

Entrepreneurial Ambidexterity of Women Entrepreneurs: An Exploratory Study

ABOUSAID Fatima-Zohra

Faculty of Legal, Economic, and Social Sciences of Ain Chock Casablanca
Hassan 2 University
Casablanca, Morocco

Abstract:- The concept of entrepreneurial ambidexterity highlights a person's ability to simultaneously explore and exploit business opportunities; by focusing on the individual capacities of the entrepreneur and on his sector of activity. Regarding to the female entrepreneurship context, research studies on the women's entrepreneurial ambidexterity are rare. This paper tries to briefly explain what the female entrepreneurial ambidexterity is and if women are or not ambidextrous while running their businesses.

Keywords:- *Entrepreneurial Ambidexterity; Women Entrepreneurs; Simultaneous Exploration and Exploitation; Opportunities; Exploratory Study.*

I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of ambidexterity has emerged with research work in strategy [1, 2]. In business, it implies the simultaneous pursuit of exploration and exploitation activities. According to March [3], "Exploration includes things captured by terms such as search, variation, risk taking, experimentation, play, flexibility, discovery, innovation. Exploitation includes such things as refinement, choice, production, efficiency, selection, implementation, execution." (p. 71).

After that, the concept has expanded to other areas including those of innovation, organizational adaptation, strategic management, organizational structure [4]; or even the field of entrepreneurship [5]. In fact, researchers have highlighted the central role of the entrepreneur, as a facilitator and essential actor of ambidexterity, through his leadership behavior.

In this regard, the ambidextrous entrepreneur is defined as the entrepreneur who develops a behavior of exploration and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities. On the one hand, the ability to explore entrepreneurial opportunities - which means the discovery of new things and the creation of new opportunities, requires : openness to innovation at the level of processes, structures and standards, research new markets [6, 7]; adopting a long-term orientation [8]; creating relationships with different partners (consumers, suppliers, competitors, etc.) [9].

On the other hand, the ability to exploit entrepreneurial opportunities – which means exploiting existing opportunities – involves managerial skills (organizing, coordinating, planning and controlling) [9]; ability to optimize and stabilize organizational routines, structures and systems [6]; improving existing skills, technologies, products and processes [7, 10]; short-term orientation [8, 11].

From a female point of view, studies on the entrepreneurial ambidexterity of women are rare to our knowledge. Studies have instead focused on analyzing the managerial practices of women entrepreneurs at work [12]. In this context, Lacasse [12] explains that one woman entrepreneur out of two devotes more than 40 hours per week to her business, which is longer than female employees, but less than male entrepreneurs. Indeed, Légaré and St-Cyr [13] report that male entrepreneurs generally spend more time managing their business, unlike female entrepreneurs. They prefer to benefit more from the flexibility of self-employment, in order to reconcile their family life and their professional life [14].

That said, women entrepreneurs manage to work more than 50 hours a week, when only 3.2% of salaried women do so [13, 15]. This explains why, despite the advantages derived from self-employment, women entrepreneurs devote a lot of time per week (more than 50 hours) to managing their business, especially if it is to manage employees [14]. Moreover, Mattis [16] suggests that women entrepreneurs do not seek reduced working hours, but rather more control over the hours they work.

In this regard, the objective of this paper is to identify the existence or absence of women entrepreneurial ambidexterity. In other words, are women entrepreneurs ambidextrous in their entrepreneurial process? This is what this paper tries to explain through a qualitative exploratory study with a sample of 20 Moroccan women entrepreneurs.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on an exploratory methodological approach, a qualitative study was carried out to identify the entrepreneurial ambidexterity of women.

To do this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of twenty Moroccan women entrepreneurs, operating in various sectors of activity. This sample is justified by the principle of information saturation [17], which consists in stopping interviewing women entrepreneurs, from the moment when the answers collected no longer allow us to enrich our research objective.

Besides, data was collected through an interview guide, including questions relating to socio-demographic profiles, business characteristics, as well as the ability to simultaneously explore and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities.

Finally, the data analysis was carried out manually, following the approach of decontextualization/recontextualization of the data [18]. Technically, all the verbatim of the women entrepreneurs interviewed (manually transcribed into a Word file) were reduced into extracts.

III. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Recall that the concept of entrepreneurial ambidexterity highlights a person's ability to simultaneously explore and exploit business opportunities; by focusing on the individual capacities of the entrepreneur and on his sector of activity [5].

To study women entrepreneurial ambidexterity, we focused on two essential points while interviewing women entrepreneurs of our research sample. The first point is to look at their way of running their business, as well as their possibly formalized management model for day-to-day management. The second point explores their perceptions of business opportunities; in other words, how they identify and exploit them.

In this regard, the results of our qualitative study are disparate. Six women entrepreneurs in our sample confirm that they are indeed ambidextrous women entrepreneurs. Seven of them say they find it difficult to exploit opportunities, even after having identified them. Four of them explain that they are more comfortable in exploiting opportunities, rather than starting a long and painful process of exploration. Finally, three of them consider the opportunity to embark on entrepreneurship as the only one that presented itself to them and that there would be no others.

Three main verbatims that summarize the position of our respondents on entrepreneurial ambidexterity are represented as below:

- “I really struggle to exploit the business opportunities I can identify, either because of competition or bad timing. As a result, I continue to explore others...”, verbatim translation of a woman entrepreneur in the event industry.

- “Exploring and exploiting business opportunities simultaneously is not rocket science. I am a mom and I do not intend to tell you how many tasks I manage to perform simultaneously in record time.”, verbatim translation of a woman entrepreneur of a beauty center.
- “In my opinion, it is only women who can do several things at the same time. It is our instinctive nature. That said, I would prefer to focus solely on exploiting one opportunity rather than exploring another and losing my bearings...”, verbatim translation of a woman entrepreneur in the car dealership.

In the same context, the results of our study showed that the entrepreneurial ambidexterity of women entrepreneurs, concurrently with the establishment of a formalized management model, would be the keystone of the growth of female businesses. One of our respondents pointed out that: “If the woman entrepreneur has a formalized management model, she will only have to ensure that it works properly. Problems related to day-to-day management would then be easier to detect, solve and anticipate. In this way, she could focus on exploring and exploiting business opportunities, likely to increase her company's turnover.”.

However, according to the point of view of three respondents, entrepreneurial ambidexterity is not a necessary condition for the female entrepreneurship's growth. Indeed, one of our female entrepreneurs' interviewees explains: “I have always known how to keep a relatively stable growth rate of my turnover, either by increasing my sales or by producing new models based on metals; but never both at the same time.”.

All these results go hand in hand with the women's entrepreneurial literature. Reference [12], for example, highlighted a typical working week of the female entrepreneurs surveyed. 75% of them say that they generally assume all the management functions in their industrial company. With their status as Chief Executive Officers, they oversee the strategic management of the organization and handle activities such as financial control, labor recruitment and procurement. They love negotiations (downstream suppliers, upstream customers, bankers). Nevertheless, they prefer to delegate the production function, in this case manufacturing, machining and assembly, to a third person or to their spouse if they are co-owners [12].

All this proves that the female entrepreneur is ambidextrous by nature, whatever the context. Simultaneously exploring and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities could significantly influence the female entrepreneurial process. Our respondents, although they are not all ambidextrous entrepreneurs, are indeed aware of the positive influence of entrepreneurial ambidexterity on the creation and/or growth of women's businesses.

Following the analysis of our results, we can formulate the subsequent proposition:

- *Entrepreneurial ambidexterity would have a significant (possibly positive) influence on the women's entrepreneurial process.*

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, studies on entrepreneurial ambidexterity are very recent, especially when it concerns female entrepreneurship. To our knowledge, no research study has been carried out in Morocco to analyze the entrepreneurial ambidexterity of women.

Through our qualitative study, we tried to examine the entrepreneurial ambidexterity of a sample of twenty Moroccan women entrepreneurs. A research proposal was released following the analysis of our results, which highlights the significant impact of entrepreneurial ambidexterity on the female entrepreneurial process.

Therefore, this paper constitutes an outline for future more detailed research in female entrepreneurial ambidexterity, which would attempt to detect the complexity of the ambidextrous behavior of women entrepreneurs, by proposing reliable and valid measurement scales.

REFERENCES

- [1]. M. E. Porter and C. Strategy, "Techniques for analyzing industries and competitors," *Competitive Strategy*. New York: Free, 1980.
- [2]. R. E. Miles, C. C. Snow, A. D. Meyer, and H. J. Coleman Jr, "Organizational strategy, structure, and process," *Academy of management review*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 546-562, 1978.
- [3]. J. G. March, "Exploration and exploitation in organizational learning," *Organization science*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 71-87, 1991.
- [4]. A. Papachroni, L. Heracleous, and S. Paroutis, "Organizational ambidexterity through the lens of paradox theory: Building a novel research agenda," *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, vol. 51, no. 1, pp. 71-93, 2015.
- [5]. S. Koubaa, "L'ambidextrie pour comprendre l'action de l'entrepreneur," *Projectics/Proy ctica/Projectique*, no. 1, pp. 31-50, 2017.
- [6]. W. K. Smith and M. L. Tushman, "Managing strategic contradictions: A top management model for managing innovation streams," *Organization science*, vol. 16, no. 5, pp. 522-536, 2005.
- [7]. A. Kuckertz and M. Wagner, "The influence of sustainability orientation on entrepreneurial intentions—Investigating the role of business experience," *Journal of business venturing*, vol. 25, no. 5, pp. 524-539, 2010.
- [8]. T. Kollmann, A. Kuckertz, and C. St ckmann, "Continuous innovation in entrepreneurial growth companies: Exploring the ambidextrous strategy," *Journal of Enterprising Culture*, vol. 17, no. 03, pp. 297-322, 2009.
- [9]. H. Neck, "Cognitive ambidexterity: The underlying mental model of the entrepreneurial leader," *The new entrepreneurial leader: Developing leaders who shape social and economic opportunity*, pp. 24-42, 2011.
- [10]. Z.-L. He and P.-K. Wong, "Exploration vs. exploitation: An empirical test of the ambidexterity hypothesis," *Organization science*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 481-494, 2004.
- [11]. C. Andriopoulos and M. W. Lewis, "Exploitation-exploration tensions and organizational ambidexterity: Managing paradoxes of innovation," *Organization science*, vol. 20, no. 4, pp. 696-717, 2009.
- [12]. R.-M. Lacasse, "La Petite entreprise au Canada: Le cas particulier de l'entrepreneuriat f minin dans le secteur manufacturier," Nice, 1990.
- [13]. M.-H. L gar  and L. St-Cyr, *Portrait statistique des femmes entrepreneures: les indicateurs de l'entrepreneuriat f minin et la disponibilit  des donn es sur les femmes et leur entreprise*. Minist re de l'industrie et du commerce, Direction des communications, 2000.
- [14]. S. Ratt , "Les femmes entrepreneures au Qu bec: Qu'en est-il," *Montr al in MICST (2000), L'entrepreneuriat f minin: Une force un atout: Portrait statistique des femmes entrepreneures*, Minist re de l'industrie et du commerce, Qu bec (Ed.), 1999.
- [15]. J. Starr and M. Yudkin, "Women entrepreneurs: A review of current research," 1996.
- [16]. M. C. Mattis, "Women entrepreneurs: out from under the glass ceiling," *Women in management review*, 2004.
- [17]. P. Mongeau, *R aliser son m moire ou sa Th se: C t  jeans and c t  tenue de Soir e*. PUQ, 2008.
- [18]. L. Savoie-Zajc, "La recherche qualitative/interpr tative en  ducation, dans KARSENTI TS & L.," *Introduction   la recherche en  ducation*, Sherbrooke,  ditions du CRP, 2000.