

**Contextual factors affecting the relationship between gender role orientation
and female entrepreneurial performance**

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Summary

In an increasingly changing world, women encounter significant barriers to starting and growing businesses. This quantitative study aims to understand the relationship between gender role orientation and business performance, emphasising the moderating effects of contextual factors and resource accessibility. Using an interdisciplinary approach, it investigates a topic largely unexplored in non-Western contexts based on data from entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan. This study analyses the role of human, social, and knowledge capital, regional culture, access to financing, and mentorship in shaping women's engagement with digital tools and platforms. Specifically, it analyses how the use of digital technologies influences the relationship between gender role orientation and business performance, highlighting sectoral differences between creative and non-creative industries. The findings offer recommendations for entrepreneurs and policymakers, initiating a broader dialogue on women's entrepreneurship.

Track 9 – Gender in management

Developmental paper

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Research background

In many sectors, including entrepreneurship, women are not adequately represented in the workforce (Strawsera, Hechavarría and Passerin, 2021). Studies suggest that promoting gender equality has the potential to boost the global economy (Woetzel et al., 2015). However, research on the determinants of women's entrepreneurial performance in non-Western countries remains limited. Lerner, Brush and Hisrich (1997), in their study on female entrepreneurship in Israel, identified several key factors influencing women's business success, including social learning capital, human capital, motivation and goals, network, demographic and environmental factors. Their findings highlighted that most research on female entrepreneurship predominantly focuses on the USA and Europe, with limited research on non-OECD countries. However, the cultural and social contexts in these countries differ significantly from those in Western countries. Therefore, it is important to analyse female entrepreneurship in less developed countries. They also found that all these factors influence the performance of women entrepreneurs, except for the social learning factors. Notably, networking factors were found to have a more significant influence than they do in Western contexts. More recently, Welsh, Kaciak, and Shamah (2018) explored the determinants of women entrepreneurs in Egypt, an emerging economy characterised by a turbulent political and socio-cultural environment. This investigation categorised the factors into three broad groups: human capital, social capital, and gender-related personal challenges. The study revealed a positive relationship between women entrepreneurs' human capital—specifically social networks, social norms, and social trust—and firm performance.

Previous research found that women are naturally less inclined to pursue entrepreneurial activities (Shahriar, 2018). The intention to start a business is considerably more complicated for women compared to men, as women are more sensitive to a range of non-economic factors (Langowitz and Minniti, 2007). The theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) applied to entrepreneurship suggests that intentions play a critical role in the decision to start a new firm. Liñán and Chen (2009) have developed the entrepreneurial intention model and tested it on individual-level data in Spain and Taiwan. The model described antecedents of intention, including subjective norm, personal attitude, and the perception of the ease or difficulty of becoming an entrepreneur (perceived behavioural control). Hamdani et al. (2023) studied gender stereotype perceptions, perceived social support, and self-efficacy in women's entrepreneurial intention in a micro-small company in Indonesia. Among these groups of factors, it was demonstrated that gender stereotype perception and perceived social support have a significant positive effect on self-efficacy.

The performance in women entrepreneurship has been typically measured in terms of economic performance, including the size of the business, profitability, revenue, years in business, geographic sales expansion, and income (Lerner, Brush and Hisrich, 1997; Welsh, Kaciak and Shamah, 2018). More recently, it was suggested that women can perceive their performance in a different way than men due to a variety of factors, including societal expectations, cultural influences, and individual experiences (e.g., Hughes et al., 2012). These differences in perception can manifest in areas such as self-assessment, confidence levels, and how they interpret feedback and success. Female entrepreneurs often value their performance and other goals on the overall perception of benefits for their life, often not directly related to growth and economic performance, such as personal growth, self-fulfilment, skills improvement, etc. (Verheul, Uhlaner & Thurik, 2005).

Theoretical background

From a theoretical perspective, female entrepreneurship can be analysed through various lenses. Resource-Based View (RBV) in gender research examines how the unique resources and capabilities of individuals and organisations can influence gender dynamics and outcomes. Key constructs of RBV include access to financial resources, human capital—such as skills and education (Welsh, Kaciak, and Shamah, 2018; Piva & Rovelli, 2022; Zhang & Carr, 2014)—social capital, which encompasses networks (Welsh, Kaciak and Shamah, 2018) and mentorship (Zozimo, Jack and Hamilton, 2017), as well as physical resources like technology and workspace (Colombelli, D'Ambrosio and Ravetti, 2024). Additionally, knowledge resources, including training and information, may enhance the profitability of female self-employment despite low productivity and profitability levels (Valdivia, 2015; Oppedal Berge & Garcia Pires, 2020). Regarding access to technology, women have fewer opportunities in innovative start-ups with science, technology, engineering and mathematics-intensive environments (Colombelli, D'Ambrosio & Ravetti, 2024).

Another theory frequently applied in female entrepreneurship research is network theory. This theory suggests that entrepreneurs acquire knowledge by observing individuals they interact with in social contexts, who are often referred to as role models (Aldrich, 1989). Key elements of network theory include access to or membership in associations that differ from those typically available to men. This limited access can restrict the diversity and reach of women's networks, potentially impacting their business performance. Entrepreneurs obtain valuable business information through the exchange of insights within these social networks. In addition, Social Feminist Theory encompasses constructs such as gender norms, societal expectations, genderbased discrimination, work-life balance, self-efficacy, and empowerment. For instance, the gendered perspective highlights that stereotypical expectations can surround female entrepreneurs, especially when they venture into high-technology fields (Marlow and McAdam, 2012).

Combining various theories provides a robust framework for understanding the unique experiences and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, particularly in how societal norms and access to resources influence their entrepreneurial journeys. For instance, Welsh, Kaciak and Shamah (2018) employed a multi-theoretical approach by integrating the resource-based view and the institutional-based view within the gender-aware 5M model (money, management, market, macro/meso environments, and motherhood) of female entrepreneurship as proposed by Brush et al. (2009). This multi-theoretical approach effectively captures different aspects of female entrepreneurship.

Research framework and study design

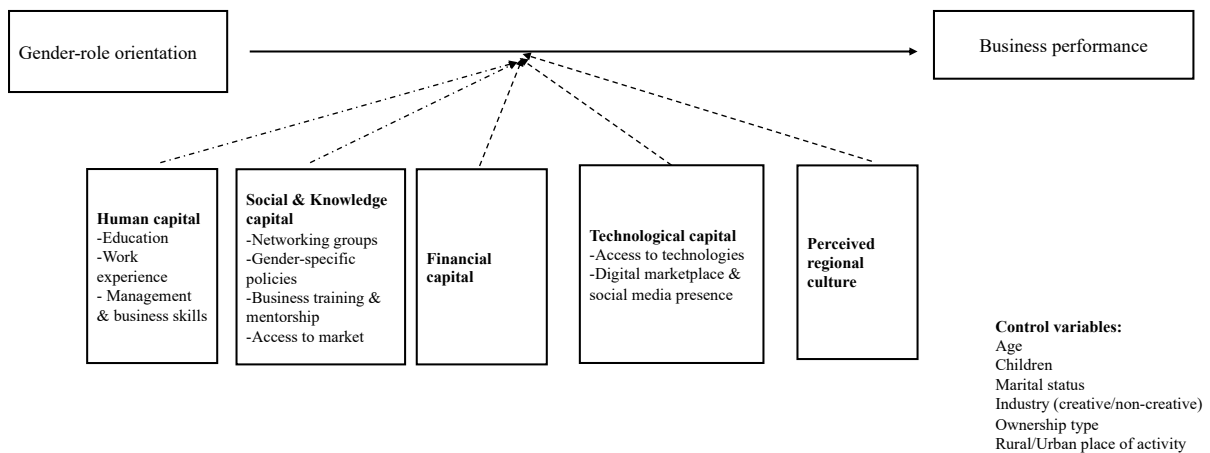
This study adopts a research model comprising the following variables:

- 1) the independent variable (gender role orientation): we adopted a 12-item simplified version of Bem's Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) scale to measure GRO (Bem, 1974). The validity of this simplified version was confirmed for a Spanish sample (Mateo and Fernández, 1991). The BSRI assumes a 2-factor structure representing the femininity and masculinity dimensions (Ahmed et al., 2016; Bem, 1981). This structure has been satisfactorily confirmed by a number of recent studies (Ahmed et al., 2016; Carver et al., 2013; Mateo and Fernández, 1991).

- 2) the dependent variable (business performance). This performance adopts a broad definition of female entrepreneurial performance as including societal expectations, cultural influences, and individual experiences (e.g., Hughes et al., 2012). The performance in this study is measured as financial performance, as well as overall benefit for women's lives (e.g. personal growth, self-fulfilment, skills improvement).
- 3) the moderator variables include human capital (Welsh et al., 2018; Piv & Rovelli, 2022; Zhang & Carr, 2014), social and knowledge capital (Welsh et al., 2018); Zozimo, Jack & Hamilton, 2017), financial capital (Fairlie & Robb, 2009; Kiefer et al., 2022), technological capital (Berger & Kuckertz, 2016), perceived regional culture (Liñán et al., 2022).

To ensure robustness, we control for key demographic and business-related factors, including age, number of children, marital status, entrepreneur type (necessity vs opportunity), industry type, ownership structure, and geographic location of business operations. Data collection is conducted through an online survey developed using validated scales from reputable literature. The survey is available in three languages—English, Kazakh, and Russian—to ensure accessibility and inclusivity for respondents in Kazakhstan.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework



Source: Authors

We are currently collecting data from both female and male entrepreneurs. Including male respondents allows for comparative analysis, enabling the identification of gender-based trends in the impact of contextual factors on business performance. To ensure diverse and representative data, we employ multiple collection methods. First, we collaborate with local partners to distribute the questionnaire to potential respondents. Additionally, we utilise local social media platforms and

online portals to reach a broader audience. Second, we leverage personal networks to enhance response rates. The collected data will be analysed quantitatively using SPSS and SmartPLS.

Further steps on paper development

Once the data collection is completed, we will expand the research by conducting a more in-depth analysis of the study's subject. We aim to collect approximately 300 responses by mid-2025, after which we will begin data analysis and manuscript writing.

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