

Factors Influencing Women's Involvement in Entrepreneurship: A Qualitative Study



Nguyen Thi Loan

PhD, Hong Duc University, No. 565 Quang Trung, Dong Ve, Thanh Hoa, Vietnam

Orcid ID: 0000-0002-2908-0193

ABSTRACT: Entrepreneurship plays a significant role in socio-economic growth of a country and is a major concern to both scholars and policy makers. Within entrepreneurial ecosystem, women entrepreneurs are also regarded as new growth engine of socio-economic development. Women historically have little access to traditional forms of business ventures. But these days, women's entrepreneurship has been spoken everywhere in each part of the world. In relation to the phenomenon, it is necessary to identify the factors that motivate women into entrepreneurship. This study aims to explore the factors that influence women's participation in entrepreneurship activities. Using a qualitative method, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 female entrepreneurs in Vietnam. The discussions addressed various factors affecting the involvement of these women in their business activities. Research results show that there are five factors affecting the active participation of informants in startup activities; (1) Family's support, (2) Environmental Effect, (3) Increase the Income Level of the Family, (4) Family Heritage Business and Exposure, and (5) Self-Independence. The findings of this study can be used as an inspiration to increase the number of female entrepreneurs in Vietnam. In addition, it can also be used as a reference to motivate women to become entrepreneurs.

KEYWORDS: Entrepreneurship, women, start-up activities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Business is an activity that generates benefits, especially for women, often leading to personal income (Nor Hanim et al., 2020). Quite a few women choose to be in business for a number of reasons: work autonomy, more time for family, earning more income, and avoiding frequent discrimination at work in general.

The growth of entrepreneurship in a country must be balanced with the participation of women. Women's participation in entrepreneurship has increased sharply over the past decade in developed and developing countries, although still below the growth rate of male entrepreneurs (Le et al., 2022). Over the years, the number of female entrepreneurs in Vietnam has increased. According to data from the General Statistics Office, the proportion of women-owned businesses increased from 4% in 2009 to 21% in 2011 and now reaches 26,5% (the highest in Southeast Asia and ranked 19th out of 54 in the list) (GSO, 2020). Vietnam is currently ranked 6th among the countries with the highest percentage of female entrepreneurs and is the only Asian representative in the top 10 countries in this ratio.

However, this number still needs to be commensurate with the potential. This is because women face more obstacles than men in building their businesses. Cultural factors still consider women responsible for housework and children as the most significant barrier for women to start businesses (Tien & Trang, 2018). In the culture of a patriarchal society, making money is the duty of men; therefore, women's self-employment is often considered inappropriate or taboo (Kumalasari et al., 2020). Because this culture is still vigorously maintained by the community, especially the rural community, the increase in female entrepreneurs in rural areas still needs to be improved.

Governments, NGOs, and other parties have tried to develop entrepreneurship among women to improve the economy in communities. Entrepreneurial development programs are offered through training, coaching, and even funding. Unfortunately, the success rate of the efforts is still low, and the reason for this still needs to be discovered as they only run the business for a short time and then revert to the previous state (Kumalasari et al., 2020).

To date, the factors affecting business participation have been discussed in general, with no discussion specifically for women. Therefore, this study was conducted to fill this gap. Accordingly, this study points out the factors that motivate women

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to enter entrepreneurship. The research results will later be used to promote and create models of entrepreneurship development for women.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview about Entrepreneurs

An entrepreneur is a person who will engage in activities in the field of business, providing products and services with the main purpose of making a profit. To do this, entrepreneurs will combine the use of human resources, financial capital, and brainpower to create a springboard for the development of the business as well as the economy. An entrepreneur is a senior executive who can run and manage an entire company or corporation. Even an entrepreneur can be a commercial enterprise's founder, owner, or principal shareholder. The term entrepreneur does not include executives and directors at state-owned companies. The entrepreneur is a term reserved for private organizations, not state agencies. In Vietnam, the entrepreneur is a term used to refer to classes associated with the private sector and this phrase has only been raised since the 1990s (Cuong, 2009)

2.2 Women Entrepreneur

According to IFC (2011), female entrepreneurs can be defined as women or groups of women who establish, organize and run a business. They work hard to earn an income to help their spouses meet the family's economic needs. Every woman must have her motivation to encourage her to become an entrepreneur. Some common factors are increased income, dissatisfaction with previous jobs, difficulty finding work, and the need to find a job with flexible hours to take care of the family (Nor Hanim et al., 2020). However, in reality, women face many challenges in running a business, such as building a network because they do not have time to participate in external networking activities due to having to take on the responsibility of taking care of the family and outside work at the same time (Kumalasari et al., 2020)

Another obstacle that hinders traditional or rural female entrepreneurs is education. In some cultures, (especially in South Asian countries), girls should not invest much in education because when they grow up, they will also marry and follow in-laws. Parents will get few benefits from investing in girls' higher education. Furthermore, even in many economically developed countries where men and women have similar levels of education, women are often less likely to receive formal education in business or financial matters, which often favor the fields of art, health, and natural sciences (Carranza et al., 2018). Therefore, training programs are essential and have the potential to turn them into successful entrepreneurs.

2.3. Women Entrepreneurs in Vietnam

The country's economic growth is affected by the increase in the employment of formal or informal women. This supports the country's faster economic growth and helps sustain household income growth, thus ensuring a fair distribution of the extra income per capita. In order to achieve this aspiration, many programs have been implemented to improve the economic status of women, such as encouraging women to participate in entrepreneurship. According to Kamunyu (2017) women's financial empowerment can promote the country's overall development.

In Vietnam, women account for 50.2% of the population and 47.3% of the labor force (GSO, 2020); women increasingly assert their important role when participating in all areas of social life, especially the economy. According to the Mastercard report in 2021, Vietnam ranks 6th among the countries with the highest percentage of female entrepreneurs. It is also the only Asian representative in the top 10 countries with a percentage of women-led businesses. Statistics from the Vietnam Association of Women Entrepreneurs (VAWE) also show that the percentage of Vietnamese businesses owned by women has increased rapidly in recent years, now accounting for more than 25% of the total number of businesses and holds the highest position in Southeast Asia. However, compared to reality, the number of female entrepreneurs and female-owned enterprises in Vietnam still needs to be higher than the potential. This can be due to many reasons, but it is still because the stereotype of businesswomen is not typical. Therefore, the government is encouraging women to participate more in this field, such as the government's project to support women startups for 2020-2025. In this scheme, the government is committed to providing a variety of support to promote women's entrepreneurship, including training, capital, technology, and trade promotion. Encouraging women to participate in entrepreneurship has become one of the main agendas for women's economic empowerment in Vietnam.

Although male entrepreneurs are the main audience of entrepreneurship in Vietnam, women are also increasing in number over the years. This may stem from the need and motivation for women to become entrepreneurs and contribute to the country's economic growth. Women have unique needs and characteristics to survive in business activities (Ismail et al., 2021). Building on previous findings, the need for achievement, affiliation, and power motivates women to enter entrepreneurship. As women entrepreneurs prepare to achieve their goals and further advance in women's businesses, the driving factors and barriers they face need to be further explored.

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3. RESEARCH METHODS

In order to meet the objective of the paper, this study used a combination of study design, qualitative case study, and secondary analysis. Within the framework of this study, case studies need to be carried out to identify the factors affecting women's participation in entrepreneurship activities in Vietnam. Case studies use a small sample to understand a complex problem in detail. The first method used semi-structured interviews with 15 selected informants in Vietnam. The sample frame of this study includes all female entrepreneurs working in Vietnam. Semi-structured interviews collected data in this design. Interviewees were approached through references and informed about the research, and their informed consent was made before conducting interviews and recording them. A prerequisite for the interviewed women is the background of their knowledge of engaging in business. The interviews focused on various factors affecting these women's participation in business activities. Samples were selected using purported sampling based on the criteria selected in the study. In addition, samples were also selected through snowball sampling. Through this snowball-based sampling, previous informants introduced the researcher to new informants with the characteristics required by the study. The number of samples is determined in the field, reaching a saturation point. This saturation point is reached when the interviewed informant gives the same or nearly identical answer as the previous informant. In the analysis, all interview data were analyzed according to the thematic approach. Details of the interviewees are provided in Table 1. Secondary analysis is performed on data from previous researchers and official government documents. This method is expected as it can leverage secondary data collection for the purpose intended by the previous researchers (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

Table 1. Profile of respondents

Entrepreneur (Code)	Type of business	No. of employees	No. of years in business	Age of respondent	Marital status of the respondent	Education level of respondent
E1	Handcraft	27	6	36	Married	Bachelor
E2	Agriculture	16	4	29	Single	Bachelor
E3	Trade & service	47	7	43	Married	High school
E4	Education	12	8	32	Married	Bachelor
E5	Sewing	10	5	37	Married	Bachelor
E6	Education	9	7	28	Married	Bachelor
E7	Furniture production	8	15	46	Married	High school
E8	Construction	29	16	49	Married	Secondary school
E9	Tourism	13	21	51		
E10	Food Service	21	28	55	Married	Intermediate
E11	Agri-base Export	8	7	38	Divorced	Postgraduate
E12	Baking	18	8	29	Married	Bachelor
E13	Garment	208	14	34	Single	
E14	Clothing trade	4	7	27	Married	Bachelor
E15	Food Service	9	6	36	Single	Postgraduate

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After conducting in-depth interviews, transcribing, analyzing, and processing the data, the researcher discovered that exciting topics are the main factors that motivate women to enter the business field. Based on an analysis of semi-structured interview data with 15 interviewees, the results show that Family's support, Environmental Effect, Increase the Income Level of the Family, Family Heritage Business and Exposure, and Self-Independence are the main factors.

Family's Support

One of the key factors driving female entrepreneurs to achieve success is emotional intelligence. According to FakhrEldin (2017), emotional intelligence is practical in women's entrepreneurship and leadership qualities in the 21st century. This quality is crucial for success and continued growth in Specific areas. So, to achieve a balanced emotional intelligence, strong family support is essential for any female entrepreneur. According to Abbas et al (2016), family is essential in bringing success to women starting a business.

Previous studies have discussed that family is always a top priority for women. As part of a patriarchal society, the position of women is still relatively weak. She often consults with men (husband/parents) in every decision. Without their consent, a

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woman cannot make confident decisions. If she decides to spite it, there will be conflicts, and it may be difficult for her to work because her family does not provide enough time to participate in the business. Therefore, it is generally agreed that the support of the family is a decisive factor in a woman's success in running a business.

"Honestly, after deciding to quit as a worker, I was baffled as to what to do, but with the encouragement of my husband, I participated in entrepreneurship courses organized by the Department of Labor, War Invalids, and Social Affairs and since then, I have had a predestined relationship with sewing until now" - Said E5

L.H.'s interpretation represents the opinions of the prominent participants. The strong motivation from within and the support of her husband, L.H encouraged her to attend a startup training course organized by the Department of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs. Finally, she was brave enough to run her own business.

For a woman starting a business, the support of her family is one factor determining a female entrepreneur's success. The family provides emotional support, capital, or business advice (Orhan & Scott, 2001). This closely resembles the results of previous studies (Naser et al., 2012; Neneh, 2018; Kumalasari et al., 2020; Hieu & Loan, 2022)

This shows that family support motivates women to become entrepreneurs; with approval and support from their husbands, they will feel confident to become successful entrepreneurs.

Environmental Effect

Get inspired to become an entrepreneur. Personal preference often lies within a hobby that can influence a business. Hopefully, female entrepreneurs can last for a long time, as it often stems from a hobby, as a hobby is often related to passion, and if someone works on their passion, no one will resist. Although hobbies and passions are the two main factors, the environment is still more important. Its support promotes the development of entrepreneurship rather than hobbies and passions; therefore, women with a good environment will still do business even if they have no interest or passion. A market is an area or place where supply and demand forces operate, buyers and sellers interact for pricing information, distribution, and channels, and other networks are developed. Nyangarika (2016) considers the network one of the most important factors for entrepreneurs to promote their products and services and build relationships with suppliers and buyers. Guled & Kaplan (2018) argue that the market potential and current market demand are the main factors contributing to the motivation for women to start businesses. In addition, Kartini & Haslina (2015) find that women will be more encouraged to start a business if they have an active network first because these networks allow them to reach a large population of the country as well as around the world to promote and sell their products and services. Similarly, Guled & Kaplan (2018) found that owners need access to the most developed and technical communication networks for business ventures to succeed.

Many women in the interview said that the field they are doing business in now is not their passion from the beginning. However, they saw a successful business opportunity, so they were determined to pursue that field and gradually became interested in their business when they saw its growth potential. When women realize that the business environment is favorable, there are opportunities for them to develop their business activities in a particular field. They will be motivated to participate in business activities, even though they may not have a passion for that field.

"At first, I was not interested and knowing about handicrafts. However, I saw that people in the area were successful in the handicraft business and the market for this product was promising, so I decided to join. I want to try if someone succeeds and knows I can be like them too"- Said E1

Increase the Income Level of the Family

"I am the first child in a low-income family in the countryside; My family has four children. As an older sister, my responsibility is to help the family and take care of my sibling's higher education. At the same time, the salary of the office job at that time was not enough for me to take care of my children's education. So I decided to switch to self-employment, and luckily, I succeeded." Said E10

This quote shows how family income motivates a woman to become an entrepreneur. She wants to change her family situation and send her sisters to higher education. She knows that entrepreneurs can make money in a short time and expand it.

Similarly, some interviewees also said: *"I need to support my family, and I want to change my family's lifestyle. I want my children to stay in the bigger house more and to study in better school"* Said E8 & E12

Many female entrepreneurs feel responsible for changing their lifestyles and increasing incomes and living standards (Rahman & Ramli, 2014). In this era, more than just depending on the husband's income is needed to feed the family's well-being. For families with many children, the family's insufficient economic resources will pressure women to find more income. Thus, entrepreneurship creates an opportunity for women to earn extra money to support their husbands' income. Most informants' husbands are the family's breadwinners, but more than their husband's income is needed to meet the family's needs. This condition becomes a problem for their entire family life. Starting a business is seen as a tool for them to overcome difficulties. For

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widowed or divorced women, starting a business is a platform to help them earn enough income for their families (Tinjuan & Pinang, 2016). Therefore, the fact that women help improve family income is the main reason that motivates some women to engage in entrepreneurship activities (Nor Hanim et al., 2020).

On the other hand, they can manage their family, children, and time by venturing into a startup. It gives them flexibility in conducting business from home, such as managing their business online through e-commerce platforms and social media, as long as they can maintain a presence or interaction. online (Mishal et al., 2019).

The results of this study agree with the findings of Tinjuan & Pinang (2016) and Nor Hanim et al., (2020) that women participate in businesses mainly because it will generate more income and support their families.

Family Heritage Business and Exposure

One of the reasons for a person to enter the business field is to inherit the family business. All informants agreed that women born and raised in families with a business tradition were likelier to engage in business activities than those born in non-business traditions. The startup culture is ingrained in their family; that is, they consider the business the primary income source. For them, business is a family legacy that needs to be preserved. They entered the business as a continuation of the family legacy. They want to make sure that the business value inherited from their family does not disappear. Most informants understand that their family struggled to grow the business. So they continue to engage in startup activities. One of the informants said:

"It took a lot of work for my family to establish and develop the business as it is today. This entrepreneurial spirit is my family's legacy. I felt it was my responsibility to develop it, so I started taking over when my parents were getting old and needed a break".

Family heritage has a significant influence on the entrepreneurial culture of informants. Some of them still run businesses that have been inherited for generations. Their tendency to engage in business activities is due to the frequent family contact with entrepreneurs and the lack of opportunities in other economic activities, such as working in state agencies - where stable monthly salaries (Nor Hanim et al., 2020). A person born into a business family tends to choose business as his profession. Family commitment to business can influence members' propensity to engage in business (Fairlie & Robb, 2007). Children tend to use their parents as role models in choosing a career. Siblings or other close relatives can also serve as role models for their involvement in business. People with family members such as parents, siblings, grandparents, or other relatives involved in the business will promote the development of business characteristics through close interaction with the business environment present (Bates, 1990). In some families, the father's involvement in the business is the main factor that motivates individuals to enter or start a business (Hout & Rosen, 2000; Hieu & Loan, 2022)

Many interviewees came from families with a business background, as they watched their parents run the business and learned many valuable lessons from their parents' way of running the business. Thus, this helps them to value and stay in business for the long term. Therefore, the startup culture is ingrained in themselves as a source of income. One of the informants said:

"Since I was young, my family has oriented me to inherit and develop the family business. Therefore, I chose business administration to study for my university degree. After graduating from college, I gradually took over the family business, and until now, I have been the mainstay of running my family business.

In some families, the father's involvement in the business is the main factor that motivates individuals to enter or start a business (Overbeke et al., 2015; Hieu & Loan, 2022)

Self-Independence

Women's interest or desire to become independent individuals drives them to engage in entrepreneurial activities. All informants agree that they want to be independent and do not want to work for any person or company. The reasons are that they are idealistic, creative, and always seek freedom. This finding is supported by Alam et al (2012) and Nor Hanim et al (2020) when they found that female entrepreneurs did not have equal opportunities in their previous work and preferred to work on their own. Furthermore, Nor Hanim et al (2020) found that most of the women in Penang they studied had a passion for business and benefited from financial independence and self-esteem. Self-directed life is living on one's income. It also means that the person is free to make their or own decisions and try to determine their future. Independent living can also allow individuals to define a schedule for their work.

At the same time, they feel they can earn more money instead of receiving a monthly salary. One of the informants said:

"I feel satisfied working alone and earning money; I do not like to work under any company and follow any rules; I want to be my boss" Said E6

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5. CONCLUSION

This paper presents the results of a preliminary study on the factors affecting women's participation in business activities in Vietnam. Based on the results, there are five factors affecting the active participation of informants in startup activities; (1) Family's support, (2) Environmental Effect, (3) Increase the Income Level of the Family, (4) Family Heritage Business and Exposure, and (5) Self-Independence. The results show that family-related reasons lie in business and exposure to family heritage, options to change family fortunes, and opportunities to increase the family's income. The right to self-determination is implicitly implanted through the entrepreneurial culture's particular element of interest and appeal. These signs indicate a trend of women entering a Vietnam business, particularly for family-related reasons. Women with a family history of a father or mother will have similar characteristics. Business culture made in a family is considered a significant source of income. A business that has been at the heart of a family's legacy for generations has been indirectly passed on to the next generation. Women taking business as their job is also due to their personal preferences. Personal interest is a longstanding interest in women's work as a businesswoman.

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