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ISP Fall 2019

The Influence of Gender on Female Business Owners in Ho Chi Minh City

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*Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Vietnam: Culture, Social Change & Development,
Fall 2019*

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Abstract

Ho Chi Minh City is commonly referred to as a developing business hub, largely due to the rapidly increasing number of private enterprises. Since the implementation of the Doi Moi in 1986, Vietnam's private business sphere has grown tremendously, and women have played a large role in this development. Today, women own just under a quarter of formal enterprises in Vietnam, but this impressive statistic does not consider the many challenges these women have faced.

Through in-depth interviews with female business owners themselves, along with an online survey, this study determines how gender influences these business owners' professional experiences. Gender norms have shifted drastically in Vietnam's recent past, and this change has affected females in a variety of ways – sometimes minimally, and other times in a paramount manner. Not only has this adjustment brought potential impacts to the personal lives of women, but also their professional lives. Through the research conducted in this survey, I was able to deduce that gender does tend to have an impact on female business owners' experiences, but the size of impact depends on many factors. Additionally, this influence comes in a variety of forms, such as treatment from peers, legal issues, and gendered expectations.

Keywords: *business, business owner, female, gender*

Table of Contents

I.	Abstract	ii
II.	Acknowledgements.....	iv
III.	List of Figures	v
IV.	Background	1
	a. Introduction	1
	b. The Doi Moi	1
	c. Private Business Sector	2
	d. Women in Business	4
	e. Gender Norms	6
V.	Methodology	8
	a. Overview	8
	b. Interview Sampling	8
	c. Interview Process	8
	d. Online Survey Sampling	10
	e. Online Survey Process	10
	f. Limitations	10
	g. Ethics	11
VI.	Findings	13
	a. Interview Results	13
	i. Interview #1	13
	ii. Interview #2	14
	iii. Interview #3	15
	iv. Interview #4	17
	v. Interview #5	17
	b. Survey Results	19
VII.	Discussion and Analysis	22
VIII.	Conclusion	24
	a. Future Findings	24
IX.	References	25
X.	Appendix	27
	a. General Interview Questions	27
	b. Online Survey Questions	27

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I would not have been able to conduct this interview process without the help of local students Yuu Katherine (Chi) and Huong Ly. They accompanied me to help with translating during the interviews themselves, and I would not have been able to do this without their help. Also, I would like to thank my host mom, Co Hoa. She gave me many contacts to use for this project, and my results would be less substantial without her help.

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List of Figures

Figure 1. Private Sector Development in Vietnam	3
Figure 2. Doing Business Data	3
Figure 3. Job Restrictions for Women	5
Figure 4. Survey Respondents Experience Regarding Sexual Discrimination.....	20
Figure 5. Respondents' Beliefs Regarding Gender's Effect on Treatment in Workplace.....	21
Figure 6. Respondents' Beliefs in Ease of Females Owning Business Over Time.....	21
Figure 7. Survey Respondents' Highest Level of Education.....	22

Background

Introduction

Vietnam has so many unique facets of culture, environment, and norms, many of which have undergone many changes within the past few decades. The country is upheld for its rapid economic development, which is a great feat within itself. Not as commonly discussed, though, is the changes this development brought to other aspects of Vietnam. Economic development is known to create opportunities regarding personal wealth, employment, and professional growth, yet these opportunities may not be equal to all citizens of Vietnam.

Traditionally, gender norms played a large roll in Vietnamese culture. These norms were typically defined by the Confucianism values of yin and yang, which consists of “logically opposed but functionally complementary components that had a characteristic structure to them” (Jamieson 13). This structure is reflected in many aspects of Vietnamese culture, but a prominent occurrence is in the male/female power structure: “ideologically men were *yang*; women, *yin*. Women were subordinate to men in the nature of things” (Jamieson 18). Following this format, males are the breadwinners of the family and independent beings, and females are dependent on their husbands and must make the necessary sacrifices to care for children.

Although there are still aspects of this norm in Vietnamese society today, it is no longer the basis of relationships and culture. Women have taken advantage of the opportunities brought with the country’s economic development, accelerating the shift away from these restrictive norms. Today, women own about 95,906 formal enterprises in Vietnam, making up about 21% of all business owners (Women-owned). Society has moved away from the inherit expectation of women staying home and caring for children, and instead, began to push women to realize their capabilities in a professional setting. This shift is not cohesive, though, and females continue to be affected by these traditional norms in present day. Depending on many factors, such as age, business type, familial relationships, and others, female business owners have a wide range of experiences regarding how their gender effects their professional lives.

The Doi Moi

Since the implementation of the Doi Moi in 1986, Vietnam’s private business sphere has grown exponentially. Prior to the Doi Moi, Vietnam was facing an economic crisis; after the reunification of the North and South Vietnam, the entire country was run under communist regime,

but the economy was suffering. Vietnam's economy was one of the poorest in the world, with its inflation rate going up to 700% (Vietnam's Reforms). In order to combat this crisis, the country needed a policy that would bring major changes – which is what the Doi Moi accomplished.

The main purpose of the Doi Moi was to move away from a centrally planned economy, and towards a socialist-oriented market economy. Essentially, the Doi Moi “would reestablish a multisector economy driven by private enterprise under government supervision” (Freeman 178). The policy had rapid effects, as poverty rates have declined from over 70% to below 6% as of 2018, and GDP per capita has increased by 2.5 times (Overview). This rapid economic development has only occurred within the last 30 years, and many changes stemming from the Doi Moi have created this successful economic climate.

The Doi Moi allowed for the creation of private owned enterprises throughout Vietnam, a sector of Vietnam's economy which was previously nonexistent. The Vietnamese population jumped at this opportunity, and “transformed a stagnant peasant economy into a vibrant, market-driven, capitalist system” (Freeman before 179). Since the implementation of the Doi Moi, Vietnam's economy has continued to grow rapidly. In just 2018, over 26,000 new enterprises were established, and the GDP grew by 7.1% within the first 6 months of 2018, which is the fastest recorded GDP growth since 2011 (Vietnam's Reforms). Vietnam's economic climate has grown rapidly and is on track to continue with this trend, making it an optimal environment for creation of new private enterprises.

Private Business Sector

The private sector has become a vital source of economic growth since the implementation of the Doi Moi. In 2016, the domestic private sector accounted for 38.6% of GDP, a highly significant amount (Binh 12). Today, the private sector “is the main contributor to job creation, poverty reduction, improved living conditions, and inclusive and sustainable growth in Vietnam (Binh 12). This sector has developed extremely rapidly, and it is important to note how this was possible. The implementation of the Doi Moi was the first step in developing Vietnam's private business sector, but other policies have also affected Vietnam's economy in paramount ways, as shown in Figure 1. A notable policy is the Enterprise law, which was first established in 1999. This law “liberalized the freedom to do business of the Vietnamese citizens and provided a formal protection of private businesses and of private ownership of businesses” (Binh 20). This law has since been updated multiple times, even further simplifying the business-owning process. An update which held major

effects was in 2005, where business registration was revised. Due to this amendment, the number of enterprises established increased significantly: “During the seven-year period of the stepped-up business registration reform (2007-2013), there were 516,000 enterprises established which is 2.5 times as much in comparison to the previous seven-year period (2000-2006)” (Minh). As this sector continues to develop and create even more job opportunities and bring more revenue to the country, Vietnam will most likely continue to update these reforms and create new ones which will help push this sector towards sustainable growth.

As private business ownership has become exponentially more common since the implementation of the Doi Moi, Vietnam’s ranking of doing business has also been increasing. In the 2016 Doing Business Report by the World Bank, a scale based on “the paid-in minimum capital requirement, number of procedures, time and cost for a small- to medium-sized limited liability company to start up and formally operate in an economy’s largest business city,” Vietnam ranked 82nd out of 190 countries (Women-owned 11). Generally, Vietnam is ranked higher than many of its neighboring countries,

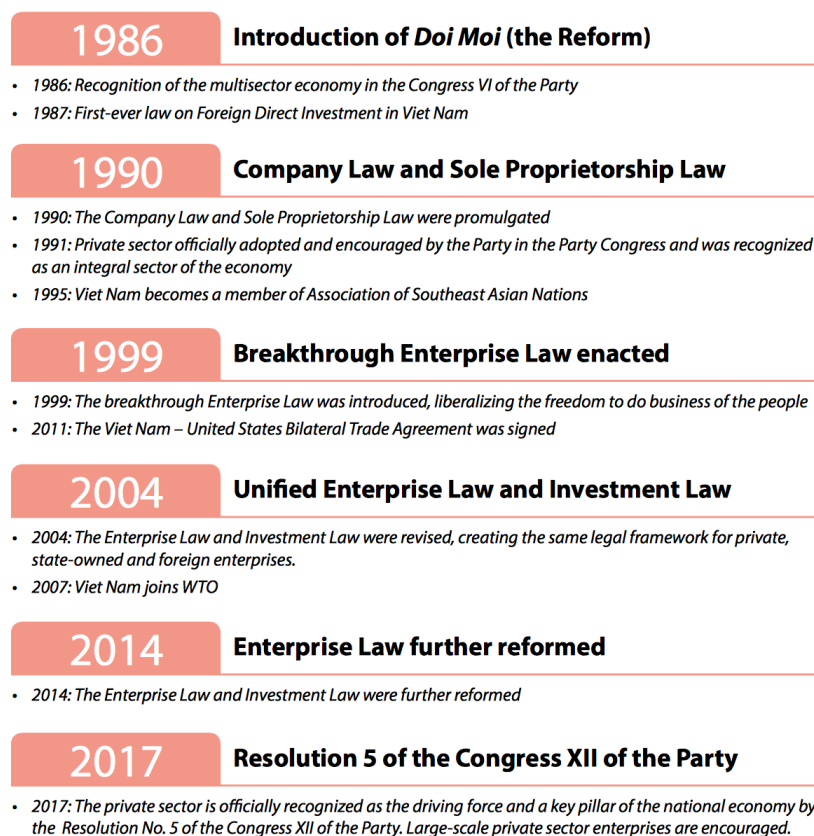


Figure 1. Private Sector Development in Vietnam (Binh 20).



Figure 2. Doing Business Data (Women-Owned 11)

but there is still much room for improvement. In other categories, such as starting a business, Vietnam scores much lower at 111th (Women-Owned 11). These statistics show that although Vietnam may be raising in the ranks of doing business, there are still necessary steps to further develop Vietnam's business sphere and make business owning more accessible to their population. Visualizations of these statistics can be seen in Figure 2.

Women in Business

Vietnam has a fairly large female representation in their business sphere, and especially in the private sector field. In 2015, 46% of individuals employed in the entire formal enterprise sector were women, and around 25% of enterprises were owned by women (Binh 13). This is a significant figure, especially when compared to the average of 8% of enterprises being owned by women in South Asia (Binh 13). Out of the businesses which are owned by women, about 57% are microenterprises, 42% are SMEs, and only 1% are large enterprises (Women-owned 1). Although Vietnam has a substantial number of female business owners, the businesses women own tend to be smaller. This indicates that women are able to take advantage of professional opportunities, but there are still factors which limit them in the business sphere.

There are many governmental regulations implemented which affect employment that are gender specific, and some of them are limiting or unfair to women. One example of such is Vietnam's maternity leave policy. In May 2013, a woman's allotted time off after giving birth was extended from 4 months to 6 months, and as of July 1st, 2013, a man's leave time was extended to 5 or 7 days, depending on the delivery (Shira). Although these extensions are advantageous for both men and women, they still perpetuate inherit biases and societal expectations. By allotting only 1 week for a man to take off of work, the law assumes that the woman will automatically be the main caretaker of the child. This assumption is deep-rooted in gender norms and only solidifies that society's perception of women has indisputable effects. This law is just one example of how laws may contribute to disparities between men and women in the professional world in Vietnam. Figure 3. shows additional legal differences between men and women in Vietnam.

Question	Answer	Source
Can women work the same night hours as men?	Yes	No restrictions could be located
Can women work in jobs deemed morally or socially inappropriate in the same way as men?	Yes	No restrictions could be located
Can women work in factories in the same way as men?	Yes	No restrictions could be located
Can women do the same jobs as men?	No	Labor Code, Art. 16o Joint Circular No. 40-2011-BLDTBXH-BYT, Appendix 1, Art. 22
Can women work in jobs deemed hazardous in the same way as men?	No	Labor Code, Art. 16o
Can women work in jobs deemed arduous in the same way as men?	No	Joint Circular No. 40-2011-BLDTBXH-BYT, Art. 2
Can women work in mining in the same way as men?	No	Labor Code, Art. 16o(3)
Can women work in the same occupations as men?	No	Joint Circular No. 40-2011-BLDTBXH-BYT, Appendix 1
Can women work in metalworking in the same way as men?	No	Joint Circular No. 40-2011-BLDTBXH-BYT, Appendix 1
Can women engage in jobs requiring lifting weights above thresholds in the same way as men?	No	Joint Circular No. 40-2011-BLDTBXH-BYT, Appendix 1
Can women do the same job-related tasks as men?	No	Joint Circular No. 40-2011-BLDTBXH-BYT, Appendix 1

Figure 3. Job Restrictions for Women (Women-owned 14).

A study conducted in 2017 concludes there are three popular misconceptions which may affect the professional potential of women entrepreneurs:

“Myth 1: Women entrepreneurs are more risk averse than men in seeking finance.

Myth 2: Women only focus on small business ‘on the side’

Myth 3: Women with children do not have time to lead a business” (Women-owned 2).

The study continues to list seven popular misconceptions found, but the disadvantages women continue to face are not limited to this list. Although these misconceptions do not fully inhibit women from becoming business owners, they do create additional barriers that men do not face in the business world: being taken less seriously when in the minority, expectation of putting motherhood over their careers, and many others. Whether people are conscious of these misconceptions or not, they stem from socialized ideas connected to women and femininity. These inherit biases have an effect on women’s place in the business world, so it is important to discuss where these misconceptions stem from.

Gender Norms

Sex and gender are two distinct, complex terms, yet they are often misused as synonyms for one another. Sex can be defined as “the biological characteristics of male and female,” which “are natural, innate, unchanging, and identical everywhere” (Alvarado 9). Meanwhile, gender can be defined as “the social characteristics of men and women,” which “are unavailable from birth, but are behaviors, roles and positions of the person which are taught, socially expected, and regarded as belonged to men, women, boys, and girls” (Alvarado 9). Sex is assigned at birth based solely on the legal or biological assessment of genitalia. This creates labels such as male, female, or intersex. Gender is more complex, though, as it is influenced by the social constructs associated with physical traits. These traits typically fall on a scale ranging on a spectrum of masculinity to femininity, and each end is interpreted differently with a unique set of socialized and politicized beliefs.

Since gender is more subjective than sex, society interprets gender expression in a more complex way than sex. Gender norms internalized stereotypes of how one should behave based on gender, or society’s expectations for the “right” behavior. Gender itself should not have a large impact throughout one’s life, but it tends to influence many different aspects because of the norms associated with one’s gender. An entire set of expectations one’s place in society are based on a single trait, creating unequal opportunities for people dependent on the how others interpret their gender. The implicit bias associated with gender norms is often unconsciously applied to situations, as people do not realize they are thinking within the structure of gender norms when interacting with others. Regardless of how gender norms are applied to situations and interactions, their prominence is prevalent in many factors of society. Many of the businesswomen I interviewed discussed how gender norms have influenced their lives, specifically in regard to being a business owner. More generally, the influence of gender norms can be seen through wage gaps, laws differentiating jobs for men versus women, misconceptions of female business owners, and other policies previously discussed.

It is important to note that while gender norms effect both men and women, they typically prevail as a disadvantage to women, especially in the business sphere. Traits commonly associated with femininity include gentleness, emotional, sensitivity, and others. Meanwhile, traits commonly associated with masculinity include independence, leadership, assertiveness, and others. The traits that are more associated with masculinity, and therefore men, are also words one might use to describe a powerful, successful business owner. Concurrently, the traits associated with femininity, and therefore women, do not paint the picture of a leader. Although people are in no ways limited to these traits depending on their gender, they are already linked to these characteristics with

disregard to their innate qualities. Although it is a disadvantage for both men and women to carry beliefs about their abilities, the qualities associated with women are far more detrimental to their role as a business professional. Gender norms are the basis for most mistreatment of women in the business sphere, and it accounts for many of women's experiences being seen as lesser than their male peers.

Methodology

Overview

The information gathered in this study comes from five in-depth interviews, an online survey, and secondary source materials. These three different source types allowed me to collect both qualitative and quantitative data, all of which are vital to my findings.

I conducted a total of five semi-structured in-depth interviews with five different female business owners in Ho Chi Minh City. I was provided with both written and verbal consent to conduct the interviews and to use the information found in both my paper and. Some interviewees opted to remain anonymous in their business or personal name, which I have refrained from using in this paper and presentation if asked. I ensured that remaining anonymous would not hinder their participation in my study. These interviews provided me with qualitative data.

In addition to the 5 in-depth interviews I conducted, I also created an online survey to gather quantitative data. This survey was a much shorter time commitment than an interview. Thus, I was able to get more responses to my survey than interviews scheduled. Also, the survey was completely anonymous, ensuring respondents would feel comfortable recording their honest opinions.

Lastly, I conducted online research to find secondary sources for my background section. I used different online libraries to find published journals, along with various independent articles. This process was fairly straightforward, and it provided me with a lot of essential background information.

Interview Sampling

Since I wanted to hear the lived experiences of female business owners, I only conducted in-depth interviews with female business owners located in Ho Chi Minh City. My criteria for whom I interviewed was fairly broad: they must identify as female, and they must be the owner of a business. Initially, my advisor connected me to a few of her friends who are female and own businesses in Ho Chi Minh City, along with Ms. Thao, another one of her friends who has a large network of business owners. Between the two of them, I was able to schedule 3 of my interviews with different female business owners: Ms. Huong, Ms. X (anonymous), and Ms. Tuyen. I arranged the interview with Ms. Hang through my host mom, Co Hoa. My last interview was arranged through snowball sampling. When Yuu Katherine (Chi) was assisting me as a translator,

she connected me with her boss, Ms. My Bui, who agreed to be interviewed. Thus, I was able to successfully schedule five interviews with five different female business owners in Ho Chi Minh City.

Interview Process

The first step to conducting these interviews was scheduling them at a convenient time for the business owners. This process was sometimes complicated, however, due to the necessary presence of a translator. Two interviews were scheduled through communicating with local student, Chi. She helped me contact 3 business owners, 2 of which agreed to participate in the project. At 1 of these interviews Chi accompanied me to translate, and at the other, her friend Huong Ly assisted me. The remaining 3 interviews were scheduled directly between me and the business owners, as they all spoke fluent English.

Prior to every interview, I prepared a list of questions to ask during the conversation. I had a general list of questions I would base the prepared questions off of, but sometimes I would add or take out a question, depending on the business. You can find my list of general questions asked during my in-depth interviews in Appendix A. All interviews conducted had the same purpose of gathering qualitative data on the lived experience of female business owners in Ho Chi Minh City. The questions were there to guide conversation about hardships they faced as a female in the business sphere, but the interview was not limited to these questions. All five of my interviews were semi-structured, meaning I based conversation off of these questions, but sometimes interjected with new questions depending on the information gathered. This approach allowed me to have a similar basis when analyzing my data, yet unique stories and experiences to differentiate between each interview. During the interview itself, I either took handwritten notes or audio-recorded the interview. This depended on the preference of the interviewee, and either method allowed me to successfully record the data.

After conducting the interview, I emailed each business owner (except some who did not provide an email) to thank them for their time, and to give them the link to my online survey. Additionally, I transcribed my written notes or audio recordings onto an online journal, which was the most efficient way to store this material. This method allowed me to centralize all data collected from each interview, including contact information, date of interview, and the data itself.

Online Survey Sampling

The online survey I created was completely anonymous, so I cannot be entirely sure the exact background of each respondent. However, in order to complete the survey, one must have been a female business owner in Ho Chi Minh City. Once my survey was finalized, I sent the link to my advisor Ngoc, Thao Nguyen, my host mom Co Hoa, and Thanh Duong, who then sent it to any friends they had who fit my criteria. I cannot be sure how many women my survey was sent to, as I had to work through my contacts to send this survey to the appropriate audience. I received 11 responses to my survey by the end of the ISP period. Although I cannot calculate an exact response rate of the survey as a whole, I have calculated specific response rates for each question asked.

Online Survey Process

I created my online survey through google forms, a platform that is easily accessible and transferable. I began my survey with a list of preliminary questions, then categorized them into 3 categories: Background Information, Professional Experience, and Effect of Gender. A complete list of all questions included in the survey can be found in Appendix B. Once I finalized my list of questions, I sent it to my advisor, Ngoc, to translate all questions to Vietnamese. This ensured a larger sample population, as it was not limited to business owners who spoke English.

Additionally, I had a short introduction before the respondents would fill out the survey, conveying what this information would be used for and ensuring anonymity. I also wrote that respondents did not have to answer any question they did not feel comfortable with. At the end of the survey, I left a space for respondents to leave their email if they wished to be interviewed for my project.

Limitations

There were various limitations faced throughout conducting this independent research project. A significant limitation which effected my research was the language barrier. It was notably more difficult to schedule and conduct interviews when this barrier was present, but it was still possible to do so with the help of local students acting as translators. During the interviews themselves, it was sometimes difficult to fully convey my point or understand what the interviewees opinions were. Although I was still able to get information using this method, the interviews I conducted in English yielded more information about the interviewees' experiences. It

was important to overcome this barrier, though, in order to obtain a more random sampling when conducting research.

Another limitation I faced was time constraints. I had the goal of conducting five interviews, which I was able to complete within the time constraint of 1 month. I knew to plan my interview goal realistically, as one month is not long a very long time to plan and execute an entire independent research project. This time was sufficient for the interviews I conducted, but I was not able to connect and schedule time to meet with more contacts than those five. I think these five interviews gave me enough information to fulfill their purpose in my study, but additional interviews would have provided more fascinating information.

Finally, a significant limitation to this study was the samples I used for research. Ideally, I would use random sampling in order to ensure non-biased results and further legitimize my findings. Unfortunately, this method was not available to me. I had to rely on my few contacts, such as my advisor and Co Thanh, to help establish connections for interviews and participants in my survey. I also used snowball sampling to find business owners to interview, as stated in the interview process. This does not yield a random sampling, but I had to use the resources available to me.

Although I faced a variety of limitations, I was still able to collect a sufficient amount of both quantitative and qualitative data. The purpose of this project is not to make a sweeping generalization of all female business owners in Ho Chi Minh City, which would not be realistic given these limitations and the multitude of factors which effect such, but rather, to provide a unique perspective into the lived experiences of these business owners.

Ethics

Several steps were taken in order to ensure this research study was conducted in an ethical manner. When creating my survey, I made it anonymous and ensured respondents they could leave any questions blank which they did not feel comfortable answering. When conducting interviews, I gave the interviewees a clear explanation of who I am, why I am conducting this research project, what my project is focused on, and what their information will be used for. In my written consent form, I gave all interviewees the option to remain anonymous and to opt out of being audio recorded or photographed. All interviews were arranged at a place and time most convenient to the interviewees.

Once all of the information was collected, I made sure to analyze the data in an ethical manner. I did not want to compare the experiences of different businesswomen, so I discuss each individual businesswoman's experiences in the findings section. Then, in the discussion and analysis section, I comment on overlapping themes and bridge together women who had similar experiences. Thus, each woman's experiences are explicitly stated as a unique perspective, but the reader can still gage commonalities between them. Again, the purpose of this study is not to make a generalized statement regarding all female business owners in Ho Chi Minh City, but rather, to share these women's unique experiences and opinions.

Findings

Interview #1

I had the opportunity to speak with Ms. Huong, who owns a vegetarian restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City. Ms. Huong is a 44-year-old vegetarian who loves her career of cooking for and operating her own restaurant, but she has faced many challenges to get to this place. She always thought the service industry would be too stressful to work in, but the prospect of owning a restaurant was enticing. Ms. Huong is a self-taught chef, and she believed she could handle the logistics of running a restaurant. This career path seemed to incorporate many of her passions, and it has held true to be something she loves.

Once Ms. Huong decided to start her own business, she faced a variety of challenges. Ms. Huong is in a unique position; not only does she run the business logistics as the owner of the restaurant, but she also works in the kitchen as a chef. These two roles bring different challenges, and her role as women effects each differently. Ms. Huong's believes her gender does not greatly influence the challenges she faces as a business owner, which are mainly handling logistics. She stated that the three biggest challenges she has faced throughout her time in this position are finding a suitable place to run her restaurant, the money to grow her business, and a staff that fit her business model. While facing these challenges, her role as a woman did not inhibited her in the slightest.

She has found it more difficult being a woman in the kitchen, though. Not only does she face a different type of stress as a chef – having a time crunch, working in front of other others, and performing for customers – but she faces the additional hardship of being in the minority. In Ms. Huong's experience, men are usually the chefs in restaurants, not women. Ms. Huong stated that it is easier for men to be chefs, as they generally “cook faster, are stronger, and are able to fix equipment if it breaks.” She believes that women have other strengths in the kitchen because they are more sophisticated, such as “decorating and plating food.” Thus, Ms. Huong thinks it is important to have a balance of both men and women in the kitchen. Additionally, women face the pressure of sacrificing time with their family for time in the kitchen. Ms. Huong believes men also face this pressure of balancing work and family life, but it tends to effect women more than men.

Although these two hardships have made Ms. Huong's experience in the kitchen more difficult as a woman, she strongly believes that the most important factor when owning a business is your own capabilities. Regardless of gender, one must be brave enough to take the first steps,

and success will follow if they believe in themselves. That being said, Ms. Huong does not believe that the government needs to create more policies to help or encourage female business owners. She thinks that every person has their set of capabilities, and that should be enough to follow their dreams. Ms. Huong has sacrificed a lot to reach this level of success, and much of that stems from her inner-motivation and drive. She stated that people admire her because of her bold career choice, and especially because she is a woman. Her professional path is a difficult one, but she believes that at the end of the day, success depends on your personal capabilities.

Interview #2

The second interview I conducted was with the owner of Gout to Bed, a home fashion and bed linen store. She chose to remain anonymous in this project, so I will refer to her as Ms. X. She is 30 years old and grew up in central Vietnam, but she has lived in Ho Chi Minh city for the past 10 years. Before starting her business, Ms. X was planning on being a lawyer. These plans shifted, though, when she became pregnant and moved to live with her mother in central Vietnam. Her mom runs a tailoring business, so Ms. X enough about fabric quality and design to start her own business. She began selling custom bed sheets to family and friends and through Facebook. People appreciated her quality materials, and her business took off. When Ms. X moved back to Ho Chi Minh City after 6 months, she switched directions from becoming a lawyer to continuing to sell bed sheets. This career gave her a more time to care for her kids, as lawyers often work late hours.

Starting her own business has come with many difficulties, but Ms. X pinpointed two specific obstacles. First, she has little to no background in running her own business. Although this route may be unconventional, she learned through challenging experiences and was able to succeed. The other main hardship she has faced is the pressure of balancing family and work. Ms. X believes that men do not have to think about this balance to the degree women must, as the responsibility of caring for children usually falls on women. This double standard is apparent, and in turn prioritizes men's business over women's business. For example, Ms. X and her friends have found it difficult to plan business trips around their duties as a mother. While men can announce their business trips without an issue, women must make arrangements for who will watch their kids while they are gone. Although they all have very supportive husbands, they still face this issue because of the prominent double standard engrained in society.

This double standard also effects how Ms. X has been treated in professional settings. When Ms. X is arranging meetings with other businessowners, she needs them to occur between

the hours of 9 AM and 4 PM because after that, she has to pick up her kids from daycare. Sometimes, people do not take this request seriously, and she is treated as an obvious annoyance. In her experience, this typically occurs when meeting with men, and more specifically, single men. She believes they do not understand the pressure to care for kids and run a business, and they prefer to meet at the end of the day so they can go home after the meeting. This scheduling conflict often results in Ms. X not being taken as seriously because of her responsibility to care for her children.

Ms. X believes there are two steps to help diminish this double standard; the first being for women to hire more support in order to ease this pressure. Ms. X's sister-in-law watches her kids at times, and she believes that she "would not be as successful without that support." Although the main responsibility of caring for the children still falls on the mother, the support is vital in balancing work and family time. Some of her friends have drivers, nannies, or chefs – all of which allow for more quality time spent between mother and child. Ms. X acknowledged that this is not always practical, though, as hiring these services can be very expensive.

The second step she believes would help support female business owners is extending maternity leave for both genders, but especially for men. As of now, women are granted six months of maternity leave, while men are only granted up to a week. This does not allot enough time off for men, especially if there is a complication in the birth. The difference between these leave periods only perpetuates the expectation of women being the sole caretaker of children. Although women have more time off than men, six months is still a short period for such a large adjustment. Many of her friends changed their career paths after having a child to a less intense job in order to spend more time with their kids, and Ms. X no longer pursued the career as a lawyer because of the intense hours. These six months are vital in the development of a child and in the future of the mothers. Although Ms. X believes maternity leave time should be extended for both men and women, it is more vital for the extension to apply to men. Despite the times Ms. X has been affected by gender norms in the professional world, she loves running her own company.

Interview #3

I had the opportunity to speak with Ms. Tuyen, a 60-year-old business owner of the clothing store Linh. She started this business when she was only 26 years old, and her passion for her work has not faded in the slightest. When in school, Ms. Tuyen studied art, but she always

loved clothing design. After she completed her education, Ms. Tuyen studied business management and clothing design independently in order to successfully open her first store.

Initially, Ms. Tuyen's business was located in Hanoi, but she moved to Ho Chi Minh City after a few years. This large of a move brings a lot of change, so she had to adjust accordingly. For her first year living in Ho Chi Minh City, she resold clothes bought from various markets. After that initial year, she had enough resources to resume designing her own silk clothing as she was previously doing in Hanoi. She prefers this method of business, as she finds her clothing more beautiful and unique.

The major challenges Ms. Tuyen mentioned about running a business were not gender specific, but rather logistical challenges any business owner may face. Her main concern was finding designs suitable to her target audience, along with purchasing a suitable quantity of clothing. For her first few years designing, Ms. Tuyen had too much leftover inventory at the end of the year that she had to get rid of. Through years of experience, Ms. Tuyen has since gotten a better idea of what fabrics, colors, and styles her customers prefer. Additionally, she has found challenges running an entire business alone. She manages a large quantity of clothing and other logistics, so she has found it necessary to have extra help. Her husband supports her career, and he assists her with deliveries and cleaning the store. Ms. Tuyen has also hired a few staff members to help around the store. This support has made running the business more manageable, as she can spend less time dealing with small tasks and details.

Ms. Tuyen does not believe that her gender has influenced her professional career, or treatment as a business owner. In fact, she believes that her position as a woman has helped her running this specific business. Since her target audience is women over the age of 35, she believes that she has an easier time connecting with her customers than a man would. Additionally, she has a better sense of what designs her customers would like because of her gender. These advantages are a major advantage in her business, as most of her greatest challenges have stem from customer preferences.

Although Ms. Tuyen sees her gender as a perk in this specific business setting, she still does not believe gender influences one's journey to becoming a business owner. Similar to Ms. Huong, she believes that if one is passionate enough, they are able to achieve anything. Ms. Tuyen credits much of her success to her motivation of turning her life-long dream into reality. She acknowledges there are a variety of challenges one must face when starting a business, but if one is willing to put in the work, they can achieve anything.

Interview #4

The fourth interview I conducted was with Ms. Hang, the founder and director of Viet Jet Tours, a popular travel agency in Vietnam. Ms. Hang opened her business in 2013, but she already had substantial experience in the tourism industry prior to this start. In 1990, Ms. Hang attended tourism school to train for this professional path, and she continued to work in this sector under the government. Throughout her years working there, she became the director of a travel agency under the government. Eventually, though, her boss told her it was time to begin preparing for retirement. Ms. Hang felt as though was not ready to stop working, so she began the switch to starting her own business.

At 58 years old, Ms. Hang is above the maximum age before retirement. She founded her business when she was already 51 years old, only leaving her four more years before she would have to stop if she was working under someone else. By starting her own business, Ms. Hang can continue doing what she loves without having to worry about stopping prematurely. Her transition to starting her own business came with challenges, but one extremely helpful aspect to through this journey was having a supportive staff. A lot of her staff members transferred over to her business when she opened it, so she already had close relationships with many of her staff members.

A large challenge Ms. Hang faced when first opening her business was her inability to travel by herself. A large part of her job was going to various destinations in order to see if the hotel, traveling, and sights were suitable for her company. She stated that although men could do these trips by themselves, she was unable to travel alone. It was important for her to be the one seeing to these logistical issues, but she had to have someone accompany her on these trips. This led to more costly trips, as she had to pay for two people to travel instead of just one person.

Despite this considerable challenge, Ms. Hang does not believe that being a woman has impacted her professional journey thus far. She believes that due to her immense support system and passion of her work, she will continue to reach success.

Interview #5

For my last interview, I was able to speak with Ms. My Bui, the owner of Remi English. She started a private business in 2014 at just 22 years old, then founded Remi English 3 years later. Remi English is a center that offers English classes to ethnic youth who otherwise would not have the opportunity to learn the language, and they also offer courses that train staff to efficiently teach English. Although Ms. My Bui studied accounting in school, she quickly changed career directions

when she discovered she was not passionate about the job prospects in that field. She began by teaching herself English, then tutoring students and teaching classes. Eventually, she turned this passion into her own business.

Ms. My Bui faced some hesitation from her family when she decided to create an independent business because they had always wanted her to have a steady career working as an accountant, or a similar desk job. Initially, Ms. My Bui's family did not support her opening Remi English. She had to devote a lot of time to running the business, and she sacrificed quality time she could have spent with her family. Additionally, her family saw this business as a risk to her personal life. Throughout this period of putting extra time into her business, she felt an immense pressure to put her family before her career.

This difficulty in putting one's career over family is not an uncommon challenge among business owners, but Ms. My Bui believes this difficulty is more common among women. She stated that the older generation tends to possess a "traditional mindset" which pushes women to depend on their husbands, not to be independent businesswomen. The pressure to put housework, caring for children, and family above all else stems from this "traditional mindset," and it is an expectations Ms. My Bui has grown up with. The "traditional mindset" allows men to realize their full set of capabilities, especially in the professional world. They grow up mentally preparing to one day provide for their future family, so when the time comes for them to start their career, they are ready to reach for any opportunity available. Instead of being pushed to embrace their full potential, women are told to choose the "safe" path – a job with steady hours but will still allow them to dedicate time to their family. Although Ms. My Bui believes men and women have the same capabilities, she also believes that women are hindered by this mindset that deems them as a dependent.

In order to combat this additional challenge women face, Ms. My Bui believes women should receive additional support when starting a business. Since she thinks women and men inherently hold the same capabilities and are equal, she does not believe that this support should come from the government. Instead, she thinks this support should come from the family, as the main difference between men and women business owners is that "women do not have as much time as men." Women need support in balancing household or family obligations and their professional lives, but this may be difficult to obtain. Ms. My Bui stated that at first, her family did not offer her this support because they did not want her to found her own business; they believed it was wrong of her to dedicate so much time to her career, and she would be better off as an

accountant. Once her business was established, her family was able to see how it gave her a sense of fulfillment, and she was doing work that she was genuinely passionate about. Now, Ms. My Bui receives a lot of her support from her family, and she stated that she has found a healthy balance between personal and professional life.

The “traditional mindset” has little effect on Ms. My Bui now, but she is aware that it hinders many women from achieving their dreams. She believes that a solution to this issue would be more workshops to show women what they are capable of. Skills that people – especially women – need to know when starting their business include “confidence, independence, and knowledge on logistical tasks.” These were factors that she found most difficult to confront, and would have appreciated more guidance in.

Another challenge Ms. My Bui faced once her business was established was difficulties in communication. When she attended workshops and networking events, she noticed an apparent difference in her interactions from when she was single to married. She stated that when she was single, “men tried harder to network with [her],” and that “businessmen would open more doors for [her], more opportunities.” Once she was married, though, she found that businessmen “were less willing to help [her],” and “conversations became less deep.” She only noticed this difference when communicating with men, and it was more apparent with single men. Businessmen should be willing to collaborate with Ms. My Bui based solely on the fact that she is an accomplished business owner, not based on her relationship status. This double standard degrades women to nothing more than a potential partner, and it discredits their major professional accomplishments.

Ms. My Bui has faced many challenges when starting her own business, and a considerable amount stem from her being a woman. Although she will continue to face these difficulties, she knows she is capable of handling all complications that come with being a business owner.

Survey Results

I received a total of 11 responses to my survey, and the findings were very telling. Unless otherwise stated, the response rate of the statistic discussed was 100%. First, I will present information on the respondents’ backgrounds. 100% of participants had completed an education level of university or higher, and a large majority completed their education in Vietnam. Only 1 participant completed their education outside of Vietnam in the United States. The median number of employees was 13, but answers ranged from 2 to 5,000. The average of number of employees would not accurately represent the given data, as only one respondent had an employee count over

100, which would skew this calculation. The response rate to this question was 72%. Half of the respondents stated that they founded the current business they own, while the other half were not the founders of their business. The average ratio of male/female workers was about 50% female, 50% male, with a response rate of 81%.

Next, I will present information on how being a female has affected the respondents. When asked to rank how much do they believe gender to have an effect on how they are treated in the professional workplace on a scale of 1-10 (1 being no effect, 10 being large effect), 82% of respondents ranked a score higher than five, and the average score was a 6.7. These statistics can be shown in Figure 5. Additionally, as shown in Figure 4, 36.4% of respondents stated that they have never experienced sexual discrimination in throughout their career, 36.4% stated they have

once, 18.2% stated that they have multiple times, and 9.1% stated that they have very often. These statistics show that 63.6% of respondents have experienced some form of sexual discrimination in the workplace. Additionally, over half stated that they believe it is more difficult for women to grow professionally. When asked if they believe it is easier for women to own a business in the present day as compared to the past (ranked on a scale 1-10, 1 being much easier in the past, 10 being much easier in the present), 90% ranked a score higher than 5, as shown in Figure 6. The average score was 7.9, which shows that most women believe it is easier to own businesses in the present day.

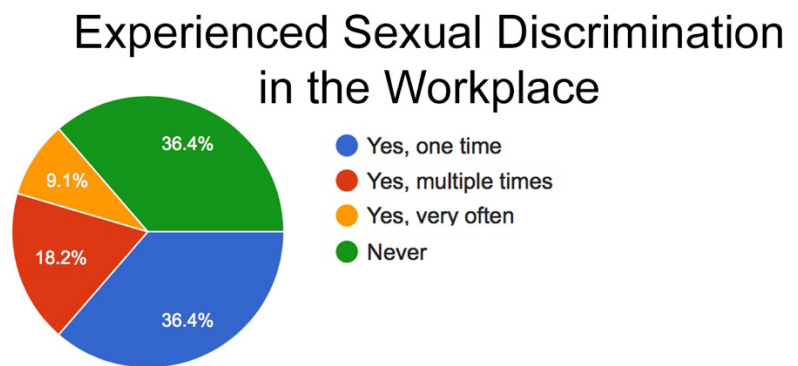


Figure 4. Survey Respondents Experience Regarding Sexual Discrimination

The Effect of Gender in the Workplace

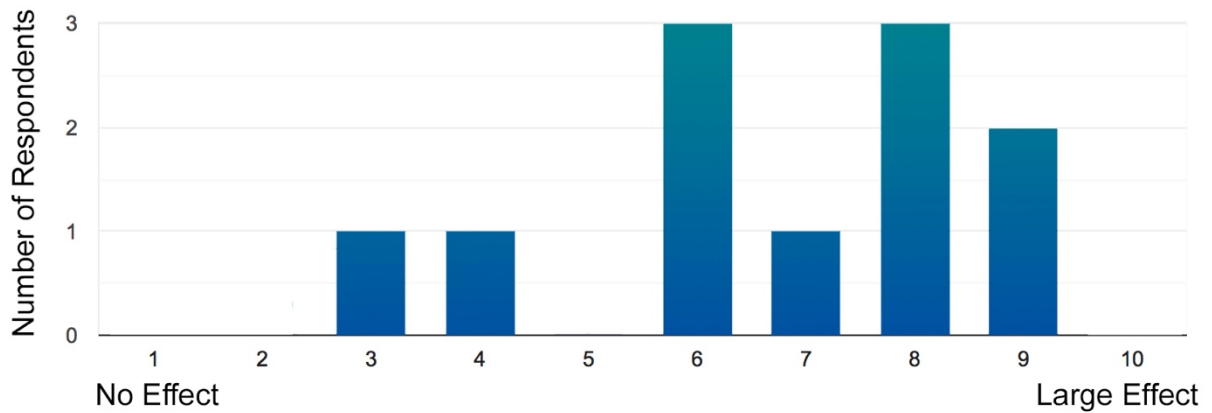


Figure 5. Respondents' Beliefs Regarding Gender's Effect on Treatment in Workplace

Belief on Women's Ease of Owning Businesses Dependent on Time

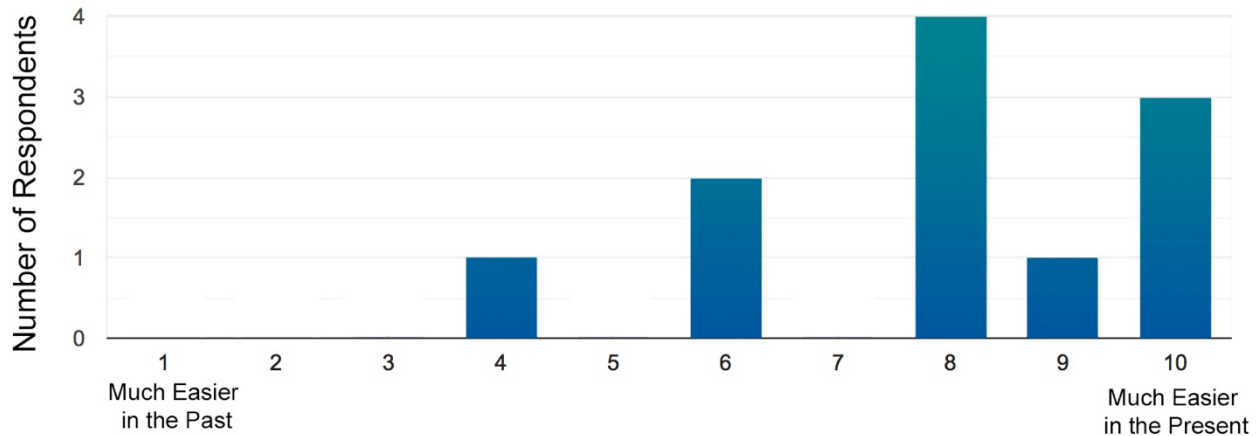


Figure 6. Respondents' Beliefs in Ease of Females Owning Business Over Time

Discussion and Analysis

Age may be a large factor in businesswomens' opinions and experiences surrounding this matter. When analyzing results from both my interviews and my surveys, I saw a common trend regarding age. From my survey, I had four respondents who were under 30 years old. 100% of these four respondents had experienced some form of sexual discrimination in their professional career, and they all believe it is more difficult for women to grow professionally. These results are similar to the experiences I heard about through the interviewing process. Out of all of my interviews, I talked to 2 businesswomen who were 30 or younger, Ms. X and Ms. My Bui. These two women both had much to discuss on the issues of sexual discrimination and how their gender has affected their professional career. They both commented on how they have been treated differently by men – particularly single men. Ms. X found it difficult to be taken seriously while arranging meetings with businessmen, and Ms. My Bui had trouble networking with businessmen once they learned she was married. No other interviewees commented on experiences similar to these, which may be due to a variety of reasons. One possibility is the younger generation of entrepreneurs are more sensitive to the effects of gender norms in their lives. Since the younger generation seems to be moving away from the “traditional mindset” Ms. My Bui spoke of, they are more likely to be aware of different treatment because of their gender. Another possibility may be lack of language barrier. I conducted both of these interviews without a translator, so communication was more efficient than with other interviews. They were not the only interviews I conducted without a translator, though, so I believe the reasoning behind this trend may be moreso linked to age.

Education may also factor into a businesswomen's success. All interviewees and survey respondents had completed at least a college or university degree, and 36.4% of survey respondents had completed graduate school, as seen in Figure 7. Additionally, one survey respondent had earned a PhD. No interviewees studied abroad, but one survey respondent studied outside of

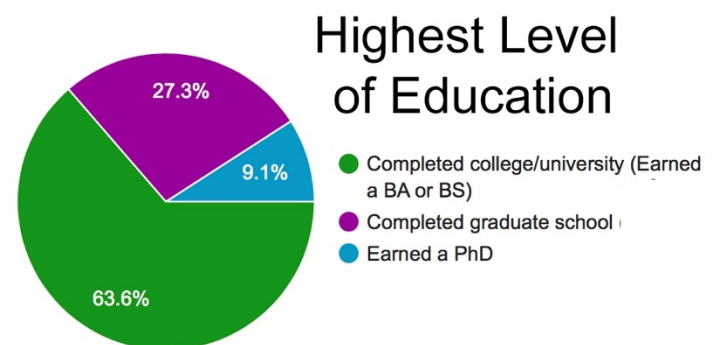


Figure 7. Survey Respondents' Highest Level of Education

Vietnam. This survey respondent also had the highest employee count of 5,000, yet this is not a significant result. The sample size is too small to make a general statement potentially linking studying abroad and scale of business, but it is of interest to note this occurrence.

A common issue that came up throughout most of my interviews was the importance of support, especially in regard to balancing time with family and business. 60% of my interviewees commented on difficulties in managing a business and a family, making it the most common issue found throughout the interview process. All 3 of the interviewees who talked about this topic stated that they believe this stress affects women more than men. Ms. X and Ms. My Bui both commented on the importance of support when finding the right balance, but the type of support varied. Ms. X talked about both familial support and hiring support, and most of her friends participate in the latter; Ms. My Bui only mentioned familial support. Regardless of the support they receive, all of the business owners who mentioned this difficulty feel as though they have found a balance of managing personal and professional life.

Although the most common challenge the women I interviewed faced was their commitment to family, there was another common trend of discriminatory legal issues. Ms. X found issue with Vietnam's maternity leave policy, while Ms. Ms. Hang was troubled by Vietnam's retirement policy. As discussed in the background section, Vietnam's current maternity leave policy leaves only around 1 week for the father of the newborn. She believes this perpetuates the gender norm of men being the breadwinner of the family, and women staying home to care for children. This should be an equal responsibility between the parents, yet this law does not leave room for equality regarding this issue. Ms. Hang started her own business largely because she was not ready to retire. The current retirement age is 60 for men and 55 for women, but this difference is unnecessary (Vietnam Plans). Ms. Hang is 58 years old and still able to work, so there is no reason for her to be forced into a premature retirement. Equalizing these legal differences between men and women would not solve all issues these women have faced, as most are due to overall attitude and treatment of women, but it would be a large step to minimizing gendered differences.

Conclusion

The women who participated in this study confirm that the experiences of female business owners range drastically depending on many factors. Although overlapping themes and commonalities could be drawn between these women, each experience remains completely valid and insightful. Each business owner has a unique story to share, as do the many others who were not interviewed in this project.

Although the majority of female business owners who participated in this study have experienced some form of sexual discrimination in a professional setting, they are still able to work with something they are passionate about. Most of the interviewees had a similar mindset about owning a business as a woman: whether they have faced a multitude of challenges regarding their gender, or none at all, their success depended on their personal drive. In order to successfully run a business, one must be extremely passionate about what they are planning to do. The work to establish a business is not easy by any means, but it is possible. Although the hardships these women have overcome will not cease, they are ready to combat any future challenges.

Future Findings

This paper scrapes the surface of an immense issue I would love to conduct more research about, yet I could not due to the limitations of time and focus of this study. I would find it very worthwhile to conduct more interviews with female business owners. The women I talked to range in age, experiences, and business types, but I did not have enough data to draw close connections between women of similar backgrounds. Additionally, having more respondents to the online survey would have helped support these findings. A sample size of 11 is not highly significant, making it difficult to draw real conclusions from this source.

Besides getting more information from the business owners themselves, I would love to further research the development of gender norms in Vietnam. Whether this be through professors, secondary sources, or other knowledgeable professionals, there is a lot more information about this topic not covered in this paper. Sex and gender, and the norms associated to these terms, are all extremely complex. Although I have studied them in the context of a classroom at Emory University, there are radical differences in how these are interpreted depending on location. It would have been extremely interesting to learn more about how society's opinions have shifted regarding gender norms in a more general sense – outside of the business world.

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Appendix

A. List of General Interview Questions

1. Full name and age
2. When was this business established, and did you found it?
3. Why did you decide to own this business?
4. What did you study in school?
5. What are some of the hardest challenges you have faced as a business owner?
6. Have you faced barriers during your professional journey because of your gender?
7. Do you believe your professional experience has been more difficult because you are female?
8. Do you believe the government should have more policies to support female business owners?
9. Are people ever surprised when they find out what your profession is?
10. Do you believe women need more support when starting a business?
11. Do you believe it has become easier or harder for women to own businesses throughout your lifetime?

B. Online Survey Questions

Background Information // Thông tin lai lịch

1. How old are you? Bạn bao nhiêu tuổi?
2. What is your highest level of education? / Mức cao nhất của giáo dục của bạn là gì?
 - a. Completed elementary school / Hoàn thành tiểu học
 - b. Completed middle school / Hoàn thành trung học cơ sở
 - c. Completed high school / Học xong cấp ba
 - d. Completed college/university (Earned a BA or BS) / Hoàn thành cao đẳng / đại học (Kiếm BA hoặc BS)
 - e. Completed graduate school (Earned a MA, MS, or MBA) / Hoàn thành trường đại học (Kiếm được bằng MA, MS hoặc MBA)
 - f. Earned a PhD / Kiếm được bằng tiến sĩ
3. Did you complete your education in Vietnam? / Bạn đã học xong ở Việt Nam chưa?
 - a. Yes / Vâng
 - b. No / Không
4. If no, where did you study? / Nếu không, bạn đã học ở đâu?

Professional Experience / Kinh nghiệm chuyên môn

1. How long have you owned this business? / Bạn sở hữu doanh nghiệp này bao lâu rồi?
2. How many employees are working for your business? / Có bao nhiêu nhân viên đang làm việc cho doanh nghiệp của bạn?
3. Did you start the business you currently run? / Bạn đã bắt đầu kinh doanh mà bạn hiện đang điều hành?
 - a. Yes / Vâng
 - b. No / Không
4. What is the Male/Female ratio in your employees? (If you are unsure, write "don't know") / Tỷ lệ Nam / Nữ trong nhân viên của bạn là bao nhiêu? (Nếu bạn không chắc chắn, hãy viết "không biết")

Effects of Gender / Ảnh hưởng của giới

1. How much do you think gender effects how you are treated in the workplace? / Bạn nghĩ hiệu ứng giới tính như thế nào khi bạn được đối xử ở nơi làm việc?
 - a. 1) No effect / Không có tác dụng
 - b. 10) Large effect / Hiệu quả lớn
2. Have you ever experienced sexual discrimination in your professional career? / Bạn đã bao giờ trải qua sự phân biệt giới tính trong sự nghiệp chuyên nghiệp của bạn?
 - a. Yes, one time / Vâng, một lần
 - b. Yes, multiple times / Vâng, nhiều lần
 - c. Yes, very often / Vâng, rất thường xuyên
 - d. Never / Không bao giờ
3. Do you believe it is more difficult for women to grow professionally? / Bạn có tin rằng phụ nữ phát triển chuyên nghiệp sẽ khó khăn hơn?
 - a. Yes / Vâng
 - b. No / Không
4. Are people ever surprised when you tell them your career? / Có bao giờ mọi người ngạc nhiên khi bạn nói với họ sự nghiệp của bạn?
 - a. 1) Never / Không bao giờ
 - b. 10) Always / Luôn luôn
5. Do you believe it is easier for women to own businesses in present day than it has been in the past? / Bạn có tin rằng phụ nữ sở hữu doanh nghiệp ngày nay dễ dàng hơn so với trước đây không?
 - a. 1) Much easier in the past / Dễ dàng hơn nhiều trong quá khứ
 - b. 10) Much easier in the present day / Dễ dàng hơn nhiều trong thời đại ngày nay