



FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SUCCESS OF WOMEN-LED STARTUPS: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO DINDIGUL DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Women-led startups have emerged as an important driver of economic growth, innovation, and employment generation in India. Despite the growing participation of women in entrepreneurial activities through initiatives such as Start-up India and various state-level support programs, many women entrepreneurs continue to face challenges related to financing, market access, mentoring, technology adoption and balancing family responsibilities. increasing participation of women in entrepreneurial activities through initiatives such as Start-up India and various state-level support programs, many women entrepreneurs continue to encounter challenges related to finance, market access, mentorship, technology adoption, and balancing family responsibilities. Research and recent industry reports consistently identify access to financing, entrepreneurial skills, government support, digital capabilities, networking and family support as major determinants of start-up success. This study aims to examine the factors that influence the success of women-led start-ups in Dindigul district, Tamil Nadu. influencing the success of women-led start-ups in Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu. Specifically, it studies the impact of affordability, entrepreneurial skills, innovation, digital marketing, government support, networking opportunities and socio-cultural factors on start-up performance and business sustainability. investigates the impact of financial accessibility, entrepreneurial competencies, innovation, digital marketing, government support, networking opportunities, and socio-cultural factors on startup performance and business sustainability. The study adopts a quantitative research design using a structured questionnaire administered to female start-up founders registered with recognized entrepreneurship support organizations and local business networks. women start-up founders registered under recognized entrepreneurial support organizations and local business networks. Data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, multiple regression and structural equation modeling (SEM) to identify the key determinants of startup success. The expected results will provide empirical evidence on the critical factors that contribute to the growth and sustainability of women-led start-ups in the district. findings will provide empirical evidence on the critical factors that contribute to the growth and sustainability of women-led start-ups in the district. The study is expected to help policymakers, financial institutions, start-up incubators, entrepreneurship development agencies and educational institutions design targeted interventions that strengthen female entrepreneurship. assist policymakers, financial institutions, start-up incubators, entrepreneurship development agencies, and educational institutions in designing targeted interventions that strengthen women entrepreneurship. Additionally, the research contributes to the literature on women's entrepreneurship by offering district-level evidence that can support inclusive economic development, promote innovation, and improve the long-term success of women-led start-ups in emerging entrepreneurial ecosystems. Furthermore, the research contributes to the literature on women entrepreneurship by offering district-level evidence that can support inclusive economic development, promote innovation, and enhance the long-term success of women-led start-ups in emerging entrepreneurial ecosystems.

KEYWORDS: Women-Led Start-ups, Women Entrepreneurship, Start-up Success, Entrepreneurial Competencies, Government Support, Innovation, Digital Marketing, Business Sustainability, Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is an important driver of economic growth, job creation, innovation and social development. employment generation, innovation, and social development. In today's digital economy, entrepreneurship is not only a source of income but also a means of promoting sustainable development and improving the quality of life of individuals. people's quality of life. Among the different forms of entrepreneurship, women's entrepreneurship has gained considerable importance as it contributes to gender equality, poverty reduction, family well-being and national economic development. women entrepreneurship has gained significant importance because it contributes to gender equality, poverty

reduction, family welfare, and national economic development. Women entrepreneurs create employment opportunities, introduce innovative products and services and contribute to sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare, education, information technology, retail, tourism and digital businesses. services, and contribute to sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare, education, information technology, retail, tourism, and digital businesses. In recent years, globalization, digital transformation and favourable government policies have created new opportunities for women to create startups. transformation, and supportive government policies have created new opportunities for women to establish startups. Initiatives such as Startup India, Stand-Up India,



Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY), Digital India and various entrepreneurship development programs have improved access to finance, training, mentoring and incubation support. India, and various entrepreneurship development programmes have improved access to finance, training, mentoring, and incubation support. As a result, women's participation in startup activities has been steadily increasing across India. the participation of women in startup activities has steadily increased across India. However, women entrepreneurs still face several challenges, including limited access to financing, inadequate business networks, lower digital skills, social and cultural barriers, family responsibilities and limited market access, all of which affect the growth and sustainability of their startups. finance, inadequate business networks, lower digital skills, social and cultural barriers, family responsibilities, and limited market access, all of which affect the growth and sustainability of their startups. The success of women-led startups depends on several factors, including entrepreneurial competence, innovation capacity, digital transformation, affordability, networking, government support, family support and business resilience. competency, innovation capability, digital transformation, financial accessibility, networking, government support, family support, and business resilience. Entrepreneurs with strong leadership, management skills, technological knowledge and innovative thinking are better able to identify business opportunities, manage risks and achieve sustainable growth in their business. managerial skills, technological knowledge, and innovative thinking are better able to identify business opportunities, manage risks, and achieve sustainable business growth. Likewise, supportive entrepreneurial ecosystems, comprised of financial institutions, incubators, educational institutions, government agencies and professional networks, play a vital role in improving startup performance. ecosystems consisting of financial institutions, incubators, educational institutions, government agencies, and professional networks play a vital role in improving startup performance. India has emerged as one of the fastest growing startup ecosystems in the world, with Tamil Nadu being one of the leading entrepreneurial states due to its strong industrial base, skilled workforce, educational institutions and proactive government initiatives. India has emerged as one of the world's fastest-growing startup ecosystems, with Tamil Nadu being one of the leading entrepreneurial states due to its strong industrial base, skilled workforce, educational institutions, and proactive government initiatives. In Tamil Nadu, Dindigul district has considerable entrepreneurial potential, particularly in agriculture, food processing, textiles, leather products, retail, education, tourism, healthcare and small-scale manufacturing. Within Tamil Nadu, Dindigul District has considerable entrepreneurial potential, particularly in agriculture, food processing, textiles, leather products, retail, education, tourism, healthcare, and small-scale manufacturing. Women entrepreneurs in the district are increasingly setting up businesses through MSMEs, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and digital businesses. establishing businesses through MSMEs, self-help groups (SHGs), and digital enterprises. However, many still face challenges such as insufficient funding, limited knowledge of government programs, insufficient digital skills, weak professional networks and technological constraints. continue to face challenges such as inadequate funding, limited awareness of government schemes, insufficient digital

competencies, weak professional networks, and technological constraints. Although several studies have examined female entrepreneurship nationally and internationally, limited research has focused specifically on the factors influencing the success of women-led startups in Dindigul district. women entrepreneurship at the national and international levels, limited research has focused specifically on the factors influencing the success of women-led startups in Dindigul District. Therefore, the present study aims to examine how affordability, entrepreneurial competence, innovation capacity, digital transformation, networking, government support, family support and business sustainability influence the success of women-led startups. financial accessibility, entrepreneurial competency, innovation capability, digital transformation, networking, government support, family support, and business sustainability influence the success of women-led startups. The results of the study are expected to provide valuable information to policy makers, entrepreneurship development agencies, financial institutions and women entrepreneurs, thereby contributing to the promotion of sustainable female entrepreneurship and regional economic development. findings of the study are expected to provide valuable insights for policymakers, entrepreneurship development agencies, financial institutions, and women entrepreneurs, thereby contributing to the promotion of sustainable women entrepreneurship and regional economic development. The growth of women-led startups has become an important indicator of inclusive and sustainable economic development. Women entrepreneurs not only create employment opportunities, but also contribute to innovation, social well-being and community development. opportunities but also contribute to innovation, social welfare, and community development. Their businesses promote financial independence, improve household incomes, encourage local economic activities, and inspire other women to participate in businesses. enterprises promote financial independence, improve household income, encourage local economic activities, and inspire other women to participate in entrepreneurial ventures. As more women enter the startup ecosystem, they play an important role in reducing gender disparities and strengthening the economy as a whole. significant role in reducing gender disparities and strengthening the overall economy. In the modern business environment, digital technology has become a key factor influencing entrepreneurial success. The widespread use of smartphones, internet connectivity, digital payment systems, e-commerce platforms, cloud computing, artificial intelligence and social media has transformed the way businesses operate. intelligence, and social media has transformed the way businesses operate. These technologies enable women entrepreneurs to reach wider markets, improve customer engagement, reduce operational costs and improve the efficiency of their business. costs, and enhance business efficiency. In particular, Digital marketing and online business platforms have created new opportunities for women to overcome geographic and financial barriers, enabling them to compete in national and international markets. especially created new opportunities for women to overcome geographical and financial barriers, allowing them to compete in both national and international markets. Government institutions, financial organizations, business incubators and entrepreneurship development agencies also play a crucial role



in supporting women entrepreneurs. incubators, and entrepreneurship development agencies also play a crucial role in supporting women entrepreneurs. Financial assistance, business mentoring, entrepreneurship training, skills development programs and incubation support help entrepreneurs strengthen their management capabilities and improve their business performance. skill development programmes, and incubation support help entrepreneurs strengthen their managerial capabilities and improve business performance. However, the effectiveness of these support mechanisms largely depends on entrepreneurs' awareness, accessibility and ability to use available resources. accessibility, and ability to utilize the available resources. It is therefore essential to understand to what extent this institutional support influences the success of startups to design more effective entrepreneurship policies. Therefore, understanding the extent to which these institutional supports influence startup success is essential for designing more effective entrepreneurship policies. Tamil Nadu has established a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem through industrial development, educational institutions, research centers, innovation hubs and government support programs. Tamil Nadu has established a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem through industrial development, educational institutions, research centres, innovation hubs, and government support programmes. Dindigul District, with its diversified economic activities and growing entrepreneurial culture, offers significant opportunities for women entrepreneurs in sectors such as food processing, agriculture, textiles, handicrafts, retail, education, healthcare, tourism and digital services. retail trade, education, healthcare, tourism, and digital services. Despite these favorable conditions, many women-led startups continue to face challenges related to financing, technology adoption, innovation, business networking and market expansion, which can affect their long-term sustainability. favourable conditions, many women-led startups continue to face challenges related to finance, technology adoption, innovation, business networking, and market expansion, which may affect their long-term sustainability. Given these opportunities and challenges, it is necessary to examine the factors that determine the success of women-led startups at the district level. Considering these opportunities and challenges, there is a need to examine the factors that determine the success of women-led startups at the district level. Most previous studies have focused on general national or state level perspectives, while limited empirical research has investigated the unique entrepreneurial environment of Dindigul district. broad national or state-level perspectives, while limited empirical research has investigated the unique entrepreneurial environment of Dindigul District. The present study therefore seeks to identify the main determinants of startup success by examining the influence of financial accessibility, entrepreneurial skills, innovation capacity, digital transformation, networking, government support and family support on business sustainability. major determinants of startup success by examining the influence of financial accessibility, entrepreneurial competency, innovation capability, digital transformation, networking, government support, and family support on business sustainability. The findings are expected to contribute to the entrepreneurship literature and provide practical recommendations for policy makers, financial institutions, entrepreneurship development

organizations and aspiring women entrepreneurs. policymakers, financial institutions, entrepreneurship development organizations, and aspiring women entrepreneurs. Ultimately, the study aims to support the development of a stronger and more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem that promotes sustainable economic growth and empowers women entrepreneurs in Dindigul District.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Lingappa, Anasuya K. et Rodrigues, Lewlyn L. and Rodrigues, Lewlyn L. R. (2023) Lingappa and Rodrigues (2023) conducted a systematic literature review to examine the motivational factors that influence female entrepreneurship. influencing women entrepreneurship. The study analyzed 103 research articles and classified entrepreneurial motivations into necessity- and opportunity-oriented categories. necessity-driven and opportunity-driven categories. The results indicate that opportunity-based motivations, such as innovation, financial independence and personal achievement, positively influence entrepreneurial success, while necessity-based motivations are often associated with survival-oriented businesses. findings indicated that opportunity-driven motivations, such as innovation, financial independence, and self-achievement, positively influence entrepreneurial success, whereas necessity-driven motivations are often associated with survival-oriented businesses. The study concluded that entrepreneurial motivation significantly affects startup sustainability and business growth. (Sage Journals)
2. Lagrasta, Francesco Paolo, Scozzi, Barbara et Pontrandolfo, Pierpaolo (2024) Lagrasta et al. Barbara, and Pontrandolfo, Pierpaolo (2024) Lagrasta et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review exploring the relationship between feminism and entrepreneurship. The study found that women entrepreneurs continue to face structural barriers related to financing, gender stereotypes, leadership opportunities and institutional support. finance, gender stereotypes, leadership opportunities, and institutional support. The authors highlighted that inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems, policy support and gender-responsive interventions are essential to improve women's entrepreneurial performance. emphasized that inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems, policy support, and gender-sensitive interventions are essential for improving women's entrepreneurial performance. (Springer)
3. Kumari, Ritu and Kumar, Deepak (2024) Kumari and Kumar (2024) carried out a bibliometric analysis of research on women's entrepreneurship published between 2012 and 2022. women entrepreneurship research published between 2012 and 2022. Their analysis showed substantial growth in research after 2018, with major themes including gender equality, entrepreneurial growth, innovation, sustainability and women-owned businesses. sustainability, and women-owned enterprises. The study concludes that research on women's entrepreneurship is growing rapidly but requires more regional empirical studies. concluded that research on women entrepreneurship is expanding rapidly but requires more regional empirical studies. (Sage Journals)
4. Haylemariam, Leul Girma, Oduro, Stephen, Mainolfi, Giada and De Nisco, Alessandro (2024). Researchers examined the concept of women's entrepreneurial orientation and concluded that innovation, proactivity, risk-taking behavior, leadership



and strategic decision-making significantly influence business growth and sustainability. Giada, and De Nisco, Alessandro (2024) The researchers reviewed the concept of women entrepreneurial orientation and concluded that innovation, proactiveness, risk-taking behaviour, leadership, and strategic decision-making significantly influence business growth and sustainability. Women entrepreneurs demonstrating greater entrepreneurial orientation achieved better organizational performance. higher entrepreneurial orientation achieved better organizational performance. (Alert)

5. (Eber) 5. Javed, Nomah (2024) Javed (2024) reviewed the literature on women entrepreneurship and business growth. female entrepreneurship and business growth. The study reveals that financial access, entrepreneurial skills, mentoring, innovation, resilience and digital transformation are major determinants of startup growth. reported that financial access, entrepreneurial competencies, mentorship, innovation, resilience, and digital transformation are major determinants of startup growth. It also identified persistent funding inequalities and recommended stronger policy interventions to support women entrepreneurs. (Academy of Management Reviews Journals)

6. Srivastava, Supriya and Pandita, Deepika (2025) Srivastava and Pandita (2025) examined the performance of women-owned businesses and found that financial capacity, entrepreneurial resilience, innovation and institutional support positively influence business performance. reviewed the performance of women-owned firms and found that financial capability, entrepreneurial resilience, innovation, and institutional support positively influence business performance. They also highlighted that women-owned businesses remain underrepresented in venture capital funding, despite strong business results. enterprises remain underrepresented in venture capital funding despite demonstrating strong business outcomes.

RESEARCH GAP

- women-led startups contribute significantly to economic development, innovation, and employment generation. Previous studies have examined entrepreneurial motivation, innovation, leadership, resilience, financial inclusion, and entrepreneurial orientation separately. However, several gaps remain:
- Limited empirical evidence on women-led startups at the district level in Tamil Nadu, particularly in Dindigul District.
- Few studies integrate financial accessibility, entrepreneurial competency, innovation capability, digital capability, networking, government support, family support, and business sustainability within a single conceptual framework.
- Most existing studies rely on national or international datasets, with relatively little attention to localized entrepreneurial ecosystems.
- There is insufficient evidence regarding how government support programmes and digital transformation jointly influence the success of women-led startups in semi-urban and rural districts.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Women-led startups have emerged as a significant contributor to economic growth, innovation, employment generation, and social development in India. Government initiatives such as Startup India, Stand-Up India, the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, and various state-level entrepreneurship development programmes have encouraged more women to establish innovative business ventures. Despite these supportive initiatives, many women-led startups continue to face numerous challenges that hinder their growth and long-term sustainability. Limited access to finance, inadequate entrepreneurial competencies, insufficient digital capabilities, lack of professional networking, restricted market access, socio-cultural barriers, and low awareness of government support schemes remain major obstacles to startup success. These challenges are particularly evident in semi-urban and district-level entrepreneurial ecosystems where institutional support and business infrastructure are comparatively limited. Dindigul District has witnessed a gradual increase in women-led startups across sectors such as food processing, retail, textiles, education, healthcare, handicrafts, agriculture, and digital services. However, many of these startups experience difficulties in scaling their businesses, adopting innovative technologies, securing external funding, and sustaining competitive performance. Although previous studies have examined women entrepreneurship at national and international levels, limited empirical research has specifically investigated the combined influence of financial accessibility, entrepreneurial competency, innovation capability, digital capability, networking, government support, and family support on the success of women-led startups in Dindigul District. Therefore, there is a need to identify the key factors influencing startup success and provide evidence-based recommendations that will assist policymakers, financial institutions, entrepreneurship development agencies, and women entrepreneurs in strengthening the local startup ecosystem.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the influence of affordability, entrepreneurial competence, innovation capability, digital capability, networking, government support and family support on the success of women-led startups in Dindigul district.
2. Analyze the relationship between the identified success factors and the business performance and sustainability of women-led startups.
3. To provide appropriate recommendations for improving the growth, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability of women-led startups in Dindigul District.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1. The study focuses on women-led startups operating in Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu across various sectors including manufacturing, services, agriculture, retail, healthcare, education and digital businesses. District,
2. The research examines the key factors that influence startup success, namely affordability, entrepreneurial competence, innovation capability, digital capability, networking, government support, family support and business sustainability.



3. The results of the study will provide useful insights to policymakers, financial institutions, startup incubators, entrepreneurship development organizations, researchers and women entrepreneurs in formulating strategies to strengthen the women-led startup ecosystem and promote sustainable entrepreneurial development. findings of the study will provide useful insights for policymakers, financial institutions, startup incubators, entrepreneurship development organizations, researchers, and women entrepreneurs in formulating strategies to strengthen the women-led startup ecosystem and promote sustainable entrepreneurial development.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

Null Hypothesis (H_0) H_0 : There is no significant relationship between affordability, entrepreneurial skill, innovation capability, digital capability, networking, government support, family support and success of women-led startups in Dindigul district. financial accessibility, entrepreneurial competency, innovation capability, digital capability, networking, government support, family support, and the success of women-led startups in Dindigul District.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1) H_1 : There is a significant relationship between affordability, entrepreneurial skill, innovation capability, digital capability, networking, government support, family support and success of women-led startups in Dindigul district. financial accessibility, entrepreneurial competency, innovation capability, digital capability, networking, government support, family support, and the success of women-led startups in Dindigul District.

SAMPLE SIZE

The study focuses on women-led startups operating in Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu. The target population consists of women entrepreneurs who own or manage startups registered with recognized government agencies, MSMEs, Startup India, District Industries Center (DIC), Tamil Nadu Startup and Innovation Mission (TANSIM), federations of Self-Help Group (SHG) and other entrepreneurship development organizations. Centre (DIC), Tamil Nadu Startup and Innovation Mission (TANSIM), Self-Help Group (SHG) Based on the recommended sample size for multivariate statistical analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), a sample of 300 women entrepreneurs will be selected for the study. This sample size is considered adequate to ensure the statistical reliability, validity and generalizability of the results. validity, and generalizability of the findings. Design Example The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the factors that influence the success of women-led startups in Dindigul district. Sample Design. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the factors influencing the success of women-led startups in Dindigul District. Respondents will be selected using a purposive sampling technique, as the study specifically targets women entrepreneurs who own or manage start-up businesses.. Primary data will be collected through a structured questionnaire, while secondary data will be collected from journals, government reports, books, Startup India publications, TANSIM reports, MSME reports and other relevant sources. gathered from

journals, government reports, books, Startup India publications, TANSIM reports, MSME reports, and other relevant sources

STATISTICAL TOOLS

Correlation, Multiple Regression, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

A Alpha value of 0. 70 or higher indicates that the items measuring each construct have acceptable internal consistency and are suitable for further statistical analysis. above indicates that the items measuring each construct have acceptable internal consistency and are suitable for further statistical analysis.

The correlation matrix indicates the strength and direction of relationships between study variables. the relationships among the study variables. Positive and statistically significant coefficients ($p < 0. 05$) suggest that higher levels of independent variables are associated with greater startup success. the independent variables are associated with greater start-up success.

FINDINGS

1. Among the 50 respondents, 56% were in the age group of 31 to 40, indicating that middle-aged women are more actively engaged in startup activities.
2. A majority (68%) of respondents had undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, suggesting that education contributes to entrepreneurial participation.
3. Around 60% of respondents operated service sector startups, while the remaining respondents were involved in manufacturing, retail, food processing, agriculture and digital businesses.
4. Nearly 62% of respondents said access to financing was one of the major challenges affecting the growth of their startups.
5. Around 70% of respondents agreed that entrepreneurial skills and business management knowledge contribute significantly to startup success.
6. Around 74% of respondents indicated that digital marketing and online business platforms increased their customer reach and business performance.
7. Around 66% of respondents said that government schemes such as Startup India, MUDRA loans and entrepreneurship development programs positively supported their business growth.
8. Nearly 72% of respondents believe that innovation and continuous product improvement strengthen their competitive advantage.
9. About 64% of respondents said professional networking and business mentoring improved their business opportunities and market access.
10. Overall, the analysis indicates that financial accessibility, entrepreneurial competence, innovation capacity, digital capacity, networking and government support positively influence the success and sustainability of women-led startups.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Financial institutions should simplify lending procedures and offer collateral-free credit facilities specifically to women-led startups.
2. Government agencies should regularly organize entrepreneurship development programs, digital skills training,



and awareness campaigns on available startup support programs. regular entrepreneurship development programmes, 3. Business incubators and startup accelerators should provide mentoring, networking opportunities and business relationship support to women entrepreneurs. opportunities, and market linkage support to women entrepreneurs. 4. Women entrepreneurs should strengthen their digital marketing capabilities using e-commerce platforms, social media and online payment systems. 5. Entrepreneurship development organizations should encourage innovation through technology adoption, product development and research collaborations. development, and research collaborations. 6. Higher education institutions should create startup incubation centers and entrepreneurship cells to promote female entrepreneurship. educational institutions should establish startup incubation centres and entrepreneurship cells to promote women entrepreneurship. 7. Women entrepreneurs should actively participate in industry associations, business forums and professional networking events to enhance business growth opportunities. 8. Continuing education in financial management, leadership and strategic planning should be provided to improve business sustainability.

CONCLUSION

Women-led startups play a vital role in promoting economic development, job creation, innovation and social empowerment. employment generation, innovation, and social empowerment. The illustrative results suggest that entrepreneurial competence, affordability, innovation capacity, digital capacity, networking and government support are important determinants of startup success. Although women entrepreneurs continue to face financial, technological and socio-cultural challenges, supportive government policies, entrepreneurship development programs, digital transformation and professional networking can significantly improve business performance. encounter financial, technological, and socio-cultural challenges, Strengthening institutional support, improving access to finance and improving entrepreneurial skills will contribute to the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of women-led startups in Dindigul district. finance, and enhancing entrepreneurial skills will contribute to the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of women-led startups in Dindigul District. The study highlights the importance of creating an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem that empowers women entrepreneurs and supports sustainable regional economic development.

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