

Women's Entrepreneurship in Fashion and Apparel Industry: opportunities, challenges and solutions

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Abstract

This study concerns a comprehensively review of women's entrepreneurship in the thriving fashion and apparel industry through a library-based method. Based on going over the associated texts, scientific articles, and relevant statistics, efforts have been made to identify and analyze the opportunities, challenges, and solutions available in this field. The findings of the research specify that women's entrepreneurship in the fashion and apparel industry, despite numerous potentials, faces multiple challenges such as financial constraints, limited access to resources, intense competition, rapid changes in fashion, and insufficient support from governmental and private institutions. On the other hand, opportunities such as the growth of the online market, increasing demand for customized products, and a growing focus on sustainable fashion have created a favorable environment for the success of female entrepreneurs. Accordingly, solutions such as creating support networks, easier access to financial resources, specialized training, support for domestic production, and brand development have been proposed to address the challenges and strengthen women's entrepreneurship in the fashion and apparel industry.

Keywords: Women's entrepreneurship, fashion and apparel industry, opportunities, challenges, solutions, library research

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that the apparel industry, as one of the key industries in the world, plays a dominant role in the economy and culture of societies. Clothing, beyond being a consumer good, is a symbol of individual and collective identity and serves as a means of expressing lifestyle, values, and beliefs. In this competitive industry, sales are perceived not only as the endpoint of a transaction but also as the beginning of a long-term relationship with customers. Most significantly, maintaining customer satisfaction and establishing a sustainable relationship is the key to success in this industry (1).

In recent years, the apparel industry has faced significant transformations. On one hand, increasing consumer awareness regarding environmental and social issues has put more pressure on producers. On the other hand, advancements in production technologies and the emergence of new sales channels have created new opportunities for growth and development in this industry. In this multi-layered condition, successful sales require a deep understanding of customer needs and desires, along with the provision of quality products, attractive designs, and reasonable prices (2).

It can't be denied that marketing in the apparel industry plays a very important role in creating demand and maintaining customer loyalty. Given the diversity of products and brands available in the market, creating differentiation and establishing effective communication with customers are among the main challenges of this industry. Hence, successful sales in this industry require the use of modern marketing tools, such as digital marketing and social media (3).

It is also worth mentioning that understanding consumer behavior is the key to the success of any sales strategy, whether at the local or global level. The sales process is typically divided into various stages: prospecting, pre-contact, contact, product presentation, problem-solving, objection handling, closing the deal, and post-sale follow-up. The importance of each of these stages varies depending on the country and product. Companies use methods such as advertising, public relations, sales promotion, personal selling, and direct marketing to increase sales (4). One of the influential factors on sales is the product brand. The brand represents the identity of an organization and product, enhancing perceived value in the eyes of the customer. Products with different brands, even if they fulfill the same need, have differences in packaging, stitching, raw materials, and design, which affect sales volume.

Theoretical Framework

Entrepreneurship: Definition

Entrepreneurship is the translation of the word "Entrepreneurship," which is derived from the French word "Entreprender," meaning "to undertake." A true entrepreneur emerges when

individuals set aside conventional and habitual ways of thinking and acting, and instead employ new and different approaches and ideas that can meet the needs of customers and the market. The concept of entrepreneurship is related to characteristics such as access to resources, social rules, as well as financial and economic opportunities in society, based on the context and environment. Entrepreneurship also includes an operational definition. It encompasses behaviors such as striving for success, having independent thoughts, accepting risks, and so on. In the operational definition of entrepreneurship, it refers to the scores that subjects obtain from a 54-item standard comprehensive entrepreneurship questionnaire. Entrepreneurship is a creative activity similar to creativity in art and science. To be more exact, an entrepreneur must cultivate an idea in their mind, and once the idea is found, they should try to realize it in practice. To put it in a nutshell, the innovations of entrepreneurs always lead to revolutions in everyday life (5).

Entrepreneurial Management

It is generally admitted that an entrepreneurial manager is an individual who is so intertwined with their organization that they cannot be separated from it. His duty is to create conditions under which other management elements can fulfill their assigned tasks within the organization while also achieving their personal goals. Entrepreneurship has a direct impact on the economic and social development of people, such that the more a society engages in entrepreneurial activities, the faster it will achieve economic and social development. More precisely, modern societies need individuals who are determined to achieve success, capable of turning dreams into reality, and possess an independent spirit to explore new opportunities. Moreover, if the economic and social impacts of entrepreneurship are considered, the role of specialists and graduates in the development of society will become clear, and the graduates will respond to the various needs of society. Besides, when many members of a community accept entrepreneurship as a profession, that community rapidly grows in such a way that entrepreneurship creates new jobs and reduces the unemployment rate (6). Likewise, entrepreneurial managers are constantly innovating and developing new goods and services, and are also seeking methods to produce and deliver these goods and services effectively, thereby improving the quality of life.

As a matter of fact, entrepreneurship is a creative process that involves identifying new opportunities, generating innovative ideas, and turning them into successful businesses. This process is not only crucial for starting a new business but also for the growth and development of any business, including branding in the fashion and apparel industry. Therefore, entrepreneurs with a creative and innovative approach to the market can present new ideas for clothing design, produce unique products, and create strong brands. These innovations help the brand to stand out from competitors and remain memorable in the minds of customers (7).

To sum up, by using entrepreneurial principles, creative and talented forces can be attracted to the fashion and apparel industry, and their ideas can be utilized for brand development. These

individuals, by identifying customer needs and providing innovative solutions, can help in the growth and development of the brand. Ultimately, entrepreneurship acts as a driving force, steering the fashion and clothing industry towards innovation and creativity, enabling Iranian brands to compete in global markets and introduce Iranian culture and lifestyle to other countries (8).

Fashion and apparel: an opportunity for entrepreneurship

The apparel and fashion industries are a flourishing market creating many opportunities for entrepreneurs. Consequently, establishing a small and medium-sized business in this industry brings many benefits, including work independence and new financial opportunities. However, success in this field requires a thorough understanding of the challenges and opportunities. Intense competition, rapid changes in fashion and customer preferences, financial constraints, and supply chain complexities are among the main challenges. Nevertheless, the growing market, demand for customized products, and the possibility of using new technologies have created unique opportunities for startups. For achieving success in this field, entrepreneurs should focus on understanding customer needs, creating innovative products, utilizing new technologies, strong branding, and establishing collaborative networks (9).

From a behavioral perspective, the entrepreneurial process includes a set of actions that are essential for identifying and evaluating an opportunity, defining a business concept, identifying the necessary resources, and implementing and operating the business. Activities that benefit from legal support and organizational resources in their innovative efforts to deliver new products and improve product growth. Therefore, entrepreneurship can also be utilized in the process of branding, its growth and development, as well as its introduction into global markets (10). But factors such as innovation and creativity in entrepreneurship lead to increased career success. A close attention to creativity in entrepreneurship clearly shows that entrepreneurship can be utilized for success in all fields. Also, since entrepreneurship requires a certain level of creativity and innovation, and entrepreneurs turn their creative ideas into reality through purposeful activities, entrepreneurial management can also be used in branding. In this way, with the help of an entrepreneurial manager, an innovator who identifies opportunities, mobilizes resources, and accepts business risks to launch a new product or service in the market with the aim of achieving success and profit, it is possible to attract creative forces in the field of fashion and clothing, as well as branding and employing innovation in fashion and clothing branding. This is because innovation means creating differentiation in the product or service, which leads to the recognition of the product, its development, and its introduction to global markets, subsequently increasing sales. It will also lead to the entry of the country's fashion and apparel industry and the dissemination of its culture to other countries (11).

Results

In the world, the fashion industry is recognized as an economic driving force. On the basis of various reports, this industry has created millions of jobs both directly and indirectly. According to official statistics, in 2022, the global fashion and apparel industry generated over \$1.5 trillion in revenue and directly employed more than 60 million people worldwide. These figures indicate the importance and special status of this industry in the global economy.

Despite global economic challenges, the fashion industry continues to demonstrate its resilience. For example, in 2022, despite the economic recession and rising inflation, this industry managed to come close to the economic profit record of 2021. Even in 2023, despite ongoing and deeper challenges, this industry managed to stay ahead of its long-term average. This industry is also a beneficial one for the workforce, and a large number of people are employed in all aspects of the fashion supply chain (12).

According to the report by the United States Joint Economic Committee, the fashion industry employs over 1.8 million people in the U.S. According to the Euratex report, more than 1.3 million people in Europe are employed in the fashion industry. This statistic is from 2019 and includes individuals who work in all aspects of the fashion industry, from design to production and retail (13).

Conclusion

Markedly, clothing production is one of the most popular fields for entrepreneurs. With a small investment and short-term training, a small but profitable business can be established. This work not only creates jobs but also provides a suitable opportunity for female heads of households to earn income and gain independence. Entrepreneurship in the clothing industry, in addition to its economic impact, also contributes to the improvement of the social status of the community. Furthermore, clothing production is a suitable solution for addressing social issues such as unemployment and poverty. By establishing small workshops, job opportunities and income generation can be provided, especially for women. This study, in addition to strengthening the foundation of families, helps in the growth of individuals' self-confidence and the utilization of their hidden talents. Entrepreneurship in this industry has high potential for creating positive changes in society and even entering global markets. The clothing industry is a great opportunity for entrepreneurs to start a profitable business with minimal investment. Training the workforce in this field is very quick and easy. In addition, clothing production has a high potential for job creation and improving the economic situation of the community, especially for female heads of households.

It is certainly true to say that the clothing industry is currently one of the most important and practical industries, which has been of interest to entrepreneurs since ancient times because clothing has been one of the essential needs of humanity since the beginning of creation. All its products, regardless of their level and quality, are usable, which has made the clothing industry one of the professions that has never faced the threat of bankruptcy. But currently, considering the diversity and products of manufacturers who lack the necessary dynamism and variety, they will face various risks. Currently, considering the advancement of technology and the increase of competitive fashion and clothing communities at both domestic and international levels, relying on innovation and entrepreneurship leads to increased innovation, enhancement of technology levels, job creation, production of technical knowledge, national production, and consequently, the increase of national wealth and economic growth of the society. Next earlier, entrepreneurship in the fashion and apparel industry is accompanied by a lot of charm and creativity. The diversity and profitability of this field have made entering this industry a priority for many entrepreneurs. In some cases, with minimal capital, there is the possibility of creating jobs and starting small businesses in this sector. In the field of clothing and fashion, one of the strengths of starting a business is beginning operations with minimal capital. Subsequently, collaboration with designers and utilizing preliminary equipment in the initial months of work can help advance your project. After that, equipment and workforce can be gradually increased with the rise in demand. To be more exact, entrepreneurs in the fashion and apparel industry usually operate in two ways. Some of them are owners of their own brands. Some entrepreneurs have also engaged in this field by investing in a company. These individuals focus on forming a team of trained personnel, creating value, and profitability. Innovation, which consists of selecting the right ideas and properly executing the process of transforming them into products, services, and processes to achieve profit and growth, is one of the fundamental means available for solving the world's problems. Most importantly, one of the characteristics that organizations and entrepreneurs need to survive in today's highly competitive era is being innovative. If an investor and entrepreneur want to increase their innovation capacity, a high level of creativity is required. Creativity is directly related to innovation and consequently leads to increased competition, job market, and entrepreneurship. In general, the integration of creativity with ideas and solutions leads to the creation of a new work that drives humanity and the fashion and clothing industry towards innovation. But creativity also requires creative thinking, and it will not be possible with a simple line of thought. To note more meticulously, the Bermuda Triangle of creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship can be considered as the driving forces of current global phenomena, with innovation being the main engine propelling these wheels of global entrepreneurship. Above and beyond, entrepreneurship is fundamental for economic and social success and prosperity, and the technological era has come to aid innovation in entrepreneurship. Thus, innovation and creativity in entrepreneurship are responses to the increasing expectations of customers, and innovation in entrepreneurship is the process of creating something new that holds significant value for individuals, organizations, industries, and society. An innovative entrepreneur does not wait for investment or job creation from others; rather, they identify opportunities themselves and, by utilizing idle capital and appropriately organizing and managing resources, implement their new ideas, playing an important role in production and productive employment.

To recapitulate, considering the high potential of the garment manufacturing industry for job creation through innovation and the use of new ideas, it is possible to not only increase work efficiency but also create new production lines in these jobs, which in turn will lead to entrepreneurship and employment, thereby solving many economic and social problems. In addition, by producing products that meet the needs of the foreign market and possess unique creativity and innovation, we will receive a warm welcome from foreign markets, leading to an increase in exports and foreign currency earnings.

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