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Relationship between Sex and Entrepreneurship Traits of Agri-Undergraduate Students in Northern India

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Abstract

This research examined the relationship between sex and the agricultural entrepreneurship characteristics of undergraduate Indian university students. This research employed a theoretical structure focusing on personal factors influencing agri-entrepreneurship. In 2021, from 619 students \ data was collected through a Google survey. The collected data were evaluated and juxtaposed with percentages, correlation, and multiple regression analysis. Male students (66.13%) outnumbered female students (33.91%) in the School of Agriculture. Entrepreneurial attributes existed among agri-undergraduate students. Significantly correlated traits associated with entrepreneurship were creativity (τ = .311), initiative taking, (τ = .188 with planning), decision-making ability (τ = .250), risk-taking propensity (τ = .154), competitiveness (τ = .172), and pressure coping (τ = .145). Sex does not affect the supervisory role. A significant association existed between 'gender' (χ^2=112.37) and 'trustworthiness' (likelihood ratio=21.55). 'Sex' and 'perceived trustworthiness' levels are unlikely to occur by chance alone. Further exploration into this underrepresented area of research is imperative to guide the formulation of targeted educational strategies that enhance the development of entrepreneurial competencies within this demographic. This investigation distinguishes itself by exploring gender-centric variables to provide insight into entrepreneurial attributes within a cohort of undergraduate scholars engaged in agricultural studies.

Introduction

Higher education, especially universities, is increasingly essential for fostering entrepreneurial skills. Notably, agricultural entrepreneurship represents a vital instrument for economic progression in India, offering many opportunities for independent enterprise engagements. (Eroglu et al., 2020). However, most current research emphasises entrepreneurship within a broader context, with minimal focus on specific student groups such as agri-undergraduate students. (Jarial & Verma, 2023). This general approach inadvertently neglects aspiring entrepreneurs' unique needs, motivations, and potential challenges within such a niche population. This gap is even more pronounced when considering the gender-related aspects of entrepreneurial inclinations (Bosanquet & Fredericks, 2022) within this population, despite their significance in the entrepreneurial discourse. Incorporating entrepreneurship education within the undergraduate agricultural curriculum is a strategic move that acknowledges the transformative power of agriculture-based entrepreneurship in alleviating poverty and invigorating rural areas. However, the extent of potential gender disparities within this group's entrepreneurial traits has been overlooked, limiting our understanding of how best to tailor such educational interventions for maximum efficacy. (Wagdi & Hasaneen, 2019). Gender plays a significant role in entrepreneurial traits and intentions (Merino & Duchemin, 2022). Research indicates that while shared traits abound among adults with entrepreneurial intentions, women with such aspirations exhibit a distinctive surge in communal tendencies (Zisser et al., 2019a). Gender and age are crucial factors that may influence entrepreneurial traits and motivation (Mei et al., 2020). Additionally, masculine, gender-identified women are more entrepreneurial. (Wiryakusuma, 2023).

Nevertheless, a holistic understanding incorporating these findings to illustrate gender disparities in entrepreneurial characteristics among agricultural undergraduate students is absent. The conceptual framework examined the individual-level factors influencing entrepreneurship. Scholarly research has increasingly acknowledged the diverse factors influencing entrepreneurial tendencies, illuminating the multidimensional aspects of entrepreneurship. The focus is on the variation in entrepreneurial attributes based on gender among undergraduate students studying agriculture in India. Using Social Role Theory as the underlying theoretical foundation, the aim is to understand how gender-based societal expectations and roles may influence entrepreneurial behaviour and traits. Social Role Theory postulates that individuals' behaviours, attitudes, and characteristics are influenced by the social roles they occupy. This may explain discernible disparities in entrepreneurial endeavours between males and females. Entrepreneurial traits refer to the personal characteristics and qualities commonly associated with successful entrepreneurship. Such characteristics can encompass a propensity for risk-taking, creativity, ambiguity tolerance, control perception, entrepreneurial mindset, preparedness for entrepreneurship, and personal attributes like the big five personality aspects (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) and emotional intelligence. These attributes are not universally relevant and can be shaped by personal factors such as age, gender, parents' profession, financial status of the family, geographic area, and level of education. Moreover, notable variations were found in students' entrepreneurial inclinations and personality characteristics (Astleitner & Zumbach, 2023) pursuing studies in health sciences. According to age, gender, parental occupation, family economic status, geographical region, and education level (Üyesi et al., 2022a), Therefore, while entrepreneurial traits are essential for successful entrepreneurship, they can be influenced by individual characteristics and should be considered in the context of the individual and their environment. It shows a complex and nuanced picture that does not prove whether men or women have a stronger inclination towards initiating their businesses. This framework guided the direction of our inquiry and provided a structure for interpreting our findings.

Considering the context above, the current study poses the following research question:
To what extent does gender influence entrepreneurial characteristics among agriculture undergraduates?

Methodology

The study was conducted at the School of Agriculture, Lovely Professional University (LPU) in Phagwara, Punjab, India. LPU is situated in the Kapurthala district of Punjab, at coordinates 31.25^{o} N latitude and 75.70^{o} East longitude, and an elevation of 249 metres above sea level. The research was centred on a distinct cohort of agri-undergraduates in their third year of the BSc programme, who were enrolled in a course on entrepreneurship and business education. The selection of this specific cohort was mostly motivated by practicality, given their easy accessibility and their representation of a pertinent populace for examining entrepreneurial attributes and propensities. As a result of their participation in an entrepreneurship-focused course, this group was an appropriate sample for the study as it afforded a one-of-a-kind opportunity to investigate the qualities and abilities that are pertinent to entrepreneurial achievement.

The survey instrument was designed using the Google Forms platform, ensuring ease of access and user-friendly interaction for participants. The structure of the survey was based on a 5-point Likert scale, which ranged from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. This scale was adapted from Module 11: Agricultural Entrepreneurship of the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services. (Shaun, 2017). To preserve the integrity of the original scale, the questions were particularly modified to fit the context of agri-undergraduate students, which ensured the questionnaire was clear, targeted, and gathered essential data. The questionnaire assessed entrepreneurial qualities. These traits were deliberately chosen to cover a wide range of entrepreneurship traits. The traits included ‘age’, ‘initiative’, ‘creativity’, ‘planner’, ‘decision maker’, ‘competitive’, ‘risktaker’, ‘pressure coping’, ‘training’, and ‘team player’.

The preliminary survey was evaluated by a team of experts. Their input improved the questions' clarity, relevancy, and completeness. An auxiliary cohort of students, not included in the primary investigation, completed a pilot iteration of the survey. This facilitated the detection of any uncertainties or concerns in the survey. The questionnaire was modified following the input obtained from the pilot test. This involved rephrasing questions, clarifying the scale, and ensuring each item captured the intended attribute. The definitive version of the questionnaire was then prepared, incorporating the revisions and feedback from the expert review and pilot testing.

The finalised survey was distributed digitally to the target sample of BSc third-year undergraduate students during their regular class sessions. This method ensured a high response rate and easy participant access. The participants were informed that their involvement was purely voluntary, that their responses would be kept confidential, and that their cooperation would not be rewarded. By employing this methodology, we ensured the ethical treatment of every participant and preserved the integrity of our study process. The purposive sampling was employed. To ensure the participants' direct relevance to the research subject, this methodology was selected. The research endeavour sought to collect perspectives from individuals who were actively enrolled in entrepreneurship and business education courses. This approach facilitated a more concentrated and comprehensive examination of entrepreneurial qualities within a particular academic setting. The sample size for the study was determined based on the total number of students enrolled in the Entrepreneurship and Business Education course during the study period of 2021. Thus, 622 students undergoing the course were included in the sample. However, during data cleaning, 619 student’s responses were recorded.

Data Analysis involved the extraction of the central tendencies and distributions, and correlation analysis to determine relationships between variables.

Results and Discussion

Relationships between Entrepreneurship Behaviour and Selected Characteristics

Table 1 shows that 'age' correlated with the ability to cope with pressure (τ = .072). 'Initiative' trait is a strong predictor of various other entrepreneurial qualities.

Table 1: Correlations between entrepreneurial traits

			Age	Initiative	Creative	Planner	Decision maker	Competitive	Risk taker	Pressure coping	Training
Kendall's tau-b (τb)	Age	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.036	-.018	.002	.055	-.046	.054	.055	.072*
	Initiative	Correlation Coefficient	.036	1.000	.311**	.188**	.118**	.172**	.088*	.145**	.162**
	Creative Planner	Correlation Coefficient	-.018	.311**	1.000	.250**	.104**	.107**	.154**	.172**	.063
	Decision maker Competitive	Correlation Coefficient	.002	.188**	.250**	1.000	.100**	.192**	.152**	.171**	.129**
	Risktaker Pressure coping	Correlation Coefficient	.055	.118**	.104**	.100**	1.000	.078*	.114**	.109**	.111**
	Training Team player Supervisory	Correlation Coefficient	-.046	.172**	.107**	.192**	.078*	1.000	.226**	.216**	.202**
	Initiative Creative Planner	Correlation Coefficient	.054	.088*	.154**	.152**	.114**	.226**	1.000	.186**	.091**
	Decision maker Competitive	Correlation Coefficient	.055	.145**	.172**	.171**	.109**	.216**	.186**	1.000	.119**
	Risk taker Pressure coping	Correlation Coefficient	.072*	.162**	.063	.129**	.111**	.202**	.091**	.119**	1.000
		N	622	622	622	619	619	622	619	619	. 622

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Age shows a very weak correlation with most traits, suggesting that these entrepreneurial characteristics are less dependent on age. This implies that while certain entrepreneurial traits tend to cluster together, they are not strongly predictive of each other. The presented statistics depict an intricate network of interconnections among a multitude of entrepreneurial attributes, indicating that these abilities frequently coexist and may mutually support one another in accomplished entrepreneurs (Tripathi, 2021). These results offer insight into critical traits and skills associated with entrepreneurship. There is a wide variety of traits and values within each sex group of entrepreneurs. These differences can be more significant than the average differences between the entire male and female groups. This shows that individual characteristics vary, regardless of gender.

Table 2: Male and female attributes vis-à-vis supervisory, leadership, trustworthiness, and knowledge updating from training

Gender	Supervisory level (%)	Leadership style (%)	Trustworthiness levels (%)	Updating from training (%)
Female	33.50	33.82	33.60	33.93
Male	65.92	65.85	65.90	65.29
Prefer not to say	0.16	2.00	0.32	0.16
χ^2	11.80	19.53	112.37	21.67
Degree of freedom	12	12	9	12
Likelihood Ratio	11.90	-	21.55	14.11

Table 2 indicates that sex does not affect the supervisory role. No significant association existed between the variables "supervisory" and "gender". No significant association was found between gender and leadership. Individual differences can affect entrepreneurial traits and intentions, but societal and institutional factors should also be considered. A significant relationship was revealed between sex and perceived trustworthiness levels($p<0.05$). Males are overrepresented than females. Social entrepreneurs, both male and female, have the same personality traits. However, some differences may explain why women are more likely than men to start new social businesses. (Bernardino et al., 2018a). Studies (Zisser et al., 2019b; Bernardino et al., 2018b; Sitaridis & Kitsios, 2022) have examined the impact of gender on personality traits and entrepreneurial intentions. They have found that gender differences in personality traits can impact entrepreneurial intentions, with women exhibiting different tendencies than men. For instance, women may prioritise job autonomy and security, while men may prioritise risk-taking and the need for achievement. Most (58.32%) of the respondents updated their knowledge through training of the total sample. Of these, 39.42% are male, and 18.90% are female. The χ^2 test indicates a statistically significant association between gender and the 'updation of knowledge' attribute as its p-value (χ^2=.041). However, the Likelihood Ratio test does not reveal a significant association, given that its p-value (.294) is higher than .05. This discrepancy might suggest that the observed significant association in Pearson's test might not be robust or could be influenced by certain assumptions or conditions in the dataset. Additionally, studies (Sitaridis & Kitsios, 2022b; Üyesi et al., 2022b; Šlogar et al., 2021) have examined the impact of socialisation, education, and access to resources on entrepreneurial traits. These studies have found that age, parental occupation, family economic status, and education level can impact entrepreneurial tendencies and competencies.

Table 3 presents the findings of a multiple regression analysis, where the dependent variable is defined as "innovative capacity for identifying better and more profitable strategies, particularly crucial in the context of robust competition and a dynamic agricultural market environment." This model investigates this innovative capacity through several independent variables: age, initiative, creative, competitive, risktaker, pressure coping, training, team player, supervisory, and leadership. The 'creative' variable is statistically significant, with a coefficient of 0.208, suggesting that greater creativity is strongly associated with higher entrepreneurial ability among these students. The 'Pressure coping' variable is also statistically significant and positively related to the dependent variable, with a 0.107 increase for each unit increase in 'pressure coping'.

Training, being a team player, supervisory skills, and leadership show positive associations with entrepreneurial ability, as reflected in their coefficients (0.051, 0.054, 0.083, and 0.022, respectively), but these are not statistically significant. Creating an environment that empowers individuals, regardless of gender, to develop their entrepreneurial potential and contribute meaningfully to society requires addressing gender bias and prejudice in the entrepreneurial ecosystem (Marketing et al., 2023). Also, nurturing an environment supporting women's growth and development as entrepreneurs is crucial (Marketing et al., 2023). One approach to enhancing women's entrepreneurial intention and fostering women's entrepreneurship is by challenging gender stereotypes within the field of agricultural entrepreneurship. (Laguía et al., 2022).

Table 3: Factor influencing agri-undergraduate students' entrepreneurial ability

	Coefficients	t-value
Constant	1.045 (0.579)	1.803
Age	0.003 (0.026)	0.104
Initiative	0.096 (0.051)	1.888

Creative	0.208 (0.046)	4.507*
Competitive	0.053 (0.036)	1.453
Risktaker	0.048 (0.038)	1.278
Pressure coping	0.107(0.042)	2.554*
Training	0.051(0.035)	1.463
Team player	0.054 (0.036)	1.487
Supervisory	0.083 (0.053)	1.560
Leadership	0.022 (0.029)	0.759

Note: * p<0.05; Figures in parentheses are standard errors

Promoting gender parity in entrepreneurship by addressing systemic biases and providing equal opportunities for individuals of all genders is crucial. Studies (Rietveld & Patel, 2022; Figueiredo et al., 2023; Marketing et al., 2023) indicated that fostering diversity and inclusivity in the entrepreneurial ecosystem can lead to more innovative and successful ventures. Research (Campbell, 2023; Zhao et al., 2020; Tenner & Hörisch, 2021) highlight the importance of diversity in entrepreneurship and the benefits it brings to problem-solving, decision-making, and venture growth. Inclusivity in the entrepreneurial ecosystem can lead to more innovative and successful ventures.

Conclusion and Recommendation

There exists a complex relationship between sex and trustworthiness, indicating significant differences in entrepreneurial characteristics across genders. Women are less trusted than men. Also, whether someone is male, or female does not impact their ability to supervise others; entrepreneurial traits matter more than sex.

Several key steps can be taken to create an environment that empowers individuals, irrespective of sex, to develop their entrepreneurial potential and make meaningful contributions to society. Firstly, promoting gender diversity within entrepreneurial teams is crucial, as it addresses environmental entrepreneurship's ecological and economic objectives. Secondly, efforts should be made to address the barriers women face in entrepreneurship, including limited access to capital, lack of supportive networks, and societal expectations related to family and caregiving responsibilities. Focusing on achieving gender parity by addressing systemic biases and ensuring equal opportunities for all individuals, rather than emphasising perceived innate differences in entrepreneurial traits, is vital for creating a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial landscape.

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