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Personality Traits of Women Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Food Businesses

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ABSTRACT

Objective - COVID-19 is the worst in the history of pandemics. Small business survival has been jeopardized in this challenging situation, although entrepreneurs desire to strategize their plans to sustain their business. Other than strategies, psychological characteristics were found to be significant factors for sustaining business among entrepreneurs. Research on the psychological characteristics of entrepreneurs has long been conducted. However, the information is scarce in terms of the main psychological characteristics of entrepreneurs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study explores the Bumiputera women entrepreneurs' psychological characteristics that enable the business's survival.

Methodology/Technique – Using purposive sampling, a semi-structured interview was conducted with Bumiputera women entrepreneurs in the food business located in Penang. Out of 60, only 17 agreed to participate.

Finding – The result of the thematic analysis revealed that self-confidence, creativity, and proactivity were identified as the primary key to sustaining their business. Surprisingly, the entrepreneur's creativity highlighted a new shed to hybrid Malay and Japanese cuisine to produce lemang sushi. Additionally, the study's findings have few consequences for entrepreneurs, societies, and the government. Although the pandemic has had a disastrous effect on health and lifestyle activities, there is always a spark of hope for introducing considerable ways to fulfill entrepreneurial desires and serve the community.

Novelty – As a result, entrepreneurs are incentivized to boost the economy as a person in society by delivering sustainable services to the community.

Type of Paper: Empirical

JEL Classification: Q01, Q18, Q19.

Keywords: Bumiputera; Women, Entrepreneur; Psychological characteristics; Proactive and Creative

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1. Introduction

A country's economic success must be linked to effective and efficient management and business activities.

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However, one of the factors driving the economy's success, the pulse or backbone, is the role of entrepreneurs who grow businesses locally or globally (Caliendo et al., 2014). Before delving into it in-depth, it is critical first to understand the definition of the term entrepreneur. Specifically, Richard Cantillion was the first author to recognise the importance of entrepreneurship in 1734 (Boyett, 1996; Landström, 2014). As per etymology, the word entrepreneur was conceptualised by the French word "entreprendre" (Rich et al., 2019; Boutillier & Uzunidis, 2013), meaning "to undertake."(Van Ness et al., 2020). Therefore, an entrepreneur can be defined as a person or team who explores, assesses, creates, and capitalises on profitable opportunities (Carton et al., 1998). Since these entrepreneurs differ from others, researchers always undertake research in this field. The significance of the study is to uncover other strategic planning, monetary support, Training, business activities, etc., consequently establishing which personality traits keep the entrepreneur's performance and at the same time sustain their business, specifically during economic turbulence is yet to be discovered.

Recently, the world has been shocked by the SARS-COV-2 virus. This virus was discovered in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019. This virus has significantly impacted human health and has effectively halted the global economic activity. During the COVID-19 pandemic, small or large companies, entrepreneurs of all genders struggled to manage their businesses. The pandemic's impact is undeniable as most companies are downsizing, closing down, losing jobs, and unable to supply or receive goods or materials due to global border closures (Bartik et al., 2020).

In Malaysia, previous research has been conducted to assess students' intention to become entrepreneurs (Chuah et al., 2016), while focusing on gender (Nor Hanim Awang et al., 2020), ethnicity, challenges, and barriers (Mohamad & Bakar, 2017). However, there is a scarcity of personality traits among Bumiputera women Entrepreneurs, particularly those in the food service industry. This is because managing food businesses has its own set of challenges regarding food safety and working perishable stock to ensure the food is safe for customers to consume. Based on previous research conducted among men and women entrepreneurs, men were more successful than women (Collins, 2007) because women had multiple responsibilities, such as prioritizing family management.

Furthermore, looking for disparities in age or gender within ethnic groupings could be helpful (Tehseen & Anderson, 2020). In researching gender and entrepreneurship, the question arises of whether Bumiputera women entrepreneurs possess psychological characteristics that enable them to survive, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, as Hu et al. (2018) highlighted, there is limited study on Asians. To help bridge the gap, what psychological characteristics do Bumiputera women entrepreneurs have in common with men and other ethnic groups that enable them to succeed? As a result, this research aimed to discover these characteristics. Undeniably, Bumiputera women entrepreneurs have positively impacted the economy. Therefore, academics and researchers must understand these drivers so that women entrepreneurs can get the support, resources, and recognition they deserve and require to thrive.

2. Literature Review

This section provides a synopsis of the selected literature on entrepreneurship and psychological traits. This is necessary to provide context and demonstrate the study's authenticity and ability to contribute by placing it within the larger context of research on entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial psychological traits.

2.1 Definition of Entrepreneurs

Various studies are being conducted on entrepreneurs these days; therefore, it is important to understand who the entrepreneur is. According to Shane and Venkataraman (2000 p.218), the basic interpretation of entrepreneurship and entrepreneur is that "entrepreneurship involves the processes of discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities." Entrepreneurs "are the individuals who discover, evaluate and exploit

[lucrative opportunities]." Additionally, Caliendo et al. (2014 p. 1) defined that "the entrepreneur 'species' is rare but important for economic growth and performance. Scientists are left wondering whether any reliable factors or variables related to the human personality affect the probability of becoming and succeeding as a self-employed entrepreneur". Because each entrepreneur is unique, personality variables, which have traditionally been studied by psychologists and have only recently been incorporated by economists, are a significant source to explain the growth of self-employed entrepreneurs (Caliendo et al., 2014). Unquestionably, entrepreneurship is one of the most stressful tasks because it requires increasing profit while sustaining the business for itself, the staff, and the county's economic growth.

Countless studies on women entrepreneurs have been conducted all over the world. One of the findings revealed that women entrepreneurs face significantly more challenges and conflicts due to household responsibilities. Aside from monitoring their job, they must also care for their family. However, surprisingly, there is significant increasing involvement of women in this field. In 2012, approximately 126 million women in 67 countries created new businesses, and 98 million are developing already established businesses (Hossain et al., 2018). Thus, women are identified as successful entrepreneurs in the modern era due to their extraordinary passion, characteristics, and competence for sturdy economic and social development (Khan et al., 2021).

2.2 Bumiputera Women Entrepreneurs

The perception of society in the past looked down on women's abilities and considered women more suitable for sitting at home. This situation also happened in many countries, such as Pakistan (Khan et al., 2021). However, in Malaysia, this situation has changed. Malay society today is more open. The appearance can see in bumiputra women in social activities and their involvement in challenging occupations. Nowadays, women are also taking themselves seriously in the field of entrepreneurship. Women's involvement in the trading environment as early as the 18th and 19th centuries marked the beginning of their involvement in entrepreneurship in the Malay States (Nor Aini Idris & Nur Afiyas Daud, 2014). Since then, society has recognised women entrepreneurs as important contributors to the country's economy.

Today, the public's attitude toward women's involvement in entrepreneurship has shifted because they regard these women as wonderful if the latter can balance both work and life well. Thus, the Government of Malaysia and government-linked corporations (GLCs) can award at least 30% of their contracts to small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), and it can go even further by allocating funds to female entrepreneurs (Voon, 2020). The government intends to boost Malaysians' engagement in entrepreneurial ventures, increasing the number of entrepreneurs in Malaysia regardless of gender. Although women entrepreneurs have become more significant players in the entrepreneurial environment, their number remains small compared to men business owners (Rozita et al., 2015).

2.3 The Turbulence in the Era of COVID-19 Pandemic

In Malaysia, this virus also has impacted most businesses, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro-SMEs, which account for 98.5 percent of Malaysian companies (SME Corporation Malaysia, 2020). The operating hours prohibitions and dining-in restrictions have jeopardised the business' survivability. According to Voon, (2020), larger SMEs could have millions of dollars in excess cash to cover wage bills, attempting to make their experience during the COVID-19 pandemic unique. Though several larger SMEs have reported that they may not survive more than two months, micro-SMEs may struggle for even shorter periods due to the lack of cash reserves. Even though micro-SMEs do not have high overheads, they do have monthly financial responsibilities in the form of employee wages and rent ranging from MYR3,000 to MYR5,000. Micro-SMEs are more flexible and adaptive due to their small size, allowing them to change their approach rapidly.

On the other hand, SMEs with a large number of employees will strive to keep overheads and implement a shift in the business path (Voon, 2020). This is an unavoidable setback for entrepreneurs. Regardless of the difficulty, what keeps them going in a turbulent situation? One of the factors is psychological characteristics which are vital to pursue as an entrepreneur (Laouiti et al., 2022).

2.4 Psychological Characteristics

Entrepreneur research literature may provide a glimpse into one of five key areas, such as psychological characteristics, entrepreneurial psychopathology, entrepreneurial comprehension, education, and international entrepreneurship, specifical education as a component of the early-life experience that contributes to male and female entrepreneurial success (Kemp, 2016). Furthermore, each entrepreneur brings to their business a variety of attributes, abilities, experiences, and resources; these character traits are associated with the individual's human resources (Calvin et al., 2010). Kemp (2016) advised entrepreneurs to understand their weaknesses and strengths to be successful in business. Furthermore, understanding the fundamental properties of owning a business and persevering to train and learn skills that will encourage successful business are all suggestions for building a business (Kemp, 2016). The personality characteristics of successful entrepreneurs are frequently debated in the literature, and personality type aptitude tests are frequently used in professional life advising sessions to help a person properly identify skills and capabilities with career motivation and attitudes toward particular career types (Kemp, 2016).

Entrepreneurial personality research has taken off in the mid-twentieth century, bringing together strategies from economic concepts, psychology, sociology, and business administration to answer the question: "Who is an entrepreneur?", "What encourages them?", and "What features characterize them?" Many conceptual challenges arose during the first few decades as scholars battled to develop a strong theoretical framework and applicable measurement instruments (Kerr et al., 2018).

One of the most meticulously assessed sets of individual psychological concepts associated with performance is the Big Five personality traits (Williams, 2011). However, the results remain elusive (Gartner, 1989). The Big Five traits are also known as Five-Factor Model (Van Ness et al., 2020). The traits are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism (alternatively emotional stability), and openness to new experiences. Although numerous theories are used to explain psychological traits, the words use interchangeable terms and refer to the same meaning.

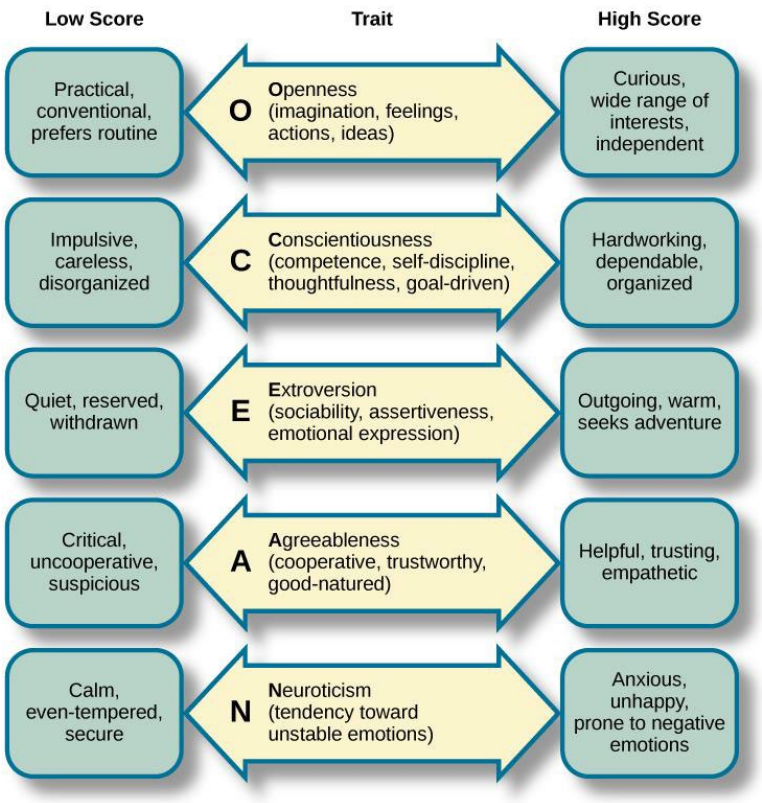

Figure 1. The Big Five Personality Traits. Reprinted from PennState, by R. Gray, 2017, https://sites.psu.edu/leadership/2017/09/02/the-importance-of-personality-trait-screening-for-todays-organizations-application-of-the-five-factor-model-ffm

Following a meta-analysis, entrepreneurs and managers differ significantly along the Big Five personality traits. For example, compared to managers, entrepreneurs score lower on neuroticism and agreeableness but higher on conscientiousness and openness to experience (Laouiti et al., 2022). The literature indicates that because "another one can mitigate the effect of one personality feature," the influence of one attribute on an outcome would rely on others (Haddoud et al., 2022).

Someone with a high level of openness can be characterised as creative, innovative, imaginative, reflective, and unconventional (Haddoud et al., 2022). People with low extraversion choose to invest additional time alone and are described as reserved, quiet, and self-sufficient (Zhao & Seibert, 2006). An emotionally balanced, self-confident, and the risk-tolerant person is considered low on the neuroticism scale (Van Ness et al., 2020). Individual differences in adaptation and emotional stability are defined by neuroticism (Zhao & Seibert, 2006); especially among women entrepreneurs, the obstacle facing them are undeniable (Bastida, 2021). Collins (2007) did a study to compare the creative and traditional tendencies of males and females, and the findings showed that both genders prefer to be creative depending on the circumstance. Creativity has emerged as a central theme in studies on the entrepreneurial process. Researchers have verified the link between creativity and enterprise, finding that new ideas are generated when information is clear and unimpeded (Biraglia & Kadile, 2017, Collin, 2007). While everyone is creative in some way, some individuals are exceptionally creative and possess qualities including innovation, persistence, independence, interest, and detachment (Heinonen et al., 2011).

Proactive personality is defined as an attitudinal construct that helps to identify differences between individuals in the significant degree to which they take the initiative to improve their surroundings (Nsengiyunva John, 2019) and to go above and beyond one's customary responsibilities to resolve an unpleasant situation like the COVID-19 pandemic (Purba & Paundra, 2018). According to Crant (1996, p. 43), "proactive personalities identify opportunities and act on them; they show initiative, take action, and

persevere until they bring about meaningful change. In contrast, people who are not proactive exhibit the opposite patterns: they fail to identify, let alone seize, opportunities to change things". A proactive personality is also associated with the invention and promotion of an implementation (Manolopoulos et al., 2022). Previously, a proactive personality was associated with job performance, flexibility, and leadership (Karabulut, 2016). Additionally, empirical evidence has shown a positive connection between creativity and proactive traits prospering at work (Alikaj et al., 2021) and enhanced the logical, decision-structuring models intended to maximise a venture's financial and social performance (Torugsa, 2013).

3. Research Methodology

As aforementioned, this study opted for a qualitative study via a case study to gather in-depth information about Bumiputera women entrepreneurs from Penang. Therefore, the protocol comprises the following elements: research question, study design, authorization seeking, ethical principles, interpretation process, and evaluation criteria (Rashid et al., 2019).

3.1 Recruitment and Sample

After formulating the research questions, as Calvin et al. (2010) suggested, conducting interviews and open dialogue with entrepreneurs was preferable to allow the informants to express or give in-depth information on specific issues. Therefore, in this case, the informants were recruited using purposive sampling. Penang Focus Group Committee, Human Capital Development (PFGCHCD) was screened to obtain the list of Bumiputera women entrepreneurs. To obtain a variety of responses and viewpoints, the informants were deliberately enlisted by securing a sample that included a variety of age groups, the type of food business conducted, the size of the company, the business period (more than three years), and the location of the business (urban or rural). The informants' privacy was protected by the approval of the Ethics Committee, the Implementation Coordination Unit (ICU), and the Prime Minister's Office, and the study could only be performed with their consent.

In qualitative research, there were no sample size guidelines (King, 1991; Patton, 2015). The sample size was determined by what the researcher wanted to know, the goal of the investigation, what was at stake, what would be valuable, what would have credence, and what could be accomplished with the resources and time allotted. The sample size for the qualitative study was measured using the information that met the saturation data (Patton, 2015). Therefore, based on the list, only 17 Bumiputera women entrepreneurs participated in this study. In qualitative studies, the sample size should not be an area of concern because it was intended to gather perspectives based on data richness rather than simply satisfying the concept of generalization.

3.2 Research Design

This qualitative study aimed to add to the body of knowledge on the major contributing factors to entrepreneurial success, specifically from women's perspectives. Therefore, the data collection through in-depth interviews was conducted. Through the interviews, the researchers discovered demographic profiles, personality traits, meaningful information, and elucidation about their journey being entrepreneurs, especially during the pandemic.

3.3 Research Setting

The location for the interview was conducted at the Ballroom, Bayview Beach Resort, Batu Ferringhi, Penang. The Penang Focus Group Committee selected this place, Human Capital Development (PFGCHCD), as a venue for the researchers and informants to complete this research. The interview was conducted from ninety minutes to two and a half hours. The session was video recorded and transcribed. Considering that the

Bumiputera women entrepreneur's mother tongue was Bahasa Malaysia, the informants were interviewed using Bahasa Malaysia. Then, the data gathered were translated from Bahasa Malaysia to English. The verification of data was interpreted and verified by a certified translator.

During the first session, the researchers gathered information about the demographic profile, and then the open-ended questions were used to gather in-depth information based on their experience operating their business during the pandemic and the Movement Control Order. After that, the informants also were asked about the most important psychological characteristics that allowed their business to survive during the hardship. All the questions were developed to uncover their strengths and ensure the business survives. Lastly, all the data were analyzed using Atlas t.i Qualitative Data Analysis and Software. The thematic analysis was performed by compiling data, sorting, breaking down, coding, and reorganizing based on the themes (Yin, 2014).

4. Results

The data were gathered and analysed after the interview, as stated in Table 1. As previously stated, 17 informants were involved in various food service businesses. Most entrepreneurs reported a 30-50 percent drop in income during the Movement Control Order. Aside from changing their strategy to sustain their business, they also possessed an excellent psychological characteristic that kept them going.

Table 1. Informant's profile and psychological characteristics

Informants	Age	Experience (year)
1	33	4.5
2	41	13
3	38	3
4	44	13
5	30	1
6	35	4
7	33	15
8	43	4
9	44	17
10	48	14
11	53	18
12	30	2
13	60	30
14	40	20
15	62	2
16	63	3
17	54	7

The qualitative research questions in this research project were structured as open-ended questions that aided in developing newer knowledge. The findings are as follows:

4.1 Self-Confidence

One of the most important psychological characteristics that allowed the informants to stay in business during the Movement Control Order implementation was confidence. Most of them said that while their income had diminished, they could withstand the COVID-19 outbreak due to their self-assured attributes. An informant reported that:

In my opinion, the first characteristic is self-confidence; I can do it! I think I can! You will never know about it until you try. Always be positive and avoid negative thinking (11).

4.2 Creativity

Aside from being self-confident, entrepreneurs must also be creative. They sell traditional meals, which include lemang. Lemang is a dish composed of glutinous rice, coconut milk, and salt before being baked with hollowed bamboo. Previously, lemang was only accessible during the festival seasons of Eid al Fitr and Eid al Adha, but it is now available all year round. Lemang is typically served with beef floss or chicken rendang. However, she attempted to incorporate it into lemang sushi, a Malay-Japanese hybrid dish. One of the informants stated that:

I've considered cooking lemang sushi. But, I'm still looking for a method to put it into practice, and I'm still on the lookout for inspiration (2).

4.3 Proactivity

Another personality characteristic discovered in this study was proactivity. The informants reported that they needed to adapt to the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, and their business was affected by it. Therefore, their proactive personality helped them to survive during hard times. One of the informants stated that:

Previously, the catering schedule ranged from 1000 to 2000 bookings. However, when COVID-19 hit, bookings plummeted to just 200-400 pax. As a result of this sharp decline, my husband and I have taken the initiative to run an online business and do home deliveries. We sold approximately 100-200 customers in 6-7 shipments in one month. We are willing to go to any length to ensure the success of this company (13).

5. Discussion

Each entrepreneur brings to their business a set of characteristics, abilities, experiences, and resources known as human equity. Personal perseverance is therefore considered a significant trait in entrepreneurs for enhancing performance and maintaining economic activity in challenging situations (Wang et al., 2022). The study's results discovered that most of them reported that self-confidence, creativity, and proactivity were important for Bumiputera women entrepreneurs, specifically in Penang. Self-confidence is a part of the openness in the Big Five personality traits. This character is critical for them to sustain their business in the long run. Previous studies suggested developing a self-confident program among women entrepreneur to boost their performance (Bastida, 2021). Thus, it is highlighted that the entrepreneur must have these good quality personality traits. Once they have it, it will lead them to be successful entrepreneurs (Prabhu et al., 2012). Surprisingly, this study discovered that even though some people negatively perceive Bumiputera women entrepreneurs, they proved confident that they could succeed. Also, Karabulut, (2016) found that self-confidence helps them battle against complex tasks, especially during the pandemic of COVID-19. Thus, self-confidence is vital to combat the limiting belief that Bumiputera, especially women, will not succeed in business. Additionally, this study established that they not only achieved in their business before the pandemic but also sustained during the movement control order and after the pandemic of COVID-19.

The underlying premise is that people who respond to new problems with a high inventiveness exhibit entrepreneurial resilience. People with high openness scores are consequently more likely to adjust to unique circumstances and exhibit better entrepreneurial stability (Haddoud et al., 2022). Therefore, the result of this study discovered that creative, another character that emerged from this discovery was the desire to combine lemang with Malay and Japanese gastronomy to create Lemang Sushi, which is a brilliant idea. Also, Tang et al. (2012) highlighted that the core of entrepreneurship is identifying and creating new opportunities. This is because Malaysia is now regarded as a gastronomic melting pot, and Malaysians enjoy eating international cuisines, particularly Japanese and Korean. Someone's creativity may motivate them to launch their own business if they actively develop ideas and find solutions. In other words, creativity may improve people's propensities to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Biraglia & Kadile, 2017), grow (Gielnik et al., 2012), and sustain their businesses. Even though everyone has some creative talent, specific individuals excel at it.

Therefore, these Bumiputera women entrepreneurs possess creativity, perseverance, independence, and involvement (Heinonen et al., 2011).

Another important characteristic was the proactive personality of the entrepreneur in relationship building, positive framing, and feedback seeking. These characteristics were associated with extraversion (Big Five Personality Traits), which is vital to being a successful entrepreneur (Laouiti et al., 2022). People with more proactive personalities exhibit behaviours that result in positive changes in their environments and personal challenges. Additionally, empirical data has demonstrated a beneficial relationship between creative behaviour, proactive personality flourishing at work (Alikaj et al., 2021), and support for emerging businesses (Hu et al., 2018). The researchers discovered that entrepreneurial alertness correlates with a proactive personality and creative industries (Hu et al., 2018). Consequently, a proactive entrepreneurial mentality enhances the logical, decision-structuring models intended to maximize a venture's financial and social performance (Torugsa et al., 2013). Thus, this study also discovered that the Bumiputera women entrepreneurs possessed these traits to make them survive in the business during turbulent situations.

Regardless of the gender of the entrepreneurs, these unique characteristics are important for them in managing the business. Women entrepreneurs require mentoring for guidance, career counseling, and greater collaboration. The study's findings will benefit the field of entrepreneurship by potentially assisting in developing entrepreneurship training projects that contribute to entrepreneurial success traits, especially in Malaysia.

6. Conclusion and Future Research

Gaining a better understanding of personality characteristics is crucial to enhancing the body of knowledge, specifically among Bumiputera women entrepreneurs in Malaysia. Therefore, the result from this study firstly highlighted that self-confidence, creativity and proactivity became among the top three characteristics articulated by the informants. Second, the result revealed that Bumiputera women entrepreneurs' involvement in the food service industry was challenging while balancing their quality of life. Third, the study highlighted new insights into the body of knowledge by conducting qualitative research on the specific ethnicity in Malaysia, which was Bumiputera women entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Undeniably, they also contributed to boosting the country's economy.

The findings of this study will benefit the field of entrepreneurship by potentially assisting the body of authorities, academicians, researchers, and other related agencies or governments in developing entrepreneurial training programs related to entrepreneurial success traits. Future research should explore developing entrepreneurial training programs that suit the Bumiputera women entrepreneur. Furthermore, it can be expanded to include women and men entrepreneurs of various nationalities, such as Chinese and Indians. Additionally, this research can be suggested to include more sample size and extend to other areas and types of businesses in Malaysia.

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