

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**EXPLORING THE
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS
AND MARKETING PRACTICES
AMONG WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS:
PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH**

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the results of my work unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This dissertation has not been submitted to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any degree or qualification.

I, hereby, acknowledge that I have been supplied with the Academic Rules and Regulations for Post Graduate, Universiti Teknologi MARA, regulating the conduct of my study and research.

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of women entrepreneurship in Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) had achieved recognition as a major player in bringing innovativeness and utilising their capabilities towards achieving SMEs development goals in Malaysia. Entrepreneurs of SMEs have the inclination to utilise interpersonal relationships in business transactions especially in the aspect of the marketing activities. An interpersonal relationship is a skill widely regarded as an intangible asset possessed by women due to the lack of tangible resources and empirical studies have shown the interpersonal relationship is an important element in marketing practices. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the interpersonal relationships and marketing practices of women entrepreneurs through the extraction of entrepreneurial experiences. This study adopts qualitative phenomenological method using in-depth interviews to extract and identify the common meaning of interpersonal relationships and marketing practices of the lived experiences of 22 women entrepreneurs domiciled in Sarawak, Malaysia. The data was organised, transcribed, retrieved and coded using Atlas.ti7 software while the analysis and the interpretation of the data conducted manually to achieve greater precision and consistency in the resulting concepts and theory development. The main findings of the dissertation identify six main themes and sub-categorised into fourteen sub-themes. These six main themes include women entrepreneurs' express meaning of interpersonal relationships; interpersonal relationship practices of women entrepreneurs; personalised, relational, fast and immediate marketing approach; selectiveness in the choice of traditional promotional tools; interpersonal relationships capabilities of the women entrepreneurs; and social entrepreneurial orientation of the women entrepreneurs. Further, the dissertation develops an integrated 6Ps Model of Women Entrepreneurs Practices based on the six main themes that become the main theoretical contribution to this dissertation. Interestingly, the unexpected findings of this dissertation explain that religion interweaved with the way women operates their business. Hence, the integration of religion and business, altruistic behaviours and community engagement are a result of the values held by the women entrepreneurs in this dissertation.

Key Words: Interpersonal Relationships, SMEs Marketing, Women Entrepreneurs, Entrepreneurship

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the overall process and discussion of the dissertation. This dissertation specifically refers to as phenomenological qualitative study with the primary aim to explore and understand how women entrepreneurs utilise interpersonal relationship as an intangible resource in the operation of a business especially in the context of marketing practices. Another goal of this dissertation is also to investigate the interpersonal relationships that define the entrepreneurial characteristics and traits of the women entrepreneurs.

The discussion begins with the role played by SMEs (Small Medium Enterprises) and how it affected WE (Women Entrepreneur). Subsequently, the challenges and limitations faced by WE in SMEs which led to the choice of business. Discussion on the problem statement centred around how women entrepreneurs establish IPR, development of studies on IPR and women entrepreneurship, marketing practices employed by SMEs and approaches adopted in studying interpersonal relationships. Next, the discussions proceed to the purpose of the study and development of the research questions and research objectives for the overall dissertation. Scope, the significance of the study and operational terms are discussed and conclude by elaborating on the organisation of the dissertation.

1.1.1 Women and the Role of Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

Individuals' decision to start a business could be affected by many factors, including personalities, cognitive attributes, social networks, prior knowledge, experience, and market or industry conditions (Short, Ketchen, Shook and Ireland, 2010). Earlier studies had shown that individuals turned to become entrepreneurs forced to embark in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as part of the entrepreneur's life strategy to earn a living due to the lack of other choices such as scarcity in job opportunities (Littunen, 2000; Ruminski-Zimmy, 2003). However, recent studies demonstrated that operating a business had become an accepted choice due to its