

Conference Paper

Women as Social Media Entrepreneurs in Indonesia

A. Rahmawati*, A. Kusuma, Sumardijati

Department of Communication, Faculty of Political and Social Science, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia

Abstract

The numbers of women entrepreneurs have been growing significantly in recent years, however, such a phenomenon is severely under-research in comparison to male entrepreneurship. This paper attempts to fill the lacuna of this scholarship by researching the background and motivations women doing business in Indonesia. Twenty women entrepreneurs in Surabaya were interviewed individually as well as in groups. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were generated to investigate, firstly motivations behind Indonesian women entrepreneurs to start their business endeavors. And secondly, how to do social media and digital technology advance women entrepreneurship. The paper concludes that overall the motivations behind women doing business are mainly to pursue their passion and creativity. This is especially prevalent in women in creative industry entrepreneurs such as fashion, craft and culinary. Secondly, women own business to continue the already established family legacy and thirdly, out of necessity to support the family. The findings also suggested that social media has its own benefits and disadvantages. Participants stated that the mobility and interactivity factors are the crucial benefits of social media while also listed restlessness and competitiveness as its disadvantages.

Keywords: Creative industry, entrepreneur, motivation, women, social media.

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is still considered as men's world since the image of hard work and agility has always been associated with masculinity (Baker et al 1997, Hamilton 2013). Furthermore, Hamilton asserts (2013) the entrepreneurship scholarship is rarely touched upon the subject of women entrepreneurship as the result of this cultural construction of male-based entrepreneurship. Thus, this paper seeks to fill the lacuna of this scholarship by investigates the way women conduct their business endeavors, more favorably through the help and advancement of digital information technology and social networking platforms. This paper is based on field research undertook during the six-months period to interrogate the rise of female entrepreneurship using social media and information technology in urban middle-class society. It doing so by conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to twenty female entrepreneurs in Surabaya from different educational, marital and age background. The next section focuses upon theories and development of women, entrepreneurship and social media. This section analyses the emerging scholarship on women entrepreneurship within various geographical locations including the already developed and developing nations. Methodological section explores the research methods and the background of research participants. Results and discussions sections explore research findings in a great length. This paper thus will be closed with a conclusion.

* Corresponding author

Email address: auliarahmawati@zoho.com

Women as Business Entrepreneurs

Research on female entrepreneurship still considered to be under-research, nevertheless it has started to grow exponentially in recent years. Even in the developed nations, there is a gap in female entrepreneurship research in comparison to men. Achtenhagen and Welter (2011) assert that the popular construction of entrepreneurship in Germany and the rest of Europe still represents successful entrepreneurs as male rather than female. They point out that one reason contributing to the lack of female entrepreneurs is the lack of media representation of female as successful entrepreneurs. Brush and Cooper (2012) also asserts the same concerns that despite the growing trend of female entrepreneurs across geographical locations, the research focusing upon such phenomenon is somewhat rare. Marlow (2013) suggests that it is imperative that entrepreneurship studies start to redefine and reconstruct the dominant narrative of male-biased entrepreneurship stories to allow more female and other minority groups voices.

Another research on female entrepreneurship begins to highlight the problems of female entrepreneurs, especially in developing nations. Lock and Lawton Smith's study on female entrepreneurs in Kenya suggests that the key factor in eradicating poverty is to give women access and supports to start their small business ventures. Mahmood (2012) also concludes that the micro-credit benefit from the government helps poor rural women to support their families and as results to this, the family's welfare and education is improved in rural Pakistan. Different from the female entrepreneurs in the developed nation who start their ventures out of hobby or passion, other research (Beqo and Gehrels 2014, Michota 2013) asserted that necessity is the ultimate motivations on why women start their business in developing nations.

In Indonesia, the numbers of female entrepreneurship are growing significantly, especially in the sub-field of the creative industry. Creative industry can be described as the type of labor that puts creativity, intellectuality, knowledge, and information as the ultimate source of work (Bridges, 2017). In Indonesia, the creative industry contributed to the nation's economy for 825 trillion last year and has projected Indonesia to be the country based on the creative economy by 2025 (Kuwado 2018). Women have started flooded the creative economy sector, especially in sub-field of fashion, craft and culinary. My own research (Rahmawati, 2016) suggested that the flexibility and mobility of social media and digital technology have solved the problem women face in starting up their business ventures since it enabled them to work independently from home. Women, by the advancement of digital technology, has finally found their way of balancing work and domesticity. The next section elaborates the methods used in this research.

METHODS

This research utilizes in-depth interviews and focuses group discussions to gather data from 20 women entrepreneurs in Surabaya. Snowball sampling is used to look for participants since the requirement is quite specific, that the research participants have been doing business for over one year period and utilize social media or digital technology to conduct their businesses. Overall, this research recruited 20 female entrepreneurs ranging from 23 to 37 years old, with an educational background from new graduate to postgraduates as well as various marital status. Participants also identified themselves from homemakers with a home-based business, to career-oriented women who manage the online business as hobbies. Some participants are new graduate and single, some others are married with children and one participant is a divorcee with children and extended families. This research has been initially tried to be as diverse as possible, but in the end, the participants are mostly middle-class educated urban women with university degrees. The next section focuses on the discussions and reflections of findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section elaborates the findings gathered through the field research from the fieldwork from May to July 2018. Since this paper explores the way women started their business endeavors, the findings focus upon two analytical categories subsequently. The first sub-section explores motivations and reasons on why women started their

own businesses and the second part elaborates how to do social networking sites and digital information technology advance the way women conduct their businesses.

What Motivate Women Embarked on Entrepreneurship?

The finding indicates that women started their business ventures towards three categories, those are the pursuit of passion or interests, out of necessities and continuing the family legacies. Most of our research participants start their business as a means of hobbies or to pursue their passions or interests. This is especially prevalent when such business is part of creative industries. Our participants' ventures mostly in the sub-field of creative industries, more notably fashion, culinary and craft. Another three participants made business in other sub-field of creative industries such as self-publishing books and creative writing skills for children and adolescents. It seems that the majority of participants have already known that they have talents, skills, and passion in their field long before starting their business. They just followed the passions along the way after they embarked onto marriage and motherhood.

The other two categories are continuing family legacy and out of necessity. One participant confessed that she has no interest or passion in that business, however, she kept doing it since that is her family business and they already have loyal customers. She also stated that she knew that business too well since her childhood hence she wouldn't let that business asset or knowledge went into waste. She also inherited the loyal employees after her parents passed away several years ago. The sentimental reason to honor and passing the family history is what made her to keeps carrying on the business.

The other participant argued that although she enjoys doing her own business, the reason why she embarked on entrepreneurship is that she is the primary caregiver and breadwinner in her family. This participant is a divorcee with two young children and after her divorce, she has to support her family. Even after she remarried again with a widower with one child, her business still becoming the primary income for her family.

How do Social Media and Digital Technology help Female Entrepreneurs?

The Internet has often been seen as the meritocratic space, where everyone can be successful as long as they can utilize and capitalize its technological advancement. Most participants argued that the only way they can conduct their business ventures because social media and digital technology make it all possible. Numerous research concludes that there has been an emerging trend on middle-class women start their business ventures as a way of nurturing their creativity, not solely as supporting family's income. Research in Australia and New Zealand (Nel et al 2010) argues that the internet offers more women to work from home while caring for their children and other domestic chores. Ekinsmyth (2014) suggests that although this is a positive development in terms of job opportunities for women, mothers have more burden to manage their business as well as domestic chores. Not only mothers have more responsibilities to take care of the family, women now have to manage their business as well.

Nevertheless, all participants strongly argued that social media offers a great opportunity for their business development and marketing. Not only in terms of business marketing and promotional tools, but social media also allows women entrepreneurs to connect with other women entrepreneurs. On top of that, participants agreed that flexibility and mobility are the key factors that make social media and the latest digital technology bring advantages to women entrepreneurs. On the other hand, the participants argued that social media also has its own challenges. Competitiveness and restlessness are the most challenging aspects of social media, according to the research participants. These are some of the excerpts:

“Sometimes it's hard to turn it off. Especially when the customers contact you at night or whenever times that suit them. Well, you have other life commitments as well, and they just keep contacting you out of hours. Sometimes at midnight.” (FM, 35 years old)

“I think the competition is high when it comes to selling your product on Instagram or Facebook. Because it's easy, thus everyone doing the same thing as well. I'm not worried though if it's not meant to be then it's not

meant to be. I'm confident that what I make is unique and good quality. My old customers will notice this.” (KK, 34 years old).

As it aforementioned above, social media and digital technology have their own benefits and challenges according to research participants. In one hand, it allows women to conduct business from home and this means women could balance work and life commitments mediated by technology. On the other hand, social media makes everything seem competitive since people have more choices and options for the same products. This requires entrepreneurs to continuously innovate and create something fresh and new. For homemakers like the majority of research participants, this proves to be challenging, since they have to balance domestic commitments but also have to work on their business at the same time.

CONCLUSION

This paper seeks to look at how women conduct their business by asking two pertinent questions. First, what motivates women to do business and second, how do social media and digital technology advances women entrepreneurship. As the findings suggested, the majority of participants started their business ventures to pursue their long-time hobbies, interests, and passion. This is significant since the majority of participants doing business in the creative industry sub-fields, an industry which the government boost to expand in the future. The findings also suggested that social media has its own benefits and disadvantages. Participants stated that the mobility and interactivity factors are the crucial benefits of social media while also listed restlessness and competitiveness as its disadvantages.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research has been supported and funded by LPPM UPN Veteran Jawa Timur.

REFERENCES

- Achtenhagen, L., & Welter, F. (2011). 'Surfing on the ironing board' – the representation of women's entrepreneurship in German newspapers. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 23(9-10), 763-786.
- Baker, T., Aldrich, H., & Nina, L. (1997). Invisible entrepreneurs: the neglect of women business owners by mass media and scholarly journals in the USA. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 9(3), 221-238
- Beqo, I., & Gehrels, S. (2014). Women entrepreneurship in developing countries: A European example. *Research In Hospitality Management*, 4(1-2), 97-103.
- Bridges, L. (2017). Flexible as freedom? The dynamics of creative industry work and the case study of the editor in publishing. *New Media & Society*, 146144481668892.
- Brush, C., & Cooper, S. (2012). Female entrepreneurship and economic development: An international perspective. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 24(1-2), 1-6.
- Hamilton, E. (2006). Whose Story is it Anyway?: Narrative Accounts of the Role of Women in Founding and Establishing Family Businesses. *International Small Business Journal*, 24(3), 253-271.
- Kuwado, F. (2018). Jokowi: Masa Depan Ekonomi Indonesia Ada di Industri Kreatif - Kompas.com. Retrieved from <http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2017/04/26/16362971/jokowi.masa.depan.ekonomi.indonesia.ada.di.industri.kreatif>.
- Marlow, S. (2014). Exploring future research agendas in the field of gender and entrepreneurship. *International Journal Of Gender And Entrepreneurship*, 6(2), 102-120.
- Michota, A. (2013). Digital security concerns and threats facing women entrepreneurs. *Journal Of Innovation And Entrepreneurship*, 2(1), 7.
- Nel, P., Maritz, A., & Thongprovati, O. (2010). Motherhood and Entrepreneurship: The Mumpreneur Phenomenon. *The International Journal Of Organizational Innovation*, 3(1), 6-34.

Rahmawati, A. (2016). *Faith, Fashion and Femininity: Visual and Audience Analysis of Indonesian Muslim Fashion Blogs* (Ph.D). Cardiff University.