveness, such as the Ease of Doing Business Index or the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), have been in sharp decline [8]. The number of women with established businesses in Tunisia is among the lowest on an international scale [9]. WE are also quite present in the informal sector.

Despite the growing interest in women entrepreneurship with significant media and political attention in recent years, very little research has focused on WE in the Tunisian context, the difficulties they face and their specific needs, especially following the crisis of the covid-19 pandemic. For instance, the National Confederation of Citizen Enterprises in Tunisia presents in 2020 the results of its Miqyes survey, a barometer of the health of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Tunisia [3]. It is a tool developed for a better understanding of the business ecosystem evolution and better informing decision makers and economic partners, while stimulating reflection on innovative and sustainable solutions for SMEs in Tunisia. In 2020, Miqyes painted a bleak picture of what Tunisian business has gone through. It put into question the relevance of decisions taken by the government, the efficiency of the banking system and even the opportunities identified during the pandemic. However, Miqyes has no particular interest in women-owned and managed businesses and its findings and conclusions remain global.

This research focuses on the impact of the covid-19 on women entrepreneurship in Tunisia and questions the resilience behaviors of WE and how they cope with the constraints related to that pandemic?

In order to answer this question, we proceed in three steps. First, based on a review of the literature, we attempt to identify the various aspects of the concept of resilience by focusing on entrepreneurs’ resilience. Secondly, we present the methodological aspects mobilized in the framework of the field study. To meet the objectives of our study, we proceeded with an exploratory qualitative approach. We explore this question through case studies of nine WE interviewed during the covid-19 crisis in November 2020 and November-December 2021. An in-depth interview attempted to identify the consequences of this pandemic: those of the-lockdown, border closures and other repercussions of the crisis on the WE and their businesses, while revealing her resilience behavior. In the third part, we devote a final section to present and discuss the results of the research based on a textual content analysis and an identification of the main themes that emerged from the life story of the nine WE interviewed. The SWOT analysis
identifies strengths and weaknesses as well as threats and opportunities. A discussion of the results follows and helps to identify the constraints, dilemmas and resilience behaviors of the nine WE.

2. Resilience and covid-19 crisis

Based on the literature review, we introduce the concept of resilience. The objective is to highlight the resilience qualities and then the relationship between the covid-19 crisis and the resilience behavior.

2.1. Concept of Resilience

The concept of "resilience" comes from the Latin resiliencia, from resiliens, and is used in several disciplines. The original meaning of the concept is linked to the science of materials where it originally referred to the resistance of a material to shocks [10]. This definition was then extended to the capacity of a body, an organism, a species, a system, a structure to overcome an alteration of its environment. It is the "fact of bouncing back". The physical phenomenon has thus been used as a metaphor in psychology to illustrate the idea that a human being can withstand trauma, hold the body, and reboot [11]. Figuratively, it is a moral strength, a quality of someone who is not discouraged, who does not give up [12]. Richardson's research related to resilience has spanned over more than 60 years and has proceeded in three waves: first, the consideration of the resilience qualities; second, the understanding of resilience as a process; and third, the development of resilience as a critical skill for dealing with adversity [17].

The resilience approach according to Anaut considers the individual based on "his or her potentials for resistance and recovery, as a subject capable of finding, in front of adversity, varied adaptive responses that allow him or her to build himself or herself despite or from deleterious or traumatic situations"[18]. It is "the capacity of a person, or of a social system, to live well, to develop positively, despite difficult living conditions, and to do so in a socially acceptable manner" [19]. "It is the fact of being able to cope with tensions or pressures and return to its initial state in addition to being able to adapt to any type of change" [20]. It is also "the ability of an individual to overcome and adapt to difficulty, uncertainty, adversity, or significant challenge" [21]. However, positive events can trigger a need for resilience as well, such as a promotion at work or a marriage [22]. Resilience is a critical component of a person's response to traumatic stress [23] and other challenging life circumstances [14]. Some view resilience as a response to a specific event, such as trauma, while others view it as a stable coping style [24].

In the process of resilience, communication skills (verbal and non-verbal) and especially interpersonal communication, interaction and exchange of resources (abilities, skills, values, beliefs), constitute the baggage of practical knowledge and successful experiences with which people confront their reality and build themselves. However, there are many factors such as intellectual efficiency, autonomy and effectiveness in dealing with the environment, sense of self-worth, relational adaptability, anticipation and planning, sense of humor, behavior and creativity that make each life course unique [25]. In summary, resilience is considered either a trait, a process, or an outcome [22]. Resilience develops over time. Indeed, people change throughout their lives and there are significant turning points at different stages. Difficult times develop skills and knowledge that can be useful later [26].

2.2. Resilience qualities

The most important periods for developing resilience qualities are childhood and adolescence [26]. Early research on resilience focused on the paradigm shift from examining risk factors that led to psychosocial problems to identifying individual strengths [27]. The theory of resilience proposed by Richardson states that there is a force within each of us that drives us to seek self-actualization, altruism, wisdom and harmony with a spiritual source of strength [28]. This strength is resilience. The character and trait of resilience means that people possess selective strengths or assets that help them survive in the face of adversity. These resilience characteristics are called protective factors or developmental assets [17].

A study conducted by Werner and Smith [29] reported the longitudinal findings of a community after studying its children since 1955 on the island of Kauai in Hawaii for 30 years. It examines a multiracial population of children designated as high risk due to broad environmental factors. Among the 700 children in the population, 200 were at risk due to perinatal stress, poverty, daily instability and severe parental mental health problems. In their 1992 study,
Werner and Smith found that 72 of these 200 children did very well despite the risk factors, inferring that what helped these young people to be competent in the face of high-risk environments was a set of resilient qualities such as being female, robust, socially responsible, adaptable, tolerant, achievement-oriented, good communicators and having good self-esteem [17]. Another series of studies conducted by British psychiatrist Rutter between 1979 and 1985 with young people in inner-city London and on the rural Isle of Wight found that a quarter of the children were resilient, even though they had experienced many risk factors. Among the resilient qualities identified in these studies, we can cite easy going temperament, being female, a positive school climate, self-control, self-efficacy, planning skills, and a warm, close personal relationship with an adult [30].

The study of resilience is based on a deductive hypothesis that can involve children, adolescents, adults, or families who, when placed in pathogenic conditions or subjected to destructuring events, resist, overcome them, and manage to maintain their psychological stability and quality of life, despite the hardships they have endured [18]. In positive psychology, studies identified resilient qualities as the strengths, positive characteristics, and virtues that characterize states of mental health, vitality, and resilience. These resilient qualities include subjective well-being, happiness, optimism, faith, self-determination, wisdom, excellence, creativity, morality and self-control, gratitude, forgiveness, dreams, hope, and humility [31]. In work-related contexts, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral resilience were conceptualized as individual resources that can be developed and strengthened over time [32]. Resilience can be measured by several measurements such as the Connor and Davidson's resilience scale which is related to five factors: persistence, tenacity and strong sense of self-efficacy, emotional and cognitive control under pressure, adaptability and ability to bounce back, control and meaning [33].

2.3. Covid-19 crisis and resilience behavior

The term crisis, which means an acute situation, corresponds to unexpected and rapid changes. In a crisis, control is limited, while those exposed to these changes are called upon to change their behavior and habits in a short period of time [34]. The Covid-19 crisis was considered as a "Black Swan" type event in relation to the expression "a rare bird in the land, rare as a black swan" to qualify it according to Taleb as an unexpected event with a low probability of occurring and that surprises everyone [35]. In fact, crises, hazards, and tragedies that strike individuals, teams, organizations, and communities require resilience behavior [36].

In the context of a crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic, managing resiliently is about guiding while being guided by contingencies. Managerial resilience then combines the act of leading, which means guiding, and resiliency, which means responding or being guided by circumstances through a process of adaptation and growth in a risky environment. It connotes the ability to absorb and learn from external shocks, while preparing to respond to what is to come [37]. Manager-leader resilience is a synthesis of two facets namely reaction and adaptation [36].

Finally, the context of the covid-19 crisis has provided adaptive answers in response to the pressures of the environment's complexity. Some SME leaders adopted an operational response through employee protection, business digitalization of their business, remote management, expense reduction, and innovation behavior. They also questioned their strategies by reprioritizing to adapt to the health crisis given the different risks, while other executives were unable to react quickly and did not successfully make the transition to telecommuting. The covid-19 pandemic appears to be a test of resilience at the global, national, industry, corporate, family, and individual levels [38].

2.4. Entrepreneurial resilience

When it comes to the entrepreneurial environment, entrepreneurs face challenges all the time [39]. Entrepreneurship is a field of endeavor characterized by stress and adversity, and in some cases even trauma [40, 33]. The literature on entrepreneurial resilience states that entrepreneurs have abilities to get going again [26] to persist and function in adverse environments [41], to create new businesses after failure [42]. Thus, resilience is the ability an entrepreneur has to cope with these difficult situations. Resilient entrepreneurs have a greater ability to renew themselves over time through innovation and to adapt to various changes and turbulence in the environment [43]. They have high self-esteem, a sense of control and are not afraid to fail. If it does happen, despite adversity, they come back stronger than before because they have learned from the situation and mistakes, and because they
have been able to change to adapt to new circumstances in their environment [44]. Entrepreneurial resilience is the ability to adapt to adversity that depends on individual resources and their interactions with the environment [45]. It is also a dynamic and an evolutionary adaptation process through which entrepreneurs acquire the knowledge, abilities, and skills that help them face an uncertain future with a positive attitude, creativity, and optimism [45]. Fisher and al. study confirms that entrepreneurs have higher resilience levels than other populations and that resilience can predict entrepreneurial success [40]. Entrepreneurial resilience means the ability of an individual to withstand a crisis. "Development resilience is the capacity overtime of a person, household or other aggregate unit to avoid poverty in the face of various stressors and in the wake of myriad shocks. If and only if that capacity is and remains high, then the unit is resilient" [46]. The WE with the traits of empathy, prudence and risk aversion and a pragmatic mind, is called to calculate well the risks of all actions, in order to choose the least risky and most profitable actions to undertake [47]. Thus, in order to face the covid-19, the best female leaders find the right balance between decisiveness and agility [47]. By way of summary, the context of the covid-19 crisis has led to the emergence of resilience behaviors. In this context, the resilience of WE is viewed through the following triptych: resistance, adaptation and transformation [48]. Resilience is also about making choices that are imposed, under duress, and not often deliberately, to ensure the survival and sustainability of the business.

3. Research methodology

To meet the objectives of this study, we proceeded with an exploratory qualitative approach using: the case study, the individual interview, the narrative method and the textual content analysis. Nine WE were interviewed. In-depth interviews were conducted during November 2020 and November-December 2021. Each interview has taken on average 2 hours and was transcribed in its entirety. All the interviewed WE and their companies were in the capital Tunis. They were the owners of their companies and were involved full time in the management of their businesses. Within the framework of this qualitative study, we opted for the semi-structured interview with open-ended questions. This technique is perfectly adapted to the context of the covid-19 pandemic, which has involved a completely new situation. The main question that guided the interview with the WE were: "What has changed for you and your business since the advent of the covid-19 pandemic?". As the objective of this empirical study was to produce a life story that describes in detail their experiences as WE, we sought to gather information on their situations and that of their companies in the context of the covid-19 pandemic: how did they react to the crisis? What were their behaviors in the face of the constraints and perverse effects of this pandemic? We thus used the tool of active listening and the techniques of questioning and paraphrasing.

4. Presentation and discussion of results

To analyze the life story of the nine interviewed WE (view table 1), the SWOT tool is used. It diagnoses the entrepreneurial and managerial situation experienced by WE by identifying strengths and weaknesses as well as threats and opportunities in the context of the pandemic crisis. The discussion of the following results identifies constraints, dilemmas and resilience behaviors of interviewed WE.

| WE | Business activity | Since | WE | Business activity | Since |
|----|------------------|------|----|------------------|------|
| 1  | Private elementary school | 1994 | 6  | Sale of handicrafts and decoration | 2015 |
| 2  | Household linen and accessories | 2004 | 7  | Bookstore and stationery store | 2018 |
| 3  | Event and wedding planner | 2008 | 8  | Creation and multimedia design | 2019 |
| 4  | Neo-American restaurant | 2014 | 9  | Data management consulting for banks, insurance companies, SMEs | 2020 |
| 5  | Personal development coaching and training center | 2015 |  |  |  |
4.1. Towards the identification of resilience behaviors of WE: constraints related to the advent of the pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic and the generalized containment put in place in Tunisia as of March 2020 to stop the spread of this pandemic led to a paralysis of the economic activity from which the nine interviewed, WE and their businesses could not escape. When asked: "What has changed for you and your business since the advent of the covid-19-related pandemic?", most interviewed WE began their story with this phrase, "I [tell you] what happened". This was followed by a detailed description of the situation they experienced since February-March 2020. This period coincided with the outbreak of the pandemic in Tunisia until the period of our survey, which corresponds to November 2020, when Tunisia experienced two waves of the pandemic with a period of very strict containment between March 22 and early May 2020. On May 4, the government began to lift the containment with a resumption of activity at 50% of the workforce in several essential sectors. These health restrictions allowed the country to reach zero people with covid-19 in June 2020 and the reopening of borders in July 2020. The following table presents the results of this SWOT analysis.

| Strengths                                                                 | Weaknesses                                          | Threats                                       | Opportunities                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Sound management/optimal management of resources and prudent measures      | Depleted financial resources and lack of means      | Lack of government support and grants         | Change in consumer behavior for purchase by delivery due to the emergence of new consumer needs: family reunions, group purchases, etc. |
| Caring and altruism, optimism, self-control                                | Vulnerability of the cash flow                      | Lack of measures to reduce contributions and social charges | More choice for delivery service providers (diversity of choice for distribution networks) and development of the delivery profession |
| Ethics and sense of responsibility                                        | Lack of funds to pay the bills                      | Rigidity of the social security system        | The crisis has accelerated the digitalization of product and service offerings |
| Stimulated by challenge and difficulties                                   | High debts and financial difficulties               | Decisions by authorities limiting opening and working hours | Need for consultants in ICT and digitalization |
| Employee-oriented management, employee resilience                         | No salary for the WE, tension in the relationship with some employees | Inflation of raw material prices              | Companies weakened by the crisis require consultants and advice |
| Image - Renown Reputation - Sympathetic capital                           | A basic product concept that is not ready for delivery | Unpredictability of the evolution of the sanitary situation | No distraction due to the covid-19 pandemic and more free time for the entrepreneur for strategic thinking |
| Experience in stock management, process review and supply chain management | 65% drop in sales during the lockdown and 40% during the reopening period | Fear of a new wave of covid-19(lockdown announcement) |                                                                                  |

Since the advent of the pandemic in Tunisia in February 2020, WE have had to deal with a range of constraints related to restrictions and stressful events such as the reopening of their businesses only in June 2020, the decrease of the turnover to 50%-80%, and the strict sanitary measures. Indeed, WE explain that consumer behavior is dependent on events related to the environment: the fear of people, the instability and complexity of the political and social framework, government decisions, and the developments in the health situation that remain unpredictable. The period of strict containment in Tunisia (from March 22 to May 4, 2020) imposed the temporary cessation of activity and resulted in many constraints as fragile cash flow, depletion of financial resources, lack of means to pay the bills, lack of salary for the WE, heavy debts and financial difficulties and at least 65% drop in turnover. Among the factors of frustration experienced and described by interviewed WE, there is the feeling of lack of support from the state whose means and resources are limited, given the context of socio-economic post-revolution crisis. They described...
the repercussions of the containment and how the company had to face the payment of the accumulation of previous debts (social charges - NSSF). In addition, all the profits generated by the resumption of the activity were absorbed by these charges. Interviewed WE describe this situation and evaluate it as presenting conditions like the start-up and launch phase of their businesses with all the constraints (risk-taking, cost of initial charges, uncertainties of solvency, etc.): "the summer worked very well, the only worry was that we had to pay the debts".

4.2. Dilemmas and resilience behavior of WE

The results show that the interviewed WE faced several dilemmas as shown in the following figure:

![Diagram showing constraints, dilemmas, and resilience behaviors](image)

**Fig. 1. Resilience behaviors of nine WE within the context of covid-19 in Tunisia**

*Dilemma 1 - Caution versus Audacity*

Resilient behavior is the ability of WE to persist in unfavourable environments and to create new projects despite failures or negative experiences. Respondents engaged their companies in a new activity despite stressful and constraining events. Resilience is also about making choices that are imposed, under duress, and not often deliberately to ensure the survival and sustainability of the business. These are emergent decisions based on the uncertain context. Even if the WE of the survey are prudent in the management of their financial resources, their behaviors reflects an audacious attitude. Indeed, despite the constraints and the context that forces them to act within a restricted context, they continue to improve their products/services and to innovate as much as possible: "Whenever we have a little flexibility, we still move forward. Why? Because it's not a disease that's going to stop us from moving. It's like a soldier. Even if he [she] is at war, as long as he [she] has strength to move, as long as he [she] has a step to move forward, well, he [she] will move forward until the end and he isn't dead. We aren't dead. Thanks God we aren’t dead, we aren’t sick, we can still live. We live and we move forward, and we pretend, as if there was nothing, because there is nothing, really! In reality! The day something comes up, we’ll deal with it!".

Surprisingly, in Chinese, a crisis is called "Wei Ji," which means both a danger and an opportunity [2]. The following testimony shows that WE’s behaviors oscillate between ensuring the survival of the business and investing in new projects for her company. "The meeting agenda today is survival. We're like a tree, we're in the middle of a storm, we just have to make sure the tree doesn't get blown away. So, the meeting agenda is survival right now. But I still keep looking. I keep asking the bank for the opportunity to [finance new projects], because I know there's a benefit to draw from the situation. I'm thinking about .... there are other projects that are coming to light".

*Dilemma 2 - Stability Versus Flexibility*

The results show that WE’ behavior oscillates between stability and flexibility, between development and survival. They have not stopped projecting themselves into the future as if the future were predictable, they are
trying to find a way to work on products/services, to expand and develop the brand. During this pandemic, there was an extremely turbulent and unpredictable environment. Yet, WE did not stop programming new projects for the digitalization of their companies. Their behaviors show a flexibility and a continuous adaptation process: "There are other projects that are emerging", "to make a platform on the phone, to facilitate ordering and delivery", "a platform, website and an application that will provide the company an online presence". According to a speech by Winston Churchill on March 5, 1946, you should never let a good crisis go to waste [49]. With the crisis, windows open. For leaders, it is important to jump at the opportunity to inject much-needed change into otherwise rigid systems. Despite the tensions and pressures from its external environment, it seeks to open up and project itself. Also, the pandemic crisis induced situations of doubt, loss of vision, uncertainty because the covid-19 virus is unpredictable, and there is no visibility. This explains why certain activity choices made by the entrepreneur are emergent choices and not deliberate ones. For instance, this entrepreneur does not know if she will keep the new delivery business activity in the long term: "delivery as a percentage of sales is 15% [...] I don't know yet if I’ll be keeping this business.”.

**Dilemma 3 - Efficiency Versus Effectiveness**

Despite the pandemic, interviewed WE engaged in strategic thinking and operational actions to introduce changes in the operation of their businesses and improve the quality of their products/services: "we continue to invest so as not to degrade the quality. Indeed, from now on, it’s our company that makes its own minced meat to ensure the quality of its ingredients and that of its main raw material". That WE has also shortened the supply circuit "We found a supplier who has its own slaughterhouse with interesting prices", going directly to the producer to avoid going through distributors who have experienced a deterioration of their services with stocks that are not sold out and have kept the same prices by reducing the quality. This reflects a change in the supply strategy. In order to process its own raw material, which remains a major differential asset for the quality of the products sold, this woman entrepreneur decides to go directly to the producers and invests in a machine. This choice enables the value creation and finally keeping the strategic position of the company on the market and the search for distinctive advantages: volume/cost, cost/quality.

**Dilemma 4 - Individual Vs Collective**

WE face difficulties to make decisions in favor either of the employees or to fulfill their duties towards the State. In other words, shall WE pay salaries or pay taxes and social charges? Indeed, the period of containment caused the temporary cessation of the business activity and created constraints regarding their responsibilities towards their employees. How could they continue to pay their employees when the company was no longer generating financial income? One WE testimonial shows that the decision was not difficult and even in her voice, it was possible to hear that it was obvious: "I'm staying open only to keep you and pay your salaries". According to his testimony, the decision making was quick and without hesitation. Indeed, her immediate reaction in favor of the socio-economic interest of employees reflects her people-oriented style and reveals qualities of empathy and caring for her employees. The WE resilience within that context is dependent on both the WE and her employees' resilience. It is embodied in a participatory and collective approach: "fortunately, there’s this enthusiasm from the employees". The resilient attitude of the employees is important because beyond the decisions imposed by WE, the decisions come from the employees themselves to redeploy human resources and refocus the company on a limited offer "to avoid waste". It’s as if WE manage this crisis by detecting the protective factors that allow them to keep their businesses running. WE testimonials suggest that her asset is the team that works with her because without the support of the employees, the WE could not go through with her choices. Stressors, crises and shocks turned into new solutions "Otherwise, they [her employees] told me: ‘we're going to open on Sundays’. Now, we work every day, even on Sunday". The interaction between that entrepreneur and her employees allows for exchange and reciprocity in an ongoing process to seek solutions to unpredictable situations imposed by the covid-19.

**5. Conclusion**

This research examines the resilience of WE in Tunisia with respect to the management of their businesses during the covid-19 crisis. Based on the life stories of nine WE, this empirical study identifies the strengths and weaknesses
as well as the threats and opportunities caused by the crisis related to the covid-19 pandemic. The results suggest that the interviewed WE faced the following dilemmas: Caution Vs Audacity, Stability Vs Flexibility, Efficiency Vs Effectiveness, and Individual Vs Collective. Despite the internal fragility and the uncertainties of the external environment, their businesses seized the opportunities of the crisis and turned them into strengths. Although the interviewed WE focused on the short-term survival problems, their entrepreneurial orientation was towards development goals, finding new markets and opportunities through the digitalization of their businesses. The results of this exploratory study suggest that the resilience behaviors of the interviewed WE are not limited to operational reactions and that the crisis led them to adopt new thinking strategic orientations. They combined both the long and the short term, and thus a coupling between a day-to-day management and strategic management. We must also emphasize that this study only focuses on nine cases of WE, which limits the external scope of our results. It would therefore be appropriate to extend these analyses to other cases of WE.

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