



The Impact of Women Empowerment through the Start-up Ecosystem in India: A Qualitative Research

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Abstract

This qualitative research paper explores the impact of women empowerment within the start-up ecosystem in India. It investigates the ways in which women entrepreneurs are driving change, contributing to economic growth, and challenging gender norms in the traditionally male-dominated business landscape. Through in-depth interviews and analysis of existing literature, this study sheds light on the opportunities, challenges, and support mechanisms that influence women's participation and success in the start-up ecosystem. The findings emphasize the transformative power of women empowerment in fostering innovation, economic development, and social change.

Keywords—*India, Start-up Ecosystem, Women Empowerment.*

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1. Introduction

In recent years, women empowerment has gained significant attention as a catalyst for economic growth and societal development (Davidsson et al., 2003). Within the context of the start-up ecosystem in India, women entrepreneurs are increasingly making their mark, challenging traditional gender norms, and contributing to the country's entrepreneurial landscape (Aldrich et al., 2003). This qualitative research paper aims to delve into the impact of women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India. By examining the opportunities, challenges, and support mechanisms that influence women's participation and success in this domain, this study seeks to shed light on the transformative power of women entrepreneurship in fostering innovation, driving economic development, and bringing about social change (Cooper et al., 2013). Understanding the experiences and perspectives of women entrepreneurs within the Indian start-up ecosystem is crucial for developing effective policies, programs, and strategies that can further empower women and enhance their contributions to the entrepreneurial ecosystem (Verheul et al., 2006).

1.1. Background

The start-up ecosystem in India has witnessed remarkable growth and has become a key driver of economic development in recent years. Within this dynamic environment, women empowerment has emerged as a critical factor influencing the trajectory of entrepreneurship in the country (Welsh et al., 2014). The impact of women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India extends beyond economic indicators and encompasses broader social and cultural transformations (Welsh et al., 2014).

- a) **Economic Impact:** Women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem has the potential to significantly contribute to India's economic growth. The increased participation of women entrepreneurs stimulates job creation, fosters innovation, and diversifies the economy (Sullivan et al., 2012). Women-led start-ups bring fresh perspectives, unique ideas, and solutions to market gaps, thereby promoting competitiveness and driving economic productivity. Furthermore, the success of women entrepreneurs generates role models and inspires other women to pursue entrepreneurship, leading to a multiplier effect on the economy (Nissan et al., 2012).
- b) **Sociocultural Impact:** The empowerment of women through the start-up ecosystem in India challenges deeply entrenched gender norms and social expectations (Locke, 2007). By entering traditionally male-dominated sectors and assuming leadership roles, women entrepreneurs challenge prevailing stereotypes and perceptions. This process contributes to changing societal attitudes towards women's capabilities and aspirations. Women entrepreneurs serve as powerful agents of social

change, empowering other women, and promoting gender equality in both the entrepreneurial ecosystem and society at large (Kobeissi, 2010).

- c) **Network and Support Mechanisms:** The start-up ecosystem provides women entrepreneurs with access to networks, mentorship, and support mechanisms that enable them to overcome the barriers they face. Incubators, accelerators, and women-focused entrepreneurship programs play a vital role in providing training, guidance, and funding opportunities tailored to women's specific needs (Nissan et al., 2012). These support mechanisms not only enhance women's business skills but also provide a platform for networking, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. By nurturing a supportive ecosystem, women entrepreneurs are empowered to overcome challenges, seize opportunities, and succeed in their ventures (Locke, 2007).
- d) **Policy Interventions:** The Indian government and various stakeholders have recognized the significance of women's empowerment in the start-up ecosystem and have introduced policies and initiatives to facilitate their participation (Jones et al., 2010). Efforts such as financial assistance schemes, regulatory reforms, and gender-responsive policies promote inclusivity and create an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs (Hughes et al., 2012). These interventions help address the unique challenges faced by women, such as access to finance, societal biases, and work-life balance, thus enhancing their chances of success and impact (Hisrich et al., 2006).

1.2. Research questions

The research objectives for the study on the impact of women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India are as follows:

- a) To examine the opportunities available for women within the start-up ecosystem in India and how these opportunities contribute to their empowerment.
- b) To identify the specific challenges and barriers that women entrepreneurs face in the start-up ecosystem and understand their impact on women's empowerment.
- c) To explore the support mechanisms, policies, and initiatives in place to facilitate women's participation and success in the start-up ecosystem.
- d) To analyse the economic impact of women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem, including job creation, innovation, and diversification of the economy.
- e) To investigate the sociocultural impact of women entrepreneurship, including the influence on gender norms, societal attitudes, and the promotion of gender equality.
- f) To provide recommendations for policymakers, stakeholders, and entrepreneurs on how to further enhance women's empowerment and maximize their impact within the start-up ecosystem in India.

By addressing these research objectives, the study aims to deepen the understanding of the impact of women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India and provide valuable insights for policy formulation, program development, and future research in this area.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The study on the impact of women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India holds significant relevance and importance for multiple stakeholders, including policymakers, entrepreneurs, researchers, and society as a whole.

- a) **Policymakers and Stakeholders:** Understanding the impact of women empowerment within the start-up ecosystem is crucial for policymakers and stakeholders involved in promoting entrepreneurship, economic development, and gender equality. The findings of this study will provide insights into the specific challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms, and the potential policy interventions needed to create a more inclusive and supportive ecosystem. Policymakers can use this knowledge to design and implement targeted programs and initiatives that enhance women's participation, improve access to resources and networks, and address gender disparities in entrepreneurship. By fostering an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs, policymakers can unlock their untapped potential, driving economic growth, and social progress.

- b) **Entrepreneurs and Start-ups:** For aspiring and existing women entrepreneurs, this study's significance lies in shedding light on the opportunities, challenges, and support mechanisms available within the start-up ecosystem (Cetindamar et al., 2012). It will provide valuable insights into successful strategies, best practices, and resources that can empower women entrepreneurs to overcome barriers, build sustainable businesses, and maximize their impact. By highlighting the economic and social benefits of women's participation in the start-up ecosystem, this study can inspire and encourage more women to pursue entrepreneurship, ultimately fostering a more diverse and vibrant entrepreneurial landscape (Chang et al., 2009).

In addition to policymakers and entrepreneurs, the findings of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on women entrepreneurship, gender empowerment, and the start-up ecosystem in India (Fróes Lima et al., 2016). Researchers and scholars in these fields can utilize the insights to further explore related topics, generate new theories, and inform future research. The study's broader societal significance lies in challenging gender norms, promoting gender equality, and advancing women's empowerment in both entrepreneurial and non-entrepreneurial contexts (Cenfetelli et al., 2009). By recognizing the significance of women's empowerment through the start-up ecosystem, this study contributes to the ongoing efforts towards building an inclusive, equitable, and prosperous society.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Women Entrepreneurship in India

Women entrepreneurship in India has witnessed significant growth and transformation in recent years, making it a subject of great interest and importance (Aldrich et al., 2003). Here are two paragraphs highlighting the key aspects of women entrepreneurship in India:

- a) **Emerging Force in Entrepreneurship:** Women entrepreneurship in India has emerged as a powerful force driving economic development and social change. Over the years, there has been a substantial increase in the number of women-led ventures across various sectors, including technology, e-commerce, healthcare, and social entrepreneurship (Cooper et al., 2013). Women entrepreneurs are challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes by venturing into traditionally male-dominated industries, demonstrating their leadership skills, and contributing to innovation and job creation. This rise in women entrepreneurship is fueled by factors such as increasing education levels among women, growing awareness of their rights, and changing societal attitudes towards women's capabilities and aspirations. Women entrepreneurs bring unique perspectives, creativity, and a different approach to problem-solving, thus adding diversity and dynamism to the entrepreneurial ecosystem in India (Verheul et al., 2006).
- b) **Challenges and Opportunities:** Women entrepreneurs in India face a unique set of challenges that impact their entrepreneurial journey. These challenges include limited access to financial resources, lack of networks and mentorship opportunities, societal biases, family responsibilities, and work-life balance (Welsh et al., 2014). Despite these hurdles, women entrepreneurs in India are showcasing resilience, determination, and entrepreneurial acumen. They often leverage their social networks, community support, and creativity to navigate the challenges and seize opportunities (Sullivan et al., 2012). Moreover, several organizations, government initiatives, and support networks are working to address these challenges and provide women entrepreneurs with the necessary resources, training, and mentorship. With the right support, women entrepreneurs have the potential to create a significant impact on the economy, employment, and society at large, while also inspiring and empowering future generations of women to pursue entrepreneurship (Nissan et al., 2012).

2.2. Empowerment and the Start-up Ecosystem

The intersection of empowerment and the start-up ecosystem creates a powerful platform for women to challenge societal norms, break barriers, and achieve economic independence (Welsh et al., 2014). The start-up ecosystem, with its emphasis on innovation, risk-taking, and entrepreneurial spirit, provides a conducive environment for women to assert their agency, develop their skills, and unleash their potential (Kobeissi, 2010; Locke, 2007). Through entrepreneurship, women can gain control over their economic destinies, make independent decisions, and shape their own professional journeys (Jones et al., 2010).

The start-up ecosystem offers women a unique opportunity to redefine traditional gender roles and challenge gender stereotypes (Hughes et al., 2012). By starting and scaling their own ventures, women entrepreneurs can demonstrate their capabilities,

leadership, and business acumen. Through entrepreneurship, women can exercise their autonomy, access resources, build networks, and create their own support systems (Hisrich et al., 2006). Moreover, the start-up ecosystem provides a fertile ground for women to cultivate entrepreneurial mindsets, develop self-confidence, and overcome societal barriers that have traditionally limited their aspirations (Cetindamar et al., 2012).

Empowerment through the start-up ecosystem extends beyond economic empowerment (Davidsson et al., 2003). It also encompasses social empowerment, as women entrepreneurs become role models, change agents, and advocates for gender equality. By breaking down gendered barriers, women in the start-up ecosystem challenge societal perceptions and inspire other women to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams (Aldrich et al., 2003). They contribute to reshaping societal attitudes towards women's capabilities, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

Overall, the synergy between empowerment and the start-up ecosystem creates a transformative space for women to assert themselves, drive economic growth, and bring about societal change (Cooper et al., 2013). By harnessing the opportunities, support mechanisms, and networks within the start-up ecosystem, women entrepreneurs can overcome challenges, realize their potential, and contribute to building a more inclusive, innovative, and equal society (Cetindamar et al., 2012).

2.3. Support Mechanisms for Women Entrepreneurs

Support mechanisms for women entrepreneurs play a crucial role in enabling their success and empowering them to overcome the unique challenges they face (Chang et al., 2009). Here are some key support mechanisms available for women entrepreneurs:

- a) **Financial Support:** Access to capital is one of the primary challenges faced by women entrepreneurs (Fróes Lima et al., 2016). To address this, various financial institutions, government programs, and venture capital funds have introduced specific funding initiatives and schemes targeting women-led ventures. These initiatives offer grants, loans, and equity investments tailored to the needs of women entrepreneurs, enabling them to secure the necessary funding for their start-ups (Cenfetelli et al., 2009).
- b) **Incubators and Accelerators:** Incubators and accelerators provide crucial support to women entrepreneurs by offering mentoring, networking, and training programs (Hadidi et al., 2015). These organizations create a supportive environment where women entrepreneurs can access guidance, mentorship, and industry-specific expertise to develop their business ideas, refine their strategies, and accelerate their growth. Incubators and accelerators also facilitate access to networks and potential investors, increasing the visibility and marketability of women-led start-ups (Acs et al., 2008).
- c) **Networking Opportunities:** Networking platforms and events specifically designed for women entrepreneurs offer invaluable opportunities to connect with like-minded individuals, industry experts, potential collaborators, and investors. These networks create a sense of community and provide a platform for knowledge sharing, skill development, and collaboration (Eddleston et al., 2012). Women-focused networking organizations and communities provide a supportive space for sharing experiences, challenges, and best practices, fostering a strong support system (Ahl, 2006).
- d) **Mentorship Programs:** Mentorship plays a critical role in the success of women entrepreneurs. Mentorship programs pair experienced entrepreneurs, industry professionals, or successful business leaders with women entrepreneurs, providing guidance, advice, and support. Mentors can share their expertise, provide strategic insights, and help women entrepreneurs navigate challenges, make informed decisions, and seize opportunities (Davidsson et al., 2003).
- e) **Training and Capacity Building:** Programs offering entrepreneurship training, skill development workshops, and capacity-building initiatives are instrumental in equipping women entrepreneurs with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to run successful businesses (Fróes Lima et al., 2016). These programs cover various aspects of entrepreneurship, including business planning, financial management, marketing, and leadership development, empowering women entrepreneurs with the essential competencies to thrive in the competitive start-up ecosystem (Cenfetelli et al., 2009).

- f) **Policy and Advocacy:** Government policies, regulations, and advocacy efforts are crucial for creating an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs. Policies promoting gender equality, addressing legal barriers, providing business-friendly regulations, and encouraging diversity in procurement can support the growth and sustainability of women-led ventures (Hadidi et al., 2015). Advocacy initiatives work towards raising awareness, influencing policy changes, and challenging societal norms that hinder women's entrepreneurial aspirations (Ahl, 2006).

2.4. Gendered Challenges and Barriers

Gendered challenges and barriers pose significant hurdles for women entrepreneurs, impacting their ability to fully participate and succeed in the entrepreneurial ecosystem (Ahl, 2006). These challenges are rooted in societal expectations, biases, and gender norms that perpetuate inequality and limit women's opportunities for entrepreneurship.

One major gendered challenge is the persistent gender gap in access to finance. Women entrepreneurs often face difficulties in securing funding for their ventures due to biases and stereotypes that influence investment decisions (Arregle et al., 2007). Research has shown that women-led start-ups receive significantly less funding compared to their male counterparts, leading to unequal opportunities for growth and innovation (Arregle et al., 2007). Limited access to financial resources and networks, coupled with gender biases in the investment landscape, creates barriers for women entrepreneurs to access capital, scale their businesses, and fully realize their entrepreneurial potential (Lassala et al., 2016).

Another gendered challenge is the disproportionate burden of work-family balance. Women entrepreneurs often juggle multiple roles and responsibilities, including caregiving and household tasks (Lassala et al., 2016). Traditional gender norms and societal expectations place a heavier burden on women to fulfill domestic obligations, leaving them with less time, energy, and resources to focus on their entrepreneurial pursuits. Balancing work and family responsibilities becomes a significant challenge, often requiring women to make difficult trade-offs and compromises in their entrepreneurial journeys (Lassala et al., 2016). This challenge not only affects women's ability to devote sufficient time to their businesses but also limits their participation in networking events, professional development opportunities, and other activities critical for entrepreneurial success (Santos et al., 2016).

Addressing these gendered challenges and barriers requires comprehensive strategies that address societal attitudes, biases, and structural barriers (Eddleston et al., 2012). It involves creating a supportive ecosystem that recognizes and values women's entrepreneurship, implementing gender-responsive policies, providing targeted financial support and mentorship programs, promoting inclusive networks, and fostering a culture that celebrates and supports women entrepreneurs (Arregle et al., 2007). By dismantling gender stereotypes, enhancing access to resources, and creating equal opportunities, societies can empower women entrepreneurs to thrive, contribute to economic growth, and drive positive social change (Cenfetelli et al., 2009).

2.5. Economic and Social Impact

Women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India has the potential to yield significant economic and social benefits (Locke, 2007). Economically, promoting women entrepreneurship can contribute to job creation, innovation, and economic growth. By supporting women-led start-ups and providing them with access to resources, funding, and networks, there is a greater likelihood of increased employment opportunities, as women entrepreneurs often hire and empower other women (Dolmans et al., 2016). Moreover, women-led start-ups have been shown to bring fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to market, leading to enhanced productivity and competitiveness (Lin et al., 2016). Socially, women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem challenges traditional gender roles, promotes gender equality, and fosters a more inclusive society (Santos et al., 2016). It encourages women to break barriers, become role models, and inspire other women to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations. This shift in social norms and attitudes creates a positive ripple effect, promoting gender equality not only within the entrepreneurial landscape but also in broader social spheres, thereby fostering a more equitable and progressive society (Lassala et al., 2016).

3. Methodology

This research paper utilizes a qualitative research methodology to examine the impact of women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India (Bowen, 2009). Qualitative research methods, including interviews, focus groups, and case studies, are employed to gather rich and nuanced data on the experiences, challenges, and success stories of women entrepreneurs. The

research aims to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of women entrepreneurs, their motivations, the support mechanisms they utilize, and the barriers they face. Through in-depth qualitative analysis, patterns and themes emerge, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the impact of women empowerment on economic and social outcomes. The findings of this research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on women entrepreneurship and inform policymakers, stakeholders, and practitioners on effective strategies to foster a more inclusive and supportive start-up ecosystem for women in India (Mohajan, 2018).

3.1. Research Design

The research design for this study employs a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively explore the impact of women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India. The study combines qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, to gather in-depth insights and narratives from women entrepreneurs, stakeholders, and experts. Additionally, quantitative data are utilized to provide a broader understanding of the trends, patterns, and statistical significance within the research population. By integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods, this research design ensures a comprehensive and robust examination of the subject matter, allowing for a deeper understanding of the experiences, challenges, and outcomes of women entrepreneurs within the start-up ecosystem in India (Wossen et al., 2022).

3.2. Sampling and Participant Selection

The sampling and participant selection for this study are carried out with careful consideration to ensure a diverse and representative sample of women entrepreneurs in the Indian start-up ecosystem. The sampling process involves identifying and recruiting participants from different sectors, geographical locations, and stages of entrepreneurship. Purposive sampling is used to select participants who possess relevant experiences, perspectives, and insights related to women empowerment and the start-up ecosystem (Bowen, 2009). Efforts are made to include participants from various backgrounds, including different age groups, educational levels, and socioeconomic backgrounds, to capture a wide range of experiences and perspectives. The sample size is determined based on data saturation, ensuring that sufficient data is collected to address the research objectives and provide comprehensive insights into the impact of women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India (Bowen, 2009).

3.3. Data Collection

Data collection for this study involves a combination of primary and secondary sources. Primary data is collected through qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations with women entrepreneurs, stakeholders, and experts in the Indian start-up ecosystem. These methods allow for the exploration of personal experiences, motivations, challenges, and strategies employed by women entrepreneurs (Mohajan, 2018). Additionally, secondary data is gathered from relevant sources such as academic journals, reports, and government publications to supplement and validate the findings. The use of both primary and secondary data enhances the rigor and validity of the research, providing a comprehensive understanding of the impact of women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India. Strict ethical guidelines and confidentiality measures are implemented to ensure the privacy and anonymity of participants throughout the data collection process.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study employs a rigorous and systematic approach to make sense of the collected data. Qualitative data, including interview transcripts, focus group discussions, and field notes, are analysed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying patterns, themes, and categories within the data. This process includes coding the data, organizing codes into themes, and interpreting the meaning behind these themes (Bowen, 2009). Quantitative data, obtained from surveys and statistical analysis, are analysed using appropriate statistical techniques to identify trends, correlations, and significant findings. The integration of qualitative and quantitative data allows for a comprehensive and holistic analysis of the research findings, providing a deeper understanding of the impact of women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India. The data analysis process is conducted with rigor, transparency, and attention to detail, ensuring the reliability and validity of the study's conclusions.

4. Findings

The findings of this study reveal significant insights into the impact of women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India. The research highlights that women entrepreneurs, when provided with the necessary support and resources, have the potential to contribute to economic growth, job creation, and innovation. It is evident that women empowerment through entrepreneurship challenges gender norms, promotes gender equality, and fosters a more inclusive society. The findings also shed light on the specific challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, such as limited access to finance, networking opportunities, and balancing work-family responsibilities. Additionally, the study identifies key support mechanisms, including financial initiatives, mentorship programs, and networking platforms, that play a crucial role in empowering women entrepreneurs. These findings have important implications for policymakers, organizations, and stakeholders in shaping a more supportive and inclusive start-up ecosystem that harnesses the full potential of women entrepreneurs in India (De Clercq et al., 2023).

4.1. Themes and Patterns

The analysis of data in this study reveals several prominent themes and patterns related to women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India. Firstly, a recurring theme is the significance of access to financial resources, with women entrepreneurs facing challenges in securing funding due to gender biases and stereotypes. Another prominent theme is the role of mentorship and networking, as women entrepreneurs benefit greatly from supportive networks and mentorship programs that provide guidance, expertise, and opportunities for growth. Additionally, the findings highlight the importance of overcoming societal barriers and gender norms, as women entrepreneurs challenge traditional roles and inspire others through their success stories. Moreover, the themes of work-life balance, navigating male-dominated industries, and the need for gender-responsive policies emerge as crucial factors that impact women entrepreneurs' experiences. These identified themes and patterns provide valuable insights for policymakers, organizations, and stakeholders to develop targeted strategies and initiatives that foster an inclusive and supportive environment for women entrepreneurs in India.

4.2. Opportunities for Women in the Start-up Ecosystem

The analysis of data in this study identifies various opportunities for women within the start-up ecosystem in India (Aljarodi et al., 2022). Firstly, there is an increasing recognition of the untapped potential of women entrepreneurs, leading to the development of initiatives and programs specifically designed to support and empower them. These opportunities include dedicated funding schemes, incubators, and accelerators that provide financial and mentorship support, as well as access to networks and resources (Ojong et al., 2021). Additionally, there is a growing emphasis on promoting diversity and inclusion within the start-up ecosystem, creating a favourable environment for women entrepreneurs to thrive. This includes initiatives that encourage gender-balanced teams, promote women-led ventures, and provide platforms for networking and collaboration (Kaciak et al., 2020). Furthermore, the digital revolution and advancements in technology have opened up new avenues and opportunities for women entrepreneurs, enabling them to leverage digital platforms, e-commerce, and digital marketing to reach wider markets and scale their businesses (Aljarodi et al., 2022). These opportunities highlight the potential for women to make significant contributions to the start-up ecosystem and play a vital role in driving economic growth and innovation in India (Kaciak et al., 2020).

4.3. Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs

The analysis of data in this study uncovers several challenges faced by women entrepreneurs within the start-up ecosystem in India. These challenges can be categorized into various dimensions (Ozkan-Canbolat et al., 2016). Firstly, access to finance emerges as a significant hurdle, with women entrepreneurs experiencing difficulties in obtaining funding due to gender biases, lack of collateral, and limited access to networks and resources (Kawai et al., 2023). Secondly, gender stereotypes and biases persist, affecting women entrepreneurs' credibility and opportunities. They face skepticism and bias from investors, customers, and partners, leading to limited support and market opportunities (Welsh et al., 2016). Thirdly, the work-life balance challenge is prominent, as women entrepreneurs navigate the demands of running a business while fulfilling traditional gender roles and responsibilities, such as caregiving and household duties (Kaciak et al., 2020). This often leads to time constraints and the need for flexible support systems. Lastly, women entrepreneurs face barriers in networking and mentorship, with limited access to supportive networks, industry connections, and mentorship opportunities compared to their male counterparts (Kawai et al., 2023). Addressing these challenges is crucial to creating a more inclusive and enabling environment for women entrepreneurs to succeed and thrive in the start-up ecosystem in India (Kaciak et al., 2020).

4.4. Support Mechanisms and Initiatives

Support mechanisms and initiatives play a crucial role in addressing the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs within the start-up ecosystem in India. Firstly, financial support mechanisms have been established to bridge the gender gap in access to funding (De Clercq et al., 2023). Government-backed initiatives, such as dedicated funds and schemes, provide financial assistance, grants, and loans to women entrepreneurs (Agrawal et al., 2017). Private sector organizations and angel investors also play a vital role by investing in women-led start-ups and providing mentorship along with financial support. These mechanisms not only enable women entrepreneurs to secure the necessary capital for their ventures but also contribute to their credibility and growth potential (Chaudhari et al., 2021a).

Secondly, mentorship programs and networking initiatives have been developed to provide guidance and support to women entrepreneurs (Das et al., 2020). Mentorship programs connect women entrepreneurs with experienced mentors who provide valuable insights, advice, and guidance based on their own entrepreneurial experiences (Zhong et al., 2021). These mentors offer support in areas such as business strategy, market knowledge, and personal development. Networking initiatives, on the other hand, create platforms for women entrepreneurs to connect with industry professionals, investors, and peers. These networks facilitate knowledge sharing, collaboration, and access to resources, enabling women entrepreneurs to expand their professional networks and gain visibility in the start-up ecosystem (Das et al., 2020).

In addition to financial and mentoring support, capacity-building programs and skill development initiatives have been established to enhance the entrepreneurial capabilities of women (Chaudhari et al., 2021a). These programs offer training and workshops on various aspects of business management, including finance, marketing, leadership, and technology. Capacity-building programs not only equip women entrepreneurs with essential skills but also empower them with the knowledge and confidence needed to navigate the challenges of entrepreneurship successfully (Das et al., 2020). Moreover, these initiatives create opportunities for women entrepreneurs to learn from experts, gain new perspectives, and stay updated with the latest trends and practices in the industry (Chaudhari et al., 2021a).

4.5. Economic and Social Impact of Women Empowerment

The analysis of data in this study reveals the significant economic and social impact of women empowerment within the start-up ecosystem in India (Basu et al., 2015). Firstly, from an economic perspective, women empowerment through entrepreneurship contributes to job creation and economic growth. Women-led start-ups have the potential to generate employment opportunities, not only for women but also for others within their ventures. By providing opportunities for women to participate actively in the economy and contribute their skills and expertise, women empowerment contributes to a more diverse and inclusive entrepreneurial landscape, leading to increased innovation, productivity, and competitiveness.

Secondly, women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem has substantial social implications. It challenges traditional gender roles and norms, promoting gender equality and women's participation in decision-making processes (Chaudhari et al., 2021b). Women entrepreneurs serve as role models, inspiring other women and girls to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations and break barriers. This shift in social norms fosters a more inclusive society, where women are recognized and valued for their entrepreneurial achievements and contributions. Additionally, women empowerment through entrepreneurship enhances women's agency and self-confidence, enabling them to make informed decisions, exercise leadership, and drive positive social change within their communities.

Moreover, women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem promotes gender-balanced representation and diversity. By providing equal opportunities and support to women entrepreneurs, the start-up ecosystem becomes more inclusive and reflective of the diverse perspectives and experiences of the population. This diversity leads to a wider range of ideas, solutions, and innovations, benefiting society as a whole (Chaudhari et al., 2021b).

5. Discussion

5.1. Women Empowerment as Catalyst for Economic Growth

Women empowerment has emerged as a powerful catalyst for economic growth, both globally and in the context of India. When women are empowered, they can actively participate in economic activities, contribute their skills and knowledge, and drive positive change in society. There are several ways in which women empowerment fuels economic growth.

Firstly, empowering women by providing them with access to education and skill development opportunities equips them with the necessary tools to enter the workforce and pursue entrepreneurial ventures. Educated and skilled women contribute to a more productive workforce, leading to increased innovation, efficiency, and competitiveness. By harnessing the untapped potential of women, economies can benefit from their talents, creativity, and unique perspectives.

Secondly, women empowerment promotes gender equality and breaks down barriers that limit women's economic participation. It challenges gender norms and biases, ensuring that women have equal access to employment opportunities, promotions, and leadership positions (Chaudhari et al., 2021b). This not only creates a fairer and more inclusive society but also allows economies to benefit from the full utilization of human capital. Increased female labor force participation and women's representation in decision-making positions drive economic growth and foster sustainable development (Kaciak et al., 2020).

Furthermore, women's economic empowerment has a multiplier effect on communities and societies. Studies have shown that women tend to invest a higher proportion of their income in education, health, and well-being of their families (Singh, 2021). This investment in human capital translates into improved health outcomes, better education for children, and overall socio-economic development. As a result, empowering women leads to the upliftment of entire communities and contributes to poverty reduction.

In the Indian context, women's empowerment through entrepreneurship has gained significant momentum. The start-up ecosystem in India has witnessed the rise of women entrepreneurs who are breaking barriers, driving innovation, and creating employment opportunities (Bharat Chillakuri et al., 2020). By supporting and empowering women entrepreneurs, India can leverage their potential to generate economic growth, promote inclusive development, and achieve its sustainable development goals.

In conclusion, women empowerment serves as a catalyst for economic growth by enabling women's active participation in the workforce, promoting gender equality, and driving positive social change (Jain Ph et al., 2016). By recognizing and investing in women's potential, societies and economies can unlock new opportunities, harness innovation, and achieve more inclusive and sustainable development.

5.2. Overcoming Gendered Challenges in the Start-up Ecosystem

Overcoming gendered challenges in the start-up ecosystem is crucial for creating a more inclusive and equitable environment that supports the success of women entrepreneurs. Several strategies and initiatives can be implemented to address these challenges effectively (Jain Ph et al., 2016).

Firstly, promoting gender-responsive policies and regulations is essential. Governments and organizations should enact and enforce policies that eliminate gender biases and promote equal opportunities for women entrepreneurs (B Chillakuri et al., 2020). This includes addressing discriminatory practices in access to funding, providing incentives for gender-balanced teams, and implementing measures to ensure fair treatment and equal opportunities in business and investment processes (Singh, 2021).

Secondly, providing targeted financial support and resources is vital to address the funding gap faced by women entrepreneurs. Initiatives such as dedicated funds, grants, and loans specifically designed for women can help bridge the financing barrier (Gherardil, 1994). Moreover, financial institutions and investors should adopt inclusive investment practices and actively support women-led ventures. Mentorship programs and networking initiatives can also play a significant role in connecting women entrepreneurs with mentors, investors, and industry experts who can provide guidance, advice, and valuable connections (Agrawal et al., 2017).

Thirdly, fostering a supportive ecosystem that encourages networking and collaboration is essential. Creating platforms and communities where women entrepreneurs can connect, share experiences, and learn from each other can help overcome isolation and provide a strong support system. Women-specific incubators, accelerators, and co-working spaces can provide tailored support, resources, and mentorship opportunities (Welsh et al., 2016).

Additionally, investing in entrepreneurship education and skill development for women is crucial. By providing access to training programs, workshops, and capacity-building initiatives, women entrepreneurs can enhance their business acumen, develop essential skills, and gain the confidence to navigate the challenges they face (De Clercq et al., 2023).

Furthermore, raising awareness about the contributions and success stories of women entrepreneurs is important to challenge stereotypes and biases. Celebrating and showcasing the achievements of women entrepreneurs can inspire and motivate other women to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations (De Clercq et al., 2023).

Lastly, creating a culture of inclusivity and diversity within the start-up ecosystem is essential. Organizations and leaders should actively promote gender equality, challenge gender biases, and ensure equal opportunities for all entrepreneurs (Agrawal et al., 2017). This includes fostering a work environment that values diversity, implementing flexible policies to support work-life balance, and encouraging the inclusion of women in decision-making processes.

By implementing these strategies and initiatives, the start-up ecosystem can break down the gendered barriers and create a more supportive and inclusive environment for women entrepreneurs to thrive. Overcoming gendered challenges will not only benefit women entrepreneurs but also contribute to economic growth, innovation, and social progress (Zhong et al., 2021).

5.3. Role of Support Mechanisms and Policy Interventions

Support mechanisms and policy interventions play a crucial role in addressing the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and promoting their empowerment within the start-up ecosystem (Ali et al., 2022). These mechanisms and interventions are essential for creating a supportive environment that enables women to overcome barriers and succeed in their entrepreneurial endeavours.

Support mechanisms, such as mentorship programs, networking platforms, and access to finance, provide critical resources and support to women entrepreneurs. Mentorship programs connect women entrepreneurs with experienced mentors who can provide guidance, share their knowledge, and offer valuable insights based on their own entrepreneurial journeys. These relationships can help women entrepreneurs navigate challenges, build their confidence, and expand their professional networks. Networking platforms and communities provide opportunities for collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and access to resources, enabling women entrepreneurs to connect with like-minded individuals, potential investors, and mentors. Access to finance is another key support mechanism, as it helps women entrepreneurs overcome the funding gap and secure the necessary capital to start and scale their ventures (Gherardil, 1994).

Policy interventions are equally important in creating an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs. Gender-responsive policies can help address systemic biases and discrimination that women face in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. These policies may include measures to promote equal access to funding, eliminate gender-based barriers in business regulations, and create incentives for gender diversity in leadership positions. Governments can also establish dedicated funds and financial schemes that specifically target women entrepreneurs, providing them with the necessary financial support and resources to launch and grow their businesses. Additionally, policies that promote entrepreneurship education, skill development, and capacity-building programs for women can enhance their entrepreneurial capabilities and increase their chances of success (Singh, 2021).

By combining support mechanisms and policy interventions, the start-up ecosystem can foster an environment that empowers women entrepreneurs. These measures not only address the gender-specific challenges but also promote diversity, innovation, and economic growth (Gherardil, 1994). Moreover, support mechanisms and policy interventions have the potential to create a multiplier effect by inspiring more women to pursue entrepreneurship, generating employment opportunities, and contributing to the overall socio-economic development of the country (Jain Ph et al., 2016).

5.4. Implications for Future Research and Practice

The study of women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India provides valuable insights and highlights the need for further research and action to address the challenges and harness the potential of women entrepreneurs. The findings of this study have several implications for future research and practice in this field.

Firstly, there is a need for more in-depth research that explores the intersectionality of women's experiences in the start-up ecosystem. Future studies can examine how factors such as age, socioeconomic background, and geographical location intersect with gender to shape the challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurs. This will provide a more nuanced understanding of the diverse experiences of women and enable the development of tailored support mechanisms and interventions.

Secondly, future research can focus on evaluating the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms and initiatives for women entrepreneurs. It is important to assess the impact of mentorship programs, networking platforms, and financial support mechanisms on the success and growth of women-led start-ups. This evaluation will help identify best practices, areas for improvement, and inform evidence-based policy recommendations.

Furthermore, research can explore the role of technology and digital platforms in promoting women empowerment within the start-up ecosystem. The digital revolution has opened up new opportunities for women entrepreneurs, and understanding the ways in which they leverage technology can provide insights into effective strategies and tools for their success.

In terms of practice, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of implementing and scaling up support mechanisms for women entrepreneurs. Organizations, policymakers, and stakeholders should collaborate to create a more inclusive and enabling environment. This includes establishing mentorship programs, networking initiatives, and financial support mechanisms that specifically target women entrepreneurs. Additionally, creating awareness and promoting gender equality within the start-up ecosystem should be prioritized, with a focus on challenging biases, providing equal opportunities, and fostering diversity.

In conclusion, the implications for future research and practice in the field of women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India call for further exploration of intersectionality, evaluation of existing support mechanisms, understanding the role of technology, and concerted efforts to implement inclusive practices. By addressing these implications, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers can work together to create a more supportive, equitable, and thriving ecosystem for women entrepreneurs in India.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research paper has shed light on the impact of women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India. It has highlighted the significant role of support mechanisms, policy interventions, and the overcoming of gendered challenges in fostering the success of women entrepreneurs. The findings emphasize the economic and social benefits of empowering women, such as job creation, innovation, and gender equality. The study also emphasizes the need for further research and action to address the specific challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and to optimize support mechanisms and policy interventions. By creating an enabling environment that promotes inclusivity, equal opportunities, and access to resources, India can unlock the untapped potential of women entrepreneurs, leading to sustainable economic growth, social progress, and a more equitable society.

6.1. Summary of Findings

The findings of this research paper highlight the significant impact of women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India. The study reveals that support mechanisms and policy interventions play a crucial role in addressing gendered challenges and creating an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs. Financial support, mentorship programs, networking initiatives, and capacity-building programs are essential in overcoming barriers and promoting the success of women entrepreneurs. The study also emphasizes the economic and social benefits of women empowerment, including job creation, innovation, and gender equality. These findings call for further research and action to optimize support mechanisms, policy interventions, and inclusive practices in the start-up ecosystem, ultimately leading to sustainable economic growth and social progress.

6.2. Recommendations for Policymakers and Stakeholders

Based on the findings of this research, several recommendations can be made for policymakers and stakeholders to further support women empowerment through the start-up ecosystem in India. Firstly, it is crucial to implement and strengthen gender-responsive policies that promote equal access to funding, eliminate discriminatory practices, and incentivize gender diversity. Additionally, policymakers should focus on expanding financial support mechanisms, mentorship programs, and networking platforms tailored specifically for women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, investing in entrepreneurship education and skill development for women, as well as fostering a culture of inclusivity and diversity, are vital. Policymakers and stakeholders should collaborate to raise awareness about the contributions of women entrepreneurs and challenge gender biases. By implementing these recommendations, policymakers and stakeholders can create an enabling environment that nurtures and empowers women entrepreneurs, driving sustainable economic growth, innovation, and social progress in India.

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