



Conceptualizing fashion entrepreneurship self-efficacy: A qualitative inquiry

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Introduction: Cultural economy development strives to create more diverse and vibrant businesses and to sustain economic growth. The importance of cultural-related entrepreneurship development establishes a growing source of employment and economic development. Fashion industry with a focus on culturally creative and diverse products, as well as leveraging locally produced agricultural products, has great potential to cultivate Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs). Although there has been a noted increase in the population of fashion entrepreneurs, many emerging entrepreneurs are still struggling in every stage of the start-up process and development of strategies to grow their businesses. To cultivate fashion entrepreneurs and facilitate creative MSEs' development, a valid instrument to identify promising fashion entrepreneurs, and assess individual fashion entrepreneur's skills and capacity to operate and grow MSEs is needed so that better business incubation service and support can be provided effectively. In the absence of such an instrument, the success of fashion entrepreneurs will likely remain difficult.

Believing in one's ability to succeed is critical to any task. This belief is often referred to as self-efficacy (BarNir, Watson, & Hutchins, 2011). Self-efficacy has been associated with varying subjects ranging from academic outcomes to exercise behaviors. A positive correlation has been found between not only self-efficacy and academic outcomes (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991) but also self-efficacy and exercise maintenance (McAuley, 1993). Entrepreneurship self-efficacy was developed as a construct to further specialize self-efficacy and to test whether a person's belief in which he or she can complete the tasks necessary to open a business (McGee, Peterson, Mueller, & Sequeira, 2009) affects entrepreneurial intent, action, and varying other behaviors.

Recently scholars have started calling for specific research on industry-domain-based entrepreneurship. The extant literature lacks fashion domain-based entrepreneurship research. As Richardson noted, "fashion apparel is a highly competitive business where product life is short and differentiation advantages are built on brand image and product styling that can be quickly imitated" (Richardson, 1996, p. 400). Researching fashion domain-based entrepreneurship is critical to advocate fashion entrepreneurship.

The purpose of this research is to conceptualize *fashion entrepreneurship efficacy*, a potential attribute supporting the success of fashion entrepreneurs. Individual interviews were conducted with existing fashion entrepreneurs with the ultimate goal to generate a valid assessing instrument, which is the critical part of accountability in the process of fashion entrepreneurship development.

Research methods: The current exploratory study started reviewing extant relevant literature. This literature review was utilized to develop an interview protocol, and compose interview questions related to motivations, external and internal factors, necessary skills, as well as challenges and risks. Then individual in-depth interviews were conducted to conceptualize the concept of fashion entrepreneurship and generate potential items for various factors. A snowball sampling method was applied to identify participants who are running small fashion businesses. Participants were invited to attend an individual online interview (through Pure Chat online software). These participants were then asked to recommend other participants with similar characteristics. The authors conducted 19

individual interviews. Among these interviewed fashion entrepreneurs, three were males and sixteen were females, and their age ranged from 22-56. Most interviews were conducted within 40-60 minutes. The online interview allowed the authors to receive the transcripts directly from participants' written responses. After these interviews, one of the authors reviewed all of the collected responses and made extensive notes. These notes along with the other transcripts were loaded into Nvivo software for qualitative analysis. All transcripts were reviewed by all authors and discussed to identify initial themes. Then, the primary investigator coded the transcripts from the 19 participants.

Findings: Five domains characterize the fashion entrepreneurship self-efficacy. *Perseverance of effort* reflects to what degree people will keep doing without giving up when meeting difficulties and problems during the operation of the business. Participants articulate that they always meet different problems, such as lack of funding, overbuying of products, higher workload, and low cash flow; rather than giving up, keeping persistence and trying to solve those problems are important for an entrepreneur. *Marketing and planning* refer to the ability to introduce promote the brand and merchandise in the market. The current fashion industry is competitive and it is hard to forecast consumers' preferences, making the marketing and planning more crucial for a fashion business. Participants articulated that marketing strategies play an important role in promoting the business and surviving in the competition. *Implementing financial* refers to the ability to manage finance and obtaining funding for the operation of the business. To make a profit is the goal of all entrepreneurs. Most participants articulated that basic knowledge of finance is necessary for a business entrepreneur. They need to know how to manage the financial issues in the running of the business and to ensure a healthy cash flow. *Risk and challenge management* refers to the ability to handle risks and challenges in the operation of the business. Inevitably, risks and challenges exist in any businesses. Especially trends are the major influences in the fashion business. Some participants mentioned buying right merchandise and keep the right amount of inventory are the most challenging tasks in running the fashion business. Having too much of an item can lead to bad stock and loss of profits. The capability of dealing with various risks and challenges related to inventory management is crucial for a fashion entrepreneur. *Innovation and creativity* refer to the ability to use the imagination or original ideas in the merchandise development. Participants stated that entrepreneur needs to view different things in another perspective than everybody else. Especially those fashion entrepreneurs who are also the designers need to have the ability to use the inspiration and envision to explore what garment can be constructed out of a certain fabric, and what body should look best in it.

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