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Networking: the key to growth for female entrepreneurs: evidence from the Sri Lankan small business tourism sector

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Abstract: Research considering entrepreneurial networking behaviour has been established substantially over the years. However, few studies have focused explicitly on female entrepreneurial networking. This study explores the role of female entrepreneurs' networks and examines the different influences on networking behaviour in the Sri Lankan tourism small business sector. Narrative interviews were used to collect data. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data systematised with the support of QSR NVivo 10. Findings show that the female entrepreneurs' networking experience provides valuable insight for developing their businesses, and they emphasised the informal nature of their contacts. The family ties support the businesswomen more than the support they receive from friends and professional ties. The women revealed that they faced a stressful situation when combining business with family matters. Based on the research findings, the model was developed, and applications of the model are recommended.

Keywords: networking; female entrepreneurs; narratives; small business; tourism.

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1 Introduction

This study aims to explore the role of female entrepreneurial networks and examine the important influences on the networking behaviour of female entrepreneurs. While female entrepreneurship is a central aspect of economic development and public policy concern in most countries, scholarly research about their entrepreneurial activities is comparatively limited (Belghiti-Mahut et al., 2020; Roomi et al., 2009; Ahl, 2002). This

study specifically focuses on female entrepreneurs who engage in the tourism industry within the small business sector in Sri Lanka. Tourism has been identified as the primary source of the income-generating sector for the Sri Lankan economy as this sector maintains the fourth position among foreign exchange earners (SLTDA, 2014). There is economic and political stability in the country after a 30-year ethnic conflict. Therefore, there are several development opportunities for the industry than ever before.

Consistent with most research in entrepreneurship, many researchers have focused on the women's traits, start-up motivations, demographic factors, issues and challenges faced by them, leadership styles and start-up business activities such as finding seed capital (Brush, 1992; Brush and Cooper, 2012; Welter, 2004; Henry et al., 2013; Williams et al., 2020). However, researchers started to focus on new areas, including work/family balance, mumpreneurs, copreneurs and non-financial capital such as networks and social capital (Brush and Cooper, 2012; Marlow and McAdam, 2013); female entrepreneurial networking is a relatively new research area (Arasti et al., 2021). As entrepreneurship literature traditionally focused on the individual entrepreneur, this study moves beyond emphasising the firm toward a focus on network relationships.

Networks can be defined in the study as an entrepreneur's relationships or connections with external actors (Premaratna, 2001), such as individuals or organisations. Most of the small firms owned by women cannot reach their targets by themselves (Premaratna, 2001). Consequently, many researchers have claimed that the survival and success of a small business depend on the supporting networks (Arasti et al., 2021; Premaratna, 2001; Klyver, 2011), and necessary resources and business opportunities can be obtained through networking (Khan, 2020; Klyver, 2011). Further marketing campaigns and innovations can be developed with the support of network actors (BarNir and Smith, 2002), proving that female entrepreneur and small businesses value networks. While many researchers focused on the positive side of networking, few studies focused on the dark side of networking (Stephanie, 2010). Time has been identified as a limitation for many entrepreneurs, especially women (Stephanie, 2010).

Moreover, some entrepreneurs believe that 'doing it alone' is better than building relationships with different parties (Stephanie, 2010). Building relationships with their competitors would have an issue in the long run (Stephanie, 2010). In this setting, this study's purpose is to explore the role of female entrepreneur's networks to answer the key questions – "why and how do female entrepreneurs form and develop their networks, what is the contribution of different network actors to women's venture and what influences the networking behaviours of female entrepreneurs." This article contributes to the literature on the networking of female entrepreneurs from a qualitative perspective by drawing on exploratory narrative research in the Sri Lankan context. The paper highlights the importance of networking to hold female entrepreneurs' business activities as a distinctive capability for their efforts. Several new research directions may enhance through the model development of the study.

2 Literature review

In entrepreneurship literature before 1980, entrepreneurs were considered one group, irrespective of gender, and entrepreneurial behaviour was not gender-specific (Brush, 2006; Williams et al., 2020). Further, female entrepreneurship was not considered a separate field, and it was a small division of entrepreneurship. After 1980, researchers

started to claim that it was not suitable to apply findings of male entrepreneurs equally to women, and female entrepreneurship would be a separate research field (Loscocco et al., 2009). In response to this argument, studies explicitly focusing on female entrepreneurs were conducted in many countries. However, findings of the female entrepreneurship studies revealed that women also have masculine characteristics and similar interests as their male counterparts (Brush, 2006). Entrepreneurship is considered a male-dominated discipline (Darnihamedani and Terjesen, 2022) and it was evident in how pictures of an 'iron lady' were applied to label female entrepreneurs. In contrast, traits related to feminine characteristics such as concern, love, and caring were hardly observed related to entrepreneurship (Bruni and Perrotta, 2014).

Female participation in entrepreneurial activities is low compared to their male counterparts in almost all countries globally and has a high failure rate. Further, women's businesses are small and less successful in terms of the number of employees, profit, sales and market share (Carter and Marlow, 2007). The majority's business is home-based and uses informal finance sources (Jayawarna et al., 2015). Female entrepreneurs exhibit constrained performance, but this is not synonymous with underperformance, a label that is a myth (Marlow and McAdam, 2013). However, it is still common for many entrepreneurship studies to portray female entrepreneurs as underperforming (Marlow and McAdam, 2013), which is often connected with how women purposefully keep their businesses small to prioritise family responsibilities. This is associated with how entrepreneurship is embedded in neoclassical economic discourses based on identifying entrepreneurs as economically active individuals who operate independently of their environment and surroundings rather than prioritising family responsibilities. To this extent, much new research in the field of female entrepreneurship is grounded on the knowledge that, in order to advance entrepreneurial theory, dominant economic theories need to be evaluated to reveal how gendered structures contribute to how people experience entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2002).

One of the predispositions within research on female entrepreneurs is to focus on societal expectations of women's responsibilities towards family matters affecting business activities, as is apparent in reviews of the particular area (Ahl, 2002). Therefore, findings of the literature review revealed that female entrepreneurs exhibited a 'family first, business second' concept, and the status of gender divisions within conceptualisations of entrepreneurship becomes outward. Indeed, society stimulates women to play multiple roles as producers and reproducers, leading women to simultaneously combine family and business matters. A realising of the problems inherent in women being supposed as entrepreneurs and mothers or homemakers is evident in how the competing of family and business is one of the critical issues facing every society.

Trying to balance family and work time is especially difficult for women who engage in entrepreneurship within tourism, as unique challenges exist due to tourism's seasonality, long hours and intensity. The impact of the power of tourism on women's time can be seen in Kousis's (1989) study of a Cretan tourism community, where female tourism entrepreneurs work 14–24 hour days and have no free weekends or holidays during the seven-month tourist high season. Engaging in tourism also has other uniqueness, as Ateljevic and Doorne's (2003) research on tourism entrepreneurs in Croatia indicates, were dealing with tourists involves an association with femininity. Accordingly, men reject dealing with tourists as it 'is beneath their male self-respect'. All

these observations on how social norms interact with entrepreneurship suggest the need for a more critical review of what entrepreneurship is.

Marlow and McAdam (2013) strongly relate the underperformance of female-owned businesses to their early undercapitalisation as they argue that this initial undercapitalisation limits access to social, human, and financial capital. The society, structure, and culture where women live significantly impact building social capital. Furthermore, scholars have indicated that women are less likely to become entrepreneurs as they lack entrepreneurial resources and support from their social networks (Klyver et al., 2008). New small businesses usually have limited resources and lack contact with external parties, and it is difficult for them to develop their business without external intervention (Surangi, 2018). Moreover, some findings indicate that women entrepreneurs depend on others' support and have more empathy for others, whereas men are more independent when they conduct business (Sonfield and Lussier, 2009).

Researchers have found that men and women are embedded in different social networks and have suggested that other types of network relationships and network content lead to diverse economic consequences (Sonfield and Lussier, 2009). Women tend to nominate more kin as people with whom they 'discuss important matters' and have more kin in their networking composition than male (Greve and Salaff, 2003; Klyver, 2011). Women's network composition has less quality in terms of resources and diversity (D'Exelle and Holvoet, 2011). Also, research has shown that women's non-kin networks are often more restricted and tend to be more homogeneous concerning wealth, education, marital and work status than men's non-kin networks (D'Exelle and Holvoet, 2011; Batjargal et al., 2009).

Additionally, other authors argue that those with an extensive network would negatively influence business success (Batjargal et al., 2009) as women are less committed to a venture. Therefore, some authors conclude that an extensive network may disadvantage female entrepreneurs. Moreover, female entrepreneurs typically raise seed capital from relatives and friends (Batjargal et al., 2009). Yet, the informal nature of these investments and less-formalised contracts create various claims from network members on the enterprise's revenues, profits and cash flows, which in turn reduces the capital available for reinvestment and growth.

In the literature, it is clear that much research has been conducted which focuses on the structural dimension, examining who forms part of the entrepreneurs' networks and at what stage they become influential, and focusing less on the relational aspect. The relational dimension of social capital can be linked to Granovetter's notion of relational embeddedness (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998), which refers to the relationships people have developed through a history of connections. Thus, this notion embraces different aspects such as tie strength, relational trust and information-sharing (Roomi et al., 2009); the focus is on specific relationship aspects, such as respect and friendship, which influence behaviour (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). As Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) highlight, people accomplish social goals such as associability, approval and respect through these ongoing personal relationships, and the relationship's focus is on trust, trustworthiness (Putnam, 1993), norms, agreements (Coleman, 1988), responsibilities, expectations as well as identity and identification (Hakanasson and Snehota, 1995).

Despite the recent research attention on entrepreneurs' networking, previous work has tended to focus on how actors connect (the structural dimension), and there is a lack of research on the resources that actors can potentially gain access to by examining whom they relate with and what resources they have (the relational dimension). To date,

researchers have conducted studies involving gender comparison in entrepreneurs' networking (D'Exelle and Holvoet, 2011; Foss, 2010). Still, very little research has been conducted explicitly focused on women (Roomi et al., 2009). In addition, it is clear that quantitative research is dominant in the female entrepreneurship and networking literature. In all respects, this research constitutes a preliminary step toward filling this academic gap. In addition, the controversial evidence of female entrepreneurs' networking identified by the academic literature, and the shortcomings of the existing research on female entrepreneurs' networks, provide compelling reasons for further research into female entrepreneurs' networks.

3 Methodology

Social constructionist philosophy and narrative design were used to understand female entrepreneurs' networking experience. According to the social constructionist philosophy, reality is shaped by society and culture through interaction with others (Gergen, 2009). This study focuses on networking relationships, and these relationships can be considered part of a particular society. Therefore, the social constructionist approach was the most suitable research philosophy to explore the role of female entrepreneurs' networks in the Sri Lankan context. Further, quantitative methods are not sufficient to explain the complexity of many essential aspects (Kallmuenzer et al., 2021) such as identities, cultural norms, and the social elements that impact these women's social networks. These concerns cannot be meaningfully reduced to numbers and qualitative research is a valuable strategy applicable to research in small businesses and entrepreneurship. Therefore, a qualitative approach particularly narrative may be more suitable for this study (Williams et al., 2020).

The narrative interview and observation were used to collect data for the study. The purposeful sampling strategy was chosen, and the participants were found through snowball sampling methods. A certain degree of representativeness was established through the variety in the representation of age, marital status, education, business type, and the number of employees. Sampling in this way, seeking variation, assists in the identification of any common themes that exist in a heterogeneous sample.

The data were collected over six months (July to January 2017) after an initial pilot study in April and May 2016. Two interview sessions were conducted with each woman totalling 28 total interviews. This second interview was scheduled two months after the first interview. In between, the researcher understood the first interview information better, which helped identify important facts and issues before going on to the second interview as a new session. The narrative interviews were held in women's business places, and the researcher could also get first-hand experience. The average length of the interviews was one and a half hours. All the interviews were recorded with the participant's permission, and thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected data using QSR NVivo 10.

4 Findings and discussion

Based on the in-depth narrative interviews and major findings are discussed in the following subsections. In addition, they will explore four research questions designed for this study.

4.1 Purposes

4.1.1 *For networking, women use more informal financial sources*

Entrepreneurs' networks are the main source of identifying and acquiring needed resources (Ratten and Tajeddini, 2017). The female business owners shared common problems with other female business owners worldwide; for example, institutional barriers appeared to influence women (Weidhaas, 2013). Financial constraints are significant worldwide and in this research; however, the socio-cultural context differentiates the findings of this study. The socio-cultural context (e.g., institutional barriers, attitudes towards female entrepreneurs, gender discrimination) in Sri Lanka is significant in its negative influence. It adds more pressure on female business owners in this study regarding finding financial assistance.

Interestingly, some researchers argue that these financial challenges women face are not based on discrimination but are mere consequences of the size and characteristics of women's business firms (Anna et al., 2012). However, Hertz (2011) has stressed that banks and lending institutions discriminate against women. This is also apparent in the interviews. For example, these women were mistreated when they interacted with financial institutions. Furthermore, most women do not obtain bank loans because they cannot use their assets as a bank guarantee. This is further evidenced by Indrani's own words:

"It is harder to get loans from bigger banks. They ask us to get a mortgage, get forms signed by permanent employees, and ask for many documents. So it is better not to take loans."

In Sri Lanka, a woman should have assets such as land to obtain a bank loan. However, most Sri Lankan families practise a two-sided tradition, giving a share of the family possessions to all the children in the family. In practice, fixed property such as land and the family home are given to sons, and mobile property such as cash and jewellery are given to daughters, usually in the form of her dowry. Therefore, they are forced to rely on informal support to face their financial and other challenges.

The women in this study used more informal sources of finance. This finding is consistent with Andriani et al. (2022) who reveals that women found it more difficult to raise finances through traditional sources than their male counterparts. This conclusion would be unsurprising in any developing country. With informal sources of finance being relatively easy to access, Sri Lankan women rely on moneylenders and pawnbrokers, rotating savings clubs and female credit associations, and family members, friends, and relatives.

4.1.2 Importance of social participation and interaction in entrepreneurial learning

As learning is steeped in daily practices, learning often occurs without them being aware of it, and it is socially situated. This means that women do not develop their entrepreneurship only individually and cognitively and through participation and interaction with their social contexts.

Rae's (2005) triadic framework of entrepreneurial learning from a gender perspective was used, which includes three major aspects:

- 1 personal and social emergence of entrepreneurial identity
- 2 contextual learning
- 3 the negotiated enterprise.

The personal and social emergence of entrepreneurial identity found that these women re-develop their entrepreneurial identities. Some entrepreneurs developed their new identities gradually through periods of experimental learning by involving different industries, consequently acquiring self-confidence, skills and self-belief. Chaya, who is connected with two other business areas (clothing and tourism), used this broad range of resources to gain more experience, knowledge, and skills to develop her new business activities. With regard to *contextual learning*, the women were then able to bridge and connect with different network actors and learning environments, which are essential to the development of the business. Finally, regarding the negotiated enterprise, it was found that the women used their network ties: formal networks; they accessed them less in the initial stages of the entrepreneurial process, and they eventually accessed their respective networks during other phases of the business. For example, they brought external labour into the business, such as employees, accountancy services, travel agents, hotel booking websites, and lawyers. The new environment created by the introduction of external labour was found to be comparable to the idea of the negotiated enterprise in this context. In this setting, Rae's (2005) entrepreneurial learning framework offers a good analysis of what makes female business owners play an important role in this context. The findings of this study add gendered aspects of entrepreneurial learning, which are essential elements of entrepreneurship development.

Based on the number of illustrations of gendered-related issues described by the women in their narratives, the details of their encounters, and the meaning attached to them, it would seem that gender is a major influential factor in learning through networking. The gendered roles were actively constructed and reconstructed throughout their entrepreneurial path. Sometimes, the women faced challenges and learned how to gain legitimacy as female entrepreneurs. In contrast, these women had to switch between their roles as entrepreneurs and as women (wife, mother). The study's accounts of some women (Kumari, Kishani, Chandrika, and Hemali) reveal that their husbands and children have not always been encouraged by not accepting their decision to be entrepreneurs.

Moreover, according to these women, their long working days are not necessarily acceptable to their husbands and children as entrepreneurs. Therefore, they may have to limit their hour, which leads to a lack of learning opportunities. Some women in the study explained how they negotiate day-to-day activities with their husbands within the frame

identified by society. Therefore, learning during the entrepreneurial career involves learning to accept and manage negotiated gender roles.

4.1.3 *Women depend on emotional support*

Emotional support is accompanied by sharing life experiences created by behaviours expressing trust, listening, and concern. Such emotional support increases the motivation and strength of these women's minds to run their businesses smoothly; the appreciation they get from network actors makes them self-assured. This finding is supported by many social network studies (Batjargal et al., 2009; Roomi et al., 2009). It was found that women are more likely to seek and provide emotional support.

This was evidenced by Badra's explanation, as follows:

"I still live in my ancestral home with my mother, and my brothers' houses are close. We are very united. They have never made me feel alone. Even my sisters-in law-have stood by me through many challenges, and I go to them whenever I face a problem."

Furthermore, in line with previous literature, this study indicates that emotional support is more likely to be provided by kin than friends or acquaintances (Ekinsmyth, 2013; Roomi et al., 2009; Batjargal et al., 2009). Additionally, most entrepreneurs keep a network going, as they expect emotional support during a crisis/issue.

5 **Methods**

5.1 *Women prefer strong ties and lack participation informal networks*

According to the research findings, it is clear that businesswomen do favour strong ties. This finding is similar to several studies that have highlighted that women prefer 'strong ties' in their networking behaviour (Arasti et al., 2021; Renzulli and Aldrich, 2000; Roomi et al., 2009; Batjargal et al., 2009) and female entrepreneurs have been shown to organise their networks around the family and social domains.

When examining formal network relationships, businesswomen based in Sri Lanka seem to have very few connections with professional organisations. They do not favour gaining assistance from them, as they seem to have a negative impression of them regarding their lack of consideration to individual needs, the absence of on-site visits, and the lack of follow-up support.

The interviewee (Kumudu), who was aware of the available support, expressed her dissatisfaction with the quality of training programs, saying, "it was not worth going after them." Further speaking her view on the available support, Kumudu stated: "some of the training offered is not linked to the needs of small businesses or women." The existence of such attitudes is also a possible reason for the low usage of the available support.

They also seem less interested in participating in these organisations' training sessions or conferences due to their lack of awareness and disappointment with the programs' quality. This is supported by the fact that only 3 of the 14 respondents in Sri Lanka had participated in training programs. These findings are consistent with Kodicara (2008), who revealed that the most commonly-mentioned inadequacies of the current support system for small businesses were that they have failed to assist businesses on an individual basis.

5.2 The importance of the interaction of bonding and bridging social capital

Another gap identified in the literature was how bonding and bridging social capital interact (Roomi et al., 2009; Ascigil and Magner, 2009). This study's findings reveal both negative and positive interactions. Enhanced bridging capital (e.g., via membership of professional organisations) positively affected bonding social capital when it enhanced local legitimacy by validating particular organisations. Conversely, female entrepreneurs leveraged existing bonding social capital to increase bridging social capital, e.g., having strong ties (friends) become bridging ties (introducing a new supplier).

Interestingly, as regards bonding social capital, all the women in the study were connected with family members, relatives, and close friends, which enabled them to exchange resources (Tajeddini et al., 2017a). However, it is not sufficient to depend on bonding social capital at the development stage of the business. Moreover, the risk of relying on bonding social capital is the expenditure of other valuable resources, such as time and money, which can increase the opportunity cost of not realising other resources (Roomi et al., 2009). For example, a particular network may prevent the business start-up from expanding, or women-only networks may limit the application of the innovative ideas of men assisting the start-up.

This research reveals that bonding social capital sometimes becomes a liability for female entrepreneurs; by concentrating on their bonding social capital, female entrepreneurs risk isolation from other sources (from different groups, gender or members of associations), which might give them access to potential information and resources. At the growth stage, female entrepreneurs need to form and use social capital across different groups, members of associations and genders (bridging social capital), based on repeated transactions that emerge from multiplex ties. The research shows that, in some cases, bridging social capital has facilitated women to develop their businesses.

5.3 The effects of seasonality on gender roles

Adding to the complexity of the social changes by entrepreneurship participation is a phenomenon common within tourism, that of seasonality. Whereas much literature has focused on seasonality's economic and social effects (Tajeddini et al., 2017b), little has been written about the impact of seasonality on gender roles (Bakas, 2014). The current study addresses this gap in the literature by focusing on an exciting situation, as the liminal period at the beginning and end of the tourism period stimulates gender role negotiations to be renegotiated and then dissolved again. The effects of seasonality can be identified by noting how many of the women in the study state that 'things are different in the low season'. In the absence of the negotiating tool of temporality, female entrepreneurs take on full responsibility for domestic tasks in the low tourism season. Seasonality also brings about the temporary 'seasonal relocation' of domestic duties, as female entrepreneurs' parents move to their children's workplaces to help them with these duties. This situation is especially marked for entrepreneurs with very small children. My field observation confirmed this:

"Kumudu's mother said that she lives with her daughter every high season for a few months to support her. She has taken over all the responsibilities for her daughter's children." (Field notes)

While many researchers focus on the economic impact on seasonality within the tourism literature, this study shows the social impact concerning relocation and restructuring of domestic responsibilities, as female entrepreneurs relieve domestic tasks on relocated parents, temporarily disrupting domestic responsibilities.

5.4 The contributions of different network ties

The significance of strong network ties, especially the family, has been confirmed by many researchers (Blisson and Rana, 2001) and by the respondents in this study. The family supports the businesswomen in a significant capacity. With daily requirements, they have helped by bringing new customers and being there whenever the need arose. Also, when the businesswoman faced difficulties, the family supported her. The family assists in ways that the other support groups would be unable to – babysitting, cooking, etc. This conflicts with the notion of a good mother and dutiful wife identity. The women framed the roles of good mother and loyal wife as a choice, but, within this choice, they still seek support from family members to make different arrangements for domestic activities and child care.

The next group is friends. The interviewees spoke about the assistance they receive from their friends regarding advice, knowledge, making contacts with other organisations, guidance, etc. The most surprising aspect of the female entrepreneurs' network analysis is that networking with friends who were just friends was not common among the entrepreneurs in this study. Furthermore, similar to family ties, the analysis has identified less need for friendship ties to give as return favours; the analysis suggests that a definite commercial detachment characterised friendship ties. In line with Klapper (2008), the findings in this study show that entrepreneurs involved friends in a range of highly task-specific activities, which shows that the entrepreneur was aware of the strengths and weaknesses of these ties.

Professional ties can provide important contacts in the form of a professional network and experience, greater access to information, and the opportunity for the entrepreneur to learn from their experiences, a service that family and friends would find problematic to deliver. The most crucial distinction between the different ties is that the entrepreneur has to pay for professional services; additionally, their involvement is occasional and limited. This finding is confirmed by Klapper (2008), who emphasises that these professional ties earn a financial return. As they do not constitute support but a service delivered, entrepreneurs occasionally use these ties.

5.5 The importance of multiplex ties

The different types of network ties that support social capital building can be classified into three categories: weak, strong and multiplex (Khan, 2020). According to the literature on networking, multi-plexity is the number of separate social contacts between any two parties; it has been defined as the "interaction of exchanges within and across relationships" (Klapper, 2008; Roomi et al., 2009). A tie between individuals is multiplex when interacting in multiple social contexts. For instance, female entrepreneurs' employees are both the owners' co-workers and neighbours, so the relationship between the two parties is multiplex since they interact within various social roles. According to Carter et al. (2003), some network relationships involve exchanging multiple resources, and providing instrumental value, such as career advice and friendship.

In the form of business advisers or friends, these multiplex ties can significantly increase the general reachability of female entrepreneurs within their networks. This finding is echoed by the female respondents in this research, who have created their social capital based on multiplex ties. Their networks include family, friends, relatives, existing customers, suppliers, employees, and professional organisations. However, Brush (1992), while working specifically in the area of female entrepreneurship, has highlighted the importance of strong ties for the growth of female-owned enterprises. The findings from this study add to the literature on the significance of multiplex ties (a combination of strong and weak ties through formal and informal networks, such as entrepreneurs' mentors, advisers, employees, and customers) and the roles played by them when entrepreneurs need to utilise their social capital.

6 Influences on networking behaviour

6.1 Tension around competing for multiple roles and societal expectations

As the women in this study negotiated their work/life arrangements, many referred to how their family dynamics influenced their business decisions. Decisions related to mothering dominated the dialogue about work/life balance. Mothers still overwhelmingly felt some need to serve as the primary caregiver for their children, a role socially constructed by generations of women. Rather than perceiving this as a burden, the women in this study celebrated it and, in most cases, tried to make arrangements to ensure their children's needs were prioritised over their business's needs. Many women agreed with rearing children and fitting a business schedule around their children's schedules, rather than vice versa.

As Kumudu states:

"Most of the time, we offer only breakfast. I don't want to do a lot of work because the children's work gets neglected then. I can cook and clean in the morning, do most of the business work while the kids are at school, and make sure I'm back to pick them up from school. If I had a 9–5 job, I would have had to put them in somewhere."

In the above extract, the woman restricts her business activities, and it was justified so that she can spend a lot of time with her children, and the idea of being a good mother seems to dominate the story. Everything is structured around her children. She chose entrepreneurship as a career option due to motherhood, and it also serves as a complement to it.

Additionally, the mothers mentioned how much they struggle once they combine mothering with business responsibilities), and they felt tense about these multiple.

As Chandrika, an owner of the tourist gift shop, said:

"I get home at about midnight in-season, around 8 pm in the off-season, and I rarely eat dinner with my kids. I know spending money is not enough, parents should encourage them in their education, and they should observe what children do ... unfortunately I have failed to do so. We all need to spend more quality time with our children, and I am no exception. I just think, what's the point of this life?"

The above quotations show that these women got stressed when trying to combine business and family matters simultaneously. Subsequently, they felt that they were bad

mothers. Similar evidence was found in Japan (Leung, 2011) and the UK (Duberley and Carrigan, 2012). Female entrepreneurs discoursed the pressures caused when their business needs a priority, which took them away from anticipated mothering duties.

Realistically, demands on these women's time are often so crucial that the majority in this study run home-based businesses, an activity which is very different from 'going to work; surrounded by domestic responsibilities, they may have to perform a combination of business activities as well. Feeling under pressure to get everything done can prove challenging to maintain a balance. Sometimes, the family will need more care; for example, when children or elderly parents are unwell. Their business may take priority at other times, particularly in the high season. Therefore, there is no doubt that they have experienced the pull of competing priorities.

Being a good mother is not enough in Sri Lankan society. Being seen as a dutiful wife is also of paramount importance; anyone who appears to put their work before their children and housewifely duties is open to criticism. In Sri Lanka, the main concern for women has a secure marriage, not only for the sake of the children but also for social reputation, where mothers were worried about hearing unpleasant remarks (Kodagoda, 2011). This finding highlights that these women's gender identity has been built around the notion of being a good mother and dutiful wife. The female participants cited negative and positive experiences of combining multiple roles. Thus, the positive and negative consequences of combining motherhood, good housewifely practices and business have an excellent explanatory value in understanding how modern women combine domestic and business responsibilities.

Being a woman as an entrepreneur is not highly regarded in Sri Lankan society (Kodagoda, 2011). It is evident through the women's own words that Sri Lankan culture does not approve of women travelling late at night. One businesswoman stated that, before marriage, her father would accompany her in all her work-related journeys and that now her husband has taken over that responsibility. The women also stated that most trade fairs and conferences take place a great distance away from their home, and because most business parties are held at night, they cannot attend these events. This is because, according to cultural norms, Sri Lankan women do not go out after dark. This invariably results in less networking and restricting the woman to her home. Participants in the study explained that, due to the restrictions imposed by their husbands, they are unable to work late. Therefore, they have a limited amount of networking opportunities. Furthermore, the Sri Lankan caste system can also restrict knowledge transfer with the broader community, and it creates pockets of conformity. This makes it more difficult for external support agencies to effect changes in the wider tourism business community.

Within any business community, collaboration among other competitors is mutual. This can be seen as a visitor recommendation in the hotel industry, while as one participant (Deepa) stated, "first, my approach is my hotel full." Once the hotel has reached total capacity, the enthusiasm then turns to helping others. As Deepa explained:

"If my hotel is full, I recommend the same caste accommodation providers near as we have good contacts. I think they also will do the same thing for me."

According to the above quotation, it can be seen as a shadow of caste, with nearby hotels (but same-caste owners) helping from each other's extra, as in this case, the referral does seem mutual.

Regarding the above findings, it is clear that women often face contradictory societal expectations regarding their business, maternal, and housewife duties. Thus, respondents

pointed to the sense of control they had over their work which enabled them to fit hours in and around other responsibilities. This contrasts with the idea that women are less dedicated to their business or work fewer hours. However, the picture painted of the transfer to entrepreneurship looked less rosy when women talked more in-depth about their daily activities and the burden of multiple roles. Every interviewee spoke of stressful times trying to combine the business with these multiple roles and societal expectations.

6.2 The necessity and importance of trust in network relationships

The findings reveal that the three types of trust are different yet linked and build on one another. However, knowledge-based trust and identity-based trust mainly emerged through analysis. Through interactions, female entrepreneurs' knowledge of each other increases and facilitates trust development. Consistent with this, Deepa narrates:

"I have always repeat guest. They trust me, and they say that this is their second home."

This displays that a good relationship with customers will result in more business opportunities (Cheryl et al., 2010). She has many repeat customers due to mutual trust, leading to advertising free of charge.

Regarding building bonding social capital, this study found that having interpersonal, shared experiences and common perspectives can be achieved in various ways through women-owned groups or communities. Anderson and Jack (2002) argue that identity-based trust develops one partner's belief in the other's application of competence, reliability, and trustworthiness to the business. Furthermore, trust is not one-dimensional but changes character as a relationship develops.

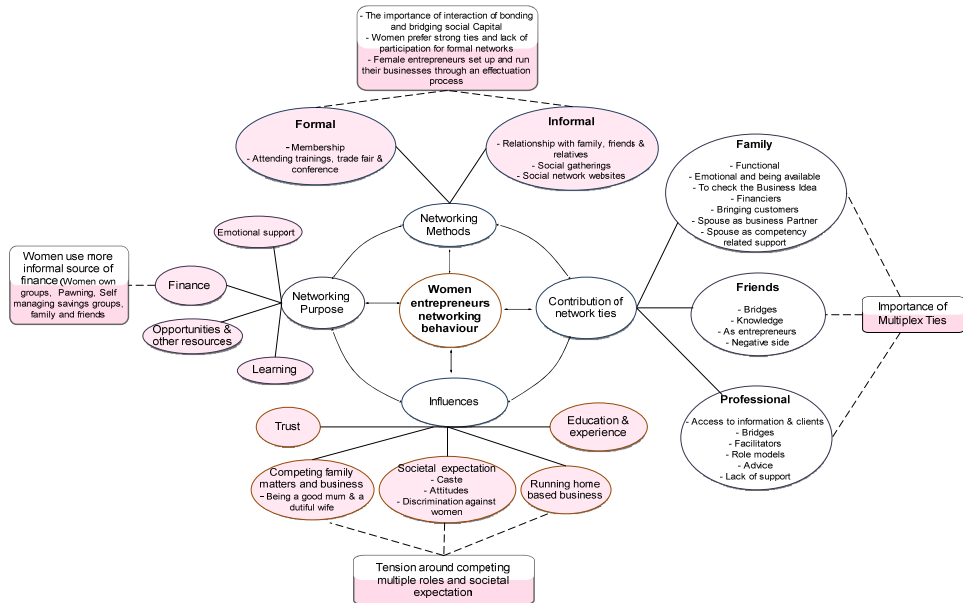
7 Proposed model

Figure 1 shows the proposed model for female entrepreneurial networking behaviour. The central point of the model is 'female entrepreneurial networking behaviour', which includes four essential interrelated pillars that emerged through the research questions. These interrelated pillars are:

- 1 purpose of networking
- 2 methods of networking
- 3 role and contribution of each network tie
- 4 influences on networking behaviour.

Methods, purpose, contribution, and influences are the main characteristics concerning female networking behaviour, which have been revealed through the literature and this research. The researcher cannot correctly explain the model's beginning and end, as the various pillars within it are interconnected. The model's linkages are shown with double-headed arrows, meaning that the process 'flows' in both directions. The boxes connected with dotted lines show the main findings and contributions of the study about the literature on female entrepreneurship and networking.

Figure 1 Proposed model in relation to the Sri Lankan female entrepreneurs' networking behaviour (see online version for colours)



8 Conclusions

The literature review shows that much previous research had been based on entrepreneurs in developed western counties, with more emphasis on male entrepreneurs. Therefore, as this research focuses on women and Sri Lanka, where entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship studies are a relatively new area, the findings are significant. As indicated in the literature review, much research has focused on the structural dimension, less on the relational side, and even fewer studies have examined both of these two dimensions of social capital. This study adds to our theoretical understanding by gaining a full view of the roles and contributions of different network ties (family, friends, and professionals) to women's ventures in Sri Lanka. It highlights the importance of the relational side of female entrepreneurs' networks.

Further, the researcher developed the model (refer to Figure 1) based on the study findings. Findings are related to the small business tourism sector in Sri Lanka. However, some cultural factors, such as caste and gender discrimination, will not be seen only in Sri Lanka. These socio-cultural factors can be visible in other Asian and Arab countries (Weidhaas, 2013), which have typical patriarchal characteristics (Weidhaas, 2013). Hence, developed models can be applied to different sectors in Sri Lanka, and many parts of the model can guide work in other Asian and some Arabic countries.

Regarding the model's application, the study's findings clearly message entrepreneurs, policymakers, and support organisations. It can encourage female entrepreneurs to use networks effectively to support their business development and better understand the unique networking issues faced by women. It may also help support organisations in Sri Lanka better understand the needs of female entrepreneurs and better

adapt their membership benefits to attract new members. Furthermore, external parties such as supporting and governmental organisations can use the information to develop campaigns to attract members by illustrating how they benefit small business owners. Moreover, this model will be helpful to researchers, particularly those in Sri Lanka and other countries. Finally, this model shows a new direction and delivers research gaps and opportunities regarding the preliminary research beforehand the model's application.

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