

Identity and Women Entrepreneurship: Emerging Issues

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Abstract: Women entrepreneurship is a recent phenomenon in India. This study has been conducted to explore the issues of identity and women entrepreneurship from the perspectives of thriving, evolving and prospering small urban India in this millennium beyond the peripherals of metropolis. The study has been to explore the levels of perceptions of identity of women entrepreneurs as businesswomen as well as to ascertain the relationship between perceptions of identity and socio-demographic and family relational factors. The study also tries to find the causal relationship between the business-organizational factors and perceptions of identity level of women entrepreneurs as also the cumulative effects of all factors on the levels of perceptions of identity of women entrepreneurs. The methodology of the study was based on the primary data collected through direct interviews with women entrepreneurs by using an interview schedule with structured questionnaire and an attitude scale. The result points to a poor level of perceptions of identity and poor self-images of women entrepreneurs. The item analysis shows that women entrepreneurs have been very vocal regarding the lack of opportunities vis-à-vis their male counterparts to be successful in their business endeavour. The study also shows that educational level, training status, business-phase, income level and financial management level have caused significant influences on the levels of perception of identity of women entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Women entrepreneurship, Identity, Training, Business-phase, Financial management

INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'Identity', be it cultural, social, ethnic, personal, or some other, is an important issue for every individual at the present-day society. Because, every one of us, to a greater or lesser extent, is concerned about the question of who I am and what is my position in the society. Identity can be defined as the interplay of characteristics that make up the individuality and uniqueness of any person or group. Such uniqueness arises out of a particular combination of traits, be they physical, emotional, psychological, social, economic, political or cultural[1].

Here the emphasis is on the personal identity of women entrepreneurs with respect to their self-perception of being an entrepreneur and playing the entrepreneurial role in the society.

In recent years, the scope for entrepreneurship development has tremendously increased in our society with the spread of industrialization, urbanization, mass communication network and education as well as effects of globalization of economy, liberalization, privatization and emergent government initiatives. The case for women entrepreneurship is no exception.

Entrepreneurship ranges in scale from solo projects (even involving the entrepreneur only in part-time) to major undertakings, creating many job

opportunities. In more recent times, the term entrepreneurship has been extended to include elements, not related necessarily to business formation activity, but to include conceptualization of entrepreneurship as a specific mindset i.e. entrepreneurial mindset, resulting in entrepreneurial initiatives e.g. in the form of social entrepreneurship, political entrepreneurship, or knowledge entrepreneurship.

The basic concept of entrepreneurship thus denotes effectiveness, an urge to take risk in the face of uncertainties and to take risk in intuition, i.e. a capacity of showing things in a way, which afterwards proves to be true. Entrepreneurship in a society, thus, is dependent on closely inter-linked economic, social, cultural, religious and psychological variables. Entrepreneurship here, thus, refers to the general trend of setting up of a new enterprise in a society[2].

The present study has attempted to explore the issues of identity and entrepreneurship of women business owners from the perspectives of thriving, evolving and prospering small urban India in this millennium beyond the peripherals of metropolis. The study has tried to connect the micro-level reality of business activities undertaken by women with the issues of identity from the perspective of socio-economic conditionalities of women entrepreneurs. The study has

been an intensive micro-level field study of women entrepreneurs, which has been exploratory and descriptive in nature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity begins with 'Self'. Self and identity begin with the assumption that there is a reciprocal relationship between the self and society[3]. The 'Self' influences society through the actions of individuals, and thereby creates groups, organizations, networks, and institutions. Society, reciprocally, influences the self through its shared languages and meanings that enable a person to take the role of other, to engage in social interaction, and to reflect upon oneself as an object. This process of reflexivity constitutes the core of selfhood and thus of identity as a part of the self. The self thus emerges in, and is reflexive of, society, wherein 'the self is acting in a social context in which other selves exist' [4].

Identity, then, as a part of the self, is a compilation of our experiences as influenced by the social, political and cultural factors that frame and mark those experiences. Therefore, identity is the answer to the question "Who am I?" with the added recognition that the "who" is always a little bit in flux, emerging from the cultures to which one belongs.

Perception, then, is how one sees the world, as influenced by the social, political, cultural and religious experiences of the society that frame and mark a person. Our selves, our identities, and our perceptions of identities are always in a process of becoming. 'Who we are' is never fixed or static but always in motion.

So, the changing views of self and perceptions of identity are part of everyone's life to some extent. Then, the process of formation of identity is subject to 'metamorphosis', as termed by[5]. In this context, psychological identity of a person also becomes an important paradigm. Psychological identity of a person is related to self-image (a person's mental model of him/herself), self-esteem, and individuality of that person[6].

Identity, then, is more situational and changeable according to varying circumstances. It has been suggested the notions of a 'three-dimensional identity', which comprises of three interlinked components [7]. The first component is an individual's personal identity, based on the fact that people are unique, and have individual distinctive features, lives, inner natures, and others. Then comes individual's social identity, which emphasizes a person's belongingness to society and its various groups, by which it defines him/her and is defined by in return. Lastly, human beings belong and know that they belong to a distinct species, define themselves and decide how they should live and conduct themselves as human

beings. From this perspective, women entrepreneurs' perceptions of identity assume very important significance due to the role of entrepreneurship in their life.

It has been suggested that women entrepreneurs perceived their businesses, not as separate economic units, but rather as integrated facets of their own lives and identities [8]. Identity, then, is to be understood as a process determined both by internal and external factors. Identity, then, is both an individual and a collective phenomenon.

Therefore, the perception of identity of a woman entrepreneur helps her orient to her context, gives meaning to her experience, and provides guidelines to action in society.

Now, it is very important to understand how entrepreneurs, and more specially, women entrepreneurs, construct their identity. In fact, entry into entrepreneurship can be seen as macro role transitions, requiring psychological and physical movements between sequentially held roles. Individuals, in their daily life, usually experience frequent and recurring psychological (and physical) movements between their simultaneously held roles: for example, between home, work and community roles. These movements are 'role alternatives' or 'micro role transitions'[9].

For women entrepreneurs, micro role transitions do not really make sense. In fact, instead of moving from one role to another, they seem to juggle continuously and simultaneously with their different roles as entrepreneurs, spouses, mothers and members of diverse groups and networks. Thus, it seems difficult to bring out transitions between their roles.

Therefore, women entrepreneurs are the result of an ongoing process of identity construction. In that way, women entrepreneurs define themselves as entrepreneurs and perhaps they define new breed of entrepreneurs [10].

Objectives

The specific objectives of the study have been as follows:

- I. To explore the level of perceptions of identity of women entrepreneurs as businesswomen.
- II. To ascertain the relationship between identity perception level of women entrepreneurs and socio-demographic and family relational factors of their life.
- III. To find the causal relationship between the business-organizational factors and perceptions of identity level of women entrepreneurs.
- IV. To examine how far socio-economic and business conditionalities of women entrepreneurs have been able to influence and

effect cumulatively on levels of perception of identities of women entrepreneurs.

METHODOLOGY

The present study has been conducted in the Ranaghat municipal town area, a sub-divisional township in the district of Nadia of the state of West Bengal in India in the mid-year of 2012. Ranaghat railway junction station is an important junction of five railway connections of the eastern railways. Ranaghat municipality is 150 years old. The researcher had found 119 business-firms, owned-and-managed by women entrepreneurs themselves, out of 358 women-owned firms as per the municipal records, out of 3041 business firms in the area.

The study was based on the primary data collected through direct interviews with women entrepreneurs by using an interview schedule with structured questionnaire and an attitude scale of 5-point Likert scale with six items, prepared following the 'Attitude Measurement Scale' of [11] through complete enumeration survey. The questionnaire consisted of objective type questions covering the socio-demographic, business-economic and legal-organizational factors of women entrepreneurial life, and subsequently the variables have been defined for the purpose of the study. The item analysis has been used for more intensive in-depth study of attitudes of women entrepreneurs towards different dimensions of social life. The data analysis have been done through SPSS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The distributions of the variables under study i.e. different socio-demographic, business-economic and legal-organizational factors of women entrepreneurial life were projected in the Table-1. Women have now been engaged in entrepreneurial endeavour with different ages and educational background. They have been mostly non-trained as well as married, coming mostly from simple families. The families of women entrepreneurs have mostly supported them. However, the decisional level-in-family has been mostly weak for women entrepreneurs. At the family level, the basic unit of society, women have still lesser degree of independence and they are dependent on their male counterparts in taking major decisions in family-matters.

There have been almost one-fourth women entrepreneurs, who have been new in business upto five years of experience. However, women entrepreneurs have been mostly in stability phase of business and nearly one-third women have been single-handedly managing their businesses. While nearly sixty-three percent women have been in trading business, the overwhelming eighty-seven percent women have sole ownership, with the majority of medium-sized firms with middle income-group. Women entrepreneurs have

been found to be mostly weak in financial management, business networking and social interaction.

The further analyses of interactive dimensions of different variables have revealed so many shades and intricacies of different issues on identity and women entrepreneurship.

The overall average identity perceptions score has come out, after rounding-off, to 20 by adding the item-scores of the identity perception items. It has indicated poor identity perception level of women entrepreneurs under study. Further, an item-wise analysis has shown that the following have been the items with respect to which the identity perception levels of women entrepreneurs have been found weak:

- a. You are clear about your business-goals.
- b. Your business-life gives you an opportunity for your self-development.
- c. You think that social networking is important for success in business.
- d. You think that institutional authorities are concerned for women entrepreneurs.
- e. Your political views are influenced by your father/husband/brother/son.

Only one item with respect to which the identity perception levels of women entrepreneurs has been found strong.

You think that you should have the same opportunities as men have in business.

The overall findings have revealed an eye-opening reality about the levels of perception of identity of women entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs, in general, have no business-goals and do not think that their business-endeavour has any role in self-development in their life. They have been least concerned about social networking to get success in business. They have also opined that institutional authorities have not been so concerned for them, which has indicated apathy from the end of authorities. The male-counterparts have also political influence on women entrepreneurs. All factors have pointed to a poor level of identity perceptions and poor self-images of women entrepreneurs.

Item-wise distribution of identity perception data of women entrepreneurs has been presented in the Table-2. It has been interesting to note that none of these distributions, when plotted, has been flat. This has implied that there have been no contradictions in the perceptions of identity by women entrepreneurs. It has signified that women entrepreneurial culture has still been in primitive and in evolving stage in our society.

Women entrepreneurs, in general, have been in compromising mood in running their businesses. At the

same time, they have been very vocal regarding the lack of opportunities vis-à-vis their male counterparts to be

successful in their business endeavour.

Table-1: Descriptive Statistics and Distribution of Variables

Variable	Valid N	Mean	SD	CV (%)
Age	119	38.66	7.14	18.47
Education	119	1.61	0.64	39.75
Training	119	0.22	0.42	190.91
Marital Status	119	1.35	0.68	50.37
Family Type	119	1.89	0.31	16.40
Family Support Index	119	3.43	0.89	25.95
Decisional Level in Family	119	2.51	1.40	55.78
Business Years	119	8.80	4.60	52.27
Business Phase	119	2.21	0.96	43.44
Firm-Size	119	0.92	0.74	80.43
Business-type	119	1.82	1.20	65.93
Proprietorship of Business	119	1.13	0.33	29.20
Size & Scale of Business	119	1.71	0.66	38.60
Income Level	119	1.87	0.70	37.43
Financial Management Index	119	2.56	1.39	54.30
Business Networking Index	119	1.82	0.78	42.86
Institutional Interaction Index	119	1.22	1.24	101.64
Social Interaction Index	119	1.01	0.99	98.02
Perception of Identity Index	119	19.72	5.39	27.33

SD= Standard Deviation; CV= Co-efficient of Variation

Table-2: Item-wise Frequency Distribution of Identity Perception Data

Item No.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	23	35	35	16	10
2	14	34	25	16	30
3	31	47	32	5	4
4	7	33	46	22	11
5	30	40	13	23	13
6	48	48	21	2	0

Table-3: Identity Perception level-wise Distribution

Identity Perception level	No. of Women Entrepreneurs
Weak	86 (72.30)
Strong	33 (27.70)
Total	119 (100)

N.B.: Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages.

The Table-3 has shown that the perception levels of identity of women entrepreneurs has been strong for only 27.70% respondents and it has been weak for 72.30% women entrepreneurs.

The analysis of correlation (Table-4) of perception of identity of women entrepreneurs in respect of different independent variables has revealed that all variables have a bearing, either positive or negative, on perceptions of identity of women entrepreneurs except marital status, family-type,

proprietorship of businesses, and size-and-scale of businesses of women entrepreneurs.

The factors of education, training, decisional level-in-family, business phase, firm size, business type, income level, financial management, business networking, institutional interaction and social interaction have been positively associated with the identity perceptions of women entrepreneurs. All the above factors have influenced the perception of identities of women entrepreneurs in a directly

proportional manner in that women entrepreneurs have perceived strong sense of identity with rising levels of the above factors.

It has also been revealed that the factors of age, family-support and business-years of women entrepreneurs have negative correlation with the perceptions of identity of women entrepreneurs. The case of family support to women entrepreneurs has shown a peculiarity in that women entrepreneurs have shown strong sense of identity with less support from family. With less family support, women entrepreneurs have to manage and operate businesses on their own way, thus showing strong perceptions of identity as businesswomen in social life.

The Table-5 has presented the regression analysis between the dependent/consequent variable - perception levels of identity of women entrepreneurs and the independent/predictor variables to depict the

causal effect of independent factors on the consequent factor of identity perceptions of women entrepreneurs. The factors of education, training, business-phase, income level and financial management level have caused significant regression effects on the perception levels of identity of women entrepreneurs.

It is quite natural that education causes consciousness. The more educated a woman entrepreneur, there is more probability of self-concept, self-image and self-awareness - all these have culminated into significant effects on perception level of identity of a woman entrepreneur as a businesswoman. Training has also been found to be closely and causally tuned to the perception of identity of women entrepreneurs. The experience of training has made a woman entrepreneur aware of the business environment and prepared her to tackle the situation confidently.

Table-4: Coefficients of Correlation

Independent Variable	r-value
Age	-.365**
Education	.606**
Training	.513**
Marital Status	.144
Family Type	-.078
Family Support	-.264**
Decisional Level in Family	.326**
Business-years	-.259**
Business Phase	.206*
Firm-Size	.276**
Business-type	.257**
Proprietorship of Business	.053
Size & Scale of Business	.174
Income Level	.280**
Financial Management Index	.688**
Business Networking Index	.546**
Institutional Interaction Index	.663**
Social Interaction Index	.428**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), Dependent Variable: Perception of identity

Business-phase has been found to cause an effect on perception of identity by women entrepreneurs. Because, different business-phases like initial, growth, stability and declining phases have consequent effects on the mind-set of a woman entrepreneur to be of her own-self. Income of women entrepreneurs has made them not only independent economically but also socially assertive persons. Income levels have caused a commensurate social status and consciousness of self-identity in women entrepreneurs.

Financial management levels have also been found to be causally related to the perception of identity of women entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs have become more confident with the hands-on experience of tackling the financial aspects of their businesses, which made them aware of their own hidden power in life.

Model Summary:

The R^2 value (Co-efficient of Determination to measure the amount of variability in one variable that is explained by the other) of the Model ($R^2 = 0.720$) has suggested that the predictor variables have jointly contributed 72% towards the perceptions level of

identity of women entrepreneurs. It has meant that all these independent variables have explained upto 72% of the total variation embedded with the consequent variable- identity perceptions of women entrepreneurs.

The F value (F = 14.308) has also been found to be significant at 0.01 level of probability, which has indicated the effectiveness of the Model.

Table-5: Regression Analysis

Independent Variable	β -value	t-value	Sig. t
(Constant)	10.961	3.166**	.002
Age	-.056	-.766	.446
Education	.214	2.819**	.006
Training	.210	2.399*	.018
Marital Status	-.028	-.401	.689
Family Type	-.078	-.850	.397
Family Support Index	-.029	-.407	.685
Decisional Level in Family	.003	.041	.967
Business-years	-.106	-1.451	.150
Business Phase	.150	2.262*	.026
Firm-Size	-.094	-1.150	.253
Business-type	.009	.129	.898
Proprietorship of Business	-.056	-.948	.345
Size & Scale of Business	-.159	-1.896	.061
Income Level	.340	3.394**	.001
Financial Management Index	.386	3.179**	.002
Business Networking Index	.119	1.482	.142
Institutional Interaction Index	-.035	-.271	.787
Social Interaction Index	.122	1.634	.106

** t is significant at the .01 level., * t is significant at the .05 level, Dependent Variable: Perception of Identity

Table-5: (Contd.): Model Summary

Model	R ²	F	Sig.
1	0.720	14.308**	0.000

** Significant at .01 level

CONCLUSION

The study has explored the intricate relationship between identity and women entrepreneurship in a representative way for the thriving small urban India. Women entrepreneurship is a multi-dimensional concept wherein the perceptions of identity of women entrepreneurs have become very important core dimension from the perspectives of educational level, training status, business-phase, income level and financial management level of women entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs' perception regarding their own values and ability, self-confidence, self-reliance and critical awareness would make them realise their own identity not only as an able woman but also as a businesswoman, which would ensure an inclusive social development.

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