

Exploring networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa

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DECLARATION

I, **KL Polori**, hereby declare that this study “**Exploring the impact of networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa**” is my original work and that all the sources I have used or cited have been appropriately indicated and acknowledged using complete references.



15 April 2021

SIGNATURE

DATE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to thank those who have supported me during the three years of study, including my employer. Without their support, this achievement would never have been possible.

To my husband, Phegelelo and my kids (Kabelo & Boitumelo), who carried me in this endeavours and believed in me even when I went through an emotional journey, thank you. Even with the late nights and the days I was away from home, they always cheered me up and reminded me of my abilities. Thank you for your patience and courage during this new journey I embarked on in the last three years.

To the house manager of our family, who stepped in with house chores and cooking delicious food to free up my time to study, thank you for all the extra efforts and keeping our home in great shape.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work in the memory of my late mother, Boniwe Luty Leboea – a remarkable serial entrepreneur that I have ever met. Only now in my adulthood, I can relate and understand her passion for multiple streams of income even though she had a full-time job as a domestic worker. Yet she had mastered the art of entrepreneurship without a formal education. May your teachings become a legacy in your bloodline for generations to come.

This work is dedicated to my husband, my CEO, my lifetime partner and my pillar of strength Phegelelo Joseph Polori, for your support and carrying me through the most challenging journey of my career development. I could not have accomplished this last milestone of my academic career if it had not been for your love and constant reminders of the bigger picture.

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“Do the one thing you think you cannot do. Fail at it. Try again. Do better the second time. The only people who never tumble are those who never mount the high wire.”

— Oprah Winfrey

ABSTRACT

In today's post-modern age, the role of women entrepreneurs in the development of a nation's economy is unavoidable and women are willing to take action in business and contribute to the growth of the nation. The birth of a growing community of women entrepreneurs has been referred to as one of the most potential human resources in the 21st century that contributes towards global economic and social development. Most female entrepreneurs in South Africa are experiencing growth and development challenges due to inadequate formal entrepreneurial networks among women. The purpose of this study was to explore networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa.

A qualitative research approach framed within an interpretive paradigm and an exploratory research design was adopted for the study. A sample of eight participants were purposefully selected to participate in the study. Data was collected through document analysis and semi-structured face-to-face interviews, and then qualitatively analysed through coding and categorisation.

This study revealed that formal networks are of great importance when it comes to assisting women entrepreneurs with financial, moral and other material supports. However, most women entrepreneurs in South Africa are not aware of such networks, hence they are finding it difficult in enhancing their business performance. The study recommended that the DTI should continue working and encouraging South African women entrepreneurs to join and actively participate in entrepreneurial networks. The study further recommended that policymakers should formalise networking at a national level as a supporting tool for women in business. The practical implication for the study was on building relationships for networking, as it is an excellent link for opening doors for business opportunities, growth and running a successful business.

Keywords: *women entrepreneurs, networking, entrepreneurship, business environment, networking organizations.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
LIST OF TABLES.....	xii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xiii
CHAPTER 1	1
NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY	2
1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY	3
1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT	4
1.4.1 Research objectives.....	5
1. 4.2 Research questions	6
1.5 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS	6

1.6	SCOPE OF THE STUDY.....	7
1.7	RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	7
1.7.1	Research paradigm.....	7
1.7.2	Research approach.....	8
1.7.3	Research design	8
1.7.4	Study population and sampling	8
1.7.5	Collection of Data.....	9
1.7.6	Data analysis techniques	9
1.8	TRUSTWORTHINESS	11
1.9	ETHICAL CONSIDERATION	12
1.10	CHAPTERS LAYOUT.....	12
1.10	SUMMARY	14
	CHAPTER 2	15
	LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION.....	15
2.1	INTRODUCTION.....	15
2.2	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	15
2.3	DEFINING ENTREPRENEUR.....	18
2.4.1	Types of network.....	20

2.4.1.1	<i>Task networks</i>	20
2.4.1.2	<i>Professional networks</i>	20
2.4.1.3	<i>Social networks</i>	21
2.4.2	Women entrepreneurs in the business environment	22
2.5	NETWORKING BETWEEN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS	24
2.5.2	Relationship between the entrepreneurial business network and business performance and success.	24
2.6	EXISTING ENVIRONMENT OF NETWORKING AMONGST FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS	25
2.6.1	Current networking in the South African business environment	26
2.6.2	Networking characteristics	29
2.7	MAJOR CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS EFFECTIVELY TO NETWORK IN THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA	31
2.7.1.1	<i>Family and cultural influences</i>	32
2.7.1.2	<i>Access to funding</i>	33
2.8	BENEFITS OF WOMEN'S NETWORKS	33
2.9	POSSIBLE STRATEGIES TO ALLEVIATE THE IMPACTS AND ENHANCE THE BENEFITS OF NETWORKING BETWEEN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS	34
2.10	SUMMARY	35
CHAPTER 3		36

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	36
3.1 INTRODUCTION	36
3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM	36
3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH	37
3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN.....	38
3.5 STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLING	38
3.6 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS	38
3.7 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE	39
3.8 DATA ANALYSIS	40
3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS	41
3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION	42
3.10.1 Informed Consent	42
3.10 SUMMARY	42
CHAPTER 4	44
ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS.....	44
4.1 INTRODUCTION	44
4.2 DATA ANALYSIS AND LITERATURE INTEGRATION	44
4.3 GATHERING OF DATA.....	45

4.3.1	Data Collection	45
4.3.2	Sampling	45
4.3.4	Data Collection Process	46
4.3.5	Data Analysis	46
4.3.5.1	Structure and Overview of Themes.....	48
4.4	OVERVIEW OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS	51
4.4.1	Businesses Background.....	52
4.5	CURRENT BUSINESS NETWORKING IN SOUTH AFRICA	53
4.6	BUILDING A NETWORK AS A WOMAN ENTREPRENEUR	55
4.7	IMPACT OF NETWORKING ON BUSINESS.....	58
4.8	NETWORKING CONTRIBUTION TO ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS	59
4.8.1	Networking Challenges for Women.....	60
4.8.2	Networking Advice for other Women Entrepreneurs	63
4.9	SUMMARY	65
	CHAPTER 5	66
5.1	INTRODUCTION	66
5.2	RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS	66
5.3	RECOMMENDATIONS	68

5.4	ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES	69
5.4.1	Research objective 1: To explore networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa.	70
5.4.2	Research objective 2: To explore the existing environment of building entrepreneurial networks for South African businesswomen.....	71
5.4.3	Research objective 3: To understand the impact of entrepreneurial networks on women entrepreneurial performance in South Africa	71
5.4.4	Research objective 4: To make available recommendations to networking organisations for the successful implementation of networking strategies	72
5.5	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	72
5.6	SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	73
5.7	PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS.....	74
5.8	SUMMARY	75
	REFERENCE LIST.....	76
	APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER	91
	APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	94
	APPENDIX C INTERVIEW # P7	96
	APPENDIX D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE.....	114

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Chapter Layout.....	13
Figure 2.1: A Proposed Model of Social Exchange Theory.....	16
Figure 2.2: Benefits of social networking for business.....	20
Figure 4.1: Themes that emanated from the research questions.....	48

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1: Business Women Networking Associations.....	25
Table 4.1: Phases of thematic analyses.....	44
Table 4.2: The relationship between the themes and the research questions....	46
Table 4.3 Participants age and duration of interviews.....	49

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations	Meaning
BBWA	Black Businesswomen's Association
BWA	Businesswomen's Association
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
EDP	Enterprise Development Program
GEM	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
ILO	The International Labour Organization
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
NWU	North-West University
PWSA	Phenomenal Women SA
SAWEN	South African Woman Entrepreneur Network
SAWIC	South African Women in Construction
SAWIMA	South African Women in Mining
SEDA	Small Enterprise Development Agency
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Entities
SMMEs	Small, Medium and Micro-Enterprises
TWIB	Technology for Women in Business

UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
WDB	Women's Development Business
WIF	Women in Finance
WOESA	Women in Oil, Energy in South Africa

CHAPTER 1

NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The growing community of women entrepreneurs has been referred to as one of the most potential human resources in the 21st century that contributes towards global economic and social development (Zeb & Kakakhel, 2018:105). This emergence of women entrepreneurs has resulted in a need for female entrepreneurs to meet, share and learn from fellow businesswomen through networking (Van Blokland, 2018). In the business environment, networking is referred to as the action or process of interacting with others to exchange information and develop professional or social contacts (Öberg, 2018:125; López-García & Puente, 2009). The entrepreneurial business network is a multidimensional network of businesses, working together to accomplish the objectives of the organisation (Jaffar, Saqlain, Mohammad, Mohd & Shafer, 2019:28). One of the characteristics contributing to business success is entrepreneurial networking. There is a positive correlation between networking and business performance (Lento *et al.*, 2014; Thrikawala, 2011:111).

In today's post-modern age, the role of women entrepreneurs in the development of a nation's economy is inevitable and women are willing to take action in business to provide a meaningful contribution to national growth agenda (Chinomona & Maziriri, 2020:835). In the current South African economic environment, Small and Medium-sized Entities (SMEs), especially those owned by women seem to lack adequate access to abundant resources. Women's networks may be a beneficial initiative to help enhance the success of women in businesses (Roling, 2012:2). The sharing of information can assist entrepreneurs to have a different outlook on their current business ventures and new opportunities. Female entrepreneurs have developed over the years to show the ability to work together and to share resources through social and entrepreneurial networking (Jaffar *et al.*, 2019:28). However, women are reported to network less effectively than men due to social factors such as work-family balance (Jaffar *et al.*, 2019:28).

Given that female entrepreneurs face unique challenges when compared to their male counterparts, this study seeks to explore the impact of networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa. The study adopted the social exchange theory to obtain an in-depth understanding of the impact of entrepreneurial networking as social activities on women entrepreneurial performance (Roling, 2012:1).

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

An entrepreneur is described as an individual or a group of individuals who identifies opportunities, allocates resources and creates value for their clients while still making a profit (Small Enterprise Development Agency [SEDA], 2015). The number of women entrepreneurs is increasing around the globe to contest on alleviating a variety of economic challenges facing the global business environment (Ramesh, 2013:117). Zeb and Kakakhel (2018:105) stated that women entrepreneurship is the road towards empowerment where women can contribute positively to the economic development in various ways including job creation, among other things. Due to social entrepreneurial networks, women around the world are now entering into the business world.

According to Leskinen (2011), the phenomenon of entrepreneurship networking includes the activities by organisations to establish and build their enterprises through social relationships, whereby the employees and employers sell and market their products within the entrepreneurial communities. Lerotholi (2018:128) described social networking as the communal structures that embody connections and strengthens relations amongst people. According to Brockner (2004:218), one way to evaluate entrepreneurial success is to measure the extent that the business meets demands and needs of interested stakeholders, as well as through the satisfaction of people with a real interest in the company.

Emuwa (2018:1) suggested several factors that women entrepreneurs could derive from effective networking. The nine benefits include inclusiveness, creative stimulation, sharing, interactive knowledge acquisition, validation, collaboration, authenticity, reflexivity and a booster for energy. Bate (2018:1) concurred that most women entrepreneurs prefer female-only networking sessions as it gives them a sense of belonging, an excellent way to find a mentor, inspiration, getting results and building confidence. A study conducted by Roling (2012:1) reveals that participating in women's network social activities have a direct association with higher levels of career-related support, greater intellectual wellbeing and a more positive attitude towards the business.

In South Africa, there are various women networking organisations that provide financial, material and moral supports to female entrepreneurs. Some of these organisations include South African Women in Construction (SAWIC); South African Women Entrepreneurship Network (SAWEN); Black Businesswomen's Association (BBWA); Women in Finance (WIF); Women in Business; Phenomenal Women South Africa; Businesswomen's Association (BWA), Technology for Women in Business (TWIB), Women's Development Business (WDB); and Women in Oil, Energy in South Africa (WOESA). These organisation aid women entrepreneurs by providing services such as advocacy to unlock land property ownership for women; Enterprise Development Program (EDP); access to material supply, finance, and economic opportunities; and access to training in all aspects of skills required to be in business and financial literacy to improve business performance (Entrepreneur Magazine, 2014).

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

All over the world, women are referred to as a weaker gender compared to men in terms of emotions and physical attributes - hence the opportunity and the prospect available to women in the business world is still underexplored at the academic level (Zeb & Kakakhel, 2018:107). A review of relevant literature (Desta, 2015; Irene, 2017; Mahadea & Kaseeram, 2018; Nadgrodkiewicz, 2011; Zeb & Kakakhel, 2018:107) revealed that only a few studies were conducted to explore the impact of formal networking between women entrepreneurs in a business environment, especially in

the South African context. This is because many scholars believe that only a handful of women own businesses. Furthermore, studies have presumed that entrepreneurship is a male-dominated activity, thus women entrepreneurship and networking between women entrepreneurs in a business environment do not feature prominently in the academic community (Ramesh, 2013:118). The researcher's awareness into this research gap prompted an in-depth theoretical and empirical exploration into networking between women entrepreneurs in a business environment in South Africa. In this regard, the results from this study could provide valuable information to policymakers to have an understanding of the factors contributing to the promotion and support of women-owned enterprises.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Factors such as lack of formal entrepreneurial networks among women in the business environment contributed to the underperformance of women in areas of growth and development (Roomi, 2013:175). Although South African women are now involved in entrepreneurial activities, the trend is not growing at a more incredible pace as compared to that of men entrepreneurs. Networking between women entrepreneurs in a business environment can undeniably play a vital role (Zeb & Kakakhel, 2018:108) in making South Africa an economically sound nation.

Women in South Africa account for 29.7 million in 2019, which is more than half of the total population (Plecher 2020). Despite this, their role in terms of economic participation in the country remains lower as compared to men. Studies have shown that only nine out of every 100 South African women are involved in early-stage entrepreneurial activities, compared to 11 out of every 100 South African men (Herrington & Kew, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor [GEM], 2017:6). This is a direct indication that more men are involved in entrepreneurial activities than women are. As a result, the South African early-stage entrepreneurial activity is more opportunity-driven (75%) in 2017, which is significantly higher than other African countries (Herrington & Kew, 2017:24). Female opportunity-driven entrepreneurship has decreased from 2016 (71.6%) to 2017 (65.7%), whereas necessity-driven entrepreneurship has increased from 27.1% in 2016 to 34.3% in 2017 (Herrington & Kew, 2017:28).

Although there is high participation of females in entrepreneurial activities around the globe and awareness of their role in economic development, female entrepreneurs are disadvantaged due to lack of appropriate and effective business networks (Kim & Siri, 2007:684). According to Viljoen and Dunga (2014:63), one of the contributing factors to the higher unemployment rate in South African is lack of growth of female-owned enterprises. As a result, women started their businesses out of necessity to supplement their household income.

Most women enter into the business world and start their own businesses although their entrepreneurial performance is negatively impacted due to inadequate formal entrepreneurial networks to assist them with financial and social support (Zeb & Kakakhel, 2018:108). The study seeks to explore networking between women entrepreneurs in a business environment in South Africa.

1.4.1 Research objectives

The primary objective of this study was to explore networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa.

To attain the main objectives for this study, the following secondary objectives were formulated:

- To explore the existing environment of building entrepreneurial networks for South African businesswomen;
- To understand the impact of entrepreneurial networks on women entrepreneurial performance in South Africa; and
- To make available recommendations to networking organisations for the successful implementation of successful networking strategies.

1. 4.2 Research questions

- How is networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment influencing the success of women entrepreneurs in South Africa?
- How effective is the existing entrepreneurial networking for South African businesswomen?
- How can the impact of entrepreneurial networks on women entrepreneurial performance in South Africa be explained?
- What recommendations can be made to networking organisations for the successful implementation of networking strategies?

1.5 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

The following key terms were defined and demarcated within the context of the current study:

1.5.1 Networking

Networking is the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions. In the context of the current study, women's networking was regarded as organised activities channelled towards assisting businesswomen in developing and advancing their entrepreneurial skills (Hampton *et al.* 2009:195).

1.5.2 Women entrepreneur

Rashmi (2016: 60) defined women entrepreneurs as “a woman or women, who initiate, organise and operate a business enterprise, or holds more than 50% control in an organisation”. For the purpose of this study, the terms “women entrepreneur” and “businesswoman” were used interchangeably when referring to women entrepreneurs.

1.5.3 Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is defined as “the process by which opportunities to create future goods and services are discovered, evaluated and exploited” (Shane and Venkataraman, 2002).

1.5.4 Business environment

Business environment refers to “the combination of internal and external factors that influence a company’s operating situation, including employees, customers, management, supply and demand, and business regulations” (Basil Hans, 2018:67).

1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The field of this study falls within the subject discipline of entrepreneurship with specific reference to networking between women entrepreneurs. This study primarily focuses on the effect of entrepreneurial networking, and it is not industry-specific but limited to South Africa.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This section provides the research design and methods that were adopted to obtain empirical answers to the research questions for this study.

1.7.1 Research paradigm

An interpretive research paradigm underpinned this study. According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016:53), interpretive research aims to try to understand the interpretation of individuals about a social phenomenon they interact with, and not to discover the universal context and value-free knowledge and truth. Interpretive paradigm was considered appropriate for this study as it helped in providing guidance for obtaining an in-depth understanding of what constitutes reality with regards to networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa and furthermore, how to understand this phenomenon.

1.7.2 Research approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research seeks to understand human action from the perspective of human actors themselves in an attempt to describe and understand, rather than explain, their actions (Babbie and Mouton, 2005:270). According to Saunders *et al.* (2016:53), qualitative research involves the collection, analysis and interpretation of data by observing what individual do and say. The qualitative research approach was considered vital for this study because it provided an in-depth understanding of the actions, attitudes and behaviours of South African women entrepreneur with regards to business networking.

1.7.3 Research design

An exploratory research design study was adopted to establish an understanding of how to best proceed on studying networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa. An exploratory research design is used in a research problem when there are few or no studies to refer to or rely upon to predict an outcome. Experimental research was considered appropriate for this study due to limited information about networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa. This study used an explorative research design. In this regard, it was possible to engage with the various participants over a period of time to gain better insight into the phenomenon under investigation. It was therefore possible to define new terms and obtain clarity on existing concepts regarding networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa.

1.7.4 Study population and sampling

A research population is a set of an element having one or more similar characteristic of interest (Siamah *et al.* 2017:1611). For the respondent to be a member of the research population, they must share at least a single characteristic of interest. The research population for this study comprised of ten women entrepreneurs in South Africa.

Since the aim of the study was not to generalise the findings of the study to the entire research population, judgement or purposive sampling was the best choice of technique. According to Valerio *et al.* (2016:146), purposive sampling entails the conscious selection of certain individuals who have the characteristics required for the study. Suitable participants were given written informed consent before they could take part in the study. With permission, the researcher could identify high profile businesswoman in South Africa with a total of eight affluent female entrepreneurs through purposeful sampling. The study comprised of female entrepreneurs from Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Free State and North-West provinces in South Africa. Purposeful sampling was the most appropriate for this study as it involved the use of knowledge for selection of the sample from the population based on the characteristics of interest. The aim was to gather a sample of participants that would yield the most insight into the phenomenon under investigation for this study, and therefore, those who would best answer the research question.

1.7.5 Collection of Data

Primary data was obtained through Zoom virtual meeting which served as face-to-face interviews with selected participants. The main aim of the interview was to stimulate participants perceptions, opinions, past experiences and meaning individuals give to specific experiences (Wahyuni, 2012:73). The appropriate method of data collection for this study was through interviews to obtain data accuracy with immediate effect. In this regard, exploratory interviews were conducted with eight selected female entrepreneurs in South Africa. All interviews were audio-recorded (Loubere, 2017:22). Participants signed the informed consent form before their interviews (refer to Appendix A). Only participants who consented to participate in the study were interviewed.

1.7.6 Data analysis techniques

Data analysis is concerned with the specific patterns in the data and serves as a tool to enhance knowledge. Qualitative data analysis involves the analysis of language, discourse, what people say and nonverbal communication to imply deeper understanding that individuals hold. For this study, computer-aided qualitative data

analysis software, Atlas.ti, was used to analyse the qualitative data. Atlas.ti was the appropriate data analysis tool for this study as it supports an interpretive exploratory theory approach for data analysis and enhances the quality of the research outcome (Smit, 2002:65). The recorded audio interviews were transcribed whereby the transcription output was also checked against the voice recording for accuracy.

Creswell's steps of thematic data analysis were then used to analyse the data. The final analysis was done by means of Creswell's generic (ATLAS-ti) qualitative analysis approach, which was thematically focused (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:31). This includes:

Assigning initial codes: An initial code can be a word, a phrase or the respondent's own words.

- Revisiting initial coding: At this stage, a large number of codes were developed.
- Developing an initial list of categories: Modified codes were organised into themes
- Modifying the initial list based on additional re-reading: After re-reading, a decision was taken on which categories are less important than others and/or can be combined.
- Revisiting categories and sub-categories: The list of categories was revisited with a view to final organising.
- Moving from categories to concepts: Codes were organised into concepts according to the most informative or logical manner of sorting.
- The analytical process was concluded by envisioning the research product
- The researcher was trained by an experienced researcher, where she acquired additional skills needed in order to accurately interpret, code data and report the research findings accordingly.

- The data was co-coded by an experienced researcher at the North-West University and the final results were only recorded after the conclusion of a consensus discussion

1.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:331), trustworthiness refers to the manner of showing the reasonableness, credibility and integrity of the qualitative research process. The reliability of this qualitative study was enhanced by using the following strategies:

- **Credibility:** The research proposal went through peer debriefing whereby it was subjected to evaluation by an experienced study leader. To establish credibility, triangulation and member-checks methods were used to confirm that the results of the research were credible or believable (Chowdhury, 2015:146,150; Creswell & Creswell, 2018:314).
- **Dependability:** Data was analysed, and consensus discussions held with the study leader to reach harmony about themes. The research measured consistency and evaluated if the research outcomes could be repeated (Chowdhury, 2015:146,150; Creswell & Creswell, 2018:314).
- **Transferability:** The ability of the research to be transferred to a different context and be comparable to other research. The detailed description of the study and the method used were given (Chowdhury, 2015:146,150; Creswell & Creswell, 2018:314).
- **Conformability:** Consultation sessions with the supervisor to assess the research process, transcriptions of the voice recordings and independent coding to compare the transcripts and coding with that of the researcher. Field notes were made available for audit purposes (Chowdhury, 2015:146,150; Creswell & Creswell, 2018:314).

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Research has an ethical-moral dimension, and the researcher has a moral and professional obligation to be ethical even when the participants for the study are unaware of or unconcerned about ethics (Neuman, 2011:145). For this study, the researcher applied for ethical clearance from the North-West University (NWU). Written permission letters were sent to all the selected participants for the study seeking their participation in the same. Consent forms were emailed to participants for signing prior to interview process. Voluntary participation was guaranteed, including granting participants the right to withdraw at any stage of the research process. The researcher ensured that there was no exposure to any risk or harm to the participants and their confidentiality was respected. No names of the participants were used during the study; i.e. pseudo names were used instead of their true names. All electronic data was stored on a password protected computer and data will not be used for any other purpose except for the study.

Informed consent

According to Given (2008:10), the data collection process needs to take into consideration voluntary informed consent and to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the parties involved in the study. The researcher informed the participants regarding the objectives of the research. They choose to participate freely in the study by signing the informed consent form (refer to Appendix A). The Informed Consent Form had North-West University letterhead attached to it. The names and contact details of the researcher and the Research Supervisor were also provided on the Informed Consent Form.

1.10 CHAPTERS LAYOUT

This study comprises of five chapters as follows:

Chapter One: Nature and scope of the study

Chapter One of the study provided an explanation of the background, problem statement and the rationale for the study. It also provided the derivation of the research objectives and research questions that guided the study. The chapter further provided a preliminary literature review as well as a brief overview of the research design and methodology for the study. Finally, the chapter offered the significance, limitations and ethical consideration for the study; and the chapter concludes with the layout for this dissertation.

Chapter Two: Literature review and theoretical foundation

This chapter reviewed relevant literature relating to the phenomenon under investigation for this study. The chapter discussed the theoretical framework, the social exchange theory through which the study is grounded. Relevant concepts relating to women entrepreneurs in the business environment were reviewed in this chapter.

Chapter Three: Research design and methods

This chapter included an explanation of the research design and methods adopted to gather practical answers for the research questions under investigation. The chapter also provided the philosophical assumption that underpins the study and locates the study under the interpretive research paradigm. The chapter further explained in detail the data collection and analysis employed for this study.

Chapter Four: Analysis and interpretations

This chapter analysed the qualitative data obtained from the participants for this study. A computer-aided qualitative data analysis software called Atlas.ti was used to analyse data.

Chapter Five: Summary, conclusions and recommendations

This chapter provided a summary of the main findings for the study. In summary, conclusions were made, and constructive recommendations provided.

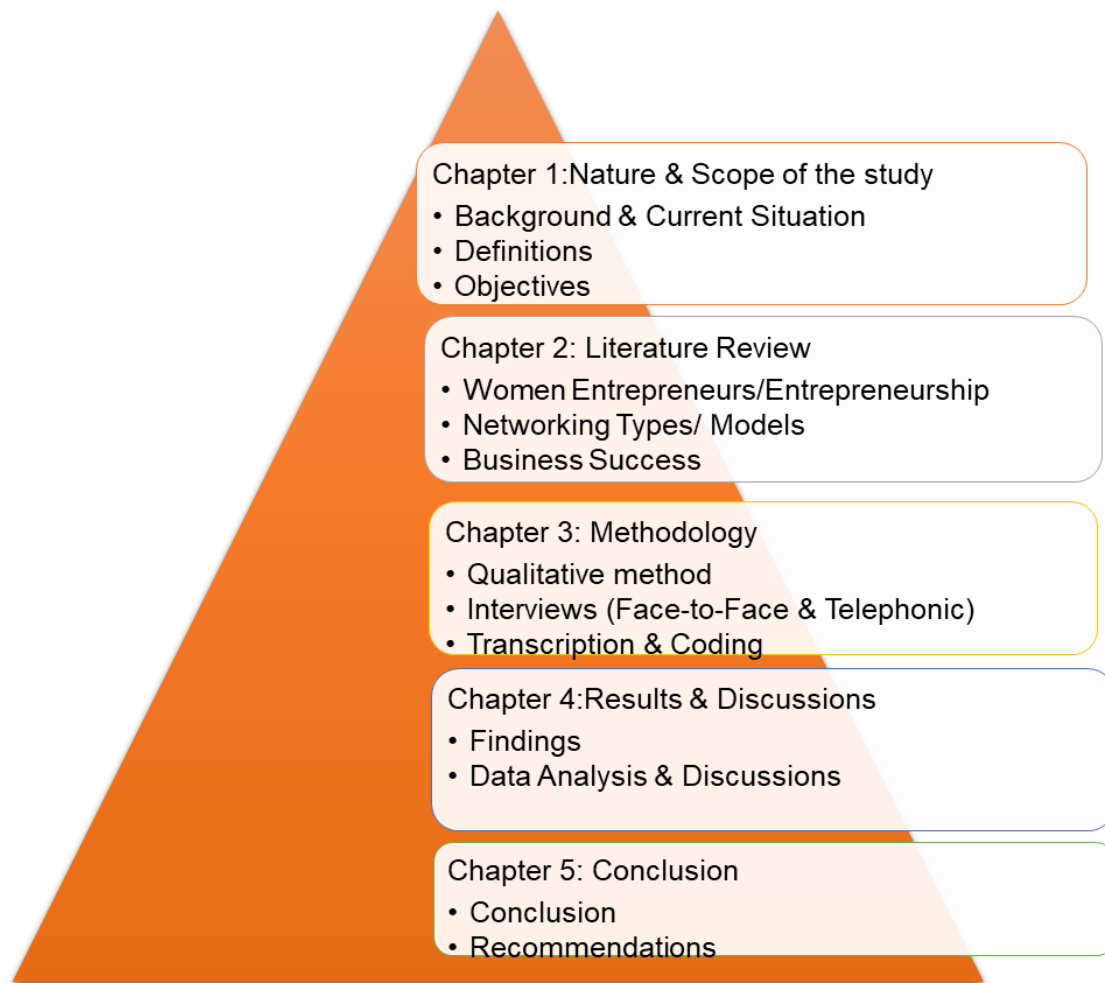


Figure 1.2 Chapter Layout

Source: Author's own compilation

1.10 SUMMARY

Overall, this chapter (Chapter One) provided an explanation of the background, problem statement and the rationale for the study. The research objectives and research questions that guided the study were also provided. The chapter further offered a brief overview of the research design and methodology for the study, the significant, limitations and ethical consideration for the study as well as the chapter layout for this dissertation.

The next chapter reviewed relevant literature relating to the themes under investigation for this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided an introductory pathway through which the study was conducted. This chapter reviewed relevant literature relating to the phenomenon under investigation for this study. The chapter begins with a discussion of the theoretical foundation through which the study was grounded. Next, a review of relevant literature relating to women entrepreneurs and networking between women entrepreneur in the business environment was conducted. The chapter also reviewed the existing environment of networking amongst female entrepreneurs from a global and South African perspective. The chapter further checked the literature link to factors affecting the success of women entrepreneurs as well as entrepreneurial challenges and benefits of networking amongst women entrepreneurs. The chapter concluded with a review of literature relating to possible strategies to alleviate the impact and enhance the benefits of networking between women entrepreneurs.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory is the common principles on which basis researchers can explain the relationship between concepts and variables (Rahi, 2017:3). According to Creswell (2014:22), the theoretical framework in qualitative research often provides the study with a lens for enquiry. While there is no consensus as to which theory of entrepreneurship is the best (Brixiová & Kangoye, 2019:2), social science research on entrepreneurship has mostly clashed around three dimensions namely; the sociological factors, the institutional environment and personal characteristics of entrepreneurs (Djankov, 2005:1). Theories such as the organisational theory (Akpobi, 2017:1), social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), transactional cost theory, resource dependency theory and institutional theory have been widely used in an attempt to explain the impact of economic and political factors such as power and dependency,

and social aspects of networking on entrepreneurs and relationship marketing (Möller & Halinen, 2000:36).

Based on the social exchange theory, this study was grounded on the sociological factors and institutional environment using professional and social networks as essential factors influencing female entrepreneurship behaviours, performance and success. The social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) stipulated that entrepreneurs are more likely to reciprocate positivity through networking as soon as they perceive that networking can be beneficial to them. According to Möller and Halinen (2000:36), networking exists among various types of actors, including individuals, organisations and firms who exchange all kinds of resources needed for the survival of a business. Furthermore, the social exchange theory describes the word “social” as a process of reciprocal exchange occurring among individuals and provides a basis for studying networking relationships (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005:874).

Empirical support of the social exchange theory shows that the social activities provided by women’s networks provide them with opportunities to develop more business-supportive relationships (Roling, 2012:1). Greguletz *et al.* (2018:3) adopted the social exchange theory using the concept of reciprocity to understand women motivations and level of craftiness to engage in networking. Their study found that women build less effective networks than men. The social exchange theory was considered an appropriate theoretical framework for this because of the following reasons:

- The social exchange theory attempts to provide an in-depth understanding and explanation on exchange behaviours among entrepreneurs and relationship developments at any level in the network perspective (Möller & Halinen, 2000:36).
- The social exchange theory provides an understanding of how networking relationships evolve as well as how businesses function and grow from a network context (Saleem, Zhang, Gopinath & Adeel, 2020:4).

Figure 2.1 below depicts the theoretical model applicable to this study. The theoretical model is a base in the social network that exist and generally the engagement of all entrepreneurs in different forms of collaboration (Malmström, & Johansson, 2016:8).

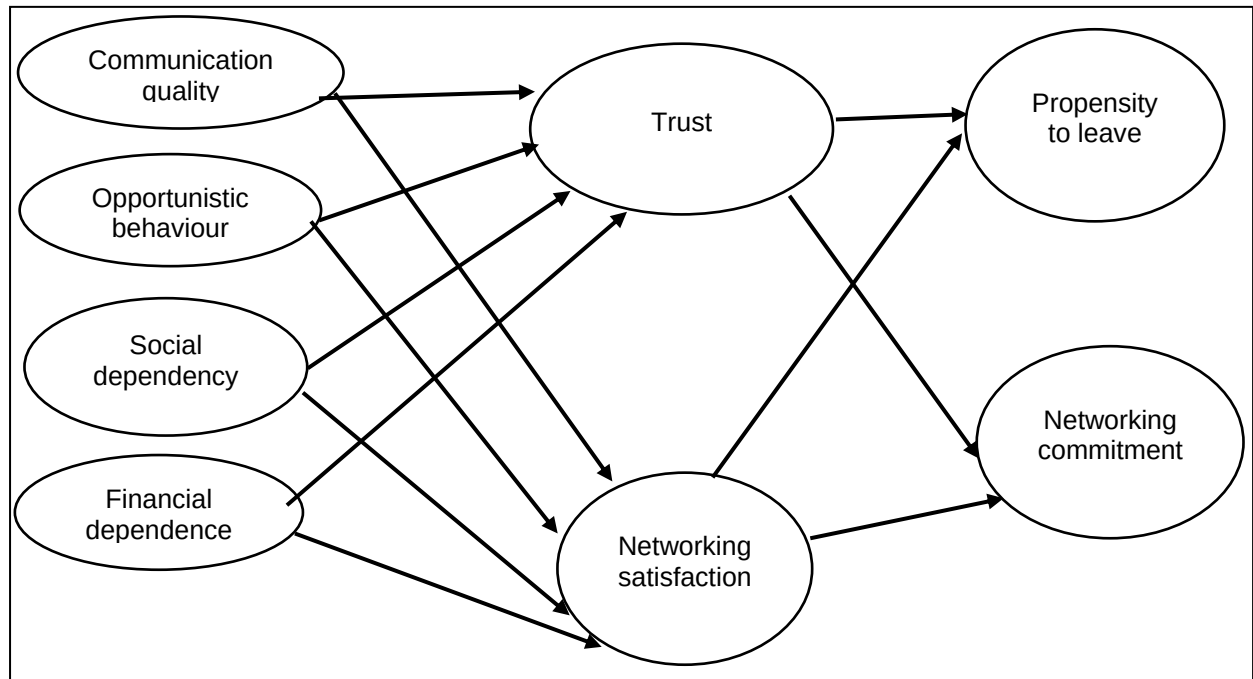


Figure 2 1: A Proposed Model of Social Exchange Theory

Source: Jeong and Oh (2017:118)

Figure 2.1 above shows that the social exchange theory suggests a trade-off in the relationship whereby an individual entrepreneur receives any kind of assistance, training or reward would try to respond with something of similar value (Saleem et al., 2016:3). Erdurmazlı, 2019:4) stated that “the exchange relationship is an intervening construct between two or more entrepreneurs, and the character of the relationship will define the consequences”. Trust is depicted to be a promising interactive construct in the business network setting between entrepreneurs and networking organisations. It is a fundamental element in the successful relationship between entrepreneurs and networking organisations (Jeong & Oh, 2017:118).

2.3 ENTREPRENEUR DEFINED

A French economist, Jean Baptiste Say (Mohr, 2015:45), developed the term entrepreneur in the early 19th century. Mohr (2015:46) further explained that an entrepreneur is regarded as one of the factors of production and referred to as an initiator, inventor, risk bearers, dynamic and idea person of action who possesses the ability to inspire others. On a similar note, Shefsky (2011:1) described entrepreneurs as individuals who are very passionate about their businesses and are enthusiastic about taking risks to transform their dreams into realities. In South Africa, several identified factors such as gender, race, location and entrepreneurial skills have a significant impact on entrepreneurship (Irene, 2017:1). The International Labour Organization (ILO) reported that women entrepreneurs in South Africa owned only a third of formal businesses (ILO, 2016:3).

There are two types of classification for entrepreneurs, namely opportunity entrepreneurs and necessity entrepreneurs. According to Botha, Nieman and Van Vuuren (2007:164), opportunity entrepreneurs are those who seek or identify an opportunity or gap in the marketplace and take the risk to fill that gap to make profit as well as aiming at accumulating wealth. In this regard, Ambrish (2014:224) described an entrepreneur as a person who possesses the competencies to exploit new opportunities to generate economic profits. Turton and Herrington (2012:2) referred necessity entrepreneurs as individuals who embark on a journey out of the need to survive due to factors such as unemployment and lack of necessary qualifications to be employed by others.

Women entrepreneur is women or group of women, who initiate, organise and operate a business enterprise (Rashmi, 2016:60). For a woman, entrepreneurship is a roadmap towards empowerment where she can make a positive contribution in the economy in terms of job creation and economic development (Gundry & Harold, 2001:453; Zeb & Kakakhel, 2018:105). In a dominating male society such as South Africa (Irene, 2017:2), starting an enterprise is a very challenging task, especially for women entrepreneurs (Rashmi, 2016:60). In this regard, the majority of women do start their entrepreneurial role through small and micro-enterprise. Cited challenges for women entrepreneurs are factors such as family obligations, inadequate start-up

capital, lack of marketing skills, management problem, mobility constraint and inability to take a risk (Rashmi, 2016:61).

2.4 ENTREPRENEURIAL NETWORK DEFINED

An entrepreneurial network is known as a socioeconomic business activity and a platform by which it brings business executives and entrepreneurs together to discuss available business opportunities (Abbas *et al.* 2019:2). Guercini and Ranfagni (2016:770) stated that “the entrepreneurial business network also provides a platform to build relationships, identify, develop or act upon opportunities of business, share information and seek potential business partners for ventures”. Hedvall, Jagstedt and Dubois (2019:1), Hedvall *et al.* (2019:1) advocated that an entrepreneurial business network is a way in which entrepreneurs can influence their business network as well as personal networks and relationships to assist in increasing new business opportunities. In this regard, the entrepreneurial business network is one of the strategic business resources which help women entrepreneurs to grow in a dynamic and competitive business environment (Machirori & Fatoki, 2013:113).

Hampton *et al.* (2009:193) recognised networking as a necessary entrepreneur’s skills vital for identifying potential opportunities and for acquiring the strategic resources essential to develop new and existing businesses. Most entrepreneurs are continuously gaining competitive advantage through network business models and gaining business talents from external sources to increase their growth (Dangelico & Pontrandolfo, 2015:413). Hampton *et al.* (2009:193) posited that effective entrepreneurial networking has a significant favourable influence on business sustainability and progress. Minai *et al.* (2012:180) asserted that entrepreneurial networking is an essential tool for women entrepreneurs to reach potential customers, create brand awareness and goodwill.

2.4.1 Types of network

The entrepreneurial business network is a multidimensional business network of business firms working together to accomplish common business objectives (Abbas *et al.*, 2019:2). These objectives are classified into operational and strategic, and entrepreneurial networks adopt these objectives based on the role they play in the competitive environment in the market (Ford *et al.*, 2014:1). Three types of entrepreneurial business network classifications are tasks networks, professional networks (entrepreneurial career network) and social network (Ibarra, 1996:1).

2.4.1.1 Task networks

Task networks comprise of the exchange of work-related information (Abbas *et al.*, 2019:2). This information includes professional expertise, professional advice, material resources, as well as political access. For women entrepreneurs to be successful, they are required to work with experts who can assist them accomplish a particular task. Shmailan (2016:203) argued that in terms of task networking skills, women are less likely to seek professional expertise compared to men. Minai *et al.*, (2012:183) affirmed that most successful entrepreneurs are usually associated with those who can obtain resources, especially informational resources from contacts.

2.4.1.2 Professional networks

Professional or entrepreneurial career networks involve creating associations with different individuals who have the skills and abilities to offer entrepreneurial career guidance and directions (Abbas *et al.*, 2019:2). These individuals may include high-level managers, sponsors, mentors, career advisors and coaches, teachers and other entrepreneurs (Brixiová & Kangoye, 2019:3). In addition, ties with professional network contribute significantly to women entrepreneurial success and performance as businesswomen who receive such professional support are more likely to have access to finance from the formal financial sector (Brixiová & Kangoye, 2019:3). Brixiová and Kangoye (2019:1) further affirmed that female entrepreneurs with a higher level of a

college education more often start their firms with more considerable capital than their less-educated counterparts.

2.4.1.3 Social networks

Social networks are known as entrepreneurial interrelationships with higher levels of closeness and trust (Abbas *et al.*, 2019:2). These relationships are with individuals, including friends and families, with whom the entrepreneur has a common background and interest (Brixiová & Kangoye, 2019:3). Social networks are considered a vital source of information, access to resources and gaining access to advisors and coaches (Klyver & Terjesen, 2007). Social networking consists of five key benefits to every entrepreneur (Lerotholi *et al.*, 2018) as shown in Figure 2.2 below.

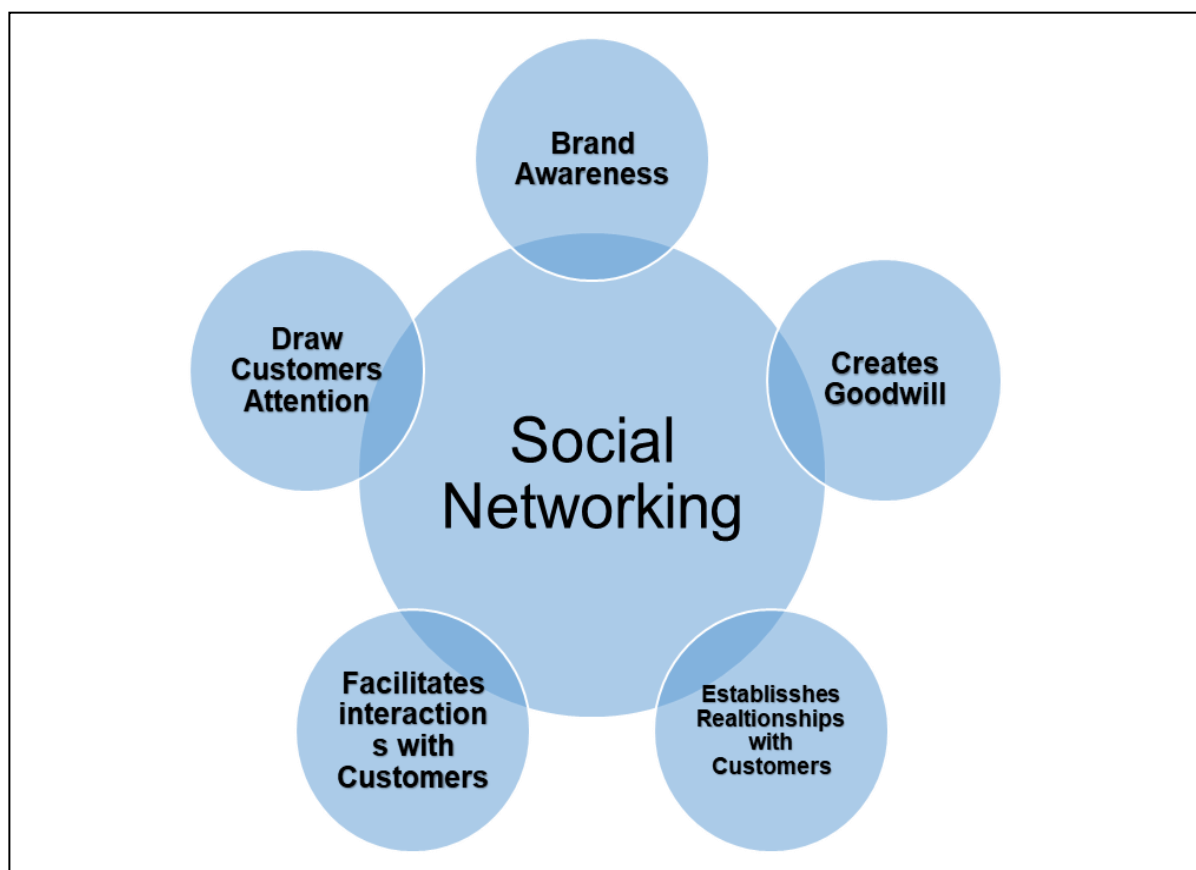


Figure 2.2: Benefits of social networking for business

Source: Ibarra (1996:1)

Figure 2.2 revealed that through social entrepreneurial networking, women entrepreneurs can create not only brand awareness but can also build goodwill. They can draw customers' attention, facilitate interaction with customers, establish a relationship with customers, and access to available supports from the state through government agencies (Minai *et al.*, 2012:180).

2.4.2 Women entrepreneurs in the business environment

Globalisation has brought about significant changes in the business environment (Meyer, 2018:1). In the mainstream economic contributions and activities, women were not fully involved. In the recent era, women entrepreneurship is increasing around the globe, and most of them are contributing significantly to fight a variety of global economic challenges (Ramesh, 2013:117). A study conducted by the ([GEM], 2018:2-3), revealed that there are approximately 163 million female entrepreneurs globally, and the majority are between the ages of 25 to 44 years. These statistics are indications that women are capable of managing successful businesses if only they faced minimal challenges. Van Blokland (2018:1) supported this view as female entrepreneurship in the United Kingdom (UK) is increasing and the rate of female entrepreneurs has increased by 45% in the last decade. Van Blokland (2018:1) further remarked that out of the 45%, 38% of the entrepreneurs were women below the age of 35 years; suggesting the young women are becoming more entrepreneurial.

From the onset, during the 18th century, the western industrial revolution brought about significant changes in the business environment (Meyer, 2018:1). However, during and after this period, women are not fully involved in the mainstream economic contributions and activities. In the recent years, a study conducted by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Bosma and Kelley, [GEM] 2018:2-3) reveals that there are approximately 163 million female entrepreneurs globally, and the majority are between the ages 25 to 44 years. These statistics are indications that women are capable of doing successful businesses provided they face fewer problems in their entrepreneurial journey.

Van Blokland (2018) supported the view that female entrepreneurship in the United Kingdom (UK) is increasing and the rate of female entrepreneurs has increased by 45% in the last decade. Van Blokland (2018) further remarked that out of the 45%, 38% of the entrepreneurs were women below the age of 35 years, thus suggesting that young women are becoming more entrepreneurial. On the other hand, research has indicated that South African women are less likely to establish a business compared to men, and the few women entrepreneurs operate in small business and have significant lack of growth possibilities (Kelley *et al.*, 2016; Herrington *et al.*, 2017:31).

The appearance of the growing community of woman entrepreneur is well-defined as a significant step towards economic and social development in the global business (SBP, 2013:2). Women are now entering into the business world, and there are more businesses owned by women in arts, crafts and tourism as compared to manufacturing and business services. Although compared to men, female entrepreneurs are less of risk-takers, cost and profit-driven entrepreneurs; however, female entrepreneurs are more conservative, quality-driven and leaning towards social justice through sustainability (Shmailan, 2016:204). Brixiová and Kangoye (2019:1) argued that female entrepreneurs more often begin their firms with little start-up capital than men and are more likely to generate the start-up capital from their own sources, which reduces the size of their firms as well as subsequent revenue generation.

Research has shown that South African men are more of opportunity entrepreneurs, while women are more of necessity entrepreneurs (Irene, 2017:2). Therefore, it is an indication that most women in South Africa embark on a business journey unprepared, with little or no knowledge of the details of business management and operations. Other scholars (Kelley *et al.*, 2016; Herrington *et al.*, 2017:31), argued that South African women are less likely to establish a business compared to men. The few women entrepreneurs operate in small companies and do not have much growth possibilities. Research has shown that women own eight to ten million SMEs in developing countries, which indicates that SMEs are a critical sector to generate

income for women and social inclusion in developing countries (Prasanna *et al.*, 2018:2).

2.5 NETWORKING BETWEEN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Networking is defined as an individual attempt to develop and maintain relationships with others who have the potential to assist them in the business venture (Forret & Dougherty, 2004: 420). An entrepreneurial business network is a multidimensional network of business entities, working together towards achieving common business goals (Abbas *et al.*, 2019:1).

Abbas *et al.*, (2019:1) further highlighted that entrepreneurial business network provides entrepreneurs with the opportunities to identify, develop and take advantages of economic opportunities, build business relationships, share information and search for potential associates for business ventures. Creating supportive relationships among women entrepreneur can play a significant role in helping more women advance in their businesses (Roling, 2012:1). Associating with other female entrepreneurs through entrepreneurial networks who understand business ventures can contribute significantly to business success (Van Blokland, 2018:1).

2.5.2 Relationship between the entrepreneurial business network and business performance and success.

Social and professional networks create a mechanism that helps entrepreneurs increase business performance as well as design and pursue new opportunities (Leyden *et al.*, 2014). On a similar note, Markussen and Roed (2014:1) claimed that networks provide entrepreneurs with opportunities to obtain resources at a lower cost as well as gain access to resources that could not be accessed otherwise. Abbas *et al.* (2019:1) found that entrepreneurs using networks and dynamics capabilities effectively and efficiently usually achieved their sustainable performance.

2.6 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT OF NETWORKING AMONGST FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

The effective network provides a channel for the exchange of information and resources that an entrepreneur can use to gain access to opportunities, save time, gain advice and moral supports that can enhance the success and survival of the business (Brush, 2007:1). Anderson *et al.*, (2007:265) provided a concise explanation in that entrepreneurial networks are the means through which entrepreneur may communicate vital information as well as gain access to essential resources to enhance business success. Ibarra (1996:1) defined a network as “sets of relationships critical to your ability to get things done, get ahead and develop personally and professionally”. Entrepreneurial talent can be natural or acquired through appropriate training (Mohr & Associates, 2015:45). Brush (2007:1, Malende & Väisänen, 2017:11-12) argued that women entrepreneurs with an extensive range of diverse networks are more likely to create contacts that link them to better opportunities such as financial resources, access to supplies, new clientele, acquiring knowledge and support. Cooper, Hampton and McGowan (2009:15) added that networking is pivotal for female entrepreneurs in information sharing, validating and recommending decision-making, as well as point out additional support and resources.

Malende and Väisänen (2017:11) highlighted that strong network links resonate as valuable assets in the advancement and success of entrepreneurial activities that an entrepreneur has in their hands. However, lack of time, failure to find like-minded people, low drive for growth, poor networking skills, and changes in the environment contribute significantly to the ineffective role of networking for female entrepreneurs (Malende & Väisänen, 2017:60). Networks and networking activities have processes and structures that female entrepreneurs can use to build credibility and trust for themselves in the business environment (Drakopoulou *et al.*, 2014:6). According to Drakopoulou *et al.*, (2014:30), women networks respond to fighting gender discrimination, gender inequality, stereotypes, and traditional expectations in the business and societal stages. In literature, women entrepreneur networking organisations advocate for women to participate in networking events relating to business activities for advice, free information, business support and working to

increase their numbers, sustainability and success, training and to make women visible.

2.6.1 Current networking in the South African business environment

One of the fundamental economic policies of the South African government is to uphold more excellent value to entrepreneurship due to its vital contribution to job creation and economic growth (SBP, 2013:2). Statistics from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) in South Africa revealed that despite government efforts in the form of government funding, training, subsidies, grants and consultative support services to assist female entrepreneurs, the failure rate of the female-owned business remains high (Irene, 2017:1).

In recent years, there have been establishment of a considerable number of new women-only entrepreneurial networks to cater to the female entrepreneurial generations who require business connections (Van Blokland, 2018:1). In the post-apartheid era, various organisational networks have been established to assist women entrepreneurs in creating better business opportunities. Some of these organisations include South African Woman Entrepreneur Network (SAWEN), South African Females in Mining (SAWIMA) and Technology for Females in Business (TWIB) as shown in Table 2.1. As a woman entrepreneur in South Africa, being part of these entrepreneurial networks can boost their business confidence, gain business inspirations and more importantly access to funding and business exposures. Van Blokland (2018:) echoed that the majority of these women network groups focused on motivation and problems rather than concrete skills, solutions and most importantly, access to capital.

Table 2.1: Businesswomen Networking Associations

Organization	Company Type	Membership Fees	Events	Benefits
South African Women in Construction	SAWIC Section 21 company	R650	Skills Development, & Training (Business management and technical workshops), and seminars	Advocacy to unlock land property ownership for women. Enterprise Development Program. Access to material supply, finance, and economic opportunities.
South African Women Entrepreneurship Network	SAWEN – Section 21 Company	R500	Seminars, Workshops, Capacity Building, Training, Organised international, educational and empowerment trade missions (Beijing, Morocco, India, New York)	Joint marketing of products, Group buying of input material or services, Joint tendering or bidding on contracts, sharing of information on new markets and opportunities, Sharing of Containers when exporting, Using members of the network as suppliers or distributors
Black Businesswomen's Association	BBWA- Non-Profit Organisation	R1500	Free networking sessions – usually in the afternoons	Inclusion in the BBWA Directory
Women in Finance	WIF		Breakfast, lunch and evening networking events, Hot Tables Event which features nine or ten hosts that are experts in the various fields	Access to training in all aspects of skills required to be in business. These include investment management, Business Assurance, Retirement Planning, Budgeting, Banking, Managing personal finance and

				National Credit Act Information
Women in Business		R0	Workshops and Seminars	One-on-one support, financial literacy, confidence building, sound boarding, conferencing, workshops, training and mentoring
Phenomenal Women SA	NPO	R850	Free Workshops and Training	The hub of Information sharing, discounts and in-service trading by members
Businesswomen's Association	BWA –Non-Profit Organisation	R550	Workshops, courses, breakfasts, lunches and some evening functions. Programme and activities range from purely socials such as golf days and movie premieres	They are creating excellent business training opportunities to improve business performance, Facilitating research on experiences of women in leadership, women in the marketplace and workplace and contributing to developing the next generation of women business leaders.
Technology for Women in Business	TWIB	R0	Training	Techno-Girl Programme. To apply for science and technology to achieve business growth in women-led enterprises, small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMMEs)
Women's Development Business	Investment holdings and Growth Fund Company	R0	Awards, Accelerator programme, Supplier development programme	Banking for Women and investing in women. Growth Fund

Women in Oil, Energy in South Africa.	WOESA- Investment Holding	R0		Ensures equal opportunities for women, especially black women in South Africa become a factor in the energy sector.
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Source: Entrepreneur Magazine (2014)

From Table 2.1 above, it can be deduced that the majority of businesswomen networking associations are engaging in skills development and training (business management and technical workshops), seminars, capacity building, educational and empowerment trade missions.

2.6.2 Networking characteristics

Research has suggested various entrepreneurial network characteristics to include “network size, network density, network diversity, network intensity, the strength of the network, number of hours spent talking to business contacts (Minai *et al.*, 2012:181; Renzulli *et al.*, 2000). For the current study, the focus is on network size, network diversity, and network density.

Network size

Network size refers to the number of individuals an entrepreneur has business interactions within the ordinary course of business (Minai *et al.*, 2012:181; Renzulli *et al.*, 2000). In this regard, every contacted individual in the entrepreneurs’ network has the potential to create an opportunity to the entrepreneurs in obtaining the needed resources such as finance, information and other resources for business survival and growth (Minai *et al.*, 2012:182).

Network diversity

The definition of network diversity is "networks that consist of various types of ties with contact persons (Hamed, 1995:7). Network diversity is classified into a homogeneous and heterogeneous network. Homogeneous structure occurs when all the network members have the same background (Minai *et al.*, 2012:182; Witt 2004:391). The description of background contacts in entrepreneurial networks is (Minai *et al.*, 2012:183):

- Network contact is associated with the nature of the relationship between entrepreneurs and their connections such as family, friends, acquaintances and business friends and associates (Witt, 2004:391);
- The occupational background includes entrepreneurs, government servant professional and private employee; and
- The ethnic background of contacts.

On the other hand, heterogeneous network occurs when networking contacts have a different background, these contacts include customers, market analysts, industry experts, financiers, accountants, lawyers, and marketing experts (Minai *et al.*, 2012:183).

Network density

Network density is well-defined as "the number of persons or actors that have high connectivity in the group of the network" (Minai *et al.*, 2012:184). Hamed (1995:1) proposed that network density could also refer to the percentage of network members who are unknown to each other. Network density includes emotional and psychological support from close contacts such as family members, relatives and friends who can provide financial support to the entrepreneurs based on the long term relationship (Minai *et al.*, 2012:184).

2.7 MAJOR CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS TO EFFECTIVELY NETWORK IN THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Factors such as lack of access to markets and funding, inadequate training and managerial experience as well as lack of support are the significant constraints affecting the success of most women entrepreneurs in developing nations such as South Africa (Kukkonen, 2017:11). Brixiová and Kangoye (2019:5) contended that the extent to which entrepreneurial networks influence business performance depends on a more considerable time on the share of friends and relatives we interact with on a daily basis. Greguletz *et al.*, (2018:1) found that extrinsic barrier of structural exclusion emanating from work-family struggle is one of the challenges women face in creating social ties in robust networks. Mandipaka (2014:127) argued that women entrepreneurs are facing challenges relating to starting, growing and sustaining a business.

Women entrepreneurs have continued to face multiple challenges such as poor business networking, work life conflict, inadequate financial resources, lack of support services, inadequate business, management and marketing skills, poor access to information, technology and digital marketing (Kamberidou, 2020:25). Irene (2017:1) argued that despite immense support from government and other interested parties in assisting women-owned businesses, approximately 20% of these businesses still collapse annually. Shah and Saurabh (2015:34) argued that one of the reasons for a high rate of failure in female-owned companies is because many female entrepreneurs could distribute their wealth with others such family and society to support economic growth and sustainability. Other scholars (e.g., Irene, 2017; Kukkonen, 2017:11; Shah & Saurabh, 2015:34) have argued that some of the reasons for the failure can be as a result of over-dependence on government incentives, inability to market their business due to inadequate competencies.

A study by Mudhovozi (2014:6366) considered the effects of psychology on women taking entrepreneurship as a viable career. The study observation deduced that their highest entrepreneurial motives were to establish successful firms and create

employment opportunities for other people. These findings show that women from different disciplines are thinking about starting their businesses to create wealth distribution and job creations to make an impact on people's life (Mudhovozi, 2014:6366). Researchers conducted a study for a female innovator-generation in consumer evaluation in the South African retail space. To indicate that females have a significant role as consumers and creators of solutions or innovations, all they need is conducive networking associations and opportunities equal to their male counterparts (Van Heerden et al., 2016:20).

Sub-Saharan African countries identified as having the highest share of global women entrepreneurship and the number of women entrepreneurs have continued to increase (GEM, 2017:1). However, South Africa's rate of entrepreneurial activities is comparatively low to other developing nations. Studies have identified various factors that have numerous impacts on women entrepreneurs (Bardasi *et al.*, 2009; Brixiová & Kangoye, 2019). Factors affecting the ecosystem include limited access to funding or credit constraint, limited mobility, family and cultural values, and social networks education (Brush *et al.*, 2017:105). Other factors include attitudes towards risk, entrepreneurial skills, institutional and business environment (Aidis & Estrin, 2014:1). These factors can either limit female from venturing into a new business or determine the growth potential of an existing business (Meyer, 2018:103). Only a limited number of studies were conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa, where legal frameworks are softer and weaker. Networking among women entrepreneurs plays a vital role (Baliamoune-Lutz & Lutz, 2017) in determining the success of women entrepreneurs.

2.7.1.1 Family and cultural influences

Many cultures in the world still believe that women are solely responsible for homes and family-related tasks (Karanja & Bwisa, 2013:34, McAdam, 2013:5). In South Africa, many cultures believe that women are not supposed to own any resources, and all the resources women own should belong to their husbands (Mungai & Ogot, 2012:175-176). Of more concern in South Africa is that there is lack of gender parity concerning entrepreneurship (Herrington & Kew, 2016:5). In the South African cultural context, an entrepreneur is typically a male, age between 25 and 44 years and customarily reside in an urban area (Meyer, 2018:104). This implies that someone who

lives in a rural area and more specifically, a female is mostly not considered an entrepreneur. Some of these cultural beliefs have generated structural and cultural constrain to female entrepreneurs (Meyer, 2018:103).

2.7.1.2 Access to funding

Access to funding as a barrier to women entrepreneurial expansion and success has been a topic with no conclusive answers and effective policy solution (Brixiová & Kangoye, 2019:4). A study in the United States of America (USA) revealed that government allocated 2,2% of the venture capital to female start-up entrepreneurs in 2017, and only 7% of partners in the global top 100 investment entities are women. Similar statistics from gender-equal countries such as Sweden are deficient at only 1% of venture capital allocated to female entrepreneurs (Van Blokland, 2018).

A study by Chinomona and Maziriri (2020:845) reveal that the major challenge facing women entrepreneurs in the Gauteng province of South Africa is the lack of resources. Chinomona and Maziriri (2020:845) recommended that there is a need for the state to allocate more financial resources to women entrepreneurs especially that the do not belong to any entrepreneurial network or are still at the start-up stage of their business.

2.8 BENEFITS OF WOMEN'S NETWORKS

Engaging in a network is vital for entrepreneurial success as it eases access to significant entrepreneurial-building resources such as business advice, technical knowledge, strategic insight or emotional support (Casciaro *et al.*, 2014:705; Greguletz *et al.*, 2018:1). A study conducted by Lerotholi *et al.* (2018) revealed that networking is a crucial determinant of success to most businesses. Brixiová and Kangoye (2019:1) found that women who affiliate with and receive support from professional, entrepreneurial networks have access to capital, and those trained in financial literacy through their networks often have access to external funding sources.

In addition to economic benefits and empowerment, networking between women entrepreneurs also provides women with prospects of shaping their identity and further integrating into the societies (Blomqvist *et al.*, 2014). Greguletz *et al.* (2018:1) argued that female entrepreneurial networks are often less powerful than men in terms of exchange benefits. Klyver and Terjesen, (2007:3) heightened those female entrepreneurs have significantly lower proportions of males in their social networks in early venture development stages, but at later stages their levels are comparable. There is an expectation that females who flourish continuing through venture stages may develop similar networks to their male counterparts (Klyver & Terjesen, 2007:4).

Other studies (Forret & Dougherty, 2004: 431; Greguletz *et al.* 2018:1) have argued that networking offers fewer benefits for women as compared to men. Bate, (2018:1) referred to five reasons why women prefer female-only networking sessions. The female-only networks give them a sense of belonging, an excellent way to find a mentor, inspiration, getting results and building confidence. The women found group networking to be useful as it had several benefits (Emuwa, 2018:1). The benefits are inclusiveness, creative stimulation, sharing, interactive knowledge acquisition, validation, collaboration, authenticity, reflexivity and a booster for energy (Emuwa, 2018:1). All these findings validate that women entrepreneurs should network effectively and efficiently to build successful businesses by the same token to male entrepreneurs.

2.9 POSSIBLE STRATEGIES TO ALLEVIATE THE IMPACTS AND ENHANCE THE BENEFITS OF NETWORKING BETWEEN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

There are increasing concerns among policymakers and even researchers on possible strategies for supporting women's access to business funding, business training, investors' network, technical assistance and information services (Brixiová & Kangoye, 2019:2). Despite these efforts, women in most of the third world countries continue to face challenges in securing white-collar jobs in the formal sector and making productive entrepreneurship as an escape avenue from low paid jobs. Misner and Hillard (2018:1) proposed various strategies such as attracting the right people,

gaining valuable customers with referrals from networking partners, best first impression, and choosing the suitable networking events for the business needs. Building, expanding networks with a calculated strategy, avoiding behaviours that can damage the reputation, and pushing away potential clients are some of the strategies.

Rashmi (2016:63) proposed the creation of state offices and business centres for women entrepreneurs. Such offices could be responsible for organising and providing networking opportunities for women wanting to start and grow their business. Rashmi (2016:63) further stated that “promoting the development of women entrepreneur networks are major sources of knowledge about women’s entrepreneurship and valuable tools for its development and promotion”. The co-operation and partnership between these networks and international networks can go a long way to promote entrepreneurial activities by women in the global economy (Rashmi, 2016:61).

2.10 SUMMARY

A review of relevant literature has shown that the ability to develop and manage an effective entrepreneurial network is an essential competence for women entrepreneurial growth. The literature further reveals that inadequate support from the South African government and its agencies has resulted in the creations of women entrepreneurial networks to assist in facilitating women entrepreneurs. In this regards, promoting women entrepreneurship will have benefits for both the economy and women in general. Research has shown that South African men are more of opportunity entrepreneurs, while women are more necessity entrepreneurs. As a result, most women in South Africa embark on a business journey unprepared, with little or no knowledge of the details of business management and operations.

The next chapter discussed in detail the research methodology employed to answer the research questions for the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter reviewed literature relating to the themes under investigation for this study. This chapter provided a detailed explanation of the research design and methodology adopted for this study. The chapter commenced with a discussion of the research paradigm that underpins the study, namely the interpretive paradigm. It further discussed the research approach and the rationale for adopting a qualitative research approach, and research design as well as the basis for employing an explorative research design. The study also focused on the targeted population, and the sampling technique and size. The chapter continued by expounding on the data collection procedures and analysis techniques. The chapter concluded with an explanation of the issues of trustworthiness applicable to the study.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm is defined as “sets of beliefs that provide theoretical frameworks for the purpose and conduct of research” (Corry *et al.*, 2019:1). Kuhn (1970:175) concurred that a research paradigm is a set of beliefs and techniques, which is shared by members of a research community. Rehman and Alharthi (2016:51) described paradigm theoretical framework and common beliefs system that aid the researcher to obtain an insight into the realities of the world. Corry *et al.* (2019:1) asserted that these sets of beliefs relate to both epistemological and ontological assumptions. Epistemological assumption refers to the researcher’s knowledge about reality, while ontological assumption relates to the nature of the reality (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016:51). Both epistemological and ontological perspectives underpinned the research methodology employed in this study. Creswell (2014:32) offered that qualitative research is about exploring and obtaining an in-depth understanding of the meaning people assign to a social or human problem. Hence, the study was underpinned by an interpretive research paradigm.

According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016:53), interpretive research attempts to understand the interpretation of individuals over a social phenomenon they interact with, and not to discover the universal context and value-free knowledge and truth. The social phenomenon interpreted in this study is networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa. Researchers criticised the validity and subjectivity of interpretive epistemologies (Marsh & Furlong, 2002:27). Rehman and Alharthi (2016:53) debated that interpretive paradigm rejects the belief that a single, verifiable reality exists independent of the researcher's reasoning; instead, interpretivism believes in socially constructed multiple realities. Interpretivist paradigm was considered appropriate for this study as it would allow the researcher to obtain an in-depth understanding of what constituted as reality with regards to networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa and how to go about getting this understanding. An interpretive research paradigm therefore underpinned the current study.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

A research approach involves all the techniques and methods employed for conducting a research study (Mishra & Alok, 2018:1). A qualitative research approach was adopted for the current study in order to observe and interpret the perceptions of women entrepreneurs within different networks in a natural setting. According to Khan (2014:224), the qualitative research method explores possible experiences and factors that little is known or studied about them. Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding, based on distinct methodological traditions on an inquiry that explores a social or human problem (Khan, 2014:225). A qualitative research approach was therefore appropriate for this study. The research problem under investigation involves the perceptions, meaning and experiences of women entrepreneurs concerning business networking in South Africa.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a general procedure that the researcher selects to combine various elements of a study consistently and coherently (Mishra & Alok, 2018:7). In other words, a research design comprises of an outline for the collection, measurement and analysis of data. Investigative research design was used for this study. An exploratory research design is employed when there are few or no earlier studies to rely on to predict the outcome of a research problem (Kabir, 2016:160). Kabir (2016,160) further stated that “the focus of exploratory research design is on gaining insights and familiarity for later investigation or undertaken when research problems are in a preliminary stage of investigation”. Various participants were engaged over time for purposes of gaining better insight into the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher was subsequently able to define new terms and clarify existing concepts concerning networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa. An exploratory research design was considered appropriate for this study as it provided the researcher with a well-grounded picture of the networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa.

3.5 STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLING

A research population is a set of elements having one or more similar characteristic of interest (Siamah, Mensah & Oteng-Abayie, 2017:1607). Siamah *et al* (2017:1611) defined a target population “as the entire group about which some information is required to be ascertained”. The research population for this study comprised all the women entrepreneurs in South Africa.

3. RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

A sample definition is as “a group of a relatively smaller number of people selected from a population for investigation purpose” (Alvi, 2016:10). Purposive sampling of eight high profile female entrepreneurs was conducted and interviews carried out until saturation was reached. Purpose samples are the most commonly used form of nonprobability sampling (Guest *et al.*, 2006:59). Their size typically relies on the

concept of “saturation” or the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data. According to the notion of saturation, as commented by Charmaz (2006), the researcher should stop collecting data when the categories (or themes) are saturated, and when gathering new data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties. This is the point where the researcher has an adequate sample (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:301). Purposive sampling was considered appropriate for this study as it involves the use of knowledge for selection of the model from the population based on the characteristics of interest. The aim was to gather a sample of participants that would yield the most insight into the phenomenon under investigation for this study, and therefore, those who would best answer the research questions.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Primary data was obtained through Zoom virtual meeting as an equivalence of face-to-face interviews with selected participants. The main aim of the interview was to stimulate respondents’ perceptions, opinions, past experiences and the meaning that individuals give to specific experiences (Wahyuni, 2012:73). The appropriate method of data collection for this study was through interviews to obtain data accuracy with immediate effect. In this regard, the researcher conducted exploratory interviews with eight selected female entrepreneurs in South Africa. All interviews were audio-recorded (Loubere, 2017:22). Participants signed the Informed Consent Form before their interviews as per the request of the researcher (refer to Appendix A). Only participants who had consented to participate in the study were interviewed.

The interviews took place at various times and homes with the selected women entrepreneurs. When the participants’ responses to initial questions did not cover specific topics of interest, sub questions were asked (Guest *et al.*, 2006:65). All respondents were asked identical questions in the same sequence, but the interviewer probed inductively on crucial responses. The interview guide included questions that explored seven perspectives on women entrepreneurial networking, namely:

- Entrepreneurial background and personal characteristics of the respondent;
- Current networking in the South African business environment, including social and family networking;

- Type and methods of networks as women entrepreneur;
- Impact of networking in the business environment;
- Benefits of networking;
- Significant challenges for women entrepreneurs to network effectively in the business environment; and
- Networking advice.

Refer to the interview guide presented in Appendix B.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is concerned with the specific patterns in the data and serves as a tool to enhance knowledge. Qualitative data analysis involves the analysis of language, discourse, what people say and nonverbal communication to imply deeper understanding that individuals hold. The researcher transcribed the recorded data, and after extensive collaboration and consultation with the supervisor, the researcher then put the transcribed output into themes and categories – the data generated from the qualitative data. For accuracy, transcription output was also checked against the voice recording.

Creswell's steps of thematic data analysis were then used to analyse the data. The final analysis was done by means of Creswell's generic (ATLAS-ti) qualitative analysis approach, which was thematically focused (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:31). This includes:

- Assigning initial codes: An initial code can be a word, a phrase or the respondent's own words;
- Revisiting initial coding: At this stage, a large number of codes were developed;
- Developing an initial list of categories: Modified codes were organised into themes;
- Modifying the initial list based on additional re-reading: After re-reading, a decision was taken on which categories are less important than others and/or can be combined;
- Revisiting categories and sub-categories: The list of categories was revisited with a view to final organising;

- Moving from categories to concepts: Codes were organised into concepts according to the most informative or logical manner of sorting;
- The analytical process was concluded by envisioning the research product;
- The researcher approached an experienced researcher who trained her with additional skills needed in order to accurately interpret and code data and report the research findings accordingly; and
- The data was co-coded by an experienced researcher at the, North-West University and the results were only recorded after the conclusion of a consensus discussion.

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:331), trustworthiness refers to the manner of showing the reasonableness, credibility and integrity of the qualitative research process. The reliability of this qualitative study was enhanced by using the following strategies:

- **Credibility:** The research proposal is subject to peer debriefing. An experienced study leader evaluated the study proposal. To establish credibility, the researcher used triangulation and member-checks methods to confirm that the results of the research were credible or believable (Chowdhury, 2015:146,150; Creswell & Creswell, 2018);
- **Dependability:** The researcher analysed data and held consensus discussions with the study leader to reach harmony about themes. The research measured consistency and evaluated if the research outcomes could be repeated (Chowdhury, 2015:146,150; Creswell & Creswell, 2018:314);
- **Transferability:** The ability of the research to be transferred to a different context and be comparable to another research. The researcher will give a detailed description of the study and the method used (Chowdhury, 2015:146,150; Creswell & Creswell, 2018:314); and
- **Conformability:** The researcher will consult the supervisor in checking the research process, transcriptions of the voice recordings and independent coding to compare the transcripts and coding with that of the researcher. Field

notes will be available for audit purposes (Chowdhury, 2015:146,150; Creswell & Creswell, 2018:314).

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Research has an ethical-moral dimension, and the researcher has a moral and professional obligation to be ethical even when the participants for the study are unaware of or unconcerned about ethics (Neuman, 2011:145). In the study, the researcher applied for ethical clearance from the North-West University (NWU). Written permission letters were sent to all the selected participants for the study seeking their consent for participation in the study. Consent forms were emailed to participants to sign before the interview. The researcher ensured voluntary participation as well as granting them the right to withdraw at any stage of the research process. The researcher also ensured that there was no exposure to any risk or harm to the participants and that their confidentiality was maintained.

3.10.1 Informed Consent

According to Given (2008:10), the data collection process needs to take into consideration voluntary informed consent and to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the parties involved in the study. Participants were informed regarding the objectives of the research. They chose to participate freely in the study by signing the informed consent form (refer to Appendix A). The Informed Consent Form had North-West University letterhead attached to it. The names and contact details of the researcher and the research supervisor were also provided in the informed consent form.

3.10 SUMMARY

This chapter provided a detailed explanation of the research design and methodology adopted for this study. The chapter commenced with a discussion of the research paradigm that underpins the study, namely the interpretive paradigm. This was followed by the research approach and the rationale for adopting a qualitative research approach. The chapter further discussed the research design as well as the cause for employing an explorative research design, elaborated on the targeted population, and

the sampling technique and size. The chapter continued by expounding on the data collection procedures and analysis techniques and concluded with an explanation of the issues of trustworthiness applicable to the study.

The next chapter analysed and presented the qualitative data obtained from the respondents for this study.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on the research design and methodology employed in this study. This chapter analysed and interpreted the qualitative data collected from eight participants using semi-structured interviews. The chapter commenced with a description of data analysis and literature integration.

4.2 DATA ANALYSIS AND LITERATURE INTEGRATION

The study made use of a qualitative research approach. According to Connelly (2016:435), qualitative research is described as a systematic approach to understand characteristics or the fundamental essence of a phenomenon. The qualitative research in this study explored the experiences, and benefits of networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa.

Results of the empirical research provided in this chapter relates to the following questions:

- How is networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment influencing women entrepreneurs' success in South Africa?
- How effective is the existing entrepreneurial networking for South African businesswomen?
- How can the impact of entrepreneurial networks on women entrepreneurial performance in South Africa be explained?
- What recommendations can be made for other women to network efficiently and help them become successful entrepreneurs?

Data gathering description and analysis are specified below.

4.3 GATHERING OF DATA

This section explains how data was gathered and analysed, as well as the methodology applied.

4.3.1 Data Collection

The study followed qualitative research methods and qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interviews with the study participants. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed and adapted to include the following six sections:

- **Section A** was used for entrepreneurial background and personal characteristics of the women entrepreneurs;
- **Section B** for current networking in the South African business environment, including social and family networking;
- **Section C** was the type and methods of networking as women entrepreneur;
- **Section D** for the impact of networking in the business environment;
- **Section E**, the benefits of networking;
- **Section F** covered the major challenges for women entrepreneurs to effectively network in the business environment; and
- **Section G** for networking advice. The interview guide used is attached as Appendix A.

4.3.2 Sampling

The researcher utilised purposive sampling (Etikan *et al.*, 2016:2) to identify affluent businesswomen in South Africa. The study included eight female entrepreneurs and the participants' geographic regions were from Gauteng, North-West, Free State and Mpumalanga.

Qualitative data was collected from eight successful women entrepreneurs across five provinces in South Africa. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate for this study as it uses knowledge to select a sample from a population, based on the characteristics of interest. Eight interviews were conducted, and data saturation was

observed at the eighth interview. Data saturation is obtained when further sampling does not yield any new information to light, implying that cases can be allocated to one of the already available categories in a growing theory (Hancock *et al.*, 2016:2124). The interviews were conducted through a virtual platform called Zoom.

4.3.4 Data Collection Process

Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection with a qualitative method (see Appendix A. All correspondence was tape-recorded during the semi-structured interviews to allow for careful analysis at the time of data analysis. Hard copies of this study are kept in secured data storage cupboards. These copies include informed consent forms and notes on the semi-structured interview.

Only research team members had access to the data. Digital records, interview transcripts as well as the digital audio tapes, are kept on password-protected computers, allowing only the research team working with the documents to have access to them. As soon as possible, all the captured data was downloaded, stored and backed up on password-protected computers and subsequently removed from the recorder. Hard copy and digital data are being held for five years and will be shredded, deleted and/or destroyed responsibly after that. These data sources will only be used for research purposes.

4.3.5 Data Analysis

Bryman and Bell (2014:342) observed that analytic inference, grounded theory, and thematic analysis are the three most used data analysis techniques. This study followed the thematic analysis approach. According to Bryman and Bell (2014:350), thematic investigation is characterised as a versatile method that does not follow a particular philosophical orientation. In a thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006:87) propose six stages. Table 4-1 below summarises these thematic research stages

Table 4.1: Phases of Thematic Analyses

Phase	Description of the Process
Familiarising yourself with the data	Verbal data needs to first be transcribed, read and then re-read while noting down initial ideas.
Generating initial codes	Systematically code exciting features of the data and collect data relevant to each code.
Searching for themes	Sort codes in potential themes and gather all relevant data for each theme.
Reviewing themes	Check if the themes work with the coded extracts and the entire data set, and subsequently make a thematic map of the analysis.
Defining and naming themes	Refine the specifics of each theme, name and define each theme.
Producing the report	Produce a scholarly report of the analysis by selecting vivid and compelling extract examples that relate back to the research question and the literature.

Source: Braun and Clarke (2006:87)

It is evident From Table 4-1 above that the coding process is emphasised in thematic coding. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding are used in three phases or

forms of coding (Bryman & Bell, 2014:346). Phase 1 is for familiarisation with data; Phase 2 for the utilisation of open coding; Phase 3 for axial coding; and selective coding in Phase 4 of thematic analysis.

The investigator used Atlas.ti software to support the data collected from the thematic analysis. The benefit of using Atlas.ti is that it provided easy access to codes and themes and helped in sorting the data (Kalpokaite & Radivojevic, 2020:296). Data saturation was realised after eight interviews. The themes that emerged from the analysis are reported in the following sections.

4.3.5.1 Structure and Overview of Themes

The empirical findings were based on themes, through the perceptions of the women entrepreneurs who participated in the study. This discussion on empirical findings is presented simultaneously with the literature integration to answer the seven research questions of the study. This chapter contains the results of the empirical research that relates to the following questions:

- a) Tell me about your business, how did it all start?
- b) In your opinion, how would you describe current networking in the South African business environment?
- c) How do you network as a women entrepreneur?
- d) What would you say is the impact of networking in the business environment?
- e) In what way do you think networking contributes to entrepreneurial success in the business environment?
- f) What are the major challenges for women entrepreneurs to effectively network in the business environment?
- g) What networking advice could you give to other women entrepreneurs?

- h) Is there anything else that you might want to discuss regarding networking or women entrepreneurs?

The relationship between the research questions and the themes discussed in this chapter are tabulated in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: The Relationship between the Themes and the Research Questions

Research Questions	Themes
Tell me about your business, how did it all start?	Business background
In your opinion, how would you describe current networking in the South African business environment?	Current business networking in South Africa
How do you network as a woman entrepreneur?	Building a network as a woman entrepreneur
What would you say is the impact of networking in the business environment?	Impact of networking on business
In what way do you think networking contributes to entrepreneurial success in the business environment?	Networking contribution to entrepreneurial success

What are the major challenges for women entrepreneurs to effectively network in the business environment?	Networking challenges for women
What networking advice could you give to other women entrepreneurs?	Networking advice for other women entrepreneurs

Source: Compiled by the researcher

The seven main themes are: 1) *the business background*, 2) *the current business networking in South Africa*, 3) *building a network as a woman entrepreneur*, 4) *impact of networking on business*, 5) *networking contribution to entrepreneurial success*, 6) *networking challenges for women*, and 7) *networking advice for other women entrepreneurs*. The sub-themes included *personal background*, *male dominance* *lack of mentorship and coaching*. Figure 4 illustrates the themes that emerged and how they are connected.

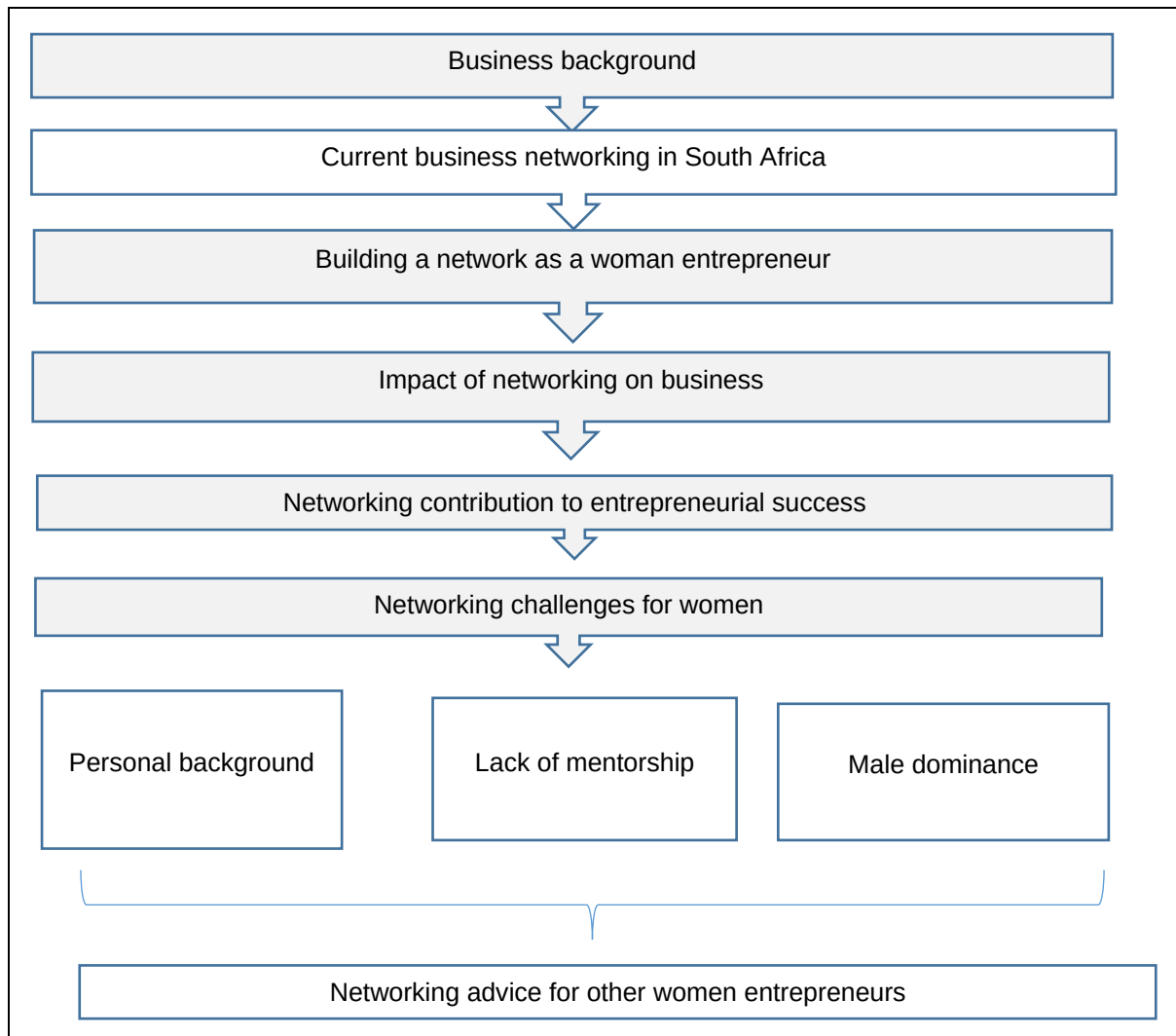


Figure 4.1: Themes that emanated from the research questions.

Source: compiled by the researcher.

4.4 OVERVIEW OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

The study participants comprised of eight (8) influential women entrepreneurs who were methodically selected from five of the nine provinces of South Africa. Most of these women entrepreneurs were within the age range of 35 to 61 years. The average interview duration was 55 minutes with the shortest interview lasting for 50 minutes, and the longest one going on for 61 minutes. Table 4.3 below provides a geographical depiction of the different ages of the participants, and the duration of the interviews conducted with them.

Table 4.3: Participants age and duration of the interviews

Participants	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
Age (years)	59	51	40	54	61	60	45	35
Duration (minutes)	53	59	61	55	60	54	59	60

4.4.1 Businesses Background

Background of businesses entails a business overview, also known as a business' information or a business' summary as it is an essential part of a business structure. It is an overview of the most significant points about the business history, how it started, management team, location, mission statement and legal framework (Machado *et al.*, 2016:15).

Participants were asked to give an overview of their businesses and explain how they had started their businesses. Most participants indicated that boredom and lack of freedom in their corporate jobs coupled with the hunger and desire to pursue new adventures and more income were the major driving forces in starting their businesses. This hunger and thirst for unique experience and success were reliably captured in the definitions of an entrepreneur propelled by Mohr (2015) and Shefsky (2011:11), where entrepreneurs are regarded as enthusiastic risk-takers who transform their dreams into realities. The need for women to balance family responsibilities and maintain a full-time job proved to be a daunting task for many. The prospect of being one's boss with all the freedom and income associated with it was incredibly appealing to most of the respondents.

Participants used their previous corporate experiences and qualifications as a conduit through which the backbone of their businesses was set. For example, one participant who had worked for a marketing and events firm went on to start an events and catering company of her own.

The following are some of the quotes where participants reveal what compelled them to start their businesses.

“I am a graduate. I am a former teacher who has been involved in informal businesses from a very young age and never imagined one day owning a thriving formal business. It was only when I was discovered and acknowledged my passion for service through various business awards that I realised that in fact, I am an entrepreneur”. (Participant 5: Zoom interview. 03 Aug.,10:30).

“I have a background in marketing and public relations, and in events, my business specialised in events and marketing, because events had been my strongest point always even when I was in corporate I loved events and organising events, so that was what I was going to do but before getting into events”. (Participant 3: Zoom interview. 29 Jul., 12:00).

“I consult, so I do not have your generic kind of business to say this is the business that I do. But I consult in different areas as I consult mainly in entrepreneurship. For young people and women, in particular, that’s where my interest is. The journey began a long time ago when I was the executive director of economic empowerment in the Pretoria Metropolitan Council”. (Participant 2. Zoom interview. 04 Jul., 16:30).

4.5 CURRENT BUSINESS NETWORKING IN SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, business networks have necessitated new business structures and 78% of entrepreneurs are at present using these modern business structures to adapt to the demands of a networked economy (Urban, 2019). Entrepreneurs in South Africa should be informed about the significance of shared knowledge, intellectual capital and establishing strategic partnerships that are promoted through the use of networks

(Urban, 2019). It is essential to incorporate constructive management and added value in business processes that can improve the competitive edge of South African enterprises (Zondi, 2016).

Participants were asked to describe the current networking situation in the South African business environment in terms of the availability of women business network organisations that they were familiar with or belonged to. Business networks provide a platform upon which elements like information, resources, ideas, opportunities and advice are shared for member institutions to gain a competitive advantage in their line of business (Brush, 2007:1; Mohr *et al.*, 2015:45). At this stage most participants were not part of any women business networking organisations, as they were oblivious of their existence in their towns and South Africa at large. Only a handful were aware of the women business networking organisations.

There was agreement that the current business environment in South Africa was male-dominated. The following are some of the quotes where participants professed their ignorance of the availability of women business networking organisations. The sections are in line with Irene's (2017:1) assertion that despite the efforts by the government of South Africa, particularly the DTI, through the ongoing funding, training and consultative support, the number of female-owned businesses remains very low.

"I do not belong to any of them. I always go as a non-member" (Participant 3: Zoom interview. 29 Jul., 12:00)

"Not that I am aware of, unfortunately. I was part of a group called South Africa Women Entrepreneurs, SAWES Entrepreneurs, but I do believe it is closed now". (Participant 7: Telephonic interview. 12 Aug., 12:30).

"I am not aware of any, and I do not belong to any. I think what I have been like I said is trying to market myself using social media..." (Participant 8: Zoom interview. 04 Sep., 18:30).

The following is a response from two of the participants who were aware of the existence and availability of women business networking organisations.

“I am aware of a lot of them, but the organisations that I am in is affiliated with a lot of wicked South African women in construction I have been with for many years...” (Participant 4: Zoom interview. 03 Aug., 08:00).

“Hmm, if you are in Hospitality, there are lots of platforms and organisations where you can affiliate with them.” (Participant 5 Zoom interview. 03 Aug., 10:30).

4.6 BUILDING A NETWORK AS A WOMAN ENTREPRENEUR

Before the wide availability of information technology, entrepreneurs used conventional business models and underwent significant restructuring and growth to adapt to the new demands of technological change (Anwar & Ali-Shah, 2020:265). Entrepreneurs are more likely to use a system that facilitates participatory decision-making and improves the effective use of modern information technology in the global economic climate (Manello *et al.*, 2019:3). The sizes and form of a business will determine the degree of decentralising networks (Mohamad & Chin, 2019:595). To ensure that businesses grow and remain active, entrepreneurs are increasingly getting involved in networking activities.

Participants were asked how they network as women entrepreneurs, mainly how they build and maintain their networks, how women network differently, and their views on networking between among women. Ibarra (1996:32) identifies three types of entrepreneurial business networks, namely tasks networks, professional networks (also known as entrepreneurial career network), and social network. The responses from participants proved social networks to be popular amongst them while other participants' answers varied. There was a consensus on the benefits and challenges associated with building and maintaining business networks.

The following quote illustrates the typical position participants had on how they build their networks:

“We network a lot through social media. So, most of our networking is done through Instagram, Facebook. We do a lot of work online now because of the pandemic. A lot of our work is not done through societies, but it is done through people reaching out to us and us even reaching out to other entrepreneurs or people within their business. And it is usually done online.” (Participant 7: Telephonic interview. 12 Aug., 12:30).

In terms of maintaining the networks, two approaches emerged. These are physical interactions and virtual interactions. Physically, women meet socially as well as on business occasions such as expos. Participants also indicated the pivotal role the internet played in maintaining their networks through the continuous and consistent use of social media as well as emailing.

The following quote is of a participant who described how they maintain their networks:

“I would say one: because I am an extrovert and also the character works if somebody approaches me and I want to do 1, 2, 3. My immediate first response is to say yes before I think about many things, of how, am I going to do that, so my first response is first yes ok let us do it and then all I will say oh God how are we going to do this let me go and do research. I promised someone K this this this and that and let me go see how best we can go do this and how best I can go and assist her.” (Participant 2: Zoom interview. 04 Jul., 16:30).

Not only did the participants think that women network differently than men, but they also stressed that women network better than men. Responses here highlighted women’s perceived superiority in communication, as well as their frankness and openness in contact.

The following quotes are responses generated from some of the participants when asked if they thought women network differently to men:

"I think women were built to have a conscience. We were created to be learner's because we will always want to know where we are going. We are not too much, and we stay because we question things and because we ask, you want to understand something because the system sidelined us. Let me say that: I would like networking to be as transparent as possible for me. I would say that nine out of ten male running businesses, our male counterparts are riskier. I think that's where we differ in the end, and I think the government should realise the importance of having women in all Industries we have something that will teach the world." (Participant 4: Zoom interview. 03 Aug., 08:00).

"Definitely women network differently, in a sense that we don't go straight to the point immediately. We are a roundabout type of human beings. In our case, to point out before we started this, we had two conversations before we got to the interview, so that is how we are as women. And it is the type of culture that you have to understand then you don't just wake up and talk business. We are different. Men can immediately meet with you and say this is what I need. With us, we will be asking about family, about kids, about that before we get to a point. For me, that's how I found out that you get interested in the personal life of a person before we get into the business of a woman. Because we are human beings, we get interested in human beings that is my perspective because the minute I understood that that is when I realised it is important that when I'm with a potential somebody that this a relationship. This business relationship can develop that's why I take it easy because I understand that you don't have to rush and say this is exactly 3 minute." (Participant 3: Zoom interview. 29 Jul., 12:00).

Only one participant was of a view that there is no difference between women networking and men networking. The following quote is a testament to this:

“I do not think women network differently, because I think we have the same methods of approaching people talking to them, taking them out for lunch having those business things and I do not think we network differently except those maybe might the way to the top using that method in a network that will be a different method that some might use, but I honestly think our networking methods are not so different from the ones that men do” (Participant 6: Zoom interview. 03 Aug., 11:30)

4.7 IMPACT OF NETWORKING ON BUSINESS

Literature has shown that networking allows businesses to stand out (Cisi *et al.*, 2020:1183). Potential clients can begin to put a name with a face. An entrepreneur who is successful in networking will remain ahead of the competition because of the impact they had. Networking offers a chance to make an impact on business, attracts and retains clients in business (Cisi *et al.*, 2020:1185).

Participants were asked about their views on the impact of networking in the business environment. Popular responses were brand development, business growth, publicity and idea generation. Below are extracts of participant responses to the question of networking impact on business:

“I think it contributes a great deal and networking has helped push a lot of entrepreneurs. A lot of businesses is through those networks and what it does. These are through those networks that some of the businesses were able to be out there...” (Participant 4: Zoom interview. 03 Aug. 08:00)

“Networking is vital for a brand, brand development, brand association.” (Participant 1 & 3 Zoom interview. 30 Jun., 09:30 and 29 Jul., 12:00)

“It opened doors because you actually can get access to markets through networking and you know when they will tell you it’s not about what you know

it's all about who you know, not what you know, but I like whoever who said who expanded it's not about what you know, but who knows who, and when they know who knows you.” (Participant 2 Zoom interview. 04 Jul., 09:30).

These responses are consistent with the findings of Markussen and Roed (2014:356); and Leyden *et al.* (2014:1157). These authors postulated the impact network has on the business environment by arguing that it allows entrepreneurs to find more opportunities, acquire resources and support as well as lower their cost of doing business through economies of scale.

4.8 NETWORKING CONTRIBUTION TO ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS

Networking offers a great source of contacts for entrepreneurs and opens the door to highly influential individuals who can be of help for business (Cisi *et al.*, 2020:1183). Networking can assist entrepreneurs in developing their credibility as an experienced, efficient, and supportive entrepreneur who can provide valuable information and connection to people in need.

Participants were asked to give their opinions on the ways networking contributes to entrepreneurial success in the business environment. Casciaro *et al.*, (2014:705) identified access to resources such as funding, business advice, technical knowledge, strategic insight, and emotional support as major networking contributors to entrepreneurial success. Blomqvist *et al.*, (2014:142) also add that through networking, women are given a chance of shaping their identity and further integration into societies. The following summarises the significant responses from the participants:

- Support from other businesses
- Support from friends
- Support from previous workmates
- Sub-contracting
- Growth through sub-contracting

The following are quotes from participants on their views on how networking contributes to entrepreneurial success:

“Hmmm, the stronger your networking relationships, the easier you will find your business. At some point, you’re going to need help and in South Africa, it’s who you know and not what you know. It is crucial to have a network established that can assist you in the times of need you know, and not in your day to day business but more when you need help.” (Participant 8: Zoom interview. 04 Sep., 18:30).

“I got exposed to a lot of clients who became my friends, and who also support me in other businesses. Except this one of clothing, from then my sales went up. Because like I say; if you have one client that client is going to tell others, and then you find yourself that instead of having one client, now you have ten because of the one client that you met and then friendships starts there. You know others are my friends now. They started being my clients.” (Participant 1: Zoom interview. 30 Jun., 09:30).

4.8.1 Networking Challenges for Women

Women face challenges when it comes to networking, especially strategic networking. At the same time, strategic networking is complicated for several entrepreneurs (Ozkazanc-Pan & Muntean, 2018:379). Some studies have shown that it is more difficult for women entrepreneurs and those working in industrial environments (Said & Enslin, 2020:2). People tend to be more quickly drawn to people who are similar to them, coupled with male-dominated senior positions, organisations and industries, implies women usually have to work harder to establish networks with decision-makers and stakeholders who have influence (De Klerk & Verreynne, 2017:477). According to Ozkazanc-Pan and Muntean (2018:380), networking across functional and hierarchical differences is hard, and gender makes it more challenging.

Participants were asked to quantify the significant challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in trying to network in the business environment effectively. Participants highlighted the following as the key challenges they face as entrepreneurs:

4.8.1.1 Personal Background

Personal background in entrepreneurial networking or small business experience is dependent on support from a community or an environment in which one operates. Usually, networking is tricky when one has no entrepreneurial background. Family background has shown to have an impact on entrepreneurial networking (Ghannad & Andersson, 2012:136).

“I think for me, I was privileged because I managed to go through university and in total, I have been to four universities in South Africa. I have been to the University of Limpopo, Wits University, Stellenbosch and I have been to the University of Kwazulu Natal. There I have contacts even now. Some are into business; some are heads of department, so you see it is quite different from someone who has never had the opportunity to study or interact with people who are in business. Imagine someone who is in a remote community with no connections whatsoever. I think an individual’s background can also determine their ability to network as an entrepreneur...” (Participant 6: Zoom interview. 03 Aug., 11:30)

4.8.1.2 Male Dominance

Karanja and Bwisa (2013:34) and McAdam (2013:5) are of the view that some of the networking challenges for women is that of family and cultural influences. They oppose that many cultures in the world still believe that women are solely responsible for homes and family-related task. Irene (2017) and Fowowe (2017:19) also added funding and management challenges to the list of networking challenges for women entrepreneurs. From the responses, it was evident that participants felt that gender bias, gender stereotyping and culture in the business world worked against them. Participants also thought that they must work harder and be exceptionally good at their work to gain recognition from their male counterparts.

"I think some women to women it is not a real challenge, but I think from woman to man, the challenges are to be recognised, to be taken seriously, to be seen as an equal, you know, men are getting better with regards to that. But there are still a lot of men out there who view women as being inferior, you know as themselves being superior to women. I have had a few incidences of walking into an office where people think I need to make them tea. They will say, oh you know two sugars and milk, and I say no. No, I am here for the meeting and not up to serve you. So, unfortunately, there is still a stigma attached out there where women are not recognised as being senior..." (Participant 7: Zoom interview. 12 Aug.,12:30)

"You know, as women, we still have to work hard and obviously, the majority of women have families and children added pressure of that running a household. It is not just about your job but having two jobs." (Participant 4: 03 Aug., 08:00)

"It is also a big challenge that now that you have to go and do these networks. And you are asked what are you bringing to the party or what are you putting on the table? They ask whether you have the money. Sometimes they say to you ok you want this document to be signed so now you must bring your husband if you are married in the community of property. So at the time the antenuptial contract was not in place for, and it was a problem, and people that you are networking with will be saying to you put something on the table. If not they start taking advantage of you of your vulnerability or your gender and say that if you do not have money they will have to sleep with me..." (Participant 2: Zoom interview. 04 Jul., 09:30).

4.8.1.3 Lack of Mentorship

Mentorship is indispensable when it comes to business. This is not only because of the knowledge and skills that entrepreneurs can learn from mentors, but also because mentoring provides professional socialisation and personal support to facilitate the success of businesses (Ajuna et al., 2018:93). Good mentorship significantly enhances entrepreneurs' chances for success.

“It is very critical as a new player in business to be able to identify key stakeholders or other people who have been in business before to act as role models or to provide you with mentorship...These people have been around for some time, and they know the challenges associated with the kind of business that you want to do and they should be able to assist you in growing your business...” (Participant 5: Zoom interview.03 Aug., 10:30).

“... the one thing that I have noticed is women are women whether they are experienced and have many years in business they tend competing against one another and sabotaging each other instead of trying to provide mentorship to those who are coming in...” (Participant 4: Zoom interview. 03 Aug., 08:00)

4.8.2 Networking Advice for other Women Entrepreneurs

According to the GEM report (Herrington & Kew, 2017:17), entrepreneurs who have more extensive and more diverse networks grow larger businesses. McAdam *et al.*, (2019:459) reported that women entrepreneurs tend to have smaller networks when compared to their male counterparts. The issue could be as a result of women entrepreneurs looking for guidance from more private environments, for example, family members and spouses, instead of a more diverse network of friends and colleagues. This smaller and narrower network can hinder women entrepreneurs from growing their businesses. Women entrepreneurs must expand their social and professional networks to include people from more diverse fields who can provide specialised advice or assistance. Building relationships with other business leaders and experts will help open doors to exciting business opportunities for entrepreneurs, additional financing sources, and new markets for their businesses to expand.

Participants were asked on the nature of advice they would give to fellow women entrepreneurs. The following summarises the participant responses regarding this question. Most participants urged fellow women entrepreneurs to:

- Be open-minded
- Be quick to implement ideas
- Be genuine, honest and truthful

- Take advantage of opportunities
- Start the day early and be prayerful
- Communicate
- Be time conscious
- Spend time with family
- Motivate and reward employees handsomely
- Celebrate success
- Support fellow women in business

The following quotes illustrate the participant responses on this matter:

“Yeah, in the beginning, my advice would be just to be yourself, you do not have to be afraid to be yourself, do not be afraid to admit that you are new, you know.”

“...with regards to the networking as a woman, it just about being open and honest, working hard, and you know to never give up. It is not easy; it is definitely not easy, but to persevere.”

“At the beginning to work hard on your networking to establish, you know, a reputation for yourself and your brand.”

“I would say let us embrace one another, let us celebrate each other, let us you know instead of being jealous or talking about this one in a bad way let us rather build each other up you know as we stand strong as women and We Stand our ground I think will achieve so much more...”

4.9 SUMMARY

The presentation of data collection and findings were discussed for this study. Gathering of data was from eight participants who have been leading women business entrepreneurs involved in family-oriented enterprises drawn from four provinces in South Africa, sought to solicit their views as women in business regarding business networking. The participants' age ranged from 35 to 61. Thematic content analysis identified themes and codes that were interconnected. Popular themes identified included business background, current networking situation in South Africa, business networking for women, the impact of business networking on business, challenges to business networking and business networking advice. For a better understanding of these findings, the next chapter focused on a detailed discussion on these results.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The overall objective of this study was to explore networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa. This included exploration of the existing environment of building entrepreneurial networks for South African businesswomen, to understand the impact of entrepreneurial networks on women entrepreneurial performance in South Africa. Lastly, the other objective was to provide recommendations to networking organisations for the successful implementation of successful networking strategies.

This chapter provided a summary of the main findings from the literature review and empirical research for obtaining the objectives. The chapter commenced with conclusions based on the main findings of the study, followed by constructive recommendations and achievement of objectives. The chapter further identified limitations of the study and also, concluded with recommendations for future research as well as practical implications for the study.

5.2 RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

This study has contributed to the existing body of literature related to the research field of women entrepreneurship business network. Networking is observed as an essential tool in developing and promoting an entrepreneurial culture in society, especially when it comes to helping women entrepreneurs in material, moral and financial support (Zeb & Kakakhel, 2018:122). Women entrepreneurs nonetheless continue to face multiple challenges such as low levels of business networking, work-life conflict, inadequate financial resources, lack of support services, inefficient business, management and marketing skills, poor access to information, technology and digital marketing (Kamberidou, 2020). For these reasons, women entrepreneurs who are not registered

to or belong to any formal network while running their business, need traditional networks to promote their products (Zeb & Kakakhel, 2018:121).

It was deduced from prior literature that entrepreneurial networks improve integration of relationship with business competitor and relationship mechanisms such as network status, power of resources control, cohesion and trust that come from communication and interaction between business industries and other members in the business network (Abbas *et al.*, 2019:19). The study reveals that women entrepreneurs who are members of entrepreneurship business networks can share resources, exchange knowledge and complement capabilities through business networks.

In terms of the influence of networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment on the success of women entrepreneurs in South Africa, the study concluded that women entrepreneurs in South Africa have limited access to formal entrepreneurs networks. This limitation has resulted in many women entrepreneurs in South Africa not having access to financial, material and moral support. Most women entrepreneurs in South Africa are not aware of the services provided by entrepreneur networking organisations in South Africa such as SAWIC, SAWEN, BBWA, WIF, Women in Business, Phenomenal Women South Africa, BWA, TWIB and WOESA (refer Section 2.6.1, Table 2.1). It can be concluded that in a post-modern era when such organisations are working in South Africa, the limited access to formal networks to women entrepreneurs is a primary concern.

Concerning the effectiveness of existing entrepreneurial networking for South African businesswomen, it was reasoned that although fewer barriers exist in entering the formal entrepreneurial network, majority of women entrepreneurs in South Africa have minimal access to these networks.

As far as the impact of entrepreneurial networks on women entrepreneurial performance in South Africa is concerned, the study concluded that formal networks have a positive influence on women entrepreneurial performance. Furthermore, entrepreneurship business networks as well as developing women entrepreneurs' dynamic capabilities can go a long way to improve their business performance significantly. This conclusion is in line with prior research by Zeb and Kakakhel (2018),

highlighting the role of the formal entrepreneurial network in getting success and stressed on the importance for women to belong in traditional entrepreneurial networks.

Preliminary recommendations that can be made to networking organisations for the implementation of successful networking strategies is that they should create a platform where women entrepreneurs can network, with the aim of improving the accessibility of information on the entrepreneurial network and other available assistance.

5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

An effort is being made by the South African government and the entrepreneurship and Small and Medium Enterprise policy makers to increase female entrepreneurship given its contribution to job creation and societal development. Despite this effort, studies have highlighted that women are still having weak social position and inadequate business network connections. These have negative impact on women entrepreneurship.

Many of the female entrepreneurs who were interviewed in this study seemed to lack more information about the support that is provided by the government to advance female entrepreneurship. This can be taken to imply that these governmental schemes were not properly communicated to the target audience, necessitating a need to revisit the mechanisms used to convey relevant information. This will assist in ensuring that communication is done through the right channels and to the right people.

Furthermore, the interviewees seemed genuinely interested in building networks and this implied that there is high demand for these networks. It may be beneficial for all parties if the policy makers in government can create a conducive atmosphere in which women can create networks that fit their special needs related to time factor, industry, resources needed and gender.

Literature (Mandipaka, 2014) has shown that the South African government is mindful that women entrepreneurs in South Africa face many challenges relating to starting,

growing, sustaining and networking enterprises. This study recommended that the Department of Trade and Industry should continue working and encouraging South African women entrepreneurs to join and actively participate in entrepreneurial networks. The study further suggested that women entrepreneurs should raise confidence and empower themselves through entrepreneurial networking, which is one of the initiatives that can be designed to enhance skills and knowledge in entrepreneurship.

The study further recommended that the Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Finance, and the Department of Small Business as policymakers should formalise networking at a national level as a supporting tool for women in business. It is important to note that more women should be afforded opportunities and resources to make decisions and learn more about entrepreneurial networking. It is recommended that women entrepreneurs should acquire skills that will help break the stereotypes and value systems that hinder them from participating in everyday activities. Women entrepreneurs should consider forming partnerships with individuals from different areas of knowledge and expertise in order to learn from one another.

5.4 ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

Although there are gender equality policies put in place, majority of female entrepreneurs in South Africa are still reported to not having access to formal business networks while others are reported to be more dependent on small networks made up of family and friends. Even though the role of entrepreneurial networks in enhancing entrepreneurship is not new in the entrepreneurial literature, little has been studied on how entrepreneurial network can be of importance to advancing women's entrepreneurship, especially in South Africa. Therefore, to enhance women entrepreneurship, it was vital to perform an in-depth exploration of the impact of networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa.

The summary of the findings was structured towards achieving the research objectives of the study.

5.4.1 Research objective 1: To explore networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa.

This objective aimed at providing an understanding into the current networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa. Literature (Urban, 2019) has shown that entrepreneurs in South Africa should be informed about the significance of shared knowledge, intellectual capital and establishing strategic partnerships that are promoted using business networks.

The study revealed that most women entrepreneurs in South Africa do not belong to any entrepreneurial or business network. Some of the reasons were that most businesswomen are not aware of women entrepreneurial networks in South Africa, as well as inadequate education and training on entrepreneurship. These findings agree with a study by Chinomona and Maziriri (2020). According to Chinomona and Maziriri (2020), lack of entrepreneurial education and training are some of the significant challenges facing women entrepreneurs in the Gauteng province of South Africa. These results are also consistent with research conducted by Rudhumbu *et al.* (2020). The findings of Rudhumbu *et al.*, (2020), revealed that “women entrepreneurs faced a complex web of challenges among which were access to finance, lack of training leading to lack of technical skills, lack of knowledge of sources of financing and technical support, high competition in the market, marginalisation of women and lack of knowledge of marketing strategies”.

The study further revealed that women entrepreneurs in South Africa experience challenges in obtaining start-up capital. Some of the participants’ emphasis was that access to finance is one of the biggest challenges hindering women entrepreneurs to network effectively in the business environment in South Africa. These findings are in line with a study by Chinomona and Maziriri (2020) that highlighted the lack of financial resources as one of the significant challenges facing women entrepreneurs in the Gauteng province of South Africa.

5.4.2 Research objective 2: To explore the existing environment of building entrepreneurial networks for South African businesswomen.

This objective assisted with obtaining insights into the existing environment of building entrepreneurial networks for South African businesswomen. Participants provided answers to the questions derived from the objective. It was found that the standard approach used by existing entrepreneurial networks is physical and virtual interactions. Participants also identified internet and social media as primary tools used by entrepreneurial networks to maintain their networks. The study further revealed that although fewer barriers exist in entering the formal entrepreneurial network, the majority of women entrepreneurs in South Africa have minimal access to traditional networks. However, some women entrepreneurs believe that traditional networks help them get moral support, financial aid, material aid and services, advice and other assistance.

5.4.3 Research objective 3: To understand the impact of entrepreneurial networks on women entrepreneurial performance in South Africa

This objective provided an understanding of the impact of entrepreneurial networks on women entrepreneurial performance in South Africa. Literature has shown that formal networks have a significant impact on entrepreneurial performance (Zeb & Kakakhel, 2018:119). The current study revealed that women entrepreneurs who belong to a particular network have a competitive advantage over those that do not belong to any entrepreneurial network. The reasons for this competitive advantage was that networking assisted the entrepreneur with brand development, business growth, publicity and idea generation. These findings are in line with a study by Cisi *et al.*, (2020) whose results revealed that an entrepreneur who is successful in networking would remain ahead of the competition because they would have made an impact. Networking offers a chance to make an impact, attracts and retains clients in business.

5.4.4 Research objective 4: To make available recommendations to networking organisations for the successful implementation of networking strategies

This objective provided an opportunity to offer recommendations to networking organisations for the successful implementation of networking strategies. Participants provided answers to the questions derived from this objective. Participants provided various recommendations that can be implemented to enhance women entrepreneurship in South African through business networks.

From the participants responses, it was deduced that women entrepreneurs must expand their social and professional networks to include people from more diverse fields, who can provide specialised advice or assistance. Building relationships with other business leaders and experts will help open the door to exciting business opportunities for entrepreneurs, additional financing sources, and new markets for their business to expand. The results indicate that a platform where women entrepreneurs can network should be established. The forum will provide information on the entrepreneurial network and other available assistance. Pakistan policymakers, for example, fell short amidst these findings as little to no effort is being made to assist women entrepreneurs in making effective networks (Zeb & Kakakhel, 2018:119).

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite the contribution made by this study, it has some limitations which provide a path for future research. Firstly, the study was limited in terms of research design and methodology and only employed a qualitative research approach to collect data. Secondly, the study was limited to a total number of eight participants and data was collected in urban areas only. Another anticipated limitation was that some of the participants might have been reluctant to share information relating to their business., The results of this study were therefore, not a general reflection of the entire South African population of women entrepreneurs.

5.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the results obtained through this study, it is recommended that future research should consider employing a mixed-method research approach, using a larger sample size so as to help solicit more information from participants. This will provide a comprehensive and more representative results so as to contribute new knowledge to the existing body of entrepreneurial literature from a quantitative perspective.

Future studies should expand the data collection to include women entrepreneurs from both rural and urban areas to generate findings that might be more insightful. Future research should incorporate the impact of cultural differences on networking among women entrepreneurs in South Africa.

The study further suggests that future research could be conducted using a longitudinal case study in order to take into consideration, the evolvement of networks and the movement from one business stage to another in the women entrepreneurial process. In other words, a case study based on a few entrepreneurs could allow researchers to study the changes in networking activities and behaviours of the women entrepreneurs over a long period of time

Future research should focus on strategies to enhance the quality of women entrepreneurial network, especially in business sectors that are traditionally male-dominated. Furthermore, a prospective study which compares male and female entrepreneurs' network would provide more insight into the extent to which women entrepreneurs displayed network behaviour suggestive of their male counterpart.

5.7 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The current study offers many managerial implications to women entrepreneurs in South Africa. The findings showed that entrepreneurial networks are inclined to improve the abilities of women to acquire valuable information, business opportunities and resources from surrounding business networks. The implications for this is that entrepreneurial networks might differentiate members who belong to the networks from other business networks who do not have this resourceful benefit.

Another practical implication for the research was about building relationships for networking as this is an excellent link to opening doors for business opportunities, growth and running a successful business. Another practical implication is that women entrepreneurs need more training in business entrepreneurship to gain more knowledge and skills in entrepreneurial networking. The social significance of this study is that women entrepreneurs can perform much better than men if they join virtual entrepreneurial networks and if they are given the necessary support.

The findings of this study highlighted the importance of women entrepreneurial networks in which businesswomen endorse their available entrepreneurial network posture and develop valuable guidelines for managers, executive and owners on how they might cultivate specific business ties and the configurational combinations.

In general, the findings of this study indicate that women entrepreneurial network can assist businesswomen to exploit external resources and opportunities for knowledge and technologies. The findings provide a platform of insight the focused research area and results might help in improving the performance and sustainability of small firms. The findings of this study are advantageous and helpful for businesswomen to consider results implications in various emerging sectors and to develop markets around the world which might have a significant impact on women entrepreneurs sustainable performance.

5.8 SUMMARY

This study was grounded on the overview of networking among women entrepreneurs in South Africa. An extensive review of relevant literature relating to the contributions and significance of networking among women entrepreneur in South Africa was conducted. Support strategies for improving networking among women entrepreneurs were discussed, and it was found that the South African government and other stakeholders need to create initiatives for encouraging networking among women entrepreneurs. The study explored the impact of networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa. The objective of this study was to explore networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa; to explore the existing environment of building entrepreneurial networks for South African businesswomen; to understand the impact of entrepreneurial networks on women entrepreneurial performance in South Africa, and make available recommendations to networking organisations for the successful implementation of successful networking strategies.

This chapter concluded the study by providing a summary of the main findings from a literature review and empirical research. From these findings, conclusions and constructive recommendations were made. The chapter also highlighted the limitations of this study. From these limitations, recommendations for future research were provided. The chapter concluded with the practical implication of the stud

Women entrepreneurs contribute to economic development in the country and are now regarded as the new generation for wealth creation through entrepreneurship. It was found that the women entrepreneurial population in South Africa is growing and the trend of performance among businesswomen who belong to a formal entrepreneurial network is increasing due to the benefits derived from these networks. Networking was observed as an essential tool in developing and promoting entrepreneurial culture in society, especially when it comes to helping women entrepreneurs in giving material, moral and financial support. The study recommends that policymakers should formalise networking at a national level, as a supporting tool for women in business. The recommendations for this study are beneficial for women entrepreneurs in South African and the world at large.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER



BUSINESS SCHOOL
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08 April 2020

To whom it may be concerned

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERVIEW

Date: _____

Participant code: _____

My name is Ketlareng Liza Polori, and I am a Master of Business Administration (MBA) student at the North-West University Business School. I am currently researching as part of my Masters' dissertation towards under the supervision of Professor Stephan van der Merwe. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled *exploring networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa*.

The purpose of this study is to explore the impacts that networking among women entrepreneurs have on women entrepreneurial performance in the business environment in South Africa.

You have been chosen to take part in this study because you are a women entrepreneur in South Africa. There are no foreseeable risks involved in taking part in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. While there are no financial

or other direct benefits of participating in this study, your experience as an as a woman entrepreneur in South Africa can, however, contribute much to assist towards developing programs to help other female entrepreneurs succeed in their future business ventures. I would, therefore, greatly appreciate your contribution. The entire interview will take approximately 45 minutes. The interview will be voice-recorded, and the interviewer will take notes during the interview process.

Your response is used only for this study. However, data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. Also, if you do not wish to answer any of the questions, you may skip them and move on to the next question. The information recorded is confidential; your name is not being included in the study. No identifying information of the participants will be shared with anyone who is not directly connected with the project.

The researcher will store audio records and hard copies (notes) of your answers for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet in the researcher private home or the research supervisors' office for future research or academic purposes. Electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Hard copies of your answers will be shredded, and/or electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme after a period of five years.

The Scientific Committee will approve the study of the NWU Business School. The Chair of the Scientific Committee is Prof Christoff Botha. He can be reached at 018 299 1672, and his email address is christoff.botha@nwu.ac.za.

Ethical clearance will be obtained by the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences Ethics Committee (EMS-REC), and the ethical clearance number will be allocated. The Chair of the Ethical Committee is Mark Rathbone. He can be reached at 018 299 1356, and his e-mail address is mark.rathbone@nwu.ac.za.

Should you have concerns about how the research has been conducted, you may contact the research supervisor of the thesis, Professor Stephan Van der Merwe. He can be reached at 018 299 1414 (Email address: stephan.vandermerwe@nwu.ac.za).

Your input is of great value to this research, and I appreciate your help in providing this information.

Sincerely,

KETLARENG LIZA POLORI

0820434898/ Ketlareng.polori@nwu.ac.za

NWU Business School

North-West University, Potchefstroom

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- i) Tell me about your business, how did it all start?
- j) In your opinion, how would you describe current networking in the South African business environment?
 - a. Probe: what is your perspective on the current networks availability to businesswomen in South Africa? (reflect on both formal and informal)
 - b. Probe: what business network organisations specifically for women are you aware of? (reflect on which of these do you belong to)

Considering what we have discussed up to now, I would like to ask you the following questions which specifically focus on you and your business as a women entrepreneur.

- k) How do you network as a women entrepreneur?
 - a. Probe: how do you build and maintain your network?
 - b. Probe: in what ways do you think women network differently, if at all?
 - c. Probe: what about networking between women?
- l) What you would say is the impact of networking in the business environment?
 - a. Probe: on you as an entrepreneur? (reflect on success)
 - b. Probe: on your business? (reflect on performance and success)

Considering your response regarding the impact of networking.

- m) In what way do you think networking contributes to entrepreneurial success in the business environment?
- n) What are the major challenges for women entrepreneurs to effectively network in the business environment?
- o) What networking advice could you give to other women entrepreneurs?
 - a. Probe: networking between women?
- p) Is there anything else that you might want to discuss regarding networking or women entrepreneurs?

APPENDIX C INTERVIEW # P7

Interview with XXX- code NR # P7

Notes	Transcription	Code
Telephone Interview due to covid19 and a limited amount of time available.	The interview took place on the 12th August 2020 from 12:46 to 13:08. Participant #7 was at home, working and taking care of the children. The researcher and NR #P7 connected on their cell phones. NR #P7 was multitasking, eating, working and attending to children at home.	
Previously connected with the participant via WhatsApp, email and telephone to explain what is expected and also send out a consent form	Researcher: Hello, how are you and thank you again. My topic is I want to establish networking among Women.	
	NR #P7 Yes. Let us start.	
	Researcher: So I would like to ask you a few questions, so would you please tell me about your business and yourself and how it all started?	

Business profile Personal Profile Qualifications	NR #P7: Yes absolutely, So I've been now in our business Since 2007 so it has been now 13 years That we've been busy in the homeware industry. And I studied a degree at Wits University. I did a B.com, so my degree was Finance, and I wanted to go into the accounting industry, but that I didn't enjoy it, not at all. So once I started working there, I didn't enjoy what I was doing. And so, can you hear me?	13 years in business, homeware industry, BCom Finance, business start-up
	Researcher: Yes,	
Work experience	NR #P7: I was outside, so I went overseas, I lived overseas, lived I in Dubai and France and England, and when I came back I had travelled quite a lot, and I bought some stuff with me from my travels, and one of those things were cutlery set, and I was able to get those products into Load of Living all those years ago. And it was the start of my business. Not something I had planned to do or nothing that I foresaw But	Travelling, product

	it ended up becoming a product or grown into a company that it is now.	
	Researcher: And how would you describe the current networking in the current South African business environment in your opinion?	
Description of networking	NR #P7: P7: described it in what manner? As in to have your own business?	Business
	Researcher: Yeah, In general, What would you say is the current environment for women to network or networking in general?	
Business Ownership	NR #P7: Look women are very supportive for women in the South African Industry, you know, I find that women enjoy working with each other and I think overseas it can be quite competitive. I don't find it competitive here at all. I see women very supportive, and when they find out that you're a female, they tend to be, they tend to enjoy working with you. You know they tend to send business towards females rather than away. It is still quite hard being a woman and to be recognized. It's still	Supportive women, South African Industry, Competitive, male-dominated, hard-working, recognition for women

	quite a strong male-dominated, you know country. But I wouldn't say it's difficult for women, I would just say probably say that obviously, we might not get the opportunities men called from the start, but if you are hard-working you can achieve this in this country, there is nothing hold against you. It's not detrimental to being a woman here. Especially in your own business, I believe it might be to your benefit to be a female To have your own business because other women will support you. There's a lot of support from a woman not being in a female running a business and yeah, I wouldn't say much from the men. I would say men are different, but I do think women enjoy working with other women. They tend to have a little bit of understanding about the support you get from them.	
	Researcher: Okay, What business networking organizations or platforms, especially for women, are you aware of them and reflect those that you belong to or you are associated with?	
	NR #P7: I don't belong to any of them. I don't know anything about them.	Networking organizations

	Researcher: But within your industry, are there no networking organizations within the hospitality industry or homeware industry don't you know any organization?	
SAWES, Networking Organization	NR #P7: Not that I am aware of, unfortunately. I was part of a group called SAWES Entrepreneurs, but I do believe it is closed now. I believe it is Called SA Women Entrepreneurs. As far as I know, it has closed now (<i>cough</i>). But before lockdown it was up and running it was an online site.	Name dropping Industry Specific
	Researcher: Okay, that's very interesting to you today, and how would you describe the current networking in the South African business environment?	
	NR #P7:	

	Researcher: Okay considering what we have discussed up to now, I would like to ask you the following questions which specifically focus on you and your business as a women entrepreneur? Number 1: how your network as a woman in section and also how do you build and maintain your system?	
Networking	NR #P7: We network a lot through social media. So most of our networking is done through Instagram, Facebook, we do a lot of work online now because of the pandemic. A lot of our work is not done through societies, but it is done through people reaching out to us and us even reaching out to other entrepreneurs or people within their business. And its usually done online.	Use of Social Media platforms, societies, other entrepreneurs, online
	Researcher: How do you maintain and build your networks, those relationships?	
Relationships Build	NR #P7: Normally we speak quite a lot to the people who are in our network, we do email them, and then we do see them over holidays, things like that. We do a lot of	Speaking with people

Maintain	expos, so within our industry, we have big expos, and we network at the expos, and we tend to see all the same people. The ladies that we network with, we see them at the expos. Expos are the type of places we catch up with, we do further networking, and obviously, things have changed a lot this year. But people within our industries we catch up with them.	Events, holiday social networks Expos, travels, Industry associates/networks,
	Researcher: And do you think women network differently, if at all, compared to men?	
Women vs men Networking differently comparisons	NR #P7: Yes, absolutely, more socially, women are better communicators, women are proactive, they, women network at a very different level. They are more efficient; they get to the point quicker. Mean people would tend to think that women talk more than men. But the truth is 9 out of 10 businesswomen communicate very clearly, no hidden agendas. You tend to find men beating around the bush and not getting straight to the point. Women are direct, and no, they are not afraid to show any sign of weakness in their questions. And you know	Women are communicators, Proactive, efficient, No Hidden agendas Different level of networking Men don't speak up, challenges

	they are not scared to ask assistance, and we turn to find men are not like that. A man would not ask for help, or a man would not say he's going through a difficult time, but a woman would. But by being like that, I tend to find that women tend to enjoy working with other women. It's a very open book, you know. I had thoroughly enjoyed working with these women. I am working with them; there's always trust with a relationship. You do find that sometimes women do jump into wrong conclusions. I had one or two incidents where women can get angry, thinking I had done something. But as soon as you explain they are quick to apologies and that gets quick to be amended. And that is a different relationship to a man, but it's a more open relationship that I prefer.	Difference between men and women Preference, wrong conclusions Emotional
	Researcher: Mmm, and what would be the impact of networking in the business environment, on you as an entrepreneur? May you reflect on your successes and your business in terms of performance and success?	

Business environment Impact on an entrepreneur Female entrepreneur Importance of network Impact of networking	NR #P7: Networking is essential for a brand, brand development, brand association. You know South Africa as much as we are a big country with 60 million people, within the working industry and within these type of Hubs, in Joburg and Cape Town, it is tiny. So if you want to be well known and established and recognized within your field, networking is crucial because South Africans we all about people. What people say about your brand, what people talk about your brand, about what people write about you on social media, what social media about you? And all of that is established within your networking. I still remember when I started my company, how important networking was because, in the beginning, nobody knows who you are, nobody knows your brand. But if your network and establish those strong networking relationships you brand will grow because those people will use you, they will talk about you. You just take a little bit of time to establish a reputable brand, but networking is the most crucial part if you want to have a brand where people know the name, and you need to do networking.	Brand, Brand development and brand association Business Hubs in South Africa What people say about your brand Strong Networking Relationships It takes time to build a reputable brand.
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	Researcher: Mmm, Shoo, and in what way do you think networking contributes to entrepreneurial success in the business environment?	
Networking Entrepreneurial Success	NR #P7: Hmmm, as I said, brand recognition, Ummm networking is also crucial for developing relationships with people who can benefit you in the future. Hmmm, you know, as I said, South Africa is small, we are small. I mean if you had to compare us with Europe or America, we are tiny here, and you need those relationships because at any point, I mean, I've got a strong networking relationship within my shipping. For example, my shipping, my bringing stuff in from China. You need networking relationships. You might need assistance with a bank. You might need a system for SARS. Those are all people within your networking relationships that you could rely on. Hmmm, the healthier you're networking relationships, the more comfortable you will find your business. Ummm at some point you're going to need help. And Ummm, in South Africa it's who you know and not what you know. It is vital to have a network established that can assist you in the times of need you know, and not in	Brand Recognition Developing relations Supplier Relationships Trust The stronger the network- the more comfortable to do business

	your day to day business but more when you need help.	Networks that can help you in times of need.
	Researcher: Shoo, And what are the significant challenges for women entrepreneurs to network in the business environment effectively?	
Challenges Women Entrepreneurs Networking effectively	NR #P7: What are the challenges? I think some women to women it's it is not a real challenge, but I guess from woman to man, the challenges are to be recognized, to be taken seriously, to be seen as an equal, you know, men are getting better with regards to that. But They are still a lot of men out there who view women as being superior, you know as themselves being superior to women. I've had a few incidences of walking into an office where people think I need to make the tea, they'll say, oh you know two to two sugars and milk, and I say no. No, I'm here for the meeting and not up to serve you. So, unfortunately, there is still a stigma attached out there where women aren't recognized as being senior, you, know, let alone an entrepreneur. Good, with these pros and cons, you know, that is the	Challenges need to be recognized The superiority of men to women The stigma attached to women entrepreneurs Women can talk to them- Selves out of any situation

	narrative of. The pro about being a woman is a woman can talk herself out of a situation and into one. And she can talk herself out of a bad situation, where I feel men can't, she can open doors where I think men can't, We are a lot more emotionally intelligent than men, and we can read a situation better than them. We can read people better than them, and we can sit as women in an office and be able to communicate with that person opposite us in a whole different level to away a man can, and there is a softness to a woman. Wherewith that can open many doors. And, you know if their situation is terrible being a woman and sitting there and saying sorry (.....<i>break</i>), network problems.	Women can open doors where men cant Women are more emotionally intelligent
	Researcher: I: Nicole, Hi Emma, pause, Emma,	
Bad phone line	NR #P7: Can you hear me,	Network interruption
	Researcher: Yes I have lost you there, And you were at that point that there is a softness to a woman	
Challenges stereotyping	NR #P7 Yes, So I was saying it does take place in business. It beneficial, you know women, I was saying that in a difficult	Softness to a woman

Masculinity Unfair advantage	situation being a woman, I can often read that situation and be able to speak openly. You learn to be embarrassed about what might have happened. The first person on the other side will be a light, will be more to my experience; they are softer with you; they are more understanding because you are a woman. I think being a man could be a bit harder, you know. That's what I am saying, you know being a female entrepreneur, Yeah, there are benefits, and there are pros and cons.	Difficult situations a woman's character can be beneficial. Being a female entrepreneur there are benefits, pros and cons as well
	Researcher: Do you think the pros overweight the cons or vice versa?	
Role Risk Families Support	NR #P7: Vice Versa, I think they equal each other out. Hmmm, <i>I don't think we are on a more comfortable platform by being a female, but I don't think it is detrimental to us.</i> I think they balance each other out. So what's negative is balanced out by what's positive. You know, as women we still have to work hard and obviously, the majority of women have families and children added pressure of that running a household. It's not just about your job but having two jobs. But yeah, I think women make excellent	Pros and Cons balance each other I don't think we are on a more straightforward platform by being a woman

	entrepreneurs. I believe women are dynamic; I find I am always compelled to be interested in a female entrepreneur than a male. If I see an article in a female entrepreneur, I tend to read it more than I would if it was a man, because I am always interested in a woman who's taken a plunge. After all, it is quite risky, and it is you know takes quite a bit of gut, but women entrepreneurs are very successful.	Negatives balance the positive out Women have to work harder than men Challenges -Women have families and Children, the pressure of running a household Risky It takes time and guts to be successful as a woman entrepreneur
	Researcher: What networking advice would you give other women entrepreneurs about networking among different women, or themselves?	

Pause	NR #P7: Pause, Attending to the kids and visitors at home. Apologies, What were you saying?	Break –phone on hold
	Pause	
	Researcher: No problem, I was just saying what networking advice would you give to other women entrepreneurs about networking among themselves?	
Networking Advice Networking among women	NR #P7: To be open, It's like what I said earlier, I would say to be open and honest, when your network to be, to be yourself, need to be yourself. To give to opportunities that come your way, be open quickly to implement. All women are good communicators Can I put you on hold for 1 minute, I have got a call.	Open-minded Implementation Take advantage of opportunities Women are good communicators

	Pause., call on hold for a minute.	
	NR #P7: Hi apologies, I am back,	
	Researcher: No problem (laughing)	
	NR #P7: What was the question?	
	Researcher: We're talking about what networking advice would you give to other women entrepreneurs?	
advice	NR #P7: My networking advice would be to put yourself out there, not to be afraid to be yourself and not to show your friends all your weaknesses. You know gladly accept help when help is offered in the networking world. At the beginning to work hard on your networking to establish, you know, a reputation for yourself and your brand. To work hard on that. You see, I have been doing it for years, I am quite established, I don't put time as much as I did in the beginning, I spent a lot of time in my networking I never said no to any opportunities, in conferences, I would do everything. But now I am a little bit more	Put yourself out there Don't be afraid to be you Work at the beginning on networking

Support	selective. Yeah, in the beginning, my advice would be of this would just be yourself, you know, don't be afraid to be yourself, don't be scared to admit that you are new, you know. Because within women entrepreneurs, they appreciate honesty. And just be yourself, you know entrepreneurs from other female entrepreneurs to ask for assistance, ask them about their story, for A woman will always sit and tell you, she will appreciate that you would want to learn from her. She will assist. Now men are a little bit different they will help. But now with regards to the networking of being a woman, it just about being open and honest, working hard, and you know to never give up. It's not easy, it is not easy but to preserve. I can tell you a few stories, where at the very beginning of my job things didn't go my way. I started this new company; we were launching with Loads of living where the very first store I was were going to be in with and the plan didn't you know. They told me in a few weeks, "Sorry Emma, we have to put your stuff for sale" And it was not what I had planned. So that I never gave you and I kept persevering. Within my job also I have come up across a few men that I found very difficult to work with. Still, my advice to women would be, be nice, don't lose your cool, be patient, just believe in yourself, you can achieve, <i>I know it sounds like it</i>	Reputation for yourself and your brand
Success/advice		Spent lot of time in networking
Background-		Ask for help
Where it all started		The storytelling of women entrepreneur journeys
Female entrepreneur Story		Hardworking, Perseverance
Support Structure		Honesty Being Open

	<i>coming from a book, but if you believe in yourself, you can accomplish a lot.</i> And go out there and do your own thing, it will be well, people will support you to it. You won't find that you are alone, you will find other community of women entrepreneurs that are very supportive of you.	The unexpected outcome Believe in yourself A community of Women Entrepreneurs
	Researcher: That is an exciting Journey. Thank you so much.	
Women in business	NR #P7: Thank you so much, please shout out if you need anything or you feel that I didn't answer anything clearly, Thank you. Good luck, Good Bless. Bye!	The END
	Researcher: Thank you, you too	

APPENDIX D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



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Economic and Management Sciences Research
Ethics Committee (EMS-REC)

29 May 2020

Prof Stephan van der Merwe
Per e-mail
Dear Prof van der Merwe,

EMS-REC FEEDBACK: 29052020

Student: Polori, KL (271933685)(NWU-00669-20-A4)

Applicant: Prof Stephan van der Merwe - MBA

Your ethics application on, *Exploring networking between women entrepreneurs in the business environment in South Africa*, which served on the EMS-REC meeting of 29 May 2020, refers.

Outcome:

Approved as a minimal risk study. A number NWU-00669-20-A4 is given for one year of ethics clearance.

Due to the Covid-19 lock down ethics clearance for applications that involve data collection or any form of contact with participants are subject to the restrictions imposed by the South African government.

Kind regards,

Mark
Rathbone

Digitally signed by Mark Rathbone
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West University, ou=Business
management,
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Prof Mark Rathbone
Chairperson: Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC)