

How can Digital Media foster Female Entrepreneurship and Innovation?

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Abstract

There are now 8.3 million women-owned businesses in the United States, who generate 1.3 trillion dollars per year. In 2012, there were 40.6 million entrepreneurs active in Europe, of whom 29% were women (11.6 million).

Women Entrepreneurs represent 49,6% the world's population and one may state companies lead by Women are crucial to increase long-term economic sustainability in various fields of both business segments and geographical areas.

The emergence of a new generation of businesswomen is an undeniable fact, and these are more technology savvy, and, in various cases, have expanded their business models and performance through Digital Media. The use of ICT represents a tangible and concrete opportunity to tackle a longstanding challenge for Women Entrepreneurs.

Introduction

Men dominate early-stage entrepreneurial activity, but as previous surveys showed, there are no differences in individual attributes, like perceived opportunities and perceived capabilities.

Only in expressing fear of failure (chart 1) there is a slightly higher presence of women than men's.

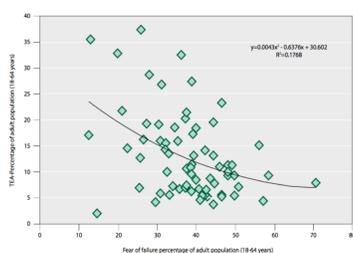


Chart 1. Correlation of fear of failure with level of TEA (GEM)

Therefore:

- 1) Are digital business a better option for female entrepreneurs facilitating the gender biased business context?
- 2) How do female entrepreneurs become more successful using digital media and ICT tools?
- 3) Does the constant use of social media tools impacts positively female entrepreneurs and their business?

This research aims explore if the use of digital media and ICT tools, in general, contributes to increase the number of female entrepreneurs fostering innovative business while also contributing to the success of their counterparts.

Methods and Materials

It is the aspiration of this research to include a **transnational data collection** between Portugal (Europe) and US, in order to compare and contrast both environments, therefore it would be essential to include in the methodology the necessary triangulation methods to obtain less biased results.

The first pilot-testing was successfully concluded, with personal interviews done to 30 Women entrepreneurs across 4 cities in United States.

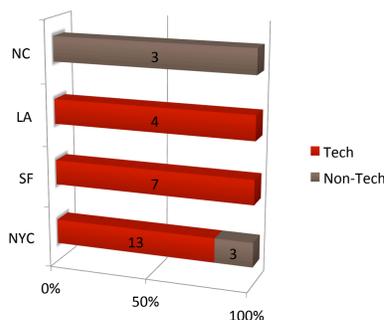


Chart 2. Entrepreneurs interviewed by Location

The data is being retrieved and processed in order to analyze the weakness of the structure and the difficulties moving forward on the research.

One of the main goals of the pilot-testing was to legitimate the scope of this research.

Results

The **first Pilot-testing** has provided insightful information and also confirmed some of the initial tacit knowledge existent about the field of work.

According to the interviews there are a couple of answers that proved the tacit knowledge in comparison to the European mindset correct:

- Most of Female entrepreneurs in US do not see failure as something overall bad but as a part of the process;
- They believe all business should be as scalable as possible in order to grow very fast and the digital tools are fundamental;
- They find the Female networks in US very strong and helpful when there is a need to develop and create new business ideas.

The interview format containing some open-ended questions made the extraction of data more challenging.

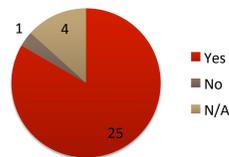


Chart 3. Do you consider yourself an Entrepreneur?

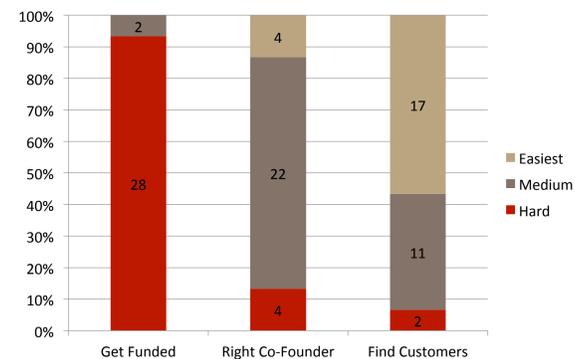


Chart 4. Business Question: Your Biggest Challenges?

Discussion

For further **research and development** there are three points that need to be considered:

1. The methodology needs to be adjusted in order to guarantee the results across the transnational business (US & Europe);
2. Once proved the initial points and the challenges are similar then a new business model can be developed with tools that might allow these female entrepreneurs to suppress their needs;
3. The ICT tools are, definitely, one of the best paths to guarantee the female entrepreneurship success.

Digital Media altogether, as tool:

- Provides flexibility;
- Is cost-efficient and;
- Helps on the optimization of processes that women need to achieve their business goals.

Furthermore, all the scientific research on female entrepreneurship is still lacking deeper investigation.

Conclusions

Regardless the life cycle phases most Women entrepreneurs face similar challenges which, can still be identifies as gender based challenges.

For most of Women:

- Access to funding – was pointed as one of the hardest challenges
- Finding the right co-founder – as a challenge that, even though on second level might impact the growth of business

These challenges have been previously identified during the literature review and so far have been proved by the research. In order to change the paradigm a new model needs to be created and implemented which might be through the ICT tools.

For Further information

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