SOWING THE SEEDS TO SOLVE A “WICKED PROBLEM”: EXAMINING HOW WOMEN AND MEN ENTREPRENEURS IN THE U.S. SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY DIFFER IN THEIR EFFORTS TO COMBAT FOOD-RELATED SOCIAL INJUSTICE (SUMMARY)

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SUMMARY

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Principal Topic

Research on gender differences in entrepreneurship has garnered much interest. Recently, studies have examined differences in the economic and social goals of women and men entrepreneurs (Meyskens, Brush and Allen, 2011). One particularly relevant social issue is the “wicked” problem associated with the U.S.’s institutionalized and highly processed food market. We integrate the topics of sustainability and gender in entrepreneurship and conduct an exploratory study about the ways women and men entrepreneurs create, build, and finance sustainable food-related ventures. As such our research contributes to and extends research on environmentally responsible entrepreneurship (Meek, Pacheco and York, 2010) and gender in entrepreneurship (Sullivan and Meek, 2012).

Method

The sample for the study includes all successfully funded crowdfunding campaigns between 2009 and 2012 on sustainably-oriented businesses in the Food category on Kickstarter (n = 126). The data were compiled from secondary data sources including the Kickstarter websites, company websites, Facebook pages, news websites and other secondary sources. Variables collected include amount of funding raised, funding goal, size of the founder’s social network, number of crowdfunding backers, quality signal data (press received), and individual founder data, etc. Data were analyzed using frequencies and ANOVA.

Results and Implications

Our findings suggest that women account for nearly half of all food-related sustainable crowdfunding campaigns. Results also revealed 1) the amount of money raised for social, green, and mixed social/green businesses does not statistically differ for businesses founded by women compared to men or mixed-gender teams, 2) no significant differences were found in the social network characteristics of women and men, 3) men have created and successfully crowdfunded more ventures with a mixed social/green component than women, 4) for social and mixed social/green firms men are more likely to pursue product expansion than women. Overall, the results suggest gender differences are minimal for sustainable food-related ventures seeking crowdfunding. We believe this may suggest crowdfunding as a viable and gender-neutral financing instrument. Further, we believe these results may tentatively suggest women are increasingly leading the charge in launching and developing sustainable businesses.

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