

Article

When Entrepreneurial Leadership Identity and Passion Meet Venture Growth Intention

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Abstract: Within the emerging domain of entrepreneurial leadership research, gender issues have been largely ignored. This study aims to examine the nexus between entrepreneurial leader identity, entrepreneurial passion, and growth intention. This is done within the stacked context of being a woman entrepreneur, and in rural, regional and remote (RRR) Australia. This unique study draws upon a cross-sectional survey of 99 women entrepreneurs, employing a partial least square structural equation model. The study has found a positive relationship between entrepreneurial leader identity on the one hand and growth intention and passion on the other but could not find any conclusive evidence of a relationship between entrepreneurial passion and venture growth intention. The study opens new research avenues into the novel construct of entrepreneurial leader identity and helps to better understand the dynamics of RRR women entrepreneurship in the Australian context.

Keywords: entrepreneurial leadership; women entrepreneurs; rural; regional; remote Australia; entrepreneurial passion; entrepreneurial leadership identity; venture growth intentions



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1. Introduction

Recent research has argued that entrepreneurial leadership, which is the main research field of this study, is a new paradigm that explores the common themes and linkages between entrepreneurship and leadership [1]. Entrepreneurial leadership is defined variously in the literature but for the purpose of this study, it is defined as individuals who identify and exploit opportunities and add value through influencing and mobilizing internal and external stakeholders who support the vision they have created for their enterprise [2–5]. The field of entrepreneurial leadership is emerging as something quite distinctive owing to the immense change in contexts and environments characterized by uncertainty and immeasurable risk within which entrepreneurs find themselves [6].

Within this emerging domain of research, gender issues have been largely ignored [7], even though there is a growing body of research on gender issues in the domains of entrepreneurship and leadership respectively [8–16]. In this paper, we follow a gender-specific approach by focusing on women in the under-explored context of rural, regional and remote (RRR) Australia. In doing so this article builds on the contextualization argument of Harrison, Leitch and McAdam [7] where gender is part of the context. They argue that, as in the field of entrepreneurship more generally, it is impossible to discuss entrepreneurial leadership separately from the context within which it is demonstrated because context affords both opportunities and constraints owing to the actions of individuals through spatial and institutional norms [17].

This study is important for several reasons. First, we do not fully understand the global phenomenon of the underrepresentation of women in entrepreneurship, regardless of cultural and political contexts [18]. Women-owned entrepreneurial ventures comprise only 13% of all entrepreneurial ventures in Australia [19]. In addition, within Australia, global start-ups with at least one female founder secured only 23.7% of all venture funding [20].

Therefore, it is essential to investigate the various aspects of women entrepreneurship in a broader context and scale, including in RRR contexts. Examining women entrepreneurs' leadership identity in RRR ventures will contribute to the scarce research on how they start or grow their businesses [21]. Additionally, to better explain the uniqueness of women's entrepreneurship as research inquiry, it is necessary to expand the theoretical concepts that are currently available. To empower RRR women entrepreneurs, it is necessary to understand the reasons behind their inability to leverage their skills to grow their businesses. Therefore, studying the role of RRR women entrepreneurs' entrepreneurial leadership in their intention to grow their businesses is important.

Second, the stacked context of being a woman and living in RRR Australia is problematic for women entrepreneurs. Natural disasters such as the recent floods and bushfires abound in RRR Australia, and there are fewer employment opportunities for women than for men in these areas [22]. Women are trying to diversify on-farm activities, find off-farm income, and grow their ventures. Women living in rural towns are seeking to improve their economic situation through entrepreneurial activities. They pursue these actions within a rural context plagued by deep-seated cultural implications, owing to the general patriarchal norms still operating in rural Australia. Women also lack access to capital and place-based education; they are being underrepresented in business and government in their regions [23]. Compared to their urban counterparts, RRR women entrepreneurs feel isolated and navigate significant barriers in their entrepreneurship journey such as the problems caused by their distance from main centers, lack of access to entrepreneurship incubation facilities and reliable internet, lack of like-minded peers, confidence, and access to mentors [24]. A greater understanding of the link between entrepreneurial leader identity, entrepreneurial passion, and the growth intentions of RRR women can create awareness and empower women in RRR settings to take steps to develop their entrepreneurial leader identity and overcome the barriers they face.

Third, understanding the factors that encourage the venture growth intentions of RRR women will not only help to empower women but will also assist in addressing the increasing priority for the innovation agenda in Australia and elsewhere [25] to cultivate more successful, growth-oriented women-owned start-ups. Supporting women-led start-ups presents opportunities to develop the entrepreneurship ecosystem in Australia and help the country become a global leader in cultivating a diverse entrepreneurship culture. Finding ways to enhance women's entrepreneurial leadership identities, address their barriers, and support their entrepreneurial passion could be an important catalyst to increase the number of RRR Australian women entrepreneurs, which in turn could have a significant positive impact on the economic benefits that would flow from addressing these barriers to the venture growth of women-owned ventures.

This study fills a theoretical gap because although the topic areas of entrepreneurial leadership, entrepreneurial passion, and venture growth, respectively, have been addressed in the context of women entrepreneurship [26–29], the construct of 'entrepreneurial leadership identity' and how it relates to entrepreneurial passion and venture growth represent a novel approach in this context. Although RRR women entrepreneurs are contributing to household revenue through their off-farm entrepreneurial activity [15,30], their self-identity as entrepreneurial leaders and their passion for entrepreneurial activity as enablers of their intention to grow their ventures is unknown. Furthermore, even though much more has been discovered about what drives the growth of small businesses [31–36] and what factors influence business growth intentions [37,38], there is still a theoretical gap regarding whether RRR women entrepreneurs as leaders view business growth as desirable and feasible [39]. Finally, owing to this lack of knowledge about the growth intentions of RRR women, there is a lack of conceptualization of explanatory growth theories regarding RRR women's entrepreneurship [40,41].

This study also fills a practical gap. In view of the lack of understanding of how RRR women entrepreneurs identify with entrepreneurial leadership and how this relates to venture growth, there is an absence of initiatives focusing on the topic area of entrepreneurial

leadership as a bridge between entrepreneurship and leadership. A greater understanding of how these variables interact can inform government policy decisions regarding funding initiatives that can enhance the supply of female entrepreneurial leaders through tailor-made entrepreneurial leadership development and venture growth programs [42].

Given these gaps, the main aim of this study is to examine whether entrepreneurial leadership identity and entrepreneurial passion can forecast venture growth intention.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Background

2.1. Women as Entrepreneurial Leaders

Leitch and Volery [1] argue that “entrepreneurs are leaders par excellence who identify opportunities and marshal resources from various stakeholders in order to exploit these opportunities and create value”. Numerous scholars view the entrepreneur as a leader [43,44]. They argue that entrepreneurs are leaders owing to their position and are encouraged to take this role because the venture requires them to do so [45]. In the same vein, leadership is seen to be a key component of the entrepreneurial process considering that entrepreneurs cannot take advantage of opportunities without enabling individual and collective efforts [46]. Entrepreneurs must demonstrate leadership for their venture to take form. Leitch, et al. [47] argue that “entrepreneurial leadership is the leadership role performed in entrepreneurial ventures, rather than in the more general sense of an entrepreneurial style of leadership”.

Women play a significant role in the broader entrepreneurial phenomenon and economic development [48]. This is particularly true in rural and regional economies as women entrepreneurs in these contexts have a significant impact on local rural and regional economies, both in terms of income and employment [49]. Women entrepreneurs also have a crucial role to play in developing sustainable businesses [50,51]. However, there remain deeply seated biases in how women as entrepreneurs and women as leaders are viewed. Women entrepreneurs continue to experience challenges in developing their leadership roles, which compromise their efficiency and often prevent them from becoming capable leaders [52–55].

Women entrepreneurial leaders face challenges in the management of relationships with others whom they lead within and outside of their enterprises. The development and management of suitable social and human capital can assist them in developing their relationships with all stakeholders [47,56,57]. Lack of such capital has a significant moderating effect on motivations for women to be entrepreneurial leaders [56,58,59]. Compared to their male counterparts, women are less likely to pursue an entrepreneurial career because they often believe they lack the necessary entrepreneurial skills and knowledge [60,61] and are not well-versed in entrepreneurial roles [62]. Wiesner [24] confirmed these self-limiting beliefs Australian RRR women entrepreneurs espouse.

Exploring the unique disposition of RRR women entrepreneurs is therefore essential to understand how women entrepreneurs perceive different aspects of entrepreneurship and venture growth to overcome gender challenges and advance their entrepreneurial leadership careers.

2.2. Entrepreneurial Leader Identity

Scholars emphasized the importance of paying more attention to the psychological aspects of entrepreneurship, as well as the ways in which its actualization may be influenced by culture [63,64]. Furthermore, Uy, et al. [65] and Stephan [66] reported that women entrepreneurs could be impacted by psychological and resilient coping mechanisms. There have been several empirical studies demonstrating that the psychological aspect of entrepreneurs has an impact on the cognitive processes involved in conscious behavioral choices, such as entrepreneurial growth intentions [66–69]. Additionally, researchers have found strong empirical evidence that psychological factors differentiate the structure of male entrepreneurship compared to women entrepreneurship, both in terms of how they go about starting a business and the goals that they hope to achieve [9,70]. Sweida and

Reichard [71] reported that the differences between women who engage in High Growth Entrepreneurship (HGE) and those who are not engaged in HGE could be explained by differences in their respective attitudes and identities. Furthermore, even though high-growth women entrepreneurs acknowledge that discrimination is a problem and a barrier, they appear to be able to mitigate the effects of gender stereotyping by viewing these barriers as challenges to overcome. They tend to see their businesses as extensions of their positive self-image and sense of identity. Therefore, women entrepreneurship cannot be fully understood without understanding entrepreneurial leader identity, which is related to how leaders themselves perceive leadership and their leadership role [72]. However, there is an absence of research that focuses on the way women entrepreneurs perceive themselves as entrepreneurial leaders and what might be the effect of leadership self-perception on entrepreneurial behavior.

2.3. Venture Growth Intention

The concept of entrepreneurial growth intention has been variously defined in previous research, using labels such as growth intention, growth aspiration, and growth motivation [37,73,74]. Dutta and Thornhill [75] define entrepreneurial growth intention as “an entrepreneur’s goal or aspiration for the growth trajectory she or he would like the venture to follow”. Even though Sadler-Smith, et al. [76] found that one of the important characteristics of the behavior of an entrepreneurial leader is the intention to grow the enterprise, this notion has not been examined within the RRR women entrepreneurship context. Therefore, investigating the relationship between RRR women entrepreneurs’ entrepreneurial leadership identity (self-perception as an entrepreneurial leader) and their intention to grow their enterprise will enable a better understanding of the phenomenon of business growth in general, and more specifically within the underdeveloped research area of RRR women entrepreneurs.

Owing to the current lack of in-depth exploration on the topic of venture growth intention, we conducted a search for antecedents of growth intention that could combine many of the constructs found in the present literature on venture growth intentions. As a result of our search, “Entrepreneurial Leader Identity” presented itself as a novel antecedent of venture growth intention, a concept related to one’s perception of oneself as an entrepreneurial leader, as opposed to entrepreneurial identity. As outlined earlier, an entrepreneurial leader is someone who recognizes and seizes possibilities for their enterprise and selects and mobilizes stakeholders to carry out the vision set to reach the entrepreneurial goal [2]. To establish an Entrepreneurial Leader Identity, it is important to internalize and describe oneself as being both an entrepreneur and a leader [77] and to incorporate this Entrepreneurial Leader Identity into one’s existing overall identity [78].

Identity is a generic term that refers to a person’s perception of who he or she is [79]. Despite the fact that the term is used in a variety of ways and from a variety of theoretical perspectives, the common theme is that identity refers to a person’s understanding of who he or she is, and that this self-understanding underpins the person’s interpretation of events, frames their intentions, and motivation, and guides their actions [80]. Diverse viewpoints on identity, despite differing in their emphasis and assumptions, conceptualize it as consisting of a plethora of motivational notions such as self-perceptions, group memberships, beliefs, values, objectives, emotions, and habitual ways of action. Consequently, it is no coincidence that diverse motivational viewpoints refer to identity as being involved in motivation [81,82]. The concept of identity may be particularly useful because it may provide a framework capable of conceptually integrating the uniqueness of different individuals’ motivation with the shared aspects of motivation among individuals belonging to a particular group, as well as the general principles of motivation that apply to people and contexts in general [83].

According to identity theory, self-identity is made up of a collection of roles that a person plays, which in turn causes a habitual activity to support the validation of the self-concept [84]. Using this theory, it can be claimed that self-identity seeks to build consistency

between attitudes and actions [85], hence eliciting specific goals. As a result, the more critical an identity is, the more identity-congruent behaviors it evokes [86]. Several research projects, including those that have been adjusted for past behavior, have demonstrated that self-identity is an essential supplementary element within the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB; [87]) for predicting both intentions and behaviors, e.g., [88–90]. The TPB posits that individuals plan their behavior, and such human behavior is preceded by an individual's intentions to engage in a particular behavior. Accordingly, intention is an accurate predictor of planned behavior.

In a meta-analysis, Rise, et al. [91] revealed that self-identity explained a considerable amount of additional variance in intentions after correcting for historical behavior. There is rising evidence to support the inclusion of identity—both personal and social—in the TPB to predict intentions e.g., [91–94]. Theoretically, this advancement marks the incorporation of key concepts from social identity theory [95,96] and identity theory [97,98] into the TPB to predict intentions. When a particular social identity serves as the primary basis for self-conception, an individual's behavior becomes group-based and influenced by the norms of that social category or group. The process of categorizing oneself in terms of a specific social identity highlights similarities between the self and other ingroup members and emphasizes disparities between the self and outgroup members. As a result, the behavior and expectations of other group members will serve as a guide for appropriate behavior, mainly when that social identity is fundamental to the self-concept.

Cognitive interpretations of leadership experiences influence the development of a leader's self-identity. If a person's self-image matches his or her impression of a leader [77], or if he or she can display the competencies of a prototypical leader, he or she is more likely to identify as a leader [99]. The ability to identify as a leader improves when one experiences another leader with whom one can identify. Leadership experiences provide an opportunity to emulate observed leadership behaviors. According to Lord and Hall [100], leader identity is a type of cognitive schema that serves as a reservoir for information and knowledge associated with a leadership role. It also guides an individual's behavior and interactions in leadership roles and processes [101]. Therefore, it is argued that Entrepreneurial Leader Identity guides the entrepreneurial leader in the entrepreneurial process and behavior, including venture growth process and behavior.

2.4. Entrepreneurial Passion

Passion can be defined as a strong inclination towards a self-defining activity that people love, consider significant, and to which they commit time and effort [102]. Passion is an essential part of entrepreneurship; it can play an important role in the entrepreneurial process, from starting a business to its outcome, including business growth and the behavior of entrepreneurs [103–105]. Moreover, it is associated with positive sentiments and attitudes towards entrepreneurial activities vital to the self-identity of an entrepreneur [106,107]. Passion strengthens motivation and stimulates individuals to continue through the difficulties associated with accomplishing complex tasks [107]. Passion will therefore have a positive impact on business growth [108].

Entrepreneurial passion (EP) can be defined as an entrepreneur's intense positive feelings towards a particular entrepreneurial activity or "domain" that they are engaged in, and which relates to their entrepreneurial venture, such as inventing, founding, or developing, and correlating with the activity or "domain" as central to their self-identity [109].

Passion influences critical outcomes such as creativity in developing entrepreneurial intentions [110], entrepreneurial persistence [103], employees' commitment [111], entrepreneurial performance [112], technological innovation [113], strategic change [114], and venture investment [115]. Furthermore, researchers have shown that EP is positively associated with entrepreneurial intention [106,116,117]. Some researchers have also explored the relationship between EP and venture growth e.g., [108,118–120]. Even though the literature explores the relationship between EP and entrepreneurial intention and the relationship between EP and venture growth, the relationship between EP and growth

intention is still an understudied research area with no existing research in the RRR women entrepreneurship context.

Passion motivates people to overcome obstacles when accomplishing complex tasks [107], which influences business growth positively [120]. Because this is a complex issue, it will be beneficial to understand the antecedents that lead to EP. In their exploration of this question, scholars have identified several personal and social aspects that contribute to entrepreneurial passion. Besides its benefits, researchers have focused more on outcomes than on antecedents. In their review, Newman, et al. [121] found that only 25 of the 60 empirical research papers published on entrepreneurial passion examined its antecedents. The origin of passion is not yet completely understood; therefore, an exploration of the antecedents of entrepreneurial passion is needed. According to Webb, et al. [122], examining entrepreneurial identities and identity theory may provide intriguing new insights into the entrepreneurship process. An identity theory lens can illuminate the origins of passion and the factors that influence its growth.

According to a growing body of research, passion is an important part of entrepreneurship, and it plays a substantial impact on the business formation process and its outcomes [110,117,123–125]. Researchers have argued that EP is an important personal trait that drives people to start businesses [126,127]. Passion has been considered by researchers to be a trait-like attribute that influences the entrepreneurial process via more proximal and situation-specific motivational elements [106,108].

3. Hypothesis Development

A growing body of research shows that self-identity is an important predictor of behavioral intentions [89,128–131]. Although Sparks and Shepherd [132] suggested that self-identity should influence intentions through attitudes, they discovered that green consumers' identity was an independent predictor of intentions to purchase organic products. It was argued that entrepreneurial identity was a good determinant of intentionality [133]. Early literature also indicates a positive relationship between entrepreneurial self-identity and entrepreneurial intentions [90,134–136]. Recently, Ndofirepi [137] found that entrepreneurial self-identity had a direct statistically significant effect on entrepreneurial intention. Because the construct 'entrepreneurial leadership identity' has not been examined in the RRR women entrepreneurship context, the first research question explored in this paper is: What is the relationship between the Entrepreneurial Leader Identity of Australian RRR women entrepreneurs and their venture growth intentions? Even though it has not been tested, it could be argued that the Entrepreneurial Leader Identity of women entrepreneurs in the RRR context is likely to be positively related to venture growth intention. The first hypothesis tested is:

H1. *The Entrepreneurial Leader Identity of Australian RRR women entrepreneurs is positively related to their venture growth intentions.*

Identity theory acknowledges that taking into account other people's perspectives and reactions to oneself can significantly impact one's motivation and self-construal [138,139]. When considering the theory of identity, past researchers have examined the relationship between identity and passion in the context of entrepreneurship and found that entrepreneurial identity is positively associated with harmonic entrepreneurial passion [107,140]. Although entrepreneurship scholars have explored the linkage between identity and passion from various perspectives, there is still more to explore. Surprisingly, literature on EP has mainly overlooked other identities in entrepreneurship, such as the leader identity of entrepreneurs, even though Entrepreneurial Leader Identity has the potential to be associated with EP. Nevertheless, researchers have found a close relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and entrepreneurial passion. For example, when studying women entrepreneurs, Dean and Ford [141] found that entrepreneurial leadership is associated with passion. Because there is an absence of research examining these issues within the RRR women entrepreneurship context, these arguments are indicative of a potential positive relationship between Entrepreneurial

Leader Identity and entrepreneurial passion. Therefore, our second research question examined in this paper is: Is there a positive relationship between the Entrepreneurial Leader Identity of Australian RRR women entrepreneurs and their EP. The following hypothesis will inform this research question.

H2. *The Entrepreneurial Leader Identity of RRR women entrepreneurs is positively related to their entrepreneurial passion.*

There are some empirical evidence that EP has a favorable impact on entrepreneurial behavior and performance [104,107,127]. A study conducted in Australia found that EP has a positive and significant impact on entrepreneurial success [142]. EP has been shown to be a key motivator of entrepreneurial behavior because having intense good feelings have been linked to identities [125,126,140]. Recent research, for example, has shown that EP is directly related to a wide range of entrepreneurial outcomes, including venture growth and performance, access to finance, and entrepreneurial persistence e.g., [118,143,144].

Despite substantial advances in understanding the nature and impact of EP, one of the key concerns remains unanswered: whether EP is related to venture growth intention. Given its importance in the entrepreneurial process, it is critical to understand how EP relates to entrepreneurial growth intention. There is strong evidence that passion and growth intention could be associated, as scholars have demonstrated that EP is associated with entrepreneurial intention. Some researchers have examined the relationship between EP and entrepreneurial intention and found that there was empirical evidence to support this notion [110,145]. Moreover, researchers have found that EP and entrepreneurial intention have an indirect positive relationship [146,147]. In other research domains, researchers have found a positive relationship between passion and intention. For example, the passion for speed has a positive impact on speeding behavioral intention [148], and customers' passion has been linked to their behavioral intention [149]. Our third research question, therefore asks: What is the relationship between the EP of RRR women entrepreneurs and their venture growth intention? The following hypothesis will inform this research question.

H3. *The entrepreneurial passion of RRR women entrepreneurs is positively related to their venture growth intention.*

4. Materials and Methods

4.1. Sampling and Data Collection

The data were collected from women entrepreneurs located in RRR Australia. The rationale for focusing on this group was discussed in the Introduction. An online survey was conducted to measure the entrepreneurial leadership and venture growth intention of Australian RRR women entrepreneurs. Purposive sampling was employed with respondents recruited in two tranches through non-probability snowball sampling. First, an email invitation to participate in the survey was sent to 750 women entrepreneurs subscribed to the only Australia-wide women entrepreneurship development program, The WiRE Program. This was followed up with an email to several women associations operating in RRR Australia, requesting these associations to invite women entrepreneurs in their association to participate in the survey. Potential respondents were invited to click on a survey link. One-hundred-and-nine survey responses were received after multiple reminders. Ten respondents were excluded due to missing data, which left 99 usable surveys. We suspect we could have achieved a higher response rate if Australia had not been struggling with the aftermaths of COVID and extreme flooding in rural areas at the time of distributing the survey, which significantly negatively impacted especially small businesses.

4.2. Data Collection Tools

The survey instrument was pretested with 10 participants in the study area to check the validity and appropriateness of wording, formatting, and sequencing of questions. The questions were refined based on the pilot outcomes. Three scales were utilized in this study

to measure the constructs: Entrepreneurial Leader Identity (ELI), Entrepreneurial Passion (EP) and Venture Growth Intention (GI). The construct ELI was measured by four items adapted from [150]: “Developing and nurturing a venture/business is an important part of who I am (EL1)”, “I think of myself as an entrepreneur (EL2)”, “I think of myself as a leader (EL3)” and “When I describe myself, I would include the word leader (EL4)”.

To measure EP, we drew on the four items of scale from Cardon, Gregoire, Stevens and Patel [111]. However, one item was dropped after assessing the measurement model due to low factor loading. The three items utilized were: Nurturing a new venture/business/initiative through its emerging success is enjoyable (PA1)”, “It is exciting to identify unmet market gap (PA2)” and “Inventing new solutions to problems is an important element of who I am (PA3)”; The excluded item was “Assembling the right people to work with me or my business is exciting (PA4)”.

A single item, “My intention is to grow my venture as large as possible”, measured GI. The scale was adapted from Edelman, Brush, Manolova and Greene [37]. Measurement items of all the scales were measured by 5-point Likert scales ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”.

The reliability and validity of measurement scales are discussed in Section 5.3 measurement model.

4.3. Data Analysis Method

Structural equation modelling (SEM) is a multivariate method for testing and evaluating multivariate causal relationships. SEM examines direct and indirect effects on hypothesized causal relations. In general, there are two approaches to SEM: covariance-based and component-based SEM. A large sample is needed to perform covariance-based SEM, whereas component-based SEM can be performed on a small sample. As our study hypothesized multivariate causal relations and has a small sample size, with the help of Software Smart PLS 3 [151], component-based partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was applied to test the relationship among the study constructs ELI, EP, and GI. The method was chosen because our study has a small sample size, and PLS-SEM works better with a small sample size compared to CB-SEM. Besides, PLS-SEM has more flexible requirements concerning sample distribution and measurement scales [152].

PLS-SEM requires two steps to be completed. The measurement model should be evaluated in the first step to ensure its validity. In the second step, the hypothesized relationship should be tested, and the measurement model should be evaluated to ensure its validity. Following the established guidelines for PLS-SEM [153,154], both the measurement model and the structural equation model were validated in our study. The measurement model was evaluated by assessing reliability and validity prior to evaluating the structural model [152]. Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability (CR) were used to evaluate the reliability of the constructs. Discriminant validity was assessed by the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotriat-Monotrait ratio of correlation [155]. Convergent validity was accessed by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The structural model was assessed based on explained variance (R²), predictive relevance (Q²), the significance of paths [155], and bootstrapping generated 5000 samples to compute T-values to test the model, as Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt [152] suggested.

4.4. Assessing the Common Method Bias

Common method bias is the bias produced in estimates due to the common method used to assess both independent and dependent variables. When surveys collect data on both independent and dependent variables simultaneously, the estimated effect of one variable on another may be skewed by common method variance; that is, systematic variance shared among the variables introduced into the measures by the measurement method rather than the theoretical constructs being measured [156]. In this study, common method bias was assessed by Harman’s single factor test [157].

5. Results and Key Findings

5.1. Common Method Bias

Harman's single factor test revealed that a single factor explains 48.6 per cent of the variance, which is less than 50 percent, suggesting that common method bias is not a concern for this study [156,157].

5.2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Only 18.4% of respondents were younger than 40 years old. This reflects the trend of young people, especially young women, leaving rural areas in Australia. A total of 85% of respondents possessed post-secondary school qualifications, including 52.5% of women possessing either a post-graduate diploma (14.1%) or postgraduate degree (38.4%). More than two-thirds of those surveyed were the sole proprietors of their businesses. A third of the businesses owned by respondents were family-owned. More than two-thirds of those surveyed said their businesses had no employees other than the owner(s). At least 44% of business were more than three years old, and 31% of businesses were under a year old. Nearly 37% of respondents reported that their business made a profit in the last fiscal year. Additionally, 77% of the respondents reported that they have a network of entrepreneurial friends/colleagues with whom to discuss their excitement and concerns related to their entrepreneurial vision.

5.3. Measurement Model

The measurement model is the component of the PLS model that investigates the relationship between latent variables and their measures. Prior to structural modelling of latent variables, it was necessary to evaluate the measurement model for its quality (reliability and validity). The results below demonstrate the quality of the measurement model.

As shown in Table 1, all factor loadings are greater than the threshold value of 0.6 [157]. The Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) were higher than the recommended value of 0.700 [158]. Cronbach's alpha of each construct exceeded the 0.700 thresholds. These values ascertained the reliability of the measurements. Convergent validity was acceptable because the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was over 0.500. Results established discriminant validity (shown in Table 2) as the square root of the AVEs was higher than the inter-construct correlations among the constructs [159]. Discriminant validity was confirmed by the Heterotriat-Monotrait ratio of correlation with values below the threshold of 0.90 [155]; hence, discriminant validity was established (see Table 2). These findings established the validity of measurement.

Table 1. Factor Loadings, Reliability, and Validity.

	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
EL1	0.836	0.894	0.927	0.759
EL2	0.890			
EL3	0.897			
EL4	0.863			
PA1	0.826	0.739	0.842	0.641
PA2	0.863			
PA3	0.705			
GI	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000

Table 2. Fornell-Larcker criterion and Hetrotrait-Monotrait Ratio.

	GI	ELI	PA
GI	1.000		
ELI	0.644 (0.679)	0.871	
PA	0.291 (0.309)	0.429 (0.472)	0.801

Values inside the brackets are Hetrotrait-Monotrait ratios.

5.4. Structural Model

After assurance of our measurement quality, we assessed the structural model to test our hypothesis. Table 3 shows the results of the structural model (Figure 1) assessment using 5000 bootstrap samples. The results indicate that entrepreneurial leadership intention had a positive and significantly relationship with both entrepreneurial passion ($\beta = 0.429$, $T = 4.064$, $p = 0.000$) and venture growth intention ($\beta = 0.636$, $T = 7.203$, $p = 0.000$). This finding gave us the evidence to accept the hypotheses H1 and H2. However, entrepreneurial passion had a positive but non-significant relationship with venture growth intention ($\beta = 0.018$, $T = 0.186$, $p = 0.853$). This finding suggested that the evidence was not sufficient to support our hypothesis H3. To ascertain these results from the model, we assessed the model's explanatory capacity and effect size of independent variables on dependent variables and their predictive relevance as follows:

The R2 value, the explained variance of the dependent constructs, was used to assess the structural model's explanatory capacity [160]. R2 values for entrepreneurial passion and venture growth intention were 0.184 and 0.415, respectively, above the acceptable value of 0.10 [161].

After the proposed model had been evaluated and confirmed, the next step was to see how removing a specific predictor construct affected the R2 value of an endogenous construct. As a result, we investigated the magnitude of the effects (f^2 ; [160]). On the one hand, expert user results showed that Entrepreneurial Leader Identity had a large effect size on venture growth intention ($f^2 = 0.563$) and a moderate effect size on entrepreneurial passion ($f^2 = 0.226$). On the other hand, passion had a nonsignificant impact on intention ($f^2 = 0.000$).

Finally, the current study tested the model's predictive relevance using Stone–Geisser's Q2 [160]. The results showed that all Q2 values were above zero (see Table 3), indicating that the models had predictive relevance.

Table 3. Structural model evaluation.

	β	T	p	f^2
ELI→GI	0.636	7.203	0.000	0.563
ELI→PA	0.429	4.064	0.000	0.226
PA→GI	0.018	0.186	0.853	0.000
	R2	Q2		
GI	0.415	0.374		
PA	0.184	0.072		

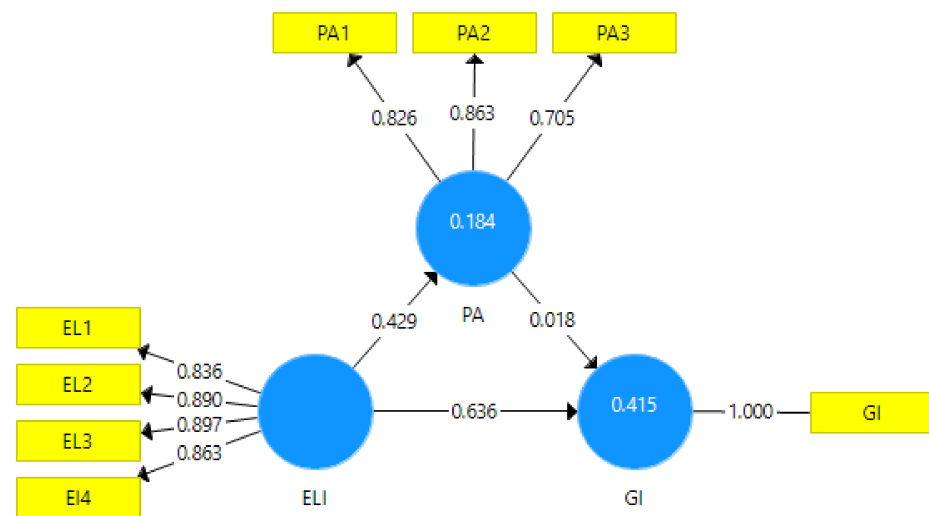


Figure 1. Structural Model.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

In view of the scant research on how women entrepreneurs regard themselves as entrepreneurial leaders, how entrepreneurial self-perceptions may impact on venture growth intentions, and to expand the understanding of antecedents of growth intentions, we proposed the concept of Entrepreneurial Leader Identity as a novel antecedent of venture growth intention. The conceptual model proposed in this paper aimed to test Entrepreneurial Leader Identity and its relationship with growth intention and entrepreneurial passion.

6.1. Discussion

With regard to the role that Entrepreneurial Leader Identity plays in Australian RRR women entrepreneurs' venture growth intentions, the results revealed that RRR women who possess a strong Entrepreneurial Leader Identity have a higher intention to grow their business. These results are supportive of the findings of Rise, Sheeran and Hukkelberg [91] in a meta-analysis that self-identity explained a considerable amount of additional variance in intentions. The results are also supportive of the rising evidence to support the inclusion of identity in the Theory of Planned Behavior to predict intentions e.g., [92–94].

Researchers in the field of entrepreneurship have investigated the relationship between identity and passion from various perspectives, e.g., [118,142,145] but have overlooked the possibility of a relationship between passion and a variety of entrepreneurial identities of an entrepreneur, one of which is Entrepreneurial Leader Identity. Murnieks, Mosakowski and Cardon [107] have argued that entrepreneurial experiences in the context of passion can impact an entrepreneur's identity and that this relationship may be reciprocal. We extended this line of argument and examined this link between Entrepreneurial Leader Identity and the entrepreneurial passion of RRR women entrepreneurs and found a significantly positive relationship. This finding is supportive of other research arguing that identities could affect passion [126,162]. Furthermore, Vallerand, et al. [163] and Cardon, Wincent, Singh and Drnovsek [126] argue that passion experiences are anchored in self-defining activities that are important for one's identity. Others have found a close relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and entrepreneurial passion within the context of women entrepreneurship [141].

Despite significant progress in understanding the nature and impact of EP, the key question of whether the EP of RRR women entrepreneurs influences their venture growth intention remains unanswered. We have examined the relationship between entrepreneurial passion and the growth intentions of RRR women entrepreneurs. Partial least square SEM of survey responses from RRR women entrepreneurs produced thought-provoking results. According to these results, there is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial

passion and venture growth intention of RRR women entrepreneurs. This finding does not support previous findings that assert that passion is a critical predictor of behavioral intentions [148,164]. Others have linked entrepreneurial passion and entrepreneurial intentions [110,145]. In addition, researchers have discovered an indirect, positive relationship between entrepreneurial passion and entrepreneurial intention [146,147]. Similar results were reported in other fields of study. For example, customers' passion is linked to their behavioral intention [149], and a passion for speed positively impacts speeding behavior [148]. In addition, Baum and Locke [108] found that a passion for work has an impact on venture growth through an entrepreneur's growth goals (which is similar to growth intentions).

A possible reason for our finding could be that passion has an indirect effect on growth intentions [146,147] instead of having a direct effect. Another explanation could lie in the fact that experiencing passion during the entrepreneurial process could affect the degree of importance RRR women entrepreneurs assign to growth events, and in this sample RRR women entrepreneurs may not assign adequate importance to growing their ventures. Because our research did not study an indirect path or venture growth importance, we suggest further examination of these concepts in the context of RRR women entrepreneurship.

6.2. Conclusions

By introducing the concept of Entrepreneurial Leader Identity, we delved into the nexus between Entrepreneurial Leader Identity, Entrepreneurial Passion, and Venture Growth Intention of Australian RRR women entrepreneurs. Although researchers have attempted to understand entrepreneurship from various perspectives, including entrepreneurial leadership, entrepreneurship cannot be fully understood without first understanding Entrepreneurial Leader Identity, which is related to how leaders perceive leadership [72,165]. Even though some researchers have studied Entrepreneurial Leader Identity, e.g., [165,166], these studies were qualitative in nature and have only explored how entrepreneurs develop their Entrepreneurial Leader Identity. Our approach can therefore be used in future empirical studies to understand the outcomes of Entrepreneurial Leader Identity better.

By quantitatively examining the effect of Entrepreneurship Leadership Identity on entrepreneurial passion and venture growth intentions and the link between entrepreneurial passion and venture growth intention, our research added another stepping stone in the attempt to better understand the role of identity in entrepreneurship in general and in entrepreneurial leadership specifically, especially in the context of RRR women entrepreneurship. This first attempt to quantify the construct 'Entrepreneurial Leader Identity' and link it to entrepreneurial passion and venture growth intention could provide researchers with a new avenue to explore entrepreneurship and the phenomenon of venture growth.

The intention to grow an enterprise and make it a sustainable business is a significant feature of entrepreneurial leaders' behavior [76]. Although past research has identified factors influencing business growth intentions [37,38], our study has shone light on the Australia RRR women entrepreneurship context. We proposed the concept of Entrepreneurial Leader Identity as a novel antecedent of venture growth intention to increase an understanding of the antecedents of growth intentions. Upon confirmation of this positive relationship, we have paved the way to better understand the business growth phenomenon within this context.

Even though we have measured venture growth intention and not "actual" growth, numerous studies have found that the former is a direct predictor of actual growth. Therefore, the results of our study also have practical implications for growing and sustaining businesses. Furthermore, there is general agreement that one's identity can be formed, developed and sustained through capacity building, training, education and especially learning-by-doing (experiential learning) practices [60,167–174].

In the RRR context where women entrepreneurs face numerous unique challenges such as distance, a male-dominated context, a lack of mentors, networks and learning-by-doing capacity-building programs, it could be very difficult for these women to strengthen

their entrepreneurial leadership identities. Capacity-building strategies that facilitate direct interactions with mentors or like-minded peers, successful entrepreneurs, and experts [29,175,176] can encourage a woman's decision to embrace a view of herself as an entrepreneur and leader [177]. However, values such as risk taking and profit motivation that are associated with entrepreneurial role models are often rejected by women entrepreneurs [178] and they push back against gendered representations of entrepreneurship. This could be because within the context of rural communities, 'place' (as in being 'rural') assumes a key role in the formation of identity since the boundaries of geographical space are much clearer defined in comparison with urban settings. Community is built through greater reliance on institutions, organizations and activities that are all carried out within a certain geographical location. As such, community is constructed on a sense of neighborliness and place is very often inseparable from an individuals' identity and the life they lead in terms of a sense of belonging [179].

We therefore argue that within a context of isolation that accompanies RRR Australia, online interactive learning-by-doing capacity-building programs and activities that offer a safe space for RRR women entrepreneurs to interact and engage with like-minded peers, mentors, experts and other successful RRR entrepreneurs and female leaders, offer tremendous opportunities for these women to develop their entrepreneurial leadership identity. In addition, opportunities to practice start-up initiatives, goal accountability and entrepreneurial responsibilities could assist in developing an entrepreneurial leadership identity. By enabling effective collaborative peer-learning behaviors, government and entrepreneurship development agencies can significantly contribute to increase the individual competence and self-confidence of RRR women entrepreneurs to be successful entrepreneurs [24,167,174,180].

Despite the positive contribution our findings make to existing entrepreneurial leadership studies, our study has some limitations. First, although there is a significant relationship between the Entrepreneurial Leader Identity of RRR women entrepreneurs and their growth intentions, our model predicts only 41% variation in growth intention, which indicates that additional factors influencing growth intention are unknown. Previous researchers applied the Theory of Planned Behavior to demonstrate that factors such as attitude, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms are predictors of growth intentions. Combining the TPB with our model has the potential to explain more variation in growth intentions. For this reason, we suggest examining such a combined model in future research.

Second, although there is the possibility of a bidirectional relationship between entrepreneurial passion and Entrepreneurial Leader Identity, our study did not examine the bidirectional relation. There is the possibility that when RRR women entrepreneurs are more passionate, they develop their entrepreneurial identity more strongly. Thus, studying the bidirectional relationship in future research will be a worthwhile research path.

Third, due to the cross-sectional nature of our study, even though the hypotheses we tested in our research were theoretically derived, causality could not be established. We recommend that future studies examine the nexus between the three constructs by designing longitudinal and experimental studies to establish causality.

Fourth, the quantitative findings presented in this paper ought to be extended to include qualitative research to explore the dynamics and reasons behind the nonsignificant relationship between entrepreneurial passion and venture growth intention of RRR women entrepreneurs reported in this paper.

Finally, the findings of our study are based on the specific context of RRR women entrepreneurship, which might be different to other contexts. Hence further studies should test the measurement constructs in other contexts.

Despite these limitations, we believe that introducing the novel construct Entrepreneurial Leader Identity and testing its role in venture growth intention and entrepreneurial passion will stimulate new research in this critical and germane area of inquiry. Profitable but also sustainable businesses are imperative to enhance the well-being of RRR women

entrepreneurs; increase the number of RRR women-owned businesses, attain a more equal dispensation of wealth, and clear the way for the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As such this study adds to the research on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) linked to social equity, in the domains of gender equality (SDG 5) and inequalities reduction (SDG 10). The SDGs cannot be achieved and will not be sustainable without increasing women's involvement and participation in the economy and in particular new value creation through self-employment and associated venture growth [181].

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