

A Study on The Challenges and Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs

*The Su Sandy, #Drushti Jain, \$Rathinasamy Muthukrishnan

*#Student, Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Business Studies (University of Northampton, UK), Amity Global Institute, Singapore. *thesusandy@gmail.com, #drushtiparmar60597@gmail.com

\$Senior Lecturer, Computing & Business Studies, Amity Global Institute, Singapore.

rmuthukrishnan@singapore.amity.edu

Abstract - This paper mainly focuses on the challenges faced by women and the motivating factors which lead to development of women entrepreneurs and their evolution overtime. It explains the definition of entrepreneur and extend terminologies of entrepreneurship and women entrepreneurs. Additionally, information of how ASEAN organisation has helped Southeast Asian women to overthrow old rooted traditions while adapting the norms of modern. Even though the entrepreneurial process is similar for both male and female, in reality, women face many struggle and challenges, which are of different dimensions and magnitudes, restricting from realizing their full potential as a female entrepreneur. Therefore, this paper will be critically evaluated based on various researched papers to clearly understand how women have overcome all the hurdles in their journey and how they have become a successful entrepreneur; creating jobs, developing businesses, innovations, solving social problems across the globe.

Keywords – ASEAN, Women Enterprises, Business.

I. INTRODUCTION

Women who have become business owners have a long history of how they have overcome the challenges and managed to successfully establish enterprises around the world. From homemaker to an entrepreneur, women had faced many hardships to earn money and start-up small businesses. Even setting up a small business requires solid funding, therefore, they had to invest their entire fortune, often at high financial risk, into the business with hopes to reap the benefits of a flourished business (Gay, 2016). In past, women were generally perceived as homemakers and were only responsible for all the household chores and well-being of their family, husband and children, therefore, they had very limited knowledge about the business or economy (Jogdankar, 2017). Nevertheless, times have changed and most women are now successful entrepreneurs, creating a large impact on the society with many established firms around the world.

The development of women entrepreneurship within a country has now become an important matter for economic development (Ambepitiya, 2016). Greater opportunities, such as increasing the limited capital of skilled workers and technology, have pushed women to become entrepreneurs alongside men. However, the representation of women entrepreneurs is still relatively low which indicates that there are many challenging barriers for them (Fernandes, 2018). In some part of developing Asian countries, it is believed that the development of women's

entrepreneurship has a tremendous impact in empowering and inspiring younger women to become business owners, and at the same time, transforming their society on a large scale (Ambepitiya, 2016). Despite, there are still many countries that remain largely untouched having a very low level of economic development and industrialization in the area. According to research, it is discovered that less than 10% of the entrepreneurs in South Asia, comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, are women (Sinha S., 2005).

II. HISTORY & BACKGROUND

2.1 What is Entrepreneur and Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship has been regarded as one of the most important determinant factors for industrial growth in both developing and developed countries. As for the word "Entrepreneurship", there is no universal agreement on its definition (Davisson, 2004). However, the word "Entrepreneurship" is quite elastic and its process generally involves "discovery, enactment, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities to create beneficial goods and services for future." (Gutterman, 2012).

Similarly, the word "Entrepreneur" is also defined in different versions varying upon different people's perspective. The word "Entrepreneur" originates from a thirteenth-century French verb, "*Entreprendre*", meaning "to do something" or "to undertake". But, during the sixteenth century, the noun form, "Entrepreneur", was

used to refer to “someone who undertakes a business venture” (Gangwar, 2016). According to one of the earlier definitions, the word “Entrepreneur” is said to be “those who create new combinations, new markets, products, or distribution systems while exploiting market opportunities through technical and/or organizational innovation” (Eroglu & Picak, 2011).

Both of these words, “Entrepreneurship” and “Entrepreneur”, must be working together in sync to establish a successful firm. Therefore, an entrepreneur has to go through a series of behavioural activities, processes and follow certain procedures of entrepreneurship for persistent progress in creating an innovative solution for a successful organization.

2.2 Definition Of “Women Entrepreneur”

The word “Woman Entrepreneur” is defined in many distinctive concepts and have various definitions according to different areas (Bruin, Brush, & Welter, 2006). Women entrepreneurs are also entitled as she-entrepreneur, owner-head of company, owner-manager of a company or woman-head of a company. They are described as “A woman who alone or with partners has founded, bought or inherited an enterprise, who assumes the risks, financial, administrative and social responsibilities and participates in its day-to-day management” (Bouzekraoui & Ferhane, 2017).

2.3 Categorization of Women Entrepreneurs

Referring to existing literature, it is stated that women entrepreneurs are categorized into three classes; those are “Chance”, “Forced” and “Created” Entrepreneurs (Seymour, 2001). It is found that these categories are the basic building blocks that motivates women to start their own business.

A chance entrepreneur is those who start a business without any clear goals or plans. Therefore, these types of businesses are most likely developed from personal entertainment to profitable economic enterprises over the years (Okafor & Amalu, 2012). Whereas, forced entrepreneurs are those who were pressured by difficult situations; such as loss of family members, financial difficulties, etc., to start a business.”. This primary motivation of theirs can turn out to be beneficial. Created entrepreneurs are those who are located, motivated, encouraged and developed through entrepreneurship development programs. These programs help train and prepare entrepreneurs to set up their own successful enterprises (Okafor & Amalu, 2012).

2.4 The Development of Women Entrepreneurs & Changes Over the Year

Women entrepreneurs running minor businesses before 17th century was earning income only for their survival. During those times, women operating such

ventures were not considered as entrepreneurial (Gay, 2016). The role of women in the society has evolved over centuries, and now, women entrepreneurs are recognized and accepted as ‘Women Entrepreneur’ in the society. Even though the idea of women entrepreneurs is becoming more palatable to the general public in most parts of the world, there are still countries where women are discriminated for their entrepreneurial ideas and participation as an entrepreneur (Kumar & Mehrotra, 2017).

Since 17th century, women started expanding their entrepreneurial ideas and taking initiatives by advancing their businesses over different industries (Gay, 2016). During the period of 18th to 20th centuries, the word “Women Entrepreneurs” became a widely accepted term after a rise of feminism from under the oppression of community who are stiff and reluctant for change. However, during the booming era of industrialization, female entrepreneurs saw this as a great opportunity in the changing times of economy and completely took advantage of the situation and earned a position for themselves in the economy (Stead, 2017).

Throughout history, there were couple of times, where women entrepreneurs had to take a step back in the society due to different circumstances; such as The Great Depression, World Wars and etc. For instance, after the World War II (WWII), many females had to enter the workforce due to lack of men power in the society as a replacement (Hoesley, 2013). Therefore, women started filling up jobs of the men and took the business to their own accords, reversing the roles and views of the society. Despite all the wreaked havoc, gruelling war, depressions, social and economic conflicts worldwide, women have emerged from the shadows and have begun to rule the business industry with strong desire to triumph over male enterprises (Jogdankar, 2017).

After much difficult times, many organisations and committee groups were set up to encourage women entrepreneurs to stand up for their right as a citizen in the community and to earn a rightful place in the workforce among the male. According to researchers, it is concluded that approximately one-third of global entrepreneurs’ population is made up of women entrepreneurs (Allen, Elam, Langowitz, & Dean, 2007). But in 2008, when the recession hit, many female owners were kicked out of job and the society was again reverted back to old traditions. Women once again had to endeavour to put themselves back in the workforce and obtain back their position (Hewlett, Luce, & Servon, 2008). Finally, the public started to appreciate and acknowledge women entrepreneurs for their valuable contribution in the economy. From then onwards, people become more progressive in their way of thinking and women entrepreneurs became an influential image among the society.

III. CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

3.1 Challenges of Being A Women Entrepreneur

Since long before the word “Entrepreneur” existed, women have always been neglected and criticized by the norms. Moreover, they were usually shackled to social customs, stern cultural roles, and were often outcasted, discriminated and harassed by males (Kumar & Mehrotra, 2017). Instead of providing a basic education to all women alike all men, they were brought up in a society where they were taught from childhood that their primary attention and responsibility is to perform household duties and take care of their family (Rijken & Merz, 2014). Comparing to men counterparts, women has to give their undivided attention to their different priorities in life, and at the same time, have to balance their work life as a “Women Entrepreneur” or “Mumpreneur”. Therefore, women usually have little time to concentrate to start a business of their own (Vijayakumar, Padma, & Sonali, 2015).

With male dominating the society, women tend to remain timid, shy or hesitant to bring herself forth to voice out her opinions or ideas while making a decision. Therefore, women became more dependent onto their family for everything and this impact largely on the downfall of confidence level. Over the past few decades, women have been trying so hard to gain respect from the society and proving them that they are capable to perform equally as men, hence, should be given the same opportunities in the economy. However, till today the most challenging obstacle that many women entrepreneurs face is the “traditional gender-roles in the society”(Jayachandran, 2015).

The most common challenges that entrepreneurs encounter typically would be shortage of funds for start-up, strict government regulations, limited access to business knowledge and lack of support during the process and crisis of business activities (Fernandes, 2018). Unlike males, female do not receive the same support and guidance from the public nor family members during the stage of pre and post debut of a business. Also, to pinpoint few of most severe challenges that a woman has to face alone as a female entrepreneur includes insufficient knowledge and skills to manage a business, inter-role conflicts, absence of proper training and education from professionals, high-risk averseness, few female leading figures, discrimination based on gender and unjust biased in access to credit. Additionally, many cultures still believe and perceive that female are less capable in the field of business compared to men (Lebakeng, 2008). The gap between the number of female and male entrepreneurs closer every day, however, the issue of gender equality and biased discrimination against sexism and feminism is still at large (Rijken & Merz, 2014). Therefore, these prejudice perception from the society causes the entrepreneurs to

doubt their capabilities and discourage them in pursuing toward for their goals.

3.2 Barriers Faced by Women in Southeast Asian Countries

Gender inequality in Southeast Asian countries is much more critical compared to other parts of Asia. Women in Southeast Asian societies encounter several barriers in the economy (Kumar & Mehrotra, 2017). The following countries are some examples to show how women are struggling in the society.

- In **Pakistan**, women entrepreneurs are deprived from equality, owing to many “deep-rooted discriminatory socio-cultural traditions and values.” (Roomi & Parrott, 2008). Also, citizens are unable to accept the changes in role and responsibilities of a women as they strongly believe that women are only meant to handle household chores (Zehra, 2008).
- As for the country of **Indonesia**, the percentage of women entrepreneurs within the country is relatively low mainly due to four main factors low level of education, responsible for heavy household chores, social cultural and religious taboos, and shortages of access to formal credit and financial institutions (Suharyo, 2005). Therefore, women are at disadvantage and constraint their ability to thrive from such rural areas.
- According to statistics, it is found that about 48.5% of **Indian** population are women (Sindhuja, Nandhini, Bhuvaneshwari, & Naresh, 2018). Also, Indian society is very well known for its deep-rooted traditions and preserved. Due to lack of proper support and absence of understanding, women from India are unable to get out of their society’s boundary and freely run their own empires (Lakshmi & Rangarajan, 2012).
- Alike other Asian countries mentioned above, **Myanmar** women also face the same barriers like, discrimination, harassment, violence and inequality based on gender. Many Myanmar people still believe that men are nobler than women, therefore, men are given priority for inheritance and education, employment and politics (Win, 2018)

From the above, it is now clear that Southeast Asian countries have to work hard on these challenges of gender equality, access to education, employment and entrepreneurship as it plays an important component for the growth of these countries.

3.3 Reasons for Failure of Women Enterprises

Finance has always been regarded as a “life-blood” for the growth of an enterprise (Coetzee, Coetzee, & Strauss,

2014). Generally being a women entrepreneur, they suffer shortage of finance on two counts (Jogdankar, 2017). Firstly, women generally do not own a property with their name, hence, they cannot get any loans or funds from financial institutions as they do not have anything to put up as collateral. Secondly, these institutions look down and consider them less creditworthy to borrow funds. As a result of having a shortage in funds to run an enterprise, the women entrepreneurs usually fail to start any operation, or have to stop the operation midway (Labaye, 2016). In addition, there are two major factors that influence an individual's decision on whether or not to pursue business as an owner. These two factors are "Perceived Opportunities" and "Perceived Capabilities". Perceived opportunities are more closely related to conditions of the economy, whereas, perceived capabilities are more of a shortage on attributes that women do not naturally possess. Shortage of attributes like women doubting their own skills and experiences on whether or not they possess the ability to start a successful business enterprise often leads to destruction of the business (Herrington, Kew, & Kew, 2014).

IV. EMPOWERMENT

4.1 Factors Motivating Women Entrepreneurs

Over the centuries, the role of women entrepreneurs has changed tremendously and the trend of women participating in entrepreneurial activities around the world is growing daily (Lantara, 2015). It is uncovered that one fifth of women are drawn to entrepreneurship by "pull" factors such as the desire for challenges, the hunger to attempt something new independently and the pride to demonstrate that they are adequate to perform excellently in businesses alike all men. As said by SCORE's director of communications Dougert, "Women entrepreneurs are succeeding despite many obstacles and odds that are stacked against them." (Stiles, 2018). This makes it clear that no matter how many difficulties or hardships a women entrepreneur has to go through, they will eventually prevail against all odds. As a matter of fact, number of female-owned businesses around the world is rising steadily and at the same time creating mass networks across globally.

Since the cost of looking after the family has increased, it has pushed entrepreneurs to start up their own businesses to support their family financially. The pressure of childcare cost motivates women to return to their business. Nevertheless, based on the studies of 2005, it is noted that only 39% of professional women chose to return to business to work full time after prioritizing all family matters (Sandberg, 2013).

Ever since the birth of a women, they are mould into a fixed frame to perform and execute multiple responsibilities. This makes women push themselves to be an efficient worker who can effectively fulfil and

accomplish their given tasks and duties (Meyer & Landsberg, 2015). Their commitment, enthusiasm and perseverance upon their roles and responsibilities is what make women a good housewife, mother, entrepreneurs and so forth. Additionally, these natural skills that females possess is what make them earn the society's recognition and respect.

Female owners tried all their best to catch up with the men owners by learning all the core knowledge about running a business in a fast economy. Also, the innovation of advanced technology has made it much more convenient, flexible and faster, that women have enough time to balance her life between personal and work. Hence, education and innovation play a vital role in motivating women to sharpen their skills and for the growth of their business (Akhtar, Ahmetoglu, & Premuzic, 2013).

Other distinct motivational factors like conditions of the economy, rates of high unemployment and external survival instinct drives female into the world of entrepreneurship. The core motivators of women self-employment involve the need for freedom, flexibility, challenges, accomplishment, recognition, self-fulfilment, desire for power, financial opportunities, thirst for continuous growth (Meyer N., 2009).

4.2 Strengthening of Women Entrepreneurship by ASEAN

The slow growing women population in the developing countries have gain much attention from many external institutions like governments, NGOs, charities, educational institutes and other business associations. Correspondingly, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are also drawn towards the idea of helping in designing and promoting, policies and programs for the development of women entrepreneurs (ASEAN, 2019). ASEAN is an intergovernmental association that involves 10 countries of Southeast Asian nations that protects each state members, facilitates growth and responsible for peace and harmony (ASEAN, 2008). Since the development of women entrepreneurship is essential for the growth of an economy, ASEAN initiated programs such as capacity-building of entrepreneurial skills, strengthening women's networks, provide finance and trainings, and design programmes to encourage start-ups.

As the number of female workers has increased in the market, the productivity and innovation within the economy has also advanced rapidly. However, there are still many challenges for governments worldwide to ensure that women are given an equal access to "4Es- Education, Employability, Employment & Entrepreneurship" as citizens (Maclean, Jagannathan, & Sarvi, 2013). The education of Southeast Asian women has made a significant rise within these years, but there is still a lot of room for transformation. Also, ASEAN have been sharing knowledge to such countries so that they can expand their networks, skills, resources, brand, profit, and capability.

ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) has put emphasis on gender equality since its inception. Therefore, it focuses on increasing the population of women entrepreneurs and fully support women entrepreneurs across Southeast Asia (ASEAN, 2008). In doing so, it provides further insights to address gender gaps that are holding back women's entrepreneurship.

Over the recent years, ASEAN government has made significant progress in addressing gender inequality, economic growth and succeeded in encouraging female education across Southeast Asia (ASEAN, 2008). ASEAN has worked hard to implement a mainstream strategy nationwide to address many problems and to gain accessibility in government programmes and services for further development (ASEAN, 2019). Although some countries have made a huge development in decreasing the gender gaps with the help of ASEAN organisation, there seems to be a considerably large amount of problems that can still be resolved.

4.3 Women Entrepreneurs as Role Models

There are innumerable number of successful entrepreneurs in the world. But to elect a couple of symbolic entrepreneurs from Asia, Hooi Ling Tan and Indra Nooyi are two of the most influential and leading examples of a successful women entrepreneurs who have inspired and motivated many young girls and women.

An Asian women entrepreneur named **Hooi Ling Tan**, is a founder of a famous enterprise known as Grab (Grab, 2017). Grab is a Malaysian-based transportation service application company, founded by Harvard graduates Hooi Ling Tan and Anthony Tan. With a lot of users from Southeast Asia, now, Grab is the leading transportation service application in Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand (Grab, 2019). Hooi Ling Tan came from a middle-class family where her father is an engineer and mother were a stockbroker. While she was working in a Malaysian company, McKinsey, she was given a chance to study abroad in the United States for business school (Haotanto, 2017). So, she took this opportunity and went overseas to study in a business school. Then she met Anthony Tan, co-founder and husband, while she was studying abroad. Together with him, she identified the problems in Malaysia and combined their knowledge with modern technology to find solutions. And this is how Grab was founded. Hooi Ling Tan was admired by many as she is an outstanding women entrepreneur who can seize any given opportunities and used it as her leverage to success (Haotanto, 2017). Consequently, all her hard work has paid off as she rose to success. Moreover, she is a living proof that all people, even introverts, have an opportunity to compete alongside other entrepreneurs in the highly competitive business industry. As said by Hooi Ling Tan herself, "If they are not doing that because they have been given the impression by a society that females should not be doing

that, then that is wrong.", it is wrong for women to fear of discrimination and doubt their abilities to venture into starting-up a new enterprise (Haotanto, 2017).

Indra Nooyi is another successful women entrepreneur who had secured a top position in the industry. She is an Indian-American Business Executive, a former Chairman and CFO of PepsiCo and now a member of board of director in Amazon. She is highly known for her innovative approaches, energy and intelligence. Even though, she came from an Indian middle-class family with a very conservative traditional background, she still managed to conquer a top position as an entrepreneur in the world of business (Umoh, 2018). But it was her genius mind that made her carve out her own path to success. Before she quickly climbed the corporate ladder and became the CEO in 2006, she was a student of Indian Institute of Management-Calcutta and then went to study in Yale School of Management. In the PepsiCo's 44-year history, Nooyi became the 5th CEO in 2006. She was frequently listed as World's 100 most powerful women in Forbes and listed as one of just 25 female CEOs in the Fortune 500 for her super insight for financial strategizing (Morris, 2019). Additionally, she is an intelligent woman with a real robust attitude. Within 2 years, Pepsi Co has gained over \$30 billion with her help (Dash, 2018).

V. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the word "Entrepreneurship" has become one of the most discussed topics in this current generation. For development of any society, entrepreneurship requires full participation from all sections of the population, including women. Women entrepreneurs are gradually growing in the market but there are many reasons why women constitute a small portion of world's entrepreneurs. After doing a deep research on this topic, it is clear that deep-rooted traditional customs are the main reasons that causes women to remain within the boundary created by society. The status of women in the society were included while challenges and barriers of women entrepreneurs were highlighted. Moreover, it has mentioned the core motivation factors that made women transform and adopt the role as an entrepreneur. ASEAN plays a vital role in promoting and encouraging women to explore opportunities and had succeeded in uplifting the women of Southeast Asian countries. Lastly, the story of two most successful women entrepreneurs and influencers of Southeast Asia, Hooi Ling Tan and Indra Nooyi has been included as an example to show that all women have an equal chance if they know how to grab the opportunities and utilize it to their advantage. This study infers that the developing countries has the dire need to focus on women workforce to build a better working world, while exploring the unexplored dimensions of business and invest in a future where they can break the prejudiced gender roles and customs.

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