

What influences the networking behaviours of female entrepreneurs?

A case for the small business tourism sector in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Purpose – Research investigating female entrepreneurs and their networking relationships has developed considerably over the past two decades. There are, however, few Sri Lankan studies that have specifically focussed on female entrepreneurs in terms of their social networks. This paper aims to examine the important influences on these female entrepreneurs' networking behaviour within small businesses in the tourism sector.

Design/methodology/approach – Having established that the social constructionist approach is most suitable for this study, in-depth narrative interviews and observations were deemed a particularly suitable research tool. In total, 14 female entrepreneurs were purposively approached and interviewed. Narrative analysis was used to analyze and interpret qualitative data, which were organized with the assistance of QSR NVivo 10, a software programme.

Findings – Competing family responsibilities and business matters (being a good mum and dutiful wife), culture and societal expectations, running home-based business and building trust were found as main influences on female entrepreneurial networking behaviours. The majority revealed stressful times trying to combine the business with multiple roles and societal expectations.

Practical implications – Applications of the model in female entrepreneurial networking behaviour are suggested, within and beyond the context of the small business tourism industry in Sri Lanka.

Originality/value – This study enriches the understanding of social networks and social capital based on the experience of Sri Lankan female entrepreneurs, which is influenced by contextual factors of identity, gender and culture.

Keywords Gender, Networking, Social constructionism, Narratives, Female entrepreneurship

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Consistent with much research on female entrepreneurship, the highest numbers of studies of female business owners have focussed on the demographic background, psychological characteristics, motivations, management style and start-up activities (Brush, 1992; Brush and Cooper, 2012; Welter, 2004; Henry *et al.*, 2015). In recent years, we have observed a shift in the research agenda from an early focus to an increasing emphasis on softer issues including work/family balance and nonfinancial resources such as personal networks, mentors and markets (Brush and Cooper, 2012; Marlow and McAdam, 2013). Female

