

Entrepreneurial Competency of Single-Mother Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

Today, the business world has embraced increasing uncertainty and abrupt changes. The concern for business owners is business sustainability, which is crucial for their business to remain relevant and flexible in unpredictable business environments. The process of change forces business owners to be ready for any consequences that affect their business. Due to overwhelming tasks and responsibilities, single mothers may need help to succeed in business. The present research offers a comprehensive review of business continuity from the perspective of single mothers. Within the scope of this research is an exhaustive and methodical investigation of the business acumen of single mothers as entrepreneurs. A literature review was conducted, and the findings may offer a comprehensive discussion of several dimensions of entrepreneurial competency. The findings contribute new information to the existing body of knowledge regarding entrepreneurial competency, which has been a recurrent topic of discussion among earlier academics who have explored the subject matter to investigate. At the end of this paper, practising entrepreneurial competency with single-mother entrepreneurs has several implications. These findings can be applied and utilized by single-mother entrepreneurs, as well as by the government, industry, and the community.

Keywords: single-mother entrepreneur, business survival, entrepreneurial competency, business environment.

1. Introduction

Single mothers raising their children alone prevents them from moving forward with life as they never imagined. They deal with how to survive in their day-to-day lives and not being able to avoid social stigma, disparities in culture, internal struggles regarding who they are or where

they stand, and hardships for themselves, their children, and their families. They often take on more responsibility than single fathers, whether due to a divorce or for some other reason why their relationships with their spouses ended. Single mothers are more likely to be the primary carers for their children. According to Afifi and Mazur's (2021) research, single mothers knowingly take on dual tasks, which can result in greater stress levels.

Meanwhile, Mohd et al. (2021) mentioned that it is the responsibility of single mothers to manage their households, keep the financial accounts of their families, and make decisions on their children's growth, education, and placement. Mohd et al. (2021) state that the fact that they have different statuses and structures in their families will produce a shift in the roles that they play within the family. Hence, the dual roles played by single mothers are burdens to themselves, and they struggle to survive not only for themselves but also for their families.

Single mothers entrepreneurs who assumed sole responsibility for raising their children expressed persistent anxiety, worry, and concern regarding the potential transmission of COVID-19 within their family unit. Based on Restubog et al. (2020) observed that the COVID-19 pandemic had the potential to elicit a range of adverse emotional responses, including dread, anxiety, and worry, among individuals. The COVID-19 pandemic substantially impacted various dimensions of individuals' quality of life, such as mobility, the capacity to fulfil daily obligations, the ability to obtain adequate relaxation, and quality of sleep (Panayiotou et al., 2021). The situation had an impact on the lives of single mothers, namely the social, economic, and psychological difficulties that arose due to the pandemic. Because of the prevailing economic crisis, single mums and their children were compelled to adopt a lifestyle characterized by austerity, necessitating the relinquishment of several amenities they would have otherwise been able to afford. It constituted the sole alternative accessible to them. One of the strategies the single mother can use is to be active in online business to survive in such circumstances. In the new business environment as an online business, the entrepreneurial activities of single mothers are aggressive, and more single mothers set up their businesses online. For example, home-based cooking, apparel and clothes, and many more products have been on online platforms such as Shopee and Lazada. Unfortunately, the struggle to sustain the business is complex for single mothers entrepreneurs who raise their children alone. Dhaliwal and Sahay (2020) discuss that women's roles are challenging due to the limitations of government support, and a lack of financial and microcredit loans, which causes them to succeed in their businesses. Moreover, Dhaliwal and Sahay (2020) highlight that the dual role has a limit to the balance between family members and business.

In the face of uncertain conditions, single mothers must modify their business strategies to ensure their ventures' continuous and sustainable growth. The particularly relevant in the evolving business landscape, which is increasingly emphasized by online platforms (Suchek et al., 2021). Various external and internal elements, including internationalization, rapid technological advancements, intense rivalry, and demographic shifts, significantly influence the considerations that single mums must account for while strategizing for their business's survival within the market (Alsayegh et al., 2020). A considerable body of studies on business survival primarily examines economic and psychological components utilized to forecast success and features implemented as strategies for ensuring survivability (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006).

Nevertheless, this study has identified a need for further evidence to bridge the gap in incorporating an economic perspective into a psychological study. As a result, numerous strategies have developed to predict which significant dimensions can contribute towards the continuation of business operations and the survivability of personal and business management (Baum & Locke, 2004).

Researchers in business and economics have taken an interest in evaluating business survival competency, which comprises a set of competencies applied to any given company setting. As a result, business competencies have recently captured the interest in studies related to women entrepreneurs. The study has significantly contributed to improving their business survival and upskilling entrepreneurial competency to remain competitive in uncertain business situations. As the company's owners, single mothers are also responsible for preparing for any possible consequences that may emerge from changes made by their business. In businesses, single mothers are aware of business risks, including decision-making. They have to be more dynamic and adaptable to unpredictable changes in economic conditions due to the primary acknowledged causes, namely the instability of political issues and changes in social, cultural, and economic settings. As a result, for single mothers to be successful in the market, they have to be competent and able to manage the situation within the company. Competence in business is one of the most important aspects to consider. The connection between an individual's level of business knowledge and the probability that their company will continue operating illustrates the vital role that single mothers play in establishing and owning various enterprises in the current setting.

2. Single Mothers and Entrepreneurial Competency

Many single mother entrepreneurs pursue business endeavours as a career path rather than doing jobs that pay a salary. In this regard, entrepreneurial activities enhance their economic standing while meeting family commitments (Kamarudin et al., 2021). As a result, the statistics show that the involvement of single mother entrepreneurs in a variety of businesses has tremendously increased (Ismail et al., 2016). Nevertheless, earlier research that focused on the single mother entrepreneur studies has shed light on several obstacles that this group needed to overcome, such as financial matters, which are one of the most significant obstacles women face in business (Topimin et al., 2019). In addition, the poor management of a business is also recognized as another constraint for single-mother entrepreneurs (Setini et al., 2020). For example, they need a business support system, such as staffing and a limit on raw materials and equipment, which causes them to fail to manage the business successfully (Osman, 2000).

In this context, this paper found that single mother entrepreneurs have a limited amount of skills and qualities as entrepreneurs. Single mother entrepreneurs gain most of their knowledge and experience from their business family, friends, and prior efforts (Ayadurai & Ahmad, 2006). Meanwhile, Abu Bakar et al. (2004) discussed that entrepreneurial qualities often become a big problem for single-mother entrepreneurs, which might lead to the failure of the business. The problem of stigmatization might be significantly more difficult for single mothers who start their businesses than one might anticipate, particularly in situations where entrepreneurial values force them to be assertive. Therefore, sustaining the business and success as a single mother

entrepreneur is only possible with the right entrepreneurial competencies (Azer et al., 2022). Therefore, the interest of this study is to comprehend the entrepreneurial competencies that can be applied and practised by a group of single-mother entrepreneurs.

3. Entrepreneurial Competencies

Competence refers to a person's traits, knowledge, skills, and abilities (Baum et al., 2001). A person's knowledge, talents, and capacity to attain the required performance are all factors that determine their competence level. Human resources play an essential role in a company. Therefore, a company must preserve and enhance its competencies for economic activities. According to Mardikaningsih et al. (2022), competencies are the fundamental characteristics that result in an entrepreneur's creation, survival, and expansion. Recognizing the critical components of personality, attitude, social roles, and self-image is crucial, developed from knowledge, skills, and experience (Man et al., 2002). In addition, Bolzani and Luppi (2021), the blend of attitudes, knowledge, and abilities enables business actors to fulfil their full potential in businesses. According to Bolzani and Luppi (2021), entrepreneurial competence is vital for developing the attitudes and behavioural skills that constitute the basis of economic growth and serve as the significant competency for boosting social employability. Entrepreneurial competence is the primary competency that contributes to the development of economic growth. Chaker and Jarraya (2021) developed entrepreneurial skills as essential. They argue that it is not enough to supply content; instead, an environment that supports a genuine business situation must also stimulate and increase the desire to become an entrepreneur. According to Mitchelmore and Rowley (2010), entrepreneurial competence describes the factors that must be acquired to be successful when operating a firm. According to Bolzani and Luppi (2021), this term encompasses a wide range of cognitive, personal, and interpersonal competencies that thoroughly cover a variety of social domains.

For a business owner to live up to their obligations, they must come to terms with the fact that it is impossible to forecast the future of their company. According to Zahra et al. (2014), entrepreneurial competency is becoming increasingly essential to proactive efforts towards the problems in the company environment. The term "entrepreneurial competency" can refer to either "threshold competencies" or "differentiating competencies" because it is essential for owners of small businesses to improve the performance of their companies (Ibidunni et al., 2021). Both of these are further divided into additional subcategories. The most essential skills an individual must possess are "threshold competencies" or "core competencies". The core competencies are distinct qualities developed in important functional domains. These characteristics, including quality, service, innovation, team building, adaptability, and responsiveness, contribute to an organization's ability to surpass its competition. These fundamental skills and abilities will form the basis of a company's ability to outperform its competitors and are typically sustained over a significant period (Ibidunni et al., 2021).

3.1 Commitment competency

Proactiveness, creativity, dedication, and determination are essential traits of prosperous company entrepreneurs (Man et al., 2002). Having these essential traits is what is known as

commitment competency. Fazal et al. (2022) suggest that commitment, conflict management, and communications talents could help obtain a competitive edge. Furthermore, entrepreneurs with a strong focus on the long term, a can-do attitude, and an entrepreneurial motivation were more likely to possess commitment abilities. Humphrey et al. (2017) conducted a study that found a strong correlation between organizational commitment, employment retention, and improved work performance. It is often believed that entrepreneurs must exhibit dedication to sustain a competitive advantage.

3.2 Conceptual Competency

Conceptual competency is the ability to stimulate new thought patterns and produce new ideas and concepts, which may sometimes entail deviating from the typical way of doing things (Michalko, 2000; Man et al., 2002). Conceptual competency refers to the capacity to think creatively and innovatively. According to Thompson et al. (1997), business owners can think creatively, approach problems from multiple angles, find novel methods to create value and put energy into testing and implementing novel ideas. This skill allowed entrepreneurs to focus on finding and acting on new ideas. According to Bird (1995), conceptual abilities are a significant factor in an individual's capacity to think analytically and deal with uncertainty. Conceptual competency reflects entrepreneurs' conceptual talents, such as evaluating, solving problems, making innovative decisions, and taking risks (Man & Lau, 2008). Entrepreneurial success determines by a person's ability to reflect identifiable and observable responses, such as their analytical, cognitive, learning, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities, as well as their capacity to tolerate stress, be creative, and manage risks and uncertainties.

Entrepreneurial activities necessitate a higher conceptual capacity for learning, problem-solving, analysis, and making decisions (Fazal et al., 2022). Analytical ability in complex situations is necessary for conceptual competency (Man et al., 2002). The explanation includes understanding and absorbing complex information, making decisions about opportunities, evaluating the risk of new markets, evaluating different sourcing methods, and building novel capabilities. All of these are examples of complicated scenarios that need conceptual competence.

3.3 Organizing Organizing Competency

One of an entrepreneur's responsibilities is spotting opportunities and seizing them when they present themselves. According to Man and Lau (2001), an entrepreneur's ability to look for, find, and evaluate good business chances is dealt with in this competency. Entrepreneurs are leading to form organizations and bravely take any business risks when they see potential opportunities coming to their business. They believe these opportunities will result in favourable outcomes for their businesses. In contrast, Snell and Lau (1994) discovered that being prepared to take advantage of relevant chances is an essential competency requirement for expanding businesses. Entrepreneurs must always look for goods and services that have the potential to benefit customers or end users, as their ability to seize opportunities rests on their comprehension of consumer demand (Choi & Shepherd, 2004). Various contexts, including online, offline, and in-person, are utilized for this search. Being quick on one's feet to come up with fresh ideas and turn them into great business possibilities is a must for entrepreneurs (Kwon et al., 2018). Mamun et al. (2018) assert that skilled business owners are better at sifting through potential new

prospects. Man et al. (2002) defined opportunity recognition competency as an entrepreneur's capacity to recognize and choose appropriate opportunities before engaging in entrepreneurial activities. A study by Man et al. (2008) further validated the significance of entrepreneurs' ability to identify possibilities that generate income to enhance enterprises' organizational competency and competitive reach. Entrepreneurs need to identify opportunities to make money by having more business-savvy ideas, creative ways of doing things, and unique ways to minimize the risk of losing (Zainol & Al-Mamun, 2018).

3.4 Relationship Competency

Entrepreneurs must interact with many individuals during their business, including customers, suppliers, workers, government officials, competitors, and other stakeholders. According to Jenssen and Greve (2002), one of the most important things for entrepreneurs is to network with a wide variety of people because doing so enables them to access information and other resources. In order to accomplish this, business owners need to have strong relationship competency so that they may develop in their respective companies. Findings and discussions from earlier studies agree with those from Barringer and Harrison (2000), who say that women business owners use their social contacts to get the money and resources they need to start their businesses. According to Mamun et al. (2018), the current highly competitive business environment mandates that businesses cultivate vital networking with their stakeholders to gain a competitive advantage. Man et al. (2002) defined relationship competency as interactions that entail building trust and cooperation through persuasion, networking, and interpersonal relationships. Halvadia and Singh's (2018) study claims that relationship competency is the ability to identify, cultivate, and uphold meaningful business relationships both inside and externally. These ties should build on existing customer bonds to gain a competitive edge. Customer value, relationship quality, and satisfaction based on communication, trust, and relationship investment are the pillars upon which Sayil et al. (2018) assert that relationship competency can create consumer loyalty. It can enable competitive advantages.

3.5 Strategic Competency

The ability of an entrepreneur to create a vision for the future and take strategic action, which needs them to think beyond day-to-day operations, is a part of strategic competency (Stonehouse & Pemberton, 2002). Entrepreneurs can make better choices and actions when they have this vision. When they reach it, their companies will have significant advantages. Furthermore, entrepreneurs can develop effective strategies and implement them to achieve their objectives when they comprehensively understand their business's competitive landscape and operational approach. These methods help companies gain a competitive edge by connecting their resources with their skills. According to Cardy and Selvarajan (2006), organizational processes, functions, and routines can be considered competencies from the perspective of strategic management. Strategic competency, as defined by Man et al. (2002), refers to an entrepreneur's aptitude for formulating, evaluating, and executing the strategies of an enterprise. According to Man et al. (2008), the strategic competency of entrepreneurs plays a crucial role in enhancing the capacities and competitiveness of enterprises. For an organization to reach its goal, Cardy and Selvarajan (2006) say that its skills must match its strategic aim. The business owner's capacity to establish a vision for the company by planning, formulating, and implementing strategies, predicting

financial needs, setting clear standards and goals, and devising creative ideas to ensure value addition and integration is referred to as strategic competency by Man et al. (2002) and Zainol and Al-Mamun (2018). These abilities result in successful business performance.

4. Implications of Entrepreneurial Competency

4.1 Leadership

Many journal articles emphasize the importance of strong leadership skills in entrepreneurship. These skills include inspiring and motivating others, making strategic decisions, and effectively communicating a vision. The nuances of leadership skills include inspiring and motivating others, making strategic decisions, and effectively communicating a vision. Leadership skills are essential to entrepreneurs because they enable them to effectively guide and inspire their team toward a common goal. Furthermore, developing powerful relationships and networks with investors, customers, suppliers, and employees is dependent on leadership skills. The results of the thematic analysis shed light on the significance of leadership abilities in the context of entrepreneurship. It helps identify the leadership aspects that are most impactful in entrepreneurial contexts, such as the ability to adapt and navigate through uncertain and dynamic business.

4.2 Resource Acquisition and Development

Resource acquisition and development is acquiring and developing resources for a business venture, including skills in networking, securing funding or investment, and effectively managing resources such as personnel, technology, and infrastructure. Moreover, the entrepreneur should have the skill of source acquisition and development. Resource identification and development also refers to the capacity to locate and secure the essential assets for a company, whether they be finance, talent, or strategic alliances. Successful entrepreneurs are adept at recognizing resource acquisition opportunities and actively seek ways to develop those resources. Resource acquisition and development also involve effective networking and relationship-building with suppliers, customers, investors, and employees. Entrepreneurs must leverage their connections to secure valuable business growth and sustainability resources. The results have offered a deeper understanding of the significance of resource acquisition and development in entrepreneurial contexts, highlighting the need for entrepreneurs to possess the skills and strategies necessary to identify, acquire, and leverage resources effectively.

4.3 Opportunity Recognition and Evaluation

Successful entrepreneurs have a keen skill to recognize and assess the market's opportunities. Entrepreneurs can identify gaps or unmet needs, assess market potential and feasibility, and decide which opportunities to pursue. In order to be successful in entrepreneurship, individuals need to possess the skills of opportunity recognition and evaluation by identifying potential opportunities within the market and evaluating their feasibility and potential for success. Thematic analysis has shed light on the significance of these skills in entrepreneurial contexts, emphasizing that entrepreneurs must have a keen eye for identifying gaps or unmet needs in the market. Individuals need to have the skill to evaluate the potential of these opportunities,

considering factors like market demand, competition, and resource availability. Effective opportunity recognition requires deeply understanding of industry trends, customer preferences, and competitive landscapes. Entrepreneurs must stay informed about changes in their target market and proactively seek new business opportunities. Once an opportunity has been identified, entrepreneurs must thoroughly evaluate its potential by conducting market research, analyzing financial viability, and considering potential risks and challenges.

4.4 Innovation and Creativity

Entrepreneurs who can think critically, create creative and unique ideas, and are responsible for taking any business contingencies are more likely to succeed in today's competitive business landscape. Innovation and creativity are indeed crucial skills for entrepreneurs. Thematic analysis has confirmed that successful entrepreneurs possess a high level of innovation and creativity, enabling them to bring fresh perspectives and solutions to the market. These skills are essential for standing out in a crowded marketplace and staying ahead of competitors. Entrepreneurs who excel in this area can generate novel ideas and concepts by combining existing knowledge or technologies in unconventional ways. They embrace experimentation and are not afraid to take risks to introduce groundbreaking innovations. Moreover, these individuals actively seek out opportunities for improvement.

4.5 Risk Management

The analysis also identifies risk management as a critical competency in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs need to be able to identify potential risks, evaluate their impact on the business, and develop strategies to mitigate those risks. Starting a new business involves taking risks. Entrepreneurs must prepare to make decisions that may have uncertain outcomes and to venture outside their comfort zones. They need to assess and mitigate potential risks to protect their business and maximize its chances of success. Starting a new business involves inherent risks, and entrepreneurs must be able to navigate these challenges effectively. Risk management is about assessing and mitigating potential risks to protect the business and maximize its chances of success. Highly skilled entrepreneurs can carefully consider all possible risks, rank them by how likely they are to happen and how bad they could be if they do, and then come up with the best ways to reduce or eliminate them.

5. Conclusions

Entrepreneurial competency is essential since it specifies the knowledge and abilities required for firms to thrive in a competitive environment and navigate through it. It is common knowledge that for a business to maintain its existence and be successful over the long term; it must overcome many challenges. Studies have revealed that single mothers confront particular hurdles when maintaining a successful business. Single mothers sometimes have additional stress and responsibilities on top of those already associated with being the sole breadwinner, primary caretaker, and owner of their own business. Overcoming these challenges involves navigating limited resources and support systems while juggling the competing priorities of work and family. It is essential to have specialized assistance and resources to meet the particular

requirements of single mothers operating their businesses and ensure their continued viability. The cultivation of single mothers' existing skills can assist them in the maintenance and growth of their businesses. Acquiring skills in managing business operations, formulating and implementing strategies, and building business plans might benefit single mothers raising their children alone. These skills can assist single mothers in efficiently navigating the hurdles they experience and boost the prospects of their businesses surviving. In conclusion, mothers raising their children alone are expected to improve their skills rather than waiting for government or private sector assistance. They are required to be self-sufficient and successful in growing their businesses, which, in the end, will benefit their families and help place single mothers in Malaysia as one of the most significant financial contributors to the country as a whole.

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