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Article

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The comparative analysis of marketing activities among rural women entrepreneurs in Fars province, Iran

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship has become the crucial subject of discussion among social and economic development specialists as the key to solving problems and reducing obstacles to human development. On the other hand, marketing is also considered as a main factor for entrepreneurial businesses' survival and progress. Thus, low marketing skills in small businesses often lead to lower performance levels and higher risk failures. The present study aimed to identify and analyze the marketing activities among rural women entrepreneurs. This research was conducted using a survey method among women entrepreneurs who were the members of agricultural development specialized holding companies in Fars province, Iran. A random sampling method was used to select 307 rural entrepreneurial women. According to the findings, marketing methods such as face-to-face advertising, making phone calls, participating in exhibitions, and sending text messages by women entrepreneurs are widely used. In applying the marketing methods, paying attention to the components of the marketing mix, and applying marketing strategy, women entrepreneurs in Marvdasht had the highest score. The entrepreneurial women in Marvdasht are more risk-takers, who use both marketing methods and strategies more often than women in other cities of Fars. Finally, some suggestions were presented to improve women entrepreneurs' marketing activities.

Keywords: Marketing mix, Women entrepreneurs, Network marketing, Promotion, Competitive, Product satisfaction

Introduction

Entrepreneurship in the current world is sought after equilibrium between spirit and mind and is considered as the key to solving problems and reducing the barriers of human development. In addition, it has been the subject of discussion by many social and economic development specialists (Rezaei-Moghaddam & Izadi, 2019). They believe that entrepreneurship is the engine of human development and economic development in the countries. They also believe that entrepreneurship should play a significant role in the twenty-first century economy. Thus, the researchers and policy makers should pay attention to the needs of half of the world's population, namely women (Rijkers, 2012; Tohidyan Far & Rezaei-Moghaddam, 2019).

The concept of entrepreneurship has been considered by economists since the sixteenth century worldwide, and then most of the economic schools enter

entrepreneurship in their economic theories. Overall, entrepreneurship has been pushed by three wide streams until 1980. The first one was a public explosion of research and study in terms of book publications in terms of entrepreneurs' lives, the history of their companies, and methods of their personal businesses as well as quick ways to get rich. The second stream referred to create entrepreneurship disciplines in different educational levels of engineering and marketing. These programs have started in some schools since the 1960s and hitherto have taught in more than 500 schools of the USA and Canada. Third stream is related to the government interest to the studies in terms of industrial innovations as well as small enterprises in order to encourage them to grow (Seyed Javadin, 2007).

Following the success of micro finance programs worldwide, similar plans have been implemented in Iran as well. Rural women micro credit fund is one of the plans supported and implemented by the government since 2000. These micro credit funds collect little savings of rural women and organize these financial resources in economic activities with agricultural preference. Financial support to rural women, reinforcing them for better collaboration, and increasing their self-confidence and social status are the main purposes of micro credit funds. There are 722 funds with more than 21,000 members which have been active in providing financial services to rural women in the country (Yaghoubi Farani et al., 2014).

Based on studies, the most employment of Iran's economy was attributed to independent businesses during 1976–1996, but unemployment has become the main crisis in the 2000s due to the lack of support from entrepreneurs. Only 11.7% of Iranian women were active economically in 2000 which is very low compared with Iranian men and the women of other countries (Nazari, 2008). The necessity of women participation in economic activities is not emphasized in Iran community; therefore, there is not appropriate condition and motivation for women's employment.

According to Golred (2005), influencing factors of entrepreneurship development of Iranian women have been categorized into four divisions of individual, network, organizational, and spatial factors. Individual factors (job satisfaction, access to power, and credit in the community as well as creativity) were reported as the most important on business development of women. Similar study showed that socio-cultural factors have an influencing role on women entrepreneurship in different businesses of productive, industrial, and service in Karaj county (Zakariaei and Mokhtarpour, 2010). Based on the results of Yaghoubi Farani et al. (2014), economic situation, personal traits, and socio-cultural factors of women had high effects on their entrepreneurship, respectively.

Determining the drivers and inhibitors of entrepreneurship development is considered as one of the main issues in women entrepreneurship debates. Jomeine et al. (2015) categorized the *drivers* of entrepreneurship development of rural women into seven factors of economic, spatial, individual, socio-cultural, infrastructural, educational, and technical. The *inhibitors* were also classified into six factors labeled as economic, socio-cultural, psychological, political, technical-educational, and infrastructural based on exploratory factor analysis (Jomeini et al., 2015). Women's attitude toward their job is considered as the main factor in their economic participation in the community, and older women have more collaboration in economic activities compared with younger ones (Lahsaeizadeh and Jahangiri, 2005). Tavakoli (2005) argued that the

success of entrepreneurs attributed to internal and external factors. Innovativeness and creativity, motivation of need to success, and locus of control were internal components, and bureaucracy and paperwork decrease as well as access to the market were assumed as external components.

In today's competitive business world, marketing is a key factor in the survival and development of entrepreneurial businesses. Therefore, low marketing skills in small businesses often lead to lower performance levels and higher risk failures. A large number of entrepreneurs neglect the determination or the creation of a market which requires their product or services. The entrepreneur faces the problem of defining the market and the focus of services and products. There are many concepts that entrepreneurs have used to create successful businesses using the "opportunity diagnosis" approach. However, most realize that they need to identify the market axis for business growth and choose a product or service which addresses the needs of their customers. Therefore, one of the most important tasks that an entrepreneur faces is to estimate the demand for its products and services. An entrepreneur can experience success when he/she can correctly evaluate his/her market upon entering the industry (Stewart *et al.*, 2010).

Marketing was initially considered as synonymous with the production. During the years prior to 1970, the product was first produced and then entered the market, and eventually marketers would consider a way to sell it. Subsequently, business owners prior to their production focused on marketing activities, and after recognizing the current requirements of the customers, they produced and presented the product in accordance with the demands of the customers (Kotler, 2000). Today, successful marketing managers need to be in touch with consumers to consume and satisfy their needs during and after consumption. In the current century, marketing has moved into an interactive and interconnected era. A fundamental change in the definition and purpose of marketing in the twenty-first century is that it developed as a commercial principle beyond mere trade facilitation and transaction between producer and customer.

In general, the principles of commerce have passed through three periods. The first period dates back to before the 1930s and is entitled "the production period," in which marketing was difficult only due to the constraints in the production of goods. The second period (before the 1950s) is called the "sales period," in which the marketing process was in a way that the company provided the goods which were produced. The third period (twenty-first century) is called the "customer period," in which the customer was the entire center of marketing activities (Kotler, 2001). In the beginning, the main focus of marketing was in the producer's interests, that is, the delivery of the right products to the customer at a reasonable time, place, and price. The basic assumption of primary marketers was that the manufacturers controlled the market. Management, functions, roles, and processes, all were around this model of business management focused on the manufacturer. This notion is not valid in the information age. In fact, in the early twenty-first century, there is not any successful or accepted new model in large scale, or at least not understood in the organizations and marketing processes of the companies, given the dynamics of the global markets, unpredictable customers, the patterns of purchasing and market forecasts, segmentation, and the combinations of the new market.

Generally, the philosophy of marketing is based on four principles including a specific target market, the determination of customer needs from the customer's point of view, coordinated marketing, profitability through more and better customer satisfaction (Kotler, 2000). In the philosophy of marketing, it is believed that the way to achieve the stated goals is to recognize the needs and demands of the target markets and satisfy consumers more efficiently and effectively than competitors. The philosophy of sales and marketing is often falsified. In order to avoid mistakes, the two can be compared with each other so that sales philosophy can focus on the needs of the vendor, while the philosophy of marketing considers the customer's needs. Further, sales philosophy seeks more profit, while marketing philosophy is looking for customer satisfaction. In fact, the concept of selling looks from the inside to outside. Thus, it starts with the factory, which emphasizes the current products of the company and requires vast selling and propaganda for profitable sales. Conversely, the concept of marketing looks from the outside to the inside. This concept begins from a well-defined market, integrates customer needs and all of the activities which affect customers, and generates benefits by providing them with satisfaction (Kotler & Keller, 2017). So, successful businesses have a wide knowledge of their customers and their rivals. Receiving accurate information about the customers and competitors is the first step in studying the market and the development of the vital marketing plan. The correct assessment of the market and the development of a marketing plan for the success of existing and new businesses are essential. In developing the market plan, the primary tasks of the entrepreneur are to understand the needs and desires of the customer and to select or develop a product or service which meets the needs of the customers; the development is an incentive tool to inform the customer and/or ensure the provision of a service or product (Jones, 2005).

Marketing activity is influenced by various factors of the marketing environment; the most important of which are social and cultural factors; political, legal, and economic factors; technological factors; and competitive factors (Izadi & Rezaei-Moghaddam, 2017). Socio-cultural factors somehow affect the marketing activities such as the factors related to population, language, religion, the patterns of the institutional system, value system, esthetics, customs, various rituals, music and art, lifestyle, the role of women and men in the community, caring for children, and other points concerned with a set of conceptual, behavioral, and speech patterns of people in a community (Canedo et al., 2014). Policies and decisions of government in political, legal, economic, and financial affairs also play a decisive role in each market. Marketing decisions are heavily influenced by the political and legal developments in the environment. In some cases, laws provide opportunities for economic activities. The enactment of the law for economic activities is used for supporting companies against unfair competition, protecting consumers against unconventional practices, and protecting the interests of the community (Capaldo, 2007). In addition, technology creates a greater market share for some marketers and is an impediment and threat to others. Further, technology is considered the most effective force which shapes people's lives. Moreover, it is essential for competitive advantages and is the main incentive of globalization (Geels, 2004). Additionally, the competitive factors are one of the most important forces for any marketer in the forces related to the competition in the marketplace.

Within the scope of the activities of the organization in the industry, there are three general strategies for managers (Salavou & Halikias, 2009) such as supplying the cheapest product to the market, i.e., cost strategy, supplying a different product to the market or the strategy of distinction, and focusing on a part of the market with a price approach or concentration strategy. In Porter's viewpoint, the goal of the strategy of cost leadership and distinction is the acquisition of the entire market, and the goal of the concentration strategy is to seize parts of the market (Bigat, 2012). In cost strategy, the company produces and supplies standard products which decrease the cost for the customer. In addition, the distinction strategy means that the products and services should be supplied which are considered as certain and unique products and services and are offered to customers who are not very sensitive to the price. Further, focusing means paying attention to specific products and services that cater to the needs of the small groups of consumers. Marketing is based on four main categories (known as 4P), called the marketing mix. The production of goods or services involves some issues such as product diversity, quality, design, specifications, brand, size, packaging, warranties, services, and efficiency (Kotler, 2000). Distribution channels include some issues such as market coverage, product inventory, distribution channels, transportation, and distribution areas. The most important distribution organizations are retailers, wholesalers, dealers, and agencies (Kotler & Keller, 2017). Good pricing includes some issues such as discounts, price list, credits, and repayment terms. The promotion of sales includes issues such as advertising, face-to-face sale, the development of sales, public relations, and marketing.

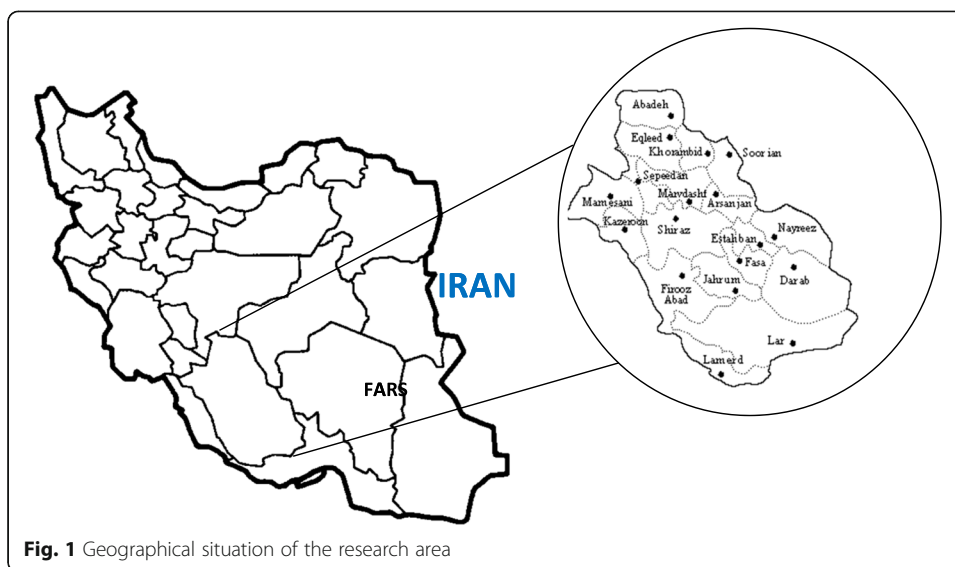
There are several ways to market. The Direct Marketing Association (DMA) defines direct marketing as a cross-selling system that uses one or more advertising spheres to provide a measurable or transactional response at any location. Practices used in direct marketing include TV marketing, catalog marketing, post-marketing, and distance marketing (Kotler & Keller, 2017). Direct marketing is an effective way for small businesses because it allows business owners to gain more direct responses from the customer, better mark the target market, and sell the product without going through the wide, long, and costly traditional channels. In network marketing, marketers sell the products of the company using "verbal advertising" or "face-to-face advertising" (Slater et al., 2010). Guerrilla marketing was introduced by Levinson and targeted entrepreneurs and small businesses. Levinson has considered small businesses with very few resources and little budget than the bigger businesses and examined the benefits of the tactics of guerrilla marketing for these companies (Bigat, 2012). E-marketing can be defined as achieving marketing goals using information technology such as the internet, e-mail, and databases. The advantages of electronic marketing for small and medium-sized enterprises are more important because they reduce the risk and the costs of entering new markets and provide more favorable conditions for competition. Furthermore, mobile marketing is a marketing approach through which the use of mobile channels to provide location-based, time-based, and personalized information to users with the goal of developing goods, services, and ideas and with the aim of realizing the interests of the stakeholders (Katz, 2008). Viral marketing is a type of an effective marketing program in the target community, which causes awareness and creates humor and rumor among people so that people tend to purchase a certain product or service.

The experience of many years of the monopolization of the license to invest in the agricultural sector by the government resulted in state policymakers setting up non-governmental funds to support the development of investment in the agricultural sector and the investment of rural women, as well as reducing unnecessary government enterprises in this regard. Therefore, the necessary steps were taken to establish agricultural development of specialized holding companies and create a non-governmental fund (microfinance) at the national, provincial, and city levels. The goals of the success of micro credit programs are the creation and development of employment. The micro credit program has been on the agenda of the Rural Women Affairs Office of the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad since 2000 (Izadi et al., 2016). Microfinance funds are used to support the rural women in the production path, reinforce their cooperative spirit and self-help, and promote their self-confidence and social status. Microfinance programs have been adopted in many countries with the aim of improving the economic status, reducing the unemployment and creating self-employment and entrepreneurship, eliminating the social inequalities, and reducing the poverty in urban and rural areas, as well as increasing the participation of the women in the labor market (Izadi et al., 2016).

The economic activities of women in their orientation toward entrepreneurial activities are related to several factors such as unemployment, independence, getting revenues, low wages, and dissatisfaction with the previous jobs. However, various factors contribute to facilitate or weaken these activities in different societies. Investigating these factors can play an important role in developing the entrepreneurial activities of women. Poor marketing is considered as one of the main weakening factors which reduces the sustainable growth of the entrepreneurs (Rijkers, 2012; Cowling & Taylor, 2001; Das, 2001). At present, market failure of the manufactured products of entrepreneurs is considered as one of the most important factors in failing to meet the goals of entrepreneurs and not increasing revenues. Therefore, the present study aimed to identify and analyze the marketing activities among the rural entrepreneurial women, as well as to provide a comparative analysis among the rural women entrepreneurs in the studied cities in terms of the status of their marketing activities.

Research method

The present research was conducted using a survey method in the Fars province of Iran among the women entrepreneurs who were the members of the agricultural development specialized holding companies (Fig. 1). In this research, the stratified random sampling method was used. The sample size was 307 according to the Morgan table (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Questionnaires were collected according to the population of each company in Shiraz, Marvdasht, and Estahban. Accordingly, 13 villages in Shiraz, 12 in Marvdasht, and 10 in Estahban were randomly selected. In each village, 5–10 questionnaires were completed according to the population of women entrepreneurs in that village. The questionnaires were completed only by rural women entrepreneurs. The data were collected through a structured questionnaire. First, the face validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by academic experts. To examine the reliability, the Cronbach's alpha test was taken through a pilot study in the village of Lapooei, Shiraz, by a sample of 30 women entrepreneurs outside the original sample. Based on these,



the improper items were revised or replaced with other appropriate terms. The alpha coefficients of the variables ranged from 0.67 to 0.88.

The use of marketing methods indicated the understanding of the studied women about these methods and their use in marketing and their sales. This variable was evaluated using questions related to the use of a variety of direct, partisan, electronic, and network marketing methods. The marketing mix was measured using the components of producing goods and services, the components of distribution channels, good pricing components, and the components of sales promotion. Marketing activities are influenced by various factors in the environment. The most important factors in the marketing environment are social and cultural factors, political factors, technological factors, and competitive factors. A marketing strategy refers to a process which enables an organization or business to achieve the best opportunities to increase sales by employing and using the least resources, thereby creating a sustainable competitive advantage. This variable was measured using questions in the field of three strategies: cost reduction, concentration, and distinction. Complete knowledge of the customer leads to the familiarity of the organization with all the interests and preferences of the client and helps the company to establish more effective communication with more continuity. The variable of marketing continuity was measured by the components of communication, after-sales service, customer demand, and target market. Risk-taking is the tendency to manage and take care of the affairs by allocating the resources and opportunities which can reasonably be expected to fail. To analyze the data, descriptive statistics was applied in order to rank the items of each variable. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was also done to compare the probable differences among the three studied counties.

Results and discussion

Married people with the highest frequency of 261 (84.7%) and single ones with a frequency of 46 (14.9%) were the sample size of the present study. The results on the

frequency distribution of the number of households indicated that the highest frequency is related to the group of 4–5 (32.5%) and the lowest frequency is related to group 7 and higher (1.3%).

Marketing methods

The use of marketing methods involves direct marketing methods, e-marketing, mobile marketing, and network marketing. In general, the variable of using marketing methods has a mean of 17.43. Based on the findings in direct marketing, the face-to-face advertisements with the mean rank of 2.55 is the most widely used and the second rank is related to the participation in the exhibitions (1.36). Given the fact that the entrepreneurs are in direct contact with the customer in these two ways, they are more effective because the face-to-face communication and the verbal advertisement are the best methods of sale since they are real and the feeling transfers accurately and completely to the customer. In communication, word of mouth is always passed to the other, which is true in this case. The use of brochures and catalogs is the least (0.87). This marketing method is more often used to introduce the products in the places where there is no familiarity with the product (Table 1).

The results showed that website design has the lowest mean rank (0.58) and use of WhatsApp's has the highest mean rank (1.47) among the items of using electronic marketing methods. Therefore, WhatsApp is mostly used among e-commerce applications. The average total application of electronic marketing methods is 4.75, and its range is 0–20. The results of using mobile marketing methods indicate that using phone calls has the highest average rank compared with text messaging. In a call method, individuals can communicate better than the text message by which they can transfer the concepts to the other side. The person perceives the tone of the voice

Table 1 Frequency distribution of applying marketing methods

Component	Item	Very low		Low		Medium		High		Very high		Mean rank
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	
Direct marketing	Use of media	118	38.3	69	22.4	58	18.8	37	12	21	6.8	1.28
	Use of brochures and catalogs	170	55.2	58	18.8	43	14	13	4.2	20	6.5	0.87
	Advertisement banner	145	47.1	43	14	56	18.2	29	9.4	30	9.7	1.19
	Face-to-face advertisements	21	6.8	40	13	73	23.7	90	29.2	79	25.6	2.55
Electronic marketing	Participation in the exhibitions	122	39.6	44	14.3	74	24	41	13.3	25	8.1	1.36
	Internet	131	42.5	64	20.8	68	22.1	30	9.7	11	3.6	1.10
	Telegram	146	47.4	53	17.2	56	18.2	28	9.1	14	4.5	1.03
	WhatsApp	107	34.7	43	13	83	26.9	40	13	29	9.4	1.47
	Instagram	192	62.3	51	16.6	26	8.4	19	6.2	10	3.2	0.67
	Website design	194	63	71	23.1	17	5.5	14	4.5	7	2.3	0.58
Mobile marketing	Text messaging	71	23.1	51	16.6	82	26.6	52	16.9	48	15.6	1.85
	Using phone calls	25	8.1	42	13.6	89	28.9	78	25.3	70	22.7	2.41
Network marketing	Sales representative of products	117	38	51	16.6	61	19.8	50	16.2	18	5.8	1.33

Range = 0–52, mean = 17.43, SD = 10.05

and the other person's feeling in a phone call better than that in the text message. Thus, better communication is done which is important in marketing. The overall average mobile marketing method is 4.22, and its range is 0–8. Based on the findings, most sales are made through a mobile phone call method. The extent of using network marketing was measured with the item of product sales representative (1.33), which allocates the least rank among the ways to use marketing methods. The findings are in line with the study of Rezaei-Moghaddam and Izadi (2019).

Marketing mix

The results of the status of goods production and services indicate that the item of product quality assurance rank has the highest mean among the items (3.25), and the importance of packaging has a high average of the items (3.16). The quality and packaging of the products are two important items in attracting customers (Table 2). In addition, the impact of health licenses on increasing sales is among the items which are important for most respondents (3.04). Among the items, it should be highlighted. The impact of a particular name on sales increases by an average of 2.78. In the marketing field, all entrepreneurs should seek branding and using a specific name. The specific name and brand for each product would improve the chance of product sales and marketing in different regions. The status of producing goods and services has an average of 28.09 and a range of 9–40.

The results of the frequency distribution of the distribution channels showed that among the items, distribution by their own individuals (2.79) and sales to retailers (2.69) were the highest. Further, the items related to intermediate sales, sales to wholesales, and sales in other villages had the lowest average rating, which could be related to one of the reasons for this problem in sales and the volume of low sales among entrepreneurs and the limited scope of their sales. The range related to the distribution channels is from 0 to 32, and the overall mean is 18.29.

The overall mean of sales promotion is 17.79 with a range of 4–28. The importance of customer satisfaction is the highest (3.49), and then the follow-up rate for post-sales satisfaction was given a high average among women entrepreneurs (2.77). It is cost effective for entrepreneurs since they keep their permanent customers, and customers' satisfaction with product promotion and creating referred customers. Advertisement for the product introduction was allocated the average rank of 1.90. This option is considered as a reason for the low success of entrepreneurs in sales because the advertisement is a key factor in increasing sales.

All items related to good pricing have a fairly close average, and the overall average is 16.06. Among the items, the bargaining power on the customer side (2.59), the amount of time to make the payment (2.54), and a discount rate to the client (2.34) had the highest average. The inability of the women entrepreneurs to resist the customers' request for discounts made them sell products below the real price. Thus, production costs are hard to recoup from the sale of products and do not have a good profit (Table 2). It is worth noting that the entrepreneurs have difficulty working with customers in pricing methods and cost recovery methods and have weak performance. Generally, the marketing mix variable included the following four components (80.23).

Table 2 Frequency distribution of marketing mix

Component	Item	Very low		Low		Medium		High		Very high		Mean Rank
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Product	Product quality assurance	2	0.6	5	1.6	43	14	122	39.6	135	43.8	3.25
	The difference between quality of product with the same in market	10	3.2	24	7.8	82	26.6	117	38	73	23.7	2.72
	Variety of products in response to customer need	5	1.6	23	7.5	92	29.9	122	39.6	58	18.8	2.68
	Variety of product compared with the same in market	10	3.2	34	11	85	27.6	126	40.9	45	14.6	2.54
	The impact of a particular name on sales increases	20	6.5	10	3.2	51	16.6	157	50	64	20.8	2.78
	The impact of sanitary licenses on increasing sales increase	17	5.5	8	2.6	21	6.8	153	49.7	101	32.8	3.04
	Importance of packaging	12	3.9	5	1.6	22	7.1	147	47.7	116	37.7	3.16
	Importance of packaging to attract the customer attention	9	2.9	13	4.2	43	14	150	48.7	87	28.2	2.97
	The impact of packaging on sales increase	10	3.2	6	1.9	50	16.2	151	49	85	27.6	2.45
	Better and more sanitary packaging in comparison with other similar products in the market	14	4.5	35	11.4	97	31.5	105	34.1	46	14.9	2.98
Place	Sales to retailers	16	5.2	30	9.7	72	23.4	103	33.4	85	27.6	2.69
	Sales to wholesalers	62	20.1	61	19.8	77	25	50	16.2	54	17.5	1.91
	Intermediate sales	69	22.4	63	20.5	80	26	64	20.8	28	9.1	1.73
	Distribution by their own individuals	15	4.9	29	9.4	53	17.2	111	36	94	30.5	2.79
	Sales in city	47	15.3	40	13	87	28.2	72	23.4	57	18.5	2.17
	Sales in other villages	62	20.1	63	20.5	63	20.5	68	22.1	46	14.9	1.91
	Sales in own village	22	7.1	26	8.4	67	21.8	110	35.7	77	25	2.64
	Sales to neighbors	28	9.1	26	8.4	67	21.8	88	28.6	96	31.2	2.65
Promotion	Communicate with customer after sale	26	8.4	32	10.4	87	28.2	91	29.5	68	22.1	2.47
	The importance of customer satisfaction	0	0	3	1	20	6.5	105	34.1	174	56.5	3.49
	Follow-up rate for post-sales satisfaction	10	3.2	23	7.5	68	22.1	130	42.2	73	23.7	2.77
	After-sales service to customer	28	9.1	40	13	93	30.2	92	29.5	37	12	2.24
	Providing information about product after buying the goods	13	4.2	22	7.1	104	33.8	101	32.8	59	19.2	2.57
	Informing the customers about other products	11	3.6	12	3.9	77	25	136	44.2	62	20.1	2.76
	Advertisement for the product introduction	56	18.2	58	18.8	77	25	79	25.6	31	10.1	1.90
Price	Discount rate to the client	9	2.9	31	10.1	151	49	70	22.7	41	13.3	2.34
	The bargaining power on the customer side	12	3.9	33	10.7	92	29.9	99	32.1	70	22.7	2.59
	Bargaining acceptance of entrepreneur	13	4.2	45	14.6	140	45.5	78	25.3	21	6.8	2.27
	Possibility of returning product	47	15.3	52	16.9	85	27.6	84	27.3	35	11.4	2.03
	Installment for cost refund	30	9.7	47	15.3	90	29.2	93	30.2	46	14.9	2.25

Table 2 Frequency distribution of marketing mix (Continued)

Component	Item	Very low		Low		Medium		High		Very high		Mean Rank
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
	The amount of time to pay for the installment	20	6.5	34	11	67	21.8	116	37.7	59	19.2	2.54
	Difference of price with the same product in market	23	7.5	51	16.6	102	33.1	74	24	55	17.9	2.29

Range = 0–128, mean = 80.23, SD = 17.62

Marketing environment factors

The overall average of competitive factors is 6.21, and its range is 0–12. The items have an average score similar to each other, and the highest average is related to the rate of knowledge of competitors (2.12). The rate of considering the competitors’ weaknesses and strengths has lower average (Table 3). The results of the frequency distribution of political, legal, and economic factors indicated that the item of the rate of the effect of inflation on cost reduction has the highest average (2.76), and then the rate of limit on

Table 3 Frequency distribution of environmental factors

Component	Item	Very low		Low		Medium		High		Very high		Mean rank
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Political, legal, and economic factors	Effect of inflation on cost reduction	21	6.8	29	9.4	43	14	119	38.6	92	29.9	2.76
	Limit on sales on behalf of the family	101	32.8	97	31.5	42	13.6	44	14.3	21	6.8	1.30
	Limit on sales on behalf of the government	68	22.1	72	23.4	68	22.1	62	20.1	35	11.4	1.75
	Limit on sales on behalf of the media	80	26	64	20.8	60	19.5	66	21.4	36	11.7	1.72
	Limit on sales by health care institutions	65	21.1	71	23.1	63	20.5	67	21.8	36	11.7	1.79
Competitive factors	Knowledge of competitors	28	9.1	45	14.6	130	42.2	70	22.7	34	11	2.12
	Considering the competitors’ strengths	32	11	49	15.9	100	32.5	103	33.4	21	6.8	2.09
	Considering the competitors’ weaknesses	38	12.3	51	16.6	103	33.4	97	31.5	16	5.2	2.01
Technological factors	Effect of technology on increasing sales	49	15.9	42	13.6	86	27.9	96	31.2	33	10.4	2.07
	Effect of social network on increasing sale	61	19.8	26	8.4	81	26.3	89	28.9	48	15.6	2.12
	Effect of providing professional information on sales growth	15	4.9	20	6.5	81	26.3	130	42.2	121	39.3	3.23
	Effect of the rhetoric and speaking ability on sales growth	3	1	6	1.9	30	9.7	146	47.4	121	39.3	3.23
Socio-cultural factors	Customers’ ability in purchasing	13	4.2	29	9.4	140	45.5	96	31.2	29	9.4	2.32
	Income of permanent customers	13	4.2	26	8.4	152	49.4	74	24	36	11.7	2.31
	Observance of the average sales visit	12	3.9	26	8.4	99	32.1	106	34.4	62	20.1	2.59
	Attention paid to the behavior and tone of the conversation in sales	1	0.3	7	2.3	37	12	116	37.7	145	47.1	3.30

Range = 0–64, mean = 35.87, SD = 9.17

sales by health care institutions is 1.79. The lowest average was related to the limit on sale on behalf of the family so that families could create very limited restrictions for entrepreneurs. The status of inflation and price hurdles, as well as the limitations from health institutes, are for entrepreneurs, due to the lack of their business development. In addition, some businesses may be defeated and completely eradicated for some reasons. The political, legal, and economic factors have an overall average of 9.25 with a range of 0–20.

The results related to the technological factors indicated that the item of the effect of the rhetoric and speaking ability on increasing sales is the highest value (3.23), and the item of the effect of technology on sales has the lowest average (2.07). These findings indicate that the entrepreneurs use technology to sell and market their products very little, although the use of technology is considered as one of the important methods to increase sales. The women entrepreneurs pinpointed this issue. Further, the people who have better rhetoric and speaking ability are more successful in sales. The technological factors have a total average of 9.97 with a range of 0–16. The highest average rank of items related to socio-cultural factors is due to the rate of attention paid to the behavior and tone of the conversation in sales which equals 3.30, and then the rate of observance of the average sales visit is 2.59. These two factors are very important when dealing with the time of sale, which the entrepreneurs used correctly with a high average (Table 3). In general, the socio-cultural factors have a mean of 10.45 with a range of 0–16. Overall, the mean of the variable of environmental marketing factors was 35.58. The findings regarding environmental factors are in line with the study of Tohidyan Far and Rezaei-Moghaddam (2019) and Izadi and Rezaei-Moghaddam (2017).

Marketing strategies

The results of the frequency distribution of price reduction strategy indicate that the possibility of providing a discount for a major purchase (2.66) is higher than the other items and the item of the possibility of presenting a gift in the case of a major purchase has the lowest mean (2.14). In general, in marketing and selling, giving gifts is more beneficial than discounting to the major purchasers. In this research, women entrepreneurs do the opposite and use more discounts. Giving a gift is more beneficial because of the positive aspect and the impact on the customer's mind (Table 4). The overall mean of the cost reduction strategy is 9.56, and its range is 0–16.

The frequency distribution of concentration strategy indicates that the use of new ideas of the customers and awareness of the needs and tastes of the customer has the highest average of 2.60 and 2.58, and the lowest average is associated with sales concentration on specific individuals (1.75). On the contrary, knowledge of the target market is relatively low. By recognizing the target market and market orientation, entrepreneurs can have a lot of growth in their business, which should be highlighted. The overall mean of the concentration strategy is 18.16, and its range is 0–32.

The results obtained from the frequency distribution of the distinction strategies indicate that the increase in the quality of the product has a higher average (3.26) than the rest of the items, and the post-sales service has the lowest average (1.97). After-sales service is important for customers, leading to customer loyalty and a stronger

Table 4 Frequency distribution of marketing strategies

Component	Item	Very Low		Low		Medium		High		Very High		Mean rank
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Concentration strategy	Knowing the target market	26	8.4	44	14.3	95	30.8	96	31.2	37	12	2.25
	Awareness of the needs and tastes of the customer	14	4.5	31	10.1	63	20.5	159	51.6	39	12.7	2.58
	Use of new ideas of the customers	22	7.1	18	5.8	76	24.7	133	43.2	57	18.5	2.60
	Research to identify customer need	25	8.1	35	11.4	74	24	104	33.8	68	22.1	2.51
	Special product for specific stratum	56	18.2	38	12.3	77	25	84	27.3	50	16.2	2.11
	Special product for specific taste and style	52	16.9	40	13	72	23.4	91	29.5	50	16.2	2.15
	Sales concentration on specific individuals	74	24	58	18.8	68	22.1	70	22.7	31	10.1	1.75
	Attention to small groups of consumers	21	6.8	36	11.7	86	27.9	119	38.6	39	12.7	2.40
Price reduction strategy	Supplying the cheapest product to the market	24	7.8	25	8.1	109	35.4	111	36	34	11	2.35
	Possibility of installment sale	22	7.1	35	11.4	74	24	107	34.7	67	21.8	2.53
	Possibility of providing a discount for major purchase	10	3.2	22	7.1	91	29.5	116	37.7	63	20.5	2.66
	Possibility of presenting a gift in the case of a major purchase	33	10.7	46	14.9	109	35.4	77	25	38	12.3	2.14
Distinction strategy	Supplying a different product to the market	34	11	41	13.3	76	24.7	107	34.7	47	15.3	2.30
	Different packaging	50	16.2	50	16.2	78	25.3	90	29.2	38	12.3	2.05
	Post-sales service	45	14.6	61	19.8	88	28.6	82	26.6	30	9.7	1.97
	Increase in the quality of the product	1	0.3	2	0.6	51	16.6	113	36.7	139	45.1	3.26

Range = 0–64, mean = 37.27, SD = 11.67

relationship with the entrepreneur. In general, after-sales service is considered as one of the dimensions of customer service, which should be considered by entrepreneurs. The distinction strategy range is 0–16, and the overall mean is 9.55.

Continuity of marketing

The rate of sincere relationship, relation with neighbors and relatives, customers’ returns for the next purchase, and the rate of awareness of the product satisfaction with the means of 3.01, 3.22, 3.03, and 3 have the highest values among the other items. The rate of sincere relationship has the highest mean indicating that communication with the neighbor and relatives can play a very important role in the marketing continuity (Table 5). The overall mean of the marketing continuity is 23, and the range of the variables is from 0 to 32.

The comparison of research variables among the studied counties

The comparison of the application of marketing methods among women entrepreneurs

The results of one-way ANOVA for comparing the application of marketing methods indicated a significant difference between the application of marketing methods in

Table 5 Frequency distribution of continuity of marketing

Item	Very low		Low		Medium		High		Very high		Mean rank
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Sincere relationship with customer	6	1.9	10	3.2	58	18.8	133	43.2	99	32.1	3.01
Relation with neighbors and relatives	4	1.3	5	1.6	38	12.3	133	43.2	127	41.2	3.22
Participate in group activities	15	4.9	22	7.1	72	23.4	115	37.3	81	26.3	2.74
Communication after sale	12	3.9	42	13.6	72	23.4	114	37	62	20.1	2.57
Customers' returns for the next purchase	6	1.9	5	1.6	67	21.8	121	39.3	105	34.1	3.03
Customers who advertise to attract more customers for purchasing	8	2.6	7	2.3	84	27.3	126	40.9	76	24.7	2.85
Advertisement by customers among their friends	4	1.3	13	4.2	87	28.2	127	41.2	70	22.7	2.82
Awareness of the product satisfaction	3	1	7	2.3	64	20.8	142	46.1	88	28.6	3

Range = 0–32, mean = 23, SD = 5.34, max = 32, min = 0

three cities ($P = 0.0001$). The results of the LSD test showed a significant difference between the mean of a variable of the application of marketing methods in Marvdasht and Shiraz, and the women entrepreneurs of Marvdasht city have used marketing methods more with a mean of 24 compared with Shiraz (14.7) (Table 6). In addition, the mean scores of this variable are different between Marvdasht with Estahban. In fact, women in Marvdasht had higher mean than those in Estahban. In general, rural women in Marvdasht used more marketing methods than those in Shiraz and Estahban. There is no significant difference between the mean score of this variable among the women in Shiraz and Estahban.

Comparing the application of direct marketing methods in the three cities shows that there is a significant difference between the use of direct marketing methods ($P = 0.0001$). According to the results of the LSD test, there is a significant difference between the mean of direct marketing methods used in Marvdasht and Shiraz and the women entrepreneurs of Marvdasht city with a mean of 10.27 compared with Shiraz (5.67) which used direct marketing methods more. In addition, there is a significant difference between the mean score of this variable in Marvdasht with Estahban, and the women in Marvdasht have higher mean than those in Estahban. Generally, women of Marvdasht have used more direct marketing methods than Shiraz and Estahban. However, no significant difference was observed between the mean score of this variable among the women in Shiraz with Estahban.

Further, there is a significant difference between the use of electronic marketing methods in three cities ($P = 0.0001$). The results of the LSD test indicated that there is a significant difference between the mean score of this variable in Marvdasht with Shiraz and Estahban. Women in the city of Marvdasht with a mean of 6.03 are in a

Table 6 ANOVA results for marketing methods among women entrepreneurs in the studied counties

Variable	Shiraz		Marvdasht		Estahban		F	Sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Application of marketing methods	14.70 ^a	9.15	24 ^b	9.79	15.64 ^a	9.02	27.36	0.0001
Application of direct marketing	5.67 ^a	3.59	10.27 ^b	4.81	6.65 ^a	4.39	30.72	0.0001
Application of electronic marketing	4.35 ^a	4.57	6.03 ^b	3.69	4.23 ^a	4.21	4.99	0.0001
Application of mobile marketing	3.79 ^a	2.24	5.50 ^b	2.28	3.75 ^a	2.01	18.51	0.0001

^{a, b} The means of the same letters denote no significant difference at a significance level of 0.05

better position, compared with the other two cities in terms of using electronic marketing methods. However, no significant difference was observed between the mean score of this variable among women in Estahban and Shiraz. There is a significant difference between the mean of using the mobile phone marketing method in the three studied cities. The results of the LSD test showed that the women in Marvdasht with the mean of 5.50 have a higher mean than other cities (Table 6).

Comparison of the marketing mix variable among women entrepreneurs

The results of one-way ANOVA indicate a significant difference between the mean of the marketing mix in the three studied cities ($P = 0.0001$). The results of the LSD test show that there is a significant difference between the mean score of this variable in Marvdasht with Shiraz and Estahban. Women in Marvdasht city are at a higher level with a mean of 95.20 than in two other cities in terms of the marketing mix. However, no significant difference was observed between the mean score of this variable among women in Shiraz and Estahban (Table 7). The findings are in line with the study of Rezaei-Moghaddam and Izadi and (2019).

There is a significant difference between the status of the production of goods and services in the three cities ($P = 0.008$). The results of the LSD test showed that the score in Marvdasht has a mean of 29.79 and above. There is no significant difference between the mean of this variable in Shiraz and Estahban. There is a significant difference between the status of distribution channels ($P = 0.0001$). According to the results of the LSD test, the score of this variable in Marvdasht is 23.45, which is more than the other two cities. In other words, women entrepreneurs in Marvdasht had better performance in marketing distribution channels (sales to retailers, wholesalers, etc.). There is a significant difference between the mean of sales promotion status in the three cities ($P = 0.0001$). In addition, the results of the LSD test showed that women in Marvdasht had a mean of 20.65 as the highest mean and had better status than the two other cities. There is a significant difference between the status of good pricing in the three cities ($P = 0.0001$). The results of the LSD test indicated that Marvdasht had the highest mean of 21.3. However, no significant difference was observed between the mean of Shiraz and Estahban.

Comparison of environmental factors among the women entrepreneurs

The results of the one-way ANOVA analysis showed a significant difference between the environmental factors in the three cities ($P = 0.0001$). The results of the LSD test

Table 7 ANOVA results for comparing the marketing mix among the women entrepreneurs in the studied counties

Variable	Shiraz		Marvdasht		Estahban		F	Sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Marketing mix	75.90 ^a	12.55	95.20 ^b	17.43	73.80 ^a	16.34	52.76	0.0001
Products	27.31 ^a	5.70	29.79 ^b	5.24	27.73 ^a	6.10	4.86	0.008
Place	16.74 ^a	5.10	23.45 ^b	6.30	16.10 ^a	5.38	47.25	0.0001
Promotion	17.79 ^a	4.73	20.65 ^b	4.40	15.53 ^c	5.61	23.82	0.0001
Price	14.05 ^a	4.16	21.30 ^b	5.68	14.40 ^a	4.28	69.36	0.0001

^{a, b} The means of the same letters denote no significant difference at a significance level of 0.05

indicated that its mean in Marvdasht (42.26) is higher than that of the other two cities. There is no significant difference between the mean score of environmental factors in Shiraz and Estahban (Table 8). In addition, there is a significant difference between the mean of competitive factors in the three cities ($P = 0.0001$). Regarding the analysis of the LSD test, a significant difference was observed between the mean score of competitive factors in Marvdasht with Estahban and Shiraz, while no significant difference was reported between the mean scores in Shiraz and Estahban. Women in Marvdasht, with a higher mean (7.6) highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of their rivals in more than two other cities. Further, there is a significant difference between legal, political, and economic factors in the three cities ($P = 0.0001$). The results of the LSD test indicated a significant difference between the mean scores in the three cities, and Marvdasht had a higher mean (11.7). Thus, the women in Marvdasht have faced more economic and political restrictions on the part of the government, family, etc. The difference in technological factors was significant in the three cities ($P = 0.004$). Further, the results of LSD analysis indicated a significant difference between the mean in Marvdasht and Shiraz, as well as Estahban. Marvdasht had the highest mean (10.95). There is a significant difference between socio-cultural factors in the three cities ($P = 0.0001$). On the other hand, the analysis of LSD indicated a significant difference between the socio-cultural factors in the three cities.

Comparison of marketing strategies, risk-taking, and marketing continuity among women entrepreneurs

There is a significant difference between the marketing strategy variables in the three cities ($P = 0.0001$). In addition, the results of the LSD test showed that the score of this variable in Marvdasht has a higher mean (45.79). There is no significant difference between the means of the marketing strategy variables in Shiraz and Estahban (Table 9).

There is a significant difference between the means of risk-taking variables in the three cities ($P = 0.0001$). The results of the LSD test showed that women entrepreneurs in Marvdasht city with a mean of 12.02 are better than their risk-taking variable, and their risk-taking morale is higher, which can be regarded as one of the reasons for the success of more sample women in Marvdasht than in the other two cities. There is no significant difference between the risk-taking in Shiraz and Estahban (Table 9). In addition, there is a significant difference between the mean of marketing continuity in the three studied cities. The results of the LSD test showed that the women in Marvdasht with a mean of 25.9 had a higher mean than those in other cities. In other words,

Table 8 ANOVA results for environmental factors among women entrepreneurs in the studied counties

Variable	Shiraz		Marvdasht		Estahban		F	Sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Environmental factors	33.06 ^a	8.10	42.26 ^b	8.14	34.30 ^a	8.81	32.24	0.0001
Competitive factors	5.64 ^a	2.86	7.60 ^b	2.01	5.79 ^a	3.09	14.19	0.0001
Political, legal and economic factors	7.35 ^a	4.20	11.70 ^b	4.42	9.65 ^c	3.89	27.28	0.0001
Technological factors	9.80 ^a	3.54	10.95 ^b	2.77	9.40 ^a	2.92	5.67	0.004
Socio-cultural factors	10.26 ^a	2.34	12.00 ^b	2.47	9.46 ^c	2.76	23.27	0.0001

^{a, b} The means of the same letters denote no significant difference at the probability level of 0.05

Table 9 ANOVA results for comparing some variables of research among women entrepreneurs in the studied counties

Variable	Shiraz		Marvdasht		Estahban		F	Sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Marketing strategies	34.32	10.49	45.79	10.33	34.20	10.81	35.24	0.0001
Risk taking	10.30	3.25	12.02	2.40	10.39	2.98	9.48	0.0001
The continuity of marketing	22.94	4.80	25.90	4.87	20.79	5.29	23.48	0.0001

^{a, b} The means of the same letters denote no significant difference at the probability level of 0.05
 The range of marketing strategies variable: 0–64, range risk-taking: 0–16, range of marketing continuity variable: 0–32

women entrepreneurs in Marvdasht had better performance in marketing continuity than Shiraz and Estahban. Considering the significance level, the women in Shiraz with a mean of 22.94 had a higher status in terms of marketing continuity compared to Estahban (Table 9).

Conclusion

The economic development process of any country is provided through its human resources. Given that women are half of the human resources, they are the subject and purpose of any kind of development and contribute to the goals of socio-economic development. Therefore, women’s participation is considered as one of the basic tools of development. Accordingly, the creation of small businesses and entry into entrepreneurship or self-employment is regarded as one of the main areas of women’s participation in rural society. Microfinance funds play a significant role in this regard. The microcredit system is one of the strategies proposed in the last few decades for accelerating the investment process and strengthening the financial foundation and saving in rural areas, which aimed at women’s job creation.

In this paper, in order to identify a variety of marketing methods, the impact of various marketing methods was analyzed. The methods of face-to-face advertising are in the direct marketing category and have the highest ranking, and women are more aware of this method and employ it. Face-to-face communication and verbal propaganda are the best-selling methods because of the correct and complete transmission of the seller’s sense to the customer. Using phone calls is also very useful. In this way, women can better communicate with each other and transfer the concepts to the opposite side. Further, participating in exhibitions and using text messages are used by entrepreneurial women.

Regarding the marketing mix, the women entrepreneurs are very weak about pricing, and they have problems with discounts and bargaining on the part of customers, which is a deterrent to marketing. In connection with distribution channels, very limited channels are used, which reduces sales volume. In general, the sales and marketing process is difficult and very poor when the various channels cannot be used for marketing and only a simple and traditional distribution method is used. In promoting sales, women entrepreneurs use advertisements to introduce their products less. Women only use limited communication and verbal propaganda in the village with their neighbors and relatives to sell their products, which is not effective for their business development. Verbal advertising is the best kind of advertisement due to engaging the client’s feeling and trustworthiness, but it should not use as the only way.

The results of the study of entrepreneurial women's marketing strategies showed that the distinction strategy was used less. It is suggested that the authorities should be responsible to explain the entrepreneurial marketing strategy, and they should plan a certain strategy for each city through monitoring. Explaining the strategies requires expertise and plays an important role in the activity of entrepreneurs.

The comparison of the mean of variables for women entrepreneurs in the three studied cities indicated that, with regard to using marketing methods, paying attention to marketing mix components and applying marketing strategy, Marvdasht had the highest score, which may be related to the wider scope of women's entrepreneurship activities. Women entrepreneurs in Marvdasht had more risk-taking and more marketing methods. They also use marketing strategies more than entrepreneurs in the two other cities. It is suggested that holding training courses by relevant institutions or members of the board of directors for members with a view to developing knowledge and marketing skills including training related to identifying a variety of marketing methods, communication skills, explaining strategies, and influencing the marketing of the entrepreneurs should be prioritized. By considering more employed women in the various marketing methods areas, it is suggested that holding marketing training courses should be supported so that women entrepreneurs can be aware of a variety of marketing methods and use them to sell their products. Furthermore, it is very important to hold periodic conferences between women who are members of the fund which has better performance with the other funds' members in this regard.

Concerning the marketing mix variable, women entrepreneurs in Marvdasht use more distribution channels in their sales, compared with those in Shiraz. The women in Estahban had the lowest mean. Therefore, the women in Estahban faced a low level of the low-profit marketing mix. It is suggested to hold friendly, collaborative meetings between entrepreneurs in all three cities. Thus, improvement can take place by the exchange of information among successful individuals with others. In the case of risk-taking, women in Marvdasht are in a better situation, which should be considered in the training of women in the two other cities. Regarding pricing, an association, as well as a union, should be established as one of the important components of the marketing mix. In relation to distribution channels, it is suggested that the types of distribution channels be addressed by entrepreneurs and some conditions should be provided for them, in addition to the distribution channels they use such as retailers, and the like. They require access to the other distribution channels like wholesalers and should be encouraged to sell in the other locations. Further, it is suggested to provide entrepreneurs with effective promotional strategies to make them more successful in marketing their products given that advertising is an effective factor in sales growth. Training empowers women in general and specifically in rural areas would be a vital role in rural development in order to help them launch their own enterprises which have income for rural household. It has also an important effect on agricultural vulnerability decrease by providing conditions for different non-farming jobs in rural areas. Remaining rural households in their village and even reverse migration may also another impact of rural women entrepreneurship development, because they will find their hometown as a place that could start a job and earn money.

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