

Abstract

Growth is a phenomenon of interest for entrepreneurship as well as management studies. This thesis presents a study on the growth aspirations of entrepreneurs in the context of Indian women entrepreneurs.

Growth is an important indicator of performance. Given this, growth has mostly been studied as an outcome. This implies two assumptions: (a) the implicit assumption of universal desirability of growth; and (b) the interest in studying factors that enable or impede growth. This resulted in studies that considered various resources, capabilities, etc. that were necessary for the growth of the venture. Most significantly and commonly studied are a firm's financial, social, and human resources. However, recent studies have shown that the entrepreneurs' expectancies from their ventures are very varied (Manolova et al 2012, Wiklund et al 2003). Measuring growth in number terms also assumes that entrepreneurs equate growth with success (Achtenhagen et al 2010). Some entrepreneurs wish for financial success whereas many others aspire for autonomy, independence, self-realisation, recognition, etc. (Manolova et al 2012). Therefore, there are ventures which do not grow despite the abundance of resources and also there are entrepreneurs who do not engage in actively pursuing acquisition of resources because of venture expectancies being different from just financial motives.

Given the importance of entrepreneurship to economic development because of its multiple positive spillovers such as employment generation, it is important to understand the factors affecting the growth of a firm. There is an increasing call for considering growth as a process instead of an outcome. This essentially means moving away from the question of 'can the firm grow?' to 'does the firm want to grow?'. In owner-managed ventures, the decision maker is the entrepreneur. This decision is paramount not just in the firm's utilisation of the resources but also of the firm's active pursuit of relevant resources for growth. Therefore, it is important to understand the cognition and contextual variables in play that facilitate entrepreneurial decision making with respect to pursuing growth or non-growth.

In this thesis, I look at growth as a planned behaviour. According to the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen 1991, 1995), the performance of any planned behaviour is preceded by the intent to perform the behaviour. The stronger the intention to perform the behaviour, the higher the chances of the performance of the behaviour. In the venture growth context, studies have found that growth aspiration is a relevant and stable predictor of growth (eg. Delmar and Wiklund 2008).

The context of the study is Indian women entrepreneurs. Extant literature informs us that women entrepreneurs deliberately choose to stay small, and impose growth thresholds (Cliff 1998; Morris, Miyasaki, Watters, and Coombes 2006). This evidence of deliberate choice to stay small among women entrepreneurs indicates that the intention to grow is likely the strongest predictor of growth for them. Therefore, women entrepreneurship would provide the right context for us to study the various factors that drive growth aspirations.

A two-stage research design was adopted in this study. Given the fragmented development of theory with respect to growth aspirations as illustrated in the review, as well as lack of growth intention studies in the Indian context, an exploratory qualitative study was conducted. This was also done to ascertain the relevance and appropriateness of the variables identified by TPB and extant literature in the specific context of Indian women entrepreneurs with respect to growth aspirations. This was followed by a quantitative study which tested the model, which resulted from the case study and review of extant literature, using data obtained from survey. The final sample consisted of 172 women

entrepreneurs. The data was analysed using Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). SmartPLS was used for analysis.

The results reveal that the entrepreneur's attitude towards growth and her perception of her entrepreneurial self-efficacy are the important predictors of her growth aspiration. Family support moderates the relationship between attitude towards growth and growth aspiration in the case of direct involvement of family members in the venture. Role identity and the approval from the immediate social group the entrepreneur belonged to did not have any significant effect on the growth aspirations of the entrepreneur.

This study emphasises the significance of entrepreneur's personal choice in the growth of a firm. Opportunity and resource seeking behaviour is secondary to the entrepreneur's intent to either grow the firm or not. The theoretical and policy contributions of the study originate from this fact.

From an opportunity-driven view of entrepreneurial growth, this study informs us of the importance of the individual and her choice in the growth of ventures. It is imperative to bring the individual back into the discussion and willingness to grow should be treated as the first step in the process of growth for a comprehensive understanding of growth.

From a policy perspective, it underscores Shane's (2009) contention that subsidisation of the formation of a new business does not guarantee encouragement of high-growth ventures. This study, by drawing attention to the factors that affect the growth aspirations of entrepreneurs, contributes to policy making by allowing for more targeted and specific programmes to increase the confidence of entrepreneurs in their ability to perform entrepreneurial growth functions and thereby increasing their willingness to grow.