

An Exploratory Study of Women Entrepreneurship: Developing Conceptual Framework by Applying Attribution Theory for Describing Successful Single Mother Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

Women entrepreneurs have now been recognized as a driving force for the economies of many countries. Women entrepreneur successfully contributed to job opportunity and improved the quality of life. Women entrepreneurs, especially single mother entrepreneurs, have gone through countless obstacles and lowest point in their personal life experience, which transformed them into independent and successful women. This paper is exploring the Attribution Theory as the underpinning theory and then proposed a conceptual framework explaining individual factors and situational factors towards women entrepreneurship mainly to describe the unique phenomenon of successful single mother entrepreneurs. The element of individual factors, namely cognitive, motivation, personality trait and competencies, are crucial for explaining single mother entrepreneur's success. In contrast, situational factors like economics, political and social are added value to the single mother entrepreneur's business achievement. Further research is needed to establish a viable women entrepreneurship model, especially for single mother entrepreneurs. The existing theoretical is still unexplored and cannot explain women entrepreneurship's phenomena, especially single mother entrepreneurs. Therefore, this discussion offers some direction for future research in women entrepreneurship, particularly on the model of successful single mother entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurship, Psychology, Sociology.

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurial activities have become part of the economic development strategies of many countries in the world. The latest trend grasps entrepreneurial development activities in a country emphasizing and focusing on women. There are consistent thoughts among policymakers and scholars that the number of women entrepreneurs leading in entrepreneurial activity has grown significantly (Al Matroushi et al., 2020; Ayob et al., 2018; Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017), even though men still operate the majority of businesses. Women's entrepreneurship in Malaysia has grown over time, focusing on industrialization and an increasing interest in privatization, self-employment, and business-oriented

women's entrepreneurship (Ayob et al., 2018). However, it is seen as if women's involvement in entrepreneurship is not noticeable as it is likely people only know little about women entrepreneurs compared to men entrepreneurs.

Along the process of creating job opportunities, contributing to innovation, and creating wealth in developed economies, women entrepreneurs commonly confronted various obstacles, limitations, and roadblocks. The obstacles are listed as difficulties in acquiring financial resources, traditional gender roles, a lack of human capital (e.g. management skills), limited access to networks and fear of failure (Cho et al., 2020). All the issues confronted by women entrepreneurs were previously discussed from feminist approaches that shape the varied strategic choice that led to the growth and success of their business (Teoh & Chong, 2008). Moreover, women entrepreneurs had difficulties applying work-life balance (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014), especially for single mother entrepreneurs. The previous life experience of single mother entrepreneur mainly being associated with traumatic and economic losses, pressure from the families and society (Tran Nguyet, 2021). Single mother entrepreneurs encounter all the issue and developed ways on how to mitigate the unwanted impacts while improving their core value in life, especially their businesses. The financial stress (Adnan et al., 2021) and social pressure (Zakaria & Md. Akhir, 2018) make a single mother entrepreneur laden with evocative experience, which became an internal hindrance for them to power the incorporate qualities of successful entrepreneurs. Ismail, Rahim, Kamal, Mat, and Husin (2015) noted the growing numbers of single mothers who run a small business for income generation despite their lack of various business skills. Abu Bakar, Md Ali, Md Som and Bujang, (2007) denoted majority of single mother entrepreneurs intentionally involved in low-risk businesses like food and drink business, clothing, and retail trade. The reason is the existent of different risk in business like financial risk, government regulation, technology (Salleh et al., 2021) that the single mother entrepreneurs must deal with can affect the success of their business. Moreover, the social environmental factors; for example, stigmatization, can be more complex than one might expect, especially when entrepreneurial values require single mother entrepreneurs to be aggressive, thus preventing them from playing their part effectively in society and leading to success (Topimin et al., 2019). All these challenges are confronted by single mother entrepreneurs independently.

Previous literature mainly discuss on the phenomenon of women's entrepreneurship (Max & Ballereau, 2013), the women business owners themselves (Hechavarria et al., 2019), and factor affecting their businesses (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017). However, existing theoretical underpinning still cannot explain the women entrepreneurship phenomena especially single mother entrepreneurs. Therefore, this study will lead to the future direction of highlighting successful women entrepreneurs' factors and developing an appropriate model for successful single mother entrepreneurs.

2. Literature Review

The most frequent component dictated in entrepreneurship studies are cognition, motivation, competencies and personality that appear under psychological perspectives besides the existing theory of economic and sociological.

2.1. Individual Factors

Fadzil et al. (2019) mention that human cognition differed from one person to the others based on their past experienced, background and knowledge, which can influence their judgment and decision in the entrepreneurial process and activities. Even there are some similarities between men and women entrepreneurs quality such as creativity, risk-taking, inspiration, need for autonomy and freedom, tolerance of ambiguity, hardworking and persistent attitude, and optimism, Gartner, (1989) finds that it is beneficial in stressing certain characteristics which make entrepreneurs different from others. In the context of women entrepreneurs, their motivation somehow different because of the distinctive condition, example the focus in this study is to single mother. Shane et al., (2012) describe the significance of motivation based on different opportunities emerging associate with the current situation happen. For example, women were pulled into entrepreneurship in a remarkably similar way to men. However, the push factors they experienced were largely related to their families (that is being flexibility in term of time with children). This finding is significant because women considered (in advance of starting the business) the potential difficulties of integrating their family and the business (Kirkwood, 2009).

- **Cognitive**

The entrepreneurial cognitive can explain the entrepreneur's behavior, which is related to identifying of opportunities for the creation of businesses and business growth (Sánchez et al., 2011). Arafat et al., (2020) explain on perception from the external environment that influences the opportunities and risk in business for women entrepreneurs in India. Other than that, self-efficacy is one of the entrepreneurial cognition refer to the capabilities of entrepreneurs to perform business-related tasks, which are the core resources for an entrepreneur (Yusuff et al., 2019). Previously (Bandura, 1999) claimed that people can change their behavior in everyday life by using self-efficacy to determine individual performance. The changing behavior manifests as more and more women entrepreneurs engaged in high grow business (Sweida & Reichard, 2013). Wannamakok & Chang, (2020) discuss cognitive based on the social cognitive theory from the perspective of entrepreneurial role models, opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial knowledge, which catalysts for motivating potential female entrepreneurs. The findings indicate women may still be motivated to entrepreneurship if they are exposed to role models, able to recognize market opportunities and equipped with knowledge about initiating and running a new venture. Thus, this study appears at an appropriate time as the researcher want to expose the successful single mother entrepreneurs as perfect role models in entrepreneurship activities.

- **Motivation**

Previous research elaborating about entrepreneur's motivation factors such as job satisfaction (Parasuraman et al., 1996), working experience (Brush et al., 2010), family business background (Abdul Kader et al., 2009), age (Roddin et al., 2012; Yetim, 2008) and education level (Sappleton, 2009). Farouk et al., (2014) believed work experience assist the entrepreneur to create an opportunity to business venture as the knowledge on specific product, technology used, markets are useful for go through the process and decision making. Singh, (1993) clarify the different motive among women entrepreneurs in his study. He states that become independent and achieving something was most predominant among women entrepreneur who was self-inspired and self-motivated and who started their business on their own initiative, whereas purely pecuniary considerations motivated those who

inherited the business started either by their husbands or some other member of the family. Nel et al. (2010) focus on the issue of work-life balance for single mother entrepreneurs as they encounter risk involved in running their own business while setting aside the amount of appropriate time for their family responsibilities. So, single mother entrepreneur's motivation for the business success is a vast consideration towards providing their family with a better life.

- **Personality traits**

The concept of personality, in a broad sense, includes abilities (e.g. general intelligence, as well as numerical, verbal, spatial or emotional intelligence), motives (e.g. need for achievement, power or affiliation), attitudes (including values) and characteristics of temperament in defining the overarching style of a person's experiences and actions (Roddin et al., 2012). The majority of studies examining women entrepreneurs personality relatively similar with man (Brush et al., 1977; Hundera et al., 2019). Brockhaus, (1980) focus three main aspect that related to entrepreneur's psychology are achievement, locus of controls and risk taking. A. F. Fadzil et al., (2020) found seven themes of entrepreneurial personality as a conceptual process of entrepreneurship such as creativity, risk taking, inspiration, need for autonomy & freedom, tolerance for ambiguity, hard-working and persistence and lastly optimism. From feminist perspective, specific traits of women entrepreneurs such as socio-emotional which include understanding, warm, emotional, and caring that assist in strategize their business growth (Huq et al., 2020). Research done in India by Agarwal et al., (2020) witness women entrepreneurs confidently utilizing their strong and powerful personality traits confronting the deterrent in small vocation. Rani and Hashim, (2017) notice women entrepreneurs in Malaysia able to produce profitable businesses as long as they successfully overcome the obstacles.

- **Competencies**

Competence is a job-related term that refers to the fields of work where an individual is skilled. It was found that entrepreneurs with entrepreneurial competencies seek for better opportunities and formulate a better strategy that fits their business (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2010).) Mitchelmore et al., (2014) analyzes the competency level of female entrepreneurship and determines that there are four main groups of competencies that are most important to business performance and growth. These four clusters are: personal and relationship; business and management; entrepreneurship; and the efficiency of human relations. Rasdi et al., (2020) denoted women entrepreneurs that equip themselves with self-leadership skills not only able to thrive in businesses, but also in their personal lives. Besides that, women entrepreneurs who use oral communication positively establish connections, offer support, boosted participation, shared information, have good interpersonal skills, and get support (Abdul Rashid, 2016). Besides the communication skill, other important skill required by entrepreneurs include the computer skill that influence their personal judgment decision (A. F. M. Fadzil et al., 2017). Skills and competencies required by single mother entrepreneurs were secure from their personal experience and background (Broussard et al., 2012).

2.2. Situational factors

Brush, (1992) explain on the environment factor which refers to a relationship that exists between women entrepreneurs and surrounding conditions. Entrepreneurs are more likely to thrive in business if they have personal encouragement, guidance, motivation, and knowledge especially if they are from small rural area (Abdul Kader et al., 2009). Syed et al. (2011) in their study has identified the success

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factors of women entrepreneurs in Southern Region of Malaysia whereby they found that family support, social ties and internal motivation are the significant elements affecting success among women entrepreneurs. Specifically, for single mother entrepreneurs, lack of support from the social surrounding might lead to higher risk of business loss. The scenario is keep bugging single mother entrepreneurs as they often feel self-bound by the environment such as family relationship, employment and (Brush et al., 1977; Shane et al., 2012). In other words, single mother entrepreneurs feel the need for them to meet the social needs of their environment. So, when discussing situational factors, several factors such as economic, political, and social comes to the picture.

- **Economics**

Lindvert et al., (2015) argued that only larger business contributes to economic development in developing country without noticing indirect contribution of small business. This condition has made it difficult for them to create networks, particularly in financial markets such as commercial banks, venture capitalists, microcredit lending, business angels and public support structures targeted at entrepreneurs. Bland, (2019); Mansor and Che Mat, (2010); Solesvik et al., (2019) concluded that access and availability of finances and government support are critical success factors as perceived by small business owner/managers. In the context of women entrepreneur in Malaysia, micro-financing facilities complemented by schemes are being offered by micro financial institutions such as the National Business Group Fund (TEKUN Nasional) and the Malaysian Trusts Trust (AIM). For March 2014, TEKUN Nasional has loaned 347,225 loans totalling RM2.98 billion to women entrepreneurs. Nguyen et al., (2014) believed that with government support, these schemes could be expanded to provide both a greater level of funding and wider access; for both business start-up and subsequent growth for women entrepreneur's business.

- **Political**

At a macro level, women entrepreneurs have now been recognized as the contributor of the economic growth. More and more initiative from the government especially in develop and emerging country like Australia (Farr-Wharton & Brunetto, 2007), Korea (Ha Lee et al., 2011), United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Naser et al., 2009), Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2014), Malaysia (Rose et al., 2006; Yusuff et al., 2019) were available for the women entrepreneur business development. The discussion signified the roles of government in supporting the development of business networks by introducing key players within an industry and/or acting as a support (providing knowledge or secretarial support) for existing business networks. Unfortunately, there are a cases in some country that the women entrepreneurs unable to acquire appropriate support from the government (Said & Enslin, 2020). Al-Shami et al., (2020) discover that in order to improve on opportunity exploitation efficiency and assist in mitigating the external and internal causes of business failure among Malaysian females, government need to understand the specific obstacles facing female entrepreneurs. That is the reason there are business policies at government level opportunities specifically for women entrepreneur to grow and support their business (Ibrahim et al., 2017). Plus, proper guidance and assistant from the government in term of R&D especially for product innovation for the service business have had a significant effect only in the case of SMEs (Kim et al., 2016).

- **Social**

Surrounding oneself with positive people will have an effect on an entrepreneur's confidence and activity in the business (Pardo & Alfonso, 2017). Support from close family and friends is needed for the single mother entrepreneurs to manage their small kids and business. It has been previously shown by Hoe et al., (2012) that the survival of business very much affected by the support of external motivation factors like family and close friends. Besides that, social network is important to ensure the continuity of the business. A social network is made up of persons to whom the individuals primarily relate on a social level. Normally single mother will have their own support group that allows the member to discuss and gather to listen to others challenges and difficulties (Mclanahan & Adelberg, 2015). This network helps the single mother to actively involved in the business because they have enough support from their circle or friends. (Brüderl & Preisendörfer, 1998) notice that entrepreneurs with broad and diverse social network are more successful because of full support from their network which increases the probability of survival and growth of newly founded businesses.

3. Underpinning theory

Attribution theory makes its debut in social psychology and other related disciplines like human resources (Hewett et al., 2017), specifically motivational, organizational behavior to see employees' behavior towards their achievements (Martinko & Mackey, 2019). The great enthusiasm generated by attribution theories in the 1980s does not last long as it declined ever since (Weiner, 2008). Indeed, this theory has been credited as a dominant idea before been upgraded by Jones (1972) and Harold Kelley (1967) developed the theoretical structure, which is now seen as the epitome of social psychology (Malle, 2011).

In order to explain women's' entrepreneurship phenomenon, particularly the successful of single mother entrepreneurs, this study has taken attribution theory as underpinning theory to discuss two perspectives that associated with their success. Attribution theory defines attribution as a form of individual explanation for the cause of their success and failure. This theory's fundamental focus states that a person has a natural desire to know the causes of essential outcomes in their lives and that all their properties affect their response to this outcome (Heider, 1958). According to Heider (1958), a person act as amateur scientists in social settings. He also pointed out that, "we generally explain the behavior in two ways; either we attribute behavior to someone or a situation". The theory of attribution by Heider (1958) separates behavioral properties into two angles, external or internal factors. Internal attribution: When an internal attribution is made, the causes of the behavior given are in that person, that is, the variables that make a person accountable such as attitude, abilities, characters, and personalities. External attribution: When external attribution is made, the cause of the behavior is given to the condition in which the behavior is perceived. It is a form of analysis for determining success and failure. Through this theory, internal attribution and external attributions can be translated in explaining the successful of single mother entrepreneur's either financially or non-financially. Hence, attribution theory is crucial for this study to help people understand causes of successful behavior of single mother entrepreneurs.

4. Proposed Framework

Figure 1 depicts the proposed conceptual framework based on Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958) that can explain women entrepreneurship phenomenon, particularly the successful of single mother entrepreneurs. There are two factors highlighted which are individual factors and situational factors

towards the successful of single mother entrepreneurs. Individual factors are related to internal strength that provides unique characteristics and qualities as well as relating to personality based on the specific role of the individual. Attribution literally means giving responsibility to the actor, in this context refer to the single mother entrepreneur. For the situational factor, Kirkwood, (2009) believed that entrepreneur was not motivated by single factor, but more complex and integrated factors surround them. Referring Brush (1992) explaining that the environment refers to a relationship that exists between women entrepreneurs and surrounding conditions like impacts of political, cultural, technological.

Figure.1 showing the conceptual framework of single mother entrepreneur's success.



5. Conclusion

In conclusion, women entrepreneurship is getting widely discussed among researchers as their contribution to the family, community and the country are being recognized. One sub-group under women entrepreneurs that been discuss in this paper are comes from single mother. The phenomena of successful single mother entrepreneurs can lead to better economic development and perhaps they can be the perfect role model for women entrepreneurs. Consequently, the existence of individual factor and situational factor clearly show the interconnection with the single mother entrepreneurs' success. The proposed framework is useful for women entrepreneurs, particularly single mother entrepreneurs, for strategic planning as they can sustain and be a competitive business venture.

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