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Study of the Contribution of Research into Women Entrepreneurship: A Meta-analysis of Discourses in the Literature using ATLAS.ti

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Abstract: In this paper, we have analyzed how existing literature contributes to women entrepreneurship research in terms of theoretical, methodological and practical ways of understanding. Based on relevant contents and discourses, a main line within the trend of development can be seen as women entrepreneurship shifting from a marginalized discipline to a more multi-dimensional research concept. Certain representative issues evoke development or are even being left as "atheoretical" at some point; the "alternative" angle is accordingly significant for an in-depth exploration through the relevant materials. The literature resources are chosen with close attention to the keywords "women entrepreneurship" in current issues from academically well-known journals and books. Therefore, we plan to set three objectives in this analysis based on the following three questions: (1) Why is it important to study women entrepreneurship? (2) How does current research contribute to women entrepreneurship both from theoretical and practical points of view? (3) What are the future concerns provided by the relevant discussions? The time range has been set from 2006 to 2012, so that we can anticipate the contemporary research situation and how women entrepreneurship has evolved. Four positions ("equal opportunities", "meritocracy", "special contribution", and "alternative values") synthesized by Alvesson and Billing (2009) as "approaches to the understanding of women and leadership" will be "borrowed" to help classify and understand the theoretical background. Useful discussions and conclusions can be generalized through integrating the four positions with multiple points, which have been summarized by reading through the literature. (Seven points include "overall research development of women entrepreneurship", "empirical data gaps", "enterprising promise of women entrepreneurship", "comparisons between male and female entrepreneurs", "barriers (inequality) for female entrepreneurs", "important role of women entrepreneurs", and "cultural (national) differences for studying women entrepreneurship"). Discourses related to diverse perspectives of studying women entrepreneurship will be highlighted and concentrated on in order to conduct a meta-analysis. During the analyzing process, ATLAS.ti will be used as a support tool.

Keywords: women entrepreneurship, gender study, meta-analysis, ATLAS.ti

Overview of the aims

In recent years, research into women entrepreneurship has had an encouraging start and continuously gained comparative cumulative attention in academia. From the late 1990s, the "wave" of researching women entrepreneurship and small business has been positioned from a marginalized to a more central stage. The situation is changing – women are not merely an "invisible" force and they cannot be roughly categorized as "otherness". (Kyrö, 2009) The substantial growth of both quality and quantity in women-owned/led enterprises has to some extent been analyzed within a multi-dimensional paradigm based on diverse approaches. (Bruin, Brush, and Welter, 2006; Brush et al. 2010; Acs et al. 2011; Hughes et al. 2012) Contextual factors also at the same time shed light on research concerning how women develop their businesses, which includes not only internal (individual characteristics and ways to gather financial and/or social capital) but also external

(environmental, cultural and demographic influences) elements. (Brush et al. 2010; Hughes and Jennings, 2012)

Nevertheless, we need to study the contribution that gender studies and women entrepreneurship have brought to the field as it cannot be self-evident: certain miscellaneous issues are evoking development (Sirec, Tominc, and Rebernik, 2010) or have even been left "atheoretical" at some point (Fischer, Reuber, and Dyke, 1993), or an "alternative" (Carrier, Julien, and Menvielle, 2008) angle is accordingly meaningful for an in-depth exploration through the relevant materials. Therefore, we plan to set three objectives in this proposal based on the following questions: Why is it important to study women entrepreneurship? How does current research contribute to women entrepreneurship both from theoretical and practical points of view? What are the future concerns provided by the relevant discussions? The literature resources are chosen with close attention to the keywords "women entrepreneurship" in current issues from journals and books (See Methodology and methods). In order to clarify the research aims in a more systematic manner, discourses related to diverse perspectives studying women entrepreneurship will be highlighted and concentrated on for a meta-analysis. During the analysis process, ATLAS.ti will be used as a support tool.

Seven points have been summarized after the preliminary searching and reading, which presents certain initiatives and/or interests manifesting what, why and how women entrepreneurship is still a scarcely represented area of study, and therefore, does need further analysis. Generally, the absence in the theoretical development and practical data-processing appear to be a prevalent concern. Not only in terms of quantity but the improvement in women-owned enterprises is also becoming considerably promising. Furthermore, "in recent years the subject of women's entrepreneurship has attracted attention from a number of researchers, most of whom have compared the situation of women entrepreneurs to that of their male counterpart" (Carrier, Julien, and Menvielle, 2008); however, "little progress has been made in understanding whether such differences are pervasive, let alone why they might exist" (Fischer, Reuber, and Dyke, 2006).

Access to financial (and/or social) resources is somehow obstructed and narrowed due to the gender disparity. Certain "structural barriers" exclude women from strategy-making process. (Sirec, Tominc, and Rebernik, 2010) Indeed, it is imperative to improve the quality of gender equality as well as certain well-organized empowerment tactics. The role of women entrepreneurs is considerably emphasized through a professional impression instead of the traditional family-centralized positioning. However, such barriers regarding ethical and financial factors still exist, which are in some way derived from the male-dominant stereotype. Normally, women entrepreneurship research is empirically focused on examples found in Western developed countries; whereas similar data in developing countries are largely unexplored. A systematic view is thus required that the instances from those emerging countries (such as African, Asian and Latin American countries) can contribute a comparative facet to approaching a mutual understanding among different cultures.

Therefore, we use a meta-analysis in this study in order to explore the outcomes of women entrepreneurship research, a broad field but still too little has been understood in terms of its contribution to theory and practice.

Theoretical framework

In general terms, research on women entrepreneurs has been associated with several typical tendencies – in terms of the male-dominant stereotype, with gendered-embodied studies, to comparisons between male and

female entrepreneurs. (Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio, 2005) However accordingly, contemporary research in women entrepreneurship has inspired “new directions” (Ahl, 2006), which is also necessary for more fruitful developments. To simply point out differences between genders cannot produce abundant and useful results. Both similarities and dissimilarities indeed exist in the same way. Gender differences have been doubted and research on it has been criticized (Birley, 1989) – “many of the factors that contribute to business success and survival are the same regardless of gender” (Brush and Hisrich, 1991). Based on previous literature collected in hand, both theoretical and methodological perspectives have been developed with a series of interesting angles without emphasis on gender differentiating the analysis. Through this process, certain points can be identified for future attention. (Bruin, Brush, and Welter, 2007)

From the theoretical points of view, “organizational framework” has been synthesized into female entrepreneurship research considering both the “entrepreneurial domain” and “resource domain”. Within the field of the “entrepreneurial domain”, the following aspects are frequently under observation in women entrepreneurship analyses: “human capital”, “social capital”, “financial capital”, and “personal/cognition goals”. (Brush et al. 2006) Meanwhile, women entrepreneurial growth and performance are also closely interrelated with factors concerning “financing”, “networks and social capital” (Bruin, Brush, and Welter, 2007); as well as “motivating factors”, “management style”, “work-family balance”. (Carrier, Julien, and Menvielle 2008) Brush et al. (2010) have added more approaches related to the growth of women enterprises such as “family and individual context”, the “venture concept”, “firm resources”, “institutional financial resources” and even “country context”. New “explanations/approaches” are welcome in women entrepreneurship research as “contextual explanations” from an “objectivist and/or constructionist approach” deserve more focused attention compared to “individualistic” approaches. (Hughes et al. 2012) Furthermore, various ways of studying women entrepreneurship are being explored by following a “macro-meso-micro logic” involving “diverse settings, questions and approaches”. (Hughes and Jennings, 2012)

By applying a meta-analysis as our methodological choice, we will follow a qualitative way of analyzing, as previous research has gained statistical results through the quantitative meta-analysis of “gender and leadership style” (Eagly and Johnson, 1991). Others who have used a meta-analysis from a qualitative approach will inspire our research – literature as “discursive practices” (Ahl, 2006), studies for an “integrated perspective” (Brush, 1992), and a “deconstructive gaze” at business archives (Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio, 2005).

Aiming to perceive the contributions that have evolved in women entrepreneurship research, the four positions synthesized by Alvesson and Billing (2009) - “approaches to the understanding of women and leadership” – will be “borrowed” to classify and understand the theoretical background. (Abbott, 2003) Notably, the fact that entrepreneurs are different from managers (the former “desire to grow the business rapidly” Gundry and Welsch, 2001) is apparent in general; nevertheless, theories existing in entrepreneurship and management (leadership) are usually somehow intertwined when considering “venture success” for instance. (Brush and Hisrich, 1991) Yet by bridging gender into a multi-dimensional analysis, it is not wise to veil entrepreneurship from its interrelation with relevant organizational/institutional aspects. (Brush et al. 2010; Hughes and Jennings, 2012) Although entrepreneurship is gaining in heterogeneity and becoming an independent discipline, its close link to management studies, relatively speaking, is a process of inheriting and developing based on meaningful antecedents. (Landström and Benner, 2010; Landström, Harirchi, and Åström, 2012)

Four positions will be demonstrated in the following part:
Equal opportunities: "The advocates of the equal opportunity position to some extent consider 'legitimate' explanations for a lower degree of females in senior jobs, such as lower investment in a managerially relevant education and other priorities than a managerial career."
Meritocracy: "While the equal opportunities argument looks at obstacles and possibilities from an ethical-political point of view, a meritocratic argument is interested in combating the irrational social forces, which prevent the full utilization of the qualified human resources and thereby to increase effectivity."
Special contribution: "Women possess complementary qualifications and, thus, the potential for making new and important contributions to the field of management."
Alternative values: "This approach has some similarities with the special-contribution view, but it stresses the difference between typical male and female values more strongly, and also emphasizes conflicts between the two. It is a direct offspring from the feminist standpoint perspective and thus basically critical to male-dominant institutions." (Alvesson and Billing 2009)

In the discussion section, certain understandings based on the four positions will be linked to the findings.

Methodology and methods

The methodology applied in this research paper is a literature-based analysis. A review is conducted on the basis of five special issues and six book compilations (selected from academically-respected and leading publications) on women entrepreneurship, which includes 27 articles and 111 book chapters, altogether 136 items that are chosen as a resource pool for this study. The time range has been set to reflect a contemporary concern that is 2006 onwards (from 2006 to 2012), providing that women entrepreneurship is shifting its position from a marginalized discipline to a salient concept for research. Besides the general keyword (set as "women entrepreneurship"), other relevant terms are also considered – women/female entrepreneurs/ business owners/managers – so as to achieve promising quality throughout the sample.

A qualitative meta-analysis is taken into consideration in order to approach proper views to understand the importance of studying women entrepreneurship and what contribution these textual materials provide for women entrepreneurship research. The result is suitable for synthesizing and interpreting discursive constructions in secondary analyses of qualitative data for presenting the "idiographic integration" of "the intensive, case-oriented study of phenomena in larger and more varied samples" (Sandelowski, 2004; Sandelowski and Barroso, 2006). Various methods and techniques can be "borrowed" for initiating "analogy" along the way from processing research ideas to generalizing understandings (Abbott, 2003), which involves thematic content analysis, discourse analysis, and comparative analysis methods.

The initial step was to read through 11 introductory sections within each journal and book, which provided a general picture of the primary trends in women entrepreneurship research. The remaining literature (that includes 125 articles and chapters) were examined following a thematic content analysis using ATLAS.ti to extract keywords and patterns related to women entrepreneurship research. Seven codes have been summarized through interpreting and understanding the discourses beyond and across texts. (Relevant terminology will be explained in the nomenclature) The analysis requires systematic and reflexive thinking capabilities during the entire process. A comparative analysis is needed meanwhile for comparing and integrating categories aiming to delimit the interrelations and boundaries among different codes and quotations.

Nomenclature

ATLAS.ti: is defined as a computer software program, which has been largely applied in qualitative research for exploring different types of materials especially without particular structures (e.g. "text, pictures, sound and video"). Researchers are able to categorizing each document based on codes which can be created partly in accordance with their interpretation and logic. By analyzing the relationship between the codes, theoretical ideas can be generalized in a transparent and visualized way. A code is meant as a text segment located, selected and marked by researchers based on the research objectives/questions; it can be identified directly as a quotation or defined by the researchers themselves with a new name in a streamlined version.

Findings

In the following section, relevant direct quotations with appropriate articulations will be discussed for each code. We plan to present each of them and review the central issues within. Relevant points will be reflected upon correspondingly in accordance with our theoretical framework.

Code 1 Overall research development of women entrepreneurship: Women entrepreneurship studies have achieved fruitful research results, where it is important to analyze women entrepreneurship as to recognize female entrepreneurs as a "heterogeneous" group from multifaceted contexts. (Hill, Leitch, and Harrison, 2010) Theoretical studies are needed in various respects to broaden gender-differentiated issues – not only to allocate certain "equal opportunities" between female and male entrepreneurs (through "feminist analytical lens" Hechavarria et al. 2012) – but also most importantly to consider the "alternative values" and/or "special contribution" of women entrepreneurs (from the series of perceptions "self-employment, financial and social capital").

Code 2 Empirical data gaps: Studies concerning women entrepreneurship still remain marginal to some extent. Considering the conceptual development, previous work in some respects needs to be enriched or optimized – such angles require future attention: more data should be included with the careful selection of samples and variables (Birley, 1989), and what kind of emphasis should be concentrated on (e.g. differences among sectors or industries in which women entrepreneurs are positioned, whether there is a common boundary to advocate gender similarity or gender difference, and how to construct a feminist view based on "alternative values" or "special contribution").

Code 3 Enterprising promise of women entrepreneurship: Recently, as reflected in statistical data, the amount of women-owned enterprises is increasing substantially. They are willing to start their own business with support from venture-capital injections. At the same time, many more women prefer to be self-employed, which gives a new impetus as a field for researchers and practitioners to explore. Women entrepreneurs are becoming successful leaders in both large companies and SMEs worldwide with "a tremendous impact on employment and global business environments" (Kickul et al. 2010). Such great progress can be traced back to women's "special contribution".

Code 4 Comparisons between male and female entrepreneurs: Disparity between male and female entrepreneurs exists not only in pursuing venture capital but also developing social networks. (Carter et al. 2007) Women naturally correspond to family-oriented obligations; therefore, they constitute a lower involvement in entrepreneurial-related activities. Other features – inexperienced background and inadequate

motivation (lower level of self-confidence and/or self-efficacy) – really lead them out of a favorable situation inside the company. It is necessary to think about framing a rather optimal mechanism for female entrepreneurs to gain "equal opportunities" with their "special contribution" and/or "alternative values".

Code 5 Barriers (inequality) for female entrepreneurs: Women entrepreneurs are imprinted with difficulties accessing both financial and social capital (especially for establishing a start-up). Besides the obstacles coming from the external environment (social, cultural and institutional factors), some women entrepreneurs eventually take the unequal situation for granted by following the gender-differentiated labor distribution (either consciously or unconsciously). In other words, "the relative silence and invisibility of women in entrepreneurial discourse… the leadership in founding and running business is most naturally male." (McAdam and Marlow, 2012) This is therefore asking for attention in terms of both ethics (equality and workplace humanization) and organizational efficiency.

Code 6 Important role of women entrepreneurs: In recent years, women entrepreneurs have started to perform an important role in both social and economic spheres. They are gaining comparatively more and more economic and political power. Meanwhile female entrepreneurs are labeled as "great problem solvers for keeping things in order" (Markovic, 2007), which helps organizations to achieve sustainability as a whole. One fact can be perceived – women represent a significant position in having a "special contribution" and "alternative values" in the managerial or even decision-making process (not only in SMEs, family businesses or copreneurship firms but also large companies).

Code 7 Cultural (national) differences for studying women entrepreneurship: Studying women entrepreneurship in developed (western) countries is favored by many researchers based on diverse instances. Nevertheless, given women entrepreneurs in certain developed countries are emerging with remarkable levels of achievement, this is turning into a prominent topic for academic attention. Culture-related prospects can be reckoned a starting point for embarking on a more comparative analysis. "...in developing countries…contribution of female entrepreneurship to economic development rests not only on its employment and wealth creation, but also on the diversity of entrepreneurial activity and the improvement of the overall quality of entrepreneurship" (Nissan, Carrasco, and Castano, 2012).

Discussions and future concerns

The figure (Figure 1) below indicates the interrelation between the findings summarized by the seven codes and four positions of women in management. Code 1 focuses on the overall interest in women entrepreneurship development. We gathered direct quotations primarily from theoretical perspectives – female entrepreneurship research can be conducted by incorporating both personal (such as ambition, motivation, and self-efficacy) and environmental (referred to as social and economic) factors. In Code 2 our understanding is based on empirical study, which asks either for a typical case study (such as self-employed entrepreneurs) or longitudinal research (including women entrepreneurs working in different types of enterprises). Apparently, both of these two macro viewpoints can be synthesized accordingly into four positions. Alternative values and special contribution represent more aspects from the female entrepreneur's perspective – they possess comparatively peculiar personal characteristics. Equal opportunities and meritocracy suggest more favor for organizational or social perspectives. Equal treatment tends to become a core tendency aiming to improve efficiency in an organization.

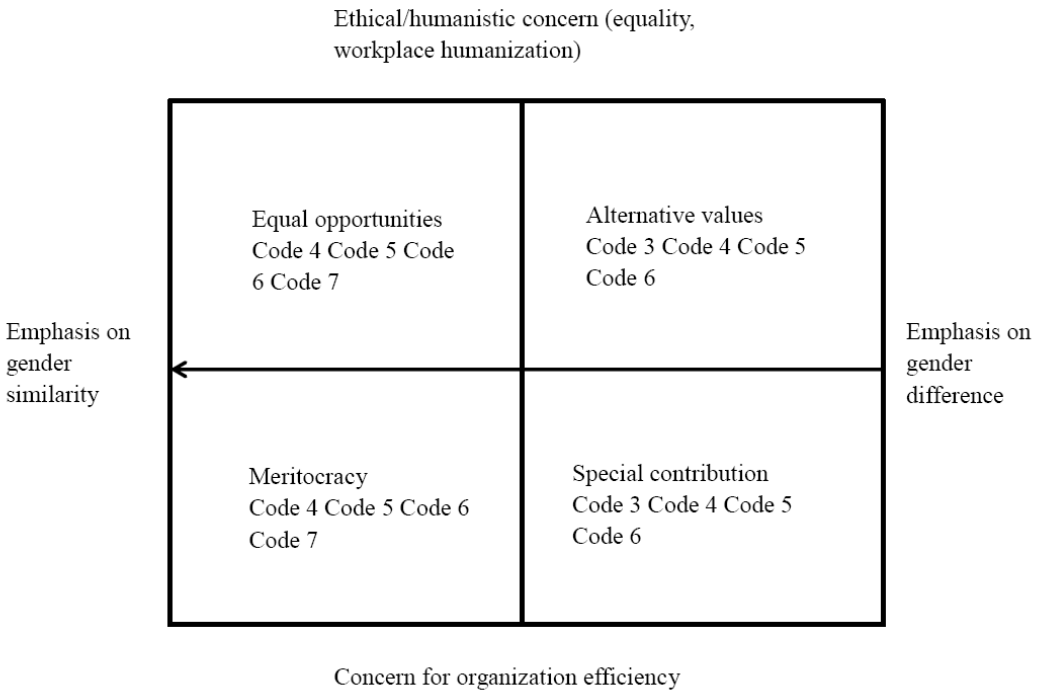

Figure 1: Understanding of women entrepreneurship positioned into the four approaches (Source: adapted from Alvesson and Billing (2009)

Through grouping the four positions into two categories, we intend to further discuss how their internal logics link to the relevant codes. "Women can contribute something essential to organizations…to prefer a people-oriented and democratic leadership style, to make the social structure less hierarchical, and to change the workplace climate so that empathy and intuition become more significant." (Alvesson and Billing, 2009) Those special personal features differentiate female entrepreneurs from their male counterparts. (Linked to Code 3 and Code 4) Women entrepreneurs are more socialization-oriented. Nevertheless, from a more radical perspective, feminists prefer a change that differs from the male-dominant stereotype, that usually is the core (Linked to Code 5) Conflicts between female and male entrepreneurs are more emphasized in the alternative-value viewpoints. (Linked to Code 5) In this sense, women entrepreneurs are expected to exert remarkable influence in the decision-making process through appropriately reflecting and applying their advantageous capabilities. (Linked to Code 6)

To compare female and male entrepreneurs without clear regulations will eventually direct researchers to enter an endless circulation. This calls forth a proper prerequisite, either from personal or institutional points of view. The ultimate goal at this point can be set as to achieve equal opportunities distributed in an organization. Organizational instrumentality corresponds to ethical concern in terms of less discrimination. Furthermore, in society, people need to be treated equally according to their capabilities regardless of other concerns or prejudice. Position and privilege can thus be properly allocated with the aim of enhancing organizational efficiency and achieving the common good. Meritocracy is not a utopia but an ideal situation though anticipating an optimal harmony both in micro (an organization) and macro (the whole society) dimensions. This is also applicable throughout the world despite the differences between nations and cultures. We tried to clarify and summarize the discussion into a flowchart. (See Figure 2)

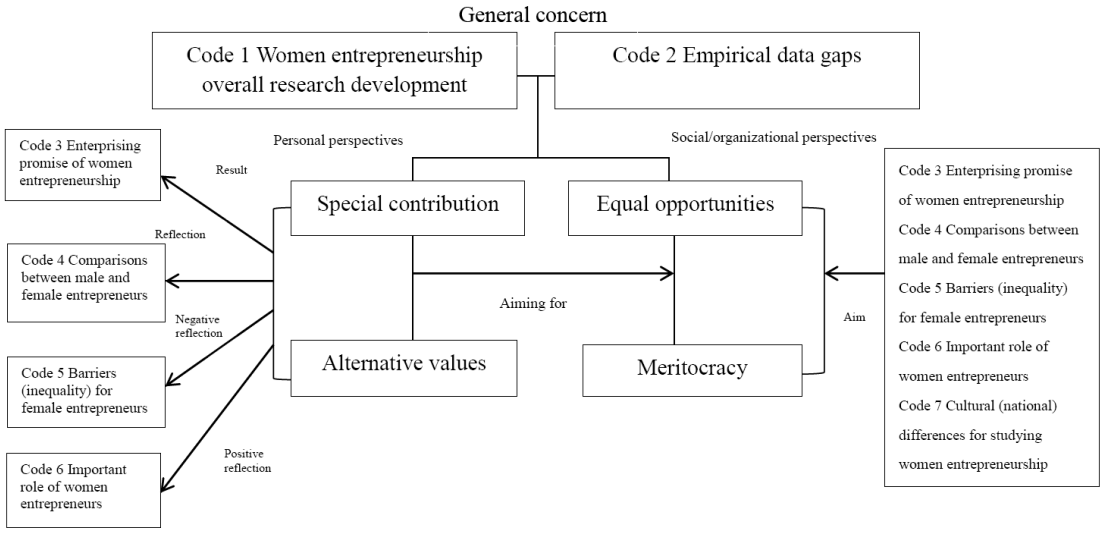

Figure 2: Internal logic between codes and positions

Women entrepreneurship is indeed worthwhile researching and contributions are diversified depending on a great variety of concerns. It cannot be simply defined as marginalized within entrepreneurship research; on the contrary, women entrepreneurship will to some extent broaden and enrich the existing theoretical development of entrepreneurship. The aim is to provide research with relevant preliminary and exploratory proposals. Meanwhile, more discussion and possible debate should definitely be developed on the basis of this research. It may also be valuable to analyze more recent publications that have emerged since 2012. Additionally, we intend to pursue certain statistical results, which are able to show how many articles correspond with each position. Through numerical data, reliability can be enhanced, and reciprocity is further enhanced between the theoretical framework and empirical findings.

Furthermore, from a practical perspective, certain points can be suggested to relevant practitioners; for example, entrepreneurs, managers, policy/law-makers and lenders among others. Future research could explore questions such as why is it important to study women entrepreneurship; what position would be set for a female entrepreneur in an organization; how to help women entrepreneurs make good use of their advantages and resources; what policies or laws could be established to achieve an equal/efficient situation. (Answers to these questions are useful for consideration as a starting point – from the internal perspective: to improve women's own self-awareness and self-confidence; from the external perspective: to support them with equal access to financial/social capital.)

Conclusion

Women entrepreneurship research calls forth new approaches. As more diverse disciplines become involved, more systematic and logical ways of thinking are needed. Theories from organizational studies can provide useful understandings; meanwhile, longitudinal analyses of previous studies will help generalize inspiring points. This paper can somehow highlight purposeful findings. At the very least, both conceptual and practical developments will lead to more constructive suggestions for future research. To integrate different perspectives instead of focusing on a single view may provide a useful new direction for gender studies. Merely comparing the differences between female and male entrepreneurs is considered narrow minded. Heterogonous contextual factors are worth a deeper exploration.

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