

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates whether incubators help women entrepreneurs in overcoming their impoverished social networks to effectively perform their entrepreneurial functions. I look at various dimensions of social networks, which have been identified in extant literature on social networks namely network size, network density, network diversity, centrality in network and strength of ties. Also, I identify and investigate into three key entrepreneurial functions that have featured in the debates in economics and entrepreneurship literatures on key entrepreneurial functions that entrepreneurs perform, namely opportunity recognition, resource mobilization and innovation. Further, I explore women entrepreneurship in the context of an emerging economy, India. The context of emerging economy is important to women entrepreneurship as institutions of any context have a significant impact on entrepreneurship. I explore how these institutions affect women and whether they impact their social networks and/or the entrepreneurial functions that they perform. I also look at incubators as a mechanism of intervention to explore whether and how they are able to affect social networks and entrepreneurial functions. Even incubators perform significantly different activities in an emerging economy than those that they perform in their more industrialized economies. I explore how they do so in my dissertation. I examine this in three essays. My first essay compares social network dimensions of incubated and non-incubated women entrepreneurs to examine if there are significant differences between them. My second essay primarily focuses on entrepreneurial functions of incubated men and women entrepreneurs and non-incubated women entrepreneurs to understand differences between these three groups and explore relationships between the three entrepreneurial functions to observe how incubators influence these relationships. My third essay examines the influence of social network dimensions on entrepreneurial functions. The findings of this thesis have resulted in some important discoveries about the role incubators play in facilitating women entrepreneurs.

Essay 1: What is the difference between the dimensions of the social network of women entrepreneurs when a) They own non-incubated firm and b) They own incubated firm?

In this essay, I examine social network dimensions of incubated and non-incubated women entrepreneurs to investigate whether incubators create some advantages for women entrepreneurs that help them overcome their impoverished social network. Various gender studies argue that ever since childhood, women are socialized in certain ways and have gender-specific roles, perceptions and social constructions. These get more ingrained when women enter another stage of their life of marriage and parenthood. Gendered norms are more entrenched in emerging economies than they are in industrialized economies, owing to prevalence of more engrained patriarchal traditions and underdeveloped formal institutions. Resultantly, women's social network become small, with more kin-centered connections resulting in a small network size, low network diversity, high network density, low centrality in their networks and strong ties with more expressive connections in their social

networks. These starting conditions of social networks are impoverished for entrepreneurship. However, there exists a paucity of discussion on ways to develop social networks of women entrepreneurs. This essay presents one important approach towards addressing the social network related challenges through the intervention of incubators. The results suggest that there is a significant difference between incubated and non-incubated entrepreneurs on their social network dimensions such that incubated women entrepreneurs have a significantly effective social network for entrepreneurial functions relative to their non-incubated counterparts.

Essay 2: What is the difference between the entrepreneurial functions undertaken by women entrepreneurs when a) They own non-incubated firm and b) They own incubated firm? How do incubators add value to the entrepreneurial functions that entrepreneurs perform?

This essay tries to answer two questions — 1. Does incubation, as a mechanism of intervention, foster entrepreneurial functions and create a level playing field for women entrepreneurs? and 2. Does incubation add value to the entrepreneurial functions that entrepreneurs perform, in general, for all entrepreneurs irrespective of gender? If yes, then how does it do so?

Gendered institutions, both formal and informal, in which women entrepreneurship is embedded, creates a number of impediments for them that obstruct her effective performance of entrepreneurial functions. For example, alertness and prior knowledge are important for the function of opportunity recognition. However, alertness, which is a cognitive function, is dependent on someone being in a flow of information and undergoing brainstorming with peers on a regular basis; paucity of such conditions depletes alertness in women entrepreneurs. Institutionalized gender-related restrictions also impede formal education, skill gathering and experiences, which create prior knowledge on a subject. These institutions affect her opportunity recognition adversely. Similarly, institutions of emerging economies impoverish resource mobilization and innovation of women entrepreneurs. As a result, women entrepreneurs are expected to perform poorly on these entrepreneurial functions. My first question in this essay seeks to understand if incubation is able to create better starting conditions for women entrepreneurs and create a level playing field for them with respect to their male counterparts.

My second question in this essay explores whether incubators add value to entrepreneurial functions that entrepreneurs perform. These three entrepreneurial functions are theoretically distinct; however, they have been known to have significant linkages with each other. Extant literature on entrepreneurship widely focuses on each of these three entrepreneurial functions individually, to the oblivion of the other entrepreneurial functions. Thus, a research gap exists in understanding the relationship between entrepreneurial functions. Therefore, in this essay, I take an integrative and holistic approach of considering all entrepreneurial functions, with their operationalization. Specifically, I explore whether enhanced opportunity recognition and resource mobilization lead to enhanced innovation? I find that incubation aligns opportunity recognition and resource mobilization to feed into innovation, to positively enhance the process of innovation. I also find that in emerging

economies, incubation is able to affect both men and women entrepreneurs positively, but it is also able to remove some gender-related restrictions for women imposed on them by the institutions of emerging economy. I suggest that incubators might have the potential to reverse the decimation of cognitive frameworks of women entrepreneurs and to expand possibilities of their interactions. Incubation also signals legitimacy of their entrepreneurial capabilities to influential members of society, who matter, but who are negatively biased towards her, owing to her gender.

Essay 3: What is the influence of social network dimensions on entrepreneurial functions undertaken by women entrepreneurs, a) who own non-incubated firm and b) who own incubated firm? Does incubation influence this relationship?

In this essay, I investigate the influence of social network of incubated and non-incubated women entrepreneurs in emerging economies on the three entrepreneurial functions that they perform. Discourses on social networks in entrepreneurial contexts have proposed both negative and positive effects of various social network dimensions; extant research has been inconclusive on many of these dimensions and their effect on entrepreneurial functions. Also, these studies largely have been acontextual in nature and they have been conducted with a focus on general entrepreneurship, which consist of predominantly male entrepreneurs. However, social relations are essentially contextual in nature and can provide substantive insights in the case of the two categories of women entrepreneurs, incubated and non-incubated, in emerging economies, chosen for this study. My third essay attempts to provide a holistic understanding of the dynamics of forces in the relationships between social network dimensions and entrepreneurial functions. I look at these relationships with the lenses of problem of embeddedness. Problem of embeddedness is a classic issue in embeddedness, wherein, economic behavior of individuals is predicated upon their ongoing social relations, which evolves as individuals transact, making it difficult to have sweeping predictions of universal order or disorder in their economic behaviour.

I adopt spline regression to explore these relationships. I find that some network dimensions like network size have an inverted V-shape relationship with entrepreneurial functions, as predicted by problem of embeddedness, wherein, costs of managing a large network might outweigh the benefits obtained from the network beyond a certain threshold point. However, this is true only for incubated women entrepreneurs. I find an oppositional V-shape spline relationship for non-incubated women entrepreneurs, which suggests that the threshold point happens for different reasons for this category of women entrepreneurs, wherein, when she acquires a particular critical size of network, it enhances her status in her network, enabling her to perform increasingly better on her entrepreneurial functions; thus, critical size is the threshold point for her. I also find that some network dimensions like centrality in the network compensates for the low status of non-incubated entrepreneurs and aids her in performing her entrepreneurial functions but has no significant effect for incubated women entrepreneurs for whom the cost of maintaining centrality in their networks outweighs the benefits. Therefore, I find that the two categories selected for this study have significantly different roots to their expected

economic behavior due to their social relations. These findings help us extend the lenses of problem of embeddedness by giving alternative explanations to why threshold points occur beyond the cost-benefit explanations that have been proposed in the extant literature on embeddedness.

Keywords: Women entrepreneurship; Incubators; Opportunity Recognition; Resource Mobilization; Innovation; Social Network; Entrepreneurial Functions; Emerging Economies