

The Linkage Between Ethnicity and Opportunity Recognition: A Case Study of Micro-Women Entrepreneurs

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the opportunity recognition of micro-women entrepreneurs by investigating the linkages of opportunity recognition with ethnicity. This study focuses on the cultural theory and the theory of mixed embeddedness as two of the most frequently used theories in ethnic entrepreneurship literature. Micro-women business operators from three main ethnicities in Sri Lanka: Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim operating in a selected locality have been chosen as the participants of the study. The data were gathered through face-to-face in-depth interviews using a topic guide. The data were analyzed adopting three simultaneous stages: within-case analysis, cross-case analysis, and comparison of findings with the theory. The findings revealed five themes; support from family, social networking, culture, and geographical location that influence the micro-women business of different ethnicities to recognize business opportunities. Also, findings showed that there are several similarities and differences identified among ethnic micro women business operators when recognizing an opportunity. The findings further revealed that opportunities for women of one ethnicity are not opportunities for women of another ethnicity due to their ethnicity-related specific contextual factors.

Keywords: Ethnic Entrepreneurship, Micro-women entrepreneurship, Opportunity Recognition

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM, 2020), women are involved in a wide range of entrepreneurial activities worldwide that pay off in terms of job and wealth creation. Despite facing barriers like stereotyping (Ma et al., 2018; Neneh, 2019), having less access to finance (Marlow, 2020), and surviving work-family conflict (Wu et al., 2019), women still manage to contribute to economic advancements (Kelley et al., 2017). However, most of their businesses are recognized as “micro” scale. Kerr (2018) has stated that micro-business entrepreneurs primarily operate their businesses as a lifestyle business, and hence they have meager expectations for growth beyond a targeted income. Most micro businesses focus on keeping their businesses within a limit of control since the micro business operators are more concerned about survival rather than growth (Gray et al., 2019). Such perception may reflect why most women do not want to grow their businesses beyond the micro level.

According to Dheer (2019), entrepreneurs are people who engage in business activities and build (start), develop, and manage a business, risking time, effort, and money for this purpose. Sobel et al. (2010) study reveals that entrepreneurial activities are richer in cultures with higher ethnic diversity. In economies, diversified cultures will lead to innovation (Ozgen et al. 2012) and productivity (Trax et al., 2015). Also, it will provide an opportunity for a society to experience a richer mix of ideas (Sobel et al., 2010) and cognitions. However, the total entrepreneurial activity of female entrepreneurs does not follow the same pattern across regions (GEM, 2020). Also, in the past decades, most cities in the industrialized world have seen a vast influx of people from different sociocultural settings (Allen et al., 2012). Scholars such as Li et al. (2020), Teixeira et al. (2007), Kraal (2017); Spinuzzi (2017) have conducted studies on the integration of ethnic entrepreneurship initiatives in a formal urban economy which states that there could be a different set of opportunities and constraints experienced by women belong to different ethnicities.

This paper presents an exploratory study of the opportunity recognition of micro women entrepreneurs in a sample of Sri Lankan micro business operators who belong to different ethnicities, Sinhalese, and Tamil, Muslim in a selected location. This paper attempts to investigate the linkages of opportunity recognition with ethnicity

highlighting the study's implications for future directions in women's entrepreneurship research.

1.2 Problem Statement and the Objective of the Study

In general, any given society consists of diversified cultural groups. The nature of this diversification can be evaluated using the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, age, and socioeconomic status, which are called the 'visible factors' (Özmen & Karacaoğlu, 2019). And there are some other factors identified as 'invisible factors' such as creativity, beliefs, and taste which can also be used to evaluate diversification in any given context (Özmen & Karacaoğlu, 2019; Hernández-Pozas, 2019). These cultural, societal, and ethnic differences stimulate innovation (Brzozowski, 2019) since they attract multiple forms of human capital, and encourage cultural and artistic creativity, and technological and scientific innovation (Eraydin et al., 2010).

According to Sutter et al. (2019) and Shane & Venkataraman (2000), recognizing an opportunity is a fundamental part of the domain of entrepreneurship. Opportunity is an essential element of entrepreneurship. It is “a situation in which a person can exploit a new business idea that has the potential to generate profit” (Shane, 2003). Generally, an entrepreneurial opportunity may lead to the formation of new economic activities and new organizations and is key to a start-up's success or failure (Foss et al., 2013; McMullen and Dimov, 2013; Davidsson, 2015). They, along with many other scholars, including Cavallo et al. (2019), Teece (2017), and Bhuiyan & Ivlevs (2019), have argued that individuals must identify and perceive the right opportunity to be successful in their ventures. Once an opportunity is perceived, institutional entrepreneurship will require creativity, social networks, and previous experiences to create an impact on the chosen opportunity (Anheier, 2014) for entrepreneurship. People of different ethnicities will have differences when perceiving opportunities because they belong to different institutions and their effort to create an impact on the chosen opportunity could be different (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Alvarez & Barney, 2013). Li et al. (2015) have stated that despite one's intention to become an entrepreneur, not all individuals will realize the availability of an opportunity. Furthermore, it has been argued that micro-women entrepreneurs representing different ethnic backgrounds may identify opportunities differently due to their differences in sensitivity towards available opportunities (Liñán, 2007). Similarly, Panda (2018) and Dheer et al. (2019) have

argued that differences in opportunity recognition among different ethnicities exist. Scholars such as Li et al. (2020), Teixeira et al. (2007), Kraal (2017), and Spinuzzi (2017) have conducted studies on the integration of ethnic entrepreneurship initiatives in a formal urban economy which states that there could be a different set of opportunities and constraints experienced by women belong to different ethnicities. It will also be beneficial to explore whether the intersection of multiple inequalities among women representing different ethnicities provides opportunities for advancing entrepreneurship (Carter et al., 2015; Ram and Jones, 2008). Consequently, noticeable research gaps exist to understand how women business entrepreneurs of different ethnic backgrounds recognize business opportunities. Furthermore, if a such difference exists, it is essential to investigate the salient differences across ethnicities; Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the linkage between the ethnicity and opportunity recognition of micro women business operators in the selected geographical location of Sri Lanka.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Opportunity recognition

The term 'opportunity' can be defined as the 'means of generating an economic value' which is not been exploited previously (Boudreaux et al., 2019; Baron, 2008). What makes an entrepreneur different from a non-entrepreneur is the entrepreneur's ability to recognize and exploit an opportunity (Baron et al., 2006; Asante & Affum-Osei, 2019). According to Sutter et al. (2019) and Shane & Venkataraman (2000), recognizing an opportunity is a fundamental part of the domain of entrepreneurship. They, along with many other scholars, including Cavallo et al. (2019), Teece (2017), and Bhuiyan & Ivlevs (2019), have argued that individuals must identify and perceive the right opportunity to be successful in their venture formation. Once an opportunity is perceived, entrepreneurship activity will require creativity, social networks, and previous experiences to create an impact on the chosen opportunity (Anheier, 2014). Therefore, networks being inclusive or exclusive will depend on the social context where the business operates (Kraus et al., 2020). Also, according to Wang & Altinay (2012), the ability of an individual to recognize a business opportunity will depend on the inclusion/exclusion criteria being concerned. Ethnic women entrepreneurs use religion and culture to limit themselves from being exposed beyond a boundary

(Lamine, 2018). And how an individual may create an impact on the chosen opportunity may differ based on his/her ethnicity (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Alvarez & Barney, 2013). Li et al. (2015) have stated that despite one's intention to become an entrepreneur, not all individuals will realize the availability of an opportunity.

Mostly the theoretical interpretations of early entrepreneurship literature assume that all entrepreneurs exhibit similar traits and practices, but the recent entrepreneurship literature suggests that entrepreneurs with different cultural backgrounds may pursue entrepreneurship differently (Ahmad, 2007; Dana, 2015) similarly how they recognize opportunities may also differ from one ethnicity to another (Gupta et al., 2019). That is because any given society generally consists of diversified cultural groups. To support this claim, a recent study done by Panda (2018) explains the Islamic cultural perspectives on ethics and social responsibility and it also highlighted the effect of Islamic culture and religion on entrepreneurial practices, more specifically on recognizing opportunities. The study further shows how the nature of entrepreneurship changes in terms of innovativeness, and usage of resources (Halal, Haram practices) with the pressure from the Islamic perspective. Availability of resources is a key factor that influences entrepreneurship activity (Agrawal et al., 2020), however, what is perceived as a resource by an individual from one culture may not be viewed as a resource by an individual from another culture (Turkina & Thai, 2013).

2.2 Linkage between Ethnicity and opportunity recognition.

Scholars who have studied entrepreneurship have considered 'ethnicity' as a 'social construct' (Hartley, 2012). It has been argued in the entrepreneurship literature that business operators belonging to different ethnicities prefer to serve their ethnic groups (de Vries et al., 2020). That is because business operators from different ethnicities expose to new and scarce information available in their environment which gives them the benefit of recognizing business opportunities within a similar context (Spiegel, 2017) and being able to serve their co-ethnic groups who share similar needs and demands (Çaglar & Glick, 2018). In addition to that, being able to serve their ethnic group strengthens their social capital (Guercini et al., 2017) which can be recognized as a factor influencing ethnic entrepreneurship (Jamaludin et al., 2020). Also, there is evidence in the entrepreneurship literature that the ethnic communities who are less

reliant on their ethnic group seek support from other ethnic groups to ensure the survival of the venture (Barberis & Solano, 2018; Zubair & Brzozowski, 2018).

The nature of entrepreneurship seems to be influenced by the environment, previous experiences, education, and work experiences which affect the capacity of a business operator to recognize, manage and act on an opportunity (Cohen et al., 2019). Similarly, the role played by "ethnicity" in the entrepreneurship context is acknowledged (Spiegel, 2017). It is argued in the literature that entrepreneurial activities conducted by different 'ethnic' groups are different from each other due to the connections, patterns of communication, and migratory experiences (if they share) (Aldrich & Waldinger, 1990; Welter, 2011). Studies on ethnic entrepreneurs show that they seek opportunities to create their source of employment in response to a lack of employment opportunities (Stephens et al., 2021). When ethnic business operators are seeking opportunities, they mostly tend to be community focused because the literature suggests that entrepreneurial activities that are engaged by ethnic entrepreneurs mirror and progress community objectives (Gupta et al., 2019).

2.2.1 Opportunity Recognition and Ethnic micro-women Entrepreneurs

Opportunity recognition in micro women entrepreneurs representing different ethnicities has identified entrepreneurship as an event full of constraints. That is because the women who own micro firms usually face constraints due to gender inequality which ultimately will affect their venture creation (Panda, 2018). This means that a woman's choice to pursue entrepreneurship may or may not occur due to labor market restrictions or the glass ceiling career problems in general (Stephens et al., 2021). According to Maalaoui & Gaies (2020), women often perceive self-employment as a survival strategy and as a method for unifying multiple roles (Kaya, 2019).

Women usually have a different set of career satisfiers compared to men (Welsh et al., 2021) where women prefer to seek entrepreneurship opportunities through social relationships even if it is a challenging task (Panda, 2018). According to Kodithuwakku & Perera (2003), family support and networking are recognized as two factors contributing to success in entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurship action leads to recognizing an opportunity spinning around factors like cognition and the entrepreneurship process (Ahmed et al., 2020). Which makes the need to ask the

question, why do some people and others discover opportunities? (Sutter & Bruton, 2019). Wood & McKinley (2020) has developed a strategy to help answer the above questions. According to Wood & McKinley (2020), an entrepreneur's action toward recognizing an opportunity can be either a discovery or a creation. Similarly, in each context, women may pursue opportunities or may overcome challenges despite the constraints available, yet it could be distinctly different from one ethnicity to another. Entrepreneurship literature explains the nature of the actor (in this case the micro woman entrepreneur) to be an important determinant in opportunity identification. This leads to the argument, that ethnicity may influence opportunity identification, whether it be a discovery or a creation (Foss & Klein, 2017).

Some literature can be found investigating African American micro women and their lack of access to finance and how it has negatively affected them to recognize opportunities (Imani et al., 2020), and similar investigations have been done on Hispanic women (Cho et al., 2019). Both African American and Hispanic women who have become micro-entrepreneurs or have the potential to become one has severely affected by the double disadvantage to seek finance. These financial constraints have affected the start-ups of business ventures, especially those women who are pulled into self-employment (Pietila et al., 2021). Women from different ethnicities have reported that they were discouraged from banks and other financial institutions when obtaining services that provide strong evidence of bootstrapping among ethnic women which negatively influences opportunity recognition (Cho et al., 2019).

Recent literature suggests that micro-women entrepreneurs representing different cultural backgrounds engage in entrepreneurial activities differently, particularly when recognizing opportunities (Schaltegger et al., 2018). Cultural attitudes may influence entrepreneurial practices due to different perspectives that different cultures hold. For example, Agarwal et al. (2020) state the effect of Islamic culture on entrepreneurial practices. Also, what is perceived as a resource by a micro woman in one culture may not perceive as a resource by a woman from another culture. Ramadani et al. (2019) further argue that what an opportunity is for a woman from one ethnicity may not be the same as someone else from a different ethnicity.

This is explained by cultural theory and mixed embeddedness theory, which are widely used theories in opportunity recognition in ethnic entrepreneurship literature (Poggesi et al., 2020).

Most importantly, micro-women business operators tend to recognize opportunities within their community niche market (Wang & Altinay, 2012) that they access through social ties or close groups, which creates cultural proximity (Dhingra, 2007). Community-based niche markets created through social ties may provide opportunities embedded in a set of social relations (Al-Dajani et al., 2015). And an individual's ability to perceive those opportunities may depend on the level of to what extent an individual integrates social relations (Lassalle & McElwee, 2016) and her ethnicity. The theory of mixed embeddedness explains how micro women from different ethnicities operate in a constrained environment in terms of social, economic, and institutional factors. The theory of mixed embeddedness suggests that micro-woman business operators respond to local situational conditions available in the respective environment, and they can be different from one ethnicity to another (Ghouse et al., 2017).

Foss & Klein (2020) states in their article that entrepreneurial opportunities are situations where ethnic goods, services, and markets can be introduced and popularized among co-ethnic groups. A potential business operator may find this as an opportunity because the right location will get him/her business opportunities to exploit. A social learning process theory by Wenger (1998) proposed that a person must actively involve in the practicing communities and constructing his/her identity at the same time. This involvement will shape what they do, who they are, and how they interpret what they do in the communities and further help identify opportunities. Also, it connects individuals with their social context as they develop their entrepreneurial identity and capability through his/her living environment (Rae, 2017). According to Parkinson & Howorth (2008), the geographical location where the business operates is extremely important to an entrepreneur in general when identifying opportunities. When considering ethnic women, the availability of resources and availability of cheap labor (sometimes co-ethnic) are considered some of the main reasons for them to choose a particular geographical location (Perrini & Vurro, 2010) for their venture formation. The choice of the geographical location for the business venture may change the opportunity structure since the different locations will contribute to social capital differently (Ram & Villares-Varela, 2017). Therefore, ethnic women business operators

would have recognized opportunities in the location of their business operations. (Audretsch et al., 2021).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative approach is adopted in this study since it enables the researcher to capture the contextual variables relevant to the phenomenon under investigation and more real-world experiences (Eisenhardt, 2020). Furthermore, a multiple embedded case study (Yin, 2017; Barnes, 2017) design was used since it offered the opportunity to explore the cases in-depth in their given contexts.

3.2 Selection of the study site

This study was carried out in a chosen location of the Kandy district, where a rich ethnic diversity and women-formed and led micro-enterprises are widely available.

The three major ethnic groups in the country; Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims have widely spread in the Kandy district. Accordingly, Egoda Kalugammuwa Grama Niladhari Division, in Kandy District was chosen as the geographical site for this study, as it appeared to contain a diversity of ethnic micro women business operators. The study site is spread over 0.728 km² with a total population of 3,681 of which the male population represents 48.1% and females represent 51.9% of the total population.

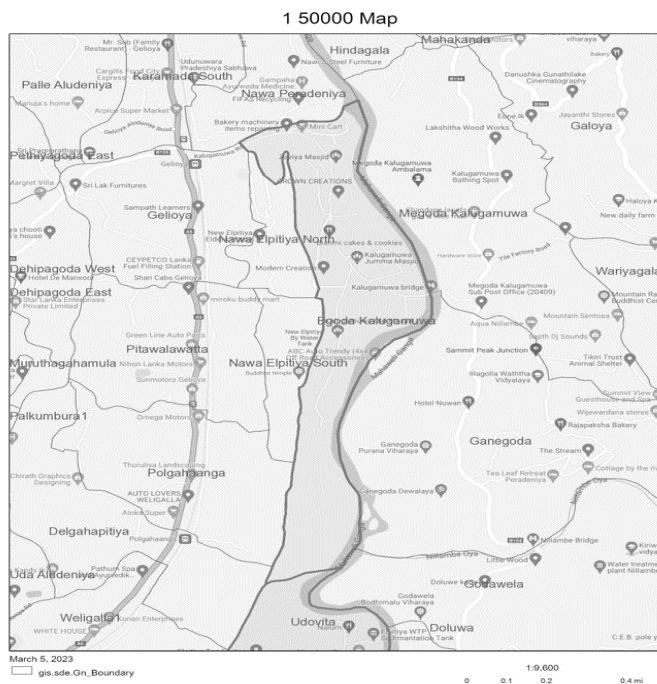


Figure SEQ Figure 1* ARABIC 1: Map of Egoda Kalugammuwa Grama Niladhari Division by the Survey department of Sri Lanka,

Population by ethnic group represents 65% of Muslims, 23% of Tamils, and 12% of Sinhalese in the selected study site.

3.3 Population and Sample

The population of this study is the micro women entrepreneurs from three main ethnicities of Sri Lanka: Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim¹, who are residing in

the study site. Gherhes et al. (2018) defined the size of a micro business as a business having 0 to 9 employees, which was originally defined in an OECD report in 2005. This study used the same definition for recognizing micro businesses in the selected location. Most of the businesses carried out by both men and women in this location are micro businesses. In this study, 12 respondents were selected as the study sample from the selected geographical location. Firstly, the respondents were chosen using the snowball method through the key informants. It allows researchers to access receptive populations (Santoro et al., 2021). The sample was selected based on the recommendations of previous respondents. The sample consists of the micro-women from Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim ethnicities. 12 micro-women business operators were selected to check the research instrument.

¹ The population proximity according to the Department of Census and Statistics is as follows. The Sinhalese make up 74.9% of the majority of the population (2017/2018 census) and are concentrated in the densely populated southwest and central parts of the island. Another ethnic population is Sri Lanka Tamils, who live predominantly in the north and east of the island and form the largest non-majority ethnic group at 11.1% (2017/2018 census) of the population. Muslims, descendants of Arab traders that settled in Sri Lanka form the third largest ethnic group at 9.3% of the population. They are mostly concentrated in urban areas in the southern parts of the island with substantial populations in the Central and Eastern provinces. There are also Indian Tamils who form a distinct ethnic group comprising 4.1% of the population.

3.4 Method of Data Collection

Data were collected using in-depth interviews aided by a topic guide which were supplemented by other data sources such as direct observation, and field notes for data triangulation.

3.5 Data Analysis

The thematic approach is used as the analysis method in this study since it is a method to comprehend behaviors, and experiences across a data set by analyzing repeated patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Adopting a thematic approach helps the researcher to extract knowledge from micro-women entrepreneurs from different ethnicities and to identify patterns and to extract a common or shared meaning (Herber & Barroso, 2020). The data analysis process included three phases: within-case analysis, cross-case analysis, and matching the emerging patterns with theory. This is done to improve the validity of the data retrieved (Rashid et al., 2019). At first, the themes were identified and afterward, the patterns were matched. The within-case analysis allows the researcher to identify emerging patterns formed by an individual's case, and a cross-case analysis will help the researcher to identify the emerging similarities and differences across cases subject to the pattern-matching technique (Yin, 2017). Differences that emerged from the analysis were used as directions for new research implications.

Each notable response that occurred in an interview was given a separate code during the note-taking stage. Later, similar codes were combined for further analysis. Finally, the frequency of common responses that occurred in interviews was categorized into themes. The themes identified are explained in Table 2. Also, the different patterns that emerged based on each theme are illustrated in Tables 3-6.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Profiles of the study sample

The profile of the ethnic micro women business operators in the qualitative study sample is listed in the tables below. The common types of micro-businesses engaged by women from different ethnicities observed were food processing, needlework, and poultry farming. (See Table 1).

Table 1: Profile of the study sample.

	Case 1 Sinhalese	Case 2 Sinhalese	Case 3 Sinhalese	Case 4 Sinhalese	Case 5 Tamil	Case 6 Tamil	Case 7 Tamil	Case 8 Tamil	Case 9 Muslim	Case 10 Muslim	Case 11 Muslim	Case 12 Muslim
Code assigned	S1	S2	S3	S4	T1	T2	T3	T4	M1	M2	M3	M4
Type of the business	Food processing	Tailoring/ Needlework	Poultry farming	Boutique shop	Food processing	Wholesale Retail Business	Boutique shop	Food processing (snacks)	Food processing	poultry farming	Needlework	Needlework
Age	40	55	62	57	38	41	45	33	36	45	38	26
Education	A/L	A/L	Grade 10	A/L	O/L	A/L	O/L	Grade 7	O/L	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 10
Duration (yr) of the business	7	12	5	15	21	15	12	10	20	10	15	5

4.2 Pattern Identification

There were some common themes identified which will be presented in the forthcoming discussion to make the reader understand the study context.

The following table explains the 5 themes identified from the data set (Table 2).

Table 2: Themes identified from the data set.

Theme 1: Support from family influencing opportunity recognition	This theme describes how participants find the support from immediate/extend family as an influence to recognize an opportunity to start a business. Also, how women were able to balance their role in the family while running a business was considered.
Theme 2: Networking influencing opportunity recognition	This theme describes how participants manage the availability of human capital around them and how do they influence participants to recognize an opportunity.
Theme 3: Culture influencing opportunity recognition	This theme describes how culture influenced the type of business they started or the products that they sell.
Theme 4: Geographical location influencing opportunity recognition	This theme describes how does the geographical location of the business influences the opportunity recognition.

4.2.1 ‘Support from Family’ influencing opportunity recognition.

Respondents described how an emphasis on entrepreneurship practices often existed, which had been passed on to them through their parents acting as role models. For example, the study shows that most Sinhalese micro women rely on their families to learn and share the experience with those who run businesses in the family (see Table 3). Almost all the women from Sinhalese backgrounds believed that their family members provide first-hand entrepreneurial knowledge to them. Dhingra (2007) shows that entrepreneurs will reach out to a limited number of close groups to discuss their issues in venture formation. This is also discussed in Stephens et al. (2021)'s study that it is beneficial for entrepreneurs with a lack of experience to rely on entrepreneurs with more experience like theirs' which ultimately affect the growth of their business (Barberis & Solano, 2018; Alajani et al., 2015) and creativity (Spiegel, 2017). This behavior also describes in the social learning theory (Cohen et al., 2019) explaining why people recognize others who have more experience or maturity in business than them as “role models”. Table 3 shows the frequency of the theme ‘support from family influencing opportunity recognition’ and how it varies within and across cases.

Table 3: Support from family influencing opportunity recognition.

Case	S1	S2	S3	S4	T1	T2	T3	T4	M1	M2	M3	M4
Theme frequency	5	4	4	4	3	4	5	3	1	5	2	1

4.2.2 ‘Networking’ influencing opportunity recognition.

It is observed among Tamil entrepreneurs that their culture has imposed limits on them being exposed beyond their family; they did not consider their social network other than the family to play an important role when recognizing opportunities. Also, a similar nature was observed among the Muslim respondents. As Table 4 shows below the theme frequency are lesser among the Muslim respondents. Some of the Muslim respondents mentioned ‘networking’ is irrelevant when recognizing opportunities. Sinhalese respondents used their existing networks to form new networks to recognize opportunities. Table 4 shows the frequency of the theme ‘networking influencing opportunity recognition’ and how it varies within and across cases. One of the important findings is the difference in male and female composition available in networks across ethnicities. The nature of the networks among the Sinhalese and Tamil business operators are similar in one of the ways since their networks comprise both men and women. Sinhalese and Tamil business operators have formed networks with people from their own and other ethnicities since they believe that it gives a positive effect on opportunities. They mostly form networks through extended family and relatives and friends of the extended family. Tamil business operators stated that they often form networks through their customers. Their network is tightly knit around other Muslim women business operators from the same geographic location. Muslim women business operators’ network is comparatively narrow, and they network with other women business operators from the same ethnicity to share their experiences and their knowledge of the product and market, as well as to provide suggestions to handle customer-related issues. This finding is consistent with Kraus et al. (2020) who suggest that the social context will influence a network being inclusive or exclusive.

Table 4: Networking influencing opportunity recognition.

Case	S1	S2	S3	S4	T1	T2	T3	T4	M1	M2	M3	M4
Theme frequency	5	4	4	4	3	4	5	3	1	5	2	1

4.2.3 ‘Culture’ influencing opportunity recognition.

Muslim respondents believe that the nature of their business should symbolize their cultural roots. Also, another finding from this study revealed that opportunities for Muslim women are mostly triggered by cultural values (see Table 5). The Sinhalese women didn't consider the 'culture' influencing their business opportunities, instead, they wanted to expand their businesses to customers from other ethnic groups. A similar pattern was identified among both Muslim and Tamil respondents about how much the culture has influenced their business decisions. This is described in the Cultural theory (Poggesi et al., 2020), which explains that inter-group trust has become the foundation of ethnicity-based social construct. Strong ties ethnic women have with their ethnic communities show the social and cultural linkages consistent with mixed embeddedness (Dhingra, 2007). Both Muslim and Tamil business operators use their cultural heritage to recognize opportunities and innovate entrepreneurial solutions. The types of businesses both Muslim and Tamil women have formed symbolize their respective cultures immensely. For example, Muslim women are trying to form Home

Table 5: Culture influencing opportunity recognition.

Case	S1	S2	S3	S4	T1	T2	T3	T4	M1	M2	M3	M4
Theme frequency	2	1	1	0	5	2	3	1	5	1	4	4

based Halal Businesses which shows their determination to comply with the Islamic culture (Panda, 2018).

4.2.4 ‘Geographical location’ influencing opportunity recognition.

Ethnic minority is the result of social interaction between people of different cultural groups and the realization by both the host population and the minority group that there

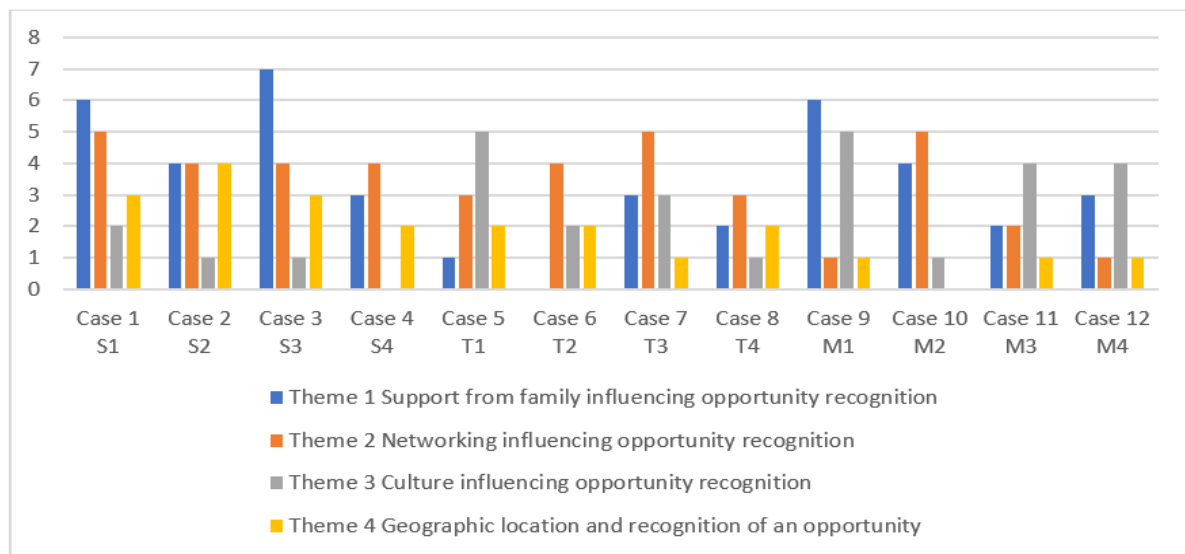
is a difference between the two groups in culture and behavior (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2019). Groups delimited by race were assumed to have developed their social forms in relative isolation as a response to such geographical influences as density, mobility, resource availability, and environmental conditions (Carse & Kneas, 2019). It was found that the Muslim micro-entrepreneurs compared to the women from other ethnicities believe that the location of their business could provide opportunities because the location influences the availability of co-ethnic labor (see Table 6). Also, some other respondents representing Tamil and Muslim ethnicities whose businesses had been operating for a longer period, or whose businesses had become successful relatively quickly, stressed how they were not reliant on customers either from similar ethnic backgrounds or from their geographic location. This confirms the argument made by Parkinson & Howorth (2008); the contribution of social capital and ethnic family settlement enhances the process of opportunity recognition (Ram & Villares-Varela, 2017) which is explained in the mixed embeddedness theory. Sinhalese Further, it was found that institutional factor like geographical location is an important element that ensures competitive advantages, and it influences the productivity of a business (Audretsch et al., 2021). Table 6 shows how the theme ‘geographical location influencing opportunity recognition’ and how varies within and across cases.

Table 6: Geographical location influencing opportunity recognition.

Case	S1	S2	S3	S4	T1	T2	T3	T4	M1	M2	M3	M4
Theme frequency	3	4	3	2	2	2	1	2	1	0	1	1

A summary of all four themes and how the theme frequency varies across and within cases is given in the chart below (see Figure 2). The nature of each case regarding all the themes can be studied in the following chart.

Figure 2: Comparison of patterns (pattern matching) emerged from the cross-case analysis.



4. CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative case study investigation involved 12 women micro-business operators representing three different ethnicities from a selected geographic location in Kandy, Sri Lanka. The purpose was to examine the linkage between the ethnicity and opportunity recognition of micro women business operators in the selected geographical location.

Interestingly, Sinhalese micro-women business operators had recognized that the geographical location of the business would influence opportunity recognition. However, Muslim and Tamil business operators have opposite views. They only see the location of the business as a source of co-ethnic labor. Geographical location has provided Muslim women business operators access to co-ethnic labor, strengthening their social capital. Accordingly, trust between the micro business operator and their co-ethnic labor can be developed (Stam, 2015) which further influenced sharing of market-related information and other information related to business opportunities, enabling them to recognize opportunities.

Microbusiness operators of some ethnicities who had been operating their businesses for a longer duration compared to others have chosen to develop strong networks with the local communities. This study revealed that entrepreneurship activity by micro business operators from different ethnic groups is not just about producing a local living but also about adding to the local community by growing their network. Sinhalese and

Tamil business operators recognized the importance of being part of networks in which business-related information can be easily shared which leads to opportunities. Ethnicities, where Sinhalese and Tamil business operators showed a higher mixed-gender composition in their networks, but Muslim business operators had only women in their networks, and they also had the intention of adding only women in future networks as well. This finding builds on existing evidence of cultural influence on network formation for opportunity recognition which is different from one ethnicity to another.

Support from family is crucial for women's success in their entrepreneurship activities. Muslim women entrepreneurs often have limited family support compared to Sinhalese and Tamil women, and this can place more restrictions on their role as business operators which limited the family's influence on opportunity recognition when it comes to Muslim women. It's important to consider how a specific entrepreneurial context differs from one ethnicity to another that may cultivate different family relationships leading to recognition or non-recognition of business opportunities among different ethnicities. These results should be considered when developing action plans to encourage female entrepreneurial activity as a means of fostering economic and social development in Sri Lanka.

This study proved that micro women entrepreneurs across different ethnicities mostly experience similar benefits in each context, for example, availability of resources, and reaching a steady customer base. Also, while a woman from one ethnicity identifies an opportunity, other women from different ethnicities have failed to identify it. Therefore, even though the opportunities are presented in the environment, some of the micro-women entrepreneurs from different ethnicities did not perceive them due to their socio-cultural differences. Therefore, it can be concluded that there's a strong linkage between ethnicity and opportunity recognition in the context of micro-women entrepreneurs and the need to consider such contextual differences when formulating policies for the micro-women entrepreneurship development of different ethnicities.

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