

The Moderating Role of Relational Support and Entrepreneurial Skills on Women Entrepreneurs' Motivation and Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

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This paper explores the moderating effects of relational support and entrepreneurial skills on the motivation and sustainability of women entrepreneurs in India. Building on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this study assesses how relational support from family and friends, combined with entrepreneurial skills, strengthens the relationship between motivation and entrepreneurial sustainability. Using data collected from 396 women entrepreneurs, the findings reveal that higher levels of relational support and skills amplify the impact of motivation on sustainability. The study significantly contributes to the literature on women entrepreneurship in developing nations and provides practical recommendations for fostering supportive networks for entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurs, Self-Determination Theory, Relational Support, Entrepreneurial Skills, Motivation, Sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Women entrepreneurs face distinct challenges in pursuing entrepreneurial success, particularly in developing countries like India. Among these challenges are societal expectations, limited access to resources, and the need for relational support from family and friends. In this context, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers a valuable lens through which to understand the intrinsic motivation of entrepreneurs and how it impacts their sustainability. According to SDT, individuals are driven by their need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, significantly influencing their motivation to achieve entrepreneurial goals.

Relational support from family and friends and the development of entrepreneurial skills are important factors that can enhance an entrepreneur's intrinsic motivation and contribute to the sustainability of their ventures. Despite the growing body of research on women entrepreneurship, relatively little attention has been given to the moderating role of relational support and skills in influencing entrepreneurial sustainability. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining how these factors interact with motivation to affect the long-term sustainability of women entrepreneurs in India.

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the moderating role of relational support and entrepreneurial skills in strengthening the relationship between motivation and sustainability. The study also aims to provide practical insights into how women entrepreneurs can leverage their support networks and skills to ensure the success and longevity of their businesses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-Determination Theory and Entrepreneurial Motivation

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that individuals are motivated by their need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In the entrepreneurial context, motivation refers to the drive to engage in entrepreneurial activities,

overcome challenges, and achieve business goals. Entrepreneurs with high intrinsic motivation are more likely to take risks, innovate, and persist in facing difficulties (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Previous research has demonstrated that motivation is a key determinant of entrepreneurial success, particularly in challenging environments (Gok et al., 2021). This study considers motivation a crucial factor influencing the sustainability of women entrepreneurs in India. However, motivation alone may not be sufficient to ensure long-term success; relational support and entrepreneurial skills will likely play an important moderating role.

Relational Support and Entrepreneurial Success

Relational support refers to the assistance and encouragement that entrepreneurs receive from family members, friends, and other close relations. This support can be financial help, emotional encouragement, or practical advice. Previous studies have shown that relational support is an important predictor of entrepreneurial success, particularly for women entrepreneurs who may face additional resource access barriers (Tlaiss, 2018; Gupta & Mirchandani, 2018).

In the Indian context, where family structures are often closely knit, relational support is especially important for women entrepreneurs. The present study examines how relational support interacts with motivation to influence entrepreneurial sustainability. It is hypothesized that higher levels of relational support will enhance the effect of motivation on sustainability.

Entrepreneurial Skills as a Moderator

Entrepreneurial skills, including technical, managerial, and strategic competencies, are critical for the success and sustainability of entrepreneurial ventures. Skills enable entrepreneurs to identify opportunities, manage resources effectively, and respond to market changes. Prior research has demonstrated that individuals with higher entrepreneurial skills are more likely to succeed in their ventures (Neumeyer et al., 2018).

This study hypothesizes that entrepreneurial skills will moderate the relationship between motivation and sustainability. Entrepreneurs with higher skill levels are expected to be more effective at translating their motivation into sustainable business outcomes.

Three-Way Interaction: Motivation, Relational Support, and Skills

While the direct effects of relational support and entrepreneurial skills on sustainability are well-documented, relatively few studies have examined the three-way interaction between motivation, relational support, and skills. This study proposes that women entrepreneurs with high levels of relational support and entrepreneurial skills will be better able to leverage their motivation to achieve sustainability. The study aims to test this three-way interaction and provide new insights into how these factors influence entrepreneurial success.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Collection

This study collected data from 396 women entrepreneurs in the Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu, India. The sample was selected using systematic stratified random sampling, ensuring representation across various regional sectors and districts. The survey instrument was designed to measure key variables, including motivation, relational support, entrepreneurial skills, and sustainability.

Demographic data, including age, education, family type, and business experience, were also collected. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age (in years)	Below 25	2	0.5%
	26–35	34	8.6%

	36–45	185	47.0%
	46 and above	173	43.9%
Marital Status	Married	189	48.0%
	Unmarried	91	23.1%
	Divorced	49	12.4%
	Widow	65	16.5%
Education	Up to 8th grade	75	19.0%
	Senior secondary school	116	29.4%
	Undergraduate bachelor's degree	109	27.7%
	Professional and other degrees	94	23.9%

Measures

The key variables in this study were measured using validated scales adapted for the Indian context:

- **Motivation:** Measured using a 4-item scale that assesses respondents' intrinsic motivation to achieve business success and overcome challenges (Ryan & Deci, 2000).
- **Relational Support:** A 3-item scale was used to measure the extent of emotional, financial, and practical support provided by family and friends (Tlaiss, 2018).
- **Entrepreneurial Skills:** A 4-item scale measured the respondents' technical, managerial, and strategic competencies related to running their businesses (Neumeyer et al., 2018).
- **Sustainability:** The sustainability of the respondents' businesses was measured using a 5-item scale that assesses long-term business success (Shane, 2003).

All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) with the LISREL software and PROCESS macros to test the moderating effects of relational support and entrepreneurial skills. Model 3 of Hayes' PROCESS macros was employed to test the three-way interaction between motivation, relational support, and entrepreneurial skills.

RESULTS

Measurement Model

The measurement model was evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs used in the study. All factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, with values ranging from 0.72 to 0.82, indicating strong item reliability. The Cronbach's alpha values for the key constructs (motivation, relational support, entrepreneurial skills, and sustainability) were all above 0.70, confirming internal consistency. Specifically, Cronbach's alpha for motivation was 0.75. For relational support, it was 0.77. For entrepreneurial skills, it was 0.79, and for sustainability, it was 0.78.

The composite reliability (CR) values ranged between 0.85 and 0.90, demonstrating that the constructs reliably measured their respective domains. Average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.53 to 0.60, above the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating that the constructs possessed adequate convergent validity (Hair et al., 2018). These results suggest that the measures used in this study are both reliable and valid for examining the relationships between the key variables.

Descriptive Statistics

Before proceeding with hypothesis testing, we calculated the key variables' means, standard deviations, and correlations (Table 2). On average, women entrepreneurs reported high levels of motivation ($M = 4.1$, $SD = 0.54$) and moderate levels of relational support ($M = 3.8$, $SD = 0.63$). The correlation between motivation and sustainability was positive and significant ($r = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$), as was the correlation between entrepreneurial skills and sustainability ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$). These descriptive statistics provide initial support for the hypothesized relationships between the variables.

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Motivation	4.10	0.54	1.00			
2. Relational Support	3.80	0.63	0.28**	1.00		
3. Entrepreneurial Skills	4.00	0.61	0.31**	0.24**	1.00	
4. Sustainability	4.02	0.58	0.36**	0.30**	0.41**	1.00

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

Hypotheses Testing

H1: ESE is Positively Related to Motivation

The first step in testing the proposed model involved examining the direct relationship between Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) and motivation. Regression analysis revealed that ESE is a significant predictor of motivation ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 1. This result indicates that women entrepreneurs with higher levels of ESE are more motivated to succeed in their ventures. The positive and significant relationship suggests that self-efficacy fosters an intrinsic drive to achieve business goals and overcome challenges, essential for entrepreneurial success.

This finding aligns with prior research that established self-efficacy's importance in motivating individuals to pursue and persist in entrepreneurial activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000; McGee & Peterson, 2019). High self-efficacy enables entrepreneurs to set challenging goals and persist in adversity, thus enhancing their overall motivation to succeed.

H2: Motivation is Positively Related to Entrepreneurial Sustainability

The analysis confirmed that motivation is positively and significantly related to entrepreneurial sustainability ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.01$). Entrepreneurs who exhibit high levels of intrinsic motivation are more likely to sustain their businesses over the long term. This result supports Hypothesis 2 and underscores the importance of motivation as a driving force behind entrepreneurial success.

Motivated entrepreneurs are not only more likely to seize opportunities but also more likely to persist through challenges and uncertainties. As such, their businesses are more likely to survive and thrive in competitive markets. The positive relationship between motivation and sustainability suggests that entrepreneurs with a strong internal drive are better equipped to weather the ups and downs of entrepreneurial life, ensuring long-term viability for their ventures.

H3: Motivation Mediates the Relationship between ESE and Entrepreneurial Sustainability

A mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS macros to examine the mediating role of motivation. The results indicate that motivation partially mediates the relationship between ESE and entrepreneurial sustainability (indirect effect = 0.0212, $p < 0.01$). This supports Hypothesis 3, demonstrating that motivation acts as a bridge between ESE and sustainability. Women entrepreneurs with higher ESE are more motivated, and this increased motivation, in turn, enhances the sustainability of their businesses.

The mediation effect highlights the crucial role of motivation in translating self-efficacy into tangible business outcomes. While ESE directly influences sustainability, the indirect effect through motivation indicates that

entrepreneurs who believe in their abilities are more driven to succeed, further reinforcing their ventures' sustainability.

H2a: Relational Support and Skills Moderate the Relationship between Motivation and Sustainability

The most complex analysis in this study examined the three-way interaction between motivation, relational support, and entrepreneurial skills on sustainability. Using Model 3 of the PROCESS macros, the results showed that relational support and entrepreneurial skills significantly moderate the relationship between motivation and sustainability ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 2a.

Table 3: Results of Three-Way Interaction Testing

Interaction (Motivation × Relational Support × Skills)	Coefficient (β)	p-value
Motivation × Relational Support × Skills	0.36	<0.001

Interpretation of the Three-Way Interaction

The significant three-way interaction suggests that the positive effect of motivation on sustainability is strongest when both relational support and entrepreneurial skills are high. Entrepreneurs with strong support networks and well-developed skills can better channel their motivation into actions that promote long-term sustainability. Conversely, when relational support or entrepreneurial skills are low, the positive effect of motivation on sustainability is diminished.

The results suggest that relational support gives women entrepreneurs the emotional and practical resources needed to persist through challenges, while entrepreneurial skills give them the tools to make informed decisions and manage their businesses effectively. Together, these factors amplify the positive impact of motivation on sustainability, resulting in more resilient and successful businesses.

Visual Interpretation:

We can visualize the three-way interaction through slope analysis to better understand this interaction. Entrepreneurs with high motivation, high relational support, and high skills exhibit a steeper upward slope in their sustainability outcomes than those with lower support and skills. This indicates that relational support and skills do not merely add to motivation's impact but exponentially enhance it when all factors are aligned.

DISCUSSION:

The expanded findings from this study provide several important insights into the complex relationship between motivation, relational support, entrepreneurial skills, and sustainability. First, consistent with the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), intrinsic motivation is vital in driving entrepreneurial success. Entrepreneurs who are internally driven are more likely to engage in the actions needed to sustain their businesses over time. However, the strength of this relationship depends heavily on the support entrepreneurs receive from their social networks and the skills they bring to their businesses.

The significant three-way interaction indicates that relational support and entrepreneurial skills are critical motivation amplifiers. Women entrepreneurs who receive strong support from family and friends are more likely to overcome the psychological and practical barriers that hinder their entrepreneurial efforts. Similarly, entrepreneurs with well-developed skills can better translate their motivation into concrete actions that promote long-term business sustainability.

The findings of this study have important practical implications. First, policymakers and business support organizations should focus on strengthening the relational networks of women entrepreneurs, as these networks provide crucial support for sustaining businesses. Additionally, entrepreneurship training programs should emphasize the development of technical, managerial, and strategic skills, as these skills enhance the ability of motivated entrepreneurs to succeed in competitive markets.

CONCLUSION

This study significantly contributes to the literature on women's entrepreneurship by examining the moderating role of relational support and entrepreneurial skills on the relationship between motivation and sustainability. The findings suggest that fostering strong support networks and enhancing entrepreneurial skills are critical for the long-term success of women entrepreneurs. Future research should explore the role of other contextual factors, such as access to financial resources and mentorship, in promoting entrepreneurial sustainability.

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