

TURNING THE POINT: PERSONAL TRAITS AND CHALLENGES DURING SMALL BUSINESSES' GROWTH

Author/s

Mo Jia, Dr. Carolina Quintero Rodriguez; School of Fashion and Textiles, The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Corresponding Author: carolina.quinterorodriguez@rmit.edu.au

Keywords

Fashion Entrepreneur, Business Growth, Personal Traits, Personal Challenges, Micro Fashion Business

Abstract

As the backbone of the Australian economy and workforce, fashion small business owners often face difficulties during business growth. Fashion entrepreneurs are challenged as they perform a designer and an entrepreneur role while aiming at growing their businesses in the early stages of growth. These roles, require owners to develop skills to manage the business and to develop the creative side in a race for success, always shaped by the entrepreneur's personality.

Various research has demonstrated that in a small business, the entrepreneur's personality is strongly bonded with his/her business's initial growth as founding and managing a business requires the owner to be hard-working, self-motivated, and persistent. As well as good personal traits which can benefit the business significantly, having clear goals, passion and strong new resource skills will influence the business's success. However, no research has been found with a focus on Australian independent fashion entrepreneurs' personal characteristics in the early stages of business growth. This research aims to determine the common personal challenges and traits of small businesses owner that influences business growth.

Qualitative research was conducted with Australian small to medium independent fashion business owners, who have been successful in turning their businesses from micro to small. It was determined that most successful businesses interviewed had an informal start. They were not ambitious nor set a clear business goal at the beginning of their journey, the business itself was seen as a passionate hobby rather than a source of income. It was also determined that 'interest' and 'passion' led to new businesses, however, at the early stages of business growth, the lack of clear business goals or a strong commitment to growing the business was a constant.

However, after business owners achieved their initial success moments, there was a desire for further growth and survival. Their confidence was raised from positive market feedback, which also encouraged their personal traits to grow.

After further committing to the business, more challenges have been encountered that led to further development, which was also pre-conditions for their first major turning point to occur.

The findings of this study provide practical information for independent fashion designers and entrepreneurs, who own fashion businesses on a micro-scale and want to pursue further business growth. The study also provides an understanding of the expectations of their personal growth while growing a business, as well as the essential factors that can encourage them in the early stages of growth, thus assisting them in making better decisions.

Introduction

Fashion and textile businesses are great contributors to the Australian economy, providing more than \$27.2 billion to the economy (representing about 1.5 per cent of the total national economy) and generating more than 489,000 jobs (Ernst & Young Australia, 2021).

Simultaneously, small businesses have long been the backbone of Australia's economy and workforce (McCrimdell, 2022). Over 5.7 million jobs (28.3 per cent) were generated from micro to small businesses in Australia in 2018-2019 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). However, micro to small businesses continue to have poorer average survival rates (64.4 percent) compared to medium and large businesses (82.5 per cent), while the survival rate of non-employing enterprises (micro business) continues to be the lowest (60 per cent) (Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman, 2020). However, as micro and small businesses thrive along with the fashion industry, many fashion designers and entrepreneurs flourish in Australia (Walsh, 2009). Nonetheless, designers with unrealistic expectations of the industry and a lack of business management skills led many micro and small fashion businesses to fail (Craik, 2015), with entrepreneurs establishing their businesses for the love of the product, not for the love of running a business (Andersen, Ashton, and Colley, 2015).

Strong characteristics found in the fashion industry are competitiveness, short product cycles, cost pressure, and unpredictability (Marcus, Jochen, and Matthias, 2018) and it is not surprising that fashion businesses are seen as high-risk to investors, who are hesitant to provide financial support to new fashion initiatives and labels (Craik, 2015). Furthermore, personality traits are seen as one of the main causes of new business success (Baum and Locke, 2004) as new fashion business owners often fail to withstand the pressures of forward planning, outsourcing and quality control (Craik, 2015). Strategic management and strategic planning have become two of the main challenges for Australian small creative businesses (Andersen, Ashton, and Colley, 2015).

Every entrepreneur hopes their business will flourish and stay alive and although many studies can be found in micro to small business growth, none of them has been conducted in the context of the Australian independent fashion business. Hence, this research aims to determine the common personal traits and challenges of small businesses owner that influences business growth, within the context of Australian micro independent fashion businesses.

Literature Review

Understanding independent fashion businesses

The complexity and diversity of the fashion industry make it difficult to draw clear lines for fashion businesses, as it is much broader than just designer brands. It also includes businesses that operate in textile supply, manufacturing, education, uniforms and workwear, media, and so on (Ernst & Young Australia, 2021). Thus, Ernst & Young Australia (2021) separated Australian fashion economy activities into 'Inner' and 'Outer' cores. The fashion businesses that operate on the 'inner cores', indicate a traditional industrial structure—fashion design, production, and distribution while the businesses that operate in the outer economy activities have more crossovers with other industries, such as tourism, education, and journalism. Malem (2008) stated that the 'independent fashion business owners' indicates those who founded their own businesses, and then followed the path of creating, producing, and selling their collections.

Tuite (2019) classified small independent fashion businesses as those that employ fewer than 20 people, and usually have a strong authorial voice, innovative aesthetic and are very focused. They are directly tied to the abilities and talents of the business owners, which are extremely personal and highly respected for their uniqueness. High-quality pieces with an emphasis on professionalism can often be found in independent fashion businesses, which differentiates them from mainstream and fast fashion (Tuite, 2019).

Fashion businesses owner's personal challenges

Independent fashion business owners often face several difficulties and problems from all facets of the sector as they must find a balance between innovation and a realistic managerial approach (Sarkar and Karim, 2019). Ideal circumstances happen when designers possess leadership characteristics and work as both artists and business owners (Gurova and Morozova, 2018). Burke (2013) differentiated the fashion design entrepreneur's challenges into (1) industry challenges, such as the source of funds and low entry barrier, and (2) personal challenges, which include seven categories listed below:

- Lack of market knowledge – The importance of market awareness is enormous in the fashion industry. However, fashion designers generally do not have sufficient market expertise, when turning their passion and creativity into a commercially successful product (Sarkar and Karim, 2019).
- Set of skills – Designers often set up their businesses on their own and undertake all the responsibilities, such as design; production; marketing; distribution and sales (Sarkar and Karim, 2019), requiring designers to obtain multiple sets of business skills and multi-tasking (Gurova and Morozova, 2018). This challenge also leads to long working hours and an unbalanced lifestyle, which is typical for micro to small fashion business owners (Skov, 2002).
- Business skills – If designers want to maintain their freedom of creativity, they must take responsibility of business control and have solid business skills (Tuite, 2019).

- However, lack of business skills was found to be the main challenge for fashion entrepreneurs as the strength and capacity to manage a business are different for each individual and can be improved with industry experience (Sarkar and Karim, 2019).
- Individual Education: Specialist vs. generalist – It is a debatable question whether it is better to educate fashion students into designers or entrepreneurs, as entrepreneurship and creativity are frequently considered opposites (Sarkar and Karim, 2019). Gurova and Morozova (2018) stated that designers are typically educated as artists rather than entrepreneurs, which causes challenges for them later on if they decide to start their own business.
- Personality – Entrepreneurs' personal attributes were acknowledged by investors and entrepreneurs as the most important factors in a business's success (Sexton, 2001). Founding and managing a business requires the owner to be hard-working, self-motivated, persistent, tolerant of ambiguity, and opportunistic (Sarkar and Karim, 2019).
- Designer as the brand – It is common for designers to develop an emotional connection with their brands (Sarkar and Karim, 2019) as they use their designs and their businesses as narratives to express their values and principles (Gurova and Morozova, 2018), which creates a critical but interesting challenge; designers always need to communicate their personality through their products and stay true to themselves, so their businesses can be sustained in the long run (Sarkar and Karim, 2019).
- Small-scaled nature – Many challenges naturally come with the new business due to its small scale, such as limited clients and are less preferred by manufacturers (O'Connor, 1998). On the other hand, some businesses prefer to remain small, as fashion is seen as an unstable and unpredictable industry and owners are afraid of overburdening themselves during the expansion (Saviolo, 2002).

These challenges underlined the struggle of a small independent fashion business owner, who is identified as a designer and entrepreneur at the same time.

Fashion businesses owner's personality traits

Kirzner (1985) identified that personal performance improvements result in business growth. Unlike people who manage established businesses, entrepreneurs need to find and utilise new products, new processes, and new organisational structures for growing a business (Davidsson, Low, and Wright, 2001; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000; Zahra, Ireland, and Hitt, 2000). An entrepreneur's personality is strongly bonded with his/her business's initial growth.

During a six-year psychological study on hundreds of entrepreneurs/CEOs and associates, Baum and Locke (2004) revealed that goals, self-efficacy, and shared vision are all motivation factors that have major direct benefits on a business's subsequent growth. Meanwhile, business owners' passion, perseverance, and new resource skills are impacting business growth indirectly:

Goal – The most well-acknowledged motivation for business growth and survival, which was studied by many researchers (Covin and Slevin, 1997; Carsrud and Krueger, 1995). It has been found that more specific and difficult types of goals produce better growth results (Baum and Locke, 2004).

Self-efficacy – ‘Self-efficacy’ is shown through confidence in a specific task. Business owners can use self-efficacy as an indicator when facing uncertainties in their business (Baum and Locke, 2004). In addition, people who are confident in their entrepreneurial talents (in terms of risk-taking and business expansion) are more inclined to pursue a career as an entrepreneur (Chen, Greene, and Crick, 1998).

Shared vision – House and Shamir (1993) defined vision as “the value and/or goals in which a business should strive.” Entrepreneurs have visions of the business they wish to create, which may include fantasies of expanding firms, recognition, and personal fortune. A well-communicated vision will encourage high business performance (Baum and Locke, 2004).

Passion – Passion is a key attribute of outstanding entrepreneurs that can be measured through emotions of love, connection, and desire (Baum and Locke, 2004). It also supports businesses to deal with a huge amount of unpredictability and shortage of resources (Timmons 2000).

Perseverance – Perseverance is a character trait that requires continuous goal-directed behaviour and energy in challenging situations. It is an essential trait for business owners, as small businesses often need to overcome extreme obstacles when entering a market (Gartner, Gatewood, and Shaver, 1991) It was found that entrepreneurs generally demonstrated higher perseverance than those who work for others (Baum and Locke, 2004).

New resource skills – The new resource skills indicate sourcing funds and human resources, as well as building up new processes and procedures for the business (Bhidé, 2000). Limited growth is often caused by a lack of new resources and failure to hire people with resource skills (Timmons 2000).

Concepts of business growth and how they are best assessed

Business growth is a natural process that occurs over time (Davidsson, Achtenhagen, and Naldi, 2005). Davidsson, Achtenhagen, and Naldi (2005) revealed two definitions of ‘growth’ in their study, (1) the ‘change in amount’ and (2) the ‘growing process’ that leads the business into ‘change in amount.’ However, this paper will only be focusing on determining the business growth as its first definition—‘change in amount’.

Growth can represent the ‘change in amount’ when a business grows from small to large in size (Davidsson, Achtenhagen, and Naldi, 2005). This can be quantified using a variety of indicators. The most common indicators are sales, employment, assets, physical output, market share, and profit (Ardishvili et al., 1998; Weinzimmer, Nystrom, and Freeman, 1998). ‘Sales’ and

'employment' are the most usual ways to measure business size and growth (Delmar, Davidsson, and Gartner, 2003). The rest indicators are less common and can be difficult to apply to micro and small businesses (Davidsson, Achtenhagen, and Naldi, 2005):

Sales – Sales are the most generic and relevant indicators available, as all businesses require sales in order to thrive (Davidsson, Achtenhagen, and Naldi, 2005). The Australian Taxation Office (2021) classed business size by its sales as follows:

Micro businesses – \$1 - <\$2 million

Small businesses – \$2 million - <\$10 million

Medium businesses – \$10 million - <\$100 million

Large businesses – \$100m or more

Growth of employment – Growth of employment is another commonly used indicator, as it is the most relevant for certain uses. For instance, policymakers are interested in raising the employment rate through entrepreneurship (Davidsson and Wiklund, 2000), as micro and small businesses are critical for employment rates in society (Dobbs and Hamilton, 2007). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020) separates businesses into 4 sizes according to their number of employees:

Micro businesses – less than 4 employees

Small businesses – between 5 and 20 employees

Medium businesses – between 20 and 199 employees

Large businesses – 200 or more employees

On the other hand, staff expansion is not considered a business goal itself by management (Robson and Bennett 2000), as some companies heavily rely on outsourcing employees, which makes employment less related to business growth (Delmar et al., 2003).

Methodology

The qualitative method was applied to this research. A semi-structured interview was conducted with Australian small and medium independent fashion business owners, who have been successful in turning their businesses from micro to small. This means that their businesses have either reached \$2 million in yearly revenue or hired over four employees during the last year, depending on the data presented. These businesses also operate on the traditional pathway of fashion design, production, and distribution. Convenience sampling was applied in the selection process, businesses selected were all found in Melbourne, Australia.

Participants were notified of the intentions of the research with a preliminary explanation via email. Then an interview containing 18 open-ended questions was scheduled and conducted.

Questions were designed based on respondents' real-life experiences, their perceptions of the entrepreneurial journey from micro to small scale.

Results and Discussion

An invitation to potential participants was emailed to 20 business owners selected from resources including personal connections, previous RMIT Fashion Entrepreneurship course guest lecturers, Google search and the Australian Fashion Council's website. Six of them responded to the email and accepted to participate in the study. Four of the businesses were founded throughout the past 10 years, and their current business size is identified as small businesses, as they all have at least four employees. Their first business scale expansion occurred within two years from the interview and successfully remained small scale since then.

The other two businesses were founded as independent fashion businesses over 17 years ago, and their business scale successfully and continuously grew into medium-scaled and large-scaled businesses. One of them now has developed into over 50 stores internationally, with over 500 employees. The second business decided to remain independent throughout those years and currently operates over 10 stores in Australia, with over 80 employees.

Beginning of their journey – passion

As an entrepreneur, 'passion', 'goal' and 'self-efficacy' are all-important personal traits for business growth (Baum and Locke, 2004). Similarly, at the very initial stage of the businesses interviewed, it seems that 'passion' was commonly dominating most entrepreneurs and their behaviours before they had a clear business 'goal' and were motivated by it. Most businesses interviewed had a very informal start. They were not ambitious and the business itself was seen as a passionate hobby rather than a source of income. From most of their stories, it was found that interest and passion led to new businesses, without clear business goals or strong commitment, nor a large number of funds. Additionally, very minimal 'self-efficacy' was shown, as most of them did not think of making it a business and lacked commitment.

Participant 6 identified 'hobby' attitude in the early days as a positive impact on the business,

My sister and I started and grew our label purely as a side hobby, with no intention or commercial restraints or commercial ambition. We evolved and spent the first five years not trying to make it a business, which was one of the good things that took a lot of pressure off the commercial side of the business. We weren't in it to make money. We were doing it because we enjoyed it and we were having fun.

Furthermore, independent fashion business owners interviewed were all self-funded in the early stages, using their profit to maintain their businesses and continue operations. They all let their businesses grow organically with limited start-up funds, as they had started their businesses softly with no expectation for future commercial success.

They did not outsource any financial support by their choice, as they were happy with its 'hobby scale' and were not in a hurry for business expansion.

Participant 5 expressed,

There were really no financial obstacles for me because it was self-perpetuating. The money I profited, I put straight back into the growing business, and I did that for a very long time, which was great.

Craik's (2015) and Sarkar and Karim (2019) stated that the fashion industry is often seen as high-risk to investors, so investors are generally not willing to support them. A debate can be raised from here, as for some newborn Australian independent fashion businesses, this 'un-select' situation might come from both sides; the entrepreneur and the investors, as entrepreneurs lack goals and ambitions at that moment. This was also supported by Saviolo's (2002) theory of small fashion businesses' nature, that determine that many business owners are afraid of overburdening themselves in the unpredictable fashion industry, so they choose to remain at their current scale.

The initial success - self-efficacy & goal

Nonetheless, the business owners' 'passionate hobby' attitude ended at their first small success, which also encouraged their 'goal', and 'self- efficacy' to come to light. Many interviewees revealed they changed their minds when they had their first commercial success, which made them realise their business's potential and possibilities for growth. Positive market feedback gave them confidence, as well as sparked their desire for growth and survival. They started to believe what they were doing was worth the costs and were willing to contribute their full energy to the business, mentally and financially. It is natural for the business goal to evolve along with business growth (Andriani et al., 2018). In addition, 'self-efficacy' was elevated, as the business owners build faith and are more committed to their entrepreneurial journey (Chen, Greene, and Crick, 1998).

Participant 4 recalled,

I remember receiving a wholesale order for \$1,500. That is when I first realised that I could really make a living out of this. It gave me the confidence to go bigger.

Participant 6 described,

After we did the show at Australian Fashion Week, we had 30 wholesale accounts in really good shops. We couldn't ask for better. My business partner and I decided to sit down and wrote a five-year plan. We were like, let's have a crack at this and see what we can do with it. Our first goal was to give up our part-time jobs and have this as our full-time jobs.

The challenges - perseverance, new resource skills & shared vision

After officially committing to the business and having the desire to further the development, more challenges were found that came with the interviewees' ambition to grow. Entrepreneurs had to successfully overcome them, as they were critical for their continued business growth. These challenges included adapting to the new identity, lack of market knowledge and business skills, and sourcing the right manufacturers. It was found that entrepreneurs and their businesses truly evolved in the process of overcoming these problems. After 'passion', 'goal' and 'self-efficacy' came into the picture, those challenges then encouraged 'perseverance', 'new resource skills' and 'shared vision'. To this point, all six personality traits from Baum and Locke's (2004) theory were confirmed in those interviewed entrepreneurs.

The very first challenge was to adapt themselves to the new entrepreneur's role, as they had just evolved from a 'hobby attitude.' It was found that a significant number of new responsibilities and entrepreneurial tasks started to occupy their life, which made them feel torn apart from their original lifestyle, mentally and physically. With business growth, the type of responsibilities required changed and the workload was also significantly increased. However, at this point, no (or very limited) employees were hired.

Participant 4 explained,

Over the first five years I felt like no one was winning, my kids weren't getting any of me, and my business wasn't getting enough of me. I was just getting pulled in so many directions.

Aligned with the participants, Greiner (1997) explains that new business owners are often fully occupied by technical and entrepreneurial tasks. Long working hours and unbalanced lifestyles are challenging them on the daily basis (Skov, 2002), as they are trying to undertake all skills required to set up their business. This situation encouraged them to demonstrate higher 'perseverance' (Baum and Locke, 2004). Hard-working and self-motivated are also seen as key factors that can be found in those successful entrepreneurs (Sarkar and Karim, 2019).

The second challenge was that new business owners were suffering from a lack of market knowledge and business skills in many aspects, such as managing cash flow, structuring product lines, managing production, retail distribution and others, which took them years to learn, while experiencing high levels of stresses and mistakes.

Participant 4 indicated that the challenge had pushed her/him to seek further self-development,

Cash flow management is a skill you must keep massaging. It was very stressful for me for many years. I was always on tenterhooks that at any moment I could make a wrong decision and we could lose a lot of money and it was stressful. I've done a lot of work on getting to know money.

However, participant 6 also discussed how this challenge became a driver of growth:

Because we didn't know the rules or the normal process, we did things a little bit differently, which set us aside from others. For instance, because we couldn't spend a lot of money opening a shop, we had to do things ourselves and decorate them in funny ways, which gave them a point of difference. We got a good start in an unconventional manner, and it was probably because of our naivety and lack of business understanding. If we understood the industry and what was really involved, it would've been more intimidating, and we probably wouldn't have done what we did.

Likewise, participant 5 also identified,

I was naive, and naivety was bliss because I had no expectations of what it should be. I was just letting it take its way. I didn't put too much pressure on myself to make the fashion brand work. I think that's why it worked.

Countless studies can be found to support Burke's (2013) theory, which sees lack of 'market knowledge', 'business skills' and 'educated as designers not entrepreneurs' as major challenges for entrepreneurs. They significantly impact business growth and can cause failure, as the importance of market awareness is enormous in the fashion industry (Sarkar and Karim, 2019). However, it was also found that many interviewees believed the lack of knowledge and naivety allow them to be more creative and less pressured as independent designers, thus differentiating themselves from their competitors. In addition, Greiner (1997) also agreed that it is essential for new businesses to be individualistic and creative to get off the ground. Fashion entrepreneurship is a journey for designers to find the balancing point between creativity and commerciality (Sarkar and Karim, 2019). Too much from one side could cause the business to fail.

The third challenge that was mentioned by many interviewees was the struggle when trying to find the right factories, as there are minimum order quantities for production and for certain techniques. The narrow choice of manufacturers also resulted in other problems, such as product quality standard and higher cost per unit.

Participant 4 pointed out that the reason for this challenge was the disconnection between designers and manufacturers,

At the start, my first maker was trying to support me with small quantities. But after five years, we started to disconnect from our values. I didn't wanna cover a massive scale business, but his business was in stores like Topshop and ASOS, so there was a big disconnection on quantities and qualities. To this day, we still have challenges with our quantities, and we always will.

As per Burke (2013), it is part of the 'small-scaled nature' that the new businesses are less preferred by manufacturers (Burke, 2013). During this challenging process of sourcing and managing production partners, the business owners evolved a 'new resource skill' which allowed them to build up new procedures and partnerships for the business (Bhidé, 2000). In

addition, a 'well-shared vision' also allowed them to achieve better performance with their business partners and employees (Baum and Locke, 2004).

Turning the point – further strengthening of personal traits

It was found that after experiencing and overcoming the challenges, businesses entered a steady development period. The length of this period varied among the participant businesses. After that, those micro businesses embraced their first turning point of expanding into small-scale. Overcoming challenges in the initial stage and achieving personal growth, were seen as the pre-conditions for businesses' first major turning point.

With the business growth and increased workload, entrepreneurs had to make a commitment to finding helpers as they could not cover all the required roles with their limited time and skill sets. Businesses had to embrace their first expansion of team members with some employees they hired becoming one of the key factors for their continued rapid growth. The 'shared vision' and 'new resources skills' were noticeably shown when they sourced and managed their employees. It was also observed that most entrepreneurs at this point have a clearer mind about their 'goals' and 'self-efficacy' in their business's future. Personality traits that were proposed by Baum and Locke's (2004) theory were all becoming more distinct and developing stronger for business owners, which continued to motivate their future business growth.

Shared by participant 5,

It was just a very small team of three. Then I expanded, one thing led to another. I hired a business advisor after I had my first retail store. Then I went from 1 store to 7 stores with his help... I reckon he was one of the key reasons, in terms of how quick I developed. He was very much responsible for finding the stores and negotiating the lease. So, I could focus on design, as the business was not my skill set.

It was also found that most interviewees struggled extremely with employee management. They all believed that they had gained growth in their management skills, as rapid business evolution stimulated the team expansion and resulted in delegating responsibilities. The experience of struggling with employee management had also alerted many of them, that they need to keep learning, taking risks and challenging themselves, in order to keep up with the business expansion..

Participant 4 expressed strongly,

That was very stressful. At that moment, I just didn't have the confidence to sit down with someone and have difficult conversations. I think I haven't upskilled enough to meet the demands of the business. As the business grows, I should always make time for my own personal development to make sure I keep nurturing it. Otherwise, my personal growth will hold the whole business back.

Until this point, businesses had accomplished their first turning point and achieved ‘change in amount’, as they officially grew to a larger size (Davidsson, Achtenhagen, and Naldi, 2005). They had officially met the small-scaled business standards that were classified by the Australian Taxation Office (2021) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020).

Conclusion

As Australian small businesses often face difficulties in growth and expansion, this study set out to determine the common personal challenges and traits of small businesses owner that influences business growth. It was revealed that entrepreneurial personal traits do not appear all at once, they slowly evolve along with the business growth and personal challenges.

In the beginning, businesses are often set up in a hobby manner, with minimum start-up funding regenerated to sustain the business. Only ‘passion’ was found on business owners at this stage. Then businesses had their initial business success commercially, which encouraged the owners’ ambition for further growth. It was when ‘self-efficacy’ and ‘goal’ were shown. Subsequently, a series of challenges were found that needed to be overcome for the business’s further growth. These challenges included adapting to the new identity, lack of market knowledge and business skills, and sourcing the right manufacturers, which also motivated entrepreneurs’ ‘perseverance’, ‘new resource skills’ and ‘shared vision’ to emerge. Finally, businesses embraced their first scale expansion with increased employees. Entrepreneurs all experienced major growth in their management skills during this turning point, as well as more explicit personal traits.

It can be concluded that the business’s early growth was accompanied by personal challenges and traits growth. Positive business growth was encouraging the growth of personality traits. Afterwards, those stronger personalities motivated entrepreneurs to pursue new opportunities that brought new challenges. Overcoming the challenges then stimulated more personal and business growth.

Finally, this study demonstrated a road map of the Australian independent fashion entrepreneur’s early growth. It also provided practical information for Australian independent fashion designers and entrepreneurs, who own fashion businesses on a micro-scale and want to pursue further growth; and for them to understand and have clear expectations of their future, as well as assisting them in making better decisions.

References

- Andersen, L., Ashton, P. & Colley, L. (2015) *Creative business in Australia : learnings from the Creative Industries Innovation Centre, 2009 to 2015*. Broadway, N.S.W.: UTS ePress, pp. 30-31.
- Andriani, M., Samadhi, T. M. A. A., Siswanto, J., & Suryadi, K. (2018) 'Aligning business process maturity level with SMEs growth in Indonesian fashion industry', *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 26(4), pp. 709–727. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijoa-08-2017-1215>
- Ardishvili, A., Cardozo, S., Harmon, S., & Vadakath, S. (1998) 'Towards a theory of new venture growth', in *1998 Babson Entrepreneurship Research Conference*, Ghent, Belgium, 21-23 May.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020) *Australian Industry, 2018-19 | Australian Bureau of Statistics*. Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/industry/industry-overview/australian-industry/latest-release> (Accessed: 15 March 2022).
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) *Jobs in Australia, 2014-15 to 2018-19 | Australian Bureau of Statistics*. Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/jobs/jobs-australia/latest-release> (Accessed 15 March 2022).
- Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman (2020) *Small Business Counts December 2020*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, p.17.
- Australian Taxation Office (2021) *Taxation statistics 2017-18*. Available at: <https://www.ato.gov.au/About-ATO/Research-and-statistics/In-detail/Taxation-statistics/Taxation-statistics---previous-editions/Taxation-statistics-2017-18/?anchor=Entitysize#Entitysize> (Accessed: 20 March 2022).
- Baum, J.R. and Locke, E.A. (2004) 'The Relationship of Entrepreneurial Traits, Skill, and Motivation to Subsequent Venture Growth', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(4), pp. 587–598. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.89.4.587>
- Bhidé, A. (2000) *The origin and evolution of new businesses*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp 69-81.
- Burke, S. (2013) *Fashion entrepreneur: starting your own fashion business*, 2nd edn, London: Burke Publishing.
- Carsrud, A.L. and Krueger, N.F. (1995) 'Entrepreneurship and social psychology: Behavioral technology for the new venture initiation process', in JA Katz & RH Brockhaus (eds.), *Advances in entrepreneurship, firm emergence, and growth*, Greenwich: JAI Press, pp. 73-96.

Chen, C. C., Greene, P. G. and Crick, A. (1998) 'Does entrepreneurial self-efficacy distinguish entrepreneurs from managers?', *Journal of Business Venturing*, 13(4), pp. 295–316. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0883-9026\(97\)00029-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0883-9026(97)00029-3)

Covin, J. G., & Slevin, D. P. (1997) 'High growth transitions: Theoretical perspectives and suggested directions', in DL Sexton & RW Smilor (eds.), *Entrepreneurship 2000*, Chicago: Upstart Publishing, pp. 99-126.

Craik, J. (2015) 'Challenges for Australian fashion', *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, 19(1), pp.56–68. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jfmm-03-2014-0017>.

Davidsson, P., Low, M. B., & Wright, M. (2001) 'Editor's Introduction: Low and MacMillan Ten Years On: Achievements and Future Directions for Entrepreneurship Research', *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 25(4), pp. 5–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104225870102500401>

Davidsson, P. & Wiklund, J. (2000) 'Conceptual and empirical challenges in the study of firm growth', in D Sexton & H Landström (eds.), *The Blackwell Handbook of Entrepreneurship*, Oxford: Blackwell Business, pp. 26-44.

Davidsson, P., Achtenhagen, L., & Naldi, L. (2005). 'Research on Small Firm Growth: A Review', in *EISB Conference: Sustaining the Entrepreneurial Spirit over Time: Implications for Young Companies, Family Businesses, and Established Companies*, Spain: IESE Business School, pp. 1-27.

Delmar, F., Davidsson, P., & Gartner, W. B. (2003) 'Arriving at the high-growth firm', *Journal of Business Venturing*, 18(2), pp. 189–216. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0883-9026\(02\)00080-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0883-9026(02)00080-0)

Dobbs, M. & Hamilton, R.T. (2007) 'Small business growth: recent evidence and new directions', *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 13(5), pp. 296–322. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13552550710780885>

Ernst & Young Australia (2021) *From high fashion to high vis The economic contribution of Australia's fashion and textile industry*, industry report, Ernst & Young Australia. Available at: <https://ausfashioncouncil.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/From-high-fashion-to-high-vis-EY-final-report-31-May-2021.pdf> (Accessed: 18 March 2022).

Gartner, W. B., Gatewood, E., & Shaver, K. G. (1991) 'Reasons for starting a business: Not-so-simple answers to simple questions', in GE Hills & RW LaForge (eds.), *Research at the marketing/entrepreneurship interface*, Chicago: University of Illinois, pp. 90-101.

Greiner, L. E. (1997) 'Evolution and Revolution as Organizations Grow: A company's past has clues for management that are critical to future success'. *Family Business Review*, 10(4), pp. 397–409. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-6248.1997.00397.x>

- Gurova, O. & Morozova, D. (2018) 'Creative precarity? Young fashion designers as entrepreneurs in Russia', *Cultural Studies*, 32(5), pp. 704–726. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2018.1428646>
- House, R. J. & Shamir, B. (1993) 'Toward the integration of transformational, charismatic and visionary theories of leadership', in M Chemers & R Ayman (eds.), *Leadership theory and research: Perspectives and directions*, San Diego: Academic Press, pp. 81-107.
- Kirzner, I.M. (1985) *Discovery and the capitalist process*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, pp.116-117.
- Malem, W. (2008) 'Fashion designers as business: London', *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, 12(3), pp. 398–414. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13612020810889335>
- Marcus, A., Jochen, S. & Matthias, F. (2018). 'Dynamic capabilities of early-stage firms: Exploring the business of renting fashion', *Journal of Small Business Strategy*, 28(2), pp. 49-67.
- McCrindle. (2022) Australia, the small business nation, *McCrindle*. Available at: <https://mccrindle.com.au/insights/blog/australia-the-small-business-nation-2/> (Accessed: 15 March 2022).
- O'Connor, J. (1998) *The Cultural Production Sector in Manchester*, Manchester Institute for Popular Culture, Manchester, UK, pp. 178-179.
- Robson, J. A. & Bennett, R. J. (2000) 'SME growth: The relationship with business advice and external collaboration', *Small Business Economics*, 15(3), pp. 193-208.
- Sarkar, S. & Karim, A. M. (2019) 'Fashion Designers as Entrepreneurs: Investigating the Perception and Challenges', *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 9 (12), pp. 662–673.
- Saviolo, S. (2002) *Brand and identity management in fashion companies*, Università Commerciale Luigi Bocconi, Milan, Italy, pp. 7-8.
- Sexton, D.L. (2001) 'Wayne Huizenga: Entrepreneur and wealth creator', *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 15(1), pp. 40–48. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ame.2001.4251392>
- Shane, S. & Venkataraman, S. (2000) 'The Promise of Entrepreneurship as a Field of Research', *Academy of Management Review*, 25(1), pp. 217–226. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2000.2791611>
- Skov, L. (2002) 'Hong Kong fashion designers as cultural intermediaries: out of global garment production', *Cultural Studies*, 16(4), pp. 553–569. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380210139115>

Timmons, J. A. (2000) *New venture creation: Entrepreneurship 2000*, 5th edn, Richard D. Irwin, Homewood, IL.

Tuite, A. (2019) 'What is Independent Fashion? An Australian Perspective', *Fashion Practice*, 11(1), pp. 5–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17569370.2019.1565368>

Walsh, S. (2009) *Australian Fashion Directions – Getting It Right*, International Specialised Skills Institute, Victoria.

Weinzimmer, L. G., Nystrom, P.C.. & Freeman, S. J. (1998). 'Measuring Organizational Growth: Issues, Consequences and Guidelines', *Journal of Management*, 24(2), pp. 235–262. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639802400205>

Zahra, S. A., Ireland, R. D., & Hitt, M. A. (2000). 'International expansion by new venture firms: international diversity, mode of market entry, technological learning, and performance', *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(5), pp. 925–950. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1556420>