

A Comprehensive Review of Homepreneurs in the Digital Era

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Abstract

In today's competitive environment, businesses are reaching homes and are creating homepreneurs. Home-based businesses are now a substantial part of the small business sector and account for an increasing proportion of business start-ups. In India, homepreneurs were largely defined by women because for ages, Indian women were bound by societal pressures and thus, were restricted from moving out for employment opportunities. So, they resorted to becoming homepreneurs. With government policies, globalization and development of entrepreneurial spirit, not only millennials but the middle age women and men are becoming imminent entrepreneurs. Digitalization in business processes has redefined the concept of homepreneurs in India. In the era of challenging customers, circadian changing buying behavior and integration of technology acceptance among customers, the concept of home based businesses has changed. This study comprehends and explores the concept of homepreneurs in India. The study identifies the salient characteristics of homepreneurs and their businesses and addresses the level of digitalization in home based businesses, its effects, and the proposal of an agenda for the future.

Home-based online business ventures are an increasingly universal, yet an under-researched phenomenon. The study provides better experiences, understanding and creates a mind-set of businesspersons for setting up and running such enterprises.

Keywords : Digitalization, home-based businesses, homepreneurs

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A homepreneur is a business owner who is actively balancing the role of a homemaker and an entrepreneur, and is doing business from home. Home-based work has continued its existence, though its advent, process, and methodology have changed in the last few years. New and emerging economies have a large unorganised and micro-firms sector consisting majorly of home-based businesses (HBBs) (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2015). The early concept defined homepreneurs as a landscape of informal sector, poverty, insecurity, and women's work. As far as India is concerned, the initiation can be traced to joint Hindu family businesses from where the concept developed in which women homepreneurs constitute a very negligible proportion of total entrepreneurs.

Homepreneurs have been in existence since ancient times. Women play a vital role in running home based ventures. Ancient civilisations witnessed that women homepreneurs have sold their products not only in nearby towns, but also in neighbouring countries as well. In the current scenario, both men and women entrepreneurs are engaged in unorganized sectors like agriculture, agro-based industries, handicrafts, handlooms, kitchen activities (pickles, powders and papads), and businesses like basket making and others which are home based in nature.

A number of factors explain why homepreneurship is emergent and contributes to the Indian economy. Largely in India, homepreneurship is defined by homemakers who have the desire to rebuild confidence in one's own abilities by earning money. The Indian startup ecosystem motivates men to establish their careers as homepreneurs. According

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Business Standard, “Women constitute around 14% of total entrepreneurship. Out of this, 2.76 million women entrepreneurs work in the agriculture sector, whereas 5.29 million women work in the non-agriculture sector.” (2018). However, the average employment in women-owned enterprises remains at a meagre 1.67%. As per Government Equalities Office (2013), on an average, more than a third of global firms have women entrepreneurs. More than 48% were in small cities as compared to 42% in large cities in India. More than 35% of women entrepreneurs were placed in manufacturing and almost 38% in the service sector.

Now, the functioning of homepreneurs in India is being driven by digitalization. Digitalization has shaped the locus of entrepreneurial opportunities in the economy, and it is transforming best practices for the search of such opportunities (Ramachandran, 2020). These two trends operate in entrepreneurial ecosystems or communities of stakeholders and specialised resources that support the creation and scale-up of new business ventures. This stage of social marketing is a blessing for homepreneurs. Digitalization has played a vital role in mainstreaming homepreneurs. The process of digitalization is giving a platform to new age homepreneurs to sell their products along with access to experts in areas such as IT, content, marketing, logistics, and customer support.

Literature Review

In order to review and understand the conceptual development of homepreneurs and the level of digitalization, a systematic literature review was conducted. Conventional research on homepreneurs digitalization is categorised in two parts; one is comprehension and conceptual development of homepreneurs, and another is digitalization of home based businesses and small businesses.

Comprehension and Conceptual Development of Homepreneurs

There is a dearth of literature on the conceptual development of homepreneurs. In fact, many researchers worked on Home Based Business (HBBs) which contribute to comprehension of homepreneurs. Studies on home-based businesses lean towards descriptive and theoretical (Anwar & Daniel, 2017a; Anwar & Daniel, 2017b; Betts and Huzey, 2009; Mason, Carter, & Tagg, 2011). Home based businesses contribute to major economies of the world (Mason et al., 2011). Studies on home-based businesses have considered gender as a specific aspect of such businesses (Bryant, 2000; Nansen, Arnold, Gibbs, & Davis, 2010; Walker & Webster, 2004). Online home based business entity operated by a self-employed person working either at home or from home and who is using the internet to carry out a significant proportion of business activities that may include sourcing, selling, providing services, and communicating with stakeholders. The business may be operated full-time or part-time (Anwar & Daniel, 2014).

Studies have identified important determinants for operating home businesses such as cost effectiveness, minimal investments, no requirement of office premises, low infrastructural requirements, and convenience (Mason et al., 2011). Home-based businesses attract women homepreneurs because childcare and fulfilling other family needs becomes easier, and also the flexible working hours improve work-life balance and quality of life.

Digitalization of Home Based Businesses and Small Businesses

With the rapid digitalization of products and services across industries, the entrepreneurial opportunities in these markets are also increasingly getting infused with digital technologies (Nambisan, 2017). Digitalization is supporting entrepreneurship and enabling potential scalability of businesses. Digital technologies are enhancing development of product ideas and business models (Nambisan, 2017). There is a dearth of studies investigating home-based businesses in relation to digital technologies. Digitalization has removed the issues of physical space and visibility of doing a business from home.

Most of the studies focus on businesses that operate exclusively online and make extensive use of the internet (Daniel, Domenico, & Sharma, 2015). Digitalisation impacts homepreneurs and entrepreneurs. It is creating new opportunities and businesses are shifting from offline to online (Sussan & Zoltan, 2017). Online payment systems and

social media platforms help entrepreneurs to develop market networks and effectively communicate with customers (Pergelova, Manolova, Simeonova-Ganeva, & Yordanova, 2019).

Scope and Objectives of the Study

India's economy is one of the fastest growing economies and market places for the e-commerce industry. A large number of small-scale vendors and homepreneurs are connecting to B2C or C2C e-commerce platforms to sell their unique creations. It will meet the increasing demand for online retail. Social media channels and online marketplaces have made it simple for women working from home to reach new audiences, deliver products, and receive payments. The Digital India campaign digitalizes various home based businesses as well. Extensive use of technology has brought immense opportunities for budding entrepreneurs. Therefore, in the wake of digitalization, it becomes crucial to understand the changing landscape of homepreneurs in India, and understand the level of digitalization among them. Thus, it would allow digital and ICT firms to define future course of action. The study has been conducted conceptually using secondary sources in order to fulfill objectives :

- ↪ To comprehend and describe the concept of homepreneurs,
- ↪ Identify the salient characteristics of homepreneurs and their businesses,
- ↪ To understand the level of digitalization in home based businesses, and
- ↪ Finally to propose an agenda for the future.

Homepreneurs - A Comprehension

A homepreneur is defined as a business owner who is actively balancing the role of a homemaker and an entrepreneur, doing business from home. In India this term is more associated with women. Women homepreneurs are women who carry out business in their homes. Homepreneurs have been there since primeval times. The responsibility of home and the accompanying lack of time to devote fully to job, and lack of societal acceptance have made women restrain themselves to part-time and temporary nature of entrepreneurial activities.

On the other hand, research on entrepreneurship revealed that it has been the domain of men for long but changing economic conditions, reducing disparity between men and women, lack of job opportunities, and also favourable start-up ecosystems have motivated Indian males to do businesses from the comfort of their homes.

Thus, it can be said that homepreneurs are entrepreneurs who are involved in home based businesses and are engaged in entrepreneurial activities from their homes.

Definition of Homepreneurs

Within academic or practitioner literature, there is no clear definition for a homepreneur. Homepreneurs are people who consider their home as their primary workplace. Urban Dictionary (n.d.) defines a homepreneur as a “self-starter who tries different businesses to make a living from his/her home”. Homepreneurs are also defined as small business owners who are running viable enterprises from their homes. Their headquarters or their operational control centres are their home, anywhere from a bedroom, garage, barn or studio.

According to the SBA4 (Small Business Administration of USA), homepreneurship is home business. This is about 20% of new businesses in the USA. Homepreneurs even though prevailing in our country for many centuries, still need a strategic approach for their marketing practices, financial support, business performance, and their level of satisfaction, personally and professionally.

The early stage concept of homepreneurs typically categorized entrepreneurs as those who operate from their homes or were garage startups. However, with the nature of work homepreneurs are performing and the products or

services they are dealing with, they cannot be categorically sidelined from mainstream entrepreneurship. They choose to be operational homepreneurs based on their passion and comfort and contribute to the economy.

As the traditional definitions of career and employment begin to shift, a close look at home-based workforce, looking at their attitudes to work, and how it defines them has given a new perspective to the concept of homepreneurs for the last few years.

With advances in technology and a more mindful approach to work/life balance, people are giving up the 9 to 5 office lifestyle for a chance to start their own business. Taking to their kitchens and garages, the transformation of homepreneurs has taken place widely all over the world.

On the basis of these studies and in the wake of emergence of digitalisation, homepreneurs can be defined as self-employed individuals who are functioning and conducting business activities from homes, making viable use of internet, digitalization and social media marketing, creating customer networks, and reaching large number of potential buyers, undertaking trading, sourcing, selling, and servicing activities.

Factors Leading to Growth of Homepreneurs in India

Entrepreneurship in India is dated back to the joint family structure, a peculiar Indian phenomenon, which has powered the success of many Indian businesses. The Indian continent did not promote the concept of homepreneurs but post liberalization, it has become more acceptable and in this millennium, more structured. The success of homepreneurs has been enabled by various growth factors. After liberalization, business opportunities in India were manifold. Liberalization brought various economic reforms supporting businesses and people with acumen started taking risks from their homes. Shift in cultural beliefs have also supported homepreneurship. The divide in men and women has bridged lately, thereby giving equal opportunities to women to start businesses.

Employment generation has slowed down in the last few years. India's unemployment rate hit a 3-year-high of 8.4% in August 2019. People started exploring data based jobs, buying and selling through online platforms, and content writing jobs. This has motivated more men to shift to starting home based businesses.

Government support and policy initiatives on financial reforms have supported women entrepreneurs to start their own business. In India, women entrepreneurs can create 150-170 million jobs by 2030 and it is more than 25% of the required jobs for the entire working age population (Chawla, Rajan, & Sahni, 2020). Almost 16 million women owned enterprises are creating direct employment for about 27 million people in India. By enabling women entrepreneurs to start up and scale, direct employment can be increased by 50-60 million (Chawla, Rajan, & Sahni, 2020).

Apart from these, there are various reasons for people choosing to start up a business from home, spanning a better work/life balance, financial motivations. The people around the world and also interestingly Indians also find flexible schedules feasible, they love the chance to make their own schedules and work around as per their own commitments. Job satisfaction and pay are the most important factors fuelling the move to homepreneurship. Homepreneurship is people's empowerment. Developments in technology are also providing new opportunities to people to harness. The pay doesn't necessarily translate into instant success, but the main incentive 'being their own boss' is rewarding for choosing businesses at home. For these people, the chance to set their own hours and feel like they are gaining more from setting their own agenda is what appeals most.

Characteristics of Homepreneurs

Homepreneurs have been in existence since ancient times. In all civilizations, ancient and medieval, one reads accounts of women homepreneurs who not only sold their wares in their neighbouring houses and in nearby towns, but also in neighbouring countries (Singu, 2018).

Indian families are experiencing swift changes due to the increased pace of urbanization and modernization. This has opened new landscapes, increased awareness, and raised aspirations of personal growth. The new government schemes provide opportunity to establish home based business ventures at minimal cost and in short time. Home based businesses are mostly managed by married females belonging to an age group of 40 to 50 years. The family set up

is nuclear and the reason to choose business from home is to take care of their families. The initial investments are arranged through personal savings (Indrani & Priyadarshani, 2017).

Financial independence, ambition, business idea implementation, desire to become owner and work drive homepreneurs. Sulaksha Shetty, a homepreneur addresses the rising demand for home-cooked, healthy meals in metropolitan cities across the country. She decided to cater by ensuring inclusive growth and establishing Tiffins & Thots (Make in India, n.d.). Effective women entrepreneurs influence and encourage women to pick entrepreneurship as their career option (Hemalatha, 2012). Supportive family members and small investments, desire for a good life, confidence about skills, and knowledge influence homepreneurs in India (Indrani and Priyadarshani, 2017).

Homepreneurs are ambitious individuals with a commercial idea; they are meticulous and attentive to their business work, confident, experienced, and innovative to make their businesses succeed. They analyze every occurrence and situation to proceed carefully. Homepreneurs are creative and have solutions for every bottleneck. Homepreneurs are multi-taskers and skilled with efficient management practices. They are effective in resource management and utilize resources, that is time, space, raw material or money with zero wastage (Swami & Naidu, 2020). Skill, knowledge, and adaptability in business are the main reasons to get into home business ventures. Homepreneurs can take up challenging roles to meet personal needs and become economically independent. With the introduction of media, homepreneurs have become aware of their own qualities, rights, and work situations. A majority of homepreneurs are engaged in unorganized sectors like handicrafts, handlooms, kitchen activities (pickles, powders and papads), and other cottage based industries like basket making etc. which are home based jobs (Singu, 2018). Homepreneurs are risk takers and particularly calculate risks that will pay off in future. They are customer centric and understand the importance of customer satisfaction. They try to maintain fine quality products and services for their customers. Homepreneurs are fanatical and their business is the extension of their personality and values, and this is what helps them to be self-motivated and drives them forward (Swami & Naidu, 2020). Utilization of ICTs for work is one of the skills that are increasingly being developed among groups engaged in home business enterprises (Ching, 2006).

Homepreneurs are entrepreneurs and therefore, they have similar characteristics. Thus, based upon studies and research it can be said that Homepreneurs are no doubt risk takers who embrace failure and have great focus. These individuals have great business ideas and are creative; they use their resources effectively and come up with solutions for problems. Homepreneurs are multi taskers, manage home and resources efficiently simultaneously. They have passion for their business and are highly motivated to succeed. Finally, homepreneurs are passionate. Their business is the extension of their personality, ethics, and this is what helps them to be self-motivated and drives them forward.

Digitalization Among Homepreneurs and Road Ahead

Digital technologies are transforming the nature of entrepreneurial processes, entrepreneurial activities and the way in which entrepreneurship is pursued (Nambisan, 2017). The growing impact and importance of digitalization in the contemporary business environment of homepreneurs is evident from their business practices. The landscape of businesses in India has changed extensively after the adoption of the internet and homepreneurs have become part of this wave. The arrival of the Digital India concept has truly introduced new routes for homepreneurs. They are pursuing digital ways of promotion, selling, and functioning of their business.

This new-age technique of digitalizing boosts home-based business and gives a strong advantage by doing things better, faster, and cheaper. With the world speedily growing to adapt and operate in a digital environment, there are now plenty of options. Homepreneurs are connecting with people, processes, and content to run business as efficiently as possible. They are reaching clients, customers, and staff conveniently through social media, mobile applications, and websites.

The wave of digitalization is supporting homepreneurs through social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, blog posts, and YouTube videos to bring their businesses to remotest areas. These platforms are used by home based businesses as influencers and trade channels. According to a recent report by the consulting firm Zinnov, the number of homepreneurs selling lifestyle and clothing products has reached two million. The report also points out that with the help of basic internet tools, these homepreneurs are clocking business worth \$ 8-9 billion in gross sales and are

projected to strike up to \$ 48-60 billion by 2022. The report clearly shows the growing impact and importance of social selling in the contemporary business environment.

The high-speed internet age and growing access to smartphones have given birth to social selling which is the most prevalent business of homepreneurs. Buyers of today are trying out new avenues of shopping more than ever, and homepreneurs are leveraging this opportunity to enhance their digital network and social selling orbit. Social selling is the need for business to grow with changing times, making selling more intimate, fun, and engaging. Social selling is surely the way forward for the ambitious brands and homepreneurs today. The following factors showcase the level of digitalization among homepreneurs.

Digital ‘Bazaars’ and Communities

Social media has helped homepreneurs reach out to their customers for networking, lead generation, and marketing. The advent of digital communities on social media platforms makes communicating to communities easier. Homepreneurs can showcase their products, give live demonstrations, and interact with prospective customers through these social groups. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Whatsapp, and Facebook are used extensively to market products. Digitalisation has made payments easier with mobile wallets like Paytm and PayPal. These social media platforms are working on providing payment gateways to homepreneurs as well.

Growth of E-Tailer Platforms

Growth of homepreneurs has also marked the growth of e-commerce B2B platforms. As social selling has increased due to digitalization, e-tailers like Meesho are dealing in ethnic wear, clothing, home décor, and fashion accessories and many more categories have steadily been introduced, which means encouraging more homepreneurs and small sellers into social selling. These e-tailers offer cash back or premium benefits to homepreneurs who are actively involved in sharing their products online. The growth and support of e-tailers is boosting digital footprints of homepreneurs and generating handsome rewards and benefits for staying socially active.

However, homepreneurs have their own set of challenges. Secured payments and negotiations with potential customers are restrictions for homepreneurs. As digitalization has increased with easy access to the internet, huge competition has increased within the home based business industry. A lot of buyer seller groups dealing in similar categories of products have emerged on all social media platforms with cut throat price cutting, thereby impacting personal profits of homepreneurs. Logistics and supply chain is also an emergent challenge for homepreneurs as far as the Indian business panorama is concerned. “While the job comes with freedom, the person must have the skills and knack for doing sales and interacting with customers,” says Chandigarh-based Piu Mishra who works as a holiday expert with MakeMyTrip.

Homepreneurs backed with innovative digitalization will be the future of home based businesses. The structure and network mechanisms of overall businesses would change. The next stage of digitalization would include providing digital solutions through adoption of Artificial Intelligence and Machine learning to provide real time solutions to customers (Rausser, 2017). Digital solutions would steer up homepreneurs to focus on customization, and adapting to customer needs to create new products as per their requirements. E-commerce among home-based businesses (Mason et al., 2011), dealers, and supplier integration would improve.

Conclusion

Home based businesses have now become a reality and firms have started evolving their business ideas. The present economic crisis transformed ideologies towards home based ventures. Homemakers can contribute a lot to economic development by utilizing their unique skills, knowledge, and desire. The “AtmaNirbhar Bharat” initiative by the government will pave the way for home based businesses in India. The need of the hour is to develop a supportive ecosystem, sustainability and enhancement of scale of home based businesses, and digital platforms. The policies and

initiatives by the government can mark a difference in this business segment. The digital era and its transformations have brought about the significance of home based businesses and thus, for homepreneurs in the economy.

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