

Entrepreneurial traits and risk profile of female indigenous entrepreneurs of Kabui (Rongmei) tribe of Manipur: A case study

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship based on cultural materials has become an important part of generating income and livelihood for many artisans. This paper explores the various entrepreneurial traits and risk profile of female indigenous entrepreneurs belonging to the Kabui (Rongmei) tribe who are mainly settled in the Indian state of Manipur. For the study, twenty female indigenous entrepreneurs were chosen from the age group of 20 to 50 years. The categories of entrepreneurs were divided into three groups: weaving traditional attires, ornaments and traditional food and beverages. It was observed that most of the female indigenous entrepreneurs were highly self-motivated with the spirit of uplifting cultural values and creating a sustainable source of income. Though risk of failure could impact them financially, they felt less threatened by failure due to the belief that cultural materials and its products are widely consumed and valued by the community. Strong networking mainly with the immediate customer and intermediaries could be seen widely across all the three categories. Willingness to expand the entrepreneurial endeavours and generating informal jobs for the semi-skilled artisans were also highlighted by the entrepreneurs.

Keywords: *Indigenous entrepreneurship, traits, risk, sustainability, cultural materials.*

INTRODUCTION:

The entrepreneurial landscape is diverse, encompassing individuals from various backgrounds, including indigenous communities. Female indigenous entrepreneurs represent a unique segment within this ecosystem, characterized by distinct entrepreneurial traits and risk profiles shaped by cultural, social, and economic factors. This comparative study explores the entrepreneurial traits and risk profiles of female indigenous entrepreneurs, highlighting their strengths, challenges, and contributions to the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Female indigenous entrepreneurs often exhibit a strong sense of cultural identity and resilience, drawing upon traditional knowledge, values, and practices in their entrepreneurial endeavours. Their connection to culture and community influences business practices, decision-making, and relationships with stakeholders. Female indigenous entrepreneurs are deeply rooted in their communities, actively engaging with local networks, support systems, and social enterprises. They leverage community resources, partnerships, and collaboration to drive social impact, economic development, and sustainability in indigenous territories.

Adaptability and Innovation: Indigenous entrepreneurship is characterized by adaptability and innovation, as female entrepreneurs navigate dynamic market environments, changing consumer preferences, and evolving industry trends. They demonstrate creativity, resourcefulness, and flexibility in responding to challenges and seizing opportunities. Female indigenous entrepreneurs face cultural barriers and stereotypes that may limit their access to resources, opportunities, and markets. Discrimination, prejudice, and systemic inequalities pose challenges to entrepreneurship, hindering business growth and success.

Limited access to capital, credit, and financial services is a significant barrier for female indigenous entrepreneurs, constraining their ability to start, expand, and sustain businesses. Lack of collateral, financial literacy, and investment networks further exacerbate financial constraints and risk exposure. Indigenous entrepreneurs operate in diverse and often remote markets, characterized by economic volatility, market

fluctuations, and regulatory complexities. Uncertainty in market demand, supply chains, and government policies poses risks to business viability and sustainability.

Empowering female indigenous entrepreneurs requires acknowledging and respecting indigenous cultures, traditions, and knowledge systems. Culturally sensitive support programs, mentorship initiatives, and capacity-building workshops can strengthen cultural identity and resilience among indigenous women entrepreneurs. Promoting financial inclusion and access to capital is essential for supporting female indigenous entrepreneurs. Initiatives such as microfinance programs, community investment funds, and government grants tailored to indigenous communities can address financial barriers and unlock entrepreneurial potential.

Providing training, education, and skills development opportunities is crucial for enhancing the entrepreneurial capabilities of indigenous women. Entrepreneurship education, vocational training, and mentorship programs can equip female entrepreneurs with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to succeed in business. Female indigenous entrepreneurs possess unique entrepreneurial traits and face distinct risk profiles shaped by cultural heritage, community context, and socio-economic factors. While they exhibit resilience, adaptability, and innovation in their entrepreneurial endeavours, they also encounter barriers such as cultural discrimination, financial constraints, and market uncertainty. Empowering female indigenous entrepreneurs requires holistic support strategies that address cultural, financial, and skills-related needs, fostering an inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem that harnesses the diverse talents and contributions of indigenous women to economic development and social progress.

The present study focuses on the entrepreneurial traits and risk profile of female indigenous entrepreneurs of Kabui (Rongmei) tribe of Manipur (India). The Kabui tribe is recognized as a tribe under (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 (Part III - Rules and Orders under the Constitution of India). It is also known as the Rongmei tribe which is recognized by the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Act, 2011. The Kabui (Rongmei) tribe are mostly inhabited in the three North-Eastern states of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Entrepreneurship is a vital driver of economic growth and innovation, yet not all individuals possess the qualities necessary to excel in this domain. This literature review synthesizes the existing scholarship on entrepreneurial traits, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the key characteristics associated with entrepreneurial success.

Trait theory, rooted in psychology, suggests that certain enduring personal qualities predispose individuals towards entrepreneurial behaviour. Early studies by McClelland (1961) identified the need for achievement as a central trait in entrepreneurs. Subsequent research expanded this framework, incorporating personality traits such as extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability, collectively known as the Big Five personality traits (Zhao et al., 2010).

Cognitive theories emphasize the importance of cognitive processes in entrepreneurial activities. Creativity, problem-solving ability, and adaptability are frequently cited cognitive traits associated with successful entrepreneurs (Baron, 2008). Furthermore, studies suggest that entrepreneurs exhibit higher levels of cognitive flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity, enabling them to navigate complex and uncertain environments effectively (Obschonka et al., 2019).

Social cognitive theory posits that individual traits interact with environmental and behavioural factors to influence entrepreneurial outcomes. Social networks, mentorship, and role models play significant roles in shaping entrepreneurial behaviour (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986). Additionally, cultural and institutional contexts influence the manifestation and impact of entrepreneurial traits (Shane, 2012).

Empirical studies provide robust evidence supporting the relationship between specific traits and entrepreneurial success. Meta-analyses reveal that traits such as need for achievement, risk-taking propensity, and locus of control are consistently associated with entrepreneurial intentions and performance (Rauch & Frese, 2007). However, the strength of these relationships may vary across contexts and industries.

Contextual factors, including gender, age, education, and industry, moderate the relationship between traits and entrepreneurial outcomes. For instance, while certain traits may be universally beneficial, their effects can be amplified or attenuated by contextual variables (Mueller & Thomas, 2001). Moreover, cultural differences influence the expression and interpretation of entrepreneurial traits (Hofstede, 2001).

This literature review provides a structured overview of the key concepts, theories, and empirical findings in the study of entrepreneurial traits. It highlights the multidimensional nature of entrepreneurship and underscores the importance of considering individual, cognitive, and social factors in understanding entrepreneurial behaviour.

OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of this research are highlighted below:

1. To study the entrepreneurial traits and risk profile of the female indigenous entrepreneurs.
2. To see the risk-taking behaviour and its financial implications.
3. To explore the role of culture in building entrepreneurial traits.

METHODOLOGY:

This paper explores the various entrepreneurial traits and risk profile of female indigenous entrepreneurs belonging to the Kabui (Rongmei) tribe who are mainly settled in the Indian state of Manipur through a qualitative lens. For the study, twenty female indigenous entrepreneurs were chosen from the age group of 20 to 50 years. The categories of entrepreneurs were divided into three groups: weaving traditional attires, ornaments and traditional food and beverages.

For data collection, semi-structured interview was used to gain qualitative and deeper aspects of the entrepreneurial traits and risk profile of the female entrepreneurs. Semi-structured interviews play a crucial role in entrepreneurial research by facilitating in-depth exploration, rich data collection, contextual understanding, participant engagement, iterative inquiry, flexible analysis, and capturing diverse perspectives essential for advancing theoretical knowledge and informing practical implications in the field of entrepreneurship.

Thematic Analysis (TA) was used for analysing the transcribed data from the Kabui (Rongmei) to English. Thematic analysis is a valuable methodological approach in entrepreneurial research, offering a systematic and flexible framework for exploring complex phenomena, capturing rich data, identifying emerging patterns, generating theory, informing practice and policy, and enhancing rigor and trustworthiness in qualitative research findings.

ANALYSIS:

Based on the data provided by the participants, following are the detailed analysis of the excerpts transcribed in English.

Participant Ent B (26/F):

“I am a person who is motivated from within. I try to push beyond my limits to achieve my goals and inspire my friends and family members to participate in the entrepreneurial endeavours. Self-motivation and the desire to achieve specific goals without any distractions is crucial for any entrepreneurship. Any distractions from the process and the goal may unnecessarily lead to unproductive and fragmented mind”

The response given above by one of the female entrepreneurs alludes the importance of self-motivation and direction of efforts towards achieving specific goal. Self-motivation trait could also be seen with other female entrepreneurs who are also working with other cultural products. Given the nature of work and the locality where many of the female entrepreneurs are working, many entrepreneurs felt the need for self-motivation as their driving force in running their endeavours.

Participant Ent Z (35/F):

“As a female entrepreneur, the task here is not easy as we navigate through various challenges of our work and family life. The risk of failure is high and there are also possibilities of huge financial loss in the event of absolute failure of our endeavour. Since our income is not high and we do not have any financial back-up in case of losses, we are very careful of the number of products we produce. I would call it a calculated risk based of the customer demands, season of the year and specific advanced orders”.

The narrative above clearly indicates that the entrepreneur has to make calculated risk since there is high chances of failure in the indigenous entrepreneurship. Risk taking behaviour could be clearly seen among the entrepreneurs due to the involvement of financial resources in their endeavour. Lack of financial back-up and security was also highlighted as challenges to the entrepreneurs. Though there is chance of failure in entrepreneurship, many of the entrepreneurs take clear and calculated risk to mitigate it.

Participant Ent P (42/F):

“In my long years of weaving our traditional clothes and accessories, I personally felt that culture and traditions play a very important role in the entrepreneurship particularly in specific community-based products which are connected to traditions and local belief systems. Though time brings changes, indigenous traditions and belief systems hardly changes over the decades which has helped many indigenous entrepreneurs to survive for long despite the many challenges”.

The importance of culture and traditional belief system in the success of indigenous entrepreneurship was clearly highlighted by the above female participant who had a long year of experience in the field of weaving traditional clothes and accessories. Since almost all the indigenous products are rooted in culture, it is crucial to understand one's own culture and its belief systems while discussing indigenous entrepreneurship. The genesis of indigenous entrepreneurship is considered to be culture and its traditional belief system for many entrepreneurs.

Participant Ent Y (33/F):

“Since many of the indigenous entrepreneurs are illiterate and lack education, we are unable to access to Government schemes or programmes which may benefit the local entrepreneurs. Lack of awareness and initiative could be some handicaps among ourselves which we need to explore more. For us, each day is a challenge which need to overcome with confidence and think through the many possibilities of entrepreneurship. I think creativity and passion to innovate our cultural materials could change the entrepreneurial landscape in the time to come”.

Creativity and passion for innovation was highlighted as a crucial window to future indigenous entrepreneurship. Challenges and opportunities are seen as part of the entrepreneurship process which needs to be taken seriously for entrepreneurial success. Lack of education and illiterate hinders the benefits that might timely reach the indigenous entrepreneurs. The participant also reflected the need to overcome the various challenges so that young entrepreneurs can create new and innovative products that may attract customers not only the local but also global customers in the future.

DISCUSSIONS:

Female entrepreneurship has gained increasing attention in recent years as women continue to make significant strides in business ownership and leadership roles. This paper examines the unique traits and characteristics associated with female entrepreneurs, shedding light on the diverse factors that shape their entrepreneurial behaviour and success. Historically, entrepreneurship has been predominantly portrayed through a masculine lens, with traits such as assertiveness, risk-taking, and competitiveness valorised (Brush, 1992). This gendered perspective has obscured the distinct entrepreneurial qualities exhibited by women, leading to a limited understanding of female entrepreneurship.

Contrary to traditional stereotypes, female entrepreneurs often exhibit a diverse set of traits that reflect their unique experiences, motivations, and approaches to business. Research suggests that women entrepreneurs

tend to demonstrate high levels of resilience, empathy, and relationship-building skills (Marlow & McAdam, 2013). These traits enable them to navigate challenges, build strong networks, and foster collaborative environments conducive to business growth. Female entrepreneurs frequently display traits associated with empowerment and self-efficacy, including self-confidence, determination, and a sense of purpose (Brush et al., 2006). Despite facing systemic barriers and gender biases, women entrepreneurs demonstrate remarkable resilience and perseverance in pursuing their entrepreneurial goals (Fischer et al., 1993). Their ability to overcome adversity and forge their path exemplifies the strength of female entrepreneurial spirit.

Women entrepreneurs often prioritize social impact and community engagement in their business endeavours. Research indicates that female-led ventures are more likely to incorporate social responsibility and sustainability practices into their operations (Alsos et al., 2016). This emphasis on social consciousness reflects women's tendency to integrate their personal values and social missions into their entrepreneurial ventures, thereby contributing to positive societal change. Female entrepreneurs excel in collaborative leadership styles characterized by inclusivity, empathy, and consensus-building (Dumas & Frechette, 2012). Their ability to foster cohesive teams and create supportive work environments enhances organizational effectiveness and employee satisfaction. Women entrepreneurs leverage their interpersonal skills to cultivate diverse and inclusive workplaces that foster innovation and creativity.

Challenges and Opportunities

Despite their entrepreneurial strengths, women continue to face persistent challenges in accessing capital, networks, and opportunities for growth (Coleman & Robb, 2016). Addressing these barriers requires concerted efforts to promote gender equality, provide targeted support services, and amplify the voices of women entrepreneurs in policy-making and decision-making processes.

Critiques and Future Directions

Despite the wealth of research on entrepreneurial traits, several limitations persist. Methodological issues, such as reliance on self-report measures and cross-sectional designs, challenge the validity and generalizability of findings. Moreover, the dynamic nature of entrepreneurship necessitates longitudinal studies to capture changes in traits over time. Future research should adopt interdisciplinary approaches, integrating insights from psychology, sociology, economics, and neuroscience to enhance our understanding of entrepreneurial behaviour.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, female entrepreneurs embody a rich array of traits and characteristics that distinguish them as dynamic and resilient leaders in the entrepreneurial landscape. By recognizing and celebrating the diverse talents and contributions of women entrepreneurs, societies can harness the full potential of female-led innovation and economic empowerment. Fostering an inclusive and supportive ecosystem that values and nurtures female entrepreneurial talent is essential for advancing gender equality and fostering sustainable economic development. While considerable progress has been made in identifying and studying these traits, ongoing research is needed to address methodological challenges and explore new avenues for inquiry. A nuanced understanding of entrepreneurial traits is essential for informing entrepreneurship education, training, and policy initiatives aimed at fostering entrepreneurial talent and fostering economic development.

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