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THEORISING A FRAMEWORK OF FACTORS INFLUENCING PERFORMANCE OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Recognising the importance of the emerging women entrepreneurs in creating a vibrant and dynamic economy for the nation, the Malaysian Government has been actively promoting women entrepreneurship towards realising Malaysia's Vision 2020. However, notwithstanding the importance of this area, surprisingly little research has been undertaken to determine the factors influencing performance of women entrepreneurs, particularly in Malaysia.

To close this gap, an in-depth literature survey was conducted to identify a comprehensive list of factors influencing the performance of Malaysian women entrepreneurs. The literature suggests that social psychological and organisational approaches are widely used to explore and analyse the relationship between the influence of women's individual characteristics, parental influence, their business management and business strategies, goals and motives, networking and entrepreneurial orientation towards their business performance. This resulted in the development of a comprehensive theoretical framework which provides significant insights related to women entrepreneurship practices and their performance levels in Malaysia.

Keyword(s): Entrepreneurship, Women, Performance, Malaysia, Literature Survey, Theoretical Framework

INTRODUCTION

It is not an uncommon trend that the number of women entrepreneurs continues to increase steadily worldwide. Women represent more than one-third of all people involved in entrepreneurial activity [Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), 2004]. Valencia (2006) reports that 40.54 percent out of estimation of 73 million people who are active entrepreneurs in the 34 nations are women (GEM, 2005). This corroborates Sitterly's (2001) findings where 40 to 50 percent of all businesses are owned by women, with an admirable success rate of 75 percent. At the southeast region of Asia, 18 to 30 percent of self-employed workers in Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand were women (Licuanan, 1992). In Malaysia, the Companies Commission of Malaysia (CCM, 2003), reported that 49,554 units of women-owned businesses were registered in 2000, and the number has increased to 54,626 units in 2001. There were 28,185 units of women-owned businesses which registered in the first half of 2002.

Mohamed and Syarisa (n.d.) acknowledge that women are becoming a very important economic group and therefore more efforts are needed to nurture them in taking up entrepreneurship. Notwithstanding the increasing importance and numbers of women entrepreneurs, few studies have focused on or included women in their research sample (Baker & Aldrich, 1997) and data segregation on their performance are rather scarce and

difficult to obtain. This is due to the lack of awareness in both government and among business associations of the importance of women's businesses especially in Asian countries [United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), 1996]. In order to overcome this problem, in Malaysia, the Ministry of Women and Family Development has developed the Gender Disaggregated Database Information System (GDIS). The GDIS is supposed to provide data for gender analysis and planning and to be used as a tool to develop gender responsive policies, strategies and programmes. Still the development of the GDIS is at its infancy stage where there are no data on women entrepreneurs that have been collected by this system so far.

Further, it was reported by the Ministry of Women and Family Development (2003) that Malaysian women entrepreneurs are under-represented in the business world with evidence that some undesirable development where micro-enterprises which were scaled up to bigger enterprises were subsequently managed and taken over by the husbands or other family members (Jariah & Laily, 1997). Besides that, the number of Malaysian women who make it to the international market is still small (Rafidah, 2005). They are urged to change their mindset in line with the changing of times in the business world and are advised to start producing quality products which are capable of penetrating the global market (Azlan, 2005).

From the research perspective, a relatively small number of studies have investigated the factors influencing entrepreneurial performance exclusively among women (Brush & Hisrich, 1991). Studies on the factors affecting performance of women entrepreneurs' of their businesses are limited in scope, as any existing research most often focuses on individual characteristics and motives as performance predictors. Insofar, the majority of related studies were conducted in Western countries like USA, Canada, United Kingdom, and Europe (Lerner, Brush & Hisrich, 1997). We can thus make safe conclusion that our present knowledge about this phenomenon is still insufficient.

It is of critical importance to note that the problems and the challenges faced particularly by women entrepreneurs today need to be taken into consideration. Besides, their successes need to be recognized for them to grow their businesses and to effectively access their business opportunities. To fill the above gaps, this study therefore aims to provide a holistic view of factors influencing the performance of women entrepreneurs through a comprehensive review of literature available on entrepreneurship. This resulted in the development of a theoretical framework for the initiation of policies and programmes for entrepreneurship development among women. From the practical point of view, it serves not only to provide a self-check to current women entrepreneurs, but also to increase women involvement in entrepreneurship through a better understanding of the determinants of business performance of women entrepreneurs in general and in the Malaysian context in particular. Such an understanding of the pre-requisites for Malaysian women entrepreneurs to succeed in their businesses is of critical importance especially in today's competitive environment.

Women Entrepreneurship in the Malaysian Context: An Overview

In 1980, women accounted for only 7% of employers in the economically active population of Malaysia. In 1984, 0.6% of Malaysian women entrepreneurs were classified as employers, while 16% were classified as own-account workers. Hardly 10% of the total number of all employers was women (Jamilah, 1992). The percentage rose to only 8.5% in 1990, with men still comprising the vast majority in employer status [Women's Aid Organisation (WAO), 2001].

However, women entrepreneurship has recently become an important pool of resources for Malaysia's economic growth and personal prosperity. Women account for about half of the total population, and about 36.7 percent of Malaysia's total workforce of 10.9 million, with an increasing representation at the professional, managerial and technical levels [Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP), 2006]. According to Normah (2006), the participation of women in Malaysia's small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in 2003 was 1,122,000, or 36.8% of the total employment in SMEs. A proxy for women entrepreneurs obtained from Population Census in 2000 indicates that 30.3% are working proprietors and active business partners [United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Malaysia, 2007].

It is not surprising that the number of women entrepreneurs in Malaysia has increased in the past three decades due to the emphasis on industrialisation, and growing interests in privatisation, self-employment and business-oriented employment. All of these have been facilitated by the growth in various sectors such as banking and financing, food manufacturing, general trading, personal and public services, education, training and consultancy, and others. It was found that Malaysian women have been increasingly involved in various enterprises which were formerly male-dominated (Maimunah, 1996a; 1996b). According to The Department of Statistics of Malaysia (2005), there were 518,000 companies involved in services, manufacturing and agricultural sectors, of which 99.1% were SMEs. More than 82,000 or 16% were women-owned companies with 89.5% of them involved in the services sector, 7.5% in manufacturing and 3.0% in the agricultural sector.

More importantly, the government support is considered cornerstone to the development of women's entrepreneurs. This can be seen from the establishment of the Ministry of Entrepreneurial and Cooperative Development (MECD) in 1995, and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) in 2001. These ministries, together with other supporting government agencies provide support to women entrepreneurs in terms of funding, physical infrastructure and business advisory services. In terms of financial support, the government has encouraged the creation of special funds targeted for women entrepreneurs, such as Special Assistance Schemes through the Small and Medium Industries Development Corporation (SMIDEC). The SMIDEC has allocated special assistance scheme worth RM9.2 million in 2006 for women entrepreneurs. It was reported that between August 1999 and June 2006, 541 women-owned companies have been granted grants and soft loans by SMIDEC worth a total of RM52.33 million. A total of 196 approvals were grants worth RM2.44 million for the information and communications technology (ICT) sector, while 128 approvals worth RM850,000 were for grants for market development projects (The Star Press, 2006).

Many women entrepreneur associations were established, such as the Federation of Women Entrepreneurs Association Malaysia (FEM), National Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Malaysia (NAWEM), Persatuan Usahawan Wanita Bumiputera (USAHANITA), the Women's Wing of the Malay Chamber of Commerce Malaysia of the State of Selangor, and so forth in order to promote and encourage more Malaysian women to become entrepreneurs besides creating a platform for networking among them.

It is clear that the Malaysian government has been actively involved and concerned about women entrepreneurship development in the last decade. This is to ensure that women entrepreneurs are not left out from the process of national and economic development, particularly in important sectors such as information and communications technology (ICT) and bio-technology, in order for the country to successfully realise Vision 2020. However, based on GEM's study on Malaysia's entrepreneurial environment, the results reflected poorly on the government's performance, claiming that its policies disfavour new firms, and the government bureaucracy and regulation and licensing requirements impede new firms from expanding. It raised doubts about the government's competence and effectiveness in supporting new and growing firms. The study singled out the lack of financial support, quality of education and training, and overall market openness as other main factors holding back Malaysian entrepreneurs (Gatsiounis, 2006).

Notwithstanding the above, various research attempts were undertaken to identify factors influencing the performance of women entrepreneurs as evidenced from the literature and prior surveys, albeit these factors being studied in a fragmented fashion and conducted among the developed nations. It is of paramount importance for the Malaysian women entrepreneurs to comprehend these factors as they bear substantial influence on their business performance, especially when they compete in this challenging, globalised business arena.

The following section discusses the definitions and factors influencing performance of women entrepreneurs based on the review of literature that have garnered impressive theoretical and practical support. The issues facing women entrepreneurs are highlighted. A theoretical framework is then formulated to depict the relationships between the factors discussed. Recommendations for Malaysian women entrepreneurs are then provided before concluding this paper.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND BACKGROUND

Factors Influencing Performance of Women Entrepreneurs

There are diverse definitions of woman entrepreneur which depend on the context of its role. In the context of Malaysia, women in business can be classified in the census under the employment classification of employer, self-employed and own-account workers (Jamilah, 1992). In 2000, only 10.4% of the 3.23 million Malaysian working females were employers while more than a third of them were paid employees in all economic sectors (MWFD, 2003). Based on United Nations Economic and Social Commission for

Asia and the Pacific's (UNESCAP, n.d.) discussion paper, women in business generally fall into small, micro and medium enterprises (SMMEs), either as managers or as owners from an employer's angle.

The performance of women entrepreneurs in their businesses has become an important area of recent policy and academic debate. Comparatively little rigorous and in-depth research, however, has been undertaken on the issues of gender and business performance, especially in Malaysia.

Performance is the act of performing; of doing something successfully; using knowledge as distinguished from merely possessing it. However, performance seems to be conceptualised, operationalised and measured in different ways (Srinivasan et al., 1994), thus making cross-comparison difficult. Among the most frequently used operationalisations are survival, growth in employees, and profitability (Lerner, Brush, & Hisrich, 1997).

Chandler and Hanks (1994:77) argue that the model of individual job performance indicate that performance is a function of ability, motivation and opportunity. The performance of a business founder is measured by the performance of the organisation (Schein, 1987), which is in turn influenced by the environment in within which the organisation emerges (Covin & Slevin, 1989; Hofer & Sandberg, 1987; Tsai et al. 1991). Based on Rosa et al's (1996) study, they outlined four different measures of comparative performance of business by gender, that is, primary performance measures (number of employees, growth in employees, sales turnover, value of capital assets); proxy performance measures (geographical range of markets; VAT registration); subjective measures (including the ability of the business to meet business and domestic needs); and entrepreneurial performance measures (the desire for growth, the ownership of multiple businesses). Amongst the most frequently used measures of performance are annual sales, number of employees, return on sales, growth in sales, and growth in employee numbers (Brush & Vanderwerf, 1992). Fischer et al.'s (1993) study found that women's businesses tend to perform less well on measures such as sales, employment and growth, but concluded that the determinants of gender differences in business performance were far more complex than had been recognised in earlier studies.

Box et al. (1995) suggest that there are 4 elements which have positive relationship with the business performance of Thai entrepreneurs, that is, previous experience as a member of an entrepreneurial management team, number of previous starts, age and scanning intensity. On the other hand, Hisrich et al. (1997) propose human capital (level of education, years of experience and business skill), personal goals, and strategy to assess the performance of men and women entrepreneurs.

Lerner and Hisrich (1997) conducted a study on Israeli women entrepreneurs and categorised the factors that affect their performance into five perspectives, that is, motivations and goals ; social learning theory (entrepreneurial socialization) ; network affiliation (contacts and membership in organizations); human capital (level of education,

business skills) ; and environmental influences (location, sectoral participation, and sociopolitical variables).

Thibault et al. (2002) suggest personal factors such as demographic variable and business factors such as amount of financing, use of technology, age of business, operating location, business structure and number of full-time employees as important factors in examining the sales performance of entrepreneurs in SMEs in Southwestern Ontario.

Machado, Cyr, and, Mione (2003) suggest that women entrepreneurs' managerial styles with the variables such as a) planning and strategic choices; b) decision style; c) formulation of objectives; d) structure of the company and share of power; and e) human resources policies were linked to and had association with their performance. The performance measures used in their study are turnover, number of employees, profit as well as the largest and the smallest salary paid.

Fischer et al. (1993) state that most of the comparative studies among men and women entrepreneurs' performance are adopted with two theories, that is, liberal feminist and social feminist. Liberal feminist theory is based on premise that women are facing overt discrimination from, for example, education and/or business experience (Fischer et al., 1993; Watson, 2002). Social feminist theory is based on socialisation process, such as, family setting, social values, norms, experience, educational aspirations, and expectations (Fischer et al., 1993; Learner, et al., 1997).

The above literature surveys indicate that various research efforts have been undertaken to identify the factors influencing successful performance of entrepreneurs and that the factors have been studied in isolation

Previous literature seems to suggest that there are five factors, a) individual characteristics; b) management practices; c) goals and motivations; d) networking; and finally e) entrepreneurial orientation, influencing the performance of entrepreneurs. Each of these factors, in turn, consists of supporting factors as depicted in Figure 1. The factors are discussed below:

Individual Characteristics and Performance

The individual characteristics focus on the influence of resources, in particular the level of education, occupation of parents, age, managerial skill, previous entrepreneurial experience and industry experience levels affecting entrepreneurial firm performance. Age and years of formal education have been shown to correlate positively with the business performance of women entrepreneurs. Dolinski et al. (1993) reckon that less-educated women may face financial or human capital constraints which limit their business pursuits. At the same time, managerial skills and particular strengths in generating ideas and dealing with people (Birley & Norburn, 1987; Brush & Hisrich, 1991; Hisrich & Brush, 1984; Hoad & Rosko, 1964) were important for a woman entrepreneur in establishing a business. Box, Watts and Hisrich (1994) and Box, White and Barr (1993) found that the entrepreneur's years of prior experience in the industry are

positively correlated with firm performance. This is supported by Schiller and Crewson (1997) who found that the dominant predictors of success for women entrepreneurs are industry experience and years of self-employment. However, Shim and Eestlick (1993) found that women have less work experience and their firms were younger than men. As a result, they lack of networks or contact, socialisation practices and family roles. Masud et al. (1999) in a study on micro-enterprise project through 319 women in Peninsular Malaysia discovered that women gained knowledge through their projects in managing and controlling productive resources, skill, and experience, and an increase in their ability to source relevant information and solve problems that equip them to become entrepreneurs and setting the business successfully.

From the environmental perspective, family influence, particularly parental influence has been found as the antecedent of small business career interest. Family members, especially parents play a key role in establishing the desirability and credibility of entrepreneurial action for individuals. Scherer et al. (1989) found that the presence of a parent entrepreneurial role model was associated with an individual's business performance. Individuals with a parent entrepreneurial role model were perceived to be high performers and were significantly different from individuals without entrepreneurial role models, who were perceived to be low performers. The majority of successful women entrepreneurs identified one parent as being more influential, that is, many successful women identify strongly with their fathers (Henning & Jardim, 1978). Belcourt et al.'s (1991) study reported that 33 percent of Canadian women entrepreneurs surveyed stated their fathers were entrepreneurs. This is logical as parent-child relationship promotes achievement striving and independence (Stein & Bailey, 1973). Female labor force participation also seems to be related to the attitude of the family towards women. Aminah (1998), for instance, in a study of selected successful career women in Malaysia, revealed that changing attitudes of parents and husbands towards a more positive trend were perceived to be related to higher educational attainment of women which in turn could influence women's participation in the labor force by setting up their own businesses.

Management Practices and Performance

Buttner (2001) reports that the management styles of women entrepreneurs was best described using relational dimensions such as mutual empowering, collaboration, sharing of information, empathy and nurturing. Importantly, these dimensions, which have also been associated with women in different professional occupations, were deemed to be associated with firm performance. Women do work differently from men. According to Heffernan (2003), female negotiating styles have been shown to be different and it has been demonstrated that they are significantly more beneficial to long term business success. The most recent study that explored a genetic basis for special attributes of women in social ability and empathy imply a better performance of companies created and run by women because of their ability to communicate better with employees, suppliers and customers (Valencia, 2006).

According to Porter (1996), the essence of strategy is choosing to perform activities differently from rivals, which requires creativity and insight. Bracker et al. (1986, 1988) found that firms which undertook strategic planning performed better financially. Iakovleva (n.d) suggests three elements of business strategies which have significant relationship with performance, i.e. founder's entrepreneurial competence, founder's managerial competence, and strategies applied by the firm. The strategic adaptation perspective holds that success is primarily dependent upon the fit between changes in the environment and entrepreneur's ability to develop and execute effective strategies. This approach takes into consideration on both environmental influence and entrepreneurial strategies as determinant of firm's performance. In this regard, women entrepreneurs who focused on strategic planning are likely to achieve higher performance.

Goals and Motivations and Performance

An increasing number of scholars believe that the growth of a business is, at least in part, determined by the entrepreneur's motivation (Shane et al., 1991). Psychological motivations such as achievement, independence, and locus of control (pull factors) have received significant research attention to their influence on business start-up but less attention has been paid to their relationship to business performance (Brockhaus & Horwitz, 1986). Studies conducted by Storey (1994) and Glancey et al. (1998) found that women pulled into establishing their enterprises have more profitable and higher profit margin.

According to Brush (1990), individual motivations and goals such as profitability, revenues and sales growth have been found to be related to performance in women-owned businesses, albeit their tendency to perform less well than their male counterparts (Fisher et al., 1993). Researchers found that women typically are motivated by a more complex set of objectives for starting a business than male counterparts. Factors related to the desire to achieve flexibility between work and family lives are valued differently by the genders (Cinamon & Rich, 2002; Stephens & Felman, 1997). In addition, Hisrich and Brush (1987) found that individual motivations and owner/founder goals are related to performance in women-owned businesses where opportunity motivation was related to survival and independence was associated with "no growth". As a result, motivation shows a strong relationship to performance (Lerner et al., 1997). It can be an important explanatory variable to firm performance (Miner, 1990; Miner et al., 1992; Wiklund, 1998) as far as women entrepreneurs are concerned. In Malaysia, Nordin's study (2005) revealed that the psychological motives such as self satisfaction and the search for independence and supportive environmental factors such as industry sector and source of finance affect women entrepreneurs from Terengganu in exerting themselves into businesses.

Networking and Performance

Networks have long been hailed as essential to the survival of female-run establishment (Blanco et al., 1996; Brodsky, 1993; Shim and Eastlick, 1998). Women value their ability to develop relationships. Hisrich and Brush (1987) suggested that support systems,

mentors, and advisors; business associates and friends; participation in trade associations and women's groups are the significant networks which are positively associated with business performance. According to Fraser (1995) and Wheeler (1995), the use of informal mentoring supportive relationships is one of the best ways of establishing a business and these relationships helped the new entrepreneur bypass the obstacles which impede growth, success, and personal fulfillment. However, women are often excluded from social networks or informal networks of information such as male-only clubs, old boys networks, and business lunches compared to men (Brush, 1990) due to lack of time (Belcourt et al, 1991).

In Malaysia, women entrepreneurs faced a shortage of peer support networks compared with men [Women Institute of Management (WIM), 1997] even though various women entrepreneurs and industry associations have been formed (FEM, NAWEM, USAHANITA) which generally serve as a platform for women entrepreneurs to establish networks and exchange information and experiences as well as to conduct training programmes, seminars and workshops on motivation, leadership and entrepreneur development and to provide other means of support. This is due to the fact that women may not join these associations as they might be overloaded with business and family responsibilities. This limits the women entrepreneurs' ability to seek informal advice and peer financing as well as the information networks needed for survival and growth. This might pose a challenge to women entrepreneurs in establishing networks which are helpful to the survival of their businesses.

Entrepreneurial Orientation and Performance

"Entrepreneurial" is often associated with venturesome or creative in terms of acquiring the resources an entrepreneur needs to build and grow her business. The entrepreneur is characterised principally by innovative behaviour and will employ strategic management practices in the business (Birley, 1996). Entrepreneurial orientation such as innovativeness, and risk taking are the factors found to determine the success of a woman entrepreneur in her business. Innovativeness enables women entrepreneurs to venture into new things, that is, technology, products and market whereas risk taking is required if women are to venture into relatively large-scale businesses. Bernama (2006) reported that a Malaysian woman entrepreneur needs to have confidence, courage and strong will power to succeed in business, be efficient and able to produce goods and services of high quality, in steady supply and at competitive prices. This may apply to the Malaysian women entrepreneurs to become more creative in producing and promoting their products and services and as well as willing to take risks with confidence they had to compete with others. However, women view risk as loss, danger ruin and hurt and they do not see risk as affecting their future. In short, women tend to avoid risky actions and decisions compared with men (Henning & Jardim, 1977).

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

There is a debate over the last decade on what determines the performance of women entrepreneurs. Prior literature has indicated that women possess different characteristics

and thus strengths and/or weaknesses compared to men. As such, the collection of data on the profile, experience, management skill and competency, size and sector, individual characteristics and the motives of Malaysian women entrepreneurs are needed in order to allow the policy makers, educators, women associations and public to identify appropriate planning of national policies and programmes. This not only helps the government to identify the appropriate target, but also leads the women entrepreneurs in developing appropriate skills and capabilities in doing businesses especially at the start-up phase and might help them to create and sustain their business ventures successfully. In this regard, a comprehensive study on factors determining the performance of women entrepreneurs, particularly in the pre-startup and start-up phases would be beneficial.

Another important factor to be taken into consideration is the support received from the government of Malaysia. While the government has undertaken various efforts in promoting entrepreneurship especially among the women, there are more to be accomplished. The policy makers should continue their efforts in nurturing more women entrepreneurs and also to facilitate their success. A policy that is friendly to new firms must be enacted. These include removing constraints such as red-tapes and to simplify the licensing requirements. More financial support are needed in various forms such as pre-seed and seed funding in order to draw more women into entrepreneurship. It is also important to encourage big corporations to have business collaborations with SMEs and to facilitate SMEs' growth as they go international. Without these supports, the efforts in creating quality, resilient and successful women entrepreneurs in all sectors of the economy would be cumbersome. Given a conducive environment and adequate support, Malaysian women entrepreneurs can realise their full potential and maximise their contribution to the country's economic development.

In line with the social learning theory, the parents must be encouraged to motivate their children, particularly daughters to venture into entrepreneurship. In the past decades, many of these parents are employees and therefore, they would expect their child to become one too. However, with the strong economic growth and greater awareness on entrepreneurship, many new ventures have surfaced. The broadcast of success stories of women entrepreneurs coupled with the need for more employment opportunities due to economic growth have prompted greater attention from all parties, including parents to venture into businesses and/or to encourage their children in doing so. Many universities has started to offer degree programme in entrepreneurship and/or make the subject of entrepreneurship mandatory. If it is true that entrepreneurial parents influence their daughters to become entrepreneurs, then these efforts by the government and universities will not fetch maximum results if the majority of parents are not entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, if this notion holds true, the current women generation who venture into entrepreneurship will create a larger pool of women entrepreneurs of the next generation! Women and men entrepreneurs tend to perform differently. The women entrepreneurs should realise that by gaining access to the technical networks and business training that women need to succeed is of great importance. Thus, the women entrepreneurs should utilise this opportunity to the fullest extent by becoming members of these associations. Women nowadays certainly do not need to lose their femininity to achieve success in a man's world in social network perspective. They should stay competence and objective

and improve themselves to prove their capabilities in this business world (Sze, 2005, p.26). Besides, their spouses play important roles in encouraging their entrepreneurial wives to join and participate in the activities of these associations. Women non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and groups should network so that information on Government assistance available specifically for women entrepreneurs can be filtered down. This can contribute to the efficiency and competitive edge of the companies not only related to financing but also to programmes such as capacity-building, benchmarking, development of best practices and development of export markets. With the proactive intervention of associations representing women entrepreneurs, many more would be aware of the various support programmes and facilities (The Star Press, 2006). It is worth mentioning that the support given by spouse is of paramount importance. Their support enables the women entrepreneurs more time to join and to participate in beneficial activities of these associations.

Furthermore, women entrepreneurs were less likely to own multiple businesses, less eager to plan for expansion, and where expansion was planned, their strategies for growth were often significantly different from those of their male counterparts (Rosa et al., 1996). Clearly, there is a need of more and better opportunities for potential women entrepreneurs to gain equal access to management, and financial skills that are deemed to be important for business success. In addition, the Malaysian women entrepreneurs need to have an acute understanding of the entrepreneurial orientation in order for them to succeed in their ventures. These orientations, including confidence, courage, strong will power, risk taking, creativity and innovativeness, and so on can be embedded within the women entrepreneurs through short courses, training programmes, mentoring or even long-term courses leading to the award of a diploma or degree. This is where the government agencies and associations play an important role in nurturing these skills within the women entrepreneurs. Incentives in the form of income tax relief, discounted or free-of-charge association membership and training could help to mould successful women entrepreneurs.

In conclusion, this study has contributed to both theoretical and practical aspects of factors affecting the performance of women entrepreneurs. If we can achieve a better understanding of the important factors influencing the performance of women entrepreneurs, this will have implications for Malaysian women entrepreneurs and investors to broaden their business successfully in this globalised environment. If certain factors increase the odds for success, then entrepreneurs can appraise their own prospects with this in mind.

Future studies are necessary to investigate the variables depicted in the theoretical framework. It is also interesting to compare the findings between men and women entrepreneurs using the comprehensive framework developed. Comparison between nations is another area that warrants further research attention.

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