

EXPLORING ENTREPRENEURIAL MOTIVATION AND SUCCESS PERCEPTIONS AMONG WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN AZERBAIJAN (QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY)

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Abstract

This study examines the motivating factors entrepreneurial ambitions and perceptions of success among women entrepreneurs in Azerbaijan. The study is grounded in qualitative data collected within the framework of a postdoctoral research project analyzing women's entrepreneurship and experiences with self-employment across various professional sectors. A case study methodology was employed to analyze responses provided by women entrepreneurs operating in areas such as fashion, tailoring, beauty services, and psychological consulting.

The findings indicate that intrinsic motivation plays a significant role in engagement in entrepreneurship. Passion for work, self-confidence, creativity, financial independence, and the desire to contribute positively to society emerged as the main motivating factors driving the establishment of independent businesses. The participants of the study also highlighted the importance of flexibility, personal fulfillment, and professional recognition in influencing their entrepreneurial experiences.

In defining success, respondents emphasized non-financial aspects including customer satisfaction, positive feedback, social impact, and the appreciation of their work by clients and society. Additionally, many of the participants expressed long-term ambitions related to brand development, international recognition, business expansion, and the establishment of educational or training centers. The study contributes to the literature on women's entrepreneurship by offering qualitative insights into the motivational factors and dynamics and perceptions of success among women entrepreneurs in the Azerbaijani context.

Keywords: *women entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial motivation, success perception, qualitative research*

Introduction

Women's entrepreneurial engagement has gained considerable attention as a significant contributor to economic growth, innovation, competitiveness, and sustainable social development. In countries with varying levels of economic development businesses owned by women contribute to labor market development, strengthening economic resilience among vulnerable populations and facilitate the expansion and diversification of local economic activities. In addition to their role in economic development, women entrepreneurs make a substantial contribution to addressing gender inequalities facilitating sustainable community development and advancing inclusive social development. Accordingly, analyzing the underlying factors that stimulate women's entrepreneurial engagement and how they conceptualize entrepreneurial accomplishment has become a prominent area of scholarly research and policy analysis.

In Azerbaijan, women's engagement in business creation activities has demonstrated continuous growth throughout the last decade, supported by institutional and governmental initiatives facilitating the expansion of small and medium-sized enterprises self-employment programs, and women's economic empowerment. While the number of women-led businesses has witnessed substantial growth women engaged in entrepreneurial activities remain confronted with various challenges such as limited access to funding opportunities, balancing household and entrepreneurial responsibilities and limited participation in professional and business networks. Furthermore, an increasing number of women have successfully launched their own businesses, contributing to economic growth and innovation across a wide range of sectors, including fashion, tailoring, beauty services, education, consulting, and creative industries. In this context, qualitative research has explored the personal motivations that encourage Azerbaijani women to become entrepreneurs and the ways in which they evaluate entrepreneurial success.

Earlier empirical research devoted considerable attention to structural and institutional challenges such as financial accessibility, business success, and institutional frameworks supporting women entrepreneurs. While these dimensions remain central, the intrinsic motivations underlying entrepreneurship remain underexplored, self-development goals and the ways in which success is perceived that shape entrepreneurial experiences. Success in entrepreneurship cannot be assessed solely in terms of financial outcomes such as revenue generation and business growth. There is growing recognition that research suggests that women entrepreneurs often associate success with self-actualization, service quality and customer satisfaction, contribution to community development, professional esteem, control over work-life balance, and opportunities for continuous learning and self-enhancement.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the entrepreneurial motivations, ambitions, and perceptions of success among women entrepreneurs in

Azerbaijan through a qualitative case study approach. The study examines the experiences of women operating businesses in sectors including fashion, tailoring, beauty services, and psychological consulting.

Literature Review

The findings of Shukla et al. suggest that women's entrepreneurial performance is influenced more by internal and relational factors than by formal institutional support. Specifically, entrepreneurial intentions, intrinsic motivation, and family support were identified as stronger predictors of business performance than government or institutional assistance, emphasizing the critical role of psychological and social capital in entrepreneurial development (Shukla et al., 2025). The literature indicates a need for further research examining the motivations, barriers, and facilitating factors that shape women's entrepreneurial experiences. In addition, assessing the effectiveness of current entrepreneurial support programs in meeting the unique needs of women entrepreneurs remains an important area for investigation (Turley et al., 2025). The literature identifies several additional barriers to the growth of women-owned businesses, including cultural constraints, limited motivation, safety and security concerns, and challenges arising from government regulations, employment policies, and the implementation of business support measures (Santos & Moustafa, n.d.) The literature indicates that family income plays a significant role in shaping women's entrepreneurial motivation and business outcomes. Adequate household financial resources provide greater economic security, enabling women to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities, invest in business development, and achieve sustainable business performance. Conversely, financial limitations at the household level may constrain entrepreneurial intentions and the capacity for business expansion (Purba et al., 2024). Previous research suggests that intrinsic motivation, personal determination, and strong social support are critical factors contributing to women's entrepreneurial success. Studies indicate that encouragement from family, professional networks, and other support groups enhances women's confidence, facilitates business growth, and strengthens their contribution to economic development. Furthermore, increased exposure to entrepreneurial opportunities, training, and mentoring has been identified as essential for enabling women entrepreneurs to expand their businesses and compete in both domestic and international markets (Ahmad & Ali, 2023). Scholars have emphasized the need for further investigation into the motivational factors underlying women's entrepreneurial activities. Such research can advance understanding of the drivers of women's entrepreneurship and provide evidence for developing more effective strategies to enhance women's economic participation and contribution to sustainable economic development (Rahman et al., 2024). This research gap provides a strong rationale for the present study, which explores the motivational factors and

perceptions of success among women entrepreneurs in Azerbaijan through a qualitative case study approach.

Methodology

The current study employed a qualitative case study approach to investigate the entrepreneurial motivations, ambitions, and perceptions of success among women entrepreneurs in Azerbaijan. A qualitative research framework was considered the most appropriate because it provides the opportunity to an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, motivations, and individual conceptualizations of entrepreneurial success.

The study included ten women entrepreneurs operating in diverse sectors, including fashion, tailoring, beauty services, psychological consulting, education, and other service-oriented businesses. Eligible participants were identified through a purposive sampling approach to ensure that participants had well-established entrepreneurial backgrounds and could contribute detailed perspectives on the factors affecting their entrepreneurial trajectories.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. A semi-structured interview guide was developed consistent with the study's objectives and organized into five thematic sections: (1) personal and business background; (2) entrepreneurial motivations and business establishment; (3) perceptions of entrepreneurial success; (4) challenges and enabling factors influencing business development; and (5) future aspirations and business growth plans. This structure provided flexibility for participants to elaborate on their entrepreneurial experiences while ensuring methodological consistency across interviews.

The interviews captured participants' perspectives on a broad spectrum of issues including intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for starting a business, the catalysts for entrepreneurial entry, the influence of family relationships and social support, self-defined measures of business success beyond objective financial indicators, and customer relationship quality professional recognition, work-life balance, and long-term entrepreneurial ambitions. Emphasis was placed on investigating how women conceptualize entrepreneurial success within their personal, professional, and social contexts.

The interview data were systematically analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis was conducted through iterative comparison of participants' responses to identify common experiences as well as variations across different business sectors.

Entrepreneurial Motivation

The findings suggested that women's entrepreneurial motivation was strongly influenced by internally driven motivations rather than externally imposed factors. While financial independence remained an important objective, participants frequently highlighted personal fulfillment and self-development, creativity, and the intention to generate positive social change as the key factors influencing their decision to become entrepreneurs. The findings showed that nearly all participants described entrepreneurship as a means of transforming a personal passion into a sustainable career. Rather than treating entrepreneurship primarily as a profit-generating activity, they interpreted it as an opportunity to pursue meaningful work that reflected their abilities, interests, and core values. Another influential motivating factor was self-confidence and personal efficacy. Several interviewees emphasized that confidence in their capacity to overcome challenges empowered them to start their own businesses. Belief in their professional capabilities empowered them to undertake entrepreneurial risks and pursue business ownership.

The interviews also provided evidence that financial independence continues to be highly important, although not dominant, motivation. Another prominent theme was the desire to contribute to social value creation. Participants, particularly those operating in psychological consulting and service-related fields, expressed a commitment to helping others as a central purpose of their businesses. In general, delivering psychosocial support, improving clients' well-being, and enhancing community well-being were described as equally important as achieving commercial success. The interviews additionally identified autonomy and flexibility as key priorities. Participants appreciated the opportunity to organize their work independently and pursue innovative ideas.

Entrepreneurial aspirations and future goals

The most frequently articulated theme of aspiration involved professional recognition and brand development. One fashion entrepreneur expressed the ambition of becoming one of Azerbaijan's leading stylists before introducing her own fashion brand to international markets. Similarly, participants in the beauty industry emphasized increasing the visibility and reputation of their businesses. Several entrepreneurs planned to increase production capacity, establish additional branches, or diversify their services. Expansion was viewed as a natural progression toward long-term sustainability and greater market competitiveness.

With a focus on knowledge sharing and human capital development some respondents expressed aspirations that extended beyond commercial success. One participant planned to establish a Fashion School to train future tailors and fashion professionals, while others expressed a desire to educate, mentor, or support young specialists entering their industries. These ambitions demonstrate that many women

entrepreneurs perceive entrepreneurship as a platform for creating broader social and professional impact. Several participants hoped to introduce their services or products into foreign markets and achieve international recognition. This reflects increasing entrepreneurial ambition among Azerbaijani women and their willingness to compete beyond domestic markets.

Perceptions of entrepreneurial success

The most consistently reported indicator of success was customer satisfaction. Participants consistently described positive feedback, appreciation, and gratitude from clients as the strongest evidence that they had achieved success. Entrepreneurs in both service and creative industries emphasized that satisfied customers motivated them to continue improving their businesses. For many participants, success was associated with sustaining commitment to their profession and deriving satisfaction from their work and experiencing personal satisfaction from daily entrepreneurial activities. The analysis suggests that entrepreneurial success is closely connected to psychological well-being and meaningful work rather than sole financial achievement.

Participants also emphasized social recognition. Having their products appreciated, being recognized by society, and developing a positive professional reputation were considered important measures of entrepreneurial accomplishment. Entrepreneurs viewed public recognition as confirmation of both their professional competence and the value they create for clients.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that women's entrepreneurial engagement is primarily driven by intrinsic factors, including passion for their profession, self-confidence, creativity, personal fulfillment, and the desire to contribute positively to society. The study underscores that women entrepreneurs associate success with multiple interrelated dimensions extending beyond financial performance. Customer satisfaction, positive feedback, professional recognition, meaningful social impact, and personal fulfillment were identified as the principal indicators of entrepreneurial success.

These findings contribute to the growing literature on women's entrepreneurship by providing context-specific qualitative evidence from Azerbaijan. They suggest that entrepreneurship support should move beyond financial assistance and place greater emphasis on mentoring, capacity building, networking opportunities, and initiatives that strengthen women's entrepreneurial confidence, leadership, and professional development.

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