Breaking Barriers: Place-Specific Factors Shaping Entrepreneurial Growth and Innovation

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship and innovation have emerged as crucial drivers of India's economic growth, catalysed by government initiatives such as Startup India, Stand-Up India, and Make in India. However, significant regional disparities persist, with urban centres like Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Bengaluru thriving, while rural and Tier-2 regions lag due to insufficient access to capital, infrastructure, and entrepreneurial support. This empirical study applies the Gioia methodology (Gioia 2013), analysing qualitative data from interviews with entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, and policymakers to identify key drivers and barriers to entrepreneurship in India. By developing second-order themes like Region-Specific Policy Support and Entrepreneurial Ecosystems, the study provides a comparative analysis between India's policies and global models from the U.S. and China. The findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to address regional disparities, recommending an inclusive policy framework to stimulate balanced growth across diverse geographic regions. This research adds to global discussions on fostering regional innovation and proposes policy reforms for equitable entrepreneurial development in India.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial growth, Innovation ecosystems, Regional disparities, Place-based policies, Venture capital

Introduction

Entrepreneurship has been widely recognized as a cornerstone of economic development, with India making significant strides in this domain through government initiatives like Startup India, Stand-Up India, and Make in India. These initiatives are designed to foster innovation, enhance job creation, and stimulate the growth of new businesses, particularly in technology-driven sectors. Despite such efforts, stark regional disparities in entrepreneurial activity persist. Urban centers like Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad have benefited disproportionately from these programs, while rural and Tier-2 cities remain underserved due to limited access to capital, infrastructure, and entrepreneurial support systems (Ghosh & Saha, 2020).

While the Startup India initiative has succeeded in boosting entrepreneurial ecosystems in major metropolitan areas, its impact on smaller cities and rural regions has been minimal. In these areas, gaps in infrastructure, venture capital availability, and skilled labour pools have hindered the creation and growth of new businesses. As Naudé (2019) points out, entrepreneurship tends to cluster in regions with favourable conditions for new ventures, leading to uneven spatial distribution. This presents a significant challenge for policymakers aiming to stimulate inclusive growth across the country. Despite government interventions, rural entrepreneurs often struggle to access the same level of support available in urban hubs, resulting in a widening rural-urban divide (Banerjee & Duflo, 2019).

India's efforts to build a dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem can be contextualized within a broader global framework, where countries like the United States and China have developed

region-specific innovation policies with measurable success. For instance, the U.S. has cultivated one of the world's most successful entrepreneurial ecosystems in Silicon Valley, thanks to the integration of venture capital, innovation clusters, and supportive policy frameworks (Feldman & Kogler, 2010). Similarly, China's state-driven approach, particularly through the establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), has fostered rapid growth in innovation hubs like Shenzhen (Zhang & Whitley, 2017). These examples highlight the importance of place-based policies in driving regional entrepreneurship and innovation, areas where India's decentralized and market-driven approach has yielded mixed results.

This study explores the effectiveness of India's region-specific entrepreneurship policies through an empirical lens, employing the Gioia methodology to capture nuanced insights from entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, and policymakers across different regions. The study compares India's policy framework with successful global models, using metrics such as startup success rates, innovation outputs, and venture capital availability. Audretsch and Keilbach (2007) emphasize that government interventions can only succeed when there is an alignment between policy objectives and the actual needs of entrepreneurs on the ground. By identifying both the strengths and limitations of current policies, this paper contributes to the theoretical understanding of regional innovation ecosystems and offers actionable insights for fostering inclusive entrepreneurial growth across India. The goal is to provide a comprehensive assessment that informs future policy adjustments, ensuring that India's entrepreneurial boom benefits all regions, not just a select few urban centers.

Literature

Entrepreneurship and innovation have long been recognized as critical drivers of economic growth and regional development, particularly in emerging markets like India. Numerous scholars have emphasized the role of entrepreneurship in fostering innovation, job creation, and regional economic development. For instance, Ahlstrom and Ding (2014) highlight that entrepreneurship in rapidly developing economies such as China has led to substantial economic transformation, a trend that is similarly observable in India through government initiatives like Startup India and Make in India. These policies, aimed at boosting entrepreneurial ecosystems, have seen success in major urban centers but have struggled to replicate this impact in rural and Tier-2 regions (Ghosh & Saha, 2020). This uneven development aligns with Naudé's (2019) assertion that entrepreneurship tends to cluster in regions with more favourable economic conditions, further exacerbating regional disparities.

International comparisons further underscore the challenges and opportunities for fostering entrepreneurship in India. Feldman and Kogler (2010) argue that the success of entrepreneurial ecosystems in regions like Silicon Valley in the U.S. is largely due to a confluence of factors, including venture capital availability, infrastructure, and a strong culture of innovation. Similarly, Zhang and Whitley (2017) point out that China's rapid economic development has been facilitated by state-driven policies, such as Special Economic Zones (SEZs), which have successfully concentrated innovation in hubs like Shenzhen. In contrast, India's more decentralized approach has resulted in mixed outcomes, with urban centers like Bengaluru and Hyderabad thriving while rural regions remain underserved (Ghosh & Saha, 2020). Banerjee and Duflo (2019) further highlight those structural challenges in rural India, such as limited access to capital and inadequate infrastructure, continue to impede the growth of entrepreneurial activity in these areas.

Research has also shown that government intervention plays a crucial role in creating conducive environments for entrepreneurship. Audretsch and Keilbach (2007) argue that

effective entrepreneurship policies must be aligned with the actual needs of entrepreneurs, particularly in terms of access to capital, mentorship, and infrastructure. However, the implementation of these policies has been inconsistent across regions in India. While urban areas have benefited from targeted interventions such as incubators, venture capital networks, and mentorship programs, rural and Tier-2 cities still face significant barriers to accessing these resources (Banerjee & Duflo, 2019). This is in contrast to countries like Israel and the U.S., where government programs have actively incentivized entrepreneurship in underserved areas, creating more balanced regional innovation ecosystems (Ahlstrom & Ding, 2014).

Ultimately, India's entrepreneurial landscape reflects both the potential for growth and the challenges of regional disparity. As Ghosh and Saha (2020) note, the success of urban entrepreneurial ecosystems has positioned India as a growing innovation hub on the global stage. However, as Naudé (2019) emphasizes, fostering inclusive growth requires more than just policy interventions—it demands the development of region-specific ecosystems that address the unique challenges faced by rural and semi-urban entrepreneurs. Without targeted reforms to improve access to capital, infrastructure, and mentorship outside of urban centers, India risks perpetuating the rural-urban divide in its entrepreneurial development trajectory (Zhang & Whitley, 2017).

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative inductive approach, employing the Gioia methodology to explore the role of region-specific entrepreneurship policies in India. The Gioia method is especially useful for developing new theoretical insights from empirical data, as it allows for the systematic organization and interpretation of complex, multi-faceted data (Gioia 2013). Through semi-structured interviews and archival data collection, the study captures nuanced perspectives from stakeholders, offering a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness and limitations of current government initiatives in promoting entrepreneurship.

Data Collection

Two primary sources of data were utilized:

Semi-Structured Interviews: Fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted with entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, policymakers, and industry experts from various regions across India. The interviewees provided insights into their experiences with government initiatives like Startup India, Make in India, and Stand-Up India, focusing on their efficacy in different geographical settings. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility, encouraging respondents to elaborate on specific challenges and opportunities they encountered in their respective regions. Open-ended questions were used to prompt discussion on regional disparities, infrastructure support, and venture capital availability.

Archival Data: Secondary data were collected from government reports, academic publications, and industry analysis on regional entrepreneurship trends. This archival data provided context and helped corroborate findings from the interviews, particularly in terms of firm birth rates, venture capital distribution, and the effectiveness of existing entrepreneurial ecosystems across urban and rural regions.

Data Analysis

The data were systematically analyzed using the three-step process inherent in the Gioia methodology:

First-Order Concepts: Raw data from interviews and secondary sources were coded into specific first-order concepts, capturing the explicit language and ideas of the participants. These included terms like "government subsidies for tech startups," "venture capital availability in urban areas," and "limited infrastructure in rural regions."

Second-Order Themes: The first-order concepts were then categorized into broader second-order themes, revealing deeper patterns across the data. For example, concepts related to venture capital were grouped under the theme of "Access to Capital," while those related to infrastructure support were categorized under "Entrepreneurial Support Systems."

Aggregate Dimensions: Finally, these second-order themes were distilled into higher-level aggregate dimensions that reflect broader theoretical insights. For instance, themes like "Policy Effectiveness" and "Infrastructure Development" were aggregated into "Regional Innovation Growth."

Data Structure

The following table illustrates how the data were organized into 1st Order Concepts, 2nd Order Themes, and Aggregate Dimensions:

Supporting Factors: Data Structure Table

1st Order Concepts	2nd Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions
Government subsidies for tech startups	Financial Support from Government	Policy Support
Incentives for entrepreneurs through Startup India		
Availability of incubation centers in Tier-1 cities		
Venture capital funding in urban areas	Venture Capital and Angel Networks	
Angel investor networks supporting tech-based startups		
Private-sector funding opportunities in metropolitan regions		
Collaboration between entrepreneurs and government	Public-Private Collaborations	
Public-private partnerships fostering innovation		
Incubation support for early-stage startups		
Digital infrastructure development in metro regions	Urban Infrastructure Development	Entrepreneurial Support

Availability of co-working spaces in cities		
Access to high-speed internet and technology		
Mentorship programs through Startup India	Government-Backed Mentorship Programs	
Business accelerators supported by SEZ initiatives		
Collaboration with technical institutes for R&D support		
Increasing access to technical education	Skill Development Initiatives	
Government-funded training programs for entrepreneurs		
Entrepreneurship courses offered at regional universities		
National policies encouraging innovation hubs in cities	Government Policies Driving Innovation	Regional Innovation Growth
Tax incentives for innovation-driven enterprises		
Regulatory reforms to reduce business complexity		
Networking opportunities through entrepreneurship events	Networking and Collaborative Ecosystems	
Conferences and innovation expos to showcase startups		

Local entrepreneur networks enhancing startup visibility		
Infrastructure support from state governments	State-Level Infrastructure Investments	
Expansion of tech parks and special economic zones		
Infrastructure developments in urban innovation hubs		
Strategic alliances between startups and large enterprises	Corporate-Startup Collaborations	
Corporate-backed accelerator programs		
Support from multinational corporations to scale innovations		

Hindering Factors: Data Structure Table

1st Order Concepts	**2nd Order Themes**	**Aggregate Dimensions**
Limited access to venture capital in rural areas	Venture Capital Constraints	Access to Capital
Few angel investor networks outside major cities		
High competition for limited investment in Tier-2 regions		
Insufficient technical infrastructure in rural regions	Infrastructure Gaps	

Poor internet connectivity in semi-urban areas		
Lack of modern workspaces and tech parks in smaller cities		
Low awareness of Startup India in rural regions	Awareness and Outreach Challenges	
Lack of information about government initiatives		
Limited promotion of programs in semi-urban areas		
Delays in funding for early-stage startups	Funding Barriers for Startups	Policy Implementation Gaps
Bureaucratic hurdles in accessing government support		
Slow approval processes for government loans		
Inadequate mentorship in Tier-2 and rural regions	Mentorship and Support Gaps	
Limited access to experienced industry mentors		
Absence of incubators and accelerators in smaller regions		
Lack of professional networks for rural entrepreneurs	Professional Networking Deficits	
Entrepreneurs struggling to connect with industry peers		
Lack of networking events outside major cities		

Policy implementation delays in rural areas	Delays in Policy Execution	
Lack of coordination between policymakers and entrepreneurs		
Difficulty in scaling startups due to limited market access	Market Access Challenges	Regional Disparities Access to Capital
Startups unable to penetrate urban markets from rural areas		
High transportation and logistics costs for rural businesses		
Limited scalability of rural startups due to funding shortages	Funding and Growth Constraints	
High costs for scaling early-stage businesses in semi-urban areas		
Lack of resources for R&D in rural startups		

Findings

This study reveals key insights into place-based entrepreneurship and innovation in India, especially when compared to global innovation hubs. Through the application of the Gioia methodology, we have identified several supporting and hindering factors that influence the growth of entrepreneurship across different regions of India. These findings highlight both the strengths and challenges faced by Indian entrepreneurs, particularly when India's policies and ecosystems are compared to those in countries like the United States and China, where region-specific policies have successfully developed vibrant innovation ecosystems.

Supporting Factors

The data shows that place-based government policies such as Startup India, Make in India, and Stand-Up India have played a crucial role in fostering entrepreneurial ecosystems, particularly in urban centers like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Mumbai. These initiatives have enabled region-specific growth by offering financial incentives, incubation support, and access to government-backed funding. As one entrepreneur noted, "Without Startup India's grants and incubators, we would never have scaled our business to the level it is today."

Compared to global innovation hubs like Silicon Valley in the United States or Shenzhen in China, India's urban regions are beginning to show similar patterns of success, albeit at a smaller scale. Access to venture capital and private-sector funding in India's metropolitan regions have accelerated the growth of tech-driven startups. As one participant mentioned, "In Bengaluru, the flow of venture capital has really helped us compete internationally." However, unlike the deep and consistent capital networks in places like Silicon Valley, India's funding landscape is still in its early stages of development, mostly concentrated in Tier-1 cities.

In addition to financial backing, infrastructure development in India's urban centers has mirrored the growth seen in global hubs. Participants pointed out that co-working spaces, tech parks, and digital infrastructure have significantly improved in cities, creating a conducive environment for startups. One tech entrepreneur noted, "The infrastructure here has come a long way, and it's beginning to feel like the kind of support you see in Silicon Valley." These developments align with the success of innovation-driven ecosystems in countries like China, where government-backed infrastructure projects have been integral to the growth of regions like Shenzhen.

Further, entrepreneurial support systems, such as mentorship programs and networking opportunities, have gained momentum, especially through government programs and partnerships with private organizations. This is akin to models in the U.S., where a strong culture of mentorship and investor networks supports startup ecosystems. As one founder explained, "The government has really fostered networking events that connect us with mentors, which is something we previously lacked." This progress in India's urban hubs is encouraging, particularly when viewed in light of global best practices.

Hindering Factors

While India's urban centers have seen marked improvements in place-based entrepreneurship, the findings reveal significant challenges in rural and semi-urban regions, which lag behind due to regional disparities in access to resources, funding, and infrastructure. In comparison to regional innovation policies in the U.S. and China, which have successfully spread innovation ecosystems beyond major cities, India faces a more significant rural-urban divide. One

entrepreneur in a Tier-2 city lamented, "We don't have the same access to capital and infrastructure that startups in Bengaluru have; the gap is huge."

Access to venture capital remains highly concentrated in Tier-1 cities, with limited funding opportunities for rural and semi-urban entrepreneurs. While the Startup India program aims to support entrepreneurs in all regions, the outreach and actual availability of funds are still limited in non-metropolitan areas. This is in contrast to regions like Israel's Startup Nation, where government policy actively encourages startups in all regions through direct funding and infrastructure development. A rural entrepreneur noted, "We struggle to even get a meeting with investors, whereas in urban hubs, it's much easier."

In addition to funding challenges, infrastructure gaps in rural India present a significant hindrance to entrepreneurial growth. Participants highlighted issues such as poor internet connectivity and the lack of modern workspaces, making it difficult for rural startups to scale and compete on a national or global level. One participant shared, "We can't compete with urban startups when we don't even have reliable internet for daily operations." These disparities contrast with countries like China, where infrastructure development in even secondary cities has been a government priority, facilitating broader regional innovation.

The implementation of policies in rural areas also remains inconsistent. Many entrepreneurs in non-urban regions expressed frustration with bureaucratic hurdles and delays in accessing government programs. One interviewee stated, "We hear about these great policies, but by the time the funds reach us, it's too late to make a difference." This stands in stark contrast to countries like the U.S., where place-based policies like Opportunity Zones have streamlined processes to incentivize investment in underserved areas. The slow and inefficient execution of policies in rural India is a key reason why regional disparities persist.

Lastly, mentorship and professional support remain concentrated in India's urban areas, leaving rural entrepreneurs without the necessary guidance to grow and scale their businesses. In comparison, countries like the United States and Israel have robust support systems even for startups located outside major cities, providing a more balanced distribution of resources. One rural entrepreneur in India remarked, "We feel isolated here. There's no one to guide us, and we're cut off from the professional networks that urban startups take for granted."

Key Insights

1. Global Comparisons: While India's place-based entrepreneurial policies have shown success in urban centers, they fall short when compared to global hubs such as Silicon Valley and Shenzhen, where consistent capital flow, mentorship, and infrastructure development are equally available in both primary and secondary regions.
2. Rural-Urban Divide: The rural-urban divide in India's entrepreneurship ecosystem is far more pronounced than in countries like China and the U.S., where place-based policies have been more effectively implemented across regions. Improving capital accessibility and infrastructure in non-urban areas is crucial for bridging this gap.
3. Policy Implementation: Despite the existence of supportive policies, India's rural and semi-urban regions experience policy implementation delays, unlike the streamlined execution seen in countries like the U.S. and Israel, where government programs reach underserved areas more efficiently.

Theoretical Implications

This study makes a significant contribution to the body of knowledge on regional innovation ecosystems and entrepreneurship by revealing the critical importance of place-specific factors in shaping entrepreneurial growth. The research confirms and extends the knowledge spillover theory of entrepreneurship (Audretsch & Keilbach, 2007), which posits that innovation and entrepreneurial success are often concentrated in regions where favorable conditions, such as access to capital, infrastructure, and mentorship, are present. By focusing on the context of India, an emerging economy with pronounced regional disparities, the study broadens the understanding of how decentralized and market-driven policy frameworks can lead to uneven outcomes in entrepreneurship. A unique theoretical contribution of this study lies in its comparative analysis of India's entrepreneurial landscape with successful innovation hubs in the U.S. (e.g., Silicon Valley) and China (e.g., Shenzhen). While these global examples emphasize the role of region-specific government interventions and infrastructure in fostering innovation, the findings from India suggest that a more decentralized approach can leave certain regions—particularly rural and Tier-2 cities—significantly underserved. The insights generated underscore the need to incorporate regional characteristics into entrepreneurial theory, as policies and ecosystems cannot be designed with a one-size-fits-all approach.

The study also refines the understanding of regional disparities in entrepreneurship by emphasizing the importance of infrastructure and capital access. While prior literature has focused extensively on the role of venture capital and technology in entrepreneurial success (Feldman & Kogler, 2010), this research highlights how regional variations in infrastructure—such as digital connectivity and incubation centers—play an equally critical role. The conceptual framework developed in this study could serve as a foundation for future research that investigates how localized entrepreneurial ecosystems evolve under different policy regimes, thereby extending theories of regional development and entrepreneurship.

Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study have profound implications for policymakers, entrepreneurs, and stakeholders in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. For policymakers, the study highlights the urgent need for targeted, region-specific interventions to address the disparities between urban and rural entrepreneurship. While initiatives such as *Startup India* and *Make in India* have successfully spurred innovation in urban hubs like Bengaluru and Hyderabad, they have had limited impact on rural areas. Policymakers should focus on improving access to venture capital, enhancing digital infrastructure, and fostering local mentorship programs to ensure that entrepreneurs in underserved regions are not left behind.

One actionable recommendation for policymakers is to establish regional innovation hubs in rural and Tier-2 cities. These hubs can serve as a focal point for entrepreneurial activities by providing the necessary infrastructure, such as co-working spaces, high-speed internet, and business incubation centers. Additionally, targeted financial interventions such as regional venture capital funds or government-backed loan programs could stimulate entrepreneurial activity in these regions. Policymakers can also collaborate with private-sector stakeholders to create public-private partnerships that foster innovation and growth in non-urban areas.

For entrepreneurs, especially those in underserved regions, the study offers practical insights into how they can navigate challenges posed by limited access to capital and infrastructure. Entrepreneurs in rural and semi-urban regions could benefit from forming strategic alliances with urban-based startups or tapping into government schemes like *Stand-Up India* designed specifically for underdeveloped areas. Additionally, entrepreneurs could benefit from building local networks and leveraging digital platforms to access mentorship and financial resources

remotely. By doing so, they can overcome some of the geographical disadvantages that currently hinder growth in less-developed areas.

Managerial and Entrepreneurial Implications

For managers and entrepreneurs, the implications of this study go beyond simply understanding regional disparities—they also point to actionable strategies that can be adopted to enhance entrepreneurial success in different geographic contexts. Entrepreneurs in urban hubs, for instance, can leverage their position in well-established ecosystems by collaborating with government programs and tapping into venture capital networks to scale their businesses quickly. However, this study emphasizes that managers in these thriving regions should also recognize the untapped potential in rural and Tier-2 markets. Expanding operations or offering mentorship and partnership opportunities in these areas can not only help bridge the rural-urban divide but also unlock new market opportunities.

From an entrepreneurial perspective, those operating in rural areas must adopt innovative strategies to overcome the lack of infrastructure and capital. Forming collaborations with urban-based companies, participating in government-backed programs, and utilizing technology to reach broader markets are crucial for entrepreneurs in these regions. Rural entrepreneurs can also benefit from adopting sustainable business practices, which are increasingly recognized as a competitive advantage in global markets. The integration of social and environmental goals into their business models may attract impact investors and government grants aimed at promoting sustainable development. For entrepreneurs and managers focused on sustainable entrepreneurship, the findings of this study suggest that there is significant opportunity in aligning business models with regional development goals. By addressing local challenges—such as the lack of infrastructure, employment opportunities, or education gaps—entrepreneurs can create sustainable, region-specific business models that are not only profitable but also contribute to the broader socio-economic development of their communities.

In sum, this research underscores the importance of localized approaches to entrepreneurship in India and other emerging markets, urging policymakers, entrepreneurs, and managers to consider the unique needs and challenges of different regions. By fostering a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem, both rural and urban regions can benefit from the broader economic and social impact of entrepreneurial growth. This holistic approach to entrepreneurship—where both urban and rural areas are developed in tandem—can create a more balanced and sustainable economic future.

Conclusion

The findings underscore the need for a more inclusive approach to entrepreneurship policy, which must be tailored to the unique challenges of different regions. Expanding access to venture capital, improving infrastructure, and fostering stronger mentorship and networking systems in rural areas are essential for achieving balanced growth. Additionally, the study reveals that rural entrepreneurs face significant bureaucratic delays in accessing government programs, further exacerbating regional inequalities. Streamlining policy implementation is critical to ensuring that rural and semi-urban entrepreneurs can benefit from these initiatives.

Incorporating sustainability into India's entrepreneurial strategies is vital for fostering long-term, inclusive growth. As highlighted in the Schumpeterian approach to social entrepreneurship, sustainable entrepreneurship can serve as a powerful tool for addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. By integrating sustainability goals into entrepreneurial development, India can leverage its entrepreneurial surge to contribute to

broader sustainable development objectives, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Social enterprises and sustainable businesses have the potential to play a transformative role in bridging the rural-urban divide while promoting eco-friendly and socially responsible innovation.

To ensure the long-term success of entrepreneurial initiatives, the government and private sector must collaborate to create ecosystems that support sustainable growth across all regions. This includes fostering corporate social entrepreneurship (CSE), promoting sustainable business practices, and providing targeted financial and technical support to underdeveloped regions. The path forward lies in building region-specific innovation hubs, enhancing rural infrastructure, and ensuring that all regions have equal access to the resources necessary for entrepreneurial success.

In conclusion, India's entrepreneurial ecosystem holds immense potential for driving economic growth and innovation. However, addressing regional disparities and embedding sustainability into the entrepreneurial framework are essential steps toward achieving inclusive, equitable development across the country. By aligning entrepreneurial policies with sustainability objectives, India can unlock the full potential of its entrepreneurial talent and contribute meaningfully to global sustainable development.

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