
Growth perception amongst women entrepreneurs: An emerging economy perspective

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Abstract: Consistent with studies that focus on business growth amongst female and male entrepreneurs, this study examines the way women entrepreneurs in Lagos-State, Nigeria, perceive business growth. It utilises Nvivo for coding transcribed data obtained through face-to-face interviews that involved 35 women entrepreneurs in Lagos-State. From an in-depth analysis of their conceptualisation of business growth, the study develops comprehensive insights into the way growth is perceived in women-owned enterprises in Lagos-State. It reveals that women entrepreneurs involved in the day-to-day operations of small garment-producing enterprises associate growth with a percentage change in their clientele

however small. More importantly, they accept that their descriptors of growth derive from the interrelation between their social environment, individual thought and behaviour. Thus, this study contributes to the literature on gender and entrepreneurship by illustrating context-specific parameters that shape the way women entrepreneurs in a developing country conceptualise business growth.

Keywords: Women-owned businesses; business growth; garment manufacturing industry; Lagos Nigeria

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1. Introduction

Many scholars are beginning to recognise that growth should be studied using a person-centred approach (e.g. Eddleston and Powell, 2008; Weber and Geneste, 2014; Manolova, Brush, Edelman and Shaver, 2012). Kiviluoto (2013) explained that several stakeholders including entrepreneurs, policymakers, public investors and venture capitalists perceive growth from a business development perspective. Kiviluoto's exploratory study also established that perceptions of growth amongst the afore-mentioned stakeholders were significantly diverse. Such diversity raises fundamental questions concerning the most suitable definition of business growth. It is therefore less surprising that the call for future studies that focus on women entrepreneurship with an emphasis on defining growth from an entrepreneurs' perceptive

continues to grow (see for example; Achtenagen, Naldi and Melin, 2010; Brush, Edelman and Shaver, 2012; Costin, 2012; Kiviluoto, 2013). According to Costin (2012), understanding growth from an entrepreneur's perspective is crucial for two important reasons; (a) entrepreneurs are individuals who often determine strategies for growing their firms and (b) they also determine the level of growth for their firms. Thus, paying attention on their views regarding the way they depict growth can advance our understanding of this elusive business concept.

There is a body of literature that is beginning to emerge pointing toward a social feminist theoretical perspective of growth. For instance, in the study of the growth intentions of U.S. women and men nascent entrepreneurs, Manolova, Brush, Edelman and Shaver (2012) confirmed that men considered growth in their businesses as financial success; while women depicted growth as self-realisation, recognition, innovation and financial success. Similarly, in a study on gender related perceptions of SME success, Weber and Geneste (2014) explained that Australian men perceived success as extrinsic variables (such as turnover and net profit); but their women counterparts were more satisfied with success in their lifestyle. Drawing on the social feminist perspective and expectancy theory, scholars that include; Eddleston and Powell (2008); Fischer, Reuber and Dyke (1993); Nyakudya, Simba and Herrington (2017) acknowledge that gender identity shape women's attitudes, expectations, behaviours and the meanings they attach to entrepreneurship.

The majority of existing studies seem to pay more attention to women entrepreneurs in advanced economies. As highlighted above, studies by Manolova et al. (2012); Dalborg et al. (2015); Weber and Geneste (2014) have focused on women entrepreneurs in the US, Australia and Sweden. This is problematic as it has resulted in a scarcity of studies that provide insights into the way women entrepreneurs in an emerging economy perceive growth. Moreover, evidence generated using companies in advanced economies that include the USA, Britain and Australia cannot be simply transposed or applied across different contexts because entrepreneurship is context-bound and ethnocentric (Cheraghi, Setti and Schøtt, 2014; Dana, 1995; Dana, 2000; Dana and Dana, 2005). Azmat and Fujimoto (2016) explained this more fully stressing that women entrepreneurs in a developing country are likely to conceptualise entrepreneurship differently from their counterparts in developed countries. Likewise, Welter (2011, 2016) explained that the divergent business, social, spatial and institutional contexts enable women from developing countries to act and solve business problems differently from those women entrepreneurs in developed countries. In the light of that, this study draws on Welter's (2011; 2016) views on women entrepreneurs, and it explicitly provides a contextualised perspective on growth by utilising evidence from women entrepreneurs we sampled in a developing economy –Nigeria.

The absence of studies that focus on women's perception of growth in developing countries is our primary motivation for undertaking this research. We see this knowledge gap as the main factor that has contributed to the increased failure of policies intended to support growth in women-owned businesses (Frooman, 1999; Kiviluoto, 2013), particularly in developing economies. For instance, the 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer showed that success levels of public policies in developing countries were very low with South Africa at 15%, Nigeria 31% and Liberia 32% (Edelman, 2017; Andrews, 2018). According to the Organisation for

Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), such high rates of policy failures can be reduced when policymakers obtain adequate information about the target population –that is women entrepreneurs (OECD, 2000). Against that backdrop, this article develops a comprehensive understanding of the perception of growth amongst women entrepreneurs in a developing country. Specifically, we investigate the growth perceptions of 35 women entrepreneurs who operate small garment-producing enterprises in Lagos Nigeria and the reasons behind their choice of growth perceptive.

Quite clearly, the findings presented in the article have a profound effect on entrepreneurship policy development particularly in the developing country context. They provide policymakers with information and instructive guidance needed for developing effective programs that can support the growth of women-owned enterprises operating in developing countries.

Moreover, our study builds on previous studies by Eddleston and Powell (2008); Kiviluoto (2013); Anggadwita and Dhewanto (2016), Sirec and Mocnik (2016), Ratten (2016), Alsos, Carter and Ljunggren (2014); Weber and Geneste (2014).

2. Theoretical Background

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitoring group (GEM, 2015) reported that the rate of Total Early-stage Entrepreneurship Activity (TEA) among women was high in emerging economies, particularly in Sub-Sahara African nations. Many scholars (e.g. Quagrainie, 2016; Moulton and Anderson, 2005; Ramadan, Gerguri, Dana and Tašaminova, 2013) recognise that entrepreneurial activity amongst women in the most Sub-Saharan countries is crucial for economic development and for upward social mobility. Increased entrepreneurial activity among women in Sub-Saharan countries has been credited with the reduction of child trafficking and prostitution rates (Ifeanyi and Elehibi, 2011), improved child education rates in Ghana and the Republic of Niger (Chea, 2008; Otoo, Ibro, Fulton and Lowenberg, 2012); enhanced nutritional status in families in Botswana (Ama, Mangadi and Ama, 2014); crime reduction in Ogun State Nigeria (Iyiola and Azuh, 2014); as well as hunger and poverty alleviation in Kenya (Misango and Ongiti, 2013). Notwithstanding that, Ratten (2014) noted that these socio-economic benefits that are derived from increased entrepreneurial activity amongst women have not been fully exploited in emerging economies such in Sub-Saharan Africa. This can be linked to the inadequacy of many of the support mechanisms for business development amongst women-owned businesses in emerging economies, especially those in Sub-Saharan Africa (Dana, 2007; Ahmad and Xavier, 2011; Quagrainie, 2016). Related to that, Ramadan, Hisrich and Gerguri-Rashiti (2015) explained that the effectiveness of the support mechanisms for women can be enhanced when stakeholders (i.e. policymakers) develop comprehensive knowledge about their operations in emerging markets. Existing knowledge on gender entrepreneurship is limited and does not offer context-specific insights about the way women entrepreneurs operating in small businesses perceive growth particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Yet such knowledge can provide new theoretical avenues for developing entrepreneurship and small business research.

2.1. The conceptualisation of growth in women entrepreneurship literature

Growth is a multifaceted concept (Cliff, 1998; Walker and Brown, 2004; Weber and Schaper, 2007; Actenhagen, Naldi and Melin, 2010; Naldi and Davidsson, 2010; Stosic, 2016). Existing studies conceptualise growth using sales revenue, size, the number of employees, asset and profit growth (for example Kemp and Verhoeven, 2002; Gilbert, McDougall, and Audretsch, 2006; Coleman, 2007; Dobbs and Hamilton, 2007; Prasad, Naidu, Murthy, Winkel and Ehrhardt, 2013). The relevance of each description of growth presented in the literature remains unclear. For example, Kiviluoto (2013) argued that the use of sales to illustrate growth tells too little of a complicated phenomenon.

Furthermore, the number of employees, assets and increased profit margins have been considered as overly simplistic and inconsistent with the practitioners' understanding of growth (Davidsson and Wiklund, 2000; Lacobucci and Rosa, 2010; Leitch, Hill and Neergaard, 2010; Dalborg, Friedrichs and Wincent, 2012). The ambiguity of existing growth descriptors highlights the confusion that is widespread in studies that are related to business growth within the entrepreneurship domain (see for example Cliff, 1998; Walker and Brown, 2004; Manolova et al., 2012; Kiviluoto, 2013). Thus, this study aims to provide clarity by focusing on a contextualised perception of growth.

2.2. Growth perceptions and expectations

In attempting to provide an understanding of the concept of business growth, Eddleston and Powell (2008) put forward a person-centred approach as a mechanism for determining the most appropriate way of interpreting and studying growth. Generally, in entrepreneurship, there are four key stakeholders whose perspective on growth can be considered and these include; entrepreneurs, policymakers, public investors and venture capitalists (Leitch, Hill, and Harrison, 2010; Kiviluoto, 2013). Based on our understanding, a critical question that needs attention is concerned with identifying an applicable growth perspective that is consistent with the context being studied. Solving that puzzle can provide meaningful insights into entrepreneurship and small business research. Kiviluoto (2013) explained that various entrepreneurship stakeholders including entrepreneurs, policymakers, public investors and venture capitalists often perceive growth differently from one another. Using the shareholders theoretical perspective, the growth of a business is an outcome of the decisions made by the business owner/s (Friedman, 1970; Actenhagen, Naldi and Melin, 2010; Kiviluoto, 2013). Moreover, a focus on entrepreneurs' growth perceptions should be given a central role – especially as they decide whether to grow their businesses or not (Costin, 2012). Studying firm growth from an entrepreneur's perspective has become extremely important because its outcomes can assist key policy institutions in sourcing essential resources that can have a profound effect on enterprise development (Frooman 1999; Kiviluoto, 2013).

Drawing on the social feminists' perspective, existing studies (e.g. Manolova, 2012; Weber and Geneste, 2014) advance the notion that women entrepreneurs manage their businesses in a way that is different from their male counterparts because of variations in gender socialisation, education and experience (Fischer et al., 1993; Brush, Edelman, Manolova and Welter, 2019). This has led to an increase in studies that focus on developing an understanding of how women perceive growth in general. For instance, Dalborg, Friedrichs and Wincent (2012) explained that Swedish women entrepreneurs perceive growth to be about creating work and being

appreciated. Women's choices of qualitative perception of growth (i.e. creating work and being appreciated) are determined primarily by their feminine feature and gender identity (Dalborg et al., 2012). Likewise, Subramaniam and Islam (2014) established that Singaporean women entrepreneurs perceived business growth as constant innovation and improvement of human capital. Related to that, in Stosic (2016) it was discovered that Serbian women entrepreneurs perceived business growth to be an increase in customers and employee satisfaction and improved relations with stakeholders.

Similarly, Costin (2012) found that Irish women entrepreneurs associated business growth with improving customer service, building a reputation, personal development and loyalty from staff. The diversity in the way growth was perceived in the studies above indicate that the way women interpret growth may perhaps differ from context to context. Similarly, Azmat and Fujimoto (2016) explained that women are a disparate group; which implies that the way women entrepreneurs perceive growth in a developing country context is probably different from the way women entrepreneurs in the developed country context conceptualise growth. Taking into consideration the growing acceptance that scholars should contextualise entrepreneurship theory (see Dana, 1996; 2000; Welter, 2011; Welter, Gartner and Wright, 2016), we advance the notion that the way women perceive growth depends on the industry sector they operate in.

2.3. Social feminist theory and Women's perception of growth

The social feminist theory assumes that, due to differences in early and ongoing socialisation, women and men inherently differ in their behavioural traits (Fischer, Reuber and Dyke, 1993; Gunnerud, 1997; Verheul, Stel and Roy Thurik, 2006; Manolova et al., 2012). This theory proposes that women are not innately inferior to men, only that they behave as well as develop in different ways (Jaggar 1983; Elizabeth and Baines, 1998). The differences between women and men are derived from the diverse socio-cultural experiences they are each exposed to from their birth (Chodorow 1978; Calas and Smircich 1989; Gunnerud, 1997). The literature on gender often associates female and male socio-cultural experiences with the socialist processes that are embedded in family settings, societal, cultural and economic values (Fischer et al., 1993; Aliyu, 2013). In other words, female and male socio-cultural experiences are "constructed and negotiated within a historical, social and geographical context and accomplished through praxis" (Gunnerud, 1997; p.266). For women, this societal praxis generally encourages them to possess traits such as gentleness, sensitivity, compassion, submissiveness and deference (Elise, 1997; Elizabeth and Baines, 1998; Justine, Sonya, Katherine and Diane, 2005; Verheul, Stel and Roy Thurik, 2006). Their feminine traits often shape the meaning women attach to entrepreneurship (Fischer, Reuber and Dyke, 1993; Manolova et al., 2012; Weber and Geneste, 2014).

Moreover, social feminists advance the school of thought that feminine attributes shape the way women entrepreneurs manage the ventures they establish (Verheul and Thurik, 2001). Furthermore, Eddleston and Powell (2008) acknowledge that gender traits form women's behaviours and the meaning they attach to entrepreneurship. Similarly, research emerging in social psychology suggests that male entrepreneurs are more often motivated by financial and instrumental concerns while women are more often motivated by relational and social concerns

(Smith 2000). For instance, Manolova et al. (2012) showed that women entrepreneurs in the USA desired non-financial forms of success compared to their male counterparts who preferred financial successes. Similarly, in their study of gender-related perceptions of SME success, Weber and Geneste (2014) identified that women entrepreneurs preferred intrinsic success (non-financial: lifestyle and perceived success); while their male counterparts preferred extrinsic forms successes (financial: sales, number of employees and profit).

Both Manolova et al.'s (2012) and Weber and Geneste's (2014) ideas converged on the impression that the preference for non-financial forms of successes amongst female entrepreneurs is generally grounded in their feminine traits of gentleness, sensitivity, compassion, submissiveness and deference. Thus, based on the social feminist perspective, we make the following propositions:

Proposition 1: Women entrepreneurs in an emerging economy perceive growth using nonfinancial descriptors.

Proposition 2: There is a link between the way in which women entrepreneurs (operating in an emerging economy) perceive growth and their feminine traits.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Approach

The main focus of this article is to develop an understanding of the way women entrepreneurs in Lagos-state Nigeria perceive business growth. As such, it was deemed appropriate to adopt a qualitative approach for this exploratory study. Doing so enabled us to develop new insights and learn from the stories told by our key informants, reducing the likelihood of measurement errors common in survey studies (Dana and Dana, 2005). The qualitative approach we adopted also enabled us to pay more attention to the context (Dana, 1999; Dana, 2002) particularly as sensitivity to the cultural environment of Lagos Nigeria is crucial. Quite clearly, depth and context (the focus of qualitative research) was vital for developing fresh insights into the way in which women entrepreneurs perceived growth and the reasons behind their choices in a developing country context, Lagos Nigeria. Therefore, taking into consideration that the concept of women entrepreneurship in developing economies remains at an explorative stage (Pathak, Goltz and Buche, 2013; Yadav and Unni, 2016); women entrepreneurs were interviewed, and the process stopped when we reached qualitative saturation (Morse, 1995; Mason, 2010; Saunders *et al.*, 2018).

3.2. Data

In this article, we considered women entrepreneurs operating in the garment production sector within the fashion industry. The fashion industry (which includes garment production) in Sub-Saharan Africa is estimated to be worth \$31 Billion- with Nigeria contributing the most substantial proportion (CNBC, 2015), and this value is expected to double in the next 10 years (Euromonitor International, 2015; AFDB, 2016). Secondly, the fashion industry accounts for the second-largest number of jobs in Sub-Saharan Africa, following Agriculture (AFDB, 2016).

Apart from its significant contribution to employment generation, the Nigerian Fashion Industry contributes 0.47% (₦380 Billion) towards Nigerian rebased GDP (Nigerian Observer, 2015). Although, the oil and gas sector contribute more (13.8%), yet with the petrodollars, fast diminishing, the Federal Government of Nigeria have recognised that the fashion industry has the potential to diversify the economy, generate more employment and reduce poverty levels (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2017). The fashion industry is primarily dominated by women, and it is considered as a means for improving the living conditions of women and youth in Nigeria (AFDB, 2016).

3.3.Data Sample, Collection and Analysis

The women entrepreneurs who were the key informants and part of a convenience sample provided rich data for analysis (McGowan, Redeker, Cooper and Greenan, 2012). The sample size was achieved by interviewing the participants until qualitative saturation was achieved (Morse, 1995; Mason, 2010; Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

In-depth interviews were conducted with 35 women entrepreneurs. Each participant was involved in an interview that lasted on average of 60 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed (Creswell, 2014). As a result of the inductive analysis of interview data, crucial issues about how participants perceive business growth emerged. Furthermore, rich insights about the way women entrepreneurs in Lagos perceived growth were derived from the data we gathered.

Before analysing our data, we transcribed all the interviews into word-processed text (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). The transcripts were coded using the labels we derived from the data (data-driven codes) and the literature through “a priori codes” technique (Farquhar, 2012). The technique we used was based on QSR NVivo – a qualitative data analysis software. According to Yin (2012), computer software programs are useful and can support the coding and analysis of large amounts of data. To address the research questions, the data were analysed using across cases and thematic analysis techniques.

4. Findings

The findings of this study offer a comprehensive understanding of the way women entrepreneurs in Nigeria perceive growth. In the following sections, we provide detailed interpretations of their perception of growth using themes we generated from our qualitative discussions.

4.1.Women entrepreneur’s perceptions of growth

Overall, growth is perceived mostly as an “increase in the number of customers”. Twenty-five percent (25%) of women entrepreneurs in our sample explained the growth in terms of customer numbers. Table 1 illustrates a range of the descriptors our group of female entrepreneurs used.

Insert Table 1

Although there were nineteen (19) other variables mentioned, our key informants linked “increase in the number of customers” to other growth descriptors such as “rise in exports” and “increase in sales or turnover”. This was because it was unlikely for women entrepreneurs to record a “rise in exports” or “increase in sales” without simultaneously recording an “increase in the number of customers”. Furthermore, an “increase in the number of employees”, “growth in the number of sewing machines”, “change of the location of the workshop” and “improvement in the quality of garments” were seen as the basis for achieving an increase in clientele by our sampled women entrepreneurs.

This was made explicit by four of our participants who commented that:

If someone does not have the equipment that we need, customers will not come. So, I want to increase the number of equipment in my business, and I know that customers will be coming, and I can get plenty of work to do (Respondent ZG2).

I will love to establish the business more than this. I wish to employ more people to sew clothes for male customers. I want more staffs to sew clothes and look for customers (Respondent O18).

My business has grown when it becomes more attractive which will make more customers to come to me for garments (Respondent X1).

I am working towards exporting my clothes to America and England (Respondent T0).

Thus, women entrepreneurs in the garment manufacturing sector use growth descriptors such as “increase in their garment production equipment” as a way of explaining an increase in their clientele base. Likewise, women entrepreneurs used their “change in location” to achieve an “increase in the number of customers”. Moreover, women entrepreneurs “increased their workforce” with the aim of increasing, meeting and even exceeding customers’ expectations. Figure 1 illustrates the descriptors of growth as perceived by our sampled entrepreneurs, and it shows the way they are connected. From that its unequivocal that women entrepreneurs in our study perceived growth in terms of an “increase in the number of customers”.

Insert Figure 1

On the contrary, existing literature (see for example; Dalborg, Friedrichs and Wincent, 2012; Subramaniam and Islam, 2014) provide evidence that suggests that other women entrepreneurs define business growth using growth variables (such as constant innovation and improvement of human capital) which are different from those in Figure 2. In that regard, we argue that

contextual differences account for the divergence between the definition offered by participants in this study and those sampled elsewhere, especially from a developed country context.

Insert Figure 2A and 2B

4.2. Financial or Non-financial perspective of growth

The variables used to describe growth were aggregated, and our findings show that growth was perceived mainly in financial terms including “increase in customers” (see figure 2a and 2b for extracts from comments made by our respondents). Fifty-six percent (56%) of women entrepreneurs in our sample explained growth using financial perspectives. Six per cent (6%) described growth using primarily non-financial perspectives. While 38% described growth using both financial and non-financial perspectives (Table 2).

Insert Table 2

Women entrepreneurs’ primary preference of financial perspective of growth introduces a different dimension contributing to Manolova et al.’s (2012) and Weber and Geneste’s (2014) ideas. These new insights advance the notion that women entrepreneurs’ favour non-financial forms of successes because of their feminine traits that include gentleness, sensitivity, compassion, submissiveness and deference. In addition, the new insights we developed extend the social feminist perspective. They show an alignment between the gender-features of women and their choice of growth perspective. The majority of the female entrepreneurs we sampled for our study admitted that their interest in financial perspective of growth is principally shaped by the financial situation of their families and the present economic condition of Nigeria. For instance, respondent M14 commented:

When my husband lost his job in 2013, I found it difficult as I had to take up his role of paying the children’s school fees, the rent of my workshop and the family’s feeding. I went on my knees to plead with the proprietors of my children’s school to allow me time to raise the money from my business. I borrowed money from 3 different people to be able to pay my children’s school fees and take care of the family. It is from my business that I had to raise money to return the loan and look after my family’s needs. So, it is through my customers that I can raise money for my business and look after my family. This is affecting my business too, as my business cannot grow with all these problems.

Similarly, respondent O18 and E1 commented:

You know Nigeria and how things are tight at the moment. Before my husband can consider helping me, he is focusing on the children. I have to work, run my business and generate money to support him (O18).

As Nigeria is now, you cannot live your husband to look after the home alone. I have to support my husband by providing financially for the family and myself. That is how to make the family grow up very well (E1).

The statements above indicate that the choices of financial growth among women entrepreneurs are primarily driven by the need to survive instead of their gender traits. Moreover, 38% of the women entrepreneurs who combined financial and non-financial perspectives suggested that their financial needs and their gender traits inform their choice of growth. While 6% of the women entrepreneurs who preferred a non-financial perspective of growth mentioned that their family members are financially stable. In other words, their gender traits played the primary role in their choice of non-financial perspectives of growth.

5. Discussion

This paper focussed on the way female entrepreneurs perceived business growth in a developing country, Lagos Nigeria. Although there were a variety of growth perceptions; our group of female entrepreneurs shared similar views on growth perception and by large conceptualised it as an “increase in the number of customers”. The extant literature on gender and entrepreneurship acknowledge that women entrepreneurs are dissimilar in the way they perceive entrepreneurship and growth (Welter, 2011; Sirec and Mocnik, 2016; Azmat and Fujimoto, 2016). Thus, this study contributes to this discourse by showing that female entrepreneurs are not necessarily different, but they instead define growth based on their psychosocial and environmental conditions. Accordingly, we keep in line with the neoclassical idea of language which assumes that similar thoughts can be expressed in a variety of different ways (Popper 1970; Chandler, 1994). In keeping with such long-established concepts this also implies that it can be problematic to conclude that women are different until an attempt is made to explore linkages between the observed differences.

To be exact, women entrepreneurs in Lagos primarily perceive growth as an increase in the number of customers. In their situation, the psychosocial and environmental challenges were responsible for the varieties of growth descriptors, other than increase in clientele, they employed. However, these other growth descriptors (secondary descriptors) were merely employed as a means to achieve their primary perceptions of growth –increase in clientele (figure 3). For instance, we found that those entrepreneurs who were having financial problems perceived growth as “increase in cash”. Similarly, those female entrepreneurs who possessed old-fashioned or had limited assets in the form of sewing machines considered growth from

“increase in equipment” perspective. The objective of buying more equipment and cash was meant to attract more customers. In other words, some growth perceptions (such as increasing equipment) are merely “aid” to achieve the primary meaning of growth – growth in customer base. Women with limited or no psychosocial and environmental challenges perceived growth directly as an “increase in the number of customers” (figure 3).

Insert Table 3

Going by the social feminist perspective, our participants were not expected to perceive growth using financial descriptors of growth nor a combination of financial and non-financial descriptors (Fischer et al., 1993). This brings us to two conclusions: (i) The influence of feminine features on female entrepreneurs, and their perception of growth has been eroded by the psychosocial and environmental challenges that women face; (ii) Women have started to switch their feminine traits for masculine attributes, as these features are associated with the categories of descriptors used by our participants. Regarding the second point, our research shows that some women entrepreneurs are co-leaders and co-providers for their households. Thus, women may possess a combination of feminine and masculine features, and as such, perceive growth in a similar way as their male counterparts.

6. Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature on gender and entrepreneurship. It shows how women entrepreneurs operating within the garment manufacturing sector conceptualise growth in an emerging economy perspective. Women perceive growth in financial perspective primarily as an “increase in their customer base”. As such, we recommend that policymakers should consider developing support mechanisms that will assist women entrepreneurs to grow their customer base. Through this focus, government are more likely to develop effective supports mechanism for women in this region. For future studies, we recommend that researchers interested in studying the growth of women-owned businesses operating in the garment manufacturing sector should consider studying growth using the descriptor “increase in the number of customers”.

This is crucial in order to generate findings that will aid the development of effective support mechanisms for women entrepreneurs operating in the garment manufacturing sector in Lagos Nigeria. Future studies should also consider establishing linkages between different perceptions. This should further establish whether women are truly different in their perceptions of growth or they instead utilise different perceptions to mean the same thing. Lastly, future research should consider the influence of feminine traits on women’s entrepreneurship in relation to the social and financial constraints of their context, especially in a developing country context. As our research illustrates, feminine traits are becoming less distinctive under urgent social and financial pressures.

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Tables

Table 1: Variables used by women entrepreneurs to describe business growth

| Financial Perspective of Growth | Proportion of Responses (%) | Non-Financial Perspective of Growth | Proportion of Responses (%) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Increase in customers | 26 | Increase in appreciation, admiration and encouragement | 9 |
| Growth in equipment | 10 | Change in the workshop's location and shop attractiveness | 6 |
| Increase in cash | 8 | Increased customer satisfaction | 6 |
| Increase in workforce | 7 | Number of people impacted | 4 |
| Increase in export | 6 | Self-development/ competence enhancement | 2 |
| Increase in turnover/sales | 4 | Increase in joy and happiness | 1 |
| Business Diversification | 4 | Higher Social class of customer | 1 |
| Increase in outlets | 2 | | |
| Increase in production | 2 | | |
| Growth in profit | 1 | | |
| Increase in investment | 1 | | |

Table 2: Categories of growth perspectives

| Category of growth perspective | Proportion of respondents (%) |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Financial Perspective | 56 |
| Non-Financial Perspective | 6 |
| Both financial and non-financial perspective | 38 |

Figures

Figure 1: The link between "increase in customer base" and other growth descriptors used by women

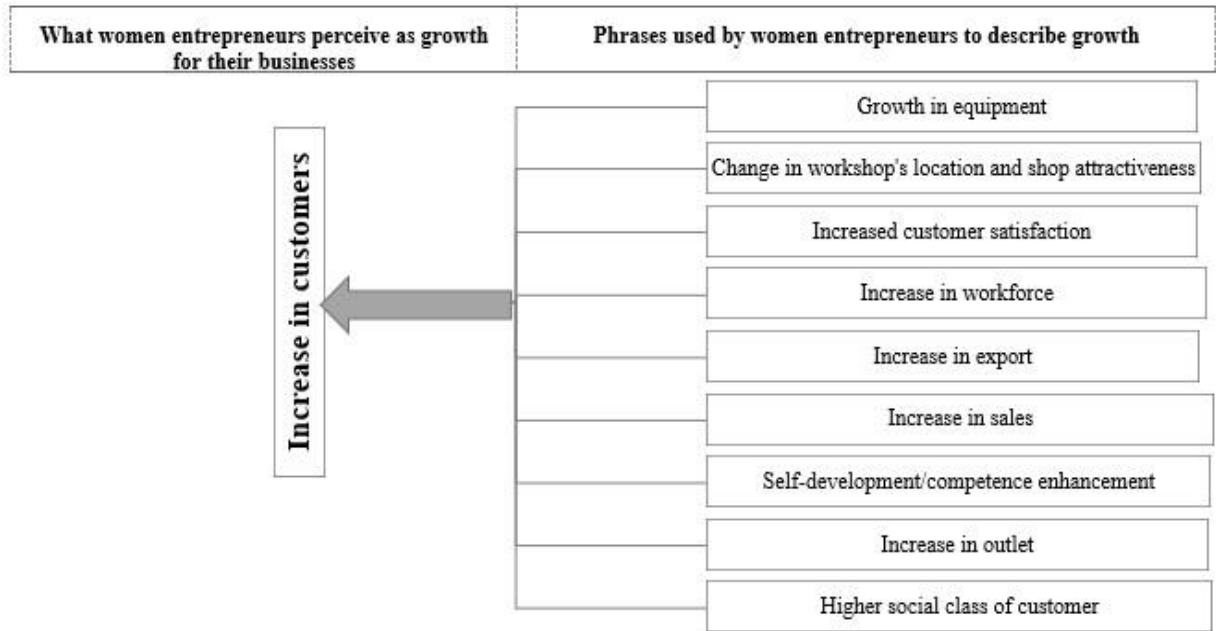


Figure 2a: The perception of growth amongst female entrepreneurs and their growth categories

| RESPONDENTS | Primary Codes | Secondary Codes | Theoretical code |
|-------------|--|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| O18 | If I can start selling tailoring materials | Business Diversification | FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVE OF GROWTH |
| | When I can start a fish-pond business in addition to this sewing-business | Business Diversification | |
| | When I am selling clothing materials | Business Diversification | |
| | When I employ more people | Growth in workforce | |
| ZA9 | When I establish other branches for my sewing business | Increase in outlets | |
| | Growth means capital increase | Increase in investment | |
| | When I employ more employees | Increase in workforce | |
| | Increase in the number of people patronising my business | Increase in customers | |
| W2 | When I am no longer relying on anyone for money | Increase in cash | |
| | When I have more customers to the extent that I don't have time to sleep. | Increase in customers | |
| J3 | | | |
| S13 | The presence of more money | Increase in cash | |
| | Means to sew and send clothes to those abroad. | Increase in export | |
| | When I sew like ten clothes a day | Increase in production | |
| | Have plenty of jobs to do for people and I am sewing clothes every day. | Increase in production | |
| C9 | When I have more workers | Increase in workforce | |
| | The more profit I make within my business | Growth in profit | |
| | When I have more people wearing my clothes design and patronising my business | Increase in customers | |
| | | | |
| B1 | | | |
| A13 | When my business generates a turnover of 50-75% higher than that of previous year. | Increase in turnover/sales | |
| | The number of customers gained per year and I am retaining the one I started with | Increase in customers | |
| O18 | If my business has more customers | Increase in customers | |
| | I want to recruit more staffs to sew clothes and look for contract | Growth in workforce | |
| V17 | When more people bring their clothes for me to sew. | Increase in customers | |
| | When I have modern equipment that I can use to do my job | Growth in equipment | |
| ZG1 | When more customers visit my business | Increase in customers | |
| K5 | The existence of newer equipment shows I am growing | Growth in equipment | |
| ZG2 | When more customers visit my business | Increase in customers | |
| N16 | When I have newer equipment that I need to run my business | Growth in equipment | |
| | Growth means when I have more customers | Increase in customers | |
| ZG3 | When more customers visit my business | Increase in customers | |
| O18 | When I possess more modern machines, it shows I am growing. | Growth in equipment | |
| ZG4 | When more customers visit my business | Increase in customers | |
| ZG5 | When more customers visit my business | Increase in customers | |

Figure 2b: The perception of growth amongst female entrepreneurs and their growth categories

| RESPONDENTS | Primary Codes | Secondary Codes | Theoretical code |
|-------------|---|--|--|
| ZB10 | Growth is when big women patronise me, I give them latest style | Social class of customer | NON-FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVE |
| | I want my workshop to move away from this place to Island or Ikeja. | Location of workshop and shop attractiveness | |
| | Growth is when I give customer latest style and they are not complaining | Customer satisfaction | |
| | When I am more creative than I used to be | Self-development/ competence enhancement | |
| P7 | When I train more people. I love to teach others how to sew garments | Self-development/ competence enhancement | NON-FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVE |
| | When I have more joy and happiness | Increase in joy and happiness | |
| Y10 | Growth is when I change my location | Location of workshop and shop attractiveness | BOTH FINANCIAL AND NON-FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVE |
| | When I modernise my shop | Location of workshop and shop attractiveness | |
| | When I possess modern machines | Growth in equipment | |
| | When I open another shop for the purpose of selling materials | Increase in outlets | |
| G2 | More cash to go to Dubai to buy materials | Increase in cash | |
| | When customers get the best garments, they want. | Customer satisfaction | |
| | When I possess more equipment | Increase in equipment | |
| | When more people are patronising my business | Increase in customers | |
| T0 | Growth for me means the number of people I affect. People I am able to impact and influence daily. | Number people impacted | |
| | Growth is also my financial status | Increase in cash | |
| | Increase in my turnover | Increase in sales | |
| | Income | Increase in cash | |
| | Exporting my products to America, England and outside this country. | Increase in export | |
| | The number of clients I am able to have | Increase in customers | |
| X1 | When there are additional employees | Increase in workforce | |
| | When I am able to help those that cannot establish their businesses. I want to pay them so that they can easily save money and after a year, start their own businesses. | Number people impacted | |
| | When I increase the beauty of my shop | Location of workshop and shop attractiveness | |
| | When I am making more money | Increase in cash | |
| E1 | When more customers come to my shop | Increase in customers | |
| | Growth is when customer appreciate my work | Increase in appreciation, admiration and encouragement | |
| | When I improve the garments, I am able to produce | Self-development/ competence enhancement | |
| | Sew and sending to those abroad | Increase in export | |
| F4 | The more I am seeing more customers | Increase in customers | |
| | When I employ a lot of people | Increase in workforce | |
| | When People appreciate my handiwork | Increase in appreciation, admiration and encouragement | |
| | When I have good equipment to produce garments | Increase in equipment | |
| Z10 | When I am sewing in Nigeria and abroad | Increase in export | |
| | It is when people at the top to know me | Increase in appreciation, admiration and encouragement | |
| | My workshop is too small, and I want to go somewhere else, somewhere bigger that my clothes are able to fit. If I move from here to somewhere bigger, this shows that my business is growing. | Location of workshop and shop attractiveness | |
| | It is when people at the top to know me | Increase in appreciation, admiration and encouragement | |
| I2 | When I employ more staffs | Increase in workforce | |
| | When I sew for those abroad | Increase in export | |
| | When we have 5 sew various garments and sell of them and then we produce another set. | Increase in turnover/sales | |
| | When my customers like the clothes I sew. | Increase in appreciation, admiration and encouragement | |
| L13 | If I have 2 customers before and now 8 and now 10 customers, this shows that the business is growing. | Increase in customers | |
| | I measure growth through the amount of complains or complement I get | Customer satisfaction | |
| | I want to make sure my customers do not have to consider another designer. | Customer satisfaction | |
| | Increased income | Increase in cash | |
| U13 | Increase in my customer base | Increase in customers | |
| | Growth means when people like my work and they are happy with my output. | Customer satisfaction | |
| H4 | The more customers I am getting, the more my business is growing | Increase in customers | |
| | Growth is when I train many people so that the life of our young ones will change, and they will not be idle. | Number people impacted | |
| M14 | When I possess modern equipment for garment production | Increase in equipment | |
| | When people admire what I do | Increase in appreciation, admiration and encouragement | |
| | When I get more encouragement from people | Increase in appreciation, admiration and encouragement | |
| | When more people patronise my business | Increase in customers | |

Figure 3: The way women entrepreneurs construct their perception of growth

