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## **The transformative influence of social media: an exploratory case study of empowerment in repressive society**

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**Abstract:** The literature and the theoretical foundation in this discipline shows that little research has explored the complex decisions faced by transgender entrepreneurs in India. Our work describes a case study that serves as a first step in addressing this research gap and investigates the factors that influence entrepreneurship among transgender individuals in this restrictive culture. This qualitative research constructs a model to explain the relationships between factors that affect entrepreneurial behaviour among transgender, and then modify the model based on interview data collected from our key informant. A key finding points out the important role that social networking plays in entrepreneurial success when the transgender entrepreneur's skill set is an integral part of a small scale or family business endeavour. This study suggests future research directed at understanding the unique aspects of transgender entrepreneurship in India and informs on entrepreneurship and public policy in India about this population of entrepreneurs.

**Keywords:** transsexual entrepreneurs; challenges; autonomy; achievement; social networking site influence; perceived behavioural control.

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## 1 Introduction

Formative years in the lives of transgender individuals close to puberty are often traumatic and filled with confusion and chaos (Mani and Joseph, 2013). In the low socio-economic status (SES) group in India, the challenges are more severe, with poverty and lack of education destroying self-esteem, with often tragic consequences. Transgender individuals are often confused about their existence in the context of their gender identities. Trans people face many challenges, including lack of information about their unique personal circumstances. Families of trans individuals may not have sufficient understanding to empathise with the unique circumstances faced by this population.

Prior research indicates that mainstream society in India has refused to offer suitable employment opportunities for visibly trans-identified people (Bockrath, 2003; Lynton and Rajan, 1974). As a result, transgender individuals belonging to SES groups have

historically resorted to illegal activities, domestic servitude, prostitution, and begging as alternative sources of income (Bockrath, 2003).

Individual skill based livelihoods can elevate the living circumstances of low SES trans individuals, helping them to overcome challenges like social exclusion, loss of self-esteem, and loneliness, and can increase matrimonial probabilities and the potential for decent family life. We contend that as an alternative to salaried jobs, self-employment, encouraged by Indian communities, can be a viable solution to the extreme social exclusion of low SES transgender individuals by mainstream society.

Little research has examined entrepreneurial endeavours undertaken by transgender individuals. In this research, our key informant is an educator, a subject matter expert, and a transgender entrepreneur. This blended expertise allowed our key informant to serve as both as an informed subject and a guide in developing future research. Our subject's responses allowed us to analyse the transformation of a transgender as she transitioned from male to female, and into a successful entrepreneur. Little or no research has investigated entrepreneurship in the context of the challenges, motivations, intentions, and entrepreneurial success of transgender individuals. Hence, this narrative inquiry-based qualitative study (Polkinghorne, 1995) fills this research gap.

While we have utilised a single case to finalise our research questions for future research, we analysed the data that we obtained from our key informant and used it to improve the theoretical foundation, and the research model. Our analysis demonstrated that our research questions are appropriate for a further study and that this case study and interview answered the research questions. Our work results in relevant research questions for future research and provides insightful answers to the research questions we identified.

This study builds its theoretical foundation on Giddens' structuration theory, the theory of planned behaviour, and McClelland's achievement motivation Theory as we seek more in-depth insights and explore factors that influence the activities that lead to entrepreneurial success among transgender entrepreneurs while addressing the unique challenges faced by this neglected segment of Indian society. This study adds to the existing body of knowledge by explaining the cultural factors and social attitudes of Indian society towards SES underprivileged transgender individuals in the context of their entrepreneurial success. Through this exploratory case study, we pilot test a qualitative approach to developing a pioneering means to improve outcomes for this portion of Indian society. This demonstration study introduces a new social phenomenon not previously explored in gender studies or entrepreneurial studies. We examine entrepreneurialism as a means of social reform, and integration of the low SES, disadvantaged, and ostracised transgender population into mainstream society.

## **2 Literature review**

### *2.1 Transgender research*

Prior research indicates that the living conditions of transgender individuals of low SES in India have lead people to resort to prostitution and or begging as a source of livelihood (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Researchers investigated transgenderism in India extensively (Bockrath, 2003; Green, 2004; Joseph and Mani, 2013). Transgenderism is defined as crossing over to the opposite gender (Green, 2004). Transgender identity surfaces when

individuals experience cognitive and affective dissonance with their assigned gender identities at birth and align their inner sexual identities by crossing over into the opposite gender identity (Green, 2004). Prior research indicates that such individuals experience suffocation and an overbearing feeling that consumes them. They often articulate feelings of being trapped, either as a man or a woman. In the wrong body, which deviates from the traditionally accepted social norms of gender definition (Green, 2004).

In India, a group of men belonging to low SES emerged who have internalised feelings of being women but still lead lives of family-men within their communities. They call themselves Kothi. Kothi identity begins forming at the onset of puberty as these men become aware of their alternate sexual orientations (Khan et al., 2005).

Prior research suggests that poverty and lack of education amongst the low SES Kothi community has also led to the proliferation of male sex workers as these men find this occupation lucrative and an easy means to provide for their families, and at the same time, justifies their dual life style (Chakrapani et al., 2007). These Kothi sex-workers often cross-dress to solicit clients (Khan et al., 2005). When such an individual is the only wage-earning member of the household, the threat of poverty and near starvation motivates the wives of such sex workers to overlook the transgender persona of their husbands by necessity (Nagoshi and Brzuzy, 2010).

Joseph and Mani (2013) described the complete social exclusion of Hijras, Kinnars, and Aravanies, other communities of transgender individuals, from mainstream Indian society (Joseph and Mani, 2013). 'Hijra' is a pejorative term used to indicate a third gender, a derogatory term used to describe gay sexual behaviour, and a word which is used to describe a source of livelihood for some (Bockrath, 2003; Joseph and Mani, 2013). In very low SES communities, families expel and ostracise a transgender family member. Unprotected and unsheltered, these young men seek alternate lifestyles and join the Hijra community. The Hijra community is a framework that protects them from near starvation and maintains the physical safety of transgender individuals (Bockrath, 2003).

## 2.2 *Giddens' structuration theory*

By structuration, Giddens refers to socially accepted norms and standards. When people interact, their actions can be simple social interactions, like casual conversations, or they may collaborate to produce project deliverables. Structuration theory posits that reciprocal interactions take place between the actors and the structure. People interact socially with each other in certain circumstances or contexts. As they interact, the context continuously evolves through the interactions (Giddens, 1984). Giddens calls this the duality of structures.

In the context of entrepreneurial organisations, structure indicates rules and regulations, best practices, and policies that constitute business processes (Krafzig et al., 2005). As industry implements business processes based on specific policies (structure), through trial and error, they arrive at best practices, which become part of the structure. Structuration theory thus explains this process.

Humans respond to circumstances through their actions, including social interactions. People adhere to the standards, norms, or rules that create the context. As other people conform to these actions over time, these actions become the norm. Previous research related to transgender communities within Indian subcontinent indicates that historically, rich patrons created a social employment structure for members of the socially excluded

'Hijra' community by inviting them into their households during celebrations of auspicious life- events like weddings or births to offer a blessing (Bockrath, 2003).

Similarly, in the context of entrepreneurship, successful transgender entrepreneurial endeavours can lead to a new Indian social structure or norm, leading to a new level of integration of socially excluded transgender into mainstream society. This research adapts Giddens' structuration theory to propose that the substandard living conditions of the impoverished transgender community in India can be elevated by encouraging entrepreneurialism amongst members of transgender communities.

### *2.3 Theory of planned behaviour*

According to the theory of reasoned action, humans can choose and control how they behave socially, and therefore behavioural intentions can predict actual behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1977). Intentions alone do not necessarily lead to behaviour. For any situation, a person can cognitively decide what action to take. Each person's action or behaviour is under that person's volitional control. Every situation represents an individual goal that poses a unique challenge for the person to overcome. The person may not know for sure whether he or she will be able to overcome these challenges to behave successfully as planned, but the perception of achievability influences the intention to implement specific behaviours.

The theory of reasoned action is an extension of the theory of planned behaviour in which Ajzen (2002) added another factor perceived behavioural control, which is the awareness that an individual can overcome challenges and obstacles (Ajzen, 2002). This study takes into account the social exclusion of transgender individuals. Deeper insights into the lives of trans genders reveal that mainstream Indian society has historically refused any interaction, including offering services to or accepting services from transgender individuals (Bockrath, 2003; Lynton and Rajan, 1974). The Theory of Planned Behaviour informs this study by explaining the unique challenges faced by transgender entrepreneurs, which are beyond their control.

### *2.4 David McClelland's achievement motivation theory*

McClelland (1965) developed achievement motivation theory, which states that entrepreneurs are strongly motivated to fulfil ambitions pragmatically. There are inherent characteristics of an entrepreneur (McClelland, 1965). Affiliation motivation is the need to be friendly and be liked by everybody. Power motivation is the need to acquire the power which can take the form of autonomy authority or wealth which are acquired by the success of their entrepreneurial efforts. Achievement motivation theory states that entrepreneurs possess these inherent characteristics and that achievement of goals, affiliations, and power are strong motivators of entrepreneurial intentions.

### *2.5 Autonomy*

Prior research has defined intrinsic motivations as those motivating factors that do not depend on external rewards like monetary benefits. A person is naturally motivated to do a job better because it gives the person internal gratification to do so (Deci, 1975). Moreover, intrinsic motivation influences self-determination as self-determination is the

willpower to complete achievements (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Self-determination influences autonomy, which means that people independently establish their own goals and objectives.

McClelland's achievement motivation theory indicates that entrepreneurs are strongly motivated by an opportunity to enjoy autonomy which helps them acquire power (McClelland, 1965). Autonomy signifies freedom that forces people to be responsible for their own decisions and actions that lead to the success or failure of their endeavours.

This research considers the challenges that influence transgender individuals in India to seek sustainable financial independence through entrepreneurship to improve their standard of living and inclusion in Indian society.

## *2.6 Social networking impacts*

Zimmer and Aldrich (1986) suggest that entrepreneurship evolves through continuing social interaction and networking. Social networking helps entrepreneurs to remain connected to various resources. As opportunities present themselves, social networking makes it easy for an entrepreneur to tap into resources already available. Where entrepreneurial success depends upon the entrepreneur's ability to recognise opportunities, a large portion of that success depends upon how quickly an entrepreneur responds to the opportunity. Prior research indicates that entrepreneurs have recognised the potential of social networking where social interactions become critical to meeting various needs of entrepreneurial activity (Zimmer and Aldrich, 1986).

## *2.7 Achievement motivation*

Prior research has investigated extensively the need for achievement as a strong entrepreneurial motivator (Carsrud and Brännback, 2011; Carsrud et al., 1989; Shane et al., 2003). Prior works investigated independence from the entrepreneurial perspective. An entrepreneur practices independence when he uses judgment to make decisions and does not rely on affirmations from others. Independence allows the entrepreneur to exploit an opportunity identified as a gap in the marketplace. An entrepreneur, to achieve and retain independence, must be driven to succeed (Shane et al., 2003). Entrepreneurial success can be obtained through hard work, fierce competitiveness, and mastering entrepreneurial activities (Carsrud et al., 1989). Entrepreneurial achievement depends on the entrepreneur's personality traits including eloquence, aggression in speech, power hunger, and a strong need to be influential (Carsrud et al., 1989). Prior studies in social entrepreneurship indicate that motivation and achievement focus on solving social problems (Ruskin and Seymour, 2016).

## *2.8 Entrepreneurial perceived behavioural control*

Entrepreneurial perceived behavioural control is the awareness of individuals that they will be able to be in control and overcome challenges in their businesses. It is an essential antecedent of entrepreneurial intention (Liñán and Chen, 2009). The authors report that perceived behavioural control is the awareness of being able to overcome challenges (Ajzen, 2002), and perceived feasibility, defined by Shapero and Sokol (1982) is the degree to which people believe that they possess the necessary competencies to start something new and succeed at it. Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy in an individual as

an intrinsic personal trait in self-confidence and the belief that they have ability to successfully complete a task (Bandura, 1977). Based on the literature of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), perceived feasibility (Shapiro and Sokol, 1982), and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 2002), Liñán and Chen (2009) defined entrepreneurial perceived behavioural control.

### *2.9 Influence of social networking on entrepreneurial activities*

Personality-based theories (Brockhaus, 1982; Lee and Tsang, 2001) suggest that personality traits such as risk-taking proclivity, aggressiveness, extraversion, being in control, ambition, and a high need for achievement are some of the qualities that will increase an individual's entrepreneurial success. Zimmer and Aldrich (1986) suggest that entrepreneurship also evolves through continuing social interaction and networking. Within the framework of social networking, entrepreneur is the central link that connects mesh of complex connections. These relationships aid entrepreneurs in connecting the right resources to the exploit opportunities in a timely manner. Entrepreneurs, through persistent and tenacious effort, create enterprises, recognising through their network of social interactions that that various needs can be met (Zimmer and Aldrich, 1986).

## **3 Research methodology**

Our research methodology employs narrative inquiry from a single subject, a type of qualitative research methodology, to produce this case study. Researchers have used single-subject case studies to contribute to the relevant body of knowledge in multiple disciplines. For example, Freud and Strachey published a case study of a single subject, Anna O., diagnosed with hysteria, which marked the beginning of psychoanalysis (Freud and Strachey, 1977). Agrawal (2014) published a case study based on a single subject, a medical practitioner turned entrepreneur, who established an assisted living facility for senior citizens in India. This single subject provided the basis for investigating factors that included entrepreneurial education, vision, and futuristic goals and ambitions within this unique entrepreneurial venture to add to the existing research that investigated social entrepreneurship (Agrawal, 2014). In each of these cases, an exploratory pilot study played an introductory role in the developing study of a new endeavour. This study similarly contributes to the academic gender studies, social networking, and entrepreneurial literature.

This study investigates the challenges faced by a member of a unique target population (i.e., transgender individuals) and particularises the evolution of the subject of this case study (Eckstein, 1975). Flyvbjerg (2006) concluded that extreme exemplar cases reveal more profound insights into the process under examination. The methodology used in this study explores life events and engages narrative analytic procedures to produce an explanatory analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). This study utilises a crystallisation framework, described by Borkan (1999), which involves the researcher immersing completely into the responses or text data to understand and analyse it. Crystallisation then stops the process of immersion to allow the researcher to reflect on the data, articulating patterns and themes observed throughout the process of immersion (Borkan, 1999).

We initially discussed the project with two experts, one an educator, entrepreneur, and another academician who has a PhD in entrepreneurial studies. These discussions facilitated the development of the protocol for our semi-structured interview with our key informant for this case study.

To identify our subject, we conducted an internet search with the keywords entrepreneur and transgender. From this search, we shortlisted three potential candidates for interview. We then conducted an information-seeking activity using the Internet to gain deeper insights into the lives of each of these candidates. For this, we used LinkedIn, Facebook, and the Google search engine. We finally selected our key informant subject based on the information we collected and based on our expectation that the subject could articulate thoughtful responses to our interview questions in this pilot study that is the foundational study for future work.

Initially, we casually approached our subject to initiate contact. We sent a Facebook add request and established our first contact. In our very first conversation, we provided our university credentials and explained the purpose of our study. Using the file attachment, we sent her our IRB approval, as well as an informed consent notice. The subject decided to partake in this study and agreed to a series of interviews. We used the web-based application 'GoToMeeting' as our medium for conducting and recording the interviews. This technique allowed both the interviewer and the interviewee to connect to the meeting from their respective locations using either their hand-held devices or a computer with audio/video. We scheduled an online audio/visual meeting and communicated the meeting details to the subject via email. We recorded each interview, which we saved as an mp3 file on our hard disks. Using online tools is particularly useful since the research team was in a southern US state, while our subject was in a metropolitan city in India. We conducted two interviews with our respondent according to her availability. The duration of the first interview was 1 hour 34 seconds. After the first interview, the primary investigator created the transcript. The second investigator listed in the IRB application validated this transcript for its accuracy. Using Facebook messenger file transfer, we shared this transcript with our respondent for her perusal, approval, correction, and feedback. Based on her responses to the first interview, we conducted a second interview that lasted 1 hour and 26 minutes to probe further to gain deeper insights.

#### **4 Case description**

In this case study, we follow the life history of a trans woman who dreamed of life as a normal Indian woman, even as she was born and raised a man for the first 29 years of her life. This case study allows us an exceptional opportunity to explore the relationships between entrepreneurial intentions and entrepreneurial behaviour with reference to exceptional challenging circumstances faced by transgender entrepreneurs in India.

Karan (name changed to maintain the anonymity of the subject) reported that he came from humble origins. He recognised very early in life that his mannerisms and his preferences were effeminate, and that he was different from most of the other boys his age. Although at the time, he did not understand what was happening, he experienced overwhelming feelings of being trapped in a wrong body, and as puberty overtook him, his anatomical development disgusted him. He often experienced tension, trauma, and

apprehension associated with this gender dysphoria. He also realised that he was a gifted artist, with a talent for drawing. He began to pour all his emotions into his art.

Since he had an inherent sense of colour and did not like the way he looked as he matured anatomically into an adult male, he began to experiment with makeup, to make himself look beautiful, rather than handsome. As he became more skilled in this work, he was encouraged by other like-minded people. He was emotionally aligned with being a woman, and this manifested itself in his sexual relationships with homosexual men. Karan completed his graduation in 1991 and became an Economics post-graduate in 1993. He began teaching career in 1993 and taught economics to college students. By this time, he was convinced that he was not a gay man but was a trans woman. He articulated his dream of becoming a woman, which meant not only being free of the body that he was born into but also being accepted by mainstream society as an Indian woman with the respected status enjoyed by Indian women in Indian society. Karan was determined that if he embarked on this journey, he would not become a Hijra. He realised that to escape the fate of a transgendered Hijra; he would have to become financially independent.

In 1993, Karan participated in a bridal makeup competition. People noticed his work and approached him with bridal makeup orders. He identified his entrepreneurial opportunity here. He realised that he could also be successful in teaching make-up. Karan founded his makeup-academy in 1999. As his makeup school grew, cosmetic companies approached him and asked him to conduct seminars and workshops demonstrating makeup and hairdressing techniques, and promoting their products. Karan realised yet another way to generate revenue.

By 1999, Karan underwent sexual reassignment surgery and changed his name to Karina. Two months after her sexual reassignment surgery, Karina resumed her job, still maintaining a male persona. She remembers being intensely depressed, and deeply traumatised by the fact that she could not begin her life as a woman and be accepted as a female professor. She could no longer continue to work as a male faculty member, and she resigned from the faculty position in the university.

By 2006, Karina was married to her current husband, Amrit. Her transformation from a man to a woman was now complete, and she and Amrit decided to invest in a competitive mainstream salon. In 2016, she developed a cosmetic product line and got involved in manufacturing and distributing an assortment of cosmetic products, in addition to her makeup academy, salon, and bridal makeup business lines. As of 2017, all her offerings were successful, and she anticipates an increase in total returns from all of her offerings of approximately 15% to 20%.

## **5 Discussions**

Karina is a successful transgender female entrepreneur who rose from low SES. She founded her entrepreneurial endeavour while she was still anatomically male. She studied economics, and she began her career as a college instructor. When she realised that her transgender transformation would require her to find alternative employment, she used her drawing talent to create a business in which she had no prior experience.

Her entrepreneurial journey was driven by the challenges associated with her identity as a transsexual and her transformation process. In the context of the social exclusion of

transgender individuals from low SES in India, her story provides insights and useful strategies for small-scale family businesses owned and operated by transgender individuals who seek to be accepted into mainstream Indian society. Her experiences demonstrate that creating a legitimate business that provides a reputable source of work and income can also create opportunities to integrate socially excluded members of transgender communities into mainstream society. Giddens structuration theory acts as a foundation that suggests that acceptance of transgender entrepreneurship can become the social norm leading to the inclusion of a previously socially excluded segment of society in India. This exploratory case study presents our analysis and study outcomes, which can start a pioneering effort to improve the living conditions of transgender individuals in Indian society. We present details from the interviews with our subject that illustrate the steps in her evolution and the links to relevant theories.

### *5.1 Challenges impeded autonomy*

Prior theories in entrepreneurship addressed the motivation behind entrepreneurial intentions. According to McClelland et al.'s (1953) achievement motivation theory, entrepreneurs are driven by their need to achieve, which motivates their entrepreneurial activities. Entrepreneurial intentions are also motivated by the promise of financial independence (Deci, 1975) and family security (Carter, 2011). Karina speaks, in her own words (shown in italics) of the apprehensions that influenced her to seek autonomy.

I started researching on transformation, body transformation in the year 1996. I realized that it is a very lengthy and expensive procedure, and I should be financially sound... I wanted to be established as an entrepreneur. I decided that I wanted to start my own business. I started taking a special interest in makeup so that if people do not accept me as a mainstream educator, I should have an alternative option of a career in makeup, and hairstyling. So, I created two parallel lines for me; academic career and the second option of a makeup and styling career.

Prior research also indicated that mainstream society refused to offer suitable employment opportunities for visibly trans-identified people (Bockrath, 2003; Lynton and Rajan, 1974). Thus, it is imperative for trans people to seek autonomy and independence, and to move from the need to be hired by an employer to opportunities that promote self-employment. Trans people in India face many challenges in life including social exclusion, and if they belong to a low SES, they are at high risk of eviction from their homes, of being disowned by their families, facing unemployment, starvation, and even threats to their lives. Under such dire conditions, autonomy includes financial independence and the promise of not only being able to make enough money to survive but of doing so through a means that can offer respectability and inclusion in mainstream society. This case study suggests the first appropriate research question for investigation.

RQ1 Is there any relationship between factors such as financial independence, various challenges associated with transgender transformation, and the intention to establish an enterprise?

## 5.2 *Ultimate achievement*

McClelland's (1965) achievement motivation theory suggests that achievement of goals and ambitions strongly motivates entrepreneurs to engage in entrepreneurship. Other researchers showed that achievement-drive is an extremely compelling entrepreneurial motivator (Carsrud and Brännback, 2011; Carsrud et al., 1989; Shane et al., 2003). Achievement can be obtained through hard work, fierce competitiveness, and mastering entrepreneurial activities (Carsrud et al., 1989).

This study explores the meaning of success for an Indian trans woman. The narrative indicates that achievement for a trans person is related to accessing the fundamental rights of Indian citizenship, which are the rights to live as a free and socially accepted citizen. Again, in our subject's own words:

“In the neighborhood that I live, I am accepted as a woman. When people refer to me as Miss and I correct them as not Miss, but Mrs. Karina, their acceptance of my marital status gives me a cloak of respectability, which is another achievement of my life.”

“Now, I became very confident as a woman. I now have started conducting workshops, seminars at all levels of Indian society. People now have started accepting me as a woman. People who used to address me as Sir have started addressing me as Ma'am. This was my biggest achievement in my life.”

Karina then narrates how her sense of accomplishment helped her achieve her entrepreneurial goals

“Those two years were pretty tough regarding different roles I was performing: that of an academician, salon owner, housewife, daughter, and daughter in law. I learned time utility, space utility, time management, public relations. I used to take care of customer care; I used to take care of logistics, accounting, and was the purchasing manager.”

In the case of trans people, acceptance into mainstream society (social inclusion) is an important factor that is operationalised as the ultimate achievement. McClelland et al. (1953) developed achievement motivation theory, which posits that need for achievement strongly motivates entrepreneurialism (McClelland et al., 1953). We base our second research question on achievement motivation theory, and prior research conducted on social entrepreneurship (Ruskin and Seymour, 2016). Our case study, thus recommend another appropriate research question for investigation in the situation of the trials and hardships faced by trans genders

RQ2 Is there a relationship between achievements in the context of trans-life and your intentions to start an enterprise?

## 5.3 *Transgender entrepreneurial perceived behavioural control*

There are many challenges that a trans person must overcome when initiating an entrepreneurial activity in India. In India, people are most often exposed to transgenderism only when they come across Hijras in public places begging for petty cash, or at celebratory events such as marriages or births (Bockrath, 2003; Das, 2015; Siddharth, 2003). Indian mainstream society has shunned Hijra transgenders. Today, the livelihood and survival of Hijra communities are dependent on the altruism of

mainstream society (Bockrath, 2003). Karina feared that people would think of her as Hijra. She said:

“Many people by now know that the person they knew as Karan had transformed into Karina and they had a curiosity about me. In India, transgenders are not accepted as part of the mainstream society. They make a living by clapping and begging on the streets, through prostitution or being sex workers. As a result, many people started looking at me in different ways. I wanted to be a woman of the mainstream society; I should have a husband, family and family values.”

The theory of planned behaviour indicates that perceived behavioural control relates to whether people think they can overcome external challenges allowing them to behave as planned. Prior research indicates that a person may not know for sure whether he or she will be able to overcome challenges to be successful, but the perception of achievability influences the intention to indulge in success-oriented behaviours (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1977).

In the context of this study, people must be educated about transgenderism, and this can happen if they witness a transgender individual’s transformation in stages. Business success largely depends upon customer patronage (Paridon and Carraher, 2009). In this context, Karina knew that people’s behaviour toward her transgender persona was out of her control. Karina reveals her fears in her own words.

“... I started conducting makeup seminars and workshops for upcoming makeup artists in India. I was still retaining my male body, but since I was on hormone therapy, I had started exhibiting the effects of those hormones. When people would ask me why I look feminine, I still did not have the guts to tell them that I am undergoing hormone treatment and that I was planning to go for reassignment surgery.”

The stigma associated with the sexual identity of transgender individuals can negatively influence customer patronage behaviours which are beyond the control of the entrepreneur. Our case study suggests that customer patronage can be controlled to some extent if the patrons are exposed to a transformation process of an existing service provider to the community. In consideration of whether such a business will attract customers, and based on the theory of planned behaviour and our respondent’s interview, we identify another set of research questions (RQ3, RQ4, RQ5 and RQ6) appropriate for investigation.

RQ3 Will society be more accepting of your enterprise if they are sensitised in incremental stages to your transsexual conversion?

Karina further continues, in her own words:

“By the time my transition was complete, I had already established myself as a makeup artist. So, I don’t think I have had any challenges to me getting work due to my transformation. I have also observed that it does not matter a lot to my clients. Our relationship is limited to only services that I provide them. If they are happy with the services, I retain my customers. People have started realizing that gender is not important. It is the work that matters and the person.”

Hence, we propose our fourth research question:

RQ4 Does transsexual identity have any influence on service quality and customers' acceptance of the enterprise's (individual skill-base) offerings?

Prior entrepreneurial research indicates that male entrepreneurs feel threatened and resist female entrepreneurs that they perceive as wanting a larger market share (Mauchi et al., 2014). An example of a female entrepreneurial activity in India that men are not threatened by is a papad production business. Papad is an Indian cracker, and papad making is traditionally considered a woman's job at home. Men are not resistant when a group of women get together and establish a small scale business making and selling papads (Rahman and Sultana, 2012). Based on the dynamics between male and female entrepreneurs in India, the interview suggests another suitable research question for investigation.

RQ5 Will mainstream society be more accepting of services provided by a transgender if an entrepreneurial activity is typically perceived to be feminine or is gender neutral?

Karina further says (in italics)

But because of this transformation, my makeup career had picked up well. I started getting many makeup assignments. I have, in fact, realized that since most of my customers are women, they feel more comfortable with me as a woman than they felt with me when I was a man. India is still conservative enough where middle-class families still think it undesirable to allow a man to touch their women when the makeup artist working on a female customer is male. It is still a taboo. In my case, the transition from male to female has worked in favor of the general norm of the society.

A trans person can judge her ability to control the dynamics of attracting work and retaining it. We term this "trans perceived behavioural control." From the interview with Karina, an important research question is identified for further investigation.

RQ6 Will trans perceived behavioural control positively influence the entrepreneurial intentions of a transgender person?

#### *5.4 Social networking sites influence*

Karina attributes a lot of the success of her entrepreneurial efforts to social networking. In the context of overcoming challenges posed by her transformation from man to woman, Karina affirms that she has made technology work for her. She has appropriated social networking to create a curiosity about her. As her multilayered entrepreneurial career grew, Karina used social networking to capitalise on her transformation and to assume a leadership position and expand her business activities.

This is consistent with existing literature that explains entrepreneurship through network theory. Density and reachability, two dimensions of network theory, are important in entrepreneurialism (Zimmer and Aldrich, 1986). The density of a network indicates the richness of ties between people and reflects how dense an individual's social network is. We measure density by comparing the existing connections that an individual has to the total potential connections an individual can have if everyone is connected to everyone else in the network. We explain reachability in the context of social networking simply by referring to an individual's connections. An individual's immediate connection is the first connection. An individual connected to someone through their first

connections are second connections and so on. Reachability indicates how far a person is from another person on a social network related to the ranking of connections. Density and reachability play crucial roles in determining trust and confidence. Trust is generated through these interactions and depends upon the strength of the interactions (Zimmer and Aldrich, 1986).

Individuals can identify opportunities presented by a shortage of products or services in the marketplace (Alvarez and Barney, 2015). This ability is termed entrepreneurial alertness. Trust and confidence created through social interactions can lead to chance opportunities, and entrepreneurial alertness facilitates the establishment of a business (Lee and Tsang, 2001). Such an alert entrepreneur occupies the central position in the network. Prior research shows that such a central person can exploit opportunities for entrepreneurship in the framework of social networking (Zimmer and Aldrich 1986).

Karina demonstrates entrepreneurial alertness as she appropriates Twitter and Facebook as chosen social networking sites for business expansion. She uses Twitter and Facebook to display not only her work but also herself. She affirms

“India is still conservative enough where middle-class families still think it undesirable to allow a man to touch their women when the makeup artist working on a female customer is male. It is still a taboo. In my case, the transition from male to female has worked in favor of the general norm of the society.”

“I use my Facebook page for cross-marketing, I hired some web page managers who had targeted groups for me where we posted content of my work for them to see. We created YouTube videos of my work. I have 5000 followers on Facebook alone. In this way, information technology has expanded my horizon, expanded the boundaries of my business. I get cross-over inquiries for makeup from students from Nepal, Pakistan, Srilanka. My YouTube channels have helped me to get inquiries from my overseas students.”

## 6 Research summary

This case study provides a first step in addressing an identified research gap and conducts a qualitative pilot study to investigate the antecedents that impact entrepreneurship in a transgender individual in India. Through this case study, we established the foundation for an expanded study of the same phenomenon in the future and verified that our research questions could be answered with the semi-structured interview questions that we contextualised from previously validated instruments. During our interview with our key respondent, we discovered that the following four factors influenced entrepreneurialism in our transgender respondent: transgender perceived behavioural control, ultimate achievement, challenges impeded autonomy, and impact of social networking sites on entrepreneurial success. These factors are unique in this context because transgender individuals must overcome not only the typical challenges faced by conventional male and female entrepreneurs, but also challenges that are unique in the context of their sexual identity which is stigmatised, and leads to social undesirability, exclusion, and repression imposed by mainstream society in India.

## **7 Contribution to research**

This case study contributes to the literature in health and gender studies, public policy and entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial success, for a transgender entrepreneur, is a strong motivator of entrepreneurial intentions, which can foster not only enhancements to the quality of life for transgender in India but also can provoke important social change that reduces marginalisation and improve the economic condition of members of this group

## **8 Contribution to practice**

This research also informs government and policymakers in India and guides a cluster of neighbouring countries that share similar cultural backgrounds and moral frameworks to a pioneering mechanism that allows members of this marginalised group in India and in these countries to become self-sufficient members of society. Governments can promote entrepreneurial ventures initiated by transgender individuals, that both meet a societal product and service need, and which would advance their efforts toward integrating this unique segment of society into the mainstream in India and elsewhere.

## **9 Study limitations**

This case study examined the use of social networking to both foster a male to female transsexual transition and establish and maintain a successful business by a single transgendered entrepreneur in India. As a study of a single individual, the results of this study cannot be generalised but instead has served as a pilot study for an expanded study of this phenomenon in India going forward. Secondly, we acknowledge that the South Asian cultural framework of this study may not apply to other western civilisations.

## **10 Conclusions**

We utilise this case study as a pilot study that provides a foundation that should result in the future studies of transgender entrepreneurs in India. We tested a series of semi-structured interview questions contextualised from other validated instruments to verify that this tool would collect the data we were seeking before moving on to a larger sample of transgender Indian entrepreneurs. We identified challenges that impeded autonomy, ultimate achievement, perceived transgender behavioural control, and social networking sites influence as major factors that influence entrepreneurship amongst transgender individuals within the restrictive Indian culture. This research informs the entrepreneurial literature and describes a mechanism for transgender entrepreneurs in India begin to work towards sustainable business ventures and societal acceptance. This research has filled an identified research gap and highlighted the challenges of this unique group of entrepreneurs.

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