

Women Entrepreneurs in Transport Family Business: A perspective article.

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Cite as: [Mogaji, E. \(2023\), "Women entrepreneurs in transport family business: a perspective article", *Journal of Family Business Management*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFBM-08-2023-0121>](#)

Abstract

Purpose – This paper underscores the importance of conducting studies that examine the experiences of women transport entrepreneurs within the context of the intersectionality of patriarchal culture, the challenges posed by insufficient infrastructure on business operations, and the dominance of the male-dominated transport industry.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is based on a concise literature review.

Findings – The intersectionality of these factors significantly influences women's prospects, opportunities, and barriers as they navigate the entrepreneurial realm within the transportation sector. Understanding these complexities is essential to devise targeted strategies and policies that foster gender equality, promote inclusive economic growth, and empower women entrepreneurs in this vital industry.

Originality/value – This paper synthesises existing research on family business, entrepreneurship and business operations in Africa.

Keywords: patriarchy, transportation, entrepreneurs, women, Africa.

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

A transformative shift is imperative in the male-dominated landscape of family-owned transportation businesses in Africa (Nwuke et al., 2020; Nguyen & Mogaji, 2021). As the world calls for gender equality and inclusivity, the role of women in this traditional domain has come into focus (Marín-Palacios, 2023; Haddad et al., 2022; Mogaji et al., 2021). For generations, family-owned transportation businesses in Africa have predominantly been passed down from fathers to sons, with women primarily confined to support roles. Societal norms, stereotypes, and entrenched gender biases have limited women's involvement in decision-making and managerial positions within these businesses. Consequently, talented and capable women have often been overlooked, depriving the industry of fresh perspectives and innovative ideas. Moreover, with the growing interest in achieving sustainable development goals and the drive for gender equality and equal opportunities, family businesses must seize the opportunity for gender balance (Lange, 2019).

This perspective article delves into the challenges women face in family-owned transportation businesses, the opportunities for empowerment and growth, and the potential for creating a more equitable and prosperous future for all. Specifically, this article presents a unique perspective on the family business by exploring the internationality of experiences of women transport entrepreneurs in Africa. As illustrated in Figure 1, these women are sandwiched between the patriarchy and polygamous culture in many African countries (Cho et al., 2018; Kiwia et al., 2020; Oury Bailo et al., 2023); second, the insufficient and inadequate infrastructures that affect business operations in Africa (Mogaji & Nguyen, 2021; Mogaji & Nguyen, 2023; Mousa & Arslan, 2023) and third, the societal expectations of women for women in a male-dominated, informal and unregulated transport services ecosystem (Akyelken, 2020; Luo & He, 2021). This commentary delves deeper into previous research on women in transportation, highlighting gaps in the literature and offering a practical perspective for the future.

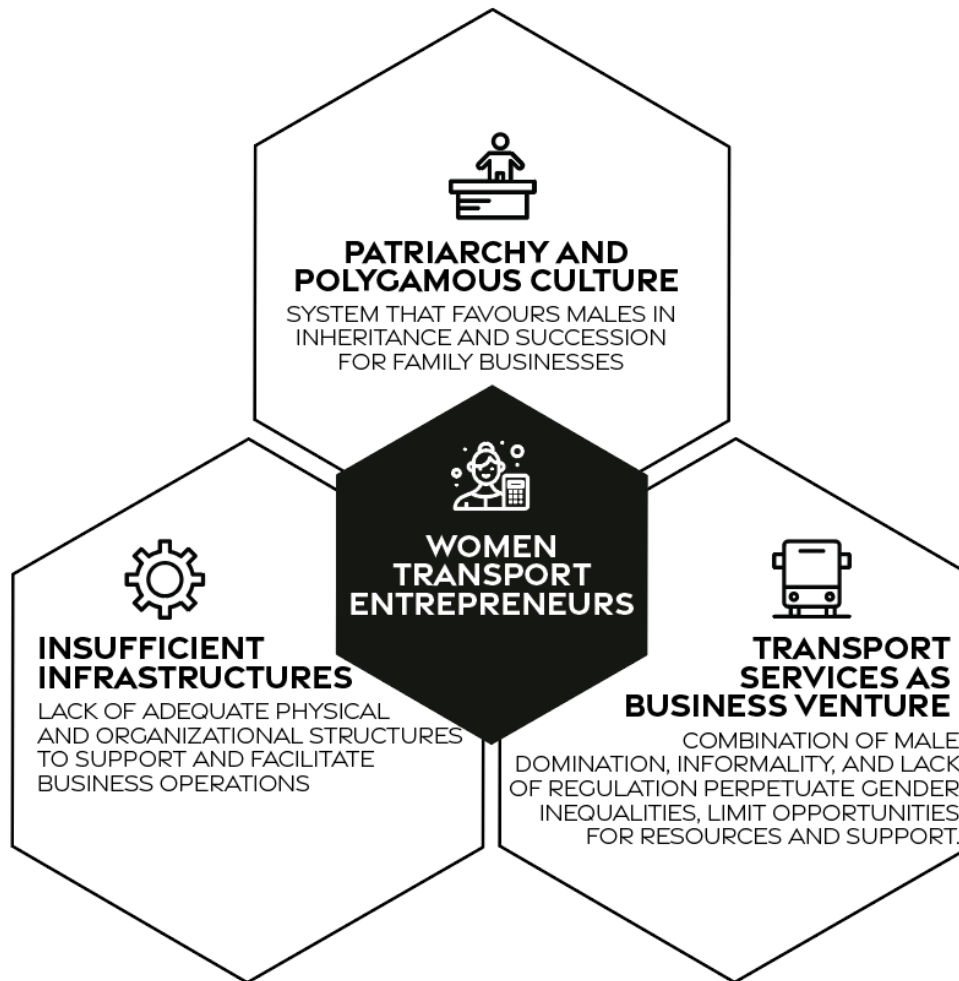


Figure 1: Intersectionality of experiences of women transport entrepreneurs in Africa.

Extant literature

Women often face cultural barriers and societal expectations that discourage them from pursuing careers in the transport sector. Concerns around safety and work-life balance further exacerbate the challenges, dissuading many from exploring opportunities within the family business. A growing number of research are beginning to explore the experiences and role of women in transportation (Churchill & Craig, 2019; French & Strachan, 2009; Akyelken, 2020). However, there are still significant gaps in our understanding as we examine the unique intersection of women in family transport businesses in many African countries.

First, the impact of patriarchy and polygamy on the socio-economic development of Africa remains an area that requires further investigation and understanding. Although a growing number of studies evaluating these phenomena (Cho et al., 2018; Fenske, 2015; Kiwia et al., 2020), their impact on women's entrepreneurship prospects within family businesses is still

limited. In patriarchal economies, women in the transportation industry encounter significant challenges due to a system favouring males in inheritance and succession for family businesses, perpetuating gender inequality and limiting women's opportunities to participate fully and excel (Kiwia et al., 2020). While studies such as Remery et al. (2014) have acknowledged gender differences in attitudes towards succession and ownership in family businesses in developed countries, women in many African countries face constraints due to the prevailing patriarchal culture in their societies (Cho et al., 2018; Oury Bailo et al., 2023).

Additionally, the practice of polygamy in some countries, particularly in West Africa, adds another layer of complexity for women entrepreneurs in Africa. Research by Adenike (2013) and Fenske (2015) has shown that polygamy practices significantly influence family dynamics. For instance, Oury Bailo et al. (2023) explored the impact of polygamy on family business succession planning in Guinea, while Cho et al. (2018) examined its effects on the sustainability of family businesses in Cameroon. These studies revealed that polygamous marriages often lead to rivalries among siblings or wives, as business owners have multiple wives and children from different mothers, hindering opportunities for women to succeed in leadership positions (Richards, 2014; Tertilt, 2005). To promote women's entrepreneurship and foster inclusive economic development, a deeper understanding of the interplay between patriarchy, polygamy, and women's opportunities within family businesses is crucial. Further research in this area can inform policies and initiatives that empower women and create a more equitable business environment in Africa.

Second, from an African perspective, with inherent challenges with infrastructures which affect family businesses, including transportation services, there needs to be a greater understanding of how these challenges affect business operations. Most studies focusing on women's experiences had been contextualised in developed countries. Haddad et al. (2022) evaluate the role and experiences of women working in transport in the UK, and French & Strachan (2009) evaluate opportunities for women in the Australian transport industry while not disparaging the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs in these developed countries; it is imperative to recognise that operating businesses in many of the African countries comes with its challenges. With inherent socio-economic challenges around infrastructures, financial support, policies and regulatory requirement (Mogaji & Nguyen, 2023; Mogaji & Nguyen, 2021; Soetan et al., 2021), prospective women transport entrepreneurs face various social, economic and cultural barriers which may not be present in developed countries.

Thirdly, it is noteworthy that studies have predominantly centred on the oversight of traditional transport planning regarding how women move within cities, their specific transport needs, and safety concerns (Akyelken, 2020; Luo & He, 2021; Noor & Iamtrakul, 2023). This research has often portrayed women primarily as transport service users rather than entrepreneurs. However, there is an emerging trend where women are increasingly becoming involved in providing transport services, mainly through the gig economy. Women are now utilising digital platforms to secure work as drivers, signifying a shift in the dynamics of the transportation industry (Churchill & Craig, 2019). This shift allows women to challenge traditional roles, empowering them to take on more active and entrepreneurial roles in the transport sector. Though the industry is often male-dominated (Noor & Iamtrakul, 2023; Haddad et al., 2022; French & Strachan, 2009), informal and unregulated (Nwaedozi et al., 2023), there are increasing opportunities for women entrepreneurs.

Future perspectives

The journey towards gender equality and women's empowerment in family-owned transportation businesses begins with challenging ingrained beliefs and embracing diversity (Churchill & Craig, 2019; Marín-Palacios, 2023; Lange, 2019). The increasing empowerment of women is evident as they take charge of their destinies, even when they are excluded from succession plans due to patriarchal norms. Women demonstrate remarkable entrepreneurial spirit, seizing opportunities in the transportation industry and venturing into the gig economy to provide transport services (Churchill & Craig, 2019). With the rapid advancement of technologies, women without family businesses are now becoming transport tech entrepreneurs, starting their ventures and contributing to the sector's growth. However, ensuring sustained support for this entrepreneurial drive is crucial, as the gender imbalance is likely to persist in the next generation of family business ownership (Lange, 2019). The PwC's 11th Global Family Business Survey in 2023 revealed that 31% of family businesses do not have any women on their boards, emphasising the need to enhance gender diversity and inclusivity (PwC, 2023) and create a more inclusive work environment that celebrates the contributions of both men and women (Nguyen & Mogaji, 2021).

To foster a more enabling environment, it is imperative to actively promote women's participation and leadership within the transportation industry. Providing mentorship, access to resources, and opportunities for skill development can help bridge the gender gap and create a more balanced representation of women in the sector. Encouraging family businesses to

embrace gender diversity and provide equal opportunities for women to join their boards can lead to more equitable decision-making and sustained growth in the industry. As women continue to forge their path as transport entrepreneurs, supporting their efforts will drive economic progress and pave the way for a more inclusive and thriving transportation sector. Encouraging women to pursue education and training in transport-related fields can equip them with the knowledge and expertise necessary to thrive in the industry (Noor & Iamtrakul, 2023). Additionally, mentorship programs and networking opportunities can provide valuable guidance and support as women navigate the traditionally male-dominated domain. Furthermore, involving women in decision-making is vital (Akyelken, 2020). By welcoming their input and recognising their expertise, family businesses can benefit from broader perspectives, resulting in more innovative and effective strategies (Lange, 2019). Women leaders can also champion diversity and inclusivity within the workplace, creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and equal opportunity.

Including women in family-owned transportation businesses is not solely about fulfilling a moral obligation but also about maximising the potential for growth and success. Embracing gender diversity has been linked to better decision-making, improved financial performance, and enhanced organisational creativity. Studies have shown that women prioritise safety and passenger comfort (Akyelken, 2020; Haddad et al., 2022; French & Strachan, 2009), which can lead to higher customer satisfaction. Additionally, women leaders have been found to foster a collaborative and supportive work culture, leading to higher employee engagement and retention rates. By cultivating an environment that values and supports women's participation, family-owned transportation businesses can tap into an extensive pool of talent, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit, positioning themselves as progressive and socially responsible leaders in the industry.

Conclusion

Family-owned transportation businesses in Africa are witnessing a transformative era, with a focus on gender equality and women's empowerment taking centre stage. Despite prevailing patriarchal and polygamous cultural norms in many African countries, fostering diversity and providing equal opportunities for women becomes not only a moral imperative but also a strategic approach for growth and prosperity. By dismantling gender barriers, promoting education and support, and involving women in decision-making, these businesses can unleash their full potential, paving the way for a more equitable and thriving future in the transport

industry. While challenges may lie ahead, embracing this change promises a more inclusive, innovative, and prosperous family transportation business, benefiting all stakeholders and contributing to a more progressive society. Today's commitment to gender equality lays the foundation for a vibrant and sustainable transport industry, where women and men work hand in hand to create a better and more promising tomorrow.

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