

Nuanced Gender Perceptions and Tourism Business Capabilities in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa: The Role of Marketing Capability in Business Performance

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Abstract: Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries, which offers possibilities for business development and expansion. Many entrepreneurs have concentrated on tourism as a lucrative sector that can generate revenue for any nation. According to earlier studies, the number of women entrepreneurs is increasing, however, many of them struggle to maintain their businesses compared to their male counterparts. With a focus on marketing capabilities and managerial capabilities, this study aims to investigate gender nuances in the performance of tourism-related enterprises in KwaZulu-Natal's Durban Central Business District. This study used questionnaire survey, a quantitative research method to collect data from 150 tourism-related business owners and managers in Durban Central Business District, KwaZulu-Natal using purposive sampling method. The participants were those who have specific knowledge in tourism-related business operations (managers and owners) and are willing to participate. Data was analysed using IBM's SPSS version 25 software. Descriptive (frequency, mean), bivariate (Spearman's Rank Correlation (two-tailed) test, Pearson's Chi-Square test, Mann-Whitney U test) and multivariate (Reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha) data analyses were applied in this study. There are no significant differences in the responses of male and female participants in this study with respect to "managerial and operational capabilities," "marketing capability," and "general entrepreneurial statements." This study did not make a conclusive finding that gender plays a strong role in differentiating business success or performance. However, marketing capability is the main factor that influence the business performance or success level. Based on this study results, authors recommend that entrepreneurial training and mentorship programmes should emphasise that formal education, marketing capability and other factors (but not gender) support business success.

Keywords: Marketing Capability, Business Capability, Gender Nuances, Business Operations, Sub-Saharan Africa

1. Introduction

Durban, the commercial hub of KwaZulu-Natal, plays a key role in South Africa's tourism economy. Tourism's contribution to the provincial GDP grew from R9 billion in 2014 to over R10 billion by 2018 (Tourism KwaZulu-Natal, 2019). The province is renowned for its heritage, culture, warm weather, beaches, and natural attractions, drawing both domestic and international tourists (Ezeuduji & Nkosi, 2017). Tourism-related entrepreneurship is essential to support growing visitor demand and benefit local communities. Like many developing countries, South Africa acknowledges entrepreneurship as a driver of economic growth (Business Environment Specialist, 2013), with tourism identified as a priority sector (Tshabalala & Ezeuduji, 2016). However, entrepreneurial activity remains relatively low in South Africa (Iwu et al., 2016).

Gender mainstreaming is increasingly becoming central to entrepreneurship studies, promoting a wholistic approach that values gender diversity and seeks to achieve equality (Shepard, 2015). Economic development is unattainable without women's active participation (Sarfaraz et al., 2014), yet their involvement in South Africa's tourism sector remains limited. Women often occupy low-level positions with few opportunities for career advancement (Tshabalala & Ezeuduji, 2016), leaving them at the margins of economic growth. Female-owned businesses also face higher closure rates and lower profitability than male-owned enterprises (Marlow & McAdam, 2013). Challenges include unfavourable societal perceptions, limited finance, weak managerial skills, and poor networks (Tshabalala & Ezeuduji, 2016). Across the SADC region, men dominate tourism management (Nyaruwata & Nyaruwata, 2013; GEM, 2012). Global efforts to empower women increasingly promote entrepreneurship, particularly in tourism, which has strong growth potential (Kimbu et al., 2019; Mkhize & Cele, 2017).

Much gender-based entrepreneurship studies (such as Kimbu et al., 2019; Kokotović et al., 2016; Mkhize & Cele, 2017; Sarfaraz et al., 2014; Todorović et al., 2016; Tshabalala & Ezeuduji, 2016; Vossenbergh, 2013; Witbooi & Ukpere, 2011) focussed on women entrepreneurship as a driver of gender equality, poverty reduction, and social development. They did not specifically explore gender-induced differences or perceptions, especially from the African perspective. This study therefore explored nuanced gender perceptions on the influences that business

capabilities may have on tourism-related business operations; and also sought if gender identity drives business performance, using the case of Durban Central Business District, in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

2. Overview of Literature

Managerial skills are a key resource for developing managerial capabilities (Wessels et al., 2017) and refer to the knowledge and ability to perform managerial tasks (Maurya & Sharma, 2017). These capabilities drive organisational success through effective coordination of human, tangible, and intangible resources (Seyedinejat et al., 2014). Research highlights notable gender differences in leadership styles. Female entrepreneurs often adopt a transformational approach, focusing on team development, empowerment, and collaboration (Guillet et al., 2019a). In contrast, male entrepreneurs tend to use more assertive and power-based approaches. Communication approaches also differs: men are more likely to rely on positional power, while women emphasise cooperation and team belonging (Sudarmanti et al., 2013). Women's leadership often emphasises work satisfaction, relationship building, and interactive management. Women-entrepreneurs are viewed as better listeners, more practical, and skilled at creating supportive and flexible work environments (Vázquez-Carrasco et al., 2011; Sudarmanti et al., 2013). They also display stronger social and human relation skills, empathy, and perseverance (Manzanera-Román & Brändle, 2016; Guillet et al., 2019b), which can enhance entrepreneurial success. However, women often face constraints related to lower levels of technical and managerial experience, which can limit their operations to smaller and informal enterprises (Sudarmanti et al., 2013).

Researchers highlight a strong positive link between marketing capabilities and business performance (Kimosop et al., 2016). Effective marketing enables entrepreneurs to grasp available opportunities, enhance competitiveness, and attract customers (Yadav, 2018). Poor marketing strategies remain a challenge for many women-owned tourism businesses, with dispersed craft dealers lacking signage and industry connections, making it difficult to reach customers (Tshabalala & Ezeuduji, 2016). Women entrepreneurs often rely on face-to-face communication (Jiyane, 2014) and word-of-mouth promotion (Tshabalala & Ezeuduji, 2016), which limits their market reach.

The growth of information and communication technologies has transformed tourism marketing. Internet tools such as social media, blogs, and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) enable organisations to share information and engage with customers. A strong online presence is now a key business asset (Chetty, 2015). Tourism businesses can use platforms like TripAdvisor, Tripcast, social media, and HearPlanet to promote offerings and gain insights from visitor reviews, helping them better understand their target market (Jovicic, 2019; Gidarakou, 2015). Although women are often viewed as adept social media users, they remain less involved in technology adoption for business, showing lower confidence and participation compared to men (Orser & Riding, 2018). This limits their access to technology-driven markets (Witbooi & Ukpere, 2011).

3. Research Design and Methods

This study examines gender differences among tourism entrepreneurs in business operations and their effect on performance, focusing on traditional societal perceptions and access to financial capital. A questionnaire survey was used to collect data. Structured questionnaires were distributed through purposive sampling, targeting tourism business owners and managers with relevant knowledge and willingness to participate (Nardi, 2018). A total of 150 respondents (75 male and 75 female) from tourism establishments in Durban CBD, eThekweni Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal, were surveyed. This approach enabled a fair comparison between male and female entrepreneurs regarding managerial, operational, and marketing capabilities.

The aim of this study is to find out if are there gender differences shown by tourism entrepreneurs in running their businesses, which may affect business performance. Focusing on traditional societal perceptions and access to financial capital. The nature of this study required a questionnaire survey to address the objectives of this study. Structured questionnaires were distributed using non-probability purposive sampling. We selected those who have precise knowledge (tourism-related business owners and managers) in tourism entrepreneurship also willing to participate (Nardi, 2018). We surveyed 150 respondents (75 male and 75 female entrepreneurs) in their tourism establishments in Durban Central Business District under EtheKwini Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. We carefully distributed the questionnaire to create a fair comparison between the characteristics of female entrepreneurs and male entrepreneurs; and how they respond to the business performance factors: "managerial and operational capabilities" and "marketing capability"

Collected data were analysed using IBM’s Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 25. We employed descriptive statistics, bivariate analyses and multivariate analysis. The data analysis showed non-normal population distributions of the ordinal variables used in assessing business operation statements (perceptions); hence this study employed Mann-Whitney U tests by comparing means of responses from two independent groups (demographic variables) to check if these are significantly different from one another. We compared business operation statements with respondents’ demographic variables. We employed Spearman’s correlation (two-tailed) test to checked for relationships between ranked or ordinal variables, to find out if there are negative or positive correlations between the variables, which for this study is between business operations statements and perceived business success classification. We conducted Mann-Whitney U tests based on the prescribed criteria that the dependent variables have ordinal scale, the independent variables have only two groups, and normality of distribution and homogeneity of variance did not prove true in a t-test. Pearson’s Chi Square test was used to check for relationships between categorical/nominal data, where some previous variables measured in an ordinal scale were recoded to support this analysis. Respondents’ profiles were compared with business start-up motivation and perception of entrepreneurial success.

Multivariate analysis (reliability tests) was employed by this study to check for the level of internal consistencies of variables used to describe factors influencing business operations (traditional societal perceptions, access to financial capital. Researchers suggest that a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of between 0.5 and 0.7 is acceptable in social science research, to denote adequate consistency of variables used in measuring a factor or dimension (Chawla & Sondhi, 2011). Nonetheless, Tavakol and Dennick (2011) posit that a low Cronbach’s alpha score may occur if there is a weak interrelationship between the variables used in the analysis, or if few variables are being used to depict a particular dimension or factor. From the reliability tests conducted on the three business operation dimensions: ‘managerial and operational capabilities’ and ‘marketing capability’; dimensions achieved above 0.6 Cronbach Alpha coefficient, hence this study finds the variables contained in these dimensions, internally consistent or related, to measure each of the dimensions

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Respondent’s Profile

The results in Table 1 show that respondents in this study are mostly South Africans (about 89%) and majority (about 61%) of the respondents had business experience of not more than six years.

Table 1: Respondents’ profile (N=150)

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
South African	Yes	88.7
	No	11.3
Gender	Male	50
	Female	50
Ethnic group	Black	52.7
	White	18.0
	Indian	22.0
	Coloured	7.3
Age group	Less than 40 years	61.3
	40 years and above	38.7
Business owner	Yes	63.3
	No	36.7
Business manager	Yes	58.7
	No	41.3
Motivation to start tourism business	Took opportunity	54.4
	Means of survival	45.6
Level of Education	Up to Secondary School (Matric)	44.0

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
	Tertiary Education	56.0
Type of Business	Accommodation	16.0
	Food and Beverage	26.7
	Events Management	10.0
	Tour Operation	3.3
	Travel Agency	4.7
	Tour Guide	2.7
	Car Rentals	7.3
	Resorts	2.0
	Consultancy	2.7
	Souvenir Shop	24.7
Number of years in business	Up to 6 years	60.7
	7years and above	39.3
Self-classification as an entrepreneur	Very successful	13.4
	Successful	43.6
	Surviving	32.2
	Struggling	9.4
	Unsuccessful	1.4

Results further show that entrepreneurs’ motivation to start a tourism business to take an opportunity is somewhat higher (about 54%) compared to the motivation of starting a business as means of survival (about 46%). Mersha and Sriram (2019) posit that in most African countries, entrepreneurs are pushed into business by socio-economic factors (such as unemployment). This study however found that majority of respondents started businesses based on available opportunity. The level of education was also highlighted as an important factor in business operation (Ramadani, 2015). The results of this study show that 56% of respondents have tertiary education. Majority of the respondents (57%) perceived themselves as successful in their businesses, as about 44% perceived themselves as successful and about 13% as very successful.

4.2 Business Operation Statements

Respondents were asked to show their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements used to measure ‘managerial and operational capabilities’, ‘marketing capability’. Previous study (Mersha & Sriram, 2019) posits that entrepreneurs in Africa lack business management skills as they are likely to be pushed into business by socio-economic challenges. Results in Table 2 contradict this statement and show that 92% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: ‘I have skills and experience in running a tourism business’. The results indicate that the majority of managers and owners of tourism businesses have skills and experience to run a tourism business. Ezeuduji, Deen and Nzama, 2025; Nzama & Ezeuduji, 2021 supports these results.

Table 2: Business operation statements (%)

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2.1 Managerial and Operational Capabilities					
I have skills and experience in running a tourism business	35.3	56.7	4.7	3.3	0.0
I give my employees the opportunity to come up with ideas or decisions in running the business	23.3	51.3	18.7	6.7	0.0
Male business managers are more capable than female business managers	8.7	8.7	13.3	54.0	15.3
Male business managers are better managers than female business managers	7.3	11.3	12.0	52.0	17.3

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I send/arrange workshops for the staff members to receive training.	30.7	41.3	14.0	12.0	2.0
<i>Reliability statistics (Managerial and Operational Capabilities): Cronbach's Alpha = .664, N of items = 5, Valid cases = 150 (100%), Excluded cases = 0 (0.0%), Total =150</i>					
2.2 Marketing Capability					
I use Internet to market my business	42.0	32.7	8.0	14.0	3.3
I rely on different sources of media to get my business known.	30.7	43.3	5.3	20.0	0.7
I do research to find out the new market trends	36.7	41.3	6.0	16.0	0.0
I know very well how to offer my products and deliver services to meet customer need (Product)	36.7	51.3	8.0	4.0	0.0
I use different promotion techniques to sell my products and services (Promotion)	41.3	38.7	2.7	17.3	0.0
<i>Reliability statistics (Marketing Capability): Cronbach's Alpha = .875, N of items = 5, Valid cases = 150 (100%), Excluded cases = 0 (0.0%), Total =150</i>					

The results in this study show that respondents mostly agreed to a set of variables used in measuring 'marketing capabilities'. Majority of respondents in this study showed that they endeavour to keep up with the market trends, as 78% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: 'I do research to find out the new market trends'. The statements concerning the marketing-mix strategy (of product and promotion) also receive high levels of agreement. 88% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: 'I know very well how to offer my products and deliver services to meet customer need (Product)'. Also, 80% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: 'I use different promotion techniques to sell my products and services (Promotion)'.

4.3 Perception of Entrepreneurial Success Level Versus Business Operation Statements

Spearman's Rank Correlation test was used to test for relationships between respondents' responses to 'perception of entrepreneurial success level' and 'business operation statements'. Based on the results in Table 3, it is evident that there is no reported correlation between gender nuanced business operation variables and perceived business success level. The variables identified to have positive correlations with perceived business success are mostly found within the dimension of 'marketing capability'. This shows that marketing capability is pivotal to business success, as all the variables within this dimension have mostly very strong positive correlation with business success. Results in this study support the findings of other authors (such as Kimosop et al., 2016) who report that there is a positive relationship between marketing capabilities and business performance.

Table 3: Correlating perception of entrepreneurial success level versus business operation statements

Statements ^a	Correlated With Perception of Entrepreneurial Success Level ^b
3.1 Managerial and Operational Capabilities	
I have skills and experience in running a tourism business	N.S
I give my employees the opportunity to come up with ideas or decisions in running the business	N.S
Male business managers are more capable than female business managers	N.S
Male business managers are better managers than female business managers	N.S
I send/arrange workshops for the staff members to receive training.	**
3.2 Marketing Capability	
I use Internet to market my business	**
I rely on different sources of media to get my business known.	**
I do research to find out the new market trends	**

Statements ^a	Correlated With Perception of Entrepreneurial Success Level ^b
I know very well how to offer my products and deliver services to meet customer need (Product)	*
I use different promotion techniques to sell my products and services (Promotion)	**

^aQuestionnaire were itemised along a 5-point Likert-type scale (business operation statements): 1, Strongly agree; 2, Agree; 3, Neutral; 4, Disagree; 5, Strongly disagree.

Questionnaire were itemised along a 5-point Likert-type scale (perceptions of entrepreneurial success level): 1, Very successful; 2, Successful; 3, Surviving; 4, Struggling; 5, Unsuccessful.

^bSpearman’s Rank correlation (two-tailed) test significance: **, $p < 0.01$; N.S., no significant results

4.4 Comparing Gender Identity With Business Operation Statements

The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with business operations’ variables; their responses were then compared with respondents’ gender. This study employed Mann-Whitney U test to check if there are significant relationships between gender identity and the business operations variables. Results in Table 4 show that male entrepreneurs showed stronger managerial capabilities than female entrepreneurs, regarding the statements: ‘I give my employees the opportunity to come up with ideas or decisions in running the business’, and ‘I send/arrange workshops for the staff members to receive training’. These results contradict some of the previous findings (Guillet et al., 2019) that women are more transformational business leaders than men. Therefore, from the findings of this study, compared to previous findings, transformational leadership can be argued not to be gender specific.

The results in Table 4 indicate that there is no significant difference between male and female mean scores regarding their responses to the variables within the ‘marketing capability’ dimension. These results support the findings of previous studies (such as Ezeuduji, Deen & Nzama, 2025; Nzama & Ezeuduji, 2021; Nzama & Ezeuduji, 2020).

Table 4: Comparing gender identity with business operation statements

Statements ^a	Mean Score (Males)	Mean Score (Females)	Compared With Gender ^b
4.1 Managerial and Operational Capabilities			
I have skills and experience in running a tourism business	1.77	1.75	N.S.
I give my employees the opportunity to come up with ideas or decisions in running the business	1.91	2.27	** Males agree more
Male business managers are more capable than female business managers	3.45	3.72	N.S.
Male business managers are better managers than female business managers	3.47	3.75	N.S.
I send/arrange workshops for the staff members to receive training.	1.91	2.36	* Males agree more
4.2 Marketing Capability			
I use Internet to market my business	1.93	2.15	N.S.
I rely on different sources of media to get my business known.	2.12	2.21	N.S.
I do research to find out the new market trends	1.83	2.20	N.S.
I know very well how to offer my products and deliver services to meet customer need (Product)	1.89	1.69	N.S.
I use different promotion techniques to sell my products and services (Promotion)	1.85	2.07	N.S.

^aQuestionnaire were itemised along a 5-point Likert-type scale (business operation statements): 1, Strongly agree; 2, Agree; 3, Neutral; 4, Disagree; 5, Strongly disagree.

^bMann-Whitney U test significance: *, $p < 0.05$; **, $p < 0.01$; N.S., no significant results.

4.5 Comparing Demographic Variables With Business Start-up Motivation and Perceptions of Entrepreneurial Success Level

We further compared demographic variables of respondents with business start-up motivation and perceptions of entrepreneurial success level (using Pearson’s Chi-Square and Mann-Whitney U tests, respectively). As shown in Table 5, results show that there is no significant relationship between ‘gender’, ‘age group’, and ‘number of years in business’ with ‘business start-up motivation’. Focussing on the purpose of this study, gender did not explain any choice between being ‘opportunity’ or ‘survival’ entrepreneur. However, nationality and educational level were identified as the socio-demographic characteristics that have significant influence on the type of motivation to start a tourism business.

Results show that respondents who have tertiary education are more ‘opportunity’ driven entrepreneurs while respondents who do not have tertiary education are more ‘survival’ driven entrepreneurs. South African respondents are more ‘opportunity’ entrepreneurs whereas non-South Africans are more ‘survival’ entrepreneurs. Non-South African entrepreneurs may struggle to find long-term resident permit in South Africa and may be discriminated against in the labour market. They may therefore decide to start businesses to survive in South Africa. Securing a decent job opportunity in South Africa may also prove difficult for those without tertiary education, hence they may end up becoming ‘survival’ entrepreneurs. These results support Mersha and Sriram’s (2019) argument that socio-economic challenges may lead individuals to start a business (as means of survival).

Table 5: Comparing demographic variables with business start-up motivation and perceptions of entrepreneurial success

Statements		Evidence From Analysis	Compared With Respondents’ Demographic Variables ^c
5.1 Motivation to start tourism business ^{a, c}			
		Cross-tabulation Results	
Nationality	South Africans	Expected count for opportunity entrepreneurs = 71.8; Actual count = 79	** South Africans are more ‘opportunity entrepreneurs’, while Non South Africans are more ‘survival’ entrepreneurs
	Non South Africans	Expected count for survival entrepreneurs = 7.6; Actual count = 15	
Gender	Male		N.S.
	Female		
Age group	Less than 40 years		N.S
	40 years and above		
Level of Education	Up to Secondary School	Expected count for opportunity entrepreneurs = 45.1; Actual count = 52	* Respondents with tertiary education are more ‘opportunity entrepreneurs’ while respondents without tertiary education are more ‘survival’ entrepreneurs
	Tertiary education	Expected count for survival entrepreneurs = 29.7; Actual count = 37	
No. of years in business	Up to 6 years		N.S.
	7years and above		
	7years and above	2.46	
5.2 Perceptions of entrepreneurial success level ^{b, d}			

Statements		Evidence From Analysis	Compared With Respondents' Demographic Variables ^c
		Mean Scores	
Nationality	South Africans	2.42	N.S.
	Non-South Africans	2.41	
Gender	Male	2.49	N.S.
	Female	2.35	
Age group	Less than 40 years	2.34	N.S.
	40 years and above	2.53	
Level of Education	Up to Secondary School	2.79	** Respondents with tertiary education agree to being more successful
	Tertiary education	2.12	
No. of years in business	Up to 6 years	2.39	N.S.
	7years and above	2.46	

^aQuestionnaire was itemised categorically: 1, Took opportunity; 2, Means of survival

^bQuestionnaire were itemised along a 5-point Likert-type scale (perceptions of entrepreneurial success level): 1, Very successful; 2, Successful; 3, Surviving; 4, Struggling; 5, Unsuccessful.

^cPearson's Chi-Square test significance: *, $p < 0.05$; **, $p < 0.01$; N.S., no significant results.

^dMann-Whitney U test significance: *, $p < 0.05$; **, $p < 0.01$; N.S., no significant results.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In this study, we explored nuanced gender perceptions on the influences that business capabilities may have on tourism-related business operations; and also sought if gender identity drives business performance, using the case of Durban Central Business District, in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Our results reveal no correlation between gender nuanced business operation variables and perceived business success level. The variables identified to have positive correlations with perceived business success are mostly found within the dimension of 'marketing capability'. This shows that marketing capability is pivotal to business success, as all variables within this dimension have mostly very strong positive correlation with business success. Gender did not explain any choice between being 'opportunity' or 'survival' entrepreneur. The only socio-demographic characteristic that has a significant influence on 'entrepreneurial success level' is the 'level of formal education'. Respondents with tertiary education perceived themselves more successful than those without tertiary education. This study reveals no convincing differences between male and female respondents regarding their responses on 'managerial and operational capabilities' and 'marketing capability'. Therefore, being male or female does not make an entrepreneur a better business manager. This study therefore recommends more entrepreneurship training and mentorship programmes in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa; and these should emphasise that formal education, marketing capability and other factors (but not gender) support business success. Hence training and mentorship should focus on building marketing capability, among others.

Ethics Declaration

Ethical clearance for this paper was obtained from the University of Zululand Research Ethics Committee (Reference: UZREC 17111-030). All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with institutional ethical standard.

AI Declaration

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) was used in conceptualising, drafting, analysing data and writing this paper.

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