

Women Entrepreneurial Characteristics in Developing Successful Brands in

Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Expansion of women in higher positions of the organizations and emerging trend of women entrepreneurs has enhanced the scholarly interest in the field of women entrepreneurship and their characteristics. Nevertheless, the contribution of them is still invisible in emerging economies. Developed and established economies have been the focus of many researchers whereas the author has focused on Sri Lanka, an emerging economy to understand the contribution of women entrepreneurs. Main objective of this research is to understand the how women entrepreneurs have developed successful brands in Sri Lanka and how they have used their innate femininity in developing their businesses. Industries focused by the researcher in order to obtain an understanding of the women entrepreneurial characteristics were fashion, bakery and cosmetics in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Seminal literature for the research was focused on ten women entrepreneur characteristics. This research was conducted as a qualitative research. Primary data collection has been done using in- depth interviews with three women entrepreneurs selected by purposive sampling method and participant and non-participant observations with data triangulation. Based on the literature an interview guide was prepared and the data was collected. The richer interpretations have been derived from the in-depth interviews and narratives were built using the stories narrated. Data has been analysed using thematic analysis. Practical implication of this research is to identify the unique entrepreneurial characteristics and use them to enhance the women led businesses in emerging economies.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurs, Entrepreneurial Characteristics, Brand Development, Emerging Economies

INTRODUCTION

Women entrepreneurs have been significantly contributing in economic development. According to Amrita, Garg & Singh (2018) approximately 25.8%-28.1% of total entrepreneurship is handled by women lead and women owned businesses. Emerging economies show an increased interest in women developed small and medium sized businesses. Sri Lanka is one of the emerging economies where the country has shown a significant enthusiasm toward the women entrepreneurs and their contribution. During last couple of decades, the women entrepreneurs have contributed immensely with their innovations and creations (Daily FT, 2019).

Productivity, capacity and the size of the economy can be improved with the competitiveness and the creativity that entrepreneurs produce (Zanjirchi et al., 2019). According to Loscocco & Bird

(2019) it is evidently, a rise of women own business is visible in last few decades worldwide. With

46% of women in the labour force (Daily FT, 2019), in an emerging economy such as Sri Lanka, shows the same characteristics in the Small Enterprises owned by women.

In male dominant societies and emerging economies in the southern part of the Asian region gender inequality is widely experienced. Furthermore, it is evident from the consistent research findings that the majority of the women owned businesses are less lucrative compared with men owned businesses (Loscocco & Bird, 2016; Bird & Sapp, 2004; Hundley, 2001; Loscocco & Robinson, 1991; Merrett & Gruidl, 2000; Robb & Coleman, 2009). However, according to Jalbert (2000), women owned businesses are qualitatively different from men owned businesses and women demonstrate specific characteristics those produce immense creativity and ‘their way of doing things’. Yet, women entrepreneurial characteristics have been researched mainly in the developed economies yet the focus on the emerging economies have been limited (Idris, 2009; Kimosop, Korir & White, 2016).

Research Problem

According to the World Bank (2019) 52.01% of the population in Sri Lanka is females showing a majority of the country is females. Out of Sri Lanka’s economically inactive population 73.5% is female (Daily FT,2019) which indicates that there are unexploited resources in the country. 29.7% women are engaged in agriculture-based activities (Daily News, 2018), with the purpose of survival. However, in a male dominant culture, women are lagged behind without participating in the economic development. Many women do not like or do not have the opportunity to become entrepreneurs due to the idea that women are born to take care of the family and that the women are not strong as men. At the same time, the idea that the women led businesses are less lucrative. Hence the researcher would like to address the problem of misconception about the women and the entrepreneurs. At the same time, since most of the researchers have focused on the characteristics of women entrepreneurs and brand development separately, researcher would like to focus on finding how some of the highly successful women entrepreneurs have used their implicit women entrepreneurial characteristics in developing successful brands in Sri Lanka.

Research Objectives

Main Objective- To discuss how the successful women entrepreneurs have developed successful brands in Sri Lanka

Sub-Objectives

1. To understand how the brands have been developed by the women entrepreneurs
2. To identify different women entrepreneurial characteristics in depth

Researcher has selected three different industries in order to carry out the research such as fashion,

bakery and cosmetic. Significance of carrying out the research is to understand how the implicit women entrepreneurial characteristics can support in developing successful brands. Successfulness of the women entrepreneurs has been determined by the researcher based on the market share, brand loyalty, brand awareness and the longevity of the business. Industries such as fashion, cosmetic or beauty and bakery which are extensively related in emotional category and creativity would be much contributed by women as they can be considered to women centric items. The industrial contribution can be enhanced by creative women entrepreneurs and development of women entrepreneurial culture will be important. The implication out of this research is that implicit entrepreneurial abilities of women can be appealed to be a thrust to develop successful and prominent brands in the market.

Researcher has not disclosed the names of the women entrepreneurs due to the confidentiality. However, these three are coming from high end fashion and cosmetic retailing and small and medium scale bakery retailing.

Following the introduction, research has critically reviewed the literature and identified the research methodology to be followed. An in-depth understanding of the selected behaviours of women will be acquired by interviews and meaning will be derived through developed themes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women entrepreneurs are the fastest growing entrepreneurs in the world (Brush et al., 2006; Brush & Cooper, 2012). They bring many assets and skills to the global market (Jalbert, 2000; Sajjad et al., 2020). In contrasting with developed nations, poverty, widowhood, divorces and lesser family income may have caused women to enter to the business world in developing nations (Carter et al., 2001; Brush et al., 2004; Sajjad et al., 2020). However, Suriyamurthi et al. (2018) revealed different obstacles faced by women in developing nations as they try to develop their businesses. As the women entrepreneurs significantly contribute to the economic development, (Sajjad et al., 2020) government and the financial institutes should be able to interfere in solving these problems (Suriyamurthi et al., 2018).

According to Welsh & Kaciak (2018) compared to their male counterparts, female businesses are built more in qualitative nature while mitigating work-family conflicts, and more stable businesses (Carter et al., 2001). According to Jalbert (2002) and Carter et al. (2001) women entrepreneurs possess specific characteristics that reveal their creativity innovativeness. Similar to them, Burns (2007) explains that the personal character traits have a greater influence on the success of entrepreneurs. Hence the author has focused on different entrepreneurial characteristics which are contributing more towards the successful brand development.

Women business leaders and entrepreneurs disclose their ability in building long term relationships

as well as maintaining work-life balance (Carter et al., 2001; Menninio & Brayfield, 2002). Similarly, Jennings and McDouglad (2007) confirms that family contexts have a significant impact on the women entrepreneurship than men. Further to that Brush et al. (2009) confirmed that the metaphor “motherhood” is included in 5M framework mainly confirming the family orientation of a woman. In comparison, instrumental and affective family enrichment and support has been shown as a benefit to the women entrepreneurs (Powelle & Eddelston,2013). However, according to Danhouser (1999) & Jurik (1998), the family-oriented nature of a woman can limit them to home base businesses and they are less lucrative. Similarly, women focus on quality than cost efficiency and the focus on small businesses due to self-efficacy (Greer & Greene, 2003) this too can be less lucrative.

In comparison to the male counterparts, women tend to select retail trade and service sector (Loscocco & Robinson, 1994; Cejka & Eagly, 1999) mainly due to gender stereotyping. However, service sector can be dominant by the women with their innate attributes to serve people.

Kimosop et al. (2016) illustrated a few women characteristics that can be useful in businesses. They are affectionate, nurturing, cooperative, imaginative, and artistic. Able to tolerate disappointment, examine and tackle issues, diligent soul of advancement and strong will to go out on a limb (Sebora and Theerapatvong, 2010) have been shown as some of the major attributes of women which can be utilized in businesses. At the same time, Jalbert (2000) showcased the below.

I. Risk Taking Propensity	II. Social adroitness
III. Focus	IV. Inter Personal Skills
V. High Energy Level	VI. Competence in Finance
VII. Married, First Born	VIII. Managing Relationships
IX. Self Employed Father	X. General Business Management Skills

Table 1: Characteristics Tendencies of Women Business Owners (Jalbert, 2000)

Adler (1997) confirmed that the female value relational style of communication and management. Many scholars have agreed upon that it is mandatory to communicate with the employees about the current business situation. Attributes of women in valuing the relationships and communication is a key in success of business. As explained by Kimosop et al. (2016) women are more communal compared to men. Communal role of women brings out nurturance, connectedness, kindness, and emotional expressiveness which is excessively used in building successful businesses (Eagly, 1987).

As explained by Dyer & Handler (1994) duty to enhance family unit economy, ability to adapt to

family related possibilities, ability to adjust family and work, relationship with life partner, relationship with kids, homemaker part, early adolescence experience and personal flexibility are few attributes of the women which many have converted in to strength to run the business.

On the ground of these literature, the researcher has conducted the study in identifying how women have utilized their feminine characteristics in developing successful brands in Sri Lanka.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Being subjective on the viewpoints of individuals and developing meanings for different individual behaviours has been the foundation of social constructivism (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996; Hoffman, 1990). Many researches have been conducted in understanding the women entrepreneurial characteristics. However, the findings have been generalized and accepted to be “true”. Further to the explanation of Anderson & Goolishian (1988); Gergen (1999), researcher should resign to be the “knower” but should understand the phenomena in-depth. Based on the above argument, the researcher has conducted the research in order to give meanings for the socially mediated dialogue of women entrepreneurs.

Following the social constructivism, the researcher has selected deductive approach in conducting the research. On the contrary to the quantitative design, to obtain more meanings and interpretations to social phenomena and for richer understanding, the qualitative research design should be followed (Howard and Borland, 2001; Saunders, 2007). Similarly, qualitative research provides an opportunity understand about the behaviours of people which is the fundamental purpose of this research. Multiple case study method allows investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the real-life events, behaviours, organizations and managerial processes (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Thus, the researcher has selected three women entrepreneurs from fashion, bakery and cosmetic industries.

A close association between the researcher and the participant can be built and obtain richer understanding on their view points and actions (Lather, 1992; Robottom & Hart, 1993; Crabtree & Miller, 1999). With the above justification, the research will be conducted as a multiple case study. Data has been collected using purposive sampling method under non-probability sampling. In-depth interviews have been conducted in order to gain richer data as face to face interviews provide an opportunity to appreciate the world in participant’s lens (Kvale, 1996; Boyce & Neal, 2006). Though there’s an opportunity to observe the interviewee during the interview (Wisker, 2001), the technique of participant and non-participant observations can reveal the reality of the life events (Bryman, 1988; Silverman, 2008). Three hours of participant and non- participant observation have been conducted by the researcher to view the reality of stories explained by the interviewer as a

way of data triangulation. The sample comprise with three women entrepreneurs who are from

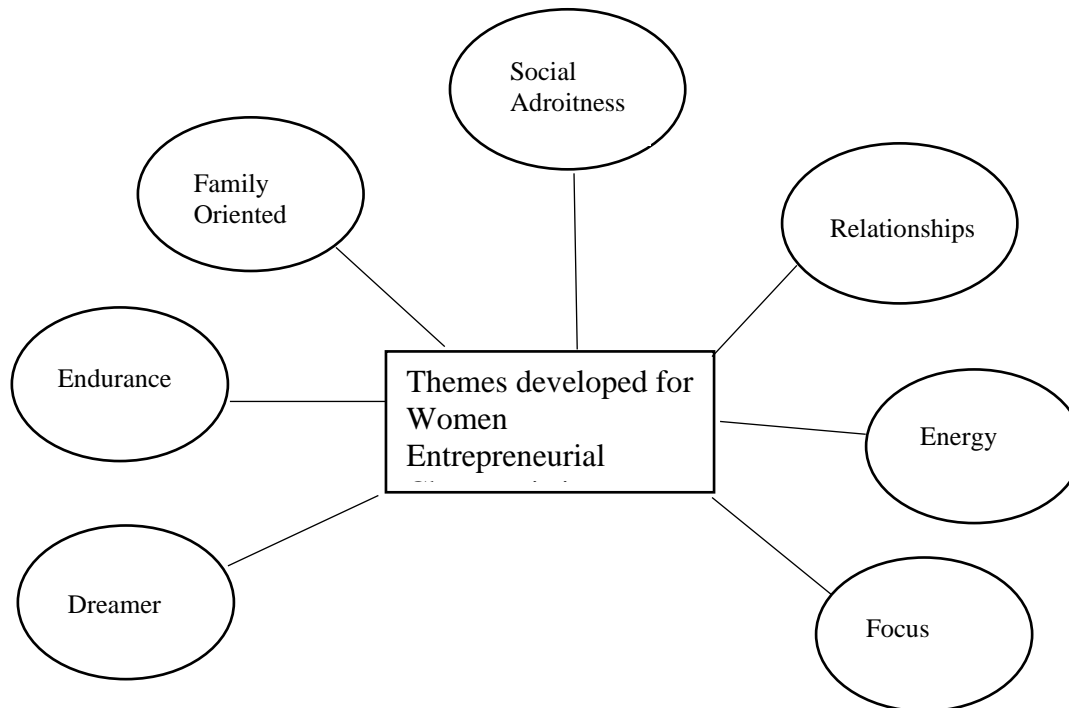
high end fashion and cosmetic retailing and bakery retailing.

Stories have been coded and themes have been developed to analyse the data. As explained by Braun & Clarke (2013), thematic analysis provides a clear picture of the stories collected by each respondent. Hence, the researcher has selected the thematic analysis in order to analyse the qualitative data collected.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Based on the found literature, following an interview guideline, the researcher has conducted in-depth interviews. Data has been coded and themes have been developed. These themes will be supported with excerpts from the responses.

Thematic Map



Themes can be defined as follows.

Definition for the theme *dreamer* is that the entrepreneurs constantly dream about how they have to upgrade themselves and the businesses. It was evident that the respondents were having dreams to open up their own business and bring it up to a certain level. A mother has dreams for the children and never give up on them. Similarly, women entrepreneurs used to constantly dream about businesses. The difference between men and women as dreamers is that men have more freedom to realize their dreams than women. However, it has been identified that women are constant dreamers. *Endurance* is a women character by nature. Evidently, a woman is running the family and historically, real women have shown great endurance in different scenarios throughout the world. Building of a business, running it with day-to-day issues and failure of it have to be endured. This has to be managed with the balancing the house which has been considered the prime duty of being a woman.

Traditionally, the role of the woman is to take care of the family. In contrasting to the barriers faced by women due to this can be converted to a strength in brand building. Usual nature of a *family orientation* has influenced them to take of the business and the staff like a family. Women nature of getting adopted to situations, understanding and sympathy can be taken under *social adroitness*. Women skills to handle any situation wisely and being proactive also can be included here. Building and managing relationships is another innate characteristic of women which is highly useful in developing businesses. Women are communal compared to men and they value relationships. Hence the *relationships* have been built to create successful brands.

The theme *energy* is built on the commitment of women. Many working women are carrying out

many roles. Similarly, a business woman can carry out many roles and be committed to the business she is running. *Focus* is another theme developed and the idea of focus is that the women tend to focus on one particular type of businesses and diversification is not in their mind. If they are committed to one business, they will find ways to develop it by not losing the focus of the main product.

After defining the themes, the researcher has shown some excerpts from the interview to support the identified themes. Interviewees have been named as I1, I2 and I3 focusing on fashion, cosmetic and bakery entrepreneurs respectively.

I1- The dream of mine to be a business woman was there since I was a kid. I got married and had kids. I got the opportunity to start the business even after my children got married. But I never give up on the dream (Anonymous, 2019).

I2- Even when I propose the idea to start the business, my husband was never supportive back then. But now he is, yet I know that I could have done better than this if I could start this business. I managed to convince him but he said that I'm all by myself. It was not scary but what scary was to give up on my dreams (Anonymous, 2019).

These excerpts from the interviews build the story of women entrepreneurs who have not given up their dreams with any circumstances. And shows that they have been constantly dreaming as how to build the business.

I3- I have had a cancer. My daughter came home with a failed marriage and my son is having a bad marriage life. With all these family problems, I managed to open up a new outlet for my bakery products. I beat the cancer. It was never easy. Problems have to be faced. I had to tolerate all these, so that I can make my brand popular. Never rested at home even I was sick. I have endured such pain yet never gave up on my businesses (Anonymous, 2019).

It is evident from the interview extract that the women entrepreneurs have endured emotional and physical failures without failing in running the business. Evidences from the literature illustrated that the endurance level of women is greater than men.

I2- I take care of my staff as family members. There are some staff members whose services is as equivalent to the age of the business. We have created a family culture here mainly because we spend more time of the day here at the office than our homes (Anonymous, 2019).

I3- I do not see any difference between my own family and my work family. We share things and we take care of each other. I believe that is one of the reasons to achieve the growth in my business (Anonymous, 2019).

Motherhood and family orientation are two words that describe a woman with greater potential. A mother builds the world and she protect it. Similarly, a women entrepreneur has a nature of taking

care of the staff as own family members which has supported in the growth of the business.

Observations of the researcher confirms the fact that these women empower employees and advise them like a mother advises her children.

I3- I do not have any degrees in managing a business. I have learnt management by looking at my own mother and running my own family. I have obtained skills to adopt to different situations purely with my life experiences. This is how I run the business. I advise my employees to learn through their experience (Anonymous, 2019).

I1- There was a time where I had to manage my family with minimum money I had. That taught me how to manage a business successfully without any academic or professional qualification. Today, I give speeches to undergraduates about how to manage businesses, well by my own first-hand experiences. Proper investment is my secret of success (Anonymous, 2019).

The extract from the interview shows that without professional and academic qualification in business management, the inherent and acquired qualities of management supported them to understand situations, be sympathetic, be proactive and empower employees.

I2- World revolves around relationships. We create relationships with our employees and customers and suppliers too. Rather than advertising with higher cost, I always believe relationships can bring more sales to the business (Anonymous, 2019).

I3- My entire business depends on word of mouth marketing. We have built relationships that are concrete and never I have advertised for a sale. Mainly I take the initiative in building up the relationships as I'm good at it (Anonymous, 2019).

According to the respondents, relationships have influenced the success of their business. They have properly built up the relationships with different parties. Relationship marketing has been a concept recently came to the practice. But the women entrepreneurs see it as vital practice to build up proper relationships and manage them. Literature explains that unlike men, women have relationship management skills, since as per the general beliefs they are very kind and soft hearted. Problem solving and sympathy is their innate qualities. Researcher observed and experienced the way how these women entrepreneurs build their relationships and manage them.

I1- I work minimum of eighteen hours a day balancing with my family work too. Sometimes we finalize designs midnight. Some days I have gone to universities to give speeches after eighteen to twenty-hour meetings with the clients (Anonymous, 2019).

I3- Going to hospitals for my treatments and then running back to start working has been the routine for some time. However, managed many orders during that time. I could never let a sickness beat me up (Anonymous, 2019).

As per the excerpt, women have many roles to play and many things to be done. The energy level of a woman can be identified with their explanation. The level of commitment and nature of taking

care of the business like a mother even with emotional and physical withdrawals shows a high

energy.

I1- Fashion is my interested area. I do not want to lose focus but I want to create the best and exclusive designs for my customers and value for the money they pay (Anonymous, 2019).

I3- Making cake has been my dream forever. I did not want to deviate from that. I think that is one of the reasons why my customers come all around the country to buy from me. I have mastered the skill and it is the best (Anonymous, 2019).

Focus is another theme developed and the women entrepreneurs describe that one of the main reasons to be successful is to be focused on one thing than focusing on too many. They show that their innate nature of focusing on the family than deviating from the family responsibilities has created them to focus on their business and specialized in it.

The interviews and the observations carried out by the researcher have resulted in building up the above themes.

CONCLUSION

Women entrepreneurs have been contributing the economic development by mainly focusing on small and medium scale businesses. Researcher's study on three different women entrepreneurs have provided more interpretations as how their entrepreneurial characteristics have built successful brands in Sri Lanka, an emerging economy in the world. The support from the literature to the found themes can be shown as follows. Family orientation of the women entrepreneurs bring out different individual qualities to the businesses to be successful (Dimova et al., 2006). According to Kimosop et al. (2016), the nature of women to build relationships can create more marketing and management capabilities. Similarly, social adroitness can enhance the entrepreneurial activities of the women entrepreneurs (Walker & Webster, 2006). Between work and family life, women try to become the bread winner for the family and many of them endure emotional and physical pains that they experience. Their innate ability with higher energy and endurance has supported them in being successful business women. According to Madson et al. (2003), these identified women entrepreneurial characteristics have been utilized by the women entrepreneurs in developing successful brands. Entrepreneurs are dreamers. With many social disadvantages, women have become successful entrepreneurs due to the capacity to dream and be focused on what they have selected to do. According to Hoang & Antoncic (2003), women need to learn and improve their skills in networking where the attributes of dreamer and the focus can support in this. Practical implication of this research is to use the identified women characteristics in developing businesses in emerging economies where an extensive potential is available.

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