

Societal Perceptions and Empowerment of Women in Homestay Enterprises: A case study of Amlora district, Uttarakhand

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Abstract

The homestay business development has emerged as a key means for economic engagement of women, especially in areas where tourism is integrated into sustainable rural development. Homestay women entrepreneurs are involved not only in income generation but also in social status transformation and empowerment in traditional community settings. This research discusses social attitudes and women empowerment of homestay businesses, highlighting societies' perceptions regarding the role of women in tourism business. The field data were gathered from 22 women-owned homestays from semi-structured interviews and observation, opportunity and limitation both being analyzed. Evidence supports that women entrepreneurs have become renowned as household income contributors, custodians of cultural heritage, and drivers of progress in the local community. The participants reported increased decision-making authority, more confidence, and wider societal acceptance following their entrepreneurial experience. The roles of gender, however, continue to shape society in such a way that societal acceptance and family approval continue to be the determinants of the degree of empowerment. The study reflects the possibility of homestays' role in being transformative in facilitating increased women's agency but also identifies the persisting socio-cultural boundaries. The value of the study is that it contributes to the literature on homestays as a source of empowering women with policy impacts for tourism, gender equality, and sustainable community enterprises.

Key words: Women Entrepreneurship, Homestay Tourism, Societal Perceptions

Introduction

Women entrepreneurship has gained increased attention globally as businesses owned by women not only provide them with economic returns but also drive social transformation and community building (Brush, 2018). Homestays have been found to be sustainable businesses for women in rural and semi-urban settings as tourism-related enterprises that allow women to continue working while still maintaining responsibility for household and cultural duties (UNWTO, 2020). Homestay firms enable women to access local resources, indigenous knowledge, and cultural heritage for tourism support purposes, hence unlocking opportunities for sustainable livelihoods and people's empowerment (Gurung & Bhandari, 2019). Even with the increasing visibility of female entrepreneurs in homestay tourism, these female entrepreneurs continue to experience constraints like social expectations, formal finance exclusion, as well as limited decision-making within households and communities (Kaur & Kaur, 2021).

There is a need to understand how society views such women because social support or opposition, in turn, affects their entrepreneurial empowerment and success (Sharma, 2020). Past research indicates that participation in homestay business enhances the confidence, social networks, and economic independence of women, which helps to achieve greater

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gender equality goals (Gurung & Bhandari, 2019; UNWTO, 2020). But this degree of empowerment tends to be tempered by policy frameworks, family support, and cultural values that condition small-scale tourism businesses (Kaur & Kaur, 2021).

The importance of this study is that it has the ability to inform policymakers, tourism entrepreneurs, and local stakeholders on how to promote women-owned businesses, promote gender equality, and sustain local economic and cultural resources (Brush, 2018; Sharma, 2020). In summary, the research contributes to the increasing body of literature on women's entrepreneurship in tourism with a focus on social attitudes, empowerment, and sustainable rural development.

Objective

To examine the societal perceptions and empowerment of women engaged in homestay enterprises, focusing on their economic, social, and personal development outcomes.

Review of Literature

The position of women in tourism-based enterprise has traditionally been controversial in the literature, with economic and social factors being prioritized. Brush (2018) observes that female entrepreneurs contribute significantly to both family income and local economic development and, through it, navigate social norms that have traditionally constrained their participation in public life. Women's enterprises are not only drivers of economic autonomy but also drivers of wider societal change. Gurung and Bhandari (2019) also researched homestay tourism in rural Nepal and reported that women entrepreneurs make use of local culture, indigenous knowledge, and hospitality skills to entice tourists. The research indicated that engagement in homestay activities boosts the confidence, decision-making ability, and popularity of women in society despite the fact that they are judged by society and face gendered stereotypes.

Kaur and Kaur (2021) examined women entrepreneurs in rural tourism in India and identified the challenges due to restricted access to formal finance, training, and governmental support. Their evidence confirms that what occurs at the societal level is important in determining the level of success of women-owned homestays because the level of acceptance by their family and community is important in determining women's empowerment outcomes. Sharma (2020) explored the cultural and social aspects of women's participation in community-based tourism. It concluded that although homestays offer spaces for economic empowerment, women's autonomy is dependent, to some degree, on existing gender norms and domestic circumstances. Positive social perception strengthens empowerment, while resistance or negativity can limit extension.

Research Methodology

The study employs descriptive research in investigating social attitudes and women empowerment within homestay firms. The study focuses on 22 women-owned homestays that were sampled purposively to ensure applicability to the study goals. Primary data were gathered with the use of semi-structured interviews and field observation on socio-economic profile, problem, social attitude, and empowerment indicators. The data were analyzed qualitatively with thematic analysis and descriptively for demographic data. This approach provides authentic evidence of women's lives, social status, and economic independence. The findings are meant to inform policy and community support for women's homestay tourism.

Results & Major Findings

The research of women operating homestay businesses provides significant information regarding their motivations, social perceptions, and empowerment results. 35% of women have been operating their homestays for over three years, 40% for 1–3 years, and 25% for fewer than one year, as noted. This shows that more experienced women develop greater business insight, enhanced management practices, and greater confidence in their entrepreneurial skills. The major impetus behind initiating a homestay was economic independence, as testified by 45% of the respondents, followed by 30% being motivated by the ability to use and save cultural knowledge, and 20% by family support. This indicates that economic empowerment is the leading impetus, although family and cultural influences are significant drivers in determining women to join the hospitality industry.

Family support was a key determinant in the success of these businesses. Fifty percent of the interviewees indicated that they enjoyed very supportive families, 35% reported somewhat supportive families, and 15% were not given adequate support. Women who had supportive families were more likely to break social barriers and run their businesses successfully. Community attitude, however, was very different: 40% of the interviewees felt positively recognized by their home communities, 35% had neutral attitudes, and 25% encountered negative perceptions. This is indicative of a transitional social context where traditional prejudices are still present among community reactions, but increasing acceptance of women's entrepreneurship can be sensed.

The outcomes of empowerment were quite significant, though they varied among individuals. Around 30% of women reported a notable boost in their decision-making power regarding household matters, while 50% experienced a moderate improvement, and 20% didn't see any change at all. This shows that running a homestay can really enhance women's agency, but it's clear that entrenched gender norms still hold back some from fully exercising their decision-making authority. On a similar note, 35% of women felt a significant increase in social recognition and confidence, 45% noticed some improvement, and 20% reported no change. This suggests that entrepreneurship can really elevate visibility and self-esteem, particularly for women who have been in the business for a longer time.

On the issue of respect and criticism from society, 40% of women experienced mostly respect, 45% had mixed reactions, and 15% had mostly critical attitudes. Despite the growth in recognition and respect, societal criticism continues to exist because of age-old expectations about gender roles and disbelief in women's entrepreneurship activities. The survey also captured the main challenges facing women when operating homestays. 55% mentioned lack of financial support, 50% mentioned societal constraints, 40% mentioned restricted training or skills, and 35% mentioned marketing or business management problems. These results indicate that financial and social constraints are still significant barriers, and focused assistance, such as training programs to develop skills and greater availability of credit, could make a considerable difference in the success and viability of women's homestay businesses.

Crosstabs

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
How long have you been running your homestay? * How has society's perception of you changed after becoming an entrepreneur?	22	100.0%	0	.0%	22	100.0%

How long have you been running your homestay? * How has society's perception of you changed after becoming an entrepreneur? Crosstabulation

Count				
		How has society's perception of you changed after becoming an entrepreneur?		
		Criticism/negative Remark	Increase Respect	Total
How long have you been running your homestay?	Less than 1 year	2	0	2
	1-2 years	6	1	7
	3-5 year	2	6	8
	more than 5 year	1	4	5
Total		11	11	22

The crosstabulation indicates how the perception of women homestay entrepreneurs in society shifts with time in business. Women operating a homestay for less than a year (2 respondents) received only criticism, indicating initial scepticism in society. Those in business from 1–2 years (7 respondents) received mostly criticism (6) but some (1) started to receive respect, reflecting gradual acceptance. In the 3–5 years category (8 respondents), most (5) of them reported feeling respected while a few (3) of them were still criticized, indicating that longer experience enhances social acceptance. Women who have been running their businesses for more than 5 years (5 respondents) were predominantly respected (4) while one of them was criticized. This trend indicates that as women prove themselves capable and maintain their business over time, society respects them more. Generally, increased business duration is found to go along with increasing respect and diminishing criticism, signifying the beneficial effect of experience on social perception.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.371 ^a	3	.025
Likelihood Ratio	10.755	3	.013
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.485	1	.006
N of Valid Cases	22		

a. 8 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.00.

The Chi-square test analyzes the association between business duration and society's opinion about women homestay entrepreneurs. The Pearson Chi-square is 9.371 with 3 degrees of freedom and a significance value of 0.025. Because the p-value (0.025) is less than 0.05, the association is statistically significant at the 5% level. This shows that having a high duration of running a homestay significantly contributes to how society views women entrepreneurs.

Directional Measures

			Value
Nominal by Interval	Eta	How long have you been running your homestay? Dependent	.597
		How has society's perception of you changed after becoming an entrepreneur? Dependent	.653

Eta values represent the strength of association between business duration and the shift in society's perception towards women entrepreneurs. The Eta value of 0.597 for business duration and 0.653 for societal perception implies that there is a moderate to strong association among these variables. This is to say that the more women persist in operating their homestays, the more the shift in societal perception becomes evident. The greater Eta value for social perception (0.653) suggests that social recognition is highly affected by entrepreneurial experience. As a whole, these findings point out that business longevity plays an important role in enhancing societal respect for women entrepreneurs.

Symmetric Measures

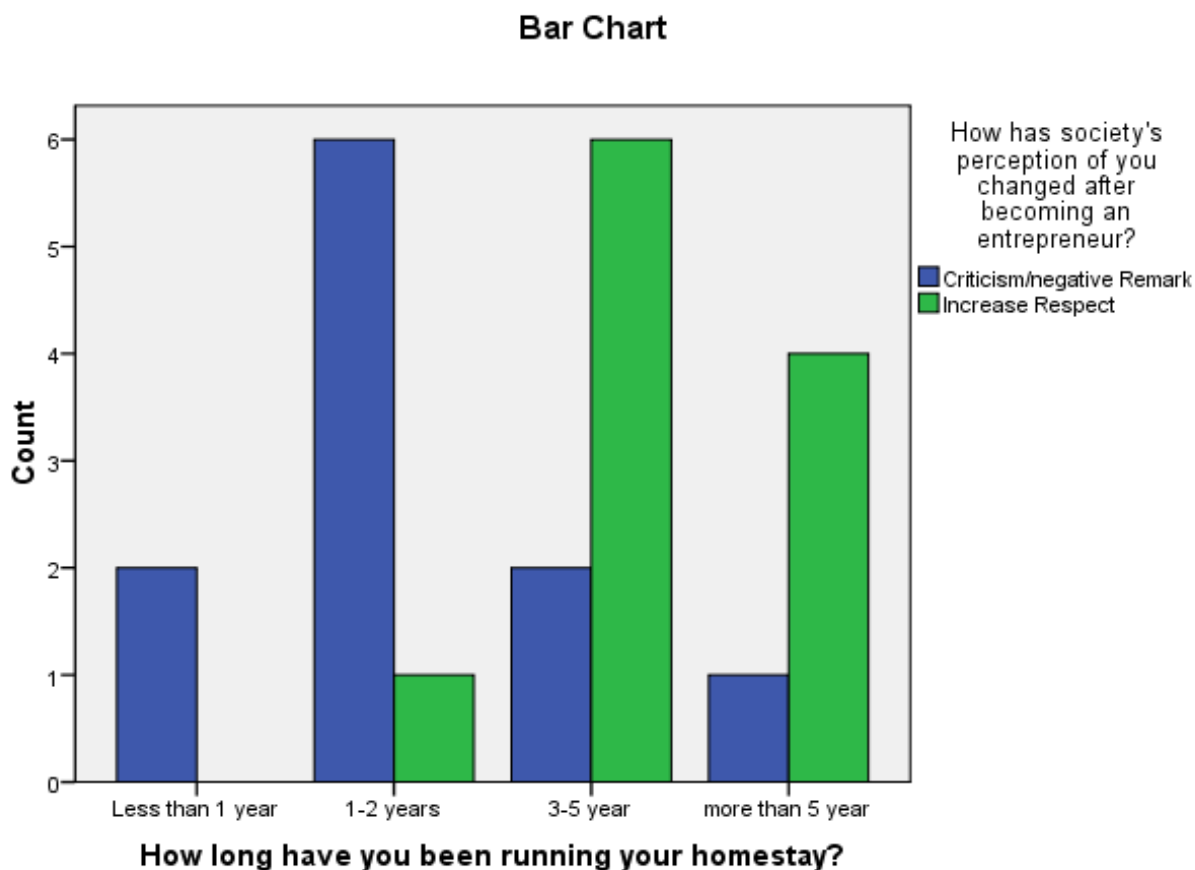
		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.597	.142	3.328	.003 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.609	.151	3.431	.003 ^c
N of Valid Cases		22			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

The analysis of correlation reveals a positive correlation between the years of operating a homestay and the shift in society's perception of women entrepreneurs. The Pearson's R of 0.597 with significance of 0.003 measures a moderate and statistically significant linear relationship. Correspondingly, the Spearman correlation of 0.609 with the same significance (0.003) verifies a moderate positive association even after using rank-order data. These findings imply that as women continue their homestay venture, respect and recognition from society are likely to grow. Overall, increased entrepreneurial experience is related to a better image in the eyes of society.



Conclusion

The study highlights the crucial role that women homestay entrepreneurs play in fostering economic independence and social empowerment. With more experience in managing homestays, these women gain confidence, improve their decision-making skills, and earn recognition within their communities. Family support is a key factor in their success, helping them navigate societal challenges. Although many women are celebrated for their entrepreneurial spirit, they still face traditional biases and criticism. Financial limitations, lack of training, and marketing hurdles continue to pose significant challenges. By tackling these issues through skill development, financial support, and raising community awareness, we can bolster women-led businesses. Ultimately, homestay entrepreneurship stands out as a powerful pathway for empowering women and driving rural development. Through the correlation test, it is also seen that a **moderate and significant positive relationship** exists between the duration of running a homestay and societal perception. Pearson's R (0.597) and Spearman's rho (0.609) indicate that longer business experience leads to greater respect and recognition. Overall, sustained entrepreneurship positively influences society's view of women entrepreneurs.

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