

The Impact of Women Entrepreneur Performance on Competitive Advantage and Business Performance

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To investigate the impact of women entrepreneur performance (WEP) on competitive advantage (CA) and business performance (BP). It also examines the mediating role of RA between WEP and BP.

Methodology: The sample consists of 183 women entrepreneurs. Data were collected from the participants by the questionnaire method. Structural equation modelling was used to explain the complex relationships between variables.

Findings: The WEP positively and significantly affects both CA and BP. While CA significantly affects BP, it also has a mediating effect.

Practical Implications: Eliminating the obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs and managing them effectively will provide them with a competitive advantage while ensuring sustainable growth.

Originality: This study includes theoretical as well as practical implications. The motivation of this study is to reveal the problems faced by women entrepreneurs and to offer solutions.

Originality: There is no study in the literature on the problems faced by SMEs owned by women entrepreneurs in TRB2 Region and how these problems affect their business performance. Therefore, this study adds a unique feature to the existing literature. In addition to the main variables, the use of competitive advantage as a mediating variable differentiates this study from other studies in the literature.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurs, Competitive Advantage, Business Performance.

Jel Codes: M10, M13, M31.

Kadın Girişimci Performansının Rekabet Avantajı ve İşletme Performansı Üzerindeki Etkisi

Öz Amaç: Kadın girişimci performansının (KGP) rekabet avantajı (RA) ve işletme performansı (İP) üzerindeki etkisini araştırmaktır. Ayrıca KGP ve İP arasında RA'nın aracılık rolünü incelemektir.

Yöntem: Örneklem, 183 kadın girişimciden oluşmaktadır. Veriler katılımcılardan anket yöntemiyle toplanmıştır. Değişkenler arasındaki karmaşık ilişkileri açıklamak için yapısal eşitlik modellemesinden yararlanılmıştır.

Bulgular: KGP'yi etkileyen faktörlerin hem RA hem de İP üzerinde pozitif ve anlamlı bir etkiye sahiptir. RA, İP üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahip olmakla birlikte, aynı zamanda aracı bir etkiye sahiptir. Pratik

Çıkarımlar: Kadın girişimcilerin karşılaştıkları engellerin ortadan kaldırılması ve etkin bir şekilde yönetilmesi, sürdürülebilir bir büyüme sağlarken aynı zamanda onlara rekabet avantajı kazandıracaktır.

Özgün Değer: Literatürde TRB2 Bölgesinde kadın girişimcilere ait KOBİ'lerin karşılaştıkları sorunları ve bu sorunların onların işletme performansları üzerinde nasıl bir etki sağladığına yönelik herhangi bir çalışmaya rastlanılmamıştır. Dolayısıyla bu çalışma, mevcut literatüre özgün bir nitelik kazandırmaktadır. Ayrıca ana değişkenlere ek olarak rekabet avantajının aracı bir değişken olarak kullanılması bu çalışmayı literatürdeki diğer çalışmalardan farklılaştırmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kadın Girişimciler, Rekabet Avantajı, İşletme Performansı.

Jel Sınıflandırması: M10, M13, M31.

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship activities significantly contribute to society and economic development in developing countries (Zeb and Ihsan, 2020). Specifically, it helps to reduce poverty by providing employment and improving living standards (Nasir et al., 2019). In recent years, women's entrepreneurship has become increasingly important, especially because of the contribution of businesses run by women to growth and development (Doucouré and Diagne, 2023). The quantity of women entrepreneurs in the business world has increased and more women entrepreneurs have been included in the competitive environment (Soysal, 2010). Recently, there have been significant developments in the contemporary economy on how the role of women entrepreneurs in SMEs has an impact on the well-being of nations. Academic studies on women's entrepreneurship in the scientific community are leading these developments (Doucouré and Diagne, 2023; Nair, 2020). When the scientific studies on women entrepreneurs are analyzed, it is possible to say that the inclusion of women in working life positively affects macroeconomic indicators and growth (Maity and Sahu, 2020). It plays an important role in socioeconomic development along with industrialization, urbanization, employment, and cultural and educational development (Hasan and Almubarak, 2016; Anggraini et al., 2022). Hence, the economic development of a country is not possible without women. Empowering women entrepreneurs is a crucial tool and the most appropriate option for the development of a country (Ismail et al., 2018; Zeb and Ihsan, 2020). Promoting women's entrepreneurship and removing barriers to it will not only contribute to economic and social development. At the same time, owning their businesses will enable them to increase their social status by achieving economic independence and gaining self-confidence (Nair, 2020).

While women are on their way to becoming entrepreneurs to gain economic independence and stand on their own two feet, they also struggle with various problems. The most important of these problems are their roles as housewives, gender discrimination, and capital (Erol and Çiçek, 2020). Women entrepreneurs lag behind their male counterparts in terms of performance when starting or expanding their businesses due to various factors (Zeb and Ihsan, 2020). For instance, women entrepreneurs may face stricter collateral requirements than male entrepreneurs when applying for loans from banks (Anggraini et al., 2022). Accessible credit and finance are pivotal for women to capitalize on entrepre-

neurial opportunities (Chipfunde et al., 2021). Understanding the impact of diverse socio-cultural and political, technical-technological, and economic factors on women entrepreneurs is of paramount importance. Thus, the factors that influence the activities of women entrepreneurs in different countries and societies should be considered and necessary solutions should be proposed (Javadian and Singh, 2012).

In the current highly competitive environment, women entrepreneurs and their talents are needed for the economic development of countries. In the global market where competition conditions are constantly changing, women entrepreneurs have a key role in sustainable development (Demir and Sezgin, 2020; Sarıtaş, 2018). In this context, women's entrepreneurship can serve as a lever for the economies of developing countries like Turkey (Uzun and Çakmak, 2020). This is because the economic prowess of countries in the international arena gains momentum with the size of the entrepreneurial capacity they have (Aslan and Atabey, 2007). Thus, enabling women entrepreneurs to participate in the competitive environment by relieving the obstacles in front of women who participate in every field and every stage of life and producing solution applications for them will make a positive and important contribution to the level of development of countries.

If we look at the studies conducted in Turkey, the main focus of the studies is on the problems faced by women entrepreneurs and the solutions needed to overcome these problems. In Turkey, there is no original research that shows what factors determine the performance of women entrepreneurs, how women entrepreneur's performance affects business performance and whether this effect provides a competitive advantage. This study aims to reveal the factors that affect women entrepreneurs the most in their business life rather than their family structure, personality traits and the reasons that push them to become entrepreneurs. The significant surge in the number of women entrepreneurs in Turkey emphasizes the need for contemporary academic research on this subject matter. From this point of view, this study will make a significant contribution to the literature as well as to society. The development of society depends on the progress of science. This understanding has been an important motivation for this study.

From this point of view, this study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the impact of women's entrepreneurial performance on business performance in TRB2 Region (Van, Hakkari, Bitlis and Muş)?
- 2) Is there a significant effect of women entrepreneur performance on competitive advantage?
- 3) Does competitive advantage have a mediating role between female entrepreneur performance and business performance?

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Women Entrepreneur Performance and Business Performance

Women entrepreneurs may face difficulties in starting a business due to various internal and external factors such as economic, social, cultural, legal, administrative, technical, or technological. These factors may directly or indirectly affect the performance of women entrepreneurs. For instance, Evcin (2017) stated in her study that different environmental factors are effective in the performance of women entrepreneurs. Evcin (2017) states that women entrepreneurs are successful when they can manage environmental factors and this success is also reflected in business activities. In his study, Erdemir (2018) found that women entrepreneurs had the most problems due to difficulties in financial and bureaucratic transactions while continuing their business activities. Economic hardship also features prominently in Carter's (2000) study. According to Carter (2000), in many societies, women have fewer inheritance rights than men. Lack of or low property ownership limits women entrepreneurs' access to credit from institutions. In this case, the lack of collateral in women's enterprises may lead to a lack of trust on the part of credit providers (Anggraini et al., 2022). This situation indicates that women entrepreneurs have fewer opportunities than men while continuing their business activities (Hossain et al., 2018; Tekeoğlu, 2013). Ali et al. (2019) found that limited availability of economic resources significantly affects the performance of businesses owned by women entrepreneurs. According to Jamali (2009), the removal of extra household and family responsibilities on women provides important opportunities to develop their work. Sadiq et al. (2014) support Jamali's (2009) view by stating that women entrepreneurs cannot compete with men due to the extra burden of housework. Furthermore, Chipfunde et al. (2021) found that family support plays a crucial role in enhancing the performance and productivity of women entrepreneurs, with support from

parents, relatives, spouses, and children significantly contributing to their success. Khan, Salamzadeh, Shah, and Hussain (2021) found in their study that external factors such as economic and sociocultural factors affect the performance of women entrepreneurs. The authors stated that high entrepreneurial performance positively and significantly impacts business performance. Various legal and administrative factors, implemented by government and administrative bodies, can also impact the performance of women entrepreneurs (Wube, 2010). Especially in underdeveloped and developing countries, the difficulty of legal and administrative procedures constitutes a significant obstacle for women entrepreneurs. All businesses legally established before the state must comply with national laws. Businesses are required to obtain documents to fulfill legal requirements such as permits, licenses, etc. (Ali et al., 2019; Jamali, 2009). The fact that entrepreneurs do not get bogged down in unnecessary procedures and processes while fulfilling these requirements can have a positive impact on entrepreneurs' motivation. Similarly, Gupta and Mirchandani (2018) and Mwobobia (2012) support this situation in their studies. The authors emphasized that the ease of legal and administrative processes when starting a business has a significant impact on the performance of women entrepreneurs. Mirchandani (2018) stated in his study that women entrepreneur performance is affected by various internal and external factors. In addition, the author stated that high female entrepreneur performance has a positive effect on business performance.

Technical and technological infrastructure resources are as important a factor in entrepreneurship as financial resources (Akyıldız, 2021). Singh and Belwal (2008) emphasize that technical aspects such as production, information and communication resources, logistics, and e-technology have an influential role in communicating with external stakeholders (*customers, suppliers, competitors, etc.*) when marketing an entrepreneur's products and services. According to Hosain et al. (2018), one of the most important factors affecting the success of women entrepreneurs in underdeveloped and developing countries compared to their male counterparts is the lack of technical and technological knowledge. Davis and Shaver (2012) argue in their study that if women entrepreneurs have sufficient technical and technological knowledge and infrastructure, business performance will increase significantly.

As can be understood from the results of the studies in the literature, the performance of women entrepreneurs can be affected by various factors. Wom-

en entrepreneurs can perform well when they cope with these factors. Anggraini et al. (2022) emphasize that high female entrepreneur performance reflects positively on business activities and ultimately leads to a significant increase in business performance. Based on previous research findings, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Women's entrepreneurial performance has a positive and significant effect on business performance.

2.2. Women Entrepreneur Performance and Competitive Advantage

Zainol and Al Mamun (2018) highlighted the crucial role of identifying, comprehending, and resolving the elements that impact entrepreneurs' performance. This is essential for setting appropriate economic policies and improving the competitiveness of businesses. This emphasis shows that entrepreneurs can gain a significant competitive advantage by solving problems with a strategic management approach. In the strategic management literature, entrepreneurial performance and competitive advantage are different variables that have a positive relationship with each other. Anwar et al. (2018) stated in their study that SMEs persistently strive to achieve superiority over their competitors. To do so, entrepreneurs try to achieve competitive advantage by minimising the factors that affect their performance. Competitive advantage plays an important role in helping entrepreneurs to survive in the market. Doucouré and Diagne (2023) contend that women-owned enterprises' competitiveness relies on their capacity to manage the challenges they encounter. Aslan and Atabey (2007) argued that for women entrepreneurs to gain a competitive advantage, they require a strong business infrastructure to address challenges. A robust business structure enhances the performance of female entrepreneurs. Aruna and Sunil (2020) argue that women entrepreneurs greatly contribute to the country's economic development. However, the authors recognize that women entrepreneurs still face numerous problems such as finance, human resources, marketing, and inadequate technological capability. Overcoming these problems will improve the competitiveness of women entrepreneurs by increasing their performance. Aruna and Sunil (2020) emphasize that competitiveness is very important to survive not only in the local market but also in the national and international markets. As a result of the study conducted by Li et al. (2006), the existence of a significant and strong relationship between the performance of entrepreneurs and com-

petitive advantage supports this situation. The authors assert that performance is crucial in obtaining a competitive advantage. Based on this, a hypothesis was developed in this study as follows.

H2: Women's entrepreneurial performance has a positive and significant effect on competitive advantage.

2.3. Competitive Advantage and Business Performance

To improve their performance and corporate value, many organizations today are developing various strategies. Creating a sustainable advantage through superiority over competitors is the main purpose of these strategies. Having unique applications and features is the primary source of viable sustainable competitive advantage. These resources lead some businesses to perform better than their competitors (Zainol and Al Mamun, 2018). Therefore, in the global economy, businesses make significant investments in practices and strategies to create a competitive advantage to be one step ahead of their competitors. From this perspective, it is clearly understood that the effect of competitive advantage on the performance of businesses is inevitable (Kılıçlı and Aygün, 2023). Wirda et al. (2019) found that competitive advantage in SMEs is an important factor for business performance. This finding suggests that competitive advantage is a result of the value that businesses provide to their customers. The quality of the product or service offered by companies creates a superior value in the minds of customers. This value paves the way for the formation of customer loyalty over time. Customer loyalty is an important source of competition for businesses to sustain their commercial life. Therefore, for SMEs to survive, they need to pay attention to the resources that provide them with competitive advantage (Wirda et al., 2019). Mohebi and Farzollahzade's (2014) assertion that "increasing competitive advantage improves business performance" is consistent with this. In their study, Udriyah et al. (2019) found that competitive advantage has a partial and positive effect on firm performance. Similarly, in the study conducted by Yang et al. (2018), it is understood that competitive advantage has a partial mediating effect on business performance. Mahmood and Hanafi (2013) argue that women-owned SMEs need to improve their competitiveness to survive in highly competitive market conditions. Anwar et al. (2018) found that competitive advantage has a positive effect on the performance of the firm both directly and indirectly. The authors underlined the importance of the concept of competitive

advantage in achieving sustainable performance in enterprises. This result supports the result of the study conducted by Hariandi and Wahyudi (2019). Eniola and Abiodun (2014) discussed the challenges faced by SMEs in gaining competitive advantage. The authors emphasised that competitive advantage has a vital role in the performance of SMEs. Anggraini et al. (2022) found that competitive advantage has a mediating effect on the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and women's business performance. In addition to the research mentioned above, numerous studies in the literature also support the direct and indirect effects of competitive advantage on business performance in SMEs. (Li et al., 2006; Lakhal, 2009; Eniola and Abiodun, 2014; Anwar et al., 2018; Hariandi and Wahyudi, 2019; Meutia and Ismail, 2012). Based on the results of the studies conducted in the literature, the following hypotheses were developed;

H3: Competitive advantage in SMEs owned by women entrepreneurs positively and significantly affects business performance.

H4: Competitive advantage in SMEs owned by women entrepreneurs has a mediating role between the women entrepreneur performance and business performance.

The research model related to the hypotheses developed as a result of the literature review is presented in Figure 1 below.

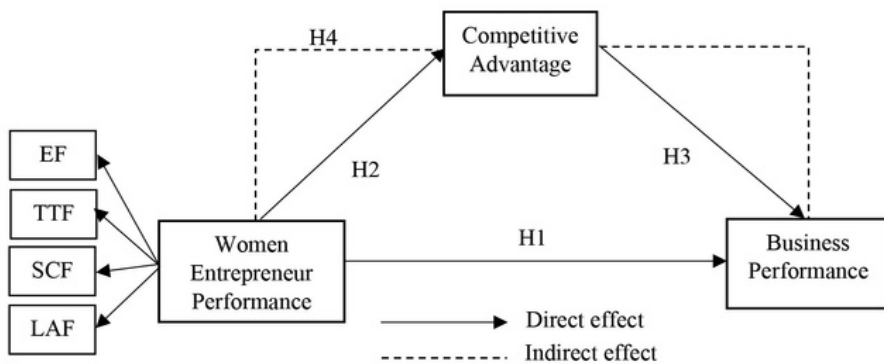


Figure 1. Research Model

3. Research Methodology

In Turkey, particularly in the eastern and south-eastern regions, the prevalence of social issues affecting women is higher than in other regions. The patriarchal social structure of these regions constrains the power and abilities of women. Women entrepreneurs in this region encounter significant challenges in their commercial activities due to social pressures. Additionally, no scientific study has been identified in the literature examining women entrepreneurs' performance in this region. For these reasons, women entrepreneurs in the TRB2 region were included in the sample. The sample for the research consisted of SMEs owned by women entrepreneurs registered with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) in the TRB2 region. Women entrepreneurs registered with the CCI were selected because they benefit from government support and other incentives. There are a total of 256 women entrepreneurs registered with the CCI in this region. Due to time and cost constraints, security issues in the region, and factors such as shell companies, it is not possible to reach all entrepreneurs. In this context, data were collected from 183 women entrepreneurs after face-to-face interviews. Data was collected from around 71% of the sample. In this study, a simple random sampling technique was used.

The method of the research is a quantitative research method. In this study, the questionnaire method was used to collect data from the participants. As a result of an extensive literature review, a questionnaire was developed that was appropriate to the purpose and scope of the research. In this study, the studies of Hossain et al. (2018), Erdemir (2018), Wube (2010), and Khan et al. (2021) were utilized to measure the performance of women entrepreneurs. Likewise, the studies of Hasan and Mubarak (2016) and Khan et al. (2021) were utilized to measure competitive advantage and business performance. The statements in the questionnaire and the sources utilized are presented in detail in Appendix 1. The statements in the questionnaire were translated into Turkish and presented to five experts to test their linguistic appropriateness. The statements whose suitability was approved by the experts were then tested for validity and reliability by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Appendix 2). The questionnaire was then piloted with twenty women entrepreneurs and finalized with minor changes. The questionnaire consists of two sections and a total of 25 items. The first section includes information on the demographic characteristics of the participants (age, education level, sector, age of the business, etc.). In the second part, items relat-

ed to women entrepreneurs' performance, competitive advantage, and business performance are included. The level of participation of items was formed as a 5-point Likert type (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). SPSS 26 and AMOS 24 statistical programs were used in the analyses.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1. Demographic Characteristics

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Marital status		
Married	123	67.2
Single	60	32.8
Age of Women Entrepreneurs		
20 - 29 years	22	12.0
30 - 39 years	45	24.6
40 - 49 years	85	46.4
≥ 50 years	31	16.9
Number of employees		
≤5	42	23.0
6-10	76	41.5
11-15	46	25.1
≥16	19	10.4
Age of the business		
≤5 years	64	35.0
6-10 years	56	30.6
11-15 years	28	15.3
16-20 years	27	14.8
≥20 years	8	4.4
Sector		
Manufacturing	40	21.9
Wholesale and retail trade	79	43.2
Accommodation and catering services	48	26.2
Transport, storage, and communication services	16	8.7
Total	183	100

Analysis of Table 1 shows that most of the respondents are married (67.2%). When analyzing the age range, the highest proportion of respondents are between 40-49 years old (46.4%). When analyzing the number of employees, the majority of enterprises have 6-10 employees (41.5%). Among the enterprises of different ages, the highest rate (35%) is found among those aged 5 years or less, while the lowest rate (4.4%) is found among those aged 20 years or more. An analysis of the sectors in which women entrepreneurs operate shows that wholesale and retail trade enterprises have the highest rate (43.2 %).

4.2. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Economic factors (EF)	4.02	0.593	-0.646	2.196
Technical/ technological factors (TTF)	4.01	0.611	-0.152	0.215
Social/ cultural factors (SCF)	4.03	0.615	-0.445	1.183
Legal/administrative factors (LAF)	4.11	0.601	-0.767	2.344
Business performance (BP)	4.00	0.609	-0.460	1.210
Competitive advantage (CA)	4.05	0.630	-0.613	0.955

In Table 2, women entrepreneur performance consists of five dimensions: economic factors (EF), technical and technological factors (TTF), social and cultural factors (SCF) and legal and administrative factors (LAF). These dimensions are also the independent variables of the study. Business performance (BP) and competitive advantage (CA) are the study’s dependent variables and consist of a single dimension. Table 2 shows that the variable with the greatest mean is EF (4.11) and the smallest mean is BP (4.00). Furthermore, EF has the minimum standard deviation (0.593) of these variables, whereas CA has the maximum standard deviation (0.630).

Normality distribution is a fundamental assumption for structural equation modelling (SEM) and statistical analysis (Aminu and Shariff, 2014). Hence, it is necessary to check if the data are normally dispersed before starting the analyses. Hair et al. (2010) argue that data are normally distributed when skewness

is between $-2/+2$ and kurtosis is between $-7/+7$. Therefore, it is possible to say that the kurtosis and skewness values of all variables are within the acceptable range (Table 2).

Correlation analysis is an important step in determining whether there is multicollinearity between variables. Performing this step will lead to reliable results regarding the hypotheses. The methods employed for identifying multicollinearity differ. For example, a correlation coefficient of 0.90 or higher between variables indicates the presence of multicollinearity (Kılıçlı and Kıpçak, 2023).

Table 3. Analysis of correlation between variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Economic factors (EF)	1.00					
Technical/Technological Factors (TTF)	0.439*	1.00				
Social/Cultural Factors (SCF)	0.677*	0.540*	1.00			
Legal/Administrative Factors (LAF)	0.770*	0.533*	0.832*	1.00		
Business Performance (BP)	0.713*	0.499*	0.863*	0.859*	1.00	
Competitive Advantage (CA)	0.744*	0.580*	0.794*	0.817*	0.870*	1.00

*N:183; * $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed).*

When analyzing Table 3, it is understood that the correlation coefficients between variables are not 0.90 or higher. Based on this, it is possible to say that there is no multicollinearity between the variables. The strongest relationship between the independent variables was between LAF and SCF ($r=0.832$; $p < 0.01$). It is understood that the SCF variable has the strongest relationship with BP, the dependent variable of the study ($r=0.863$; $p < 0.01$). It is understood that the LAF variable has the strongest relationship with CA ($r=0.817$; $p < 0.01$). In addition, Table 3 shows that there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between BP and CA ($r=0.870$; $p < 0.01$).

4.3. Reliability and Validity Analysis

Internal consistency analysis was utilised to assess the reliability of the variables. Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha (CA) values were used to calculate the internal consistency analysis. CR and CA values of 0.70 or higher indicate the reliability of the statements (Doucouré and Diagne, 2023; Khan et

al., 2021). The variables were tested for construct and convergent validity. While CFA (confirmatory factor analysis) was used to assess construct validity, AVE (average variance extraction) was used to assess convergent validity. The AVE value should have a value greater than 0.50. At the same time, the value of the CR must be greater than the value of the AVE (Kılıçlı and Aygün 2023; Doucouré and Diagne, 2023). In this study, 0.50 was taken as the lower limit for factor loading (Anggraini et al., 2022; Wirda et al., 2019).

Table 4. Analysis of reliability and validity

Variables	Factor loading range	CA	CR	AVE
	>0.50	>0.70	>0.70	>0.50
Economic Factors (EF)	0.634*- 0.837*	0.85	0.70	0.59
Technical/Technological Factors (TTF)	0.766*- 0.925*	0.89	0.77	0.70
Social/ Cultural Factors (SCF)	0.793*- 0.890*	0.88	0.77	0.69
Legal/Administrative Factors (LAF)	0.751*- 0.873*	0.91	0.80	0.68
Business Performance (BP)	0.842*- 0.913*	0.94	0.78	0.75
Competitive Advantage (CA)	0.896*- 0.832*	0.93	0.81	0.76

*N:183; * $p < 0.01$; CR > AVE.*

Upon analyzing Table 4, it can be seen that the factor loads of the statements concerning the variables range from 0.634 and 0.925. All factor loadings are above 0.50 and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) when analysing the factor loadings of the items (Anggraini et al., 2022; Wirda et al., 2019). Similarly, the CR and CA values, which explain the reliability of the variables, are above 0.70 (Doucouré and Diagne, 2023; Khan et al., 2021). Thus in addition, AVE value is greater than 0.50 and CR value is greater than AVE value ($AVE > 0.50$; $CR > AVE$). It is possible to say that all variables have a reliable structure and provide construct and convergent validity (Kılıçlı and Aygün 2023; Doucouré and Diagne, 2023). From the results in Table 4, it can be said that the items used in the questionnaire were prepared by the purpose of the study.

4.4. Testing Hypotheses

Path analysis was employed in this study to recognise direct and indirect impacts among variables. Measurement errors between variables can be calcu-

lated using path analysis. Compared to traditional regression analysis, this feature gives path analysis greater advantages (Kılıçlı and Aygün, 2023). In recent years, when investigating studies using mediator variables in structural equation models (SEM), contemporary approaches have attracted more attention because of criticisms of conventional approaches. Modern approaches can provide more valid and reliable conclusions than conventional approaches (Hair et al., 2021). In this study, to talk about the mediation effect, the Variance Account For (VAF) value was calculated, which is one of the contemporary methods of approach. If the VAF value is 0.80 and above, it indicates that there is a full mediation effect, if it is between 0.20 and 0.80, there is a partial mediation effect, and if this value is less than 0.20, there is no mediation effect (Wang and Li, 2022). The SEM developed in this study is presented in Appendix 3.

Before testing the hypotheses, it is necessary to look at the goodness of fit (GOF) values to understand that the SEM is valid and reliable. The GOF values at acceptable levels indicate that the data are compatible with the established structural model. Many goodness-of-fit values can be found in the literature. This study includes the goodness of fit values that are frequently used by researchers (Hooper et al., 2008). Kline (2005) suggested that minimum, chi-square, RMSEA, SRMR, and CFI indices be reported. In this study, it is possible to say that the GOF values are at acceptable levels in the literature. The GOF values related to the SEM analysis and the results of the research hypotheses are presented in Table 5 and Table 6 below.

Table 5. GOF values

Compliance Index	Excellent Fit Values	Acceptable Values	Model Value	Result
χ^2/df	≤ 3	$3 \leq \chi^2/df \leq 5$	2.09	Excellent
RMSEA	≤ 0.05	≤ 0.08	0.077	Acceptable
SRMR	≤ 0.05	≤ 0.08	0.045	Excellent
CFI	≥ 0.95	≥ 0.90	0.94	Acceptable

CMIN(χ^2) = 543.445 (p=0.00), df= 260

Table 6. Results of hypothesis testing

Variables	Direct Effect					Result
	B	β	S.E.	C.R.	Hypothesis	
WEP→BP	0.70	a=0.59	0.183	3.820*	H1	Supported
WEP→CA	1.20	b=0.95	0.104	11.484*	H2	Supported
CA→BP	0.37	c'=0.39	0.142	2.592*	H3	Supported

Result	Indirect Effect				
	B	β	R2	VAF	Hypothesis
WEP→CA→BP	0.44	0.37	0.95	0.58	H4

*N:183; *p<0.01; VAF: Variance Account For; B: Regression coefficient; β : Standardised regression coefficient; S.E.: Standard error; C.R.: Critical rate; ab: Indirect effect; ab+c': Total effect; VAF: ab/ab+c'.*

It is understood from Table 6 that the direct effect coefficient of women entrepreneur performance (WEP) on business performance (BP) is 0.59 ($\beta=0.59$; $p<0.01$). There was statistical significance for WEP’s direct impact on BP. This finding is also supported by the critical ratio value ($C.R:3.820>1.96$). This effect is a positive and moderate unidirectional structural relationship. This result shows that hypothesis H1 is confirmed. One of the other research hypotheses is the direct effect of WEP on competitive advantage (CA). It is understood from Table 6 that the regression coefficient showing this effect has a high coefficient of 0.95 ($\beta=0.95$; $p<0.01$). This direct effect of WEP on CA is statistically significant. This finding is also supported by the critical ratio value ($C.R:11.484>1.96$). This effect is positive and strong. Therefore, we can say that H2 is confirmed. One of the research hypotheses is the direct effect of CA on BP. Table 6 shows that the path coefficient for CA directly affecting BP is 0.39 ($\beta=0.39$; $p<0.01$). This result means that an increase of one unit in the CA leads to an increase of 0.39 in the BP. Furthermore, this effect is statistically significant. This significance is also evident from the critical ratio value ($C.R: 2,592>1,96$). This effect is a positive and low-level, unidirectional structural relationship. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is also empirically validated.

Table 6 also presents the findings regarding the mediating role of CA. It is seen that the impact of WEP on BP via CA is about 0.37 ($\beta= 0.37$). To calculate whether CA has a mediating effect, the VAF value was calculated. The computations demonstrated that the VAF value was 0.58 ($VAF=0.58$). As mentioned

previously, a VAF value ranging from 0.20 to 0.80 suggests the existence of a partial mediation effect (Kılıçlı and Aygün, 2023; Wang and Li, 2022). Therefore, it is possible to say that hypothesis H4 is confirmed, that is, CA plays a partially mediating role between WEP and BP.

After reviewing Table 6, it is evident that the R2 value is notably high at 95%. This finding indicates that the independent variables have the power to predict job performance at a high rate of 95%. The 5% unexplained rate is likely because of other variables that are not in the model and cannot be controlled for. Plonsky and Ghanbar (2018) argue that when the R2 value is 75% and above, the established model is quite robust, and the model is appropriate in terms of goodness of fit. Thus, the fact that the R2 value is as high as 95% is evidence that the structural model of WEP, CA, and BP variables is highly reliable.

5. Discussion

This study aims to investigate the impact of women entrepreneur performance (WEP) on business performance and competitive advantage. At the same time, it examines the mediating role of competitive advantage between the WEP and business performance. The sample of this study includes SMEs owned by women entrepreneurs registered with the CCI in the TRB2 region. As a result of the analyses, it is understood that the factors affecting WEP have a positive and significant effect on business performance. This result is consistent with the results of Gupta and Mirchandani (2018), Hossain et al. (2018), Ali et al. (2019), Khan et al. (2021), Chipfunde et al. (2021), Anggraini et al. (2022) and Akyıldız (2021). From this point of view, it can be said that if the obstacles (economic, technical/technological, legal/administrative, social/cultural) faced by women entrepreneurs are taken into account and solutions are found, SMEs will make significant progress in the production of quality products and services, sales profitability, and employment. From the results of this study, it is clear that women entrepreneurs perform better as businesses when access to credit is always easy when social, technical, and technological infrastructure is continuously provided, and when they have easy access to the market.

Today, women entrepreneurs are striving to navigate the challenges posed by their rivals while simultaneously investing in new sectors to gain a competitive advantage. For businesses to create a sustainable competitive advantage, inno-

vation and differentiation are essential. In this context, effective and efficient management of the factors impacting the performance of women entrepreneurs is particularly important to achieve and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage. From the data obtained (Table 6), the fact that the direct and indirect effect of WEP on competitive advantage are positive and statistically significant supports the explanations given. This finding corroborates previous studies in the literature on the relationship between WEP and competitive advantage (Li et al., 2006; Zainol and Al Mamun, 2018; Wirda et al., 2019). This result is an indication that the quality of the products or services of SMEs owned by women entrepreneurs creates customer loyalty and gains a competitive advantage. Brand equity in the eyes of consumers plays a key role in creating competitive advantage by differentiating in the marketplace. Competitive advantage empowers women entrepreneurs, giving them the confidence to overcome social barriers and succeed in business. Increasing the number of women entrepreneurs has a positive impact on economic growth, job creation, and overall social development. When investigating the literature, it is evident that few studies have investigated the relationship between these two variables. Therefore, this study gains importance due to its contribution to the existing literature.

The analyses' findings demonstrate that competitive advantage significantly and favourably affects business performance (Table 6). Based on this result, it is possible to say that resources that provide competitive advantage play an important role in the performance of enterprises owned by women entrepreneurs. This implies that for women entrepreneurs to survive in the sectors in which they operate, they need to develop their strengths and weaknesses to gain a sustainable competitive advantage. As stated by Anwar et al. (2018), if businesses want to achieve sustainable performance, they need to give importance to competitive advantage. In this study, the significant direct effect of competitive advantage on business performance supports the results of many previous studies (Kılıçlı and Aygün, 2023; Wirda et al., 2019; Udriyah et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2018; Mohebi and Farzollahzade, 2014; Mahmood and Hanafi, 2013). In addition, competitive advantage has a partial mediating effect between WEP and business performance (Table 6). This partial mediation effect is consistent with the results of Lakhal (2009), Meutia and Ismail (2012), Eniola and Abiodun (2014), Anwar et al. (2018), Hariandi and Wahyudi (2019) and Anggraini et al. (2022). The importance of competitive advantage for business performance is underlined by the results of this and previous studies. This is because wom-

en entrepreneurs, who have a competitive advantage, can achieve sustainable growth in the long term. Moreover, competitive advantage enables women entrepreneurs to respond quickly to changes in the market, which can sustain their businesses and increase profits. This also opens various opportunities for women entrepreneurs. For instance, possessing a competitive advantage enhances the credibility and reputation of women entrepreneurs. This attracts the attention of investors, customers, and business partners. Consequently, this awareness leads to the creation of new partnerships and collaborations that make businesses economically strong.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between the performance of women entrepreneurs in the TRB2 region and business performance and competitive advantage. When we look at the studies on women entrepreneurs in Turkey, there is no study on the factors affecting the business performance and competitive advantage of women entrepreneurs. Similarly, no studies have examined the mediating role of competitive advantage between entrepreneurial performance and business performance. Existing studies mostly discuss the problems faced by women entrepreneurs when starting a business. Hence, empirical evidence is limited and has only addressed this issue in a direct relationship form without taking into consideration mediator variables. This study provides a different perspective on the literature by analysing competitive advantage as a mediating variable. It also emphasizes the important role of competitive advantage between business performance and entrepreneurial performance. Eliminating or effectively managing the barriers faced by women entrepreneurs gives them a competitive advantage. This advantage will provide long-term and sustainable growth for women entrepreneurs. This study fills the existing research gap by providing an opportunity to evaluate the relationship between entrepreneurial performance, competitive advantage, and business performance from a broad perspective. This study differs from others in the literature due to its variables and results. It will serve as a valuable resource, making significant contributions to both national and international literature.

Apart from this, various recommendations can be drawn from this study. Based on the results of this study, relevant institutions or organizations can or-

ganize conferences, and seminars and provide consultancy services for women entrepreneurs. Access to capital for women entrepreneurs to improve their business performance and compete nationally or internationally can be facilitated. By telling the success stories of women who have been successful in business life, the place and importance of women in social and economic life can be emphasized to the people living in this region. This is also an incentive factor.

7. Limitations and Future Research

There were some limitations while conducting this study. The most important limitations of this study were cost and time. Other important constraints were security issues in the region and factors like shell companies. In this respect, it was not possible to reach all women entrepreneurs in the region. This limited the sample. In addition, a major problem was that participants did not answer the items seriously. There is a large research gap on women entrepreneurs in Turkey. For example, more research could be done on the characteristics of women entrepreneurs and their role in the development of SMEs in Turkey. Studies on the financing and marketing problems of women-owned SMEs can also be conducted. In future studies, using the variables used in this study or additional variables, different results may be obtained in other regions. By comparing women and men entrepreneurs, it can be tried to determine whether there is a differentiation between them. In addition, qualitative analysis methods can be used in the future to contribute to the existing literature.

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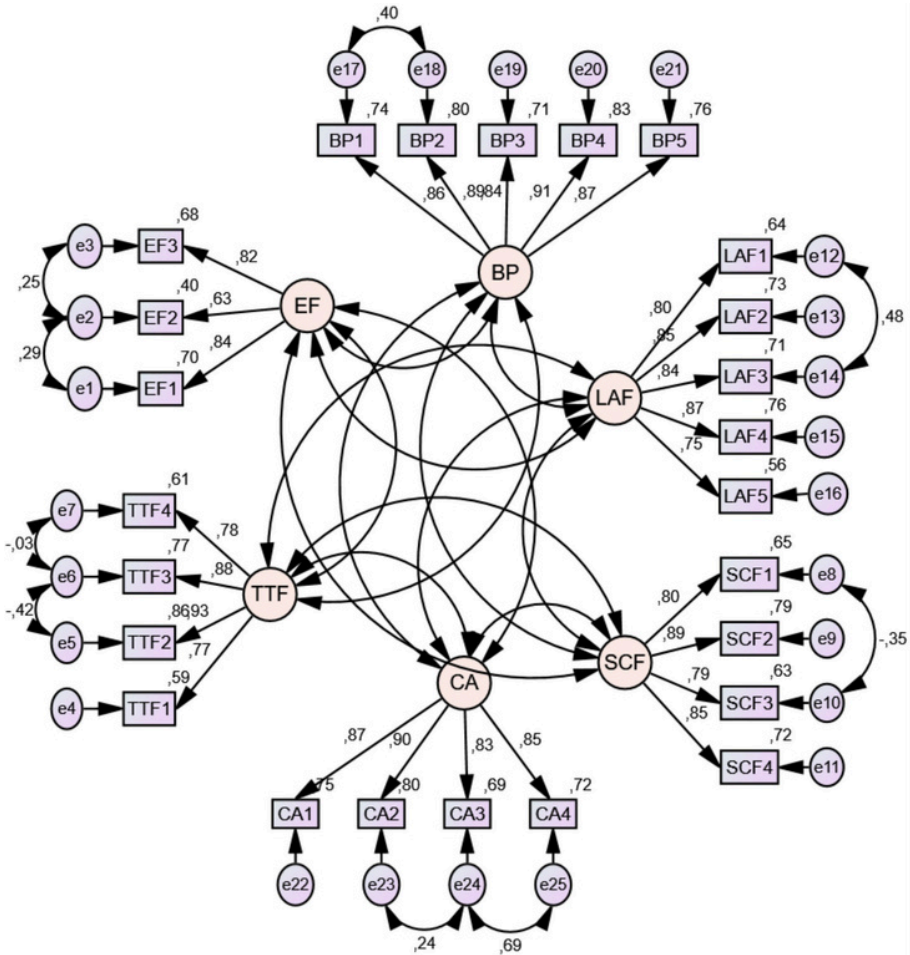
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Appendix 1. Items and reference works

Variables	Items	References
Economic	Loans provided by banks and other credit institutions are sufficient.	Erdemir (2018); Wube (2010); Khan et al. (2021)
	It is important to have assets such as buildings, land, etc. to carry out business activities.	
	I can easily access the inputs necessary to carry out business activities.	
Social/Cultural	Support from spouse, family, friends and relatives has a positive impact on the growth of my business.	Khan et al. (2021); Wube (2010)
	The attitudes of society towards my products/services are positive in the environment in which I operate.	
	My communication with employees is strong and my relationship with them is positive.	
	My communication with customers is strong and my relationship with them is positive.	
Administrative/Factors	The incentives and support provided by the state for women entrepreneurs are sufficient.	Wube (2010)
	I can obtain a loan for my business without showing any title-deeded assets.	
	The interest rates of the loans provided by banks or other credit institutions to women entrepreneurs are reasonable.	
	I did not encounter any difficulties or negativity arising from bureaucracy while establishing my business.	
	The state levies reasonable taxes on my business.	
Technical/ Technological Factors	There are sufficient technological resources and infrastructure in my enterprise.	Hossain et al. (2018)
	My enterprise has the machinery and equipment to continue its activities.	
	My enterprise has a modern technological infrastructure.	
	My enterprise has sufficient tools and equipment to carry out sales activities.	

Business Performance	In my enterprise, there has been an increase in sales and profitability in the last three years.	Khan et al. (2021); Hasan and Mubarak (2016)
	My enterprise has sufficient capacity to develop new products and processes.	
	My enterprise spends 50 per cent or more of the profit obtained as a result of its activities as capital to my enterprise.	
	My enterprise provides high-quality products and services.	
	My enterprise has a sense of social responsibility and provides employment opportunities in its neighbourhood.	
Advantage	Our company provides access to the resources it needs at competitive prices.	Kılıçlı (2022); Hasan and Mubarak (2016)
	Our company has managed to increase its market share in recent years.	
	Our company has a good image in the minds of customers.	
	Our company is able to attract the best talent available in the market.	

Appendix 2. Structural equation modelling for CFA



CMIN/df: 1,85; GFI: 0,84; CFI: 0,96; RMSEA: 0,068; SRMR: 0,042; CMIN: 463,307; df: 251

Appendix 3. Structural equation modelling (SEM)

