
HOSPITALITY MICROENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A TOOL FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN EGYPT

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ABSTRACT

Microentrepreneurship is seen as an enabling factor for women in society. However, women's involvement in entrepreneurship can be confined by various factors, such as social norms, personal circumstances, and entrepreneurial skills. This study aims to explore whether the hospitality sector in Egypt is suitable for female microentrepreneurship, as well as to determine the potential role that hospitality micro-enterprises can play in supporting women's empowerment in Egypt. A qualitative approach was adopted in this study and a semi-structured interview was used for the collection of primary data. The sample included 19 female micro-entrepreneurs in the hospitality field who were personally interviewed by the researcher. Gathered data were written out, translated, checked for accuracy, and then analyzed using thematic analysis technique. The results showed that microentrepreneurship in the hospitality sector, as a manageable, family-friendly, and socially accepted economic activity, can help women in Eastern societies to address the socio-cultural constraints of female entrepreneurship. The involvement of women in hospitality microentrepreneurship has led to the social and financial empowerment of women by improving their family income, improving their position within the family, enabling financial independence, and increasing social awareness of bigger issue. This study adds to the growing literature on the role of tourism and hospitality micro enterprises in supporting underprivileged women.

KEYWORDS: Microentrepreneurship, Hospitality, Women's Empowerment, Egypt

1. INTRODUCTION

Empowering women contributes positively to various social and economic outcomes, such as boosting economic diversification, supporting gender equality and women's rights, improving productivity, enabling inclusive economic growth, and improving the well-being of families and

communities (Ahamad et al., 2016; Akhtar, 2017; Thinji & Gichira, 2017). Among the many factors that make this possible, entrepreneurship is a powerful vehicle for the empowerment of women in many societies. For example, it was noted that women in African countries are actively involved in businesses to meet their economic needs and to acquire social emancipation by improving their position in the family and in society (Ademokun & Ajayi, 2012; Datta & Gailey, 2012; Grant, 2013; Legis, 2020). Furthermore, the involvement of women in entrepreneurial ventures improves the distribution of income in society, promotes business development by introducing new products and services (Minniti 2010), and generates a higher family income (Sahinidis et al., 2012).

Unfortunately, women's participation in entrepreneurial ventures can be limited by several factors. Metcalfe (2012) argued that subjective norms and sociocultural variables can either promote or inhibit women's participation in public life. For example, in Muslim-majority countries, Islamic Sharia rules have had a profound impact on the role of women in society (Roald, 2001; Metcalfe, 2010). Moreover, women differ from men in terms of skills, business mindset, self-efficacy, entrepreneurial skills, and willingness to take risks, which affects their entrepreneurial choices and decisions (Ward et al., 2019; Yoopetch, 2020). Women's household responsibilities can also limit their business choices. Legis (2020) explained that when women engage in entrepreneurial activities, they select businesses that allow them to comfortably manage their household responsibilities or work from home.

In this context, hospitality microentrepreneurship seems to be an appropriate solution to this dilemma because it represents an attractive field for female micro-entrepreneurship for several reasons. The hospitality sector in particular has no barriers to entry, creating a friendly business environment for new entrants, especially small and micro-entrepreneurs (Hattab, 2013; Ahmad & Abdel-Aziz, 2015). Moreover, starting and running a hospitality micro business requires a limited budget, simple skills and less effort and footprint (Mohammad, 2021). However, little is known about microentrepreneurship in the hospitality and hospitality sector with few empirical studies comprehensively investigating this concept (KC et al., 2019).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is twofold; first, to determine whether the hospitality sector in Egypt is suitable for women to engage in micro-enterprises and, second, to highlight the role that microentrepreneurship in the hospitality sector could play in supporting women's empowerment. In so doing, this research enriches the literature on hospitality management and draws the attention of academics, official bodies, and women

entrepreneurs to the importance of micro-enterprises in the hospitality field for the empowerment of women in Eastern societies.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 MICROENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

Entrepreneurship is the process of developing and managing an innovative business venture through identifying and exploiting business opportunities and gathering necessary resources to develop and manage the business (Enz & Harrison, 2012). In the same vein, microentrepreneurship simply refers to the creation and management of a micro enterprise. Dollinger (2008) argued that there are different definitions of entrepreneurship, all of which include four essential elements: innovation and creativity; identification and acquisition of resources; economic enterprise; earning opportunities associated with risk and uncertainty. Solvoll et al. (2015) also identified three main aspects for the concept of entrepreneurship, including the innovativeness, the business opportunity, and the venture development.

Pertaining to the size of a micro enterprise, business ventures can be classified according to their size using criteria such as the number of employees, total assets, and total annual revenues. Unfortunately, these criteria vary from country to country, especially with regard to total assets and total annual revenues (Berisha & Pula, 2015; Lussier & Sonfield, 2015). To overstep these variations, the European Commission advocates the number of employees as the main criterion for categorizing business enterprises (Berisha & Pula, 2015). In this case, a micro enterprise should employ a total of 9 people or less (Berisha & Pula, 2015). In the hospitality context, micro enterprises include business ventures such as travel agents guesthouses, cafés, restaurants, food trucks, etc. (Wang et al., 2019). From an economic point of view, hospitality entrepreneurship is a major contributor to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Egypt, as the majority of entrepreneurial businesses are considered micro and small hospitality enterprises including accommodation facilities, restaurants, cafés, and retail stores (Hattab, 2013; Ahmad & Abdel-Aziz, 2015).

2.2. WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is the process of enhancing the capabilities of individuals or groups and enabling them to make decisions that lead to positive social, political, environmental, and economic outcomes (Das, 2000). In other words, it is the interactive process that enables less powerful individuals to actively transform their lives through social change (Metcalf, 2012).

Similarly, women's empowerment refers to the integration of social and economic aspects to improve women's ability to access education, finance, and income in addition to controlling their life choices and participating in politics and organizations (Farah, 2006; Metcalfe, 2012). Simply put, women's empowerment involves the development of women into conscious and independent individuals who are economically and politically active, and able to make positive contributions to their communities (Legis, 2020).

The involvement in entrepreneurial business ventures can empower women in several ways. For example, earnings from the business boosts financial freedom and independence of female entrepreneurs, allowing them to provide for the financial needs of their spouses or the entire household. In addition, running a business enables individual decision-making and significant life changes, which supports women's social position in the family and society (Grant, 2013). In other words, owning and running a micro-enterprise empowers women to be financially independent and make life-changing decisions.

The hospitality industry is considered as a tool for the economic, social, and educational empowerment of women (Mrema, 2015). Malik and Balyan (2018) explained that the hospitality sector makes a significant contribution to women's empowerment by providing jobs for large numbers of women in different departments. In terms of empowering women through microentrepreneurship in the hospitality sector, past studies show that micro enterprises in the hospitality sector support women's empowerment. For example, McMillan et al. (2011) examined the potential role of small hospitality businesses, women's tea houses in Nepal, in empowering women. Their findings showed that hospitality businesses support the sustainable empowerment of women by improving their livelihoods and providing diverse choices and opportunities. Similarly, Panta and Thapa (2017) reported that engaging women in tourism and hospitality entrepreneurship led to many favorable outcomes such as enhanced self-confidence, improved skills and involvement in decision making in the family. Recently, Vukovic et al. (2021) revealed that entrepreneurship in the tourism industry enhanced women's empowerment through self-employment. Abou-Shouk et al. (2021) also reported a strong impact of women's work and entrepreneurship in the tourism and hospitality sector on women's empowerment.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

A qualitative approach was adopted in this study to enable the collection of rich and detailed information that achieve its aim. A semi-structured interviews was used as a tool for collecting primary data. The interview consisted of four main parts. The first section aimed to collect participants' personal information such as name, age, and years of experience in the hospitality industry, as well as the type and size of their hospitality micro business. The second section examined whether the participants believed that micro-enterprises in the hospitality sector were appropriate for women microentrepreneurship and identified the reasons behind this. Section two included three questions that were developed based on previous studies (Legis, 2020; Yoopetch, 2020). The third section aimed to explore the role of hospitality microentrepreneurship in empowering women by asking participants if their involvement in a hospitality micro enterprise had helped them socially, economically, or otherwise. This section included five questions that were adapted from the study of Legis (2020) to explore various aspects of women's empowerment enabled by hospitality microentrepreneurship. Section four involved one question that gathered additional comments or suggestions from respondents. Interview questions were reviewed by a panel of 6 academic experts to confirm its validity for this study.

3.2. PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES

The population of the current study includes female micro entrepreneurs in the hospitality sector in Egypt. Due to accessibility constraints, a convenience sampling technique was adopted to recruit potential participants in this study. This study defines a micro-enterprise as a business venture that has a maximum number of 9 employees. Accordingly, a total of 35 female owners of micro enterprise in the hospitality sector were approached and invited to participate in the study. Of those approached, only 19 participants agreed to be interviewed, with a response rate of approximately 54%. This sample size is considered appropriate for qualitative research (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Davies & Hughes, 2014). The sample included owners of various micro enterprises in the hospitality sector such as fast-food restaurants, kids' parks, home-based catering supplies, rental apartments, etc. The detailed characteristics of the study sample are presented in the results (Table 1).

All interviews were conducted by the researcher using the personal interview technique. First, the researcher started the interview by thanking

the respondents for participating in the study, explaining the purpose of the interview, clarifying the role of the interviewee, and assuring the anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of their personal information. Next, the participants were explicitly asked the questions and given sufficient time to respond and deliver their comments. The average duration of each interview was approximately 30 minutes, during which all responses were recorded through written notes. Finally, the collected responses were transcribed, translated, edited, and set for analysis. The thematic analysis technique was used to analyze the collected data by extracting key themes from the data and coding the reviewers' comments accordingly.

4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

4.1. PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

This section presents the characteristics of the female micro entrepreneurs involved in this study. As shown in Table 1, the age of the participants ranged from 31 to 57 years and they owned their micro enterprise in the hospitality sector for a period of 3 to 7 years. The results also showed that all participants fit the profile of a micro entrepreneur as they were all women and owned a micro enterprise in the hospitality sector with limited capacity and a small number of employees (less than 10).

Table 1: Profile of the study participants (n=19)

| No. | Age | YOE | Venture description | Venture size & location | NOE |
|-----|-----|-----|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----|
| 1 | 38 | 5 | Italian café | 15 seats, Minia | 6 |
| 2 | 40 | 5 | Day spa & beauty center | 10 guests, Cairo | 4 |
| 3 | 39 | 7 | Oriental catering supplies | Homebased, Cairo | 4 |
| 4 | 40 | 5 | Café & restaurant | 12 seats, Minia | 5 |
| 5 | 57 | 7 | Furnished rental flats | 3 apartments, Alexandria | 2 |
| 6 | 35 | 5 | Café & juice bar | 14 seats, Minia | 5 |
| 7 | 39 | 7 | Themed café | 16 seats, Hurghada | 5 |
| 8 | 45 | 3 | Ladies' gym & yoga | 15 persons, Hurghada | 4 |
| 9 | 40 | 5 | Home-based dessert | Home space, Minia | 2 |
| 10 | 45 | 5 | Beach space & café | 50 guests, Hurghada | 5 |
| 11 | 38 | 5 | Ice cream & juice bar | 12 guests, Minia | 4 |
| 12 | 31 | 4 | Fried chicken takeaway | 8 seats, Cairo | 3 |

| | | | | | |
|----|----|---|---------------------------|------------------------|---|
| 13 | 55 | 4 | Home-based meals | Homebased, Cairo | 3 |
| 14 | 47 | 3 | Café & Restaurant | 15 seats, Alexandria | 6 |
| 15 | 38 | 7 | Kids' Park & café | 30 persons, Minia | 5 |
| 16 | 38 | 5 | Wedding & event planner | Rented office, Cairo | 3 |
| 17 | 39 | 3 | Home-made pies & pastries | Homebased, Minia | 2 |
| 18 | 48 | 5 | Airbnb rental flats | 2 apartments, Hurghada | 5 |
| 19 | 37 | 3 | Fast food takeaway | 10 seats, Alexandria | 5 |

Note: YOE= years of experience, NOE= Number of employees

4.2. APTNESS OF THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY FOR WOMEN MICROENTREPRENEURSHIP

This section presents the responses of the interviewees to three questions related to the suitability of the hospitality industry for female microentrepreneurship, as discussed in the following paragraphs.

First, participants were asked whether they consider the hospitality field to be adequate for women's microentrepreneurship. Specifically, they were asked: "From your experience, do you find that the hospitality field is appropriate for women to involve in microentrepreneurial venture? to what extent?". The results showed that the majority of the responses were positive regarding the view that the hospitality sector is suitable for women to own and operate a micro or small business. Specifically, a total of 13 respondents believed that the hospitality field was completely suitable for them to develop and run a micro business. Meantime, 6 participants felt that hospitality was the only field that they were interested in or were able to easily penetrate and start a micro business venture. This result concurs with previous study of McMillan et al. (2011). Interviewees' comments regarding this question included:

"I think this is the most appropriate field in general and for women in particular due to many reasons" (Participant No. 1). *"The restaurants or food service field is suitable for me... I do not think I could have succeeded if my business was in other fields"* (Participant No.4). *"Before opening this café, I have tried other business ideas such as beauty products and women clothing store and they both failed, the only business that succeeded was this cafe"* (Participant No.7).

Second, interviewees were asked if they would recommend the hospitality industry to other women, asking "Based on your experience, would you

encourage other women to start or get involved in a micro or small business in the hospitality field?”. The results revealed that a large number of the participants’ comments (12) indicated that they highly recommend the hospitality sector to both genders, especially women interested in owning a small or micro business. Another significant number of the participants (7) have already encouraged their friends to start a small or micro business within the food and beverage business. Some respondents indicated that their successful venture has inspired others to start their own businesses. For example, some respondents reported that:

“I think this is a very good area of business for women like me... I encourage prospective entrepreneurs to engage in this broad field of business” (Participant No.15). *“Of course, I would recommend this field of business for any woman who wants to start a small business venture”* (Participant No.18).

Third, respondents were asked why they considered the hospitality field to be particularly suitable for women's microentrepreneurship. In other words, interviewees were asked: “As a microentrepreneur, in which areas/aspects did you find the hospitality field adequate for female microentrepreneurs (social, economic, operational, personal, etc.)?”. Analysis of the participants’ comments revealed five main reasons, which are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The convenience of small and micro hospitality businesses, that allows for a family-work balance, was an important determinant for female entrepreneurs to choose this field. The majority of the participants (15) reported that small and micro businesses in the hospitality industry can be very convenient for women, especially in Eastern societies where women are responsible for household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children. Compared to other businesses, micro ventures in the hospitality sector can be compatible with the personal lifestyle of women through flexible working hours and simple effort or presence to run the business. Furthermore, many micro businesses in the hospitality industry can be run from home or a modest rented space in the same neighborhood, making the operation more convenient. As a result, micro enterprises in the hospitality industry are ideal for housewives or homemakers since they allow them to manage their household responsibilities while still running a business. These findings are consistent with prior research of Legis (2020). Some respondents stated:

“For me, it is very convenient to run my business venture from home...this way I can take care of my kids and household chores as a woman and still have a business that generates reasonable income” (Participant No.17). *“In this line of work, working hours can be flexible...”*

and I do not need to go to an office to get the job done, I just go online” (Participant No.18).

One of the key aspects or reasons for considering the hospitality industry to be ideal for female microentrepreneurship is that it is consistent with social norms and collective attitudes/beliefs related to women's work and entrepreneurship. A large number of the interviewees (12) reported that conservative and male-dominated societies impose certain constraints on women's work, life choices, and business fields. That is, social approval or acceptance is a key determinant of women's work and entrepreneurship. For instance, it is socially acceptable for women to work in restaurants or cafés while it is not common for females to work in the construction business. Similarly, owning a micro business in business fields such as real estate or export/import business, is completely dominated by men. Meanwhile, women are dominant entrepreneurs in business fields such as beauty centers and women's clothing stores. Fortunately, the hospitality field is broad and encompasses various types of small and micro business ventures that concur with social norms. Hence, to be accepted and supported by society, women tend to work in or own a business in this field. Put differently, hospitality microentrepreneurship helped women tackle constraints posed by religion, culture, or social norms on female work and entrepreneurial activities. This result is supported by precedent studies of Roald (2001) and Metcalfe (2010). Respondents' comments included:

“In our traditional society, women often have few options when it comes to working or owning a business. The obvious choices include cosmetics, women's clothing, beauty centers or day spas” (Participant No.2). *“It is a decent and appropriate line of business, for me as a woman.... I received no objections or criticism from my family or friends about it, on the contrary, they all supported and encouraged me”* (Participant No.14).

The financial stability of small and micro business ventures in the hospitality sector is another important factor for women who prefer this area for entrepreneurial activity. Analysis of the respondents' comments revealed many economic justifications for selecting the hospitality sector. For example, many of the hospitality micro business are low-budget ventures with a small rental space and all necessary equipment and furniture are available at reasonable prices. In addition, these types of ventures tend to have lower operating costs because they do not require large or expensive inventory and allow families to take over the operation of the business. More importantly, given women's low tendency for taking risks, hospitality micro enterprises have the potential to succeed as they provide basic services (such as food and shelter) that draw a stable flow of

demand and income. It is a safe investment with a high success probability and limited financial risks. This result agrees with the findings of Ahmad and Abdel-Aziz (2015) and Mohammad (2021). Participant No. 6 reported that:

“My café did not cost me a lot of money to set up; the space was rented, and I purchased a few seats and tables in addition to equipment that is available for sale in many shops... Moreover, if the business fails, I can easily resell them and terminate the lease contract.”

Manageability of hospitality micro ventures is another key feature that draws many female entrepreneurs to the industry. As reported by many participants in this study, the majority of small and micro businesses in the hospitality industry are easy to operate and maintain because they do not necessitate physical strength, advanced technological abilities, specific technical skills, certain educational background, or a significant amount of work. Typically, these micro businesses operate with a few procedures and a straightforward operation. They also have few, if any, operational issues that are easy to manage. These features attract women to micro enterprises in the hospitality sector as opposed to other commercial areas such as computer and phone shops or handmade souvenirs that require technical skills and experience. Also, given that women typically have more experience than men in certain fields such as beauty centers or day spas, it makes sense that they would be more likely to start their businesses in this area. The relevant literature supports this result (Ward et al., 2019; Yooetch, 2020). Some interviewee said:

“I didn't need a university degree, expertise, or specialized skills to run a home-based food business, it only required basic cooking skills, which every woman possesses... The procedure is very straightforward; I simply get the food items, prepare them, and bring them to the consumer.” (Participant No.17).

Being a broad and interesting field of work is seen as another feature of the hospitality industry that attracts women. Respondents' comments revealed that the hospitality sector is broad and includes many small and micro businesses, such as restaurants, food takeaway/stands, children's parks, rental apartments, etc. that suit women's abilities and circumstances. In addition, businesses in this field support creativity and innovation through the flexibility that allows for renovation, upgrade, downgrade, or modification of certain features of the final product/service. In other words, the hospitality industry welcomes or encourages women entrepreneurs to improvise and create original products/services. This is interesting for women as they like to use their creativity and to add their personal touch to work/business. Conversely, other business sectors, such

as retail, can be boring because they limit the role of entrepreneurs who simply act as intermediaries between producer and consumer. Interviewees' responses included:

'One of the aspects of my business that I enjoy is the ability to develop and design a new or customized service package to meet the specific needs of each customer... and I find this attractive, and I become captivated in the process' (Participant No.16).

To summarize the results of the three previous questions, there is almost a consensus among the participants that the field of hospitality is completely appropriate for the involvement of women as microentrepreneurs and they highly recommend this field to other women. Participants reported five main reasons for choosing hospitality over other sectors, including convenience for women's lifestyle, consistency with social or subjective norms, financial stability, manageability, and broad/interesting nature of hospitality business.

4.3. HOSPITALITY MICROENTREPRENEURSHIP AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

This section explains how participating in hospitality microentrepreneurship can help women gain social and economic empowerment. In this context, interviewees were asked five questions related to exploring the extent to which their hospitality micro enterprises have contributed to their empowerment. The results are discussed in the following paragraphs.

First, participants were asked whether owning a micro enterprise have improved their lives. The exact question was "From your experience, do think being a female micro entrepreneur in the hospitality field has helped you improve your life?". A total of 12 respondents agreed that running a micro business in hospitality has significantly improved their lives in several ways. The other participants (7) explained that their micro enterprise was the main reason for their survival and leading a decent life.

Following the previous question, respondents were asked "can you describe how owing a micro business in the hospitality industry has impacted the financial aspects of your life?". Most of the participants (16) agreed that their micro enterprises in the hospitality sector had a positive impact on the financial aspects of their livelihood by generating a reasonable income that allowed them to financially support their spouses and contribute to household expenses. In some cases, the micro enterprise was the main or only source of income for the whole household. Several respondents also reported that their micro enterprises enabled their

financial independence by owning or saving private money, that they did not receive from their husbands or other family members, to meet personal needs or to satisfy some luxury desires. These results concur with the study of McMillan et al. (2011) that hospitality micro businesses have supported women's empowerment in Nepal. For instance, an interviewee stated that:

"I'm not just a housewife or someone who burdens her husband, instead I help him to take care of our family... even if I don't make a lot of money, it still helps and it means a lot to my husband and me" (Participant No.9).

Next, respondents were asked if their involvement in hospitality micro enterprises had impacted their personality or improved their position in their household or among their relatives, friends, or the local community. All respondents agreed that being a micro entrepreneur has positive psychological effects by making them feel respected and appreciated by their spouses and other family members. Also, the sense of being able to financially support their spouses and making better use of their time and capabilities filled them with joy, self-respect, and self-esteem. Such feelings also increased their satisfaction and encouraged them on to keep going and succeed. This is strongly supported by the findings of previous studies (Panta & Thapa, 2017; Vukovic et al., 2021) that tourism and hospitality micro enterprises have enhanced women's self-confidence, skills and involvement in making decisions. Some of the respondents explained:

"It fills me with joy to help my husband and children, especially in these days when living expenses increase every day, I simply use my time and my modest capabilities to do something useful and satisfying" (Participant No. 17).

Participants were also asked whether micro enterprises in the hospitality sector contributed to their health care and education or to anyone in their family for that matter. The responses showed that the majority of the respondents (15) indicated that their micro enterprises helped them support their children's education by paying for school fees, school clothing, and other supplies, as well as to pay the costs of private tutoring. Additionally, many respondents indicated that owning a micro business allows them to provide better health care for themselves and their family members by being able to afford to pay better doctors instead of going to educational or public hospitals. Interviewees' comments included:

I always try to provide a better life to my children... my business comes in handy and provides me with money which I spend on their school expenses, as well as the medical visits and tests (Participant No. 8).

Finally, the interviewees were asked if being a micro entrepreneur has contributed to their awareness of economic and social issues and, if

possible, to give an example. Some participants explained that their involvement in micro enterprises in the hospitality sector drove them to follow some global issues, namely the Russian-Ukrainian war and the exchange rate of the US dollar against the Egyptian pound. These problems strongly affect many aspects related to their business, such as the cost of raw materials, the purchasing power of customers, competitors, and the selling prices of products and services. Other participants indicated that they are actively seeking information that will impact their business or help them find a new business opportunity. For example, Participant No. 1 said: *“I always try to follow and understand major events or changes related to my business, particularly what can impact my costs and selling prices”*.

In sum, the results indicated that participants' involvement in hospitality microentrepreneurship manifested multiple aspects of women's empowerment, including financial sufficiency, access to education and health care, active role at household, and increased awareness of societal issues.

4.4. FURTHER COMMENTS

Respondents were asked if they had any additional comments or suggestions on women's empowerment and female microentrepreneurship in the hospitality sector. Some interviewees (8) indicated that there should be more support from the local community by buying more of their products/services instead of big branded enterprises. Other respondents suggested launching an electronic platform or mobile application for promoting and selling products and services of hospitality micro-enterprises. Lastly, few participants in fairs or carnivals regularly for hospitality micro-enterprises to showcase products to the public. Some of the comments are below:

“I use fresh chicken and high-quality breeding, my prices are very reasonable, and my final product is really good; yet, a lot of customers still prefer to go to some famous places... people can support us more” (Participant No. 12).

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicated that the hospitality sector is ideally suited for women's participation in microentrepreneurship. The analysis of the respondents' comments revealed several reasons why they believe the hospitality industry to be suitable for women to start a micro enterprise, including convenience for women's circumstances and lifestyle, social acceptance of women entrepreneurship in this sector, manageability of hospitality micro enterprises, financial stability of hospitality micro business, and exhilaration and excitement associated with the involvement in micro businesses in this field. This conclusion is consistent with the

relevant literature on female entrepreneurship such as Roald (2001), Metcalfe (2010), Ward et al. (2019), and Legis (2020).

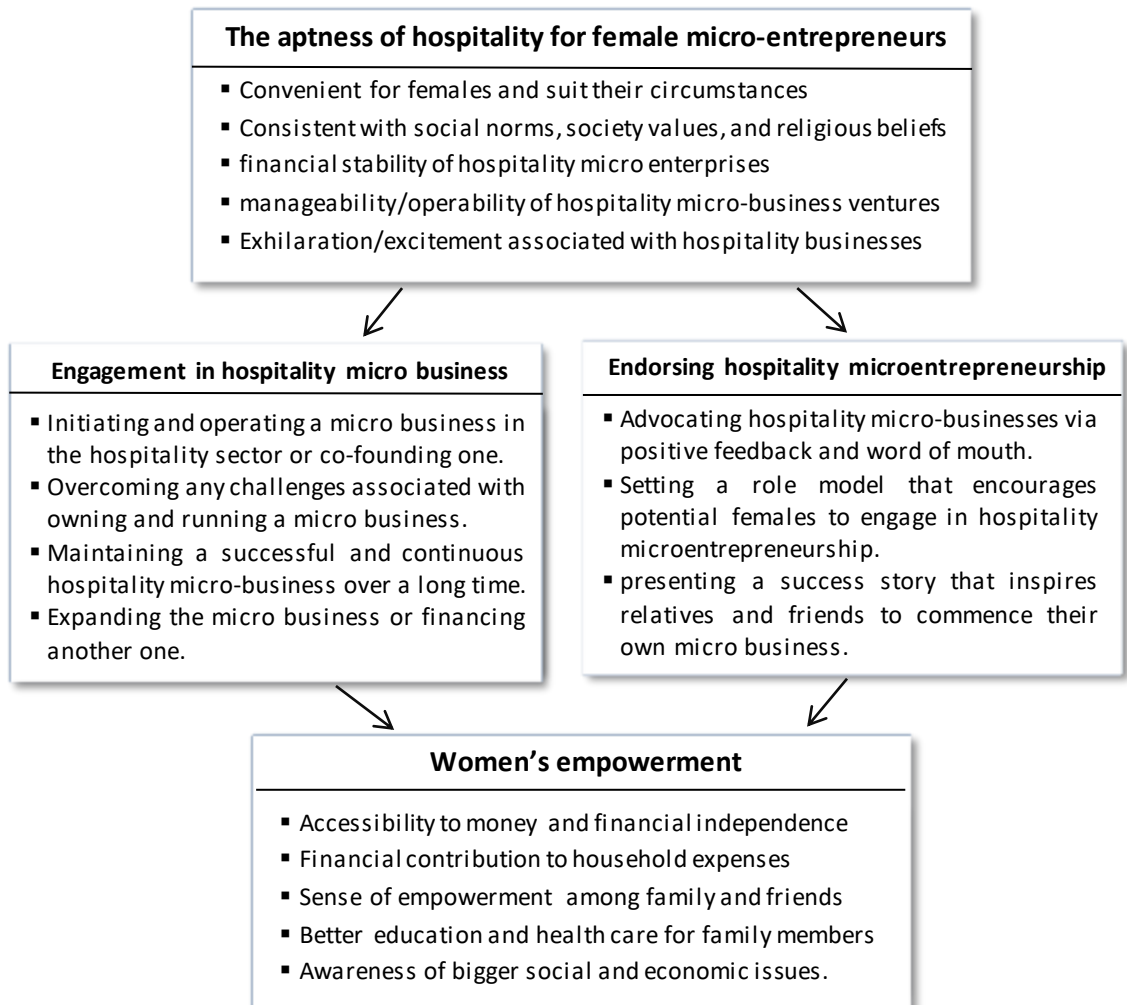


Figure 1: Summary of the study findings

The study also confirmed that microentrepreneurship in the hospitality industry is one of the key enablers of women's empowerment, especially in Eastern societies. In other words, the results revealed multiple aspects of women's empowerment due to their involvement in hospitality micro enterprises, such as access to money, financial independence, participation in household decisions, equal status in the family and community, and enhanced social and economic awareness. These manifested aspects are consistent with the economic and social empowerment of women discussed in the literature (Farah, 2006; Metcalfe, 2012; Legis, 2020).

Overall, this study achieved its objectives and emphasized the suitability of the hospitality sector for women's microentrepreneurship and its importance in supporting women's empowerment in Eastern societies. Figure 1 presents a graphical summary of the main results of this study.

6. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on its empirical findings, this study offered some practical implications. Women are advised to get involved in entrepreneurial ventures in the hospitality industry as it suits their mindset, skills, and circumstances. It is also recommended that women start a micro enterprise in the hospitality sector as it allows them to socially and financially improve their lives and that of their families. Residents of the local community are encouraged to support the micro enterprises of women entrepreneurs by buying their products more often, which contributes to the welfare of the whole community. Official bodies and non-governmental organizations are also encouraged to support women's micro enterprises by organizing or sponsoring regular exhibitions for these enterprises to promote and showcase their products. Last but not least, software companies can also help these micro businesses by introducing smart solutions, such as mobile applications or online platforms, which enable better operations for these micro enterprises in several operational aspects such as supplies procurement, marketing, and distribution.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study has certain limitations and provides some suggestions for future research. The sample size of this study is relatively small due to several accessibility constraints. Although small sample size is acceptable and common in qualitative research (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Davies & Hughes, 2014), future studies can recruit a larger sample to provide varied and detailed information. Also, further research can study female microentrepreneurship in the broad context of the tourism industry and investigate various types of tourism micro enterprises such as travel agents, gift shops, handmade souvenirs, online travel agents, etc. This enables an inclusive understanding the role of the tourism and hospitality industry in empowering women.

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