



LINKING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS WITH ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF ORGANISATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR IN ENHANCING BUSINESS PERFORMANCE



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Abstract

Women entrepreneurship is increasingly relevant to economic development, employment creation, innovation and inclusive growth. Research on women entrepreneurs has focused largely on access to finance, institutions, socio-cultural constraints, entrepreneurial orientation and external ecosystem factors, whereas less attention has been paid to the behavioural processes that link entrepreneurial characteristics with business performance. This study addresses this gap by developing a conceptual framework that proposes Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) as the behavioural mechanism mediating the relationship between women entrepreneurial characteristics and business performance, set within the broader context of Atmanirbhar Bharat. An integrative literature review of secondary sources on women entrepreneurship, organisational behaviour, OCB, entrepreneurial characteristics and business performance was conducted. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory, the framework suggests that employees may reciprocate supportive, ethical and empowering treatment through discretionary behaviours beyond formal job requirements. Innovativeness, proactiveness, resilience, ethical leadership, opportunity recognition and employee empowerment orientation are considered as entrepreneurial characteristics that may foster OCB in the form of altruism, conscientiousness, courtesy, sportsmanship and civic virtue. OCB, in turn, may improve business performance through enhanced cooperation, knowledge sharing, innovation, employee commitment, customer service and efficiency. Three propositions linking entrepreneurial characteristics, OCB and business performance are developed. The framework integrates previously separate strands of the entrepreneurship and organisational behaviour literature and offers implications for women entrepreneurs, human resource managers, entrepreneurship development institutions and policymakers. The proposed relationships require empirical verification in women-led enterprises that employ workers.

Keywords: *Atmanirbhar Bharat; Behaviour; Entrepreneurial Characteristics; Organisational Citizenship Business Performance; Social Exchange Theory; Women Entrepreneurship*

Introduction

Women entrepreneurship has become a vital part of the process of economic and social development. Women-owned and women-led enterprises contribute to employment creation, innovation, increased income, local economic activity and social empowerment. At the same time, women's entrepreneurial activity has been shaped by institutional, financial, social and cultural conditions. Research on women entrepreneurship in developing-country contexts has paid particular attention to constraining factors such as lack of access to finance, markets, networks, skills and support institutions [1, 2]. These constraining factors imply that entrepreneurial outcomes of women cannot be explained solely through individual characteristics, because they are also shaped by organisational and environmental contexts.

In India, the development of women entrepreneurship has attracted increasing policy attention. For example, the Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) was launched to enhance women's access to information, capacity building, networks, mentorship and other forms of entrepreneurship development [3]. Such initiatives are consistent with the broader objective of increasing women's participation in economic activities. The Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan was launched by the Government of India in 2020 to pursue self-reliance, domestic capability, resilience and economic development [4]. Women-led enterprises can contribute to this broader objective through enterprise creation, employment, innovation and local economic activity. However, there is a need to investigate how the relationship between women's entrepreneurial abilities and organisational outcomes is shaped by behavioural processes within enterprises.

Extensive research in organisational behaviour has identified Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) as a category of discretionary employee behaviours. The pioneering studies of Bateman and Organ [5] and Smith et al. [6] recognised citizenship behaviours as a category of behaviours extending beyond formal role requirements. Organ [7] subsequently developed OCB into an established organisational behaviour construct. Citizenship behaviours generally include helping colleagues, conscientiousness, courtesy, maintaining a constructive attitude and responsible involvement in organisational affairs. Numerous reviews have found relationships between OCB and various organisational outcomes including effectiveness and performance [8, 9, 10].

Despite a rich literature on OCB, this behavioural category has received little attention in the context of women-led organisations. Most research on women entrepreneurs investigates performance using such categories as financial resources, entrepreneurial orientation, human capital, social capital, institutions and market-related factors. For example, Ghani et al. [2] found that changes in institutions in India can affect the establishment of women-owned firms, whereas Welsh et al. [11] found that performance determinants of women entrepreneurs may vary depending on contextual conditions. Recent reviews have highlighted the multidimensionality of performance of women-owned firms [12]. These studies are useful, but they do not adequately explain how the entrepreneurial characteristics and leadership of women entrepreneurs may result in employee behaviours that determine business performance.

The present study fills this conceptual gap by suggesting OCB as the behavioural mechanism between entrepreneurial characteristics of women and business performance. The core argument of this study is not that entrepreneurial characteristics automatically lead to better performance. Rather, entrepreneurial characteristics can shape leadership and organisational climate so that employees reciprocate these actions through discretionary behaviours. Such behaviours are helpful in cooperation, knowledge sharing, innovation, customer service and efficient operations and, thus, contribute to business performance.

Social Exchange Theory [13] is the primary theoretical framework behind the above-mentioned idea. According to this theory, social interactions are characterised by reciprocal exchange of resources and treatment. In the organisational setting, employees may reciprocate supportive, fair and ethical treatment through attitudes and behaviours. The meta-analytic review of Organ and Ryan [8] shows that OCB is positively associated with job attitudes, perceived fairness, organisational commitment and leader supportiveness. Thus, the social exchange approach provides the theoretical justification for the idea that entrepreneurial characteristics, when translated into supportive, ethical and empowering leadership, may be related to OCB.

It is also necessary to consider an important condition. Since OCB is a concept referring to behaviours of employees, it can be used to analyse behavioural mechanisms only if there is an identifiable employee–organisation relationship. The mechanism is therefore applicable mainly to women-owned or women-led firms employing workers. It cannot be automatically extended to own-account firms or micro-enterprises without employees, as the employee behavioural mechanism does not work in the same way there.

Consequently, the present study has four objectives:

1. To investigate the theoretical relationship between women entrepreneurial characteristics and Organisational Citizenship Behaviour.
2. To investigate the theoretical relationship between Organisational Citizenship Behaviour and business performance of women-led enterprises.
3. To develop a conceptual framework proposing OCB as a mediator between women entrepreneurial characteristics and business performance.
4. To discuss the theoretical, managerial and policy implications of the proposed framework in the context of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Literature Review

Women Entrepreneurship and the Indian Context

Women entrepreneurship can be defined broadly as entrepreneurship initiated, owned, managed or substantially controlled by women. The literature shows that entrepreneurial participation of women should be analysed not just in terms of individual motivation. It is embedded in institutional, cultural, economic and family contexts. Through their gender-aware framework, Brush et al. [1] argued that women's entrepreneurship should be understood through markets, money, management, motherhood and macro/meso environment. This framework is relevant to India since women entrepreneurs operate in a variety of institutional and socio-cultural contexts.

Similarly, Indian literature highlights that the entrepreneurial activity of women is influenced by the environment surrounding them. For example, Ghani et al. [2] found that political reservations were associated with an increase in the number of women-owned establishments in India, especially in the informal sector and home-based enterprises. This finding is important because it demonstrates that entrepreneurial activity can respond to institutional changes rather than being determined solely by the individual characteristics of entrepreneurs.

The literature also identifies persistent barriers, including limited access to finance, socio-cultural constraints, insufficient network and skill bases and constrained access to markets. The work of NITI Aayog on the Women Entrepreneurship Platform emphasises the importance of information, capacity building, networks, mentorship and ecosystem linkages for women-led enterprises [3]. Consequently, the literature supports the idea that women's entrepreneurship is influenced by a combination of individual ability, organisational practice and the external ecosystem. However, much of the literature focuses on issues such as entry, survival, constraints to growth and ecosystem support. Fewer studies examine what happens inside women-led enterprises once employees are recruited. The organisational behaviour of employees becomes particularly important when the enterprise grows because the entrepreneur cannot personally carry out all operational activities. This implies a need to connect women entrepreneurship literature with organisational behaviour literature.

Entrepreneurial Characteristics and Business Performance

Performance is multidimensional and can include profitability, sales growth, market expansion, productivity, innovation, customer satisfaction, efficiency and sustainability. Recent research on women-owned firms supports the idea that performance should not be considered only in financial terms [12]. Rather, it emerges through the interaction of financial, human, social and organisational resources.

Such entrepreneurial characteristics as innovativeness, proactiveness, resilience and opportunity recognition can help entrepreneurs identify opportunities and respond to uncertainty and changes in the environment. However, the relationship between individual entrepreneurial characteristics and firm performance is neither automatic nor uniform. For instance, Welsh et al. [11] have shown that performance determinants of women entrepreneurs depend on contextual conditions and that different types of capital do not have an identical impact in different contexts.

This observation is important for the present conceptual framework. If entrepreneurial characteristics are treated as direct determinants of performance, the organisational mechanisms through which entrepreneurs affect employees are overlooked. The entrepreneur may be very innovative or proactive, but the beneficial effect of these characteristics for the firm will depend partly on whether employees are able to understand, support and implement the entrepreneur's strategy.

Consequently, the performance literature suggests a process approach. Entrepreneurs' characteristics can influence the way entrepreneurs manage and involve employees in the firm's activities. These practices can affect employees' attitudes and behaviours that can ultimately result in organisational outcomes. This theoretical approach provides a justification for investigating OCB as the mechanism.

Organisational Citizenship Behaviour

Organisational Citizenship Behaviour is defined as discretionary employee behaviours that are helpful in organisational functioning and are not necessarily included in formal job requirements. Smith et al. [6] identified citizenship behaviour as one of the categories of employee behaviours extending beyond formal role requirements. Organ [7] further conceptualised OCB as discretionary behaviour helpful in the effective functioning of the organisation.

The following OCB dimensions are common: altruism, conscientiousness, courtesy, sportsmanship and civic virtue [7]. Altruism refers to voluntarily helping colleagues with work-related issues. Conscientiousness implies going beyond minimal role requirements in terms of such things as attendance, punctuality or care. Courtesy involves taking steps to prevent work-related problems for colleagues. Sportsmanship implies maintaining a constructive attitude and refraining from unnecessary complaints. Civic virtue refers to responsible participation in organisational affairs.

The relevance of OCB to business performance has been studied extensively. Organ and Ryan [8] found that job attitudes, perceptions of fairness, organisational commitment and leader supportiveness are associated with OCB. Podsakoff et al. [9] have reviewed antecedents and consequences of OCB and highlighted the relationship of OCB with organisational effectiveness. Podsakoff et al. [10] further examined, through meta-analysis, the consequences of OCB at individual and organisational levels.

These findings support the interpretation of OCB as an organisationally relevant behaviour construct. However, they do not provide evidence that OCB necessarily mediates the relationship between women's entrepreneurial characteristics and business performance. That relationship is the conceptual proposition of the present study and should be empirically validated.

Importantly, OCB cannot be treated as an unlimited expectation from employees to work beyond their formal job requirements. Excessive expectations of employees' discretionary behaviour may cause role overload or citizenship fatigue [14]. Consequently, the present framework assumes that OCB is stimulated by supportive organisational conditions rather than imposed as an additional requirement.

Women Entrepreneurial Characteristics, Leadership and OCB

The connection between women entrepreneurial characteristics and OCB can be understood through leadership and organisational climate. The present framework considers six characteristics: innovativeness, proactiveness, resilience, ethical leadership, opportunity recognition and employee empowerment orientation. These characteristics have been chosen because they can plausibly influence how an entrepreneur manages employees and organises work.

Innovativeness can promote experimentation, learning and knowledge exchange. Proactiveness can encourage employees to anticipate problems and opportunities. Resilience can promote persistence through uncertainty and organisational change. Opportunity recognition can influence how employees are involved in identifying and addressing changes in customer or market needs. Ethical leadership can shape perceptions of fairness, trust and legitimacy. Employee empowerment orientation can give more autonomy, participation and responsibility to employees.

The key point is that these characteristics are not OCB themselves. On the contrary, they can influence the organisational conditions under which OCB is developed.

Social Exchange Theory provides the mechanism. When employees perceive that the entrepreneur exhibits fairness, support, trust, ethical behaviour and empowerment, they can treat the employment relationship as a positive social exchange. As a consequence, they reciprocate with behaviours exceeding minimum job requirements [8, 13].

However, the relationship should be seen as contingent rather than deterministic. The entrepreneur's characteristics can be perceived differently by employees depending on organisational culture, communication, trust, workload and institutional context. For example, proactiveness without proper communication can be perceived as pressure rather than support. Similarly, empowerment without sufficient resources and role clarity can increase employees' demands rather than promote citizenship. Consequently, the framework proposes a theoretically plausible pathway, not a universal cause-and-effect relationship.

Research Gap

Three important gaps appear in the literature.

First, the literature on women entrepreneurship has extensively studied access to resources, institutions, socio-cultural constraints, entrepreneurial orientation and business performance, but comparatively less attention has been paid to the behavioural processes within women-led firms.

Second, the literature on OCB has accumulated an extensive evidence base related to the attitudes of employees, leadership, organisational support and organisational outcomes, but most of it has been generated in established organisational settings rather than in women-led entrepreneurial firms, with only limited evidence from small enterprises [15].

Third, the two bodies of literature have seldom been integrated into a coherent conceptual model explaining how women entrepreneurial characteristics can influence business performance through employee citizenship behaviour.

The present study addresses this gap by proposing OCB as the mediating behavioural mechanism. Consequently, the contribution of this study lies not in claiming that OCB has not been studied or that women entrepreneurship has not been related to performance. Rather, it lies in integrating these separate bodies of literature into a theoretically grounded framework that can be empirically tested.

Theoretical Foundation: Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) developed by Blau [13] is the main theoretical foundation for the proposed framework. SET explains social relationships as reciprocal exchanges in which individuals reciprocate valued treatment with behaviour maintaining or strengthening the relationship.

In the organisational context, employees are not responding only to formal contracts. They also interpret how they are treated by organisational leaders. The support, fairness, trust, recognition and opportunities for participation can make employees interpret their treatment as a positive exchange. They can reciprocate with commitment, cooperation and discretionary behaviour.

The relevance of SET to OCB is confirmed by the established OCB literature. Organ and Ryan [8] found that job satisfaction, organisational commitment and leader supportiveness are associated with citizenship behaviour. Similarly, Podsakoff et al. [9] found that leadership and attitudinal factors were key antecedents of OCB.

In firms led by women, entrepreneurial traits might play an important role in shaping leader-follower relations. For instance, ethical leadership may enhance the sense of justice and trustworthiness; empowering orientation may signal trust in one's followers; resilience may demonstrate perseverance in uncertain situations; and innovativeness may motivate employees to participate in problem solving and sharing knowledge.

Thus, the following chain can be formulated:

Entrepreneurial traits → creation of a supportive/empowering organisational climate → employees' reciprocity → OCB → performance of the firm

It is not assumed that women entrepreneurs have these traits consistently or exclusively. In this study, "women entrepreneurial traits" refers to the entrepreneurial traits of women entrepreneurs studied specifically in relation to women-led enterprises.

In this way, SET also provides an explanation as to why OCB acts as a mediator, not just another independent variable. Entrepreneurial traits are situated at the level of entrepreneur/leader, whereas OCB is situated at the level of employees' behaviour. Business performance is the organisational outcome. The mediator thus links different organisational levels.

Conceptual Framework and Propositions

Proposed Conceptual Framework

The proposed framework integrates three major levels of analysis: entrepreneurial characteristics, employee behaviour and business performance.

Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

Women Entrepreneurial Characteristics

- Innovativeness
- Proactiveness
- Resilience
- Ethical Leadership
- Opportunity Recognition
- Employee Empowerment Orientation



Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (Mediator)

- Altruism
- Conscientiousness
- Courtesy
- Sportsmanship
- Civic Virtue



Business Performance

- Productivity
- Operational Efficiency
- Innovation
- Customer Satisfaction
- Business Growth
- Profitability/Sustainability



Broader Contribution to Atmanirbhar Bharat

- Employment generation
- Enterprise competitiveness
- Local economic participation
- Innovation
- Organisational resilience

Source: Developed by the authors based on the literature synthesis and Social Exchange Theory.

The framework proposes that women entrepreneurial characteristics influence business performance partly through employee OCB. The model deliberately distinguishes the characteristics of the entrepreneur from the behaviours of employees. This distinction is essential because entrepreneurial characteristics and OCB represent conceptually different constructs.

Why OCB is the Mediator

OCB is posited as a mediating variable because it is the behavioural route through which entrepreneurial characteristics and leadership could be translated into organisational consequences. Entrepreneurial characteristics could impact the way that the entrepreneur communicates, delegates, empowers and leads employees. In turn, this could influence employee perceptions and their willingness to engage in reciprocal behaviour. OCB is, in this regard, the discretionary behaviour through which the employee contributes beyond minimal formal requirements.

For instance, an entrepreneur who empowers employees can give them greater freedom to solve customers' problems. Those employees who perceive this freedom positively could help each other, exchange information, solve operational problems and make suggestions. Such behavioural characteristics would result in improved coordination and service quality. These organisational benefits, in turn, may improve performance.

Therefore, OCB does not replace entrepreneurial capability. Rather, it is a behavioural channel through which entrepreneurial capability could be translated into organisational capability.

Propositions

P1: *Women entrepreneurial characteristics are positively related to Organisational Citizenship Behaviour among employees of women-led enterprises.*

The first proposition is based on the idea that entrepreneurial characteristics affect leadership and the organisational environment. Innovativeness, proactiveness, resilience, ethical leadership, opportunity recognition and empowerment orientation could create conditions under which employees feel encouraged to be helpful and act in discretionary ways.

P2: *Organisational Citizenship Behaviour is positively related to business performance of women-led enterprises.*

The second proposition follows from the OCB literature, which links citizenship behaviours to organisational effectiveness and performance-related variables. OCB can support coordination, knowledge sharing, innovation, service quality, employee cooperation and operational efficiency [9,10].

P3: *Organisational Citizenship Behaviour mediates the relationship between women entrepreneurial characteristics and business performance.*

The third proposition is the core of the framework. As argued above, entrepreneurial characteristics may impact business performance partially through the creation of certain conditions that influence employee behaviour. Therefore, OCB is proposed as the intervening behavioural mechanism, not merely an outcome variable.

All these propositions are theoretical and have not been statistically tested in the current study.

Methodology

Research Design

In order to develop a theoretical framework, the study employs an integrative conceptual literature review approach. Integrative literature review design is appropriate when literature from various but related streams needs to be synthesised in order to develop a theoretical explanation or framework [16,17]. Such a methodology is especially useful when research is dispersed across various disciplines and theoretical framework development is the goal.

It should be noted that the present study is not an empirical survey or experimental research design. Primary data from women entrepreneurs and/or their employees were not gathered. The goal of this research was to synthesise the relevant literature on the topic and integrate it using Social Exchange Theory.

Data Sources and Search Scope

Secondary literature was considered from academic and institutional sources, including peer-reviewed journal literature indexed in major scholarly databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar and EBSCOhost, together with relevant reports from credible institutional sources.

The conceptual search focused on combinations of terms relating to:

- “women entrepreneurship” AND “business performance”;
- “women entrepreneurs” AND “entrepreneurial characteristics”;
- “women-led enterprises” AND “organisational behaviour”;
- “organisational citizenship behaviour” AND “business performance”;
- “organisational citizenship behaviour” AND leadership;
- “women entrepreneurs” AND leadership;
- “women entrepreneurship” AND India;
- “women entrepreneurship” AND social capital;
- “Atmanirbhar Bharat” AND women entrepreneurship.

The review primarily considered literature published from 2014 to 2025 for contemporary entrepreneurship and Indian-context evidence, while seminal works were retained where they were necessary to establish the theoretical and conceptual foundations of OCB and Social Exchange Theory.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were considered for inclusion in the literature search if they contributed to any of the following fields: women entrepreneurship; entrepreneurial characteristics; women-owned or women-led firms; organisational behaviour; OCB; leadership and employee behaviour; business or firm performance; Social Exchange Theory; Indian policy context of women entrepreneurship and self-reliance.

Landmark theoretical/conceptual works on OCB or Social Exchange Theory were retained irrespective of their date of publication if necessary to lay foundations for one of these theories.

Studies were excluded if they did not relate to the research objectives, were redundant relative to some other studies, were completely irrelevant to entrepreneurship or organisational behaviour or did not make any conceptual/theoretical/contextual contribution to the framework.

Since the study represents an integrative conceptual review, not a systematic review or meta-analysis, it does not claim exhaustive retrieval of the literature in the field. The study does not follow the PRISMA record screening procedure and does not report numbers of records screened and included.

Literature Analysis and Synthesis

The literature was thematically analysed. Four main themes were identified: (1) characteristics and contextual challenges of women entrepreneurship; (2) determinants and dimensions of business performance; (3) antecedents and consequences of OCB; and (4) theoretical mechanisms behind leadership and employee behaviour.

The synthesis looked at the connections between these four themes. Specifically, it focused on whether the characteristics of the entrepreneur can influence employee behaviour; whether OCB is related to organisational effectiveness; and whether Social Exchange Theory can explain the proposed relationships.

The framework was constructed based on the findings presented in the literature, rather than on the calculation of statistical effects. Consequently, the propositions reflect theoretically grounded relationships that require empirical validation.

Ethical Considerations

The study relied only on secondary literature and publicly available institutional documents and did not include human participants, interviews, surveys or any personal information. Thus, consent procedures and research ethics in relation to empirical research were not applicable to the present conceptual review. Nevertheless, the authors recognise the importance of proper attribution, interpretation and representation of prior research.

Women Entrepreneurship, Business Performance and Atmanirbhar Bharat

The Indian context is essential in the discussion of the proposed framework. Women entrepreneurs operate in various sectors and contexts, ranging from household and micro-firms to high-tech and growth-oriented firms. There is empirical evidence suggesting that the entrepreneurial activity of women can be influenced by institutional and resource contexts. For instance, Ghani et al. [2] showed that institutional changes were associated with an increase in women-owned establishments, especially informal and home-based ones.

For the interpretation of the proposed framework, it is significant that not every women-owned firm employs workers or possesses the organisational structures required for the operation of OCB. Thus, the framework is particularly relevant for women-led enterprises with employees.

Policy initiatives seek to strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem. In particular, the Women Entrepreneurship Platform developed by NITI Aayog aims to overcome informational asymmetries and to facilitate access to networks, mentorship and capacity building [3]. These are important external factors, while organisational capability becomes important once enterprises employ workers and need to coordinate their activities.

The Atmanirbhar Bharat framework provides the wider national context rather than a particular variable in the mediation model. The Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative was launched in 2020 with the objective of achieving self-reliance and economic resilience [4]. Within the framework, women-led enterprises may contribute to the objective of Atmanirbhar Bharat through business growth, employment creation, innovations and participation in the local economy.

Thus, Atmanirbhar Bharat cannot be regarded as an empirically tested outcome of OCB in this study. Rather, it serves as the background policy and developmental context within which good performance of women-led enterprises may be considered.

Discussion

Synthesis and Comparison with Previous Literature

The conceptual synthesis shows that three previously separate research streams can be connected.

The first stream relates to women entrepreneurship and demonstrates the importance of capabilities and institutional context. Brush et al. [1] showed the multidimensional nature of the women's entrepreneurship environment, while Ghani et al. [2] have demonstrated that institutional conditions can affect women's entrepreneurial participation in India. Welsh et al. [11] have shown that the determinants of women entrepreneurs' firm performance can vary depending on the context. A more recent synthesis continues to emphasise the multidimensional nature of the performance of women-owned firms [12].

The second stream concerns OCB. The role of discretionary employee behaviours beyond formal requirements has been established by Bateman and Organ [5], Smith et al. [6] and Organ [7]. The relationships between OCB and attitudinal factors such as fairness and leader supportiveness have been shown by Organ and Ryan [8]. Antecedents and consequences of OCB have been synthesised by Podsakoff et al. [9], while Podsakoff et al. [10] examined its individual- and organisational-level consequences.

The third stream relates to the connections between leadership, employee behaviour and organisational effectiveness. OCB literature highlights the importance of employee behaviour for organisational functioning, while women entrepreneurship literature incorporates behavioural aspects in explanations of firm performance less often.

Thus, the present framework does not challenge the established findings. Rather, it connects them. The contribution is made by proposing that the characteristics of women entrepreneurs may influence organisational outcomes partly through employee behaviour facilitated by the entrepreneur. OCB is the bridge between the entrepreneur and the organisation.

This connection also brings about an important caveat. The framework does not assume that women entrepreneurs are more likely than any other entrepreneur to create OCB. It does not imply that the characteristics identified are exclusively women-specific. The study considers women-led enterprises as the substantive context because the women entrepreneurship literature has traditionally emphasised factors outside the organisation. Future comparisons should examine whether gender, size of the enterprise, sector or institutional context influences the relationships [19].

Theoretical Implications

The first theoretical implication relates to the application of Social Exchange Theory to women-led entrepreneurial enterprises. The theory has been widely applied to explain employee reciprocity, while its integration with the women entrepreneurship literature provides an opportunity to understand how the characteristics of the entrepreneur can be translated into employee behaviour.

Second, the framework establishes connections between different levels of analysis. The entrepreneurial characteristics are primarily entrepreneur- or leadership-level attributes, while OCB takes place at the employee level and business performance is the organisational-level outcome. OCB thus serves as a theoretically meaningful mechanism linking these levels.

Third, the framework expands the understanding of women entrepreneurship beyond financial and institutional explanations. Financial access, market opportunities and institutional support still matter, while organisational behaviour becomes more important as enterprises employ workers and develop more complex organisational structures.

Finally, the framework provides a theoretically testable model rather than empirically confirming the relationships. The propositions can be operationalised in future empirical studies using validated measures of entrepreneurial characteristics, OCB and business performance [20].

Practical Implications

For women entrepreneurs, the framework implies that business performance may depend partly on the quality of internal organisational relationships. The entrepreneurial capability must thus be supplemented with effective employee management. Building trust, ethical behaviour, transparent communication, employee participation and empowerment may create conditions conducive to constructive discretionary behaviour.

For human resource professionals, the framework suggests including an organisational behaviour component in entrepreneurship development initiatives. Women entrepreneurs who move from self-employed individuals to employers may require training in leadership, communication, delegation, conflict resolution, employee motivation and organisational culture.

However, OCB cannot be transformed into a performance requirement for employees. Because citizenship behaviour is discretionary, organisations should create conditions that encourage constructive behaviour rather than formally demanding unpaid and excessive extra-role behaviour [14].

For entrepreneurship development institutions, training programmes may thus combine financial and technical capabilities with organisational leadership and employee management capabilities. Such an integrated approach may prove to be particularly valuable for growth-oriented women-led enterprises.

Policy Implications

The policy significance of the framework comes from expanding the meaning of entrepreneurship development. Financial support, market access, digital capability, mentorship and institutional support remain important aspects of women's entrepreneurship. However, once women-owned enterprises become employers, organisational capability becomes important too.

Entrepreneurship development programmes may thus include modules on employee management, ethical leadership, empowerment, organisational communication, employee engagement and organisational culture. Such modules would complement, rather than replace, existing financial and institutional interventions.

In the context of the WEP ecosystem, this could mean incorporating organisational behaviour into broader capacity-building initiatives [3].

In the context of Atmanirbhar Bharat, such initiatives may contribute to the development of enterprises that are not only established but also capable of providing employment, innovation and growth. Still, the present study does not empirically show that OCB contributes to the objective of national self-reliance. This link remains conceptual.

Boundary Conditions

Several boundary conditions should be noted.

First, the OCB mechanism requires the existence of employees. The framework is thus more applicable to women-led enterprises with employees than to own-account businesses.

Second, the relationship may vary depending on enterprise size. In very small enterprises, the entrepreneur-employee relationships may be informal and personalised, while in larger enterprises there might be formal HRM systems and hierarchies.

Third, sectoral differences may influence the relevance of OCB. Customer-oriented, knowledge-intensive and service enterprises may be affected by citizenship behaviour differently from enterprises with highly standardised production processes.

Fourth, OCB should not be regarded as uniformly positive in all cases. Role overload or citizenship pressure resulting from excessive expectations of discretionary behaviour may lead to citizenship fatigue and undermine the intended benefits [14].

Finally, the Indian institutional and cultural context may influence perceptions of leadership, fairness, empowerment and reciprocity. Cross-country research is needed to generalise the framework beyond India.

Conclusion

The present study proposes a conceptual framework linking women entrepreneurial characteristics with business performance via Organisational Citizenship Behaviour in the wider context of Atmanirbhar Bharat. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory and relevant literature, the framework suggests that characteristics such as innovativeness,

proactiveness, resilience, ethical leadership, opportunity recognition and employee empowerment orientation may create conditions that employees experience as supportive.

When these conditions are perceived positively by employees, they may reciprocate with discretionary behaviours such as altruism, conscientiousness, courtesy, sportsmanship and civic virtue. These behaviours may facilitate cooperation, knowledge exchange, innovation, customer service and operational effectiveness, thus contributing to business performance.

The principal contribution of the study is thus the bridging of women entrepreneurship and organisational behaviour perspectives. Rather than treating entrepreneurial characteristics as automatically determining business performance, the framework introduces OCB as a behavioural mechanism helping to explain the process of translating these characteristics into organisational outcomes.

The framework is also practically relevant. Women entrepreneurs who become employers may require not only financial and technical capabilities but also leadership and employee management capabilities. Similarly, entrepreneurship development programmes may benefit from including organisational behaviour and employee management components.

At the same time, the proposed relationships should not be interpreted as empirically established findings. The framework is conceptual and requires empirical validation. The applicability of the framework is also bounded by the presence of employees and may vary according to enterprise size, sector and institutional context.

Overall, the study provides a theoretically grounded basis for examining whether and how employee citizenship behaviour affects the performance of women-led enterprises. Further empirical studies can test the three proposed relationships and see whether OCB mediates the relationship between women entrepreneurial characteristics and business performance.

Limitations of the Study

The study has a number of limitations. First, it is based entirely on secondary literature and does not empirically test the proposed relationships. The propositions are thus theoretical expectations rather than empirical findings.

Second, the framework is developed within the Indian context and uses Atmanirbhar Bharat as its broader context. The generalisability of the framework to other countries and institutional environments requires empirical testing.

Third, the framework is focused specifically on OCB as the mediating mechanism. Other mechanisms, such as employee engagement, psychological empowerment, organisational commitment, organisational climate, innovative work behaviour and organisational resilience, may explain the relationship between entrepreneurial characteristics and business performance.

Fourth, the framework is primarily applicable to women-led enterprises with employees. It may have limited relevance to own-account women entrepreneurs as the OCB mechanism is not present in the same way in the latter case.

Fifth, the conceptual review may be affected by the availability and interpretation of the existing literature. Since the study is an integrative conceptual review and not a systematic review or meta-analysis, it does not claim exhaustive coverage of all publications in the field.

Finally, the framework treats OCB as a potentially helpful mechanism but recognises that excessive expectations of citizenship behaviour may result in role overload or citizenship fatigue [14]. Further empirical studies should thus also explore the conditions under which OCB leads to positive or potentially negative consequences.

Future Research Directions

Future research should empirically test the proposed framework using data collected from women-owned or women-led enterprises that employ workers. Structural equation modelling or partial least squares structural equation modelling may be used to test the proposed mediation relationships.

First, researchers can empirically test whether women entrepreneurial characteristics are associated with employee OCB and whether OCB predicts business performance. Multi-source designs, involving both entrepreneurs and employees, would be particularly valuable as they would help to reduce common-method bias.

Second, future studies should consider other mediators and moderators. Employee engagement, psychological empowerment, organisational commitment, organisational climate, innovative work behaviour, transformational leadership, digital capability and organisational resilience may moderate or mediate the proposed relationships.

Third, social capital represents an important area for future research. Networks, trust and relational resources may affect entrepreneurial opportunity recognition and business performance. Recent research among women entrepreneurs shows the relevance of social capital and entrepreneurial orientation to business performance [18]. Social capital can thus be explored as an antecedent, moderator or complementary mechanism in future frameworks.

Fourth, digital entrepreneurship deserves special attention. Digital platforms, e-commerce, digital marketing, artificial intelligence and technologically mediated working arrangements may affect the manner in which women entrepreneurs lead employees and coordinate their activities. Future research may explore whether digital capability influences the relationship between entrepreneurial characteristics and OCB.

Fifth, longitudinal research may explore whether OCB becomes more relevant as women-led enterprises grow from micro-enterprises into employer enterprises. Such research may also examine whether the strength of the proposed mediation varies during the stages of enterprise development.

Sixth, comparative research across sectors and geographical regions may explore how the framework works in manufacturing, services, technology, agricultural and knowledge-intensive industries. Cross-country research may also identify whether cultural and institutional differences affect the social exchange process and OCB.

Finally, future research may explore possible boundary conditions related to employee workload and citizenship fatigue. This would provide a better understanding of OCB by showing when discretionary behaviour is helpful for organisational performance and when excessive expectations become counterproductive.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that they have no personal, professional or institutional affiliations and no financial or non-financial relationships that could reasonably be perceived as influencing the content of this manuscript.

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