

GENDER DIFFERENCES OF SMALL COMMUNITY BUSINESS OWNERS IN NETWORK MEMBERSHIP PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This research examined concepts inherent in social capital and strategic network theory. Data was collected from 277 men and 100 women, who in addition to operating a small business in a small community, were members of one of twenty-nine business networks. The variables of shared vision, resource sharing, business activities, and advantages to networking, were regressed on owners' desire to continue network membership. Gender differences in owners' personal and business characteristics in relation to continued network membership were also explored and found significant, thus requiring the use of control variables in the subsequent analysis. In a hierarchical order of entry, gender, years of ownership, gross sales, and numbers of employees were first entered for statistical control. Results of hierarchical multiple regression suggested that advantages from networking and a shared vision significantly explained owners' desire to continue their network membership, with control and network variables also included in the equation. Examination of the interaction effects of gender on each of the four network-based variables suggested that gender with resource sharing also significantly explained the owners' desire to continue network membership. The total R^2 for the seven steps in variable entry equaled .505. On the basis of these findings, we suggest there are descriptive differences among male and female small business owners, such as in business size and age, that should be further explored. Variables central to social capital and strategic network theory held a positive effect on members' future network membership plans thus furthering the likelihood of the networks' future existence.