
AN IN-DEPTH STUDY ON INDIAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS AND GLOBAL INNOVATION STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

In the global economy, women entrepreneurs are becoming increasingly important for innovation and inclusive growth. The innovative tactics of women entrepreneurs in Sweden, Nigeria, the United States, and India are examined in this cross-national study. It investigates how they propel company expansion while overcoming cultural barriers, restricted capital availability, and gender bias using empirical data and case studies.

Patterns in leadership, digital adoption, and market expansion are shown using a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative performance data with qualitative interviews. Themes like adaptation, digital transformation, and community focus are common despite regional variations. The report ends with policy recommendations for inclusive innovation ecosystems after highlighting important enablers like international collaborations, digital networks, and government funding.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurs; Innovation Strategies; Cross-Country Study; Global Business; Gender and Entrepreneurship; Inclusive Innovation; Digital Transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Women's entrepreneurial leadership has increased dramatically in the twenty-first century, defying convention and propelling global economic change (Elam et al., 2019; Acs, Szerb, & Lloyd, 2018). Women continue to demonstrate resilience and innovate for inclusive growth despite sociocultural constraints, restricted access to capital, and systematic gender biases. Through community-based models, sustainable practices, and technology, globalization and digitalization have enabled women to lead enterprises across industries, especially in emerging nations (GEM, 2020; Brush et al., 2018).

To provide comparative insights into how women entrepreneurs in Nigeria, Sweden, India, and the United States navigate various ecosystems to attain business sustainability and socio-economic impact, this study examines their innovative techniques. The results are intended to educate stakeholders and policymakers in support of inclusive, innovation-driven economies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Global Trends and Barriers: While women's entrepreneurial participation is rising globally, disparities persist due to socio-economic and institutional barriers (Brush et al., 2018; Minniti & Naudé, 2010). Supportive ecosystems are more prevalent in developed economies (Kelley et al., 2017), while patriarchal norms and weak institutions limit women in developing regions (Jamali, 2009; Brixiová et al., 2020). Common challenges include limited capital, constrained networks, and caregiving expectations (Amine & Staub, 2009; Roomi & Parrott, 2008; Welter et al., 2014).

Innovation Strategies in Women-Led Enterprises: Women entrepreneurs often innovate within creative, service, and social sectors, focusing on sustainability and collaboration rather than high-risk disruption (Marlow & McAdam, 2013; Foss et al., 2019; Brush et al., 2006; Gupta & Mirchandani, 2018; Hughes et al., 2012; Alsos et al., 2013).

Cultural and Cross-Country Influences: Cultural norms strongly affect entrepreneurial strategies, with Hofstede's framework explaining variations in leadership and risk-taking (Hofstede, 2001; Hayton et al., 2002). Studies highlight how outcomes differ across Nordic and South Asian contexts based on social capital and policy support (Sarfaraz et al., 2014; Shinnar et al., 2018).

Digital Transformation and Globalization: Digital tools have broadened global access for women entrepreneurs, especially post-pandemic, though gaps remain in low-income areas (OECD, 2021; UNCTAD, 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Web Foundation, 2020).

Policy and Institutional Support: Governmental and institutional backing—including funding, training, and procurement—are critical for fostering women's innovation (Estrin & Mickiewicz, 2011; Terjesen & Lloyd, 2015). Initiatives like WEConnect and SheTrades illustrate successful interventions (ITC, 2020; OECD, 2021), though implementation gaps persist.

Social Innovation and Leadership: Women often lead through participative and ethical models that emphasize community impact and long-term value (Calás et al., 2009; Eagly & Carli, 2003; McKinsey & Company, 2020), offering a gendered innovation approach that blends economic and social goals (Zahra et al., 2009).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the innovation strategies adopted by women entrepreneurs globally, with a focus on how digital transformation and global networks shape their strategic capacities.
2. To examine the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors influencing women-led innovation, and compare the challenges and enablers in both developed and developing economies.
3. To provide policy and practice-oriented recommendations for fostering inclusive and innovation-driven women entrepreneurship.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Despite increasing global recognition of women entrepreneurs, there is limited understanding of how digital transformation and international networks influence their innovation strategies across different regions.
2. Women entrepreneurs continue to face unequal access to resources, institutional support, and market opportunities, with significant variation between developed and developing economies—yet a comparative analysis remains underexplored.
3. There is a lack of evidence-based policy frameworks and practical models that address the unique challenges of women-led innovation and promote inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- **Institutional Theory:** Helps analyze how formal institutions (laws, policies) and informal norms (culture, gender roles) shape women's entrepreneurship and innovation strategies (Scott, 2001).
- **Gendered Entrepreneurship Framework:** Developed by Brush et al. (2009), it integrates gender as a central analytical lens in entrepreneurial research, emphasizing how women's experiences are shaped by unique structural challenges.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To investigate the innovative tactics of Indian women entrepreneurs, this study uses a qualitative case study methodology (Yin, 2018). Based on their leadership positions, creative contributions, and quantifiable impact, ten entrepreneurs were chosen from a variety of industries, including technology, agriculture, fashion, wellness, and social entrepreneurship. Information was gathered from publicly accessible sources, including government databases like Startup India and DPIIT, press releases, company websites, media profiles, and published presentations. Cross-case thematic analysis (Miles et al., 2014) was used for the analysis, which allowed for the discovery of recurrent trends in innovation types, strategic approaches, and ecosystem influences. Important aspects like the nature of innovation, strategic choices, gender-specific difficulties, enabling variables, and effect indicators were the focus of the study.

CASE STUDY

Ten Indian women entrepreneurs who have spearheaded innovation in a variety of industries are the subject of this study. Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw (Biocon) promoted cost-effective healthcare by using in-house R&D and reasonably priced biosimilars.

With tech-driven customisation, Falguni Nayar (Nykaa) transformed the cosmetics retail industry and achieved a multibillion-dollar valuation after going public. Via a FemTech platform that Reliance later purchased, Richa Kar (Zivame) made lingerie purchasing more commonplace. In collaboration with UNICEF, Aditi Gupta (Menstrupedia) used digital media and culturally relevant content to overcome menstrual taboos. Radhika Ghai (ShopClues) used localized e-commerce to serve tier-2 and tier-3 areas. With credit scoring and mobile-first solutions, Upasana Taku (MobiKwik) introduced fintech innovation to small-town India. Using scalable AI tools, Neeti Mehta (Automation Anywhere) spearheaded global RPA innovation. In Indian cities, Meena Ganesh of Portea Medical established a network of tech-enabled home healthcare facilities. Vandana Luthra (VLCC) used vocational training and franchising to institutionalize wellness. After going public, Ghazal Alagh's (Mamaearth) sustainable, toxin-free personal care company became a unicorn.

ANALYTICAL WORK

Diverse approaches influenced by societal settings and sectoral demands are reflected in the innovation strategies of these women-led businesses. While Nykaa and Mamaearth made use of digital platforms,

personalization, and influencer marketing, Biocon concentrated on cost-effective, R&D-driven healthcare innovation. Menstrupedia used innovative edutainment to tackle social taboos, and Portea Medical used hybrid service delivery to close healthcare gaps. While Zivame and Portea scaled domestically via niche techniques, Biocon and Nykaa sought international alliances. While Biocon depended on international research collaborations, Nykaa and Mamaearth prospered on network effects and internet branding. The business approaches included bootstrapped acquisitions (Zivame, Portea), venture-funded unicorns (Nykaa, Mamaearth), and R&D-led expansion (Biocon).

Together, these businesspeople upended industries that were dominated by men and incorporated social impact and sustainability into their main tactics.

FINDINGS

The case studies show that innovation played a key role in a variety of industries, including FMCG (Mamaearth), e-commerce (Nykaa, Zivame), biotech (Biocon), healthcare (Portea), and ed-tech (Menstrupedia). Nykaa and Mamaearth spearheaded product and brand innovation with an emphasis on sustainability and personalization, while Biocon and Portea prioritized R&D and tech-driven healthcare. Through consumer-centric solutions, each business filled market gaps: Menstrupedia provided culturally relevant menstrual education, Nykaa and Mamaearth established trust through influencer platforms, and Zivame addressed lingerie taboos. Digital tools were essential because they made it possible to use online content and omnichannel tactics for outreach, branding, and feedback. Different strategies were employed for scaling: Nykaa and Mamaearth chose IPOs and venture capital investment, Zivame and Portea sought acquisitions, and VLCC used franchising. Every entrepreneur exhibited gendered leadership by fusing social impact with business success, whether it was through Menstrupedia's stigma-breaking education, Mamaearth's eco-conscious goal, or Biocon's reasonably priced healthcare.

CONCLUSION

This report emphasizes how important it is for Indian women entrepreneurs to leverage tech-enabled, consumer-focused, and purpose-driven tactics to propel innovation. While creating scalable, socially significant businesses based on empathy and personal experience, these women are shattering stereotypes in fields that are dominated by males. Despite resource limitations, they compete globally by utilizing digital tools and social capital. Their experiences show how innovation can help close the gap between gender equity and economic empowerment. Stronger institutional support, including funding, mentorship, and policy, is necessary for long-term improvement, though, to guarantee that women-led innovation becomes a key component of inclusive development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Establishing women-centric incubators that tackle gender-specific obstacles like financial disparities, mentorship, and network access is necessary to support women-led innovation. Platforms for cross-border collaboration can offer chances for intellectual property exchange, market integration, and worldwide exposure. Gender criteria should be incorporated into startup funding channels, and venture capital firms should be incentivized to assist funds that are focused on women through government subsidies or tax breaks. Programs for digital and financial literacy are crucial for facilitating scalable innovation, especially for women in rural and semi-urban areas. Gender-inclusive curricula and case studies that showcase a range of leadership styles should also be incorporated into entrepreneurial education.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Reforms in public procurement should prioritize women-owned MSMEs to improve market access. A National Gender Innovation Index can track women's contributions through indicators such as patents, digital adoption, exports, and employment. Trade agreements should include provisions that offer women entrepreneurs access to global coworking spaces, R&D funding, and accelerator programs. Simplifying regulatory compliance through single-window systems for GST, FDI, and labor laws will reduce bureaucratic hurdles for women founders.

LIMITATIONS

Although this study provides detail, its geographic focus on Indian women entrepreneurs limits its wider applicability. Because many companies are private, certain financial and strategic data may be dependent on secondary sources that aren't up to date or comprehensive. Furthermore, there is a bias toward industry specialization, with the majority of examples concentrating on the consumer, wellness, and technology sectors and the underrepresentation of capital-intensive and STEM-heavy industries like manufacturing and energy.

SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies can examine women's innovation methods in both established and emerging economies using a cross-country comparative approach. Research could also evaluate how policy initiatives like Startup India or Mudra Yojana affect innovation and exports over the long run. Additionally, to investigate how caste, class, and regional differences impact entrepreneurial access—particularly in India's tier-2/3 cities and tribal areas—an intersectional study is required.

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