

Introduction

As the global business environment is growing increasingly VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous), the growing need for research on the action of venturing in precarious and uncertain settings has been underscored both in the entrepreneurship literature (Bullough and Renko 2017) and beyond (Pinto, Bader and Schuster 2017). Recent research argues that external events, characteristics, context, can function as an enablement as much as they can limit entrepreneurial agency (Davidsson, Recker and Briel 2020). There has been little research done in VUCA context specifically focusing on Africa (Barnard, Cuervo-Cazurra and Manning 2017). The aim of the present paper proposal is to look at a VUCA context and the consequences of the of external disruption of international entrepreneurial action at the local level using Africa as a laboratory setting. This external disruption is viewed specifically on its effects on women.

The focal external disruption consists of unintended consequences of extreme competition and government action. The research question I intend to ask is two-pronged: How may a local external context disruption influence cross-national corporate entrepreneurial action in a) general and b) at the personal level of the entrepreneurial ventures.

I approach these questions at the firm level of analysis, allowing me to focus on general themes across interviewed participants focusing on the challenges experienced in a VUCA context. I will use a feminist lens. In doing so, I intend to add to the very limited number of studies on personal danger, concomitant fear, and their professional consequences on female entrepreneurs.

In the following, we provide a concise review of relevant literature on (1) disruptions in international entrepreneurship, (2) challenges faced in corporate entrepreneurship and specifically female entrepreneurs in times of disruption/crisis, and (3) the specific challenges posed by a VUCA context. We then proceed to account for our methodology and results before presenting our conclusions and a range of recommendations both for entrepreneurs and host countries.

Literature review

Disruptions in international entrepreneurship

There is a wide consensus that environmental and contextual changes are disequilibrating forces on entrepreneurial action (Davidsson, Recker and Briel 2020). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and international entrepreneurship (IE) are greatly affected by external forces (Baier-Fuentes, Hormiga, et al. 2019). According to Gerschewski (2016), entrepreneurial passion, perseverance and resilience are said to be key factors in survival. Davidsson (2015) defined external enabling factors as the “the aggregate-level circumstances—such as regulatory changes, technological breakthroughs, and demographic shifts—which may affect a variety of new venture creation” (Davidsson 2015, p. 677). They are the collective factors that create space for entrepreneurship action. But little has been written on what happens when the external forces which are meant to be enablers are in reality a disruptor. Specifically, how different types of external enablers combine to trigger disruption to entrepreneurial action.

Challenges faced by management and corporate entrepreneurs in a disruptive context

One aim of firms is to gain competitive advantage and corporate entrepreneurship (CE) is means towards it (Sebora and Theerapatvong 2010). It is a product of internal and external environments, yet most research on entrepreneurship, including corporate entrepreneurship, is concentrated around USA, UK, Sweden and Finland, developed countries (Baier-Fuentes, Merigó, et al. 2019). This concentration calls for attention on environments left out such as developing countries which represent 75% of world trade participants (Institute of Policy Studies n.d.). This is because challenges faced by management have a strong influence on the choice and degree of internationalisation and is dependent on a specific environmental context (Manalova, Brush and Edelman 2002).

Globally, Africa's share of world trade is 16% though economically out growing its contemporaries (Brookings Institute n.d.). Current theoretical discussions have described the African environment as an intense industry setting (Lasse, et al. 2018). It is characterised with high competition, unforgiving and tough business climate with a low generation of opportunities, VUCA. The ever-changing dynamics of African institutions, culture and demographic bring VUCA context to prominence (Barnard, Cuervo-Cazurra and Manning 2017).

Environmental drivers are important for foreign market expansion (Tarkkeli, et al. 2018). A constant change in the environment leads to an unwillingness to expand (Tarkkeli, et al. 2018). In this context, there are examples where theories developed under western economic models have not applied in African countries. (Barnard, Cuervo-Cazurra and Manning 2017). This is because different institutional environments favour different types of opportunities and evoke different challenges for firms (Young, Welter and Conger 2018).

When the challenges faced by management are directed towards a female entrepreneur

In her 2006 paper, Helene Ahl (2006) highlighted that female led entrepreneurship has often been criticised for using male-gendered lens and lacks a feminist analysis. In this lens many scholars have called for context in discussions on gender dimensions (Steyaert and Hjorth 2009, Welter 2011, Dana and Ramadhani 2015). A discussion needs to happen on assumptions that, a male will be affected the same as a female and delve more into the impact of context. This paper will take a feminist perspective, which is broadly defined as the recognition of women's subordination and the desire to rectify this. It will use this perspective to look at the effects of external disrupts at the firm level, of female led entrepreneurship.

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