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Building on Entrepreneurial Team Theory: A Women Context

Erastus Ndinguri
Framingham State University, United States.

Jessica Hill
Holyoke Community College, United States.

ABSTRACT

Using literature on entrepreneurial teams, we examine ways in which technology can be used as a connecting link to build women entrepreneurial teams. The study theorizes that use of technology creates a new realm (structural uncertainty) that gives rise to entrepreneurial women networks and women entrepreneurial opportunities (common interests) which in turn creates strong interdependence that provides a suitable environment for women entrepreneurial teams. We conceptualize that women use of technology for networking and mentoring purposes can be a first step in building the teams.

Keywords: Entrepreneurs; Entrepreneurial Teams; Technology; Team Innovation; Women Teams; Women Entrepreneurs.

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurs are touted to be important business minds in today's economy [7, 27]. It is estimated that 20 to 40 percent of the overall labor productivity growth in the eight major industrialized countries can be directly attributed to entrepreneurship [3]. Today, technology, innovation and entrepreneurship are crucial to the nation's economic revival and competitiveness in the global marketplace [14, 54]. An entrepreneur is defined as a person with the ability to create, innovate, bear risk, manage and achieve targets [49]. Studies show that more than 70% of the individuals who have studied in the United States express a desire to be self-employed or own their own business [17]. Different variables critical for the success of new entrepreneurial ventures have also been studied they include: the market and product strategy, the entrepreneur characteristics, the financial aspects, human capital, the origin of the start-up, the technology and production aspects, and the prevailing social and environmental variables [55]. Other variable that has been studied include gender and differences between female and male entrepreneurs have been explored.

This study focuses on women entrepreneurs as Women entrepreneurs' have emerged as an influential segment supporting the U.S. economy. Since 1990 women-owned businesses have played key roles as employers, customers, suppliers and competitors in the global market [4]. Growth in privately owned business by women has doubled since 1997 in the United States [29, 8]. A possible explanation for this growth is that women have been found to be more willing to take risk as a result of the environmental and economic challenges [2]. To understand this growth, researchers have looked at the role individual women play in creating successful businesses. Variables such as demographic environment, family structure, literacy, education,

socio-economic environment, labor force, employment, organizational forms, employment by sectors and economic growth have all been identified as influencing women entrepreneurs [43]. The family context as well as mentorship has also been identified as factors influencing women to start businesses. In that, start-up entrepreneurs know someone in their family or close to their family who is self-employed [38]. Even with all these studies that look at the individual women entrepreneur variables, there is a lack of research that focuses on variables influencing women entrepreneurial teams.

To begin exploring women entrepreneurial teams this study expands the scope and considers the factors that may influence women to build entrepreneurial teams. Specifically, the study conceptualizes factors that may lead to women entrepreneur team formation. Current studies addressing the entrepreneurial team phenomena focus on internal team-level perspectives that are team based and others touch on the team's structural context but they do not address external factors that may influence team formation (56). To begin the discussion on external factors, the study conceptualizes a theoretical framework that looks at role of technology as an external factor in formation of women entrepreneurial teams. Women entrepreneurial teams in this study are defined as an entity of two or more women acting jointly to make single discoveries or create a business.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To frame the study, Harper's [26] theorization of emergent entrepreneurial teams is used to define taxonomy of entrepreneurial teams. Taxonomy being how entrepreneurs differ in size, the arrangement within the team, the authority exhibited, the resources available and how they communicate [26]. According to Harper [26], entrepreneurial teams can contain at least two entrepreneurs who see themselves as team members at par with each other. To understand the conceptualized entrepreneurial team concept, Harper [26] acknowledges the focus of most research on the individualistic view of entrepreneurship. Acknowledging Schumpeter [53] theorization of the individual entrepreneur, Harper's [26] entrepreneurial team framework captures the idea that entrepreneurs can act jointly to make single discoveries of a given opportunity. Schumpeter [52] describes an entrepreneur as an individual with drive, motivation, and creativity; with the ability to overcome obstacles, innovate and readily implement their ideas. Harper projects Schumpeter's description and theorizes entrepreneurial teams as entities where team members as joint actors, heavy communicators, with high degree of coordination, mutual responsiveness on issues and a view from the members that they are achieving significant net benefit together rather than alone [26]. In addition, Harper's framework [26] builds a predictive nature where bounded structural uncertainties as well as perceived common interest create an opportune environment to build entrepreneurial team. These uncertainties in our study conceptualization are technology related which allow networks to accelerate even in geographically dispersed and diverse environment creating women entrepreneurial teams.

To understand the need to look at women entrepreneur teams, this study also uses the theory of homophily. Using Byrne's [6] similarity-attraction hypothesis, the theory argues that persons with similar traits are more likely to interact with each other. The similarity-attraction hypothesis supports the homophily theorization that espouses that similarity builds connection and as a result sustained association [40, 33]. Research also finds strong support for the

homophily hypothesis, particularly in terms of gender [30, 36]. One of the research studies conducted with an aim of identifying homophily of network ties (in a distance learning environment) conclude that developing ties with people of the same gender or race may provide better emotional support when working together [62]. Based on the homophily theory the study conceptualizes that the ties developed by women entrepreneurs are stronger than ties made across gender hence the need to study women entrepreneurial teams separately.

Therefore, using both theories the study conceptualizes that formation of women entrepreneur teams with technology as a mitigating factor (i.e., technology creates a platform in which women build networks) creates structural uncertainty that improve the environment that leads to formation of women entrepreneurial teams.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

Women entrepreneurship has seen a steady increase over the years. Women-owned firms made up 19.9% of all firms that employed people in the United States [29]. According to the American Express OPEN report, the number of women entrepreneurs in the United States between 1997-2011 increased by 50% and continues to grow [1]. However, in spite of this increase, research on female entrepreneurs is still at its infant stage. While studies indicate there are similarities between entrepreneurs in personal demographics such as gender, differences have been found between female and male entrepreneur venture choices. These differences include; the business ventures they choose, funding strategies they seek, development patterns and authority structure's they develop [22]. Additionally, Delmar and Holmquist [12] reaffirm the need for continuous studies on women entrepreneurs for two reasons: 1) there is limited recognition of women entrepreneurs as major contributors of economic growth in many economies [12]. 2) The study of women in entrepreneurship is incomprehensive and more research to understand this field is necessary [12].

Technology and Entrepreneurship

Information and communication technologies are one of the most dynamic sectors in the economy. As a result, economic growth depends on how innovative this sector is [48]. Entrepreneurship research has heavily focused on the success of individuals while they are setting up a new business [41]. Some research has theorized specific individual personal traits that entrepreneurs may possess, while others have conceptualized the idea that entrepreneurs' success results from traits that few possess [21]. However, despite these theorized individual entrepreneurial traits, recent research highlights the effects of other additional traits such as technological innovation and organizational structure as necessary to achieve success [41].

The idea pushing this is that as technology continues to evolve, this influences the rate of entrepreneurship [58]. In addition, characteristics of entrepreneurs such as risk taking and being proactive strongly relate to knowledge acquisition and technological innovation [45]. Entrepreneurial innovation today is characterized by development and adoption of technology [15]. Entrepreneurs play a key role in introducing new ventures that are technologically innovative, into the market and hence stimulating the growth of new entrepreneurs and businesses ideas [42]. Examples are evident by the development of small startup businesses that are developing inventions and technology with significant potential commercial applications [20].

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Technological innovations such as online websites, phones and social networking websites are means in which communication diffuses through organizations [19]. Through such information technologies, entrepreneurs have the ability to recognize opportunities that translate into business ideas and innovation that may eventually contribute to economic and social growth [61]. Given increased women involvement in entrepreneurship activities, technology becomes a potential link among them that leads to cultivating ideas that may translate into business ventures and thus help the economy as a whole [32]. Therefore, to optimize the relationship between technology and women entrepreneurial teams, technology as a tool for connection is important to sustain invention that in turn increases the likelihood that new firms will be founded [25].

Proposition 1: Women entrepreneurs who use technology as a tool for connection exhibit tendencies leading to formation of team-based businesses.

Women and Technology

Many opportunities are associated with technology innovation [10]. Kowalczyk, Ulieru and Unland [34] indicated that for an entrepreneur to be competitive in the new age economy, they have to be in a position to exploit new technologies that will form the basis of tomorrow's global information networks and ideas built on *e*-commerce. This information and ideas spreads using mediums such as the internet which is a resource accessible to majority of the people. There are approximately 74.4% Americans living in household's that have internet; in this house holds 78.5% are male users and 77.6 are female users [18]. Women have also been found to be more socially active than men on technology based social networks [35]. These social networks platforms create personal and professional opportunity for women to overcome the challenges that they may face in real-life interactions [28]. This in turn creates new network-based opportunities which can create a ripe ground for generating business ideas.

Despite the growth in technology-based commerce and its contribution to the economic growth there has been limited information is available on the role of technology as an external factor in formation of women entrepreneur teams. As the use of technology grows globally coupled with the ever increasingly important role women are playing in business today, [46] research is necessary to understand connections that are built by using networking technologies to create teams, and how they use them to improve efficiency and influence their business ideas. Studies reveal that "technology-based businesses have the potential to offer women entrepreneurs more work flexibility than traditional ''brick and mortar'' business" (31, 127- 128). Therefore, an increase in the number of women choosing entrepreneurial careers coupled with the explosion of technology business ventures highlights the need to explore ways in which technology can be used as a link that builds women entrepreneurial teams

Proposition 2: As a result of increased involvement with technology, women entrepreneurs will have greater connections using technology which increases interaction and team-based opportunities.

Technology and Women Entrepreneurial Teams

Women entrepreneurial team research has focused on the networking component of the teams which include family, society and acquaintances [5]. Women teams have been said to run their

businesses in a more democratic manner, share decision making, members learn from each other and are relationship oriented [7]. To understand women connections that lead to team formation, the aspect of networking and mentoring plays a central role. Research indicates that social networks are critically important to the entrepreneurial process and are central to business venture success [23]. In addition, network connections have been found to be critical during the pre-startup stage as the entrepreneurs work through the initial mobilizing stages as well as planning and the establishment phase [24]

On the other hand, one of the motivating factors for women to become entrepreneurs is having a role model or mentor guiding them throughout the process [47]. Using technologies that are interconnected, different websites have been developed by various organizations (i.e., Women Business Enterprise National Council, National Association of Women Business Owners, Women Business Owners South) to help support and act as virtual mentors for women entrepreneurs. Mattis [39] conducted a study of a national sample of 800 U.S. business owners – 650 women and 150 men employing a survey design method. Almost half (46%) of the women surveyed reported that they had a mentor or role model when starting up their business. In the current global economy women entrepreneurs continue to look for ways to exchange and transfer knowledge as well as innovate and improve. Where face to face mentoring requires physical presence of both the mentor and mentee, technology provide platforms that support virtual communities where people work together through face-to-face and virtual situations using advanced IT systems to fulfill business objectives [11]. This type of virtual mentoring creates a diverse pool provided by virtual community mentors and also flames the formation of entrepreneurial teams. Virtual mentoring is also useful in allowing women entrepreneurs to understand and communicate with the latest technology skills, which creates new possibilities for the accessibility of top mentors within across the world and making connections that catalyze team formation [9]. The ripe environment for women created by the technology enabled virtual communities is in tune with entrepreneurial teams' theorization by Harper [26] where women team entrepreneurs are joint actors, heavy communicators (using technology), with high degree of coordination, mutual responsiveness on issues and a view from the members that they are achieving significant net benefit together rather than alone [26]. Therefore, this study captures the conceptual essence of using technology in building connections that translate into entrepreneurial teams. This is outlined through the theorizing framework of women entrepreneurial teams.

Proposition 3: Women entrepreneurs who use technology to create connections that provide resources that trigger women entrepreneurial teams.

STUDY MODEL

Entrepreneurship is a combination of individual will and some environmental factors that create a need or problem that is to be solved [53]. A large part of research has focused on entrepreneurship solely emanating within individual enterprises [57]. On the other hand, entrepreneurship researchers go beyond the individual capabilities and highlights that a successful venture can be discovered and exploited when entrepreneurs combine with others to exploit an idea [26]. Therefore, this study suggests that with use of technology, women entrepreneurs will continually exploit the entrepreneurial opportunities that come with it and this will facilitate growth of networks which leads to recognition of common interests that may

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lead to joint action of teams. The model supports Harper's [26] entrepreneurial team theory analogy which pushes for expansion of the notion of exploiting opportunities not just as an individual phenomenon but to broaden our conception and look at it in a team context. Figure I below depict the conceptualized model.

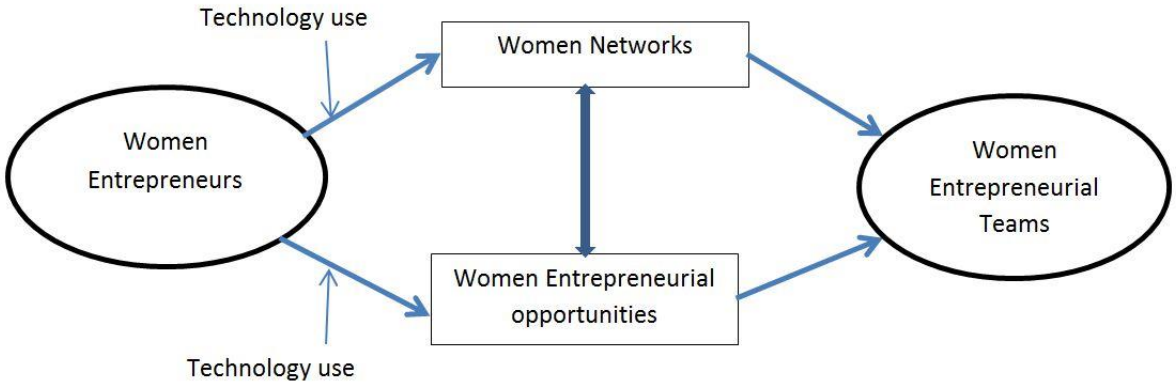

Figure I: Women Entrepreneurial Team Model.

The women entrepreneurial team model above is a conceptualized model built to represent not only the conceptual triggers emanating from women entrepreneurs using technology but also the domino effect emanating from the use. The model indicates a premise that when women entrepreneurs use technology it provides a platform where women networks and entrepreneur opportunities thrive which in turn results to connections leading to formation of women entrepreneurial teams. Studies have indicated that the combination of bounded structural uncertainty and a perceived common interest gives rise to strong interdependence which is conducive for formation of entrepreneurial teams [26]. Therefore, the study conceptualizes that use of technology creates a new realm (structural uncertainty) that gives rise to entrepreneurial women networks and women entrepreneurial opportunities (common interests) which in turn creates strong interdependence that provides a suitable environment for women entrepreneurial teams.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Job creation is a major factor in today's economy [3]. Therefore, startup businesses and ideas that can lead to job creation are a major component of the economic growth [44]. Even though women owned businesses are still in the minority compared to men, there has been a visible growth of 19.8% compared to the overall growth rate of 10.3 percent for U.S. firms [51]. In addition, from 1996 to 2014 women make up 36.8% of entrepreneurs in the United States [16]. Even with this growth, research indicates that there is not only limited recognition of women entrepreneurs as major contributors of economic growth in many economies but also studies of women in entrepreneurship are limited and more research to understand this field is necessary (12, 44).

To enhance the research on women entrepreneurs, the study proposes theoretical arguments that have both theoretical and practical implications. While the model provides technology as platform for the formation of women entrepreneurial teams, we do not mean to imply that these

are the only strategic factors that can lead to the formation of women entrepreneurial teams. Rather, we suggest that given the continued growth and use of technology that has led to connections, we are more likely to see these interactions evolving into collaborations that lead to women team-based businesses. Therefore, in addition to working to create more women entrepreneurial teams, we believe that the model we propose in this study will provide women with information, suggest a theoretical plan for practice, and suggest a resource path to successfully trigger connection among the women entrepreneurs. The study further contributes to women entrepreneur research by looking at ways in which technology can be used as catalyst to create and possibly sustain women entrepreneurial teams. As an initial framework that focuses on women team entrepreneurs and technology, this study contributes to research on entrepreneurial theory. Theories in academic fields are accounts of social processes that emphasize empirical tests of the likelihood of the narrative as well as paying attention to the scope condition of the account [13, 50]. This study therefore builds on the Harper's [26] theorization of emergent entrepreneurial teams as well as builds on Byrne's [6] similarity-attraction hypothesis. The study provides material for academic and professional interests in expanding knowledge on ways in which technology can be a platform for formation of entrepreneurial teams. Thus, enhancing the critical thinking skills for students or clients in the entrepreneurship field as well as expanding new areas of research for scholars.

To build on the research, future studies should examine whether there are gender differences in terms of affiliation and connection that may lead to entrepreneurial teams. As an initial model, the model should further be empirically tested using both genders and any differences highlighted. In addition, further research is needed to explore how male entrepreneurial teams differ from their female counterparts. If they do not differ, can technology be used as a connecting factor for both genders?

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