

GENDER STEREOTYPE IN DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: A CASE STUDY OF VIETNAMESE ENTREPRENEURS

● NGUYEN THI NGOC LIEN

ABSTRACT:

Encouraging women's leadership in digitalization is essential for eliminating gender stereotypes and addressing persistent gender disparities in the digital landscape in Vietnam. Diverse leadership teams have been consistently linked to enhanced creativity, problem-solving, and business performance, highlighting the urgent need to diversify leadership in technology-driven sectors.

Keywords: women's leadership, digitalization, gender stereotype, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

Vietnam has recently achieved significant improvement in gender equality and women's advancement in business. According to the Ministry of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs, women hold 29% of senior leadership positions globally, in which, Vietnam ranks in the top two in Asia in terms of the proportion of women in leadership roles (Molisa, 2019). Additionally, 20% of women are in higher positions in organizations and of these, 25% own a private enterprise (Nguyen, 2007). However, with only 20 percentage of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) owned by women, it still only account for a small proportion (ADB, 2023). Gender stereotype has been still existed in Vietnamese entrepreneurs.

Digitalization has been known as an inevitable trend, not only in the crisis circumstance but also in the post-Covid, "new normal" (the Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, 2021). In Vietnam, digital transformation has taken as a requirement of many businesses to meet to changing usage behavior of consumers. A large proportion of businesses applied software and solutions for sales management, online sales, omni-channel, marketing, customer system management, business management, in which, digital marketing accounts for more than 20% total expense on marketing and sales activities (USAID, 2021). Besides, digital payment platforms have a central role in e-commerce, providing a way for buyers and sellers to make or receive payments and to store value

electronically. Vietnam is one of the top three countries with highest population using digital wallets in the area, about 16% compared to Singapore 23% in 2016 (World bank, 2019). Online shoppers are nine times more likely to pay cash (cash-on-delivery – COD) than pay online in 2017 (World bank, 2019).

Women leaders in the digital era face not only traditional challenges, i.e., gender bias, underrepresentation, work-life balance issues, unconscious bias, but also specific needs in technology and innovation. The objectives of this study are to identify the obstacles that women leaders face, particularly in the digital age, and to identify methods to address these challenges with the goal to promote gender diversity, build inclusive workplaces, and inspire social justice.

2. Women's leadership in digitalization

Vietnam, like many other countries, is undergoing a rapid digital transformation, with technology playing an increasingly integral role in various sectors of the economy. In this context, the exploration of women's leadership in digitalization within Vietnam's socio-economic landscape is of paramount importance. This part aims to examine existing research on the status, challenges, and opportunities for women leaders in driving digitalization efforts in Vietnam.

Traditional gender norms and societal expectations have historically influenced women's participation in leadership roles. While women contribute significantly to the economy and workforce, they remain underrepresented in senior management positions and face barriers to career advancement. Although there have been a lot of dramatic cultural changes based on globalization and modernization, Vietnamese women today are still identified in the lens of collectivist culture derived from the oppressive values of Vietnamese Confucian society and the autonomy of the Vietnamese agricultural villages. Seriously, greatest gender imbalance has been

observed in innovation and technology industries of all sectors (United Nations Vietnam, 2023).

Several factors might affect women's leadership in digitalization within the Vietnamese business context. STEM education involving the training of technology knowledge and skills, play a crucial role for women to acquire the technical competencies required for leadership roles in technology-driven industries. STEM education would prepare the younger generation to adapt to the digital world by through learning practical skills (Ho et al., 2020). It equips students with the skills they need for self-employment or startups with rising demand on cheap computational power, user-friendly algorithms, and high connectivity, computational entrepreneurship (Vuong, 2019). However, Vietnamese women were found to be inhibited participation in STEM due to social and cultural barriers such as raising children and domestic duties (Luong Thu Ha et al., 2021). This restricts women's access to a rapidly expanding industry and poses an obstacle for women to have an impact on technologies and lead innovation (United Nations Vietnam, 2023).

Women leaders in Vietnam face various challenges and barriers in navigating the digitalization landscape. Structural constraints, including limited access to resources, networks, and mentorship opportunities, hinder women's progression into leadership positions. Gender biases and stereotypes prevalent within organizational cultures further exacerbate these challenges, impeding women's recognition and advancement in male-dominated technological environments. Moreover, work-life balance issues and caregiving responsibilities disproportionately affect women, constraining their ability to fully engage in leadership roles in the digital age.

According to research conducted by the Vietnam Women's Union, women have fewer possibilities to access and use digital resources

than men do. This disparity prevents women from using digital tools for learning and professional objectives (NDO, 2024). Limited access to technology is another barrier to success for women-owned enterprises (ADB, 2023). Not only technology, but Vietnamese women has also been restricted from information that can assist business development. They have little information about support mechanisms and business development processes in general. It affects long-term business planning and daily work management.

For training and mentoring programs, women leaders receive little formal information on how to apply or face difficulties due to complex administrative procedures and eligibility criteria (ADB, 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, many firms were forced to quickly adapt to digital business models, particularly in marketing and sales, through the establishment of websites and ecommerce. However, throughout the implementation phase, there is an abundance of knowledge and technical support.

As in many nations, Vietnam has a strong legal framework for gender equality and digital transformation, reflected in the goals of women's political representation. However, there is a huge gap the goals and actual practices in women's higher position participation. Data from the General Statistics Office in 2021 showed that out of 13,040 SMEs owned by women, 81% did not receive any support from the Government.

The report from ADB (2023) shows that government agencies frequently lack of giving comprehensive and widespread information about assistance policies for SMEs, particularly those for women entrepreneurs. Regarding gender-responsive policies, the report of United Nations Vietnam (2023) highlights the point that no gender-related issues mentioned in three key policy documents on digital transformation and innovation of Vietnam. It suggests a requirement

on data disaggregated by sex for better understanding and addressing policies' efficiency on men and women.

3. Conclusion and recommendations

Promoting women's leadership in digitalization in Vietnam require action at multiple levels. At the governance level, policymakers can enact legislation and policies aimed at enhancing gender equality and inclusivity in the workforce, including benefits for women in leadership positions and incentives for companies that prioritize gender diversity. Gender-relating issues need to be integrated into official documents related to business support policies. National policies and strategies on digitalization in the short, medium, and long term need to contain gender-specific metrics and targets to encourage women participation in the full implementation process.

There should be better cooperation between ministries at both central and local levels in implementing specific support measures for women-owned businesses, to help women more easily access to developmental programs and incentives. Additionally, education plays an important role in addressing detrimental social norms and gender stereotypes for women leaders in digital era. In which, we should encourage and advocate women and girls to high-quality education, including digital literacy and technology. Providing equal opportunities for women and girls to receive training on leadership, career advancement, and vocational training, with a particular focus on STEM fields and technical education is another solution we need to consider. Educational institutions and industry stakeholders can collaborate to provide targeted training and mentorship programs to equip women with the necessary skills and support networks for leadership roles in digitalization.

At the organizational level, fostering a culture of inclusivity and empowerment within

organizations is essential for creating conducive environments where women can thrive and contribute effectively to digital transformation initiatives. Organizations should establish diversity goals integrated into overall strategies to provide an equal opportunity for technology advancement and leadership development for women. The process of hiring and training needs to be reviewed and updated to avoid such issues as

gender bias and gender stereotypes. Employee's evaluation needs to be designed in the way to promote visibility of women leaders' achievements. By implementing these measures, organizations can create an environment where women feel empowered to contribute, innovate, and lead in the digitalization domain, ultimately driving organizational success and fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion ■

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Author's Information:

NGUYEN THI NGOC LIEN

Ph.D candidate, University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City

**ĐỊNH KIẾN GIỚI
TRONG QUÁ TRÌNH CHUYỂN ĐỔI SỐ:
NGHIÊN CỨU ĐIỂN HÌNH
ĐỐI VỚI GIỚI DOANH NHÂN VIỆT NAM**

● NGUYỄN THỊ NGỌC LIÊN

Nghiên cứu sinh, Đại học Kinh tế TP.Hồ Chí Minh

TÓM TẮT:

Khuyến khích sự lãnh đạo của nữ giới trong quá trình chuyển đổi số được xem là điều cần thiết để xóa bỏ định kiến giới và giải quyết sự chênh lệch giới tính kéo dài dai dẳng trong môi trường kỹ thuật số ở Việt Nam. Các đội ngũ lãnh đạo với tính đa dạng luôn có khả năng sáng tạo cao, giải quyết vấn đề hiệu quả, cũng như đem lại kết quả kinh doanh tích cực. Điều này cho thấy sự cấp thiết trong việc đa dạng hoá đội ngũ lãnh đạo trong các lĩnh vực có liên quan đến công nghệ.

Từ khoá: sự lãnh đạo của nữ giới, số hóa, định kiến giới, Việt Nam.