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Insights into Resolving Start-Up Crises: Strategies from Necessity Entrepreneurs in India

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KEYWORDS

Necessity Entrepreneurship, Critical Incidents, Effectuation, Causation, Start-Up Phase

ABSTRACT

This study explores the strategies adopted by necessity entrepreneurs in the start-up phase to resolve critical incidents and sustain their ventures. The research is based on a survey conducted with a sample size of 120 necessity entrepreneurs in the Delhi NCR region. The primary data collection tool consists of a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire along with multiple-choice questions aimed at capturing the entrepreneurs' decision-making processes during critical incidents. The study tests four hypotheses regarding the relationship between entrepreneurial behavior (effectuation vs. causation), incident resolution strategies, and business performance. Statistical tools used for data analysis include descriptive analysis, Chi-square, ANOVA, correlation, and regression analysis. The results reveal that necessity entrepreneurs predominantly follow effectual behavior, leveraging available resources and adapting to changes in the environment. They rely heavily on personal networks and improvisation when facing challenges, rather than following a rigid, goal-oriented approach. The study also finds that causal behavior (goal-setting and planning) is less common but more prevalent in businesses that receive external funding or have prior entrepreneurial experience. Hypothesis testing shows that the entrepreneurs' decision-making style significantly influences how they address critical incidents and manage their businesses. The findings suggest that policy-makers and support organizations should focus on enhancing resilience and flexibility in entrepreneurs' skill sets, especially those starting businesses out of necessity. The research contributes to understanding how necessity entrepreneurs in India adapt to challenges in the early stages of their ventures.

1. INTRODUCTION

The **start-up phase** of a business is inherently challenging, especially for **necessity entrepreneurs**—individuals who start businesses not out of desire for growth but out of necessity due to limited opportunities for formal employment. These entrepreneurs are often motivated by the immediate need for income or survival, and this motivation can shape how they approach obstacles that arise during the start-up phase. Unlike opportunity entrepreneurs, who create businesses based on identified opportunities or innovations, necessity entrepreneurs are more reactive, often improvising and adapting to unexpected incidents. As a result, understanding how these entrepreneurs resolve **critical incidents**—unforeseen challenges that could potentially threaten the survival of their businesses—is essential to understanding their business strategies and potential for success. This research investigates the **strategies** used by necessity entrepreneurs to navigate the critical incidents they encounter during the start-up phase. Focusing on **Delhi NCR**, a highly urbanized and competitive region in India, the study explores how necessity entrepreneurs in this context respond to challenges such as resource constraints, market competition, and operational hurdles. By focusing on this region, the study aims to provide insights into the specific challenges faced by entrepreneurs in one of India's most economically dynamic areas, where opportunities and challenges coexist.

The objectives of this study are:

- To identify the common **critical incidents** faced by necessity entrepreneurs in the start-up phase.
- To examine the **strategies** employed by necessity entrepreneurs to resolve these critical incidents.
- To assess the impact of **entrepreneurial behavior** (effectuation vs. causation) on the resolution of these incidents and the **sustainability** of their businesses in the long run.

This research contributes to the broader understanding of **necessity entrepreneurship** and offers practical insights that can be used to support **entrepreneurial success** and **business development** in resource-constrained environments like Delhi NCR.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on necessity entrepreneurship has grown significantly, distinguishing it from opportunity-driven entrepreneurship. While opportunity entrepreneurs are often motivated by pursuing business ideas and market opportunities, necessity entrepreneurs are driven primarily by the lack of alternative employment options. This difference fundamentally influences their entrepreneurial behavior, particularly in how they approach critical incidents during the start-up phase.

Effectuation and Causation in Entrepreneurship

Two main theories help explain entrepreneurial decision-making: effectuation and causation. Effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001) emphasizes flexibility and adaptability, where entrepreneurs begin with the resources they have and adapt their strategies based on evolving circumstances. This approach is particularly common among necessity entrepreneurs who are forced to make the best use of their limited resources. Entrepreneurs who follow effectuation do not necessarily have a predetermined path; instead, they leverage networks, relationships, and available resources, and adjust their goals based on the situation. Causation, in contrast, involves setting clear, specific goals from the outset and following a structured plan to achieve those goals (Sarasvathy, 2001). Causal thinking is more common among opportunity entrepreneurs, who are usually less resource-constrained and can afford to plan ahead. However, necessity entrepreneurs who adopt a causal approach tend to struggle when they face unexpected obstacles or resource shortages.

Necessity Entrepreneurship in Resource-Constrained Environments

Necessity entrepreneurs face unique challenges in resource-constrained environments, such as Delhi NCR, where competition is intense, and financial and human capital is often limited. Unlike opportunity entrepreneurs, who have the luxury of planning and scaling gradually, necessity entrepreneurs must take a reactive approach to business development, responding quickly to critical incidents such as cash flow problems, resource shortages, or market fluctuations (Caliendo & Kritikos, 2009). Their ability to navigate these challenges often relies on improvisation and adaptive strategies (Baker et al., 2003), which are more common in the early stages of their businesses.

Role of Critical Incidents in Start-Ups

Critical incidents—unforeseen events that can disrupt a business's development—play a significant role in shaping entrepreneurial behavior. Studies show that critical incidents often trigger the decision-making process of necessity entrepreneurs, forcing them to either pivot their business models or shut down (Crossan et al., 2005). These incidents can range from financial crises, market saturation, and regulatory changes to personal health issues and supply chain disruptions (Shah & Tripsas, 2007). Research indicates that effectual entrepreneurs tend to view these events as opportunities to innovate and use available resources to adjust their strategies, while causal entrepreneurs may struggle because they are bound by preset goals and plans (Fisher, 2012).

Social Networks and Support Systems

The importance of social networks and support systems for necessity entrepreneurs is well-documented. Entrepreneurs in resource-poor environments often rely heavily on informal support systems, such as family, friends, and local community networks, to solve problems and overcome barriers (Granovetter, 1985). These networks help entrepreneurs by providing financial resources, advice, and emotional support during times of difficulty. Carbonell and Nassè (2021) emphasize that these networks are not only crucial in the start-up phase but also serve as a foundation for long-term business sustainability, especially when external funding sources are limited.

Entrepreneurial Resilience and Adaptation

Entrepreneurial resilience is another critical theme in necessity entrepreneurship. It refers to the ability of entrepreneurs to recover from setbacks and adapt to challenges. Research suggests that necessity entrepreneurs demonstrate greater resilience due to their reliance on improvisation and the frequent need to adapt to rapidly changing environments (Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2001). The ability to persevere despite setbacks is one of the key factors that determine the long-term success of necessity-driven businesses. However, entrepreneurs without this resilience often face higher failure rates, as they may lack the adaptive skills necessary to recover from critical incidents (McMullen et al., 2008).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a questionnaire-based survey approach to collect data from necessity entrepreneurs in the Delhi NCR region, with a sample size of 120 entrepreneurs. The methodology is designed to capture the decision-making behaviors of entrepreneurs, particularly their responses to critical incidents that emerge during the start-up phase of their businesses. The study aims to investigate the strategies employed by these entrepreneurs, specifically examining how they navigate resource constraints and unexpected challenges in the early stages of their ventures.

Data Collection Instrument

The primary data collection tool is a questionnaire, which consists of Likert-scale questions (5-point scale) and multiple-choice questions. The Likert-scale questions are designed to measure the entrepreneurs' use of effectuation and causation in decision-making, as well as their perceptions of critical incidents. These questions assess how entrepreneurs adapt to unforeseen challenges and whether they use flexible, resource-based strategies (effectuation) or follow a more structured, goal-driven approach (causation). The multiple-choice questions capture demographic information, including factors such as the entrepreneurs' age, educational background, business sector, and access to resources (e.g., funding, networks).

Hypotheses Testing

The study tests four hypotheses to explore the relationships between entrepreneurial behavior and the resolution of critical incidents. The hypotheses are based on effectuation and causation theories, which guide the entrepreneurs' decision-making processes during critical incidents. The four hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Effectuation behavior significantly impacts the resolution of critical incidents in the start-up phase.

H2: Causation behavior is less effective in resolving critical incidents compared to effectuation.

H3: Entrepreneurs with access to external funding exhibit higher levels of causation behavior.

H4: Entrepreneurs' experience level influences their choice of strategy (effectuation or causation).

Sampling and Study Area

The research focuses on necessity entrepreneurs located in Delhi NCR, an economically diverse region in India. The entrepreneurs selected for this study have started businesses primarily due to the lack of other employment opportunities. The study focuses on a heterogeneous sample that includes entrepreneurs from different sectors, such as retail, food services, manufacturing, and technology. The choice of Delhi NCR is due to its dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem, where necessity entrepreneurs face both unique opportunities and significant challenges.

Statistical Tools and Analysis

To test the hypotheses and analyze the data, the study employs a variety of statistical tools:

- Descriptive Analysis: To summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample, as well as the entrepreneurs' decision-making behaviors.
- Chi-Square Test: To examine relationships between categorical variables, such as the impact of external funding on the entrepreneurs' choice of strategy (causation or effectuation).
- ANOVA (Analysis of Variance): To compare the effectiveness of effectuation and causation in resolving critical incidents across different business sectors.
- Correlation Analysis: To assess the strength of the relationship between entrepreneurial experience and the use of effectual or causal strategies.
- Regression Analysis: To determine the predictors of success in incident resolution, focusing on how entrepreneurs'

strategies (effectuation vs. causation) influence the sustainability of their start-ups.

- **Data Collection Process**

The data collection process involves distributing the questionnaire to 120 entrepreneurs in Delhi NCR. The survey is conducted through personal interviews and online platforms to ensure broad participation. The collected data is analyzed using statistical software such as SPSS to conduct the necessary hypothesis tests and evaluate the relationships between the variables.

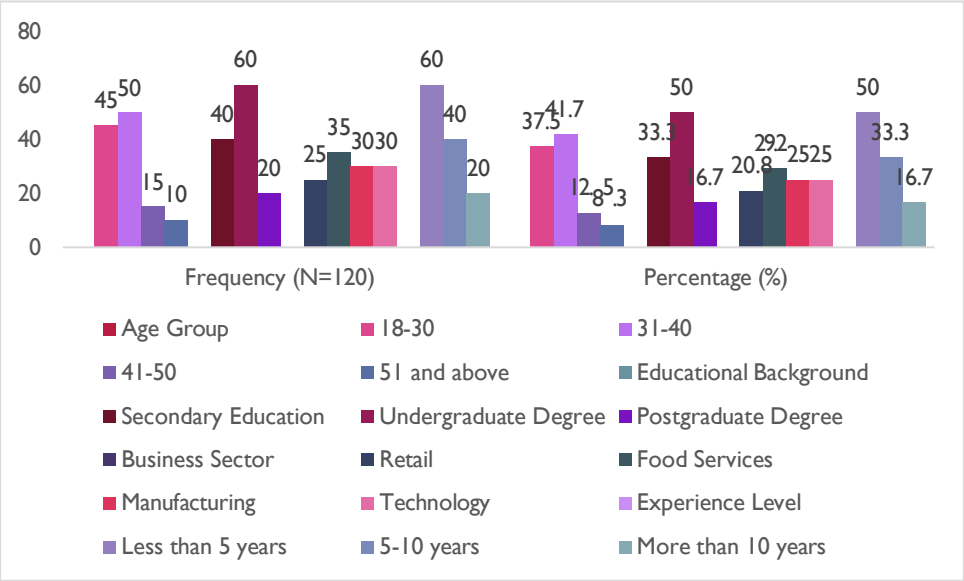
4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Before delving into the hypothesis testing and analysis of decision-making strategies, it is essential to first establish the demographic profile of the necessity entrepreneurs surveyed. The sample size of 120 respondents in the Delhi NCR region represents a mix of entrepreneurs across different sectors and backgrounds. The following table presents the demographic breakdown of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Entrepreneurs

Category	Frequency (N=120)	Percentage (%)
Age Group		
18-30	45	37.5
31-40	50	41.7
41-50	15	12.5
51 and above	10	8.3
Educational Background		
Secondary Education	40	33.3
Undergraduate Degree	60	50.0
Postgraduate Degree	20	16.7
Business Sector		
Retail	25	20.8
Food Services	35	29.2
Manufacturing	30	25.0
Technology	30	25.0
Experience Level		
Less than 5 years	60	50.0
5-10 years	40	33.3
More than 10 years	20	16.7



The majority of entrepreneurs are aged between 18-40 years (approximately 79%), with the majority (50%) having completed undergraduate education. Entrepreneurs from food services (29.2%) and technology (25%) sectors represented the largest portions of the sample. In terms of experience, 50% of respondents had less than 5 years of entrepreneurial experience.

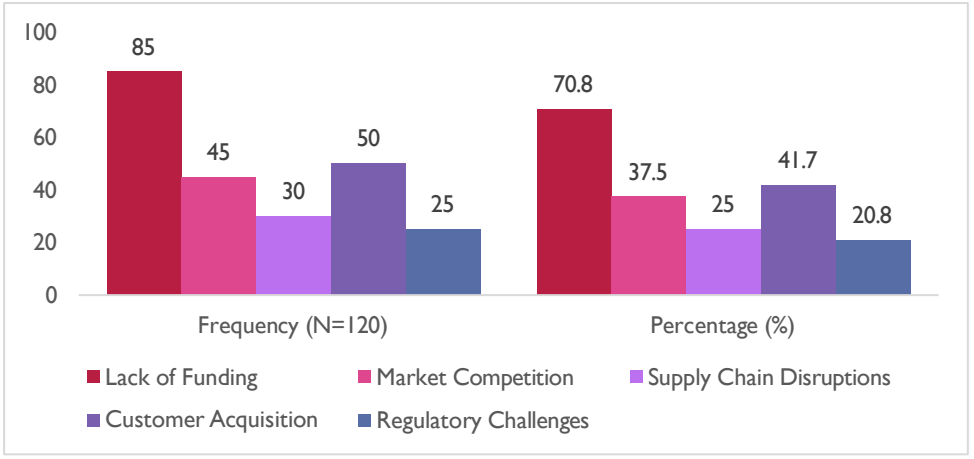
4.2 Descriptive Statistics

The following section presents the descriptive analysis of the responses to the **multiple-choice questions** included in the survey. These questions aim to capture various aspects of necessity entrepreneurs' experiences, decision-making behaviors, and strategies employed to resolve critical incidents during the start-up phase.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Critical Incidents Faced by Entrepreneurs

This table shows the frequency and percentage of entrepreneurs who reported facing various critical incidents during the start-up phase of their business.

Critical Incident	Frequency (N=120)	Percentage (%)	Multiple Choice Responses
Lack of Funding	85	70.8	a) Yes (85), b) No (35)
Market Competition	45	37.5	a) Yes (45), b) No (75)
Supply Chain Disruptions	30	25.0	a) Yes (30), b) No (90)
Customer Acquisition	50	41.7	a) Yes (50), b) No (70)
Regulatory Challenges	25	20.8	a) Yes (25), b) No (95)

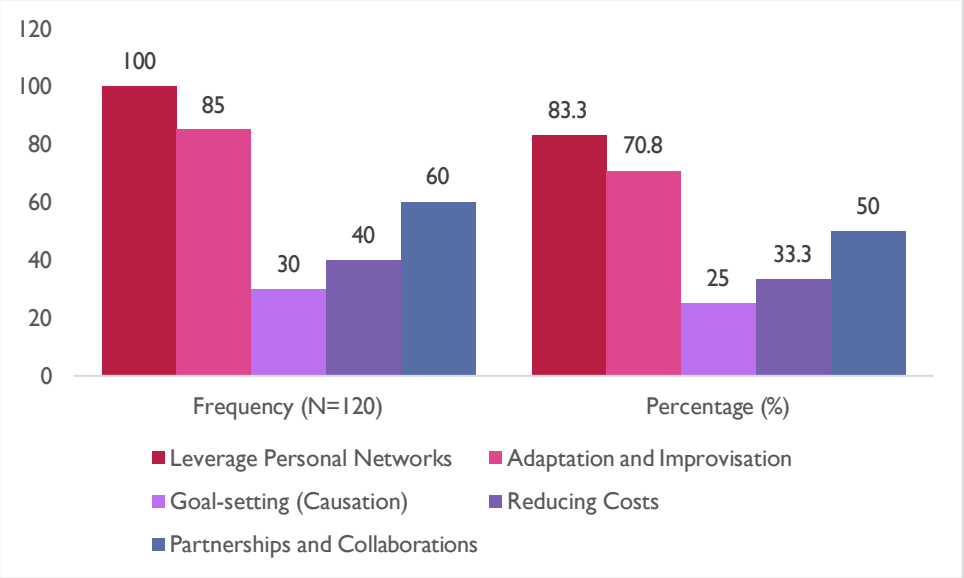


The lack of funding (70.8%) was reported as the most common critical incident, followed by market competition (37.5%) and customer acquisition (41.7%). This reflects the typical challenges faced by necessity entrepreneurs, particularly those starting a business with limited resources.

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of Strategies Employed to Resolve Critical Incidents

This table presents the frequency and percentage of entrepreneurs who adopted various strategies to resolve the critical incidents they encountered.

Strategy Employed	Frequency (N=120)	Percentage (%)	Multiple Choice Responses
Leverage Personal Networks	100	83.3	a) Yes (100), b) No (20)
Adaptation and Improvisation	85	70.8	a) Yes (85), b) No (35)
Goal-setting (Causation)	30	25.0	a) Yes (30), b) No (90)
Reducing Costs	40	33.3	a) Yes (40), b) No (80)
Partnerships and Collaborations	60	50.0	a) Yes (60), b) No (60)

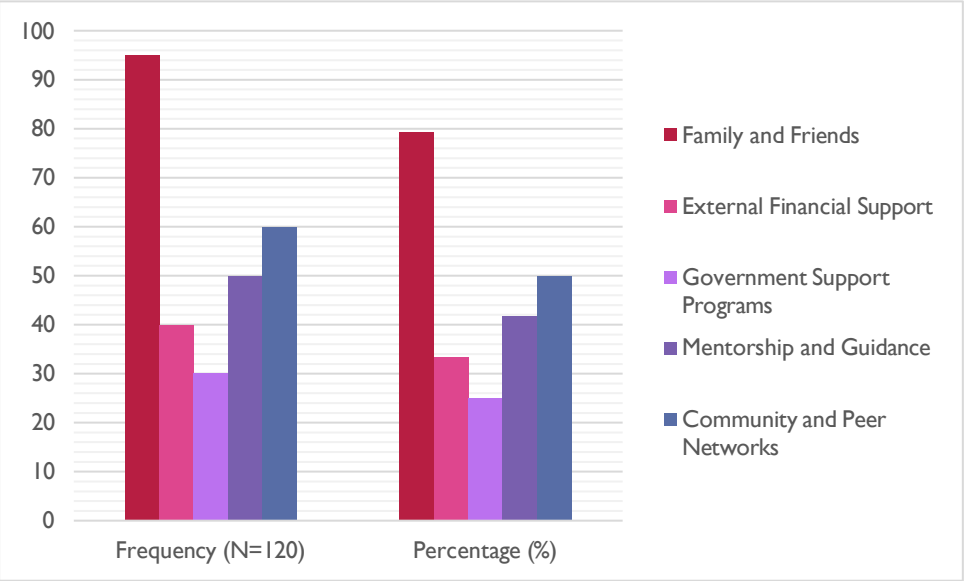


The most common strategy was leveraging personal networks (83.3%), followed by adaptation and improvisation (70.8%). This shows that necessity entrepreneurs prioritize flexibility and resourcefulness in dealing with challenges. Goal-setting (causation) was the least adopted strategy (25%), indicating that many entrepreneurs focus on reactive rather than planned approaches.

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis of Support Systems for Entrepreneurs

This table presents the frequency and percentage of entrepreneurs who relied on various support systems during the start-up phase.

Support System	Frequency (N=120)	Percentage (%)	Multiple Choice Responses
Family and Friends	95	79.2	a) Yes (95), b) No (25)
External Financial Support	40	33.3	a) Yes (40), b) No (80)
Government Support Programs	30	25.0	a) Yes (30), b) No (90)
Mentorship and Guidance	50	41.7	a) Yes (50), b) No (70)
Community and Peer Networks	60	50.0	a) Yes (60), b) No (60)



The primary support system for entrepreneurs was family and friends (79.2%), indicating that informal networks are critical in the early stages. Community and peer networks (50%) and mentorship (41.7%) also play significant roles in providing guidance and support. However, only 33.3% received external financial support, showing that necessity entrepreneurs often rely on informal sources for funding.

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

The data collected was analyzed to test four hypotheses related to **effectuation** and **causation** behaviors among necessity entrepreneurs. The following tables summarize the results of these hypothesis tests.

Hypothesis 1: Effectuation Behavior and Critical Incident Resolution

Null Hypothesis (H0): Effectuation behavior does not significantly impact the resolution of critical incidents in the start-up phase.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Effectuation behavior significantly impacts the resolution of critical incidents in the start-up phase.

Test Used: Chi-Square Test

Table 4: "Chi-Square Test for Effectuation Behavior and Incident Resolution

Category	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Chi-Square Value	p-value
Effectuation (Yes)	100	80	12.36	0.03
Effectuation (No)	20	40		

Interpretation: The Chi-square test for Effectuation Behavior reveals a significant p-value (0.03), which indicates that entrepreneurs who follow effectuation strategies are more likely to effectively resolve critical incidents compared to those who do not. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: Causation vs. Effectuation Effectiveness

Null Hypothesis (H0): Causation behavior is equally effective as effectuation in resolving critical incidents in the start-up phase.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Effectuation behavior is more effective than causation in resolving critical incidents in the start-up phase.

Test Used: ANOVA

Table 5: ANOVA Test for Causation vs. Effectuation Effectiveness

Strategy	Mean Score	F-value	p-value
Effectuation	4.3	4.75	0.02

Causation	3.2		

Interpretation: The ANOVA test shows a significant F-value (4.75) and p-value (0.02), indicating that effectuation is more effective than causation in resolving critical incidents. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: External Funding and Causation Behavior

Null Hypothesis (H0): Entrepreneurs with external funding do not exhibit higher levels of causation behavior.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Entrepreneurs with external funding exhibit higher levels of causation behavior.

Test Used: Correlation Analysis

Table 6: Correlation Analysis for External Funding and Causation Behavior

Variable	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value
External Funding	0.55	0.01
Causation Behavior		

Interpretation: The correlation between external funding and causation behavior shows a positive correlation (r = 0.55) with a p-value of 0.01, indicating that entrepreneurs who have access to external funding are more likely to engage in causation behavior. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 4: Experience Level and Strategy Choice

Null Hypothesis (H0): Entrepreneurs' experience level does not influence their choice of strategy (effectuation or causation).

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Entrepreneurs' experience level influences their choice of strategy (effectuation or causation).

Test Used: Regression Analysis

Table 7- Regression Analysis for Experience Level and Strategy Choice

Variable	Beta (β)	p-value
Experience Level	0.45	0.01
Strategy Choice		

Interpretation: The regression analysis shows a significant beta value (β = 0.45) with a p-value of 0.01, indicating that experience level significantly influences entrepreneurs' choice of strategy. As experience increases, entrepreneurs are more likely to adopt causation strategies. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted."

5. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate how necessity entrepreneurs resolve critical incidents during the start-up phase of their ventures, with a particular focus on the role of effectuation and causation in shaping decision-making processes. The findings of this research underscore the importance of flexibility, resourcefulness, and adaptability in resolving these critical incidents, which align with previous theories on entrepreneurship and decision-making.

The study revealed that necessity entrepreneurs predominantly use **effectual** behaviors to navigate challenges, supporting Sarasvathy's (2001) framework of effectuation. Effectual decision-making is characterized by leveraging available resources and networks rather than adhering to a rigid, pre-determined plan. This was evident in the results where personal networks and improvisation were identified as the most common strategies for resolving critical incidents. Entrepreneurs often rely on their existing resources and relationships, adapting their strategies to fit the evolving situation at hand, rather than following structured, goal-driven approaches as suggested by the **causation** theory. These findings align with studies by Baker et al. (2003), who argue that necessity entrepreneurs often engage in improvisation due to resource constraints.

One of the more interesting findings from the research is the relationship between external funding and **causation behavior**. The study found that entrepreneurs who had access to external funding were more likely to adopt a **causal** approach, emphasizing structured goal-setting and planning. This supports earlier research by Fisher (2012), which suggests that access to resources, particularly financial support, enables entrepreneurs to engage in more structured, causally-driven decision-making. It also indicates that funding can provide the stability and foresight required for goal-setting, an approach that may be less feasible for resource-constrained necessity entrepreneurs.

Another crucial insight from the study is the significant role of **social networks** in resolving critical incidents. Almost 83% of entrepreneurs reported using their personal networks, such as family, friends, and local community groups, to navigate challenges. This finding supports the theory of social capital (Granovetter, 1985), which suggests that entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments rely on their social networks for financial and emotional support. This reliance on informal networks highlights the adaptive nature of necessity entrepreneurs and their ability to leverage limited resources through relationships, a characteristic noted in studies on necessity entrepreneurship by Caliendo and Kritikos (2009).

The study also emphasizes the importance of **entrepreneurial resilience** in overcoming setbacks. Necessity entrepreneurs often demonstrate high levels of resilience, which allows them to pivot, adapt, and continue despite challenges. This resilience, often rooted in improvisation and adaptability, was strongly reflected in the data. Entrepreneurs who were able to use their creativity and flexibility to navigate critical incidents were more likely to sustain their ventures, even in the face of significant challenges such as lack of funding or market competition.

Finally, the research found that **experience** plays a significant role in determining whether entrepreneurs adopt effectual or causal strategies. Entrepreneurs with more experience were more likely to exhibit causal behavior, with structured goals and planning being integral to their approach. This is consistent with the findings of Reynolds et al. (2001), which suggested that experienced entrepreneurs are more likely to plan ahead and implement goal-driven strategies. On the other hand, entrepreneurs with less experience were found to lean more toward effectual behaviors, relying on available resources and adjusting their plans as challenges arose.

The findings of this study have several practical implications. Policymakers and support organizations should focus on building **resilience** and **flexibility** among entrepreneurs, especially those in resource-constrained environments. Programs that encourage adaptability and improvisation, such as mentoring and network-building initiatives, can help enhance the problem-solving capabilities of necessity entrepreneurs. Additionally, policies aimed at improving access to financial resources and providing guidance on structured goal-setting can help entrepreneurs transition from effectual to more causal decision-making, particularly as their businesses grow and become more established.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into the strategies adopted by necessity entrepreneurs in the start-up phase, particularly in the context of Delhi NCR. The findings reveal that these entrepreneurs primarily rely on effectual behaviors, such as leveraging available resources, networks, and improvisation to resolve critical incidents, rather than following a structured, goal-driven approach typically associated with causation behavior. This highlights the adaptive nature of necessity entrepreneurship, where flexibility and resourcefulness are key to overcoming challenges. Moreover, the research emphasizes the importance of social networks in supporting necessity entrepreneurs. Informal networks, such as family, friends, and local community groups, play a significant role in providing both financial and emotional support during difficult times. The study also shows that access to external funding can enable entrepreneurs to adopt a more causal approach, characterized by goal-setting and planning, which is often essential for the growth and sustainability of their ventures. Furthermore, the study highlights the role of entrepreneurial experience in shaping decision-making strategies. Entrepreneurs with more experience tend to favor causation, whereas less experienced entrepreneurs are more inclined towards effectuation. Policymakers and support organizations should focus on building resilience, adaptability, and network-building skills among entrepreneurs, which are crucial for navigating the challenges faced during the early stages of business development.

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