



Against all odds: women motivation to become entrepreneurs

Theoneste Manishimwe¹ · Joy Eghonghon Akahome² · Joseph Uwagaba³ · Ibrahim Danjuma¹

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the motivational factors that drive women to venture into entrepreneurship within male-dominated industries in Nigeria, using the frameworks of institutional theory and self-determination theory (SDT). The study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach and conducts 30 interviews with women entrepreneurs (WEs) from different sectors and backgrounds, using a snowball sampling technique. The results show that WEs are driven by various factors related to the institutional environment (regulatory, normative, and cognitive), such as economic improvement, family pressure and support, husband's consent and independence, family legacy, gender equality, skills, education, and experience. These factors reflect the economic commitment and resilience of WEs. This study enriches the existing literature on women entrepreneurs and institutional entrepreneurship by offering empirical evidence on how women entrepreneurs surmount the challenges presented by patriarchal societies and male-dominated businesses (MDB). The study posits that models of institutional entrepreneurship could potentially enhance the number of women entrepreneurs and make contribution to the attainment of sustainable development goals (SDGs) 3 and 8. This represents the pioneering study that applies both institutional theory and self-determination theory (SDT) to scrutinize women entrepreneurs operating in MDB. The study has implications for policymakers who want to foster and enable WEs in developing countries. It underscores the importance of understanding the unique women's motivations to become entrepreneurs in patriarchal societies and highlights the need for supportive institutional frameworks to facilitate their success.

Keywords Male-dominated business · Women entrepreneur · Motivation · Self-determination theory · Institutional system

Introduction

In the realm of global entrepreneurship, women have been making significant strides, despite facing numerous challenges. The GEM Women's Entrepreneurship report for 2021–2022 reveals that women's entrepreneurial activity declined by 15% from 2019 to 2020 but remained stable in 2021 (Am et al., 2022; GEM, 2021/2022). Despite this, women still account for 40% of new business owners. However, during the pandemic period of 2 years, there was an observed increase in the proportion of women-owned

businesses that closed down, rising from 2.9 to 3.6% (Am et al., 2022; GEM, 2021/2022). These women entrepreneurs (WEs) operate in various sectors, with 20% in the government and social services sector and the majority in the wholesale/retail sector (Am et al., 2022; GEM, 2021/2022). According to Am et al. (2022), GEM 2021–2022, on a global scale, the projected average of women intending to establish a business in the upcoming 3 years is approximately 17.6%, which is only about a quarter of the male rate. On average, only 25% of the owners and managers of established businesses are women (Bin-Humam et al., 2023). These statistics underscore the existing gender disparity in entrepreneurship, emphasizing the necessity for legal and policy reinforcements to support WEs.

In Africa, the trends in women's entrepreneurship are quite distinctive. A total of 58% of self-employed individuals on the continent are women, demonstrating that women in Africa are more enterprising than men (Maina & Marks, 2020). This is higher than the world average, where women constitute two-fifths of all early-stage entrepreneurs.

✉ Theoneste Manishimwe
theoneste.manishimwe@aun.edu.ng

¹ Department of Business Administration, American University of Nigeria, Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria

² Department of Entrepreneurship and Marketing, Federal University Otuoke, Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

³ University of Economics and Human Sciences, Warsaw, Poland

However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, women entrepreneurs earn 34% less than men on average, despite their high participation rates (ONU, 2022). The MIWE ranks Botswana as the best African country for fostering women's entrepreneurship, with a score of 56.3 points in 2021 (Galal, 2023). Ghana (51.1) and South Africa (54.9) follow closely (Galal, 2023). These countries not only boast a high proportion of businesses owned by women, but they also extend formal support to women entrepreneurs (Galal, 2023). Conversely, data from 11 African nations reveals that male-owned businesses, on average, possessed capital six times greater than their female-owned counterparts (Diariétou, 2019). This unequal distribution of assets may make it harder for women to access loans for SMEs, which may limit the growth of their businesses (Diariétou, 2019).

Entrepreneurship in Nigeria is a unique phenomenon. The proportion of enterprises owned by men and women is almost equal, with 57% and 43%, respectively (Adeyemi et al., 2022). Women entrepreneurs in Nigeria run 41% of micro-businesses, with a total of 23 million women engaged in this sector (PWC, 2020). Both men and women are mainly driven by opportunities, with 74% of early-stage entrepreneurs from both genders stating this as their motivation (GEM, 2019/22). However, women entrepreneurs face many challenges, such as gender discrimination, work-family balance, unfriendly business and political climates, lack of infrastructure, financial constraints, personality issues, and inadequate entrepreneurship education (Nwachukwu et al., 2021). These challenges can negatively affect the performance, growth, and survival of women-owned businesses (Mintah et al., 2022). Despite these challenges, women entrepreneurs have adopted various coping strategies, such as using their own funds and their spouses' funds to finance their businesses (Nwachukwu et al., 2021).

As a result, the Nigerian government has initiated several programs to support and empower women entrepreneurs, such as the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP), the N-Power Programme, the Flourish Africa Grant, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDAN), the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), and the You-win Programme (Flourish Africa, 2021); Akinyemi & Adejumo, 2018). These programs aim to provide women entrepreneurs with access to finance, training, mentorship, networking, market linkages, and policy advocacy. However, despite these government initiatives across the globe and specifically in Nigeria, challenges faced by WEs persist. This study aims to delve deeper into these gender-based challenges and explore why some women still find reasons to become entrepreneurs. It will also propose potential solutions to bridge the gender disparity in entrepreneurship.

Numerous scholars and researchers have previously probed into the motivational factors that inspire women

entrepreneurs. They have recognized women entrepreneurship as a highly effective strategy for mitigating poverty (Fotopoulos & Storey, 2019). Furthermore, it has been observed that an increase in women's income through entrepreneurship not only benefits their families but also positively impacts the economy (Mustafa et al., 2021). While there has been scarce research on the motivational drivers of WEs in male-dominated businesses, it's essential to understand the specific institutional conditions that affect women's motivation for entrepreneurship (Bulanova et al., 2016; Gundry and Welsch, 2001). Specifically, very few studies in the field of women's entrepreneurial intention have ventured into ostensibly male-dominated businesses (such as scaffolding, transportation, oil and gas, mining, photography, barbering, electrical engineering, shoe making, hotel business, school business) despite the existing challenges faced by women entrepreneurs due to gender biases and cultural and religious restrictions (Abe & Abe, 2021).

Institutions are factors that can either constrain or motivate an individual's behavior. This can generate either a positive (pull aspect) or negative drive (push aspect) for women who are entrepreneurs (Monteith & Camfield, 2019). Gimenez-Jimenez et al. (2020) call for further studies to focus on the institutional factors affecting women's motivation to become entrepreneurs and investigate whether these women are motivated by necessity, opportunity, or purpose (pursuing sustainable business ventures). This research aims to investigate the institutional environment (cognitive, normative, and regulative) that affects and influences Nigerian women to become entrepreneurs and determine whether they are motivated by opportunity, necessity, or purposiveness. This study also responds to the call for research on women entrepreneurship and institutional theory in developing economies by addressing the difference in the allocation of entrepreneurial efforts among regulatory, normative, and cognitive factors that lead to opportunity and necessity-driven activities (Thai & Turkina, 2014; Yousafzai et al., 2015). This perspective enables us to develop an institutional theoretical framework based on motivation and women's participation in male-dominated businesses.

Using the self-determination theory (SDT) to investigate the motivational drivers of women to becoming entrepreneurs in male-dominated businesses within institutional systems could provide valuable insights. SDT indeed offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the motivations and behaviors of entrepreneurs, particularly women. It encompasses five mini-theories: organismic integration theory, extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation, cognitive evaluation theory, and basic psychological needs theory (Adams et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2019). Each of these mini-theories provides unique insights into different aspects of entrepreneurial motivation and behavior. While

SDT provides a broad perspective on entrepreneurial motivation, it is critical to emphasize that it is not the only perspective.

The Nigerian context

Nigeria, currently the most populous African nation with a population exceeding 200 million (Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014), is forecasted to see its population double to 400 million by 2050. This growth would position it as the third most populous country worldwide (World Bank, 2020). Nigeria's rich cultural heritage, diverse ethnic groups, and vibrant music and film industries make it a symbol of hope for other African countries (Obono, 2003). Despite its challenges, Nigeria's resilience in the face of adversity and its ability to overcome challenges make it a beacon of hope for the rest of the continent. However, the significant growth in population has been found to negatively impact the management's effectiveness of human resources in Nigeria (Adeosun & Popogbe, 2021). This surge in population is linked with issues such as the impediment of economic development, limited access to education for girls, and challenges in the proper regulation of infrastructure development (Alimi et al., 2021).

Furthermore, industries such as transportation, manufacturing, banking, construction, and telecommunications remain male-dominated business environments in Nigeria (Ajibade Adisa et al., 2021). As a multi-ethnic country, most ethnic groups in Nigeria are motivated by an entrepreneurial spirit to cope with discrimination from other ethnic groups. For instance, the industrious and enterprising Igbo ethnic group is considered the most educated ethnic group in Nigeria, followed by the Yoruba ethnic group (Adeosun & Owolabi, 2021). Discrimination is present in every Nigerian institutional environment (regulatory, normative, and cognitive) (Adeosun & Owolabi, 2021).

As a country with a rich cultural heritage, Nigerians have built social relationships based on marriage, similar ethnic groups, religion, and association (Adeosun & Owolabi, 2021), emphasizing sharing, interdependency on family networks, and obligation. For example, in Nigeria, family members form a social bond that acts as social insurance. This bond has several dimensions such as financial and emotional support. These family members have reinforced their values that adhere to maintaining personal and social relationships which exert normative pressure on certain behaviors that require a commitment to the relationship. Therefore, the interviews presented here should be interpreted in the context of Nigeria, a country that is both unique and exceedingly complex.

Women in Nigeria society

Nigeria, like some other African countries such as Ethiopia (Cummings & Lopez, 2023), is fundamentally a patriarchal society. The prevalent ideology in Nigeria that "women are not good enough" is frequently linked to religious and traditional practices that place men above women in the community and professionally (Ajibade Adisa et al., 2021). These practices confine women to low-paying jobs and keep them under the glass ceiling. Women are among the most vulnerable groups, and it appears that the violation of a woman's natural rights begins at birth and continues until her death (Ajibade Adisa et al., 2021; Olonade et al., 2021). Regardless of class, profession, or education level, cultural violence against women manifests at all levels in Nigerian society and is linked to its patriarchal nature (Mshelia, 2021). The consequences of this act extend far beyond limiting women's opportunities and autonomy; it also restricts their potential and prevents them from fully participating in livelihood activities. This leads to sexually transmitted diseases, suicide, depression, murder, physical injuries, and among other things (Mshelia, 2021).

Institutional theory and self-determination theory

According to Urban (2019), institutional theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how the norms, values, and beliefs of the institutional context in which businesses operate influence those businesses. This theory posits that extrinsic and intrinsic elements collaboratively shape organizations. Intrinsic factors are internal to the organization and are often shaped by the broader institutional environment. These could include the organization's internal culture, values, and beliefs. For instance, the cognitive institutional support system, which encompasses knowledge, skills, and abilities that entrepreneurs need to succeed, can be seen as an intrinsic factor. This system is inherent to the organization and its individuals and is often fostered through educational institutions and training programs (Abe & Abe, 2021).

On the other hand, extrinsic factors originate from the larger institutional environment in which organizations operate. These include formal institutional support (also called "regulatory systems"), such as government policies, laws, and regulations; and informal institutional support (also "normative systems"), including social norms, values, and beliefs. These factors are external to the organization but exert a significant influence on its operations and behaviors (Abe & Abe, 2021; Urban, 2019). Institutional theory suggests that organizations are shaped by a multifaceted interplay of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. These factors

together form the cognitive, normative, and regulatory institutional systems which govern access to critical resources and shape entrepreneurial mindsets and behaviors (Abe & Abe, 2021; Urban, 2019). This comprehensive understanding of organizational behavior underscores the importance of both internal dynamics and external influences in shaping entrepreneurial success.

The self-determination theory (SDT) offers comprehensive insights into understanding the motivations and behaviors of entrepreneurs, particularly women. It encompasses five mini-theories: organismic integration theory, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, cognitive evaluation theory, and basic psychological needs theory. These theories provide insights into various aspects of entrepreneurial motivation and behavior (Adams et al., 2017; Ryan and Deci, 2019). Intrinsic motivation suggests that individuals engage in activities for their inherent satisfaction and enjoyment (Forner et al., 2020). Extrinsic motivation explores how external factors such as rewards or societal recognition can influence behavior (Forner et al., 2020). Cognitive evaluation theory examines how external events like feedback or evaluations can impact intrinsic motivation (Forner et al., 2020). Organismic integration theory examines how extrinsic motivations can be assimilated and incorporated into one's sense of self (Forner et al., 2020). The basic psychological needs theory underscores the significance of three fundamental psychological needs such as relatedness, competence, and autonomy for enhancing motivation, well-being, and optimal functioning (Forner et al., 2020).

Building on this discussion, institutional theory was used as a framework to explore the motivational drivers that lead women to become entrepreneurs in Nigeria, particularly in business environments that are predominantly male. It establishes a crucial link between institutional systems and gender in entrepreneurship. The challenges arising from regulatory, normative, and cognitive systems are central to this framework. These systems form the institutional environment and can significantly influence entrepreneurial activities. SDT posits that entrepreneurs who feel autonomous in their work, confident in their abilities, and supported by others are more likely to experience psychological well-being, job satisfaction, creativity, and motivation. This is consistent with the organismic integration theory aspect of SDT, which examines how extrinsic motivations can be assimilated and incorporated into one's sense of self, leading to greater well-being and satisfaction (Ryan and Deci, 2019).

On the other hand, it is crucial to recognize that the experiences and challenges of women entrepreneurs can significantly vary depending on their cultural, social, and economic contexts. As a result, a one-size-fits-all strategy would not be sufficient to understand and tackle the specific challenges faced by WEs in various contexts. This highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding that takes into account

these diverse experiences and contexts. In the process of opportunity recognition, well-being at work is conceptualized in physical, psychological, and social dimensions. While this is a comprehensive approach, it might be worth exploring how other factors such as access to resources, societal norms, or gender biases can influence this process (Stewart et al., 2021). This could provide valuable insights into how these factors interact with the basic psychological needs theory aspect of SDT. The theory also explores the relationship between motivation, entrepreneurial culture, and social environments. However, it might be worth examining how these relationships can be influenced by other factors such as gender norms or societal expectations (Stewart et al., 2021). This could shed light on how these external factors interact with both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation aspects of SDT.

Institutional frameworks and motivation

In the realm of women entrepreneurship, the interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic factors shapes a complex landscape. Intrinsic factors, internal to the individual, include push and pull motivations. Push motivations, often driven by circumstances such as unemployment or low wages, compel individuals into entrepreneurship (Galindo-Martín et al., 2019; Roomi et al., 2018). This suggests that entrepreneurship can be a necessity rather than a choice, a critical point for policy-makers.

Extrinsic factors, external to the individual, also exert significant influence. The regulatory environment, including policies like the microfinance policy of 2005 and its reframed version in 2011, is crucial for providing financial assistance to women entrepreneurs (Lincoln, 2012). However, high-interest rates and a lack of clear legislative structure pose significant challenges. Despite these hurdles, women entrepreneurs exhibit resilience in finding solutions to gain access to finance (Yang et al., 2022).

The normative perspective highlights the social and cultural factors that motivate women towards entrepreneurial activities. Despite cultural norms and gender stereotypes posing significant challenges in West Africa and most developing countries (Roomi et al., 2018), social relationships and support networks emerge as critical motivating factors for women entrepreneurs (Mehtap et al., 2017).

The cognitive perspective posits that the desire for excellence drives success (Balogun et al., 2017). This desire, fueled by personal traits and characteristics, can lead to high-level achievements in life (Mehtap et al., 2017). Successful business owners often exhibit these traits, exploiting opportunities in the marketplace and making informed decisions based on their experiences (Viinikainen et al., 2017). Women in top management positions who possess a high level of motivation, skills, experience, and entrepreneurial

spirit can significantly improve their businesses (Mehtap et al., 2017). Their motivational behavior plays a crucial role in achieving their business objectives or goals (Estay et al., 2013). Women business owners often possess strong personality traits such as a high motivational spirit, skills, experience, and educational qualifications. These traits positively influence their businesses and inspire them to take risks despite external environmental challenges (Belwal et al., 2014; Solesvik et al., 2019). Such risk-taking can open up opportunities for attaining high levels of profit for their businesses (Stephan et al., 2015).

WE in male-dominated businesses and motivation

Investigating the motivation of women entrepreneurs (WEs) in male-dominated businesses is crucial as it deepens our comprehension of the connection between entrepreneurship and elements such as development of human capital, job creation, entrepreneurial behavior of women, labor market structures, and family influences (Sian, 2019). It also aids in pinpointing the hurdles women encounter and formulating strategies to surmount them (Bullough et al., 2021). However, entrepreneur studies have often resulted in divergent views about what propels an individual to venture into entrepreneurship. The traditional focus on the traits and characteristics of specific individuals perceived by others to be entrepreneurs has led to findings that are conjectural and challenging to validate (Zakpaa, 2022). Women entrepreneurs in male-dominated businesses worldwide are motivated by a range of factors, which include personal expectations and ambitions upon entering a career, self-sufficiency in their career, academic prowess, aspirations of peers, socio-economic background, the level of training and education, and the capacity to overcome cultural conditioning and learning experiences (Sian, 2019). The desire for flexibility and autonomy in work as well as financial gain also motivates women.

In developed nations, male-dominated entrepreneurial communities often pose distinct challenges for women entrepreneurs. These challenges can originate from societal norms, a lack of exposure to these sectors, and unconscious biases (Zakpaa, 2022; Darnihamedani & Terjesen, 2022). Women in such environments often confront the perception that they are less skilled or less qualified than men. They may need to put in extra effort to prove their worth and overcome bias, which can be both time-intensive and emotionally taxing.

In Africa, women entrepreneurial activities continue to yield socio-economic advantages. However, they encounter numerous obstacles in male-dominated businesses. These include societal norms, lack of exposure to these sectors, time constraints, capital constraints, and unconscious biases (Sipula et al., 2023). Women who venture into

male-dominated sectors face unique operational challenges and may require additional assistance in overcoming discrimination and establishing networks.

In Nigeria, the entrepreneurial scene is remarkably different from those in more developed countries. Some challenges faced by entrepreneurs are as a result of the government and its policies, while others have to do with an individual's business prowess or lack thereof (Cummings & Lopez, 2023). Lack of financial capital is a major hurdle for conducting business in Nigeria.

However, there is a gap between SDT and practice in businesses (Forner et al., 2020). This gap suggests that while SDT provides a theoretical framework for understanding motivation in entrepreneurship, its practical application may be limited or inconsistent. When women join entrepreneurship in male-dominated businesses, they not only contribute to economic growth but also bring unique perspectives that can lead to innovation and improved problem-solving. However, their entry can disrupt traditional gender norms and expectations (Chen, 2013), leading to resistance in some quarters. Over time though, their presence can help challenge stereotypes and pave the way for greater gender equality in these sectors. To achieve the research aim, the following research questions are specifically addressed:

RQ1: What specific regulatory issues motivate women entrepreneurs operating in a male-dominated business environment in Nigeria, and how do these issues compare to those faced by their male counterparts over the past 5 years?

RQ2: What specific normative problems motivate women entrepreneurs operating in a male-dominated business environment in Nigeria, and how do these problems compare to those faced by their male counterparts over the past 5 years?

RQ3: What specific cognitive problems motivate women entrepreneurs operating in a male-dominated business environment in Nigeria, and how do these problems compare to those faced by their male counterparts over the past 5 years?

Research methods

In this research, a qualitative research approach was used to explore motivational drivers from participants with at least 5 years of entrepreneurial experience in male-dominated businesses (MDB) in Nigeria. For a significant comparison and explanation of differences in experiences and outcomes (Chatterjee et al., 2022), we considered each participant as a case study. The data provided were used to develop a theory using an inductive approach. We embarked on an iterative process of gathering and analyzing data, identifying

underlying patterns and relationships, and closely observing contextual interactions and motivational drivers throughout the launch process.

Our research context is women entrepreneurs in MBE. Despite a recent increase in women entrepreneurs, Nigeria is classified as a patriarchal society where culture still silences women. Despite the challenges they encounter both as women and within the context of male-dominated businesses, many of the women we interviewed remained actively engaged in these industries.

We identified 30 participants who were interviewed on a rolling basis using a snowball sampling technique. This sampling technique is used in studying women entrepreneurs in male-dominated businesses to understand their experiences and challenges. This technique allows researchers to recruit participants through referrals from existing participants, which is particularly useful in accessing hard-to-reach populations (Etikan, 2016) such as women entrepreneurs in male-dominated sectors. By using snowball sampling, researchers could tap into the networks and connections of the initial participants, enabling them to reach a wider range of women entrepreneurs in these sectors. All research participants who are women entrepreneurs in MDB have faced substantial business challenges and social and economic barriers towards discrimination. They had an education to the level of a bachelor's or master's degree, were all married, and aged between 28 and 45 years old. A fictitious name was used as the identity of each participant to preserve their confidentiality.

The data were collected using semi-structured interviews with 30 women entrepreneurs in MDB for approximately a period of 12 months. We met each identified participant at their main office and wrote rich descriptions of the respondents (Table 1). Through conducting interviews, we observed that some women entrepreneurs struggled while others thrived in the MDB environment. As a result, we did an examination of data from interviews and we explored underpinning theories for better understanding of the research findings. We collected and analyzed data simultaneously and continuously until we reached the theoretical saturation (Chatterjee et al., 2022), and we, therefore, employed an inductive theory building in arranging and classifying participants responses (Mishra, 2021). According to Crowe et al. (2015), this approach provides thorough direct insights from data for model development, which demonstrates and integrates the research findings. We employed open coding to abstract representative categories into codes resulting in the overall themes (Crowe et al., 2015). We have therefore identified suitable theories, such as the SDT, to understand the correlation among the themes, comprehend how the themes are integrated, and explain the experiences of women entrepreneurs. This approach has helped us develop an appropriate conceptual framework for the study (Table 2).

Findings

Participants recalled what prompted them to start their businesses as women entrepreneurs in male-dominated industries in developing countries. As shown in Table 2, the motivations identified by our study are classified into three major topics (regulative-related, normative-related, and cognitive-related) and seven various sub-themes.

Institutional-related motivations

Women can be often challenged by their marital status and parental responsibilities to become entrepreneurs. Married women with children often have additional responsibilities and financial needs, which can drive them towards entrepreneurship as a means to secure a flexible and sustainable income (Molina, 2020). For instance, a woman entrepreneur in Nigeria mentioned that she started her barber shop to cater for her children (Ajefu, 2019). This is in line with social, cultural, and economic factors that can determine how an entrepreneur experiences or values events and takes advantage of opportunities (Bullough et al., 2021; Shastri et al., 2022).

Using the self-determination theory (SDT), we explain these motivational drivers, which is a framework comprised of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. In terms of competence, women entrepreneurs strive to gain skills and knowledge to effectively manage their enterprises. This drive for competence can be seen in their pursuit of learning opportunities and their efforts to enhance their business acumen. In terms of autonomy, women entrepreneurs value the freedom and independence that entrepreneurship provides. This need for autonomy is fulfilled when they are able to make their own decisions and be their own bosses. And lastly, in terms of relatedness, women entrepreneurs seek to establish meaningful relationships with others in their entrepreneurial journey. They value the support and connection they get from their networks, including family, friends, mentors, and peers (Forner et al., 2020).

Despite the challenges, women entrepreneurs have taken advantage of the opportunity to make more money for themselves and improve their economic situation and that of the country (Bullough et al., 2021). In the early stage of entrepreneurship, 90% of these women were motivated first with the awareness to explore an opportunity whereby they could make money to improve their economic situation (Ajefu, 2019). This is in line with social, cultural, and economic factors that can determine how an entrepreneur experiences or values events and takes advantage of opportunities (Bullough et al., 2021).

Table 1 Demographic profile of the respondents

Respondent	Business location	Age	Marital Status and number of kids	Education level	Type of business	No. of employees	Year in business
WE1	Lagos	32	Married and four kids	MSc	Scaffolding	50	7
WE2	Lagos	30	Married and three kids	MSc	Transport. business	26	8
WE3	Lagos	34	Married and two kids	MSc	Oil and gas	25	15
WE4	Lagos	34	Married and three kids	BSc	Mining	12	5
WE5	Lagos	34	Married and four kids	MSc	Photography	7	8
WE6	Lagos	33	Married and three kids	MSc	Barber	5	8
WE7	Abuja	35	Married and five kids	BSc	Surveying	7	7
WE8	Abuja	32	Married and four kids	MSc	Oil and gas	15	8
WE9	Abuja	33	Married and two kids	MSc	Electrical engineer	12	6
WE10	Abuja	29	Married and three kids	MSc	Camera editor	12	6
WE11	Abuja	40	Married and three kids	MSc	Electrical repairer	8	6
WE12	Ibadan	42	Married and five kids	BSc	Mining	7	5
WE13	Ibadan	37	Married and five kids	BSc	Shoe maker	5	7
WE14	Ibadan	36	Married and six kids	BSc	Tricycle rider	3	5
WE15	Lagos	32	Married and four kids	MSc	Photography	7	5
WE16	Enugu	33	Married and five kids	BSc	Hotel business	13	8
WE17	Enugu	40	Married and four kids	BSc	Hotel business	15	10
WE18	Enugu	38	Married and four kids	BSc	Mining	8	8
WE19	Enugu	39	Married and three kids	BSc	Mining	7	10
WE20	Asaba	40	Married and three kids	BSc	Surveying	5	8
WE21	Abeokuta	45	Married and four kids	MSc	School business	55	9
WE22	Abeokuta	39	Married and four kids	MSc	Crèche school	12	10
WE23	Abeokuta	38	Married and five kids	BSc	Church business	6	7
WE24	Ibadan	36	Married and three kids	BSc	Hotel business	10	6
WE25	Ibadan	41	Married and five kids	MSc	Engineer	7	8
WE26	Lagos	38	Married and one kid	Tech. Sch	Barber	5	7
WE27	Lagos	28	Single and two kids	BSc	Mining	5	7
WE28	Lagos	32	Single and two kids	BSc	Photo studio	9	5
WE29	Lagos	34	Married and four kids	MSc	School owner	20	8
WE30	Owerri	39	Married and three kids	BSc	School owner	12	9

Institutional motivations of WEs in male-dominated businesses can be classified based on the self-determination theory. For instance, regulatory support from the government might help meet autonomy needs by providing financial security, normative support from society might help meet relatedness needs by fostering a sense of acceptance and belonging, and cognitive support in the form of training and education might help meet competence needs by enhancing self-esteem and recognition (World Bank (2020)). Therefore, we create a model of the motivating drivers of women entrepreneurs in MBE based on these inductively generated findings, as indicated in Table 2 and as depicted in Fig. 1.

Several studies based on institutional theory in both developed and developing countries support the conceptual framework above. Other empirical studies have identified

motivational drivers for women to engage in entrepreneurship considering institutional systems such as affiliation motivation, power motivation, incentive motivation, and competence motivation (Fayokemi Eunice & Epetimehin, 2020). It was found that women are drawn to entrepreneurship due to their desire to demonstrate their leadership potential, personal growth, and self-satisfaction (Okafor & Amalu, 2012). Ademokun and Ajayi (2012) also discovered that women engage in entrepreneurship as a result of their need for independence, personal interest, and unemployment. In Rwanda, Naicker and Nsengimana (2021) found that some of the motivational drivers for Rwandan women to engage in entrepreneurship are the need for income generation due to unemployment, the need for flexibility in work hours to care for their families, permission from partners to start startups, and breaking the career impediment to launch

Table 2 Research prepositions, institutional drivers, themes and their description, and the underpinning theory

Prepositions	Classification	Themes	Description	Self-determination theory—five mini-theories
Proposition 1: WEs operating in male-dominated business environment are more likely to be motivated by regulative-related issues in a non-inclusive institutional system	Regulative-related motivations	Taking advantage of opportunity	Entrepreneurs who take advantage of opportunities are motivated by the need for achievement, recognition, and respect from others	Extrinsic motivation
		Improving economic situation	Entrepreneurs driven by the need for esteem may strive to enhance their economic situation to gain recognition and respect from others	Extrinsic motivation
		Family pressure for financial support and independence	The need for safety, which drives women to becoming entrepreneurs to seek financial stability and security	Basic psychological needs theory (autonomy)
Proposition 2: WEs operating in a male-dominated business environment are more likely to be motivated by normative-related issues in a non-inclusive institutional system	Normative-related motivations	Seeking for work life balance	Women are motivated to choose entrepreneurship to create time for their families while maintaining independence	Intrinsic motivation and basic psychological needs theory (autonomy)
		Keeping the family legacy alive	Entrepreneurs are motivated by their need for self-esteem, respect, and recognition from others	Intrinsic motivation and basic psychological needs theory (relatedness, competence)
		Breaking the gender barrier in male-dominated jobs	Entrepreneurs are motivated by striving for personal growth, fulfillment, and the realization of one's full potential through taking advantage of women's opportunities in male-dominated businesses	Intrinsic motivation and basic psychological needs theory (relatedness and autonomy)
Proposition 3: WEs operating in a male-dominated business environment are more likely to be motivated by cognitive-related issues in a non-inclusive institutional system	Cognitive-related motivations	Knowledge through skill, education, and experience	Entrepreneurs are motivated by striving for personal growth and fulfillment and realizing their full potential through skill, education, and experience	Cognitive evaluation theory
			Entrepreneurs internalize knowledge through skill, education, and experience motivations as part of their identity; it leads to greater well-being and satisfaction	Organismic integration theory

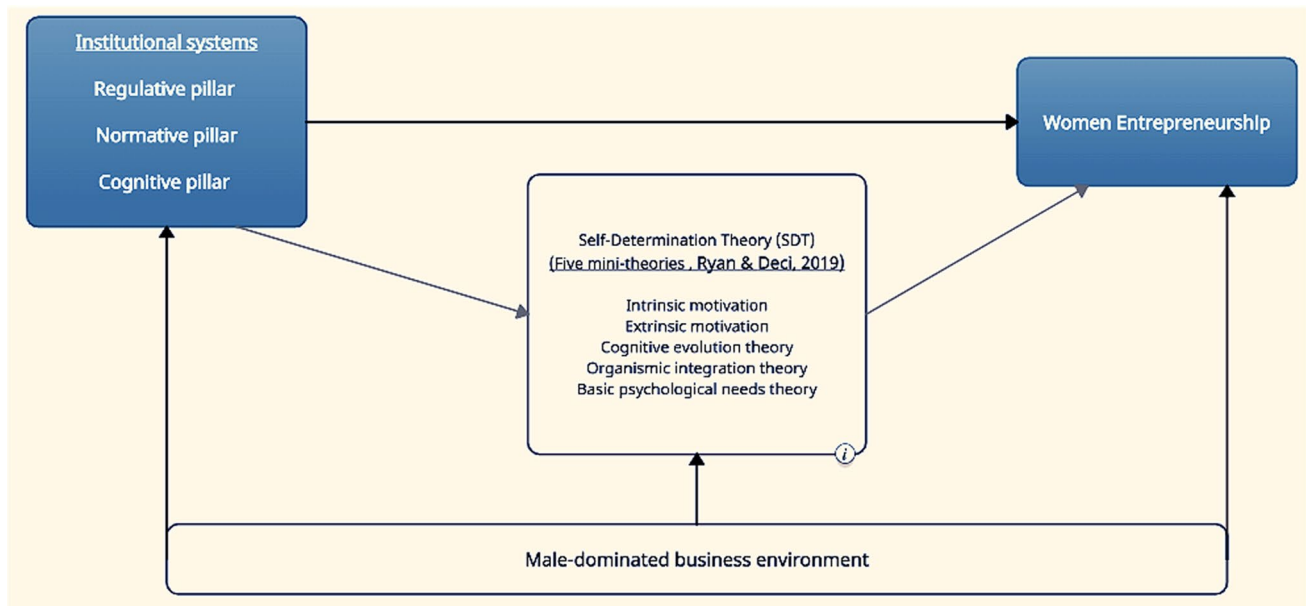


Fig. 1 WE motivational drivers' conceptual framework: SDT perspective

entrepreneurial feminism. According to a study by Naicker and Nsengimana (2021), there are numerous motivational drivers that inspire women to become entrepreneurs in Rwanda. These include social push factors such as the death of a partner, divorce, separation, disability, unwanted pregnancy, job dissatisfaction, workplace mistreatment, and refugee status. Additionally, social pull factors related to gender and women's confidence and ability to undertake tasks traditionally associated with men, such as entrepreneurship, also play a role. These factors include challenging traditional gender roles, gaining respect, and social status, achieving economic independence and recognition, and finding time for family responsibilities. Self-employment offers women the opportunity to balance family responsibilities while earning an income. Key motivators for women in entrepreneurship in emerging economies have been shown to include the financial advantages of international entrepreneurship and necessity-driven motivations stemming from a lack of career alternatives in their home countries (Jafari-Sadeghi et al., 2021). The research conducted by Jiang and Wang in 2014 indicates that the motivational drivers for women to become involved in entrepreneurship in developed nations such as South Korea and China are because they aspire to achieve social recognition and self-fulfillment. Social forces and conventional ideals have frequently repressed these desires. This helps to explain why Asian women entrepreneurs strive for acceptance from both society and oneself. Nonetheless, it has been noted that Chinese men have demonstrated a notably higher inclination than Chinese women to pursue self-employment (Plant & Ren, 2010). Later research by Yu-yan et al. (2013) also suggested that male graduates'

entrepreneurial intentions are higher than those of women, indicating a potential gender difference in entrepreneurial tendencies. Despite these findings, Ghulam and Abid (2021) found that while there is a gender-based entrepreneurship intention in China and Russia, with male students showing a higher attitude towards entrepreneurship than women in some places, there is no clear explanation for these gender differences in entrepreneurship. This has led researchers to consider gender as an important variable in entrepreneurship research.

The success of an entrepreneurial venture depends on various factors such as policy initiatives, institutional support, and social support. These factors can help women entrepreneurs by providing training programs and mentorship, public procurement, optimizing government spending, stronger networks, government for providing incentives as high-interest rate subsidy, assistance in balancing work and family obligations, assisting women in obtaining financing, enhancing entrepreneurship education, and boosting women's confidence and entrepreneurial abilities (Martínez-Rodríguez et al., 2022). Moreover, other institutional elements that encourage women to become entrepreneurs are the assistance offered by government or non-government organizations to women entrepreneurs in terms of funding, training, mentoring, networking, and other resources (Arika & Yasmin, 2021) and informal institutional support, which includes social norms, values, and beliefs that support entrepreneurship (Kazumi & Kawai, 2017). These institutional motivational drivers of women to establish their own businesses have been summarized in the SDT framework that includes five mini-theories: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic

motivation, cognitive evaluation theory, organismic integration theory and basic psychological needs theory (Adams et al., 2017; Ryan and Deci, 2019).

The conceptual framework is based on an inductive research study of women entrepreneurs in a male-dominated business environment. The framework suggests that women's motivations are affected by institutional systems and self-determination theory (SDT). It also proposes that there are direct and moderating effects among these variables. According to the framework in Fig. 1, the institutional systems are comprised of cognitive, normative, and regulative variables that shape both informal and formal rules, norms, and beliefs of a society. These systems can impact women's motivations by creating opportunities, barriers, or incentives for entrepreneurship. The research conducted by Shastri et al. (2022) provides evidence that intrinsic motivations, such as the desire for autonomy, the drive to be creative, the rejection of traditional gender roles, and the pursuit of growth, are significant factors inspiring women entrepreneurs in Rajasthan, India, a region known for its patriarchal society. This study aligns with the principles of SDT, a psychological model that interprets human motivation and behavior through the lens of three fundamental psychological needs: relatedness, competence, and autonomy. These needs can be fulfilled by different types of motivation: intrinsic motivation (doing something for its own sake), extrinsic motivation (doing something for external rewards or pressures), or amotivation (lack of motivation). The framework argues that the institutional systems can also influence the SDT mini-theories by affecting the type and level of motivation that women experience. Another study by Shastri et al. (2022) supports this argument by showing that institution systems pose challenges rather than offering women motivations towards becoming entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the framework proposes that the SDT mini-theories directly affect women's motivations to become entrepreneurs in male-dominated business environments. For instance, extrinsic motivation drives women to seize opportunities and enhance their economic situation. The need for autonomy motivates women to seek financial stability and work-life balance. The need for relatedness and competence motivates women to break gender barriers and strive for personal growth. Several studies support this proposition by examining the meaning and effect of entrepreneurial motivation in different contexts and cultures. Allan et al. (2016) developed a model that connects work volition and social class to motivation drivers in the context of SDT. They suggested that the need for relatedness and competence can motivate women to overcome gender barriers and pursue personal growth, with work volition and social class influencing the nature and intensity of their work motivation. This is complemented by other works, such as a review on female entrepreneurship discussing the challenges women

face when starting an entrepreneurial journey (Cardella et al., 2020), a study interpreting entrepreneurial motivation in a transitional economy (Shi & Wang, 2021), and a book providing a thorough analysis of SDT, including its six mini-theories (Ryan & Deci, 2017). These works collectively provide empirical evidence supporting the direct impact of SDT mini-theories on women's motivations to become entrepreneurs in male-dominated business environments. However, these effects can vary based on the context and individual traits of the entrepreneurs.

The framework also suggests that the relationship between institutional systems and women's motivations can be moderated by various factors, such as personal characteristics, social support, or environmental conditions. These factors can either enhance or weaken the effect of institutional systems on women's motivations. A third study by Shastri et al. (2019) supports this proposition by showing that the major sources of challenges for WEs are informal institutions, such as family, community, and culture.

Discussion

The motivational drivers of women to become entrepreneurs in male-dominated businesses, particularly in Nigeria, are multifaceted. Women entrepreneurs (WEs) are motivated by the prospect of seizing opportunities, enhancing their economic situation, and challenging gender norms in male-dominated professions. The pressure to provide financial support for their families and the aspiration to preserve family legacies also inspire them to establish businesses. Many of these entrepreneurs have acquired knowledge and skills through education, training, and experience. These findings suggest that Nigerian women entrepreneurs' drive stems from a blend of personal and societal factors, and they often depend on their resourcefulness to succeed (as shown in Table 2).

Table 2 presents themes that emerged from a study on the motivations of Nigerian women entrepreneurs within the regulative framework. The study found that some women entrepreneurs started their businesses to exploit a gap in the market (Sajjad et al., 2020). For instance, one school owner in Owerri established her school because there was no school in the area, and parents desired a school close to their homes. Another school owner in Lagos created a school for low-income earners because the existing schools in the area were too expensive. A creche school owner in Abeokuta launched her business because parents sought a low-cost creche for their toddlers. A hotel owner in Enugu aimed to provide a hotel that would be accessible to her customers. Lastly, a female barber in Lagos initiated her business to carve out a niche in her area of expertise and earn money to cater to her children.

The study also discovered that some women entrepreneurs started their businesses to enhance their economic situation. For example, a tricycle rider in Ibadan aspired to earn more money for herself and her family. A woman in Ibadan, who was married with five children, started a mining business because her husband was not medically fit enough to provide for the family. Another woman in Lagos, who was married with three children, launched a transportation business to support her husband, whose salary could not cover the family's expenses. Finally, a shoemaker in Ibadan established her business to improve her economic situation and provide for her children while affording good accommodation. The research highlights the need to comprehend the reasons why Nigerian women start businesses to enhance their ventures and foster economic development (Solesvik et al., 2019). Three themes emerged from interviews with Nigerian entrepreneurs regarding the normative-related drivers of their motivation. The first theme is about how husbands influenced their wives' choice to become entrepreneurs. Sometimes, husbands persuaded their wives to leave their jobs and start a business because of the challenges of balancing work and life or because they did not approve of their wives' work sectors. In other cases, husbands directly helped their wives in launching a business or expressed a wish to run a business together. Jung et al. (2018) state that the impact of husbands on their wives' entrepreneurial decision in North Korea has declined over time. In the past, husbands used to abuse their wives and prevent them from starting a business. However, due to the economic difficulties faced by families, women have had to depend on their own initiative to earn money. As a result, men have become more supportive and no longer abuse their wives. Consequently, women have been driven to establish their own businesses to support their families. The second theme is about entrepreneurs who inherited a family business or wanted to operate it to preserve the family legacy. The third theme is about women entrepreneurs who entered industries dominated by men, such as barbering, to establish themselves. This indicates significant progress being made by societies with strong patriarchal foundations. As women entrepreneurs continue to play a noteworthy role in the marketization development and even outnumber male entrepreneurs, there have been noticeable changes in gender roles, patriarchal beliefs leading to male child preference, and choice of marital partners (Jung et al., 2018). A nation's systems may be both challenged and strengthened by women entrepreneurs (Jung et al., 2018; Sajjad et al., 2020). Regarding the importance of spousal support for women in entrepreneurship, women who have supportive husbands are more likely to start a firm. However, women who have unsupportive spouses have a lower likelihood of starting a business (Ramadani et al., 2015).

Table 2 refers to the theme of acquisition of knowledge through skill, education, and experience as a motivational

driver of participants. The findings include quotes from several women entrepreneurs who discuss how they acquired the necessary knowledge and skills to establish their own businesses. For example, one entrepreneur learned scaffolding from her father at a young age, while another underwent training to become a barber. Another entrepreneur attended the school of photography, and yet another gained experience working as an apprentice for a camera studio owner. Finally, one entrepreneur notes that mining requires both skill and hard work but can be very profitable. In general, this theme emphasizes how vital experience, education, and training are to the entrepreneurial process. According to Dalborg (2015) and the European Commission (2016), it is suggested that many entrepreneurs obtain the information and skills they need through a combination of formal education, on-the-job training, and personal experience. This may be especially important for women entrepreneurs who may face additional barriers to entry into certain industries like male-dominated industries. This article sheds light on the experiences and motivations of WEs in Nigeria by demonstrating how these business owners have obtained the abilities and know-how necessary for success. Ramadani et al. (2015) highlight that husbands' education level and occupation had an impact on their wives' decision to start a business. They found that women whose husbands had higher education levels and were in professional occupations were more likely to establish their own businesses. The critical need for knowledge management in the affairs of new and small entrepreneurial ventures is indubitable (Clement et al., 2021).

While the SDT-driven framework in Fig. 1 is a relevant and interesting attempt to explain the phenomenon of women entrepreneurship in male-dominated business environments, it, however, has some limitations and gaps that could be addressed in further studies, as the framework does not explain how the institutional systems and the SDT mini-theories interact with each other. It is possible that there is feedback or mediating effects among these variables that could affect women's motivations in various ways. The framework does not account for the diversity and heterogeneity of WEs in terms of their backgrounds, goals, preferences, and behaviors. It is possible that different kinds of WEs have different motivations and reactions to institutional systems and SDT mini-theories. The dynamic and complex nature of SDT mini-theories and institutional systems is not taken into account by the framework. These characteristics may change over time and under different circumstances based on a range of variables such as social, political, economic, or technical developments. These limitations and gaps suggest that the conceptual framework could be further developed and tested using more empirical data and analytical methods. This could improve the framework's

validity and generalizability and deepen our understanding of women's entrepreneurship in male-dominated business environments or in workplaces where men predominate.

Theoretical implications

To begin with, the study underscores the influence of institutional systems on women's entrepreneurial motivations (Martínez-Rodríguez et al., 2022). These systems, comprising regulative, normative, and cognitive dimensions, shape societal rules, norms, and beliefs that can either provide opportunities or pose constraints for women entrepreneurs (Arika & Yasmin, 2021). In addition, the study leverages SDT as a psychological framework to understand women's motivations (Ryan and Deci, 2019). According to SDT, human behavior and motivation are driven by the three core psychological needs such as relatedness, autonomy, and competence. These needs can be satisfied in the context of entrepreneurship through motivational drivers such as extrinsic motivation (driven by incentives and pressures from external sources) and intrinsic motivation (driven by personal desire) (Adams et al., 2017). Furthermore, the study proposes that institutional systems can influence the SDT mini-theories by affecting the type and level of motivation that women experience. For instance, regulatory support from the government might help meet autonomy needs by providing financial security, normative support from society might help meet relatedness needs by fostering a sense of acceptance and belonging, and cognitive support in the form of training and education might help meet competence needs (World Bank, 2020). The study also suggests that the relationship between institutional systems and women's motivations can be moderated by various factors such as personal characteristics, social support, or environmental conditions. These factors can either enhance or weaken the effect of institutional systems on women's motivations (Shastri et al., 2019). Lastly, the results have significant implications for institutional support and governmental initiatives aimed at encouraging women entrepreneurs. The success of women entrepreneurs can be attributed to a number of factors, including public procurement, subsidizing high-interest rates through incentives provided by governments, stronger networks, mentoring and training programs, support in balancing work and family obligations, improvements in entrepreneurship education, assistance for women in obtaining financing, and an increase in women's self-confidence and capabilities (Martínez-Rodríguez et al., 2022). In conclusion, by integrating ideas from institutional theory and self-determination theory, this study enhances our understanding of why women choose to start their own businesses in industries with a male

predominance. It draws attention to the intricate interactions that shape entrepreneurial activity between psychological needs, human motives, and institutional systems.

Practical implications

The practical implications of this research are profound and far-reaching, offering valuable insights for various stakeholders including policymakers, educators, business leaders, and the entrepreneurs themselves. The results of the study can help shape organizational and governmental policies, facilitating the creation of interventions that support the establishment of an environment conducive to women starting their own businesses. These observations can also be incorporated into programs for entrepreneurship education and training, providing women with the tools they need to succeed in fields where men predominate. The importance of social support networks in motivating women entrepreneurs (WEs) underscores the need for initiatives that facilitate networking opportunities, such as mentorship programs, networking events, and online platforms. This study emphasizes the challenges faced by WEs in industries with a male predominance, underscoring the necessity of coordinated initiatives to advance gender equality in entrepreneurship. This could entail taking steps to dispel gender stereotypes, encourage the representation of women in leadership positions, and remove institutional barriers that prevent women from pursuing entrepreneurship. In addition, the research indicates that encouraging women entrepreneurs in industries with a male predominance can help advance economic development because these individuals not only accumulate wealth for themselves but also create jobs, foster innovation, and propel economic expansion. Therefore, this research provides critical insights that can inform strategies to support and promote women's entrepreneurship in male-dominated businesses.

Directions for future research

Future research on women's motivations to become entrepreneurs in male-dominated businesses could take several directions. Cross-cultural studies could provide a nuanced understanding of how cultural norms and values shape entrepreneurial motivations. Longitudinal studies could track the evolution of women's motivations over time, providing insights into the dynamic nature of entrepreneurial motivations. Evaluating the impact of policy interventions could offer valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners on the effectiveness of different types of support for women entrepreneurs. With the advent of digital technologies, exploring their influence on women's motivations to

venture into male-dominated businesses could reveal how technology can enable or constrain entrepreneurial aspirations. Comparative studies could enhance our understanding of gender dynamics in these sectors by analyzing the motivations of men and women entrepreneurs in similar businesses. Considering intersectionality in future research could capture the complexity and heterogeneity of women's experiences in these sectors. Lastly, delving into the psychological aspects of women's entrepreneurship, such as self-efficacy, resilience, and risk-taking propensity, could deepen our knowledge of the cognitive and emotional processes underpinning entrepreneurial motivations. These avenues not only extend the current research but also have practical implications for various stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, business leaders, and entrepreneurs themselves.

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Theoneste Manishimwe, a Ph.D. candidate and founder's scholar at the School of Business Entrepreneurship at the American University of Nigeria (AUN), Yola, serves as a research assistant and data analytics at the office of the President at AUN. He has co-supervised undergraduate research projects and coached master's students in thesis writing. He holds a B.Sc. in Petroleum Chemistry, a PGD in Management, an M.Sc. in Business Administration from AUN, and an M.Tech in Industrial Chemistry from Modibbo Adama University, Yola (MAU). His research interests include entrepreneurial marketing, entrepreneurial orientation, and digital entrepreneurship. He is also the delegate of International MUN representing the Commonwealth of the Bahamas at the UNDP.

Dr. Joy Eghonghon Akahome is an academic staff member in the Department of Entrepreneurship and Marketing at the Federal University Otuoke Bayelsa State Nigeria. She has eight years of academic experience and has attended academic conferences in Russia, UK, Poland, South Africa, and Tanzania. Joy has publications in the marketing discipline and received an academic fellowship in 2021 at Jagiellonian University Krakow Poland. She is passionate about connecting with researchers outside her environment for research collaboration and publications. Additionally, she has been a member of the American Marketing Association since 2017.

Mr. Joseph Uwagaba is an Assistant Lecturer at the University of Economics and Human Sciences in Warsaw. He is also a career advisor, education and business consultant, poet, and motivational speaker. He holds a degree in Management and Quality Studies with a specialization in Corporate Logistics, a Master's in Development Studies, a B.A in Emergency and Disaster Management, and a diploma in Theology. Joseph is the co-founder of the Talk to Me initiative and the Winners Family Rwanda. He also published his first book "A Hundred Days in Marriage."

Professor Ibrahim Danjuma is a marketing professor. He is currently the chair of Business Administration Department at the American University of Nigeria. He holds a B.Sc. in Business Management and an MBA in Marketing from Maiduguri University in Nigeria, as well as a Ph.D. in Management from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) in Malaysia.