

Gender Perspective of Entrepreneurs, Academics and Students in Essential Marketing Skills

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study was to determine whether gender differences exist amongst tourism entrepreneurs, academics and students' perceptions concerning the marketing skills that are essential to tourism entrepreneurs. Understanding the perceived importance of marketing skills essential to tourism entrepreneurs amongst male and female entrepreneurs, academics and students offers important insights on how best to tailor education and training programmes aimed at attracting both potential male and female entrepreneurs. Tourism enterprises require sophisticated management by entrepreneurs who have the necessary skills required to be successful, of which marketing skills are of vital importance. However, there is some debate as to which marketing skills are essential for entrepreneurs. Multiple item indicators from previous studies were employed to identify the most important skills for conducting the empirical part of the study. The data on the essential marketing skills for tourism entrepreneurs were collected by means of a structured self-administered questionnaire. The collected data was analysed using descriptive statistics and a two independent-samples t-test. The findings of this study suggest that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female perceptions concerning essential marketing skills amongst entrepreneurs, academics and students. This convergence of opinion concerning male and female perceptions of the skills required to operate a successful tourism enterprise highlights the efforts that have been directed at training up entrepreneurs in South Africa, particularly female entrepreneurs.*

Keywords: *Marketing skills, entrepreneurs, women's entrepreneurship, female entrepreneurs, South Africa*

1. Introduction

Worldwide, entrepreneurship is considered as a vital source for stimulating economic growth, economic competitiveness and creating employment opportunities [1], [2]. Hence, the start-up of new enterprises and growth of existing businesses are considered the bedrock of an economy and a key driver of a country's growth and development [3].

South Africa is characterised as a developing country [4] with an alarming unemployment rate that stands at 25 percent [5]. As such, the proliferation of entrepreneurship, especially small business start-ups, is encouraged and imperative to economic development and welfare [6]. Notably, during the period 2001 to 2011 the unemployment rate of females at 32 percent has been consistently higher than their male counterparts' unemployment rate of 26 percent [7]. In order to address these imbalances, development efforts in South Africa are focusing significantly on building a strong entrepreneurial focus by providing financial and non-financial assistance towards entrepreneurship, which include the development of Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) [8]. Evidence of these development efforts, with special reference to women's entrepreneurship, manifest in the White Paper on the Development of Small Business in South Africa in 1995 and include support initiatives for entrepreneurs, such as the Youth Development Agency, Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) South African Micro Apex Fund, the National Fund and the Industrial Development Corporation [9]. Further evidence includes the advancing in the development of business incubators in South Africa, due to incubators being recognised as important instruments for promoting entrepreneurial activity [10] and reducing the failure rate of SMMEs worldwide [11]. In 2015, there were 43 business incubators in operation in South Africa under the support of the SEDA programme [12].

The importance of entrepreneurship in a rapidly changing world has attracted increasing attention, with the belief that individuals with entrepreneurial skills and abilities will create several benefits at different levels of society [2]. As such, given that entrepreneurship education has proven to enhance entrepreneurial activity, the focus of business education courses and programmes has shifted extensively towards entrepreneurship [13].

Entrepreneurial graduates are considered essential in terms of future national economic success and higher education institutions (HEIs) are perceived to play a crucial role in terms of this success [14].

Women's entrepreneurship, in particular, is a phenomenon that has been recognised as a driving force in the economy due to it having a significant impact on employment and the global business environment [15]. Between 1997 and 2002 alone, the rate of women pursuing entrepreneurship increased by 19.8 percent [16]. In light of the proliferation of women entrepreneurship, researchers have sought to understand issues associated with women and entrepreneurship better [17]. Gender differences in entrepreneurship are well documented in the literature, with studies uncovering differences in business performance [18], entrepreneurial intentions [19], application of marketing strategies [20] and training needs [21]. However, various studies [22]-[23] have reported no significant gender differences in entrepreneurship, which are attributed to entrepreneurship education, exposure and the provision of a supportive environment. As such, women's entrepreneurship research is not a new phenomenon and is characterised as being at the brink of adolescence. The increasingly large number of key indicators, such as conferences, speciality journals and books, focusing specifically on female entrepreneurs provides evidence of the rapid expansion of women entrepreneurship literature [24].

The tourism industry is heralded as being potentially one of the leading driving forces for economic expansion in the world with an estimated 200 million jobs worldwide and accounting for over 10 percent of the global gross domestic product [25]. In South Africa, the tourism industry attracts local and foreign visitors to different parts of the country and is valued at 10 billion American Dollars a year [26] and, as such, offers significant potential for tourism entrepreneurs. In order to exploit the opportunities in the market, tourism entrepreneurs require a variety of skills to manage their enterprises successfully [27]. A review of the literature shows that skills, also referred to as competencies or abilities, are the physical ability to do something, which are acquired through practice or training [28]. In order to facilitate an evolving understanding of entrepreneurship, continued research that investigates the skills required by entrepreneurs is essential [29]. Marketing skills have been identified as a core function impacting all areas of a business [1] due to ever changing customer needs and competitive challenges in the market [19] and are, therefore, critical to entrepreneurial success [28].

The literature describes marketing skills as those skills that focus on facilitating, enabling and optimising the marketing process [30]. A broad search of the literature on essential skills for marketers uncovered a significant number of different skills, all of which are potentially important for tourism entrepreneurs in marketing their enterprises. For the purpose of this study, the marketing skills required by entrepreneurs are classified into five main dimensions, namely personal characteristics, general management skills, generic marketing skills, marketing mix strategies skills and functional skills. Personal characteristics refer to an individual's behaviour that is most natural, instinctive and habitual, and are observable or unobservable personal attributes [28]. Managerial skills are non-marketing specific skills that are essential for the practice of marketing [1] and refer to entrepreneurs' ability to interact with others, as well as allocate, monitor and organise assets [31]. General marketing skills involve skills in areas such as customer relationship management, selling, consumer behaviour and marketing research, all of which require complex bundles of experience and knowledge that enable entrepreneurs to coordinate activities and make use of the enterprise's assets [32]. Marketing mix strategies skills refer to those skills pertaining to the marketing mix elements and are essential for enterprise success as entrepreneurs are constantly engaged in decision making about all aspects of the marketing activity, for example product development, pricing, communication and distribution [33]. Functional skills refer to complex skills that involve the individual's ability to use specialised knowledge, methods or techniques in a specialised field [34].

Considering that higher education has an important influence on potential entrepreneurs, research into the gender perspective of the perceived importance of essential marketing skills from the perspective of entrepreneurs, academics and students is needed to gain greater insight into how best to tailor education and training programmes aimed at attracting potential entrepreneurs. In light of the preceding assertions, the aim of the current study was to determine whether there are gender differences concerning the marketing skills that are essential to tourism entrepreneurs based on the perceptions of tourism entrepreneurs, academics and students. The significance of this study lies in examining the differences and similarities between female and male tourism entrepreneurs, tourism academics and tourism management students. In addition, the study highlights the marketing skills that are essential for the tourism entrepreneur. This, in turn, will aid professionals, academics as well as incubator managers in gauging effective ways to tailor education and training programmes aimed at providing tourism entrepreneurs with the necessary marketing skills to aid in facilitating their success.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample

The sample used in this study comprised 52 tourism enterprise owners, 22 tourism management academics and 168 tourism management students. Tourism enterprise owners were defined as owners of small tourism accommodation enterprises situated in the Vaal Triangle region in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. The Vaal Triangle region is the industrial hub of South Africa with a population of almost one million residents [35] and was therefore selected as the demarcated area for the study. The sampling frame comprised a list of the small tourism enterprises situated in the Vaal Triangle region as obtained from information centres in the same region, which constituted the sampling frame of 97 participants. The manageable size of the sample frame steered the decision to administer a census of these participants, in which 52 participants took part in the study. Tourism management academics were defined as academics lecturing tourism management related subjects at two HEIs. The sampling frame comprised a combined list of tourism lecturers of two HEIs, which constituted the sampling frame of 27 participants. Owing to the manageable size of the sampling frame, a census of the participants was conducted of which 22 participants participated. Tourism management students were defined as full-time third- and fourth-year tourism management students enrolled at two HEIs. Tourism management students are considered potential future tourism entrepreneurs and third- and fourth-year students are likely to have the knowledge necessary to complete the questionnaire and were therefore included in the study. A non-probability judgement sample constituted the sampling frame of 252 for the third group or participants, of which 168 participants participated in the study. The academics and students were drawn from two HEIs situated in the Gauteng province of South Africa. These institutions were deemed suitable for inclusion in the study, given their geographical proximity to the Vaal Triangle based tourism entrepreneurs who made up the first group of participants in the study.

2.2 Instrument and data collection

The required data for this study was gathered using a self-administered structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was compiled based on previous theoretical discussions regarding marketing skills [36], [37]. The questionnaire comprised two sections. Section A elicited participants' demographic information. In Section B, participants' perceptions about the importance of the 39 marketing skills for the tourism entrepreneur were requested. These 39 items, each representing a marketing skill, were divided into five dimensions, namely personal characteristics (6 items), general management skills (4 items), generic marketing skills (11 items), marketing mix strategies skills (11 items) and functional skills (7 items). Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale, which ranged from extremely unessential (1) to extremely essential (5). The Likert scale was employed for this study because it is relatively easy to develop, it makes data easy to collect and analyse and are best applied in a self-administered survey [38]. In addition to the Likert scale in Section B, participants were asked to indicate any other marketing skills not included in this section. After its construction, two experienced researchers evaluated the questionnaire for any obvious mistakes and potential problems.

The questionnaire was then piloted on a conveniently selected sample of 32 participants in order to identify problems and to determine the completion time of the questionnaire. The Cronbach alpha statistics was computed to assess the internal consistency of the instrument and returned an acceptable value of 0.850, which exceeded the recommended level of 0.700 [39]. The internal consistency of the scale was judged by employing average inter-item correlations that returned an acceptable value of 0.179, thus suggesting convergent and discriminant validity, as this value fell within the recommended range of 0.15 and 0.50 [40]. Owing to no other skills that were reported by participants for inclusion in Section B, it is reasonable to conclude that the scale exhibited content validity. Feedback from the pilot test was used to make minor revisions to the questionnaire. Thereafter, permission to partake in the study was obtained telephonically from the participants and the questionnaire personally administered to the identified sample using a survey.

3. Results

From the sample of 316 participants, 242 completed and usable questionnaires were returned, which gives the study a 76.6 percent response rate. The gender distribution in the combined sample indicates that out of 242 participants, 65 were male (26.9%) and 177 were female (73.1%). Concerning the gender spread of the

individual samples, there were more female (63.5%) than male (36.5) enterprise owners participants, more male (59.1%) than female (40.9%) academics participants and more female (80.4%) than male (19.6%) students participants. Table 1 outlines a description of the three samples.

TABLE I: Samples Description

		Enterprise owners	Academics	Students
Sample size (N)		52	22	168
Parameter		Percentage (%)	Percentage (%)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	36.5	59.1	19.6
	Female	63.5	40.9	80.4
Institution	Traditional university	-	54.5	88.1
	University of technology	-	45.5	11.9
Academic function	Junior lecturer	-	13.6	
	Lecturer	-	50.0	
	Senior lecturer	-	27.3	
	Part-time lecturer	-	9.1	
Years of ownership	0-5 years	59.7	-	
	6-10 years	19.2	-	
	11-20 years	19.2	-	
	More than 20 years	1.9	-	
Highest qualification	Diploma/Degree	53.9	0	
	B.Tech/Honours	9.6	27.3	
	Master's degree	3.9	50.0	
	Doctorate	1.9	22.7	
	Other	19.2	0	
	Missing	11.5	0	
Years of experience in tourism industry	No practical experience	0	50.0	
	0-5 years	17.3	31.8	
	6-10 years	7.7	13.6	
	More than 10 years	5.7	4.6	
	Missing	69.3	0	
Year of study	3 rd year			77.4
	4 th year			22.6

In order to assess the internal-consistency reliability of the measuring instrument in the main survey, the Cronbach alpha values of the three groups were 0.935, 0.861 and 0.911, which were all above the recommended 0.700 level. In addition, the average inter-item correlations of the three groups were also computed and these were 0.257, 0.112 and 0.209, each of which fell within the recommended range, thus providing further proof of reliability, as well as suggesting convergent and discriminant validity. Means above 4 were returned on all five dimensions, indicating that the combined sample of enterprise owners, academics and students perceived the marketing skills in all five dimensions to be extremely essential for tourism entrepreneurs. The highest mean responses were obtained for personal characteristics, followed by general management skills, generic marketing skills, marketing mix strategies skills and functional skills. The largest standard deviation obtained was 0.449 for marketing mix strategies skills. The standard deviations obtained for all of the dimensions were below 1.00, indicating that the sample was relatively homogenous and thus the mean gave a satisfactory indication of the responses. The results of this analysis are reported on in Table 2.

TABLE II: Descriptive Statistics of the Total Sample

Marketing skills dimensions	Means	Standard deviation	Ranked order
Personal characteristics	4.461	0.364	1
General management skills	4.407	0.423	2
Generic marketing skills	4.355	0.416	3
Marketing mix strategies skills	4.275	0.449	4
Functional skills	4.229	0.367	5

*Significant at the 0.05 level

An independent-samples t-test was conducted in order to determine whether the difference between male and female perceptions concerning essential marketing skills amongst enterprise owners, academics and students were statistically significant. The significance level was set at the conventional 5 percent level. The mean

differences, t-values and p-values between male and female perceptions amongst tourism enterprise owners are reported on in Table 3.

TABLE III: Gender Perspective of Enterprise Owners

Dimension	Male		Female		t-values	P-values
	Mean n=19	Standard deviation	Mean n=33	Standard deviation		
Personal characteristics	4.491	0.345	4.459	0.354	0.313	0.755
General management skills	4.470	0.287	4.420	0.383	0.489	0.627
Generic marketing skills	4.141	0.348	4.054	0.489	0.681	0.499
Marketing mix strategies skills	4.049	0.328	3.927	0.649	0.761	0.450
Functional skills	4.253	0.381	4.152	0.374	0.937	0.353

* Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$

As is evident in Table 3, no significant differences were found between male and female enterprise owners' perceptions of the marketing skills essential to a tourism entrepreneur. This suggests that male and female enterprise owners have similar perceptions of the marketing skills required to operate a successful tourism enterprise.

TABLE IV: Gender Perspective of Academics

Dimension	Male		Female		t-values	P-values
	Mean n=13	Standard deviation	Mean n=9	Standard deviation		
Personal characteristics	4.333	0.215	4.278	0.373	0.444	0.662
General management skills	4.420	0.383	4.470	0.287	0.181	0.859
Generic marketing skills	4.252	0.295	4.051	0.402	1.358	0.190
Marketing mix strategies skills	3.927	0.649	4.049	0.328	2.174	0.042*
Functional skills	4.308	0.240	4.254	0.223	0.532	0.601

* Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 4 shows no significant differences were found between males and female academics' perceptions of personal characteristics, general management skills, generic marketing skills and functional skills as essential to tourism entrepreneurs. For the marketing mix strategies skills, there was a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.42 < 0.05$); however, the difference was borderline significant. This suggests that, in comparison to their male counterparts, female tourism management academics perceive marketing mix strategies skills as slightly more essential.

TABLE V: Gender Perspective of Students

Dimension	Male		Female		t-values	P-values
	Mean n=33	Standard deviation	Mean n=135	Standard deviation		
Personal characteristics	4.374	0.408	4.502	0.364	1.777	0.077
General management skills	4.350	0.433	4.400	0.462	0.623	0.534
Generic marketing skills	4.355	0.387	4.489	0.361	1.886	0.061
Marketing mix strategies skills	4.347	0.378	4.416	0.350	0.995	0.321
Functional skills	4.199	0.353	4.242	0.385	0.579	0.563

* Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$

As can be seen from Table 5, no significant differences were found between male and female students' perceptions of the marketing skills essential to a tourism entrepreneur. This suggests that male and female tourism management students have similar perceptions concerning the marketing skills required to operate a tourism enterprise successfully.

4. Discussion

Entrepreneurship is considered as a vital source for stimulating economic growth around the world. Hence, entrepreneurship has grown into an important research domain, particularly female entrepreneurship. In South Africa, development efforts are focusing significantly on building a strong entrepreneurial focus, especially

amongst women due to the high unemployment rate of females in the country. Various support initiatives for entrepreneurs, especially female entrepreneurs, have been established with particular focus on the development of business incubators.

The findings of this study suggest that male and female enterprise owners and students have similar perceptions on all of the five dimensions pertaining to the essential marketing skills required to operate a tourism enterprise successfully. Whilst female academics' perceive marketing mix strategies skills as slightly more essential in comparison to their male counterparts, no significant differences were found between male and female perceptions towards personal characteristics, general management skills, generic marketing skills and functional skills as essential to tourism entrepreneurs. This is consistent with other studies that investigated gender differences in entrepreneurship [23], [41] and concluded that there was no divide between male and female perceptions. This agreement amongst male and female enterprise owners, academics and students reflects the effort made in developing women's entrepreneurship in South Africa. Now, along with their male counterparts, women comprehend the essential marketing skills required to manage an enterprise successfully. This bodes well for the future South Africa's economic growth. The key to successful implementation is to continue building a strong entrepreneurial focus by providing financial as well as non-financial assistance to entrepreneurship. For professionals, academics and incubator managers, targeting potential male and female entrepreneurs, the results of this study suggest that they should be defined as one market segment for entrepreneurship education and training programmes.

One limitation of the study is that it was conducted amongst enterprise owners, academics and students in the Vaal Triangle region in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Future research could expand the work to include other regions and provinces.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to determine whether gender differences exist amongst tourism entrepreneurs, academics and students' perceptions concerning the marketing skills that are essential to tourism entrepreneurs. Of the five marketing skills dimensions, comprising 39 items, tested amongst enterprise owners, academics and students, no significant difference were found between male and female owners and students. Pertaining to the tourism management academics, a slight significant difference was found between male and female academics on one of the five dimensions. This provides a clear reflection of the effort made to developing women's entrepreneurship in South Africa and borders well for the country's future economic growth.

6. References

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