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Socio-economic characteristics of COVID-19 resilient agripreneurs

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Abstract

Agripreneurship has the potential to contribute to the economic and social development of the country. Agripreneurs are business stakeholders engaged with agriculture and allied sectors. They help to transform Indian agriculture into a profitable venture by promoting value addition. On the flipside, the survival of agripreneurs has been often confronted with various hurdles. The COVID-19 pandemic is one such crisis that caused a devastating challenge to the business cycle of agripreneurs. The lockdown and other safety measures extremely altered the existing business model and hence becoming resilient is the only possible way to sustain the business for agripreneurs. Henceforth, a study was conducted to know the socio-economic characteristics of resilient agripreneurs. A sample of 234 agripreneurs was selected using a proportionate sampling technique from the highest four agripreneurship prevailing districts of Tamil Nadu viz., Cuddalore, Coimbatore, Madurai and Salem. The data was collected using a pre-tested and well structured interview schedule. Totally, 17 socio-economic characteristics were analysed and the results revealed that the majority of the agripreneurs were middle aged (51.28%), undergraduates (45.29%), sole proprietors (73.93%), having 11 to 20 years of business experience (49.15%), had undergone up to 5 trainings (39.31%) and belonged to a nuclear family type (55.13%). The agripreneurs possessed medium level of self confidence (71.37%), information seeking behaviour (76.50%), innovativeness (61.53%), achievement motivation (56.42%), economic motivation (82.05%), competition orientation (64.53%), decision making ability (64.53%), leadership ability (61.97%), managerial ability (47.00%) and risk taking ability (62.39%). The socio-economic characteristics of agripreneurs might have transformed them to be resilient during the pandemic.

Keywords: Agripreneurs, resilience, entrepreneurial skills, COVID-19, socio-economic characteristics

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is one of the challenging tasks as they are often confronted with situations that constantly affect their survival and well-being. Globalization and rapid changes in society prone businesses to external shocks, economic, social, and environmental changes (Steiner A and Cleary J, 2014) ^[1]. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the production and supply of goods. The lockdown restrictions halted major economic activities and resulted in reduced consumption and a rapid fall in demand, as people did not venture out to purchase goods and services (Ramakumar, 2020) ^[2]. The pandemic re-shifted social and economic life with the advent of the new normal. It altered the workforce, supply chain, demand and transformed into new business models. (Pinzaru, 2020) ^[3]. To combat the new situation, resilience is necessary for individuals, organizations, and society. (Liu *et al.*, 2020) ^[4]. The resilience of entrepreneurs can be a factor for business success, as they might develop a high degree of tolerance to ambiguity, can adapt to change quickly, take advantage of the situations, and learn from their mistakes. (Ayala and Manzano, 2014) ^[5].

Entrepreneurial skills are equally important to act dynamically during a crisis. It encourages the entrepreneur's ability to develop a new company and promote social development (Suparno and Santano, 2018) ^[6]. The practice of entrepreneurs in managing risks will also enable them to react in a dynamic and innovative manner during a crisis. (Monllor and Murphy, 2017) ^[7]. The proactiveness skill of an entrepreneur helps to anticipate problems before it happens and to take immediate action (Yan *et al.*, 2018) ^[8]. Resilience is categorized as a skill or personal characteristic of an entrepreneur to thrive in the face of a disruptive environment, social and cultural norms, and political or economic constraints (Akula *et al.*, 2021) ^[9]. The continuity of business and entrepreneurial activities during a crisis minimizes its impact and also speeds up the recovery process (Williams and Vorley, 2019) ^[10] and it is one of the important forms of resilience.

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“Agripreneurs are the entrepreneurs holding their main business in agriculture or agriculture allied.” To revitalize agriculture into an attractive and profitable venture, value addition and processing is essential. Thus, the growth of agripreneurs has to be encouraged. The resilient agripreneurs i.e., who have navigated their business successfully during the COVID-19 pandemic are purposively selected for the study. The socio-economic characteristics of agripreneurs might be one of the factors responsible for the agripreneurs in espousing pandemic resilience. Hence, the study aims to analyse the socio-economic profile characteristics of agripreneurs.

2. Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in four districts of Tamil Nadu. Based on the highest number of agripreneurs, these four districts viz., Cuddalore, Coimbatore, Madurai and Salem were selected for the study. Employing a proportionate sampling method, a total of 234 agripreneurs from the four

districts were selected. The socio-economic characteristics of the study were selected based on the judges’ ratings. The variables with the highest ratings were selected and subjected to the main survey. The primary data were collected personally with the help of an interview schedule. The data was collected by face-to-face interaction with agripreneurs in their enterprise or in their homes. The socio-economic characteristics viz., Age, Educational status, Family type, Nature of ownership, Source of fund, Experience in enterprise, Information seeking behaviour, Trainings undergone, Self confidence, Innovativeness, Achievement motivation, Economic motivation, Competition orientation, Decision making ability, Leadership ability, Managerial ability and Risk taking ability were selected for the study. Percentage analysis and cumulative frequency method were used to categorize the socio-economic characteristics of the selected agripreneurs.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to their socio-economic characteristics

S. No.	Socio-economic Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Age	Young	48	20.51
		Middle	120	51.28
		Old	66	28.21
2.	Educational status	Illiterate	2	0.85
		Primary	3	1.28
		Secondary	31	13.24
		Higher Secondary	34	14.53
		Intermediate	35	14.97
		Under Graduation	106	45.29
		Post-graduation	23	9.84
3.	Family type	Nuclear	129	55.13
		Joint family	105	44.87
4.	Nature of ownership	Sole proprietorship	173	73.93
		Partnership	32	13.68
		Cooperative	2	0.85
		Family business	8	3.42
		Private Limited	8	3.42
		Farmer Producer Organisation	11	4.70
5.	Source of fund	Own fund	173	73.93
		Family and friends	27	11.54
		Bank loan	16	6.84
		Venture capital/ private investors	5	2.14
		Govt grants and subsidies	13	5.56
6.	Experience in enterprise	Less than 10 years	111	47.43
		11-20 years	115	49.15
		More than 20 years	8	3.42
7.	Information seeking behaviour	Low	41	17.52
		Medium	179	76.50
		High	14	5.98
8.	Trainings undergone	None	5	2.13
		Attended up to 5 trainings	90	38.47
		Attended 6 to 10 trainings	67	28.63
		Attended 11 to 15 trainings	18	7.69
		More than 15 trainings	54	23.08
9.	Self confidence	Low	30	12.82
		Medium	167	71.37
		High	37	15.81
10.	Innovativeness	Low	43	18.38
		Medium	144	61.53
		High	47	20.09
11.	Achievement motivation	Low	50	21.36
		Medium	132	56.42
		High	52	22.22
12.	Economic motivation	Low	25	10.68

		Medium	192	82.05
		High	17	7.26
13.	Competition orientation	Low	36	15.38
		Medium	151	64.53
14.	Decision making ability	High	47	20.09
		Low	52	22.22
15.	Leadership ability	Medium	124	52.99
		High	58	24.79
16.	Managerial ability	Low	38	16.24
		Medium	145	61.97
17.	Risk taking ability	High	51	21.79
		Low	69	29.50
16.	Managerial ability	Medium	110	47.00
		High	55	23.50
17.	Risk taking ability	Low	35	14.96
		Medium	146	62.39
		High	53	22.65

3.1 Age

It is evident from Table 1 that the majority of the agripreneurs belonged to the middle age category (51.28%) followed by the old age category (28.21%) and young age category (20.51%). An individual acquires the ability to develop his enterprise through his rich experience in the business. The period of turning into an entrepreneur grows out of age and this might be the probable reason that a significant proportion of the agripreneurs were in middle age and it was observed during the survey that most of the agripreneurs initiated their business career between the age of 30 to 45.

3.2 Educational status

Table 1 revealed that the majority of the agripreneurs had an undergraduate level of education (45.29%) followed by intermediate education (14.97%) like diploma degree, higher secondary (14.53%), secondary (13.24%), postgraduate education levels (9.84%). The remaining 1.28 per cent of the agripreneurs possessed primary education and only 0.85 per cent of them were found to be in the illiterate category. The results revealed that education is one of the important factors for initiating any business enterprise and for its successful growth. That might be the reason for the majority of the agripreneurs in the study were found to be educated.

3.3 Family type

More than half (55.13%) of the agripreneurs belonged to the nuclear family followed by 44.87 per cent in the joint family. Most of the agripreneurs moved from their hometown to start the business enterprise, which might be a reason for the majority of the agripreneur to pertain to the nuclear family.

3.4 Nature of ownership

Nearly three fourth (73.93%) of the agripreneurs were sole proprietors followed by partnership (13.68%), family business (3.42%), private limited (3.42%), farmer producer organization (4.70%) and cooperative (0.85%). Running an enterprise as a sole proprietorship will be advantageous in aspects of profits and returns. Being sole proprietors, they possess the ability to make independent decisions which would have helped them to take immediate actions during the pandemic.

3.5 Source of fund

Nearly three fourth (73.93%) of the agripreneurs relied on their own fund in initiating and developing the enterprise. 11.54 per cent of them acquired funds from friends and family

followed by bank loans (6.84%), govt grants and subsidies (5.56%) and venture capital or private investors (2.14%). As the majority of agripreneurs were sole proprietors, they had their own funds to start the enterprise. Using their own fund might have reduced the burden of agripreneurs on the impacts of business profits on the pandemic compared to funds procured from friends and families or bank loans.

3.6 Experience in enterprise

More than half (49.15%) of the agripreneurs had 11 to 20 years of business experience followed by less than 10 years of business experience (47.43%) and 3.42 per cent had more than 20 years of business experience. Most of the agripreneurs belonged to the middle age category of 31 to 45 years and their business experience increases with their age. Having experience in business might have helped them to tide over the negative impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.

3.7 Information seeking behaviour

The majority of the agripreneurs possessed medium information-seeking behaviour (76.50%) followed by low (17.52%) and high categories (5.98%). The probable reason for the distribution might be that to remain a businessman, he needs to gather up-to-date information from all credible sources. The current trends in marketing, technology advancements, demand forecasting, buyer expectations, creative advertising, etc will promote the agripreneur to develop innovative ideas. Using reliable information sources is very important and newspapers, journals, business magazines, television, the internet, mobile phones and social media are some of the commonly used sources of information. Information seeking and sharing will enhance the skills of agripreneur to be competent in the current world.

3.8 Training undergone

The majority of the agripreneurs had attended up to 5 training programmes (38.47%) followed by 28.63 per cent of them who attended 6 to 10 training programmes. 23.08 per cent of them attended more than 15 training and 7.69 per cent of the agripreneurs attended 11 to 15 training programmes. Only 2.13 per cent of the agripreneurs had not attended any training. Training programmes are helpful to enrich the knowledge and skill towards new innovative practices and in the study, the majority of the agripreneurs attended more than 5 training programmes.

3.9 Self confidence

Nearly three fourth (71.37%) of the agripreneurs had medium level of self confidence followed by high (15.81%) and low levels (12.82%) of self confidence. The reason might be that being confident in running a business will help the agripreneur to handle challenges in business more efficiently and henceforth promote the success of the enterprise. Self confidence might have shaped the agripreneurs to overcome the pandemic and become stronger to neutralise its effects.

3.10 Innovativeness

More than three fifth (61.53%) of the agripreneurs had medium level of innovativeness followed by high (20.09%) and low level (18.38%) of innovativeness. The probable reason for the distribution might be that innovation helps to create new ideas which will build the enterprise more unique compared to others. Innovation might have paved the way to rebuild and restore the business to the new normal.

3.11 Achievement motivation

More than half (56.42%) of the agripreneurs had medium level of achievement motivation followed by high (22.22%) and low level (21.36%) of achievement motivation. The reason that the majority of agripreneurs had medium level of achievement motivation might be that having a stronger sense of achievement motivation makes them persistent to achieve the goal irrespective of the challenges. It improves the commitment and consistency to work on the task assigned until it is finished. The agripreneurs with greater achievement motivation might have provoked to work harder to leverage the impacts of the pandemic and to achieve better.

3.12 Economic motivation

More than three fourth (82.05%) of the agripreneurs had medium level of economic motivation followed by low (10.68%) and high levels (7.26%) of economic motivation. The distribution might be because an enterprise starts to expand by investing more. The growth of the enterprise will be measured in terms of increased production, increased sales and profits, expanded amenities, well-developed infrastructure, better research and development activities. A successful enterprise shows prominent growth year by year. Hence, for the company's economic growth, increased economic motivation is important. It also might be the reason for agripreneurs to be resilient in the pandemic by evolving alternate or additional income generating measures.

3.13 Competition orientation

More than three fifth (64.53%) of the agripreneurs had medium level of competition orientation followed by high (20.09%) and low levels (15.38%) of competition orientation. The competitive mentality among the agripreneurs will enhance them to do better than others. It is always necessary for healthy competition between enterprises to succeed. This might be the probable reason for agripreneurs to have medium to high levels of competition orientation.

3.14 Decision making ability

More than half (52.99%) of the agripreneurs had medium level of decision-making ability followed by high (24.79%) and low levels (16.24%). The probable reason for this trend might be that making crucial decisions will regulate the correct flow of work in the enterprise. The decision-making authority has to act rapidly during an emergency by

considering all the factors in the enterprise. Thus, an agripreneur has to be an expert in decision making exclusively during a crisis like the pandemic.

3.15 Leadership ability

More than three fifth (61.97%) of the agripreneurs had medium level of leadership ability followed by high (21.79%) and low level (16.24%) of leadership ability. The plausible reason might be that an entrepreneur has to manage the members of the enterprise to do their work in the correct manner. Being influential will make the enterprise to function in an effective way and paves way for success. The leadership ability of agripreneurs might be one of the factors pertained to regulating the enterprise by delegating the work with the minimal number of employees due to lockdown and social distancing measures.

3.16 Managerial ability

Nearly half (47.00%) of the agripreneurs had medium level of managerial ability followed by low (29.50%) and high levels (23.50%) of managerial ability. The probable reason for this distribution is that planning to start a business equally involves managing the business so that each operation in the enterprise takes place without interruption. An agripreneur has to manage the raw materials and resources for production, processing and production in the enterprise, marketing and product promoting strategies, retain consumer satisfaction, maintain the demand and supply of products, delegate and manage the staff members, etc. All these events happening in the planned manner will maintain the enterprise's success. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the managerial ability of agripreneurs might have helped them to effectively manage the hindrances from raw material procurement to orienting the finished product to sale.

3.17 Risk taking ability

More than three fifth (612.39%) of the agripreneurs had medium level of risk taking ability followed by high (22.65%) and low level (14.96%) of risk taking ability. Risk is an element found in any occupation. Running an enterprise involves risks in many ways like maintaining the quality of raw materials and ensuring the standards of the product, preventive maintenance of instruments and following all the safety precautions, retaining the employees and maintaining job satisfaction by providing with better organisational climate, incentives, job security etc. Other external risk factors involve a competitive business environment, unpredicted occurrences like COVID-19, legal restraints and litigation, political influence, and new business collaborations etc., To run a business successfully, an agripreneur must have risk bearing capacity, risk avoidance techniques, risk prevention and mitigating techniques. This might be the reason for the agripreneurs in the study to develop medium to high levels of risk taking ability.

4. Conclusion

The study provides a comprehensive view of the socio-economic characteristics of COVID-19 resilient agripreneurs. The majority of agripreneurs were middle aged, sole proprietors and educated. Education is one of the important factors for running a business efficiently. As most of the agripreneurs were aged between 31 to 45 years, they had business experience of 11 to 10 years. They have attended up to five training programmes related to their business. The

training helped agripreneurs to refresh their business skills and provided an opportunity to learn new technical skills. They possessed medium information seeking behaviour, managerial ability and economic motivation. These qualities equipped with business innovations globally and propelled them to invest more in facilitating greater business development. The agripreneurs had medium to high levels of self confidence, innovativeness, achievement motivation, competition orientation, decision making ability, leadership ability and risk taking ability. These qualities might be the probable reason for agripreneurs to withstand the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. These skills made them better business people compared to others. Encouraging agriculture will provide the much needed boost to agriculture in India, which is now gearing towards doubling of farmers' income. Agripreneurs with strong determination and dedication are needed to increase the economic status of the country.

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