



From grassroots to international markets: A qualitative study of marginalized entrepreneurs in India

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ABSTRACT

Much of the growing literature on international entrepreneurship focuses on how positive circumstances, such as having prior international experience, business networks, or formal institutions lead to international entrepreneurial action and overlooks the role more challenging circumstances might play. In this study, we extend and refine challenge-based entrepreneurship theory to explore what influences international entrepreneurial action undertaken by marginalized entrepreneurs in an emerging economy. Despite widening economic and social disparities in emerging economies, little is known about entrepreneurs who have traditionally been “left behind.” Our findings suggest that these marginalized entrepreneurs have not only a set of liabilities but also advantages, including creative problem solving and perseverance, as well as local knowledge and networks. To spur the first-person international opportunity belief associated with international entrepreneurial action, an intermediary with resources and networks is needed to offset the liabilities. These intermediaries act as gatekeepers, helping some marginalized entrepreneurs but holding back others.

In 2012, Uddhab Bharali was shortlisted for the NASA Technology Award for his desktop pomegranate-deseeding machine.¹ Unlike any other machine at the time, the deseeder separated the outer cover and inner membrane without damaging the seeds and had the capacity to deseed 50–55 kg of pomegranates per hour. While developed and produced in India, the machine has been exported to both the United States and Turkey. What is surprising, however, are the challenging circumstances in which this international entrepreneurial action originated. Bharali grew up in extreme poverty in a rural district of India with limited business infrastructure. He belonged to a lower caste that is often associated with discrimination and fewer opportunities. Due to high family debt, Bharali was unable to finish his education. After his brother died due to liver sclerosis, he became responsible for taking care of his family's financial needs. As a result, he pledged to earn enough income to sustain his family and also help others living in similar situations. Yet the ability to do so did not come easily, given his constraints and lower place in society.²

1. Introduction

While the existing literature focuses on how positive circumstances such as having prior international experience (Gruenhagen et al., 2018; McDougall et al., 2003) and business networks (Bembom and Schwens, 2018; Faroque et al., 2021; Fernhaber & Li, 2013) or the presence of formal institutions (Chen, Saarenketo and Puumalainen et al., 2018) drive international entrepreneurial action, less is known about how challenging circumstances like the one Bharali experienced might play a role. Recent scholarship on challenge-based entrepreneurship argues that challenging circumstances create conditions that require individuals to adapt and, as a result, cultivate outcomes such as creativity or work discipline that can lead to entrepreneurial action (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017). In this way, it is recognized that individuals from challenging circumstances have both a set of barriers that need to be overcome as well as strengths that can be leveraged. An emerging

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¹ NextBigWhat. (2012). Assam-based serial innovator Uddhab Bharali nominated for NASA award. Retrieved from: <https://nextbigwhat.com/assam-based-serial-innovator-uddhab-bharali-nominated-for-nasa-award/>

² Nair, Divya. (2012). Amazing: Meet the Indian entrepreneur with 98 innovations! Retrieved from: <https://www.rediff.com/getahead/slide-show/slide-show-1-achievers-interview-with-uddhab-bharali/20120716.htm>

research stream has begun to draw on this to explore the relationship between various personal challenges and entrepreneurial action (e.g. Klangboonkrong & Baines, 2022; Lerner et al., 2019; Saxena & Pandya, 2018). Yet, it is unclear how challenging circumstances play out when it comes to *international* entrepreneurial action, which is a more complex type of entrepreneurial action due to the additional knowledge and resources required when crossing borders (McDougall et al., 2003). As entrepreneurial action requires an evaluation of the uncertainty associated with an opportunity (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006), it is important to understand how entrepreneurs evaluate and ultimately decide to take action when the uncertainty is heightened due to challenges at both the individual and opportunity level.

There are widening economic and social disparities in emerging economies (Bhattacharya & Sakhivel, 2004), and our interest is specifically in the international entrepreneurial action undertaken by individuals within the large subset of the population that has been “left behind.” Within India, for example, the top 10% of the population now accounts for 57% of the total national income while the bottom 50% is associated with 13% of the national income (Chancel et al., 2022). Such economic inequality is often tied to social characteristics such as caste, gender, ethnicity, or race (Bhardwaj et al., 2021), as well as institutional norms (Bapuji et al., 2020). As was the case with Bharali’s pomegranate deseeding machine, innovations developed by these marginalized entrepreneurs could meet the needs of customers in other emerging economies or even within developed economies (Gupta, 2007). Thus, there is a need to understand how this type of outlier entrepreneurial action happens.

The purpose of this study is to extend and refine challenge-based entrepreneurship theory (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017, 2021) and ask: *what influences international entrepreneurial action undertaken by marginalized entrepreneurs in emerging economies?* We focus on the drivers of international entrepreneurial action and, more specifically, on what causes the international opportunities to shift from a third-person possibility to a first-person belief associated with entrepreneurial action (cf. McMullen & Shepherd, 2006; Shepherd et al., 2007).

To address our research question, we conducted a qualitative study of three marginalized entrepreneurs from the state of Gujarat in India. We found that due to their background, these entrepreneurs not only have a set of liabilities but they also develop entrepreneurial advantages, including creative problem solving, perseverance, and local knowledge and networks. While the advantages can sufficiently outweigh the liabilities to spur first-person opportunity belief and entrepreneurial action on a local level, they are not enough to spur it on at an international level. For this, an intermediary with resources and networks is necessary to work alongside the marginalized entrepreneur and help overcome the liabilities, allowing for a shift to a first-person international opportunity belief and action. However, there are a large number of marginalized individuals in an emerging economy and only a few intermediaries acting as gatekeepers, helping some but holding back others.

We contribute to the existing knowledge in several ways. First, we extend challenge-based entrepreneurship theory to *international* entrepreneurial action. In doing so, we highlight the critical role of the intermediary and recognize marginalized entrepreneurs in emerging economies as an unexpected source of value creation (cf. Baron, Tang, Tang, and Zhang, 2018; Gargam, 2020; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017). Second, we refine the theory of entrepreneurial action (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). Our results suggest that action-specific uncertainty can be elevated by factors such as the marginalized context in which an entrepreneur is situated and the associated liabilities. For this reason, the shift from a third-person opportunity to a first-person opportunity leading to entrepreneurial action can be dependent upon an intermediary, or what we refer to as a gatekeeper. Third, we contribute to the growing research on international entrepreneurial opportunities (Mainela et al., 2014; Reuber et al., 2018) by giving voice to marginalized entrepreneurs from emerging economies as an overlooked originator of international entrepreneurial action. As

noted by Arikan and Shenkar (2022), it is critical to explore such neglected actors and locations as they move the field forward and begin to answer the next big questions. By doing so, we demonstrate that both positive and challenging circumstances can contribute to international entrepreneurial action. Finally, our study has important implications for policy makers aspiring to promote more inclusive growth while fostering innovation across borders. Specifically, our study highlights the need to make intermediaries more accessible.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. International entrepreneurial action

International entrepreneurial action has continued to be of scholarly interest for more than 30 years (Zucchella, 2021). Entrepreneurial action is “behavior in response to a judgmental decision under uncertainty about a possible opportunity for profit” (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006: 134). Extending this definition, *international* entrepreneurial action refers to behavior in response to a judgmental decision under uncertainty about a possible “opportunity—across national borders—to create future goods and services” (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, p. 540). These opportunities emerge in an iterative process of shaping and development during which the initial ideas are elaborated, refined, changed, or rejected (Dimov, 2007). They are evaluated in relation to their expected value potential and the related risk and uncertainty (McCann & Vroom, 2015), and exploited, adjusted, or rejected accordingly. In this process, a third-person opportunity—a recognized opportunity for someone—turns into a first-person opportunity, that is, an opportunity for the person in question leading to entrepreneurial action (Shepherd et al., 2007).

Existing research highlights the role of individual-, firm-, and environmental-level drivers of international entrepreneurial action. For example, at the individual level, the founder’s prior international work experience (Gruenhagen et al., 2018; McDougall et al., 2003), education (Yavuz, 2021) and international orientation (Nummela et al., 2004; Gupta et al., 2021) have all been determining factors. Once a new venture emerges, scholars have identified the importance of formal business networks (Bembom and Schwens, 2018; Faroque et al., 2021), entrepreneurial orientation (Dai et al., 2014), and venture capital (Fernhaber, McDougall-Covin and Shepherd, 2009; Park & LiPuma, 2020) for international entrepreneurial action. As new ventures do not operate in isolation, the external environment also plays a role. Indeed, the presence of formal institutions (Chen et al., 2018) and being headquartered in a location with high industry concentration (Fernhaber et al., 2014) can both contribute to such cross-border activity.

Consequently, there has been a skewed focus toward exploring the positive circumstances that lead to international entrepreneurial action, and less attention has been paid to how negative or challenging circumstances might also play a role. While there are many types of challenging circumstances, of particular interest in this study are marginalized entrepreneurs in emerging economies.

2.2. Marginalized entrepreneurs in emerging economies

Entrepreneurs face greater challenges in emerging economies in comparison to developing economies due to institutional voids, resource scarcity, and structural gaps (Cao & Shi, 2020). Yet, due to widening social and economic disparities (Chancel et al., 2022), the challenges experienced by entrepreneurs within emerging economies can vary significantly. Indeed, scholars have frequently acknowledged the mistaken assumption of homogeneity among entrepreneurship within emerging economies (Beugelsdijk & Mudambi, 2013; Dheer et al., 2015; Fernhaber et al., 2019). We focus on the often-overlooked marginalized entrepreneurs therein. As defined by Alakhunova et al. (2015, p. 2), marginalization “is both a condition and a process that prevent individuals and groups from full participation in social, economic, and

political life enjoyed by the wider society.” Within emerging economies, marginalization is often reflected by economic inequality, although tied to social characteristics such as caste, gender, class, and race (Bhardwaj et al., 2021), as well as institutional norms (Bapuji & Ertug, & Shaw, 2020).

The subset of marginalized entrepreneurs in emerging economies most commonly explored in the literature comprises grassroots entrepreneurs. The origin of the term “grassroots entrepreneur” is often attributed to the work of Gupta and colleagues (2003), who described the innovations being developed in marginalized communities that were identified through the Indian-originated Honey Bee Network (HBN); a network developed to share, support and disseminate those ideas and innovations. Since then, grassroots entrepreneurs have increasingly been explored in the literature, but scholars have not been able to agree on a single definition of the concept (Ustyuzhantseva, 2015; for an overview of definitions, see Table 1). Building on the definition of Wierenga (2020), for the purposes of this paper, we define grassroots entrepreneurs as *individuals coming from marginalized communities who have independently developed, commercialized, and scaled innovations for themselves, their community, and other people living in similar conditions.*

It is evident that grassroots entrepreneurs in emerging economies face a clear disadvantage due to their position within a marginalized community: the entrepreneurs may live in rural locations, have low income, lack education, come from a lower class, and/or be otherwise excluded from society (Gupta, 2016). Sarkar (2018) refers to grassroots entrepreneurs as innovating from the bottom of the pyramid. Gupta (2014, p. 1) similarly notes that these are “common people having no professional degree or diploma, self-employed working in the informal sector, and driven by unmet social needs.” Wierenga (2020) highlights grassroots entrepreneurs as being a unique type of low-income entrepreneurs and finds that they usually have low levels of education, live in unstable financial situations, and experience extreme resource scarcity.

Yet there are also advantages associated with the marginalized context. These individuals are outliers due to their sense of ingenuity and/or creativity, but as Gupta (2013, p. 18) puts it, “they are not at the bottom of the knowledge, ethical or innovation pyramid.” Their depth of knowledge and understanding of the local community allows grassroots

Table 1
Definitions of grassroots entrepreneurs in the literature.

Source	Definition
Bhaduri and Kumar (2011)	Individual innovators, who often undertake innovative efforts to solve localized problems and generally work outside the realm of formal organizations, such as business firms or research institutes.
Gupta (2014)	Common people having no professional degree or diploma, self-employed, working in the informal sector, and driven by unmet social needs. Their innovations have been developed without any outside help and may address one's own needs as well as that of the third party. In some cases, their innovations address larger regional or national unmet needs out of their strong empathy for the disadvantaged people, sector, and regions.
Pansera and Sarkar (2016)	Innovators with little formal education and technological know-how, living and working in penurious environments.
Sarkar (2018)	Individuals innovating from within the bottom of the pyramid. Despite extremely challenging conditions, they are able to assemble resources and to combine and align principles of business strategy and social value creation to effect important economic and social change.
Wierenga (2020)	A unique category of low-income entrepreneurs, who have independently developed, commercialized, and scaled their innovations. These entrepreneurs are isolated from the formal business market because they have either no or a low level of education. They live distant from urban centers in unstable financial situations and constantly face extreme levels of resource scarcity.
Rajan (2021)	Economically under-resourced individuals who practice entrepreneurship and innovation in extra-institutional environments.

entrepreneurs to provide solutions to everyday problems (Hossain, 2016). Prior research indicates that although they may lack financial means, they are resourceful in bundling the existing resources (Linna, 2013). Even though grassroots entrepreneurs typically have little formal education, they possess self-taught skills (Sarkar, 2018) and technological know-how (Pansera & Sarkar, 2016) learned through practical experimenting (Linna, 2013). They also invest their own time in the innovation process (Sarkar, 2018). Furthermore, community members also challenge the endeavors, which leads grassroots entrepreneurs to disregard social norms and create competitive advantage (Sarkar, 2018). In a way, their overlooked status can serve as a motivation (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017).

We posit that these individuals represent an untapped opportunity for scalable innovation abroad. Although innovations developed in marginalized communities are usually intended to solve local problems (Hossain, 2016), many have the potential to enhance productivity, promote entrepreneurship, and advance sustainable development more widely (Gupta, 2007; Pansera & Sarkar, 2016; Smith et al., 2014). As was the case with Bharali's pomegranate-deseeding machine, these innovations could meet the needs of customers in other emerging economies or even within developed economies (Gupta, 2007). Moreover, being able to promote more inclusive growth while fostering innovation across borders aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Thus, there is a need to understand how this type of international entrepreneurial action happens.

2.3. Challenge-based entrepreneurship

A promising lens for exploring the influences of international entrepreneurial action by marginalized entrepreneurs in emerging economies is challenge-based entrepreneurship theory. Miller and Le Breton-Miller (2017) put forth a challenge-based model of entrepreneurship in an attempt to help explain why and how entrepreneurship can emerge from hardship. They acknowledge that there are many different types of hardships or challenges experienced in life, such as those related to economic, socio-cultural, cognitive, and physical and emotional circumstances. These challenges can create a set of conditions (e.g., incapacity, lack of career opportunities) and experiences (e.g., being different, confronting loss) that force the individuals to adapt. Indeed, there is a need to work harder, to seek help, and to do things differently. Yet, through learning to adapt, many positive outcomes are cultivated. These might include work discipline, perseverance, higher risk tolerance, social skills, and creative approaches, all of which can be used to cultivate entrepreneurial action. In this way, unexpected entrepreneurs can emerge, and poverty of resources can lead to strengths (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2021).

This model of challenge-based entrepreneurship has been used to help explain entrepreneurial action pursued by individuals who experienced challenges due to a variety of circumstances such as the Great Chinese Famine (Cheng et al., 2021), mental disorders (Wiklund et al., 2018), and physical disabilities (Klangboonkrong & Baines, 2022; Saxena & Pandya, 2018). In many cases, the lack of employability or other income generation options is a driving factor of entrepreneurial action (Maalaoui et al., 2020). Yet, in researching blind entrepreneurs, Ng and Arndt (2019) argue that it is more than just a lack of employability and point to adaptive skills as the key to opportunity formation. In a comparison to non-disadvantaged entrepreneurs, Santoro et al. (2020) find that self-efficiency and resilience are more important for disadvantaged entrepreneurs. As noted in a review of the disability entrepreneurship literature, it is especially important to consider the context of the entrepreneur (Klangboonkrong & Baines, 2022). While insightful, the challenge-based model of entrepreneurship has not yet been extended to international entrepreneurial action, which requires taking into account the additional complexity associated with cross-border activity (McDougall et al., 2003). Moreover, the focus has largely been on more developed economies.

3. Methods

3.1. The research context

The purpose of this study is to extend and refine challenge-based entrepreneurship theory by exploring what influences international entrepreneurial action of marginalized entrepreneurs in emerging economies. India was chosen as the empirical setting of our study because it was one of the first countries to recognize the innovative potential of marginalized entrepreneurs and to create a supportive ecosystem (Ustyuzhantseva, 2015). Since the early 1990s, when this ecosystem formed around the Honey Bee Network (HBN), the scouted entrepreneurs and their innovations have been added to the HBN database, which today contains more than 51,000 entries.

The development of the ecosystem is a part of institutional change at the national level. Following economic liberalization in 1991, the Indian government relaxed many restrictions and introduced incentives and promotional schemes to support small and medium-sized businesses. Although these changes have encouraged innovation and the development of new enterprises, individuals within traditional business communities and family businesses have dominated the changes (Bruton et al., 2021). Indian society is very hierarchical due to the underlying informal caste system (Chrispal et al., 2021), and inequalities between cities and smaller urban towns remain significant (Mahadevia & Sarkar, 2012). Entrepreneurship in India is traditionally an activity of the rich, resourceful, upper-class business communities. People from lower castes (or Dalits outside the caste system) and Muslims have lower literacy rates and higher school-dropout rates, and they often work as craftsmen with very low income (Bapuji & Chrispal, 2020; Chrispal et al., 2021). Entrepreneurs from the lower strata of society are dependent on trading business communities as customers or intermediaries for them. Economic disparity has been growing (Chancel & Piketty, 2017), and the marginalized entrepreneurs remain outsiders lacking the confidence to operate in the formal market.

3.2. Research design

Given the nascent status of research on the international entrepreneurial action of marginalized entrepreneurs in emerging economies, we chose a qualitative research design for our study (cf. Edmondson & McManus, 2007). It provides the needed understanding of the underlying microprocesses and allows us to study the interplay between the phenomenon and its context (Birkinshaw et al., 2011). This approach also encourages deep engagement of the researcher in the field, which is highly important for this study (Plakoyiannaki et al., 2019). Furthermore, qualitative methods allow contextualized explanation, that is, investigation of why and how something happened in its natural context (Welch et al., 2011); thus, it is not surprising that most prior research involving marginalized entrepreneurship has been qualitative (Bruton et al., 2013). By conducting a multiple-case study, we were able to provide an interesting, rich view to the phenomenon in a real-world context (cf. Piekkari et al., 2009) and to build stronger contributions with recursive cycling among the cases, an emerging theoretical framework, and the existing literature.

3.3. Case selection

Our case selection was phenomenon-driven (Fletcher et al., 2018); that is, we were interested in cases capturing the international entrepreneurial action of marginalized entrepreneurs in India. The institutional environment of India varies considerably between states; therefore, we chose entrepreneurs from a single state, the Gujarat State. Our entrepreneurs belong to a lower caste or minority and live in rural parts of Gujarat and have developed the innovation alone, in spite of very limited resources. For us, it was important that the development of the entrepreneurial opportunity was a solo effort, as we wanted to

distinguish these entrepreneurs from entrepreneurs who build their business on collective entrepreneurship (Castellanza, 2022; Mair & Marti, 2009; Zaefarian et al., 2016). The cases were outliers, as the majority of marginalized entrepreneurs never undertake international entrepreneurial action.

We started the search for cases by consulting the HBN database, where we found several suitable cases, and two entrepreneurs agreed to participate in the research. However, early in the research process we realized that by having only cases from the HBN database we might miss important aspects related to the international entrepreneurial action of marginalized entrepreneurs. Therefore, to complement the two cases, we searched for an additional case outside this support ecosystem. This turned out to be challenging, as marginalized entrepreneurs tend to operate outside the public eye. In the end, the contact with WHEEL was initiated by the entrepreneur, who asked one of the authors for business advice. Research collaboration started soon after the first contact, and we decided to include him as the third case to add variety and depth to our study.

All three cases meet our definition of a marginalized entrepreneur, aim for international entrepreneurial action, and are based in the same institutional context but vary in terms of age, status of internationalization, and the internationalization strategy they have chosen for expansion (Table 2). These differences provide a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, thus improving the quality of our findings.

3.4. Data collection

The data collection relied strongly on key informants and their “stories”. Our key informants were the marginalized entrepreneurs, who typically are the only persons who have a holistic, longitudinal view on the venture and its operations and are responsible for the key decisions and future plans. In the case of CLAY, however, we also interviewed the son of the entrepreneur as he took charge of international activities.

Given the research context, we considered ethnographic interviews — which typically take the form of a series of friendly, casual conversations combined with participant observation (Spradley, 1979) — as a more suitable form of data collection than formal, structured interviews (Halme et al., 2022). During the first interview, we discussed entrepreneurship, innovation, and internationalization. The second interview focused mainly on international entrepreneurial action and clarified the selected themes. The third and fourth interviews were an update to understand what had happened since the previous interaction and how the business had developed internationally. The interviews were complemented with information from documentary sources. The combination of multiple types of evidence allowed us to triangulate within each case and helped to ensure the trustworthiness of our findings (Yin, 2017). Table 3 provides an overview of the data sources.

The interviews were conducted in Hindi, spoken by most Indians, or Gujarati, the language spoken in the region. The first author, responsible for most of the fieldwork, translated the questions into the local language and ensured that the interviewer and the interviewee shared the meaning of the terms. The interviews were translated and transcribed into English, and each transcription was checked by the first author native to the local languages. The interviews were complemented with participant observation, noted down in field notes. Following the recommendations of Spradley (1980), our observation started with descriptive reporting and became more focused over time as we were able to narrow down the scope of what we were looking for. In the end, it was quite selective, concentrating mainly on the factors that support or prevent the formation of a third-person international opportunity and its transformation into first-person opportunity associated with international entrepreneurial action by the marginalized entrepreneurs.

As case study research methodology strongly emphasizes studying phenomena in their real-life context (Piekkari et al., 2009), the entrepreneurs were interviewed in their factories to understand the circumstances under which they operate. During the interviews, the

Table 2
Summary of the cases.

	CLAY	DIG	WHEEL
Innovations	Pottery products, including clay refrigerator, nonstick pans, and pressure cooker	Groundnut-digging machine	Magnetic wheel
Picture of the innovation			
Founded	1988	2006	2008
Patent	Applied through National Innovation Foundation and received in 2020	Applied through National Innovation Foundation on product (in 2013) Design patent received in 2021	Patent received in 2021 (without any support)
National Innovation Foundation Award	2007	2013	Not received
International activities	First exports in 1995; continued with international operations in 2005	2017 onwards	Since 2019
Internationalization strategy	Initially reactive; became proactive after the award	Initially reactive; became proactive after the award	Reactive
Scope of international activities	Sales to the Gulf states; knowledge sharing to Zimbabwe	Sudan, Myanmar, Portugal, Senegal	Recently started; received inquiries from the Gulf states and Canada but limited sales

Table 3
Overview of the data sources.

	Interviews	Informal interactions	Observations	Documentary data sources
CLAY	2017: Entrepreneur and marketing director (6 hrs.) 2018: Entrepreneur and informal interactions with employees (altogether 8 hrs.) 2020: Entrepreneur (1 hr.) 2022: Entrepreneur and his son (1 hr 30 min)	Satvik Food Festival in December 2017, 2018, and 2019 (15–20 min)	2017 (5 pages of notes) 2018 (2 pages of notes) 2020 (1 page) 2021 (1 page) 2022 (2 pages)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> website, catalog, and product information Facebook posts and photos of the company (2015–2022) photos and videos shared by the entrepreneur published magazine articles and newspaper articles TedTalent Search, YouTube Video, 2012 videos of movie appearances and featured promotion in the Indian version of “Who Wants to be a Millionaire?” documentary on Discovery video of a panel discussion on grassroots innovations, July 2020 video of episode of Kaun Banega Cororepati, Business Insider News Portal and Epic TV Channels (2022)
DIG	2017: Entrepreneur (1.5 hrs.) 2018: Entrepreneur (1.5 hrs.) 2020: Entrepreneur (1 hr.) 2022: Entrepreneur (30 min)	Confederation of Indian Industries seminar in Rajkot in October 2018 (10 min)	2017 (4 pages of notes) 2018 (3 pages of notes) 2020 (1 page) 2022 (1 page)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> websites, catalog, and information about product and different versions photos and videos shared by the entrepreneur published magazine articles and newspaper articles
WHEEL	2017: Entrepreneur (2 hrs.) 2020: Entrepreneur (1 hr) 2022 January: Entrepreneur (1 hr) 2022 September: Entrepreneur’s son (50 mins)	Association of Muslim Entrepreneurs workshops in March 2018 and October 2019 (10–15 min) Interactions during two calls in participating in the Indian Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Bureau Investor; meeting in September and October 2020 (15–20 min) Informal call with son of the entrepreneur in September 2021	2017 (3 pages of notes) 2019 (2 pages) 2020 (1 page) 2021 (1 page) 2022 (1 page)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facebook posts and photos of the innovator (2017–2022) photos and videos shared by the entrepreneur published newspaper articles
Expert Interview	April 2021 (1 hr 30 Mins)	Informal interaction on WhatsApp	2021 (1 page)	

researchers wrote field notes with the observations they made on the journey to the factories, the physical environment of the factory, its surroundings, and the physical artifacts in place. Two of the authors were involved in the data collection, one being a local (born and raised in Gujarat) and the other foreign to the area. This allowed the authoring team to apply both emic and etic perspective on the field (cf. Buckley et al., 2014). The researcher with an emic perspective could clarify

matters related to the culture, traditions, and the society, and the one with a more etic perspective observed from a distance and could question some of the inherent assumptions. The growing contextual understanding of the entire authoring team was beneficial to the multiple rounds of data collection.

The documentary sources used prepared the researchers for the first encounter but also provided a contextualized understanding of the work

of the marginalized entrepreneur, the innovation, and the evolution of the firm. However, the amount of documentary data of the cases is limited. Therefore, it was essential that we continued to communicate with the entrepreneurs with informal calls, meetings, and interactions, and that we were able to monitor their social media fingerprint through their social media accounts and YouTube channels. Additionally, the entrepreneurs proactively contacted the researchers in-between the interviews and used social media to share their progress, which the research team has actively responded to. The key findings from these informal interactions were summarized in a “diary,” which was updated throughout the research process and used for data triangulation.

3.5. Data analysis

In qualitative research, the data collection and analysis are often tightly intertwined. Our study applies an “in vivo approach” (Andersen & Kragh, 2011), which aims at a gradual deepening of knowledge by extending and combining received theory with empirical findings and

additional theoretical insights throughout the research process. It involves matching — going back and forth between the original framework, data sources, and analysis — and this iteration via “systematic combining” (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, 2014) continues throughout the research process (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). The first “baby-steps” of analysis took place at the time when the interviews were still ongoing. The themes emerging from the first two interviews were utilized to develop the interview questions for the third interview, combined with insights from the literature review.

Data from each case were examined inductively to capture the informants’ conception of the setting and to develop first-order concepts (Van Maanen, 1979). During this initial phase, some of these concepts were amalgamated with each other. The inductive coding involved the whole research team, although the two first authors took the lead in the process. Each author coded the data separately, after which the results of the coding were compared, discussed, and refined in order to ensure the trustworthiness of our findings. The discussions among the authoring team, especially on the insider–outsider perspectives, were crucial for

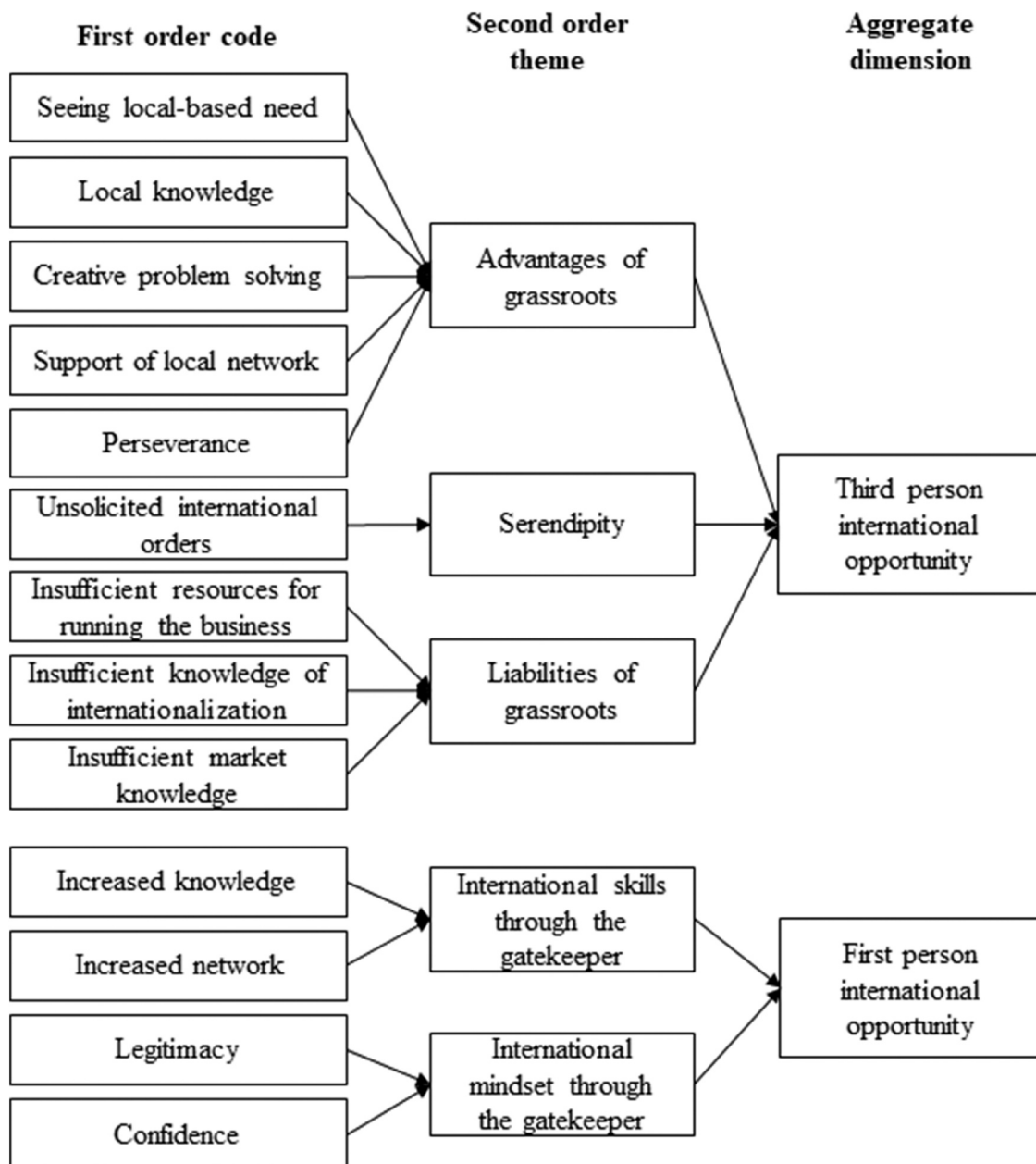


Fig. 1. Data structure.

the conceptual leap in the analytical process.

Next, using first-order concepts as our springboard, we raised the abstraction level of our analysis and applied systematic combining to search for theoretical constructs, which would help us to understand and capture the internationalization of marginalized entrepreneurs. These constructs became our second-order themes, which we applied in our cross-case analysis and grouped into single aggregate dimensions. The data structure in Fig. 1 illustrates the link between the coded, informant-based data (first-order codes) and the researcher-based interpretation of data (second-order themes) (cf. Magnani & Gioia, 2023; Gioia et al., 2013).

In our research we have followed well-established procedures to enhance the trustworthiness of our findings. We aimed at high credibility, transferability of the findings, dependability and confirmability in our research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by including a description and justification of the context, providing a detailed account of the data sources and the analysis as well as explaining how we overcame linguistic and cultural barriers (Cuervo-Cazurra et al., 2016). Besides data triangulation, we also discussed our conclusions and interpretations with an expert who had worked for the HBN and the entrepreneurship ecosystem in India for over eight years. We opened our research process by providing evidence in the form of tables (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021) as well as the data structure, which illustrates the end result of our analysis process during which we continuously compared the insights emerging from empirical data with our knowledge on prior research (cf. Dubois & Gadde, 2002). In order to secure systematic analysis of the data, we coded all different types of data and applied computer-aided software (Atlas.ti) in the coding (recommended by Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012; Sinkovics et al., 2008).

3.6. Case descriptions

We studied the international entrepreneurial action of three marginalized entrepreneurs: the entrepreneur of CLAY comes from a potter community while that of DIG has a farming background, both of which are considered economically and socially backward (Chrispal et al., 2021). The entrepreneur of WHEEL belongs to the Muslim community, which is considered, especially in the state of Gujarat, economically and socially backward (Kabir, 2020). The studied entrepreneurs started from conditions of poverty in the late 1990 s and early 2000 s. Even though India was developing fast, the benefits of this positive development reached peripheral towns and villages slowly. We observed that even today the towns of the studied entrepreneurs have challenges with infrastructure, which would be available in the bigger cities of the region. For example, the communities are lacking paved roads, which are of importance for running an international business.

The entrepreneur of CLAY started by modifying a manually operated roof tile-making machine to create earthen pans. Previously, this was a slow and manual process, but the hand-press machine had the capacity to produce 700 earthen pans in a day. Later, the entrepreneur developed several innovative clay products, of which the most well-known is a refrigerator made of clay. The first international encounter of CLAY was with a businessman from Kenya who was searching for someone who could make a water cooler. The entrepreneur of CLAY was well-known in the district, and the businessman was guided to him. Later, around 2005, a Dubai-based wholesaler approached the entrepreneur, and CLAY started selling its products to that company. The partner company used its own brand logo on CLAY products and sold them in the Gulf states.

The entrepreneur of DIG was familiar with the challenges related to the manual labor of farming, and he knew that groundnuts were breaking when manually dug from the soil. Hence, he started developing a groundnut-harvesting machine and later sold it under the company DIG. The first international opportunities arose from neighboring countries. As the entrepreneur was the first and only manufacturer of a niche agricultural machine, potential distributors contacted him

directly. The entrepreneur recognized international opportunities in Sudan in 2014–2015, when vendors originally from Gujarat but currently based in Sudan contacted him. Contact with international customers originated also from referrals from other Gujarati SMEs who recommended DIG to their customers.

The first innovation of the entrepreneur of WHEEL used energy and heat coming from the friction of plates for cooking. His second innovation was a magnetic wheel, which is an add-on to a wheel of any vehicle, utilizing the energy produced by the rotating wheel. Once the wheel has started to move, the magnetic wheel supports it, and hence the wheel captures otherwise lost kinetic energy and contributes to more efficient transport. Until now, the company has had limited sales, and its production capacity is limited. The internationalization of WHEEL is thus still in the early stages: the entrepreneur has recognized international opportunities but has not yet been able to fully exploit them. The entrepreneur has had leads and received unsolicited orders from Denmark, Dubai, Japan, the US, and the UK, but the entrepreneur has not been able to build a sustainable business based on these opportunities.

4. Findings

We analyzed what influences international entrepreneurial action undertaken by marginalized entrepreneurs in emerging economies. The analysis showed that the challenging circumstances the entrepreneurs experienced resulted in the presence of some and absence of other entrepreneurial resources. In the following we first present the drivers that lead to a third-person international opportunity and, after that, the drivers that lead the shift to a first-person international opportunity.

4.1. Third-person international opportunity

The studied marginalized entrepreneurs benefit from advantages of grassroots and serendipity leading them to understand that their innovations could have demand from foreign markets. However, the liabilities of grassroots are holding the entrepreneurs back, and hence the international market initially forms a third-person opportunity.

4.1.1. Advantages of grassroots

The entrepreneurs studied in this research built on their strengths stemming from their local environment (see Annexure 1 for additional evidence). This is manifested by the marginalized entrepreneurs *seeing local-based needs* and developing innovations to solve challenging everyday problems they experienced themselves or witnessed within their community. CLAY was created to make the pottery work lighter and more efficient with the use of technology. WHEEL developed a solution to address the high pollution level in cities in India. DIG was founded to automate the process of harvesting groundnut, which was previously heavy manual work, especially in the rainy season, and therefore it was difficult to find laborers for the work.

Labor is not available to do this work. The areas from where they are coming are getting developed. Today the same position is faced by the industries. Before the machine there used to be a lot of wastage in the groundnuts and now there is no wastage. (DIG, 2017)

Advanced education is not accessible to all in rural areas, and skills and knowledge is typically “inherited” from older family and community members as *local knowledge*. For example, the entrepreneur of CLAY learned about the pottery trade from his parents. Similarly, the owner of DIG learned about groundnut cultivation while working on his farm with his father. Another form of local knowledge comes from the embeddedness of the entrepreneurs in the community, which made them aware of the local conditions and context for which they developed the innovation. The studied entrepreneurs also benefited from prior work experience: the entrepreneur of DIG learned sales skills while working for a tractor dealership, the entrepreneur of CLAY worked in a

tile manufacturing company where he learned about the automation of manual work, and the entrepreneur of WHEEL learned engineering skills while working in a factory. The entrepreneurs built on these types of knowledge for developing their innovations.

We have studied till the school level and have worked in this electrical and mechanical field since childhood. We are good in the mechanical and electrical field. (WHEEL, 2017)

Due to their lack of formal education and knowledge, the entrepreneurs had to develop and advance their *creative problem-solving*. For example, the entrepreneurs took existing practices as the starting point for the idea of their innovation. This is illustrated by CLAY who started with commonly used practices used in pottery making and tried to make them more efficient. Typically, the entrepreneurs were experimenting with different solutions, and, through this trial-and-error approach, the entrepreneurs accumulated skills and gained experiential knowledge that was useful later. However, this was also time consuming, and this time could not be allocated to other, potentially more productive activities.

Initially for the first piece, I took almost a month to make it, but I didn't have any design of it. The people didn't like the design of it and so after all the hard work; it took me four years to complete my idea in action. (CLAY, 2018)

A network of competent people willing to assist in running the business would be useful, but there are few such actors in close proximity to the entrepreneurs. Not only is the geographical distance to major cities an issue but being a member of a marginalized community also poses challenges for networking among formal organizations. Therefore, they often rely on the *support of their local network* consisting of friends, family, and relatives. While this is common to entrepreneurs anywhere, the difference for the studied entrepreneurs is that their peers and local network included mostly people similar to them. The founder of WHEEL had his brother's support as they worked together in the factory on the innovation. The whole family of the entrepreneur was involved during the initial years of starting CLAY. Going beyond the circles closest to the entrepreneur to the extended family, it is possible to find wealthier relatives who can substantially benefit the entrepreneurial endeavor. DIG had a relative who could support the entrepreneurial endeavor financially. Nevertheless, although it is motivating to enhance skills and get approval from people close by, it is not always helpful for the international advancement of the business.

So my mom was running the press, I was making the pans, and my younger sister was involved in making the corners of the pan beautiful. In fact, we three together started this work. (CLAY, 2017)

The data show that the process from idea to final product and eventually to international customers is long, and it includes failures and setbacks. The clay oven of CLAY broke several times, the entrepreneur of DIG faced challenges selling its machine, and the entrepreneur of WHEEL felt he had failed when he could not find support (for a more detailed discussion on the experienced challenges, see Section 4.1.3). Therefore, a key characteristic that the studied marginalized entrepreneurs develop is their *perseverance*. Despite the difficulties, the studied entrepreneurs continued to work on the entrepreneurial opportunity raised from the innovation.

At that time [in 2006] I thought that there should be something to do this job of pulling out groundnuts. I had seen the potato digger and felt that this would work here and made a similar machine—but it did not work. After that I modified it [...] the modification continued till 2009. (DIG, 2017)

To conclude, the marginalized entrepreneurs in this study use local knowledge and understand local-based needs, skillfully combining these with creative problem-solving skills, their local social network, and perseverance. These are the *advantages of grassroots*, and the result is an

enterprise based on a self-developed innovation that operates on a local level and which provides the foundation for the development of the third-person international opportunity.

4.1.2. Serendipity

Serendipity – the occurrence of unexpected, fortunate incidents – was an important building block of international entrepreneurial action. While operating on the home market, the marginalized entrepreneurs received *international unsolicited orders* (see Annexure 2 for additional evidence). The entrepreneurs tried to complete these orders but, because these orders came as a surprise, the marginalized entrepreneurs struggled to pursue them further. The analysis showed that the entrepreneurs became aware of the potential of international markets but they were lacking the necessary knowledge, skills and resources to continue this international business relationship. Hence, a third-person international opportunity started to emerge.

The unsolicited orders the marginalized entrepreneurs received came through villagers and the acquaintances in their local and national network. For example, CLAY received its first international order for a water filter pot in 1995 from an Indian merchant based in Kenya, because people in the city near the CLAY factory had recommended the merchant to approach him. The first order for DIG came from Africa as a former Gujarati community member who had settled in Africa, approached the entrepreneur. Similarly, WHEEL got the first order from Canada from a friend of the entrepreneur's son.

There is a place named Thangadh near my village where there are people who do innovation. Once, there came a merchant from Africa. He asked somebody if he wanted that type of filter. Many relatives of mine stay in Thangadh. They told him that they are not involved with those types of filters, and asked him to go to [name of place]. They said that there is a person named [name] in Wankaner who makes such filters from the sand. [...] He approached me and gave an export order of water filter worth Rs. 2 lacs. (CLAY, 2020)

The innovations developed by the marginalized entrepreneurs solve local challenges and are the basis for local entrepreneurial action and unsolicited orders from foreign markets. These occasional unsolicited international orders and sporadic inquiries supported the recognition of international opportunities. However, the entrepreneurs do not have the capabilities or the resources needed to respond actively to demand from abroad. Thus, the advantages of grassroots together with serendipity form a basis for the recognition of a third-person international opportunity for marginalized entrepreneurs, but they are alone not sufficient for taking international entrepreneurial action. This is due to the liabilities of grassroots the entrepreneurs face, which is explained next.

4.1.3. Liabilities of grassroots

The studied entrepreneurs suffer from the liabilities stemming from their marginalized background, which hampers international entrepreneurial action (see Annexure 3 for additional evidence). The entrepreneurs faced several challenges stemming from their *insufficient resources for running their business*. This manifested firstly in the lack of marketing and promotion skills, such as the communication tools they could use in marketing or the communication preferences of their customers. It was a big effort for them to prepare marketing material for a potential international client, and therefore they could get frustrated after spending time on developing and sending a sales pitch via email without a timely reply from the customer. Secondly, the entrepreneurs were also hampered by their insufficient knowledge about laws, logistics, and the transportation of goods. The entrepreneur of DIG did not know about nor did he have the resources to participate in international trade fairs, which turned out later to be crucial for his business. The founder of CLAY faced challenges related to efficiently organizing production. The studied entrepreneurs also suffered from the lack of and difficulty to access funding.

I am getting orders; I do not have money or a factory to do mass production. If I get money or an investor, I can sell more wheels. (WHEEL, 2022)

Another illustrative example is that the entrepreneur of WHEEL knew applying for a patent was important, but he did not know how to apply for it. As he did not understand the procedure, he found it difficult to share with other people the unique features of his innovation and to trust that they would use that information for the patent application instead of replicating his idea. After the founder approached many people for help in filing for the patent in 2012, without success, he decided to educate himself and file the application without external help. He finally received the patent in 2021.

Another barrier was the *insufficient knowledge of internationalization*, which manifested in a lack of access to an international network as well as deficient language skills. CLAY started working with a wholesaler in Dubai from 2004 to 2005 and worked with him for around 10 years. This wholesaler was selling CLAY's products under their brand in Dubai and the Gulf states. As the owner of the CLAY did not have skills, knowledge and expertise to pursue international business independently, he let this wholesaler to sell the products under a different brand. The studied entrepreneurs were fluent and confident when they were allowed to use their local language, Gujarati, but it differs both in writing and speaking from Hindi, the prevailing language on a national level in India. The entrepreneurs did not speak English, nor did they have people in their immediate network who could help them with that, which created serious challenges in operating on international markets without support.

The idea is we are interested in approaching the foreign market, but the problem of finance comes into the picture. The language barrier is one of the biggest reasons for us [not to sell internationally]. (DIG, 2020).

The entrepreneurs also faced *insufficient market knowledge* and an inadequate understanding of how to operate internationally. While the Indian market is not homogeneous, there are additional expectations and learning required when doing business abroad. For example, international customers expected to receive detailed instructions and a user manual. They value details related to operation, maintenance, and spare parts of the machines. These details are not needed in the home market, and therefore the studied entrepreneurs are very cautious and attentive when they deal with foreign customers. Additionally, the international shipping of the machines requires more attention, as it has to be done precisely to avoid breakage, missing parts, and other mistakes. Furthermore, the entrepreneurs were quite surprised about customers' requirements for product adaptation. In all studied cases, the entrepreneurs have experience with international customers who have specific requirements for the products. Product adaptation was typically related to differences in product use, user preferences, and local conditions.

We sell the product according to the regional requirement. African countries have their own requirements. The UK and the USA have their own requirements. Accordingly, we sell the products. (CLAY, 2020)

To conclude, the entrepreneurs experience *liabilities of the grassroots* due to their lower position in society, peripheral location, and the resulting isolation from relevant networks of advisors. As a consequence of these contextual features, the entrepreneurs had insufficient entrepreneurial resources, knowledge about internationalization and market knowledge. The advantages of grassroots stemming from the local context helped to build a market presence domestically, and thus the entrepreneurs saw that their products could have potential on the international market. However, the described liabilities significantly increased the uncertainty for taking entrepreneurial action. Thus, the entrepreneurs were hampered from entering the international market, making the international expansion a third-person international

opportunity.

4.2. First-person international opportunity

In order for international entrepreneurial action to occur, a third-person international opportunity needs to shift to a first-person international opportunity. This requires a favorable assessment of one's ability to pursue the opportunity as well as the associated desirability or motivation to do so. The governmental organizations providing support were mostly out of reach for the entrepreneurs as these were either geared toward formal entrepreneurs based in cities, or the entrepreneurs felt they were not entitled to help. Therefore, the gatekeeper, either the HBN or another group of actors, played an important role in developing the international knowledge and networks of the marginalized entrepreneurs. At the same time, they gave the entrepreneurs confidence and a sense of legitimacy at the international level. Thus, the gatekeepers were a driving force in the marginalized entrepreneurs' ability to see foreign markets as a first-person international opportunity.

4.2.1. International skills through the gatekeeper

The entrepreneurs did not have many entrepreneurial peers whom they could ask for help, and the doors for international entrepreneurial action opened through the support of gatekeepers (see Annexure 4 for additional evidence). Working on their innovations and experiencing slow and organic growth of their networks, two of the entrepreneurs, DIG and CLAY, caught the attention of the HBN. This organization *increased the knowledge and the network* of the studied entrepreneurs because the local network did not always possess the needed resources or capabilities. The cofounder of the HBN ecosystem, Professor Anil Gupta, helped the entrepreneur of CLAY to improve the quality of the products manufactured to ensure that they matched the required international standards. Furthermore, the volunteers of the National Innovation Foundation and Professor Gupta helped the entrepreneur to negotiate sales deals, communicate in English with potential customers (e.g., writing emails in English), and develop sales material and other documents for foreign customers. The founder of DIG received hands-on support for its internationalization through financial support for his visits to international trade fairs and by introducing him to delegates and trade contacts from foreign countries, leading to long-lasting trade relationships. As the entrepreneur of DIG is unlikely to travel to Indonesia for an exhibition by himself, this contact would not have been made without the support of the NIF (National Innovation Foundation). Therefore, this support was an essential booster to the internationalization of these entrepreneurs.

Then Gupta Sir gave us advice: you start CLAY limited company; then in the future, you may get an investor, or it would be easy to export. Also, your brand value will increase. He also suggested that we would focus on quality and packaging for our export business. (CLAY 2020)

WHEEL did not find support from HBN but went on to seek support elsewhere. The entrepreneur realized that his internationalization capabilities are limited, and that external support would be needed to build sustainable international business. His application to HBN was rejected, but he got recognition and an award in 2013 from the Indian Institute of Technology. This has been helpful in building legitimacy, especially on the domestic market. Additionally, the continued support from the growing local networks was crucial for the internationalization of the entrepreneur, especially because the formal support structure did not reach the entrepreneur. For example, educated younger family members and friends of the founder of WHEEL acted as an important bridge builder to international markets.

The entrepreneurs are also active on social media, which they use to support their business, expand their (international) network, and connect with potential international clients. In particular, the entrepreneur of WHEEL, who lacked the support from the HBN, posts about his

innovations on different local and international online forums to increase the awareness of his innovation and find new customers but also to get confirmation that his innovation is valuable. For example, an Italian innovator and influencer posted about the entrepreneur of WHEEL and his innovation on the Facebook page “Inventor show 2020.” Overall, the studied entrepreneurs have good online presence, although the use of social media is not planned and no social media experts are involved. This has resulted, for example, in international orders for CLAY from Europe and the Gulf states.

Thus, in the shift from third-person opportunity to first-person opportunity for international entrepreneurial action, the input from the gatekeepers was crucial. The increased knowledge, financial resources, and networks of the entrepreneur, gained through the gatekeeper, exposed them to an international clientele interested in buying products from the marginalized entrepreneurs but also increased their skills to respond to the incoming orders from abroad. International orders became a more feasible option to pursue, and this paved the way for first person international opportunities.

4.2.2. International mindset through gatekeeper

In addition to the tangible support, the gatekeeper is also crucial in shaping the international mindset of the entrepreneurs (see Annexure 5 for additional evidence). This happens by increasing the *legitimacy* of the marginalized entrepreneurs. For example, HBN helped the studied entrepreneurs to seek recognition and encouraged them to apply for the Presidential Award. The award includes a certificate from the president of India and a cash prize of 100,000 rupees (1350 USD). Winning this award opened doors for the entrepreneurs of CLAY and DIG to be a part of groups and networks that were not accessible to them earlier and also increased their credibility as entrepreneurs. Receiving the award from a highly respected institution, the president of India, also improved their self-confidence and improved their position in the community in which they had faced discrimination throughout their lives, resulting in a change of behavior: they became valuable members of the society who are looked up to.

Due to this award and the support of Professor Gupta and the Honey Bee Network, people treat us well, we get good responses from the government agencies, government officers and companies. (CLAY, 2022)

The first international orders received through the support of the gatekeeper, together with the gained legitimacy, helped to increase the *confidence* of the entrepreneurs and encouraged the entrepreneurs of CLAY and DIG to pursue international orders more systematically and increased their willingness to take higher risks when going for international markets.

However, the case of WHEEL demonstrates that marginalized entrepreneurs without the support of a gatekeeper remain in an inferior position. Without business knowledge and a network beyond their local contacts, it is challenging to approach relevant partners and collaborate with them. Due to active marketing on social media and online events, WHEEL has been able to sell their products overseas, but the firm has not been able to create long-term business relationships, lowering the self-esteem of the entrepreneur. When the research team first met the entrepreneur, he was seeking confirmation from the researchers that his innovation was valuable and relevant. Nevertheless, in recent years he has received the patent, increasing his confidence, and in a meeting in 2022 he told how his product could be used by NASA and that he plans to sell the innovation to Tesla. This is a big change from a garage owner who could not complete his primary education to an entrepreneur talking about winning different competitions across the globe, and selling his products to MNCs in the global market.

Yes, the whole world has a market for it. I have a market not only in India but all over the world. I am saving energy and reducing pollution, and it is a permanent fuel. If you put this application, then

the efficiency increases by 30–40%. If the implementation is done at the company level, like on the engine, alternator, or AC, then the vehicle performance increases so much that you will not believe. (WHEEL, 2021)

The support received from the gatekeepers helps to increase the confidence of the entrepreneurs, and, as their legitimacy as entrepreneurs increases, they are better able to benefit from serendipitous events. This helps to develop an *international mindset*, to focus on their business and to take risks when going for the international markets. The international mindset also increased the desirability of international action, which helped to shift from a third-person international opportunity to a first-person international opportunity. At the same time, our findings also show that it is possible that some marginalized entrepreneurs fall out of the support ecosystem, for example, due to the limited support of gatekeepers. In that case, there is little support to overcome the liabilities, and the international action is relying on serendipitous foreign orders and remains a third-person international opportunity.

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1. Challenge-based model of international entrepreneurial action

What influences international entrepreneurial action undertaken by marginalized entrepreneurs in emerging economies? Our findings highlight the need to consider both what contributes to the development of a third-person international opportunity belief and, subsequently, the shift to a first-person international opportunity associated with international entrepreneurial action. In Fig. 2, we offer a challenge-based model of international entrepreneurial action. This model extends the existing theory on challenge-based entrepreneurship (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017) and is inspired by the work of McMullen and Shepherd on entrepreneurial action (2006, p. 140).

Given the marginalized context, the starting points for the model are the acknowledged existence of both advantages and liabilities of grassroots, situated within the challenge-based context. The advantages spur local entrepreneurial action which lead to serendipitous international inquiries. Together, these offer the knowledge base and motivation for the development of a third-person international opportunity. While the liabilities of grassroots can be overcome at the local level, they become more of an issue at the international level adding to the action-specific uncertainty. It is only with the help of the gatekeeper in which international skills and mindset are cultivated and the action-specific uncertainty lowered, thereby allowing the third-person international opportunity to shift to a first-person international opportunity associated with international entrepreneurial action. This reliance on the gatekeeper is represented by the dotted lines in the model.

It is acknowledged that the identified barriers to internationalization—a limited network as well as the lack of language skills and relevant knowledge about markets and logistics—for the marginalized entrepreneurs in our study resemble the challenges of traditional SMEs that have been discussed in prior IB research (Paul et al., 2017). However, the ability of marginalized entrepreneurs to overcome them is significantly lower than for other entrepreneurs. Because of the challenge-based context characterized, their understanding of how to conduct international operations, negotiate deals, or even understand the related institutional regulations is very limited or even nonexistent. Additionally, their personal network offers very little support. Thus, the hurdle for the shift from a third-person international opportunity to a first-person belief and resulting international entrepreneurial action can seem insurmountable.

In order to explain and better understand how international entrepreneurial action takes place among marginalized entrepreneurs in an emerging economy, we need to deviate from earlier research focusing solely on the constraints associated with such challenging circumstances and consider the potential enablers (Autio, 2005). Such an approach is

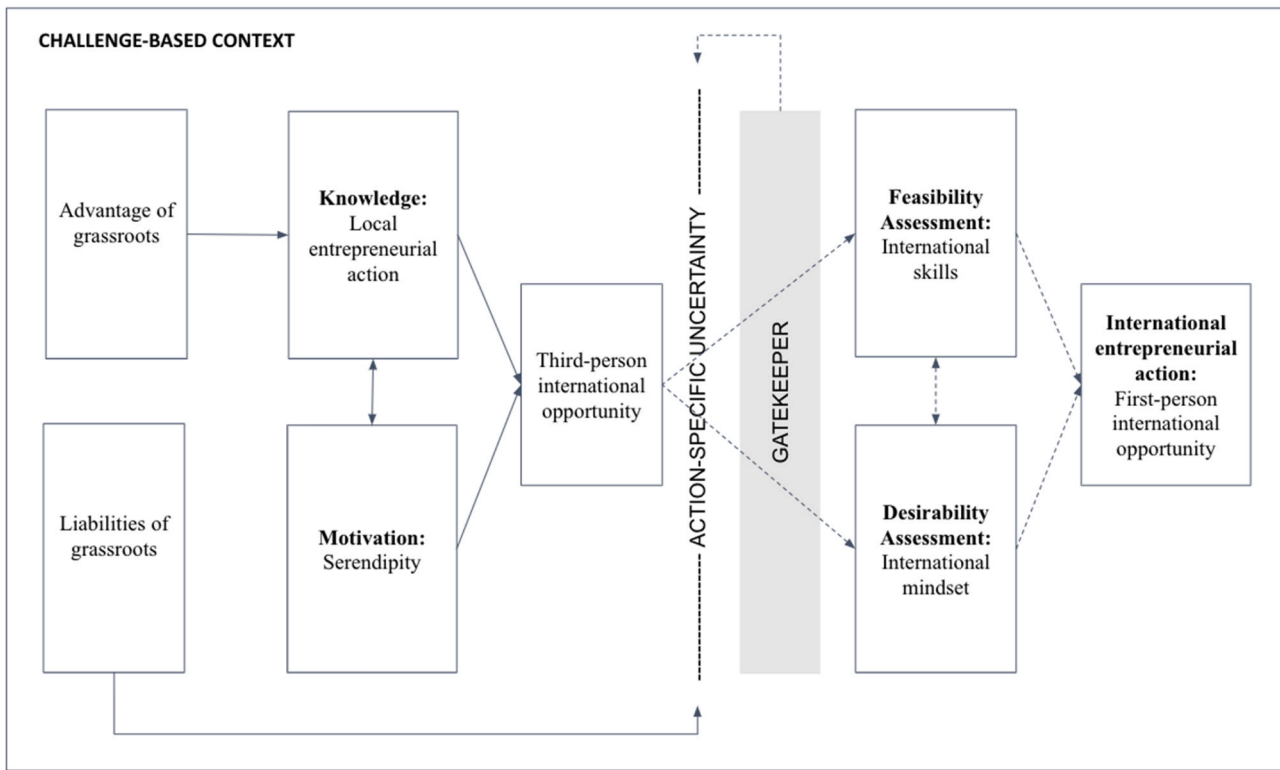


Fig. 2. Challenge-based model of international entrepreneurial action.

consistent with challenge-based entrepreneurship theory (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017) and is an addition to positive scholarship, which enriches our theoretical perspectives and proposes new avenues for research (Roberts, 2006; Stahl et al., 2016). We find that marginalized entrepreneurs in emerging economies compensate for their handicap in knowledge and resources by building capabilities, which have received less attention in prior international entrepreneurship research, such as perseverance and creative problem-solving. At the same time, being close to their local community, these individuals can develop solutions that can address the needs of many people globally more accurately than an outsider. Therefore, we argue that international entrepreneurial action requires that marginalized entrepreneurs build on the advantages of grassroots (see Table 4). However, being able to leverage the advantages of the grassroots is not enough. For international entrepreneurial action to take place, support from formal networks, such as the HBN, is decisive. These organizations are significant gatekeepers, as they act both as

Table 4
Liabilities and advantages of grassroots.

Liabilities of grassroots	Advantages of grassroots
Identity as a lower-class or marginalized individual, which inhibits the ability to see the potential impact of an innovation or to have the motivation to pursue an innovation beyond the community.	Local identity and strong relatedness to one's own community motivates the development of innovations that are impactful in meeting a local problem or need.
Being outside the formal business network and mainstream innovation ecosystem, which limits the ability to access necessary knowledge and partners to pursue innovation at a higher level outside the community.	Local network of family, friends, and peers drives a stronger community-based identity and allows for the co-creation of a locally accepted innovation that is impactful.
Lack of formal business knowledge and sometimes language skills, prohibiting the ability to scale outside of the community.	High level of local knowledge and close insight into the nature of the problem within the community, which allows for more radical and transformational solutions.

channels to and interpreters of information. They are boundary spanners, bringing together entrepreneurs and other actors who would not otherwise meet, and they are of utmost importance to the internationalization of marginalized individuals. In fact, collaboration with gatekeepers is of utmost importance for a marginalized entrepreneur to undertake international entrepreneurial action.

It should be emphasized that the role of the supporting organizations in the process is quite multifaceted. Foremost, they are intermediaries who facilitate SMEs' entry into new markets by helping them to meet the needs of local customers and supporting their sales (cf. Balabanis, 2000; Peng and Illinitch, 1998), but as earlier research on emerging economies demonstrates (e.g., Mair et al., 2012; Goswami et al., 2018), their tasks are much more complex. Prior studies also highlight the aspect of legitimacy being particularly important when strong and weak institutions coexist (Kistruck et al., 2015). It seems that the diverse tasks of supporting organizations as intermediaries are a form of social intermediation in which monetary and nonmonetary objectives are combined (Kistruck, Beamish, Qureshi, and Sutter, 2013). Thus, we agree with Bhatt, Qureshi, and Sutter (2022) that these intermediaries have a key role in building inclusive markets in the emerging economies and decided that labeling these actors as intermediaries would be belittling their role. Instead, we refer to them as "gatekeepers to knowledge and resources," and in line with Reypens and colleagues (2021), we consider them to be catalytic in nature.

The international entrepreneurial action of marginalized entrepreneurs is driven by their mindset, which differs from other international entrepreneurs. It is not based on cross-cultural skills and abilities, balancing global markets and local needs, or strategic thinking (Levy et al., 2007) or international vision (Nummela et al., 2004). Instead, international entrepreneurial action requires that the focus of the entrepreneurial mindset shifts from local to international opportunities, and this shift is strongly enhanced by external stimuli, such as the recognition and encouragement of esteemed managers, awards, and other artifacts associated with the gatekeeping support organization.

Marginalized individuals are driven by an entrepreneurial mindset

based on the aim of a rise in social class and better income. Building on the advantages and suffering from the liabilities of grassroots, the entrepreneurs recognize a business opportunity in the local/domestic market and successfully exploits it. Due to unsolicited orders, they understand that similar opportunities may exist in other markets but the opportunity remains a third-person opportunity because the entrepreneurs lack market and business knowledge, have limited resources, and perceive the uncertainty as high. In other words, although the marginalized entrepreneurs consider the opportunity desirable, a perceived lack of feasibility prevents them from taking action. Collaboration with the gatekeeper triggers a learning process (Pellegriano & McNaughton, 2017), during which the international opportunities turn into feasible business prospects, that is, first-person opportunities.

5.2. Contributions

During the last decade, IE scholars have shown growing interest in the entrepreneurial potential in emerging economies. Although the focus of research is still biased toward high-technology industries, overcoming economic inequality has also been raised to the future research agenda in entrepreneurship (Bruton et al., 2021). Our study, focusing on international entrepreneurial action undertaken by marginalized entrepreneurs in emerging economies, offers multiple contributions. First, we extend challenge-based entrepreneurship theory (Baron et al., 2018; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017; Ng & Arndt, 2019, Pidduck & Clark, 2021) to international entrepreneurial action. To fully understand how challenge-based circumstances can lead to entrepreneurial outcomes, it is necessary to consider what leads to a third-person opportunity and, subsequently, the shift to a first-person opportunity. We highlight the advantages of grassroots as a key enabler of international entrepreneurial action and in doing so, we advocate for the need to reframe what is commonly seen as a challenge or barrier as it pertains to entrepreneurship. As our research suggested that the marginalized entrepreneurs could overcome the liabilities of grassroots on their own in order to pursue local entrepreneurial action, but not international entrepreneurial action, this raises an interesting question of what limitations do exist for so-called challenged-based entrepreneurs. Is there a threshold of growth? What if a gatekeeper comes along earlier in the process?

We secondly contribute to the theory of entrepreneurial action (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). While we agree that feasibility, desirability, and uncertainty all play a role in entrepreneurial action when a third-person opportunity shifts to a first-person opportunity, our findings suggest this does not always happen automatically. For marginalized entrepreneurs in emerging economies, this requires a support organization or what we refer to as a gatekeeper. To attract the gatekeeper, some sort of success or track record at the local level is required. We posit that the liabilities of grassroots adds to the action-specific uncertainty associated with the shift from a third-person international opportunity to a first-person international opportunity, while the gatekeeper reduces the uncertainty through the support and coming alongside the entrepreneurs. This is due to the cultivation of international skills and mindset. A more nuanced understanding of these relationships would be helpful in future research, as well as exploring what other factors influence action-specific uncertainty and might bridge the gap for marginalized entrepreneurs.

Third, our study provides new insights into research on IE research in emerging economies (cf. Kiss et al., 2012). It is evident that entrepreneurs in marginalized communities of emerging economies are overlooked, or neglected (Arikan & Shenkar, 2022) as originators of international entrepreneurial action. Our findings highlight the mistaken assumption of homogeneity among entrepreneurs within emerging economies (Beugelsdijk & Mudambi, 2013; Dheer et al., 2015; Fernhaber et al., 2019) and recognize the unique advantages of marginalized entrepreneurs that can be leveraged to overcome the barriers to internationalization. This also raises questions about other

overlooked groups such as returnee entrepreneurs in post-conflict contexts (Williams et al., 2023) and refugee entrepreneurs (Abebe, 2023). Future research would benefit by understanding how such challenging circumstances lead to international entrepreneurial action, and whether or not they rely on the gatekeeper as much given their existing international ties. An interesting observation is that even marginalized entrepreneurs have global linkages in which international opportunities can surface. Yet, not all are able to act on them. This reinforces the importance of understanding the networks marginalized entrepreneurs are embedded in, whether it be to spur international opportunities or connections to gatekeepers.

While our study provides fresh insight regarding the drivers of international entrepreneurial action by marginalized individuals in emerging economies, there are some limitations. Our explanation of the international entrepreneurial action of marginalized entrepreneurs is heavily contextualized (cf. Welch, Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, Piekkari, and Plakoyiannaki, 2022), and therefore the findings are not necessarily transferable across contexts. In line with the principles of qualitative case studies (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Welch & Piekkari, 2017), our aim was not to generalize to a population but to a theory (cf. Tsang, 2014). The resulting framework of international entrepreneurial action might be applicable also in other marginalized communities in emerging markets where the entrepreneurs are exposed to similar liabilities and advantages of grassroots (Table 4).

Consequently, we would be very pleased to see future studies investigate the phenomenon in other contexts – whether it be other emerging economies or more developed economies – and even with a larger number of cases. On the other hand, it would also be interesting to study more the scope of international opportunity recognition: how marginalized entrepreneurs shift their focus to also include developed markets. Future research would also benefit from exploring the longer-term implications of international entrepreneurial action on the marginalized individual as well as his/her family and surrounding community. While we solely focused on international entrepreneurial action, it would also be interesting to study post-international entry performance and the shifting international scope.

5.3. Managerial and policy implications

For marginalized individuals who aspire to undertake international entrepreneurial action, our findings offer multiple implications. Foremost, given the importance of the gatekeeper, effort should be put forth to collaborate and seek out recognition opportunities when available. Rather than focus on the disadvantages associated with being part of a marginalized community, these entrepreneurs should try to leverage what advantages they do have—especially creativity and community-based knowledge. Other entrepreneurs might learn from the marginalized entrepreneurs about how liabilities can be turned into advantages. Finally, our study highlights the importance of developing personal capabilities such as perseverance and creative problem-solving to be able to successfully identify and exploit international opportunities. These capabilities can be nurtured by marginalized individuals from a young age.

Our paper also has important implications for policy. Most notably, this study brings forward the decisive role of a supportive ecosystem in the recognition and exploitation of international opportunities. Building and sustaining such ecosystems is crucial for the internationalization of marginalized individuals. Gatekeepers in these ecosystems cultivate their entrepreneurial identity and desire to scale, leading to the follow-on support that provides the knowledge and access to the needed networks. Thus, international entrepreneurial action can be seen in part as a pull-based phenomenon that takes place through a combination of formal and informal institutions.

Being able to promote more inclusive growth while fostering innovation across borders is an important goal at the United Nations level, and especially within emerging economies (Buckley et al., 2017). Rather

than creating separate policies to support grassroots innovation and more advanced innovation efforts, Jain and Verloop (2012, p. 285) argue that policy should focus on “ways of formulating national systems of innovation and remove bottlenecks that prevent innovators and innovations in rural spaces to become part of the mainstream R&D effort.” We fully concur that there is a need to link and connect innovations at the grassroots level within mainstream innovation efforts. However, we also recognize that the needs of individuals imprinted with lower levels of means at the grassroots are different from those with higher levels of means. Thus, we advocate for a blended approach, and one that is more accessible given that such institutions serve as gatekeepers.

5.4. Conclusion

In this study, we deviated from existing research to explore how challenging circumstances can lead to international entrepreneurial

action. Our qualitative analysis of three marginalized entrepreneurs in India highlight both the liabilities and advantages of grassroots. While the advantages of grassroots are sufficient to drive local entrepreneurial action, the gatekeeper is necessary to come alongside the entrepreneurs to spur international entrepreneurial action. We offer a challenge-based model of international entrepreneurial action that helps explain both the drivers of a third-person international opportunity and the shift to a first-person international opportunity associated with action. It is our hope that our study spurs subsequent interest in international entrepreneurship arising from marginalized communities as an impactful new research stream.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

Annexure 1. Exemplary evidence: advantages of grassroots

First-order codes	Exemplary Evidence
Seeing local-based need	No, I had not done anything [market research] and had never thought that I would get such a huge market. We had only one goal, the community that we belong to—the potter community—slowly people of our family are leaving this profession so if this work was done with some technical idea, then they won't have to put in so much hard work. (CLAY, 2017) We have currently made two machines. The first one is a groundnut decodinator. This machine helps us remove all the sand and the other impurities and dirt that is stuck on the groundnuts. This machinery would be beneficial in the post groundnut harvesting. When the customer goes out in the market to sell these groundnuts, as it is full of sand and dirt, they are acquiring less than expected. The other machine that we have made is an automatic thresher in which when the diesel gets finished, automatically the groundnuts come on one side and the dirt and other impurities get collected on the opposite side. (DIG, 2022) This is a vacuum cleaner with a double motor and is a little heavy. This is small and this is a little big. We have also developed the motor that is used in the ceramic industry. (WHEEL, 2017)
Local Knowledge	Every area has a different groundnut cultivation pattern and so the machines have to be customized. (DIG, 2017) After returning from school, we went directly to the farmland with our father after changing out of our school uniform. (DIG, 2018) We both brothers at a very early age started working in a factory due to family conditions and we learned mechanical and electrical engineering skills while working in the factory. (WHEEL; observation notes: the entrepreneur's brother narrated this while introducing themselves in the Association of Muslim Entrepreneurs gathering, 2019) While studying, I was helping my father in making pottery and sometimes I was bringing sand from the riverbeds on donkeys. I learnt the art of pottery from my father and my community members. (CLAY, 2018)
Creative Problem Solving	There is a ceramic industry, and if there is a problem there, then we have work in the ceramic industry and we used to find solutions to any problems they used to face. Suppose someone is making a machine or a blower. [...] So while making these products whatever problems are faced and we are given any query, then it is by grace of Allah that we are able to solve them. (WHEEL, 2017) When I saw my father working the whole day and only could produce a few pieces of pottery, I knew our community members are hardworking but due to traditional practices we are not efficient. That is how the idea of making pottery came in my mind to support my family and my community. (CLAY; observation notes: interaction with students in 2019) Knowing that in the village poor people fetch water from the well and the river in the clay pots but the water quality is bad and many families are suffering due to deadly diseases after drinking contaminated water so he made a 0.5 µm kandle and put in the clay pot and put that pot with kandle on another clay pot and that is how he designed the water filter to solve health problems of many poor villagers. (CLAY, Tedtalent Search, YouTube Video, 2012) In his house, the entrepreneur of WHEEL showed us different innovations from automatic washing machines to flour mills. With enthusiasm and passion, you may see a unique brightness in his eyes when he explains these innovations.” (Observation, WHEEL, 2017) One day his wife asked for non stick pan and he later made a non stick pan putting non stick coating on clay pan (CLAY, Story on Youtube Channel, July 2019)When I saw my father working the whole day and only could produce a few pieces of pottery, I knew our community members are hardworking but due to traditional practices we are not efficient. That is how the idea of making pottery came in my mind to support my family and my community. (CLAY; observation notes: interaction with students in 2019)
Support of Local Network	Son was helping and during the interview, he received a query from the USA, and he was talking to the potential customer. (Observation, CLAY, 2018) There is a place named Thangadh near my village where there are people who do innovation. Once, there came a merchant from Africa. He asked somebody if he wanted that type of filter. Many relatives of mine stay in Thangadh. They told him that they are not involved with those types of filters and asked him to go to Wankaner. They said that there is a person named [name of entrepreneur] in Wankaner who makes such filters from sand. [...] He had companies both in Rajkot and Africa. He approached me and gave an export order for a water filter worth Rs. 2 lacs. (CLAY, 2020) From our tractor business—I used to supply tractors there—at the agriculture university [about testing]. (DIG, 2017) I have a relative who works in the real estate business. He told me that I should do some good business, and he was ready to fund me. He asked how much I need, and I asked for around 25–30 lakhs. (DIG, 2017) We met a chartered accountant; he believed in us. He is helping us in our business. He is helping us [by educating us] without any expectations. He and my son and brother helped me in filing the patent. (WHEEL, 2022) The entrepreneur introduced me to his nephew as potential help for his business development in the foreign market (Observation, DIG, 2018)There is a place named Thangadh near my village where there are people who do innovation. Once, there came a merchant from Africa. He asked somebody if he wanted that type of filter. Many relatives of mine stay in Thangadh. They told him that they are not involved with those types of filters and asked him to go to Wankaner. They said that there is a person named [name of entrepreneur] in Wankaner who makes such filters from sand. [...] He had companies both in Rajkot and Africa. He approached me and gave an export order for a water filter worth Rs. 2 lacs. (CLAY, 2020)
Perseverance	If I want to do something big, I don't have anything to support it. Whatever orders I got were single piece orders. The kind of tie-ups that should have happened did not happen. (WHEEL, 2017) He kept pursuing people to see his innovation, whether they invest in his business or not. (WHEEL; observation notes: pitching event for Muslim

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First-order codes	Exemplary Evidence
	<p>entrepreneurs, 2020)</p> <p>I started my entire factory from a small workshop. Initially 1.5 lacs pan (Tawa) broke down and I did not get success but still I didn't give up. (CLAY, 2020)</p> <p>We started making this machinery along with selling our tractors. We failed earlier but afterwards we borrowed some 5–6 lakh rupees from one of my brother's friends. My elder brother also had sold one of the properties and from this money we started our production. Initially in the first year, we made 4–5 machines and went to Junagadh for a demo. So, the farmer started using it, but it didn't work. So now all the 4 machines were wasted along with our 4 lakh rupees. We had to close our factory also because we had to give the interest too for a year. But we continued working on our idea. (DIG, 2018)</p> <p>If the problem comes to your head, then innovation happens. We failed three years consecutively. If you get disheartened and demotivated due to failure you cannot make innovation. (DIG; 2020, YouTube channel of the entrepreneur)</p> <p>This is the tight slap on everyone's face who were not considering my innovation as unique, getting the patent without any support in two years is an achievement (WHEEL, telephone call in May 2021)He kept pursuing people to see his innovation, whether they invest in his business or not. (WHEEL; observation notes: pitching event for Muslim entrepreneurs, 2020)</p>

Annexure 2. Exemplary evidence: serendipity

Unsolicited International Orders	<p>There is someone in Delhi called Cosmos International—they mailed me an inquiry for the groundnut digger, and I supplied him with one machine. They had brought the Sudan party with them. There is Dilip ji from Facilitation India Pvt. Ltd. who supports me a lot. He keeps a 10% margin for himself and sells my machines. He has sent one machine to Zambia. (DIG, 2017)</p> <p>Also, two years ago there was one direct inquiry by a farmer from Portugal. (DIG 2020)</p> <p>Yes, I have got orders from Dubai as I have introduced it at Sharjah University. They approached me through Facebook. Initially, I could not sell my product outside India but after I have made my company WHEEL Private Limited. (WHEEL, 2020)</p>
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Annexure 3. Exemplary evidence: liabilities of grassroots

First order codes	Exemplary Evidence
Insufficient Resources for Running the Business	<p>Bank loan? I don't have anything to give as collateral. (WHEEL, 2017)</p> <p>We don't know anything about law. At that time he had said that I should write down everything on paper and they will help us get the patent. That is not the way to get a patent. If I give in writing my whole idea, then will the patent be in my name or his name? Is there any guarantee that if I write down my idea and give it to you then is there any guarantee that the patent will be in my name? (WHEEL, 2017)</p> <p>I came to know much later (after I had already started this factory) that first a project report has to be prepared and given to a CA and he can advise if any government subsidy is available or any loan on machinery is available at a lower interest or not. So that benefit is there—and I was not aware of that. So we kept purchasing whatever machinery we needed, step by step. We did not benefit from any government subsidy. (DIG, 2017)</p> <p>I did not have money to start my own production. I borrowed money from my ex-employer to start the business. I did not know which machinery and equipment to use, so I used my mind and developed a machine to produce pots faster. (CLAY, 2020)</p>
Insufficient Knowledge of Internationalization	<p>Currently we are getting orders from all over the country as well as from outside the country, like we recently got an order from Denmark. My problem is how to transport it from here to there. Until now, I have not received any help from the government. (WHEEL, 2017)</p> <p>I cannot approach Muslim countries, as language is a big problem. I cannot communicate, my son knows English but not so much. Therefore, there is a problem. (WHEEL, 2020)</p> <p>Many foreign customers approached me online through Facebook. One of the customers from Denmark asked me to send my [product] to Denmark, but I did not speak English, I was new on Facebook. I was not sure whether the party was genuine, and I was at risk of being cheated, so I did not follow up with him. (WHEEL, 2020)</p> <p>Yes, our first customer from Dubai would put the label of MH and then sell. At that time, we were not selling under our brand name, as we did not know that we can sell using our brand name. (CLAY, 2018)</p>
Insufficient Market Knowledge	<p>There is a huge difference, because I'm not educated that much. I'm a commerce student. I do not have sufficient knowledge and my English is not well versed. I'm not aware of the system that should be used for marketing. That makes a huge difference. (DIG, 2020)</p> <p>We had to do customization of our products. For example, if we sold our fridge in Paris, they had asked us to give space to keep wine bottles as everyone has different requirements to keep in their fridge. They gave their specifications and we used to create it accordingly. (CLAY, 2018)</p> <p>When we started thinking about doing international business, we studied all the norms of the import duties of all the territories in the world. In some countries, [such as] the Gulf there are many documents required and other norms too. So, we started studying them slowly. This way, we identified and started producing our products category wise and then we promoted in the market. (Son of the entrepreneur, CLAY, 2020)</p> <p>One of my clients from Portugal used my machine for turmeric harvesting. He sent me the video; I was shocked to know about this. (DIG, 2020)</p> <p>We did send machines to Sudan. We also made alterations and changes as per their demand because there is sandy soil over there. Unfortunately, we have not received repeat orders from there. We are still in talks with them. (DIG 2020)</p> <p>The foreign customers know everything about the machine. I have to send them each and everything, right from the operating manual. Also, I have to explain to them everything in detail, from part to part. When we load the goods, then we should not miss out on a single part. We should not miss on a single nut and bolt. We make the required arrangements, like the container size, with the help of our port agent. (DIG, 2020)</p>

Annexure 4. Exemplary evidence: international skills through the gatekeeper

First Order Codes	Exemplary Evidence
Increased Knowledge	GIAN facilitated design improvements in the fridge through the National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad. CLAY refrigerator has been featured at a conference organized by the Center for India and Global Business, Judge Business School, University of Cambridge, UK in May 2009. Bosch and Siemens Hausgeräte (BSH), Germany, one of the world's largest home appliance companies, have also written to GIAN and showed interest in the product. (CLAY, news article, 2014)
Increased Network	I replied that I did not have funds even to eat. He (Professor Gupta) told me that I had made a great invention and they would support me in that. Then they provided me an amount of Rs. 180,000 (2428 USD) from the fund. (CLAY, 2020) At that time I was also facing issues in getting a Visa. There was an institution named Swamingo of Paris. They had contacted me directly via call. I had informed Gupta Sir regarding that. He then had a talk and said that he wanted to send two boys for an internship at my place. They stayed here for two months and later in order to honor me and give a speech, they called me to Paris with all the items. So, my son and I went to Paris. There the Swamingo organization had honored me, and I had also given a speech at the innovation school there. They had found 1000 innovators across the globe. From them, they had called 11 innovators there. From that, I was the one called from India. (CLAY, 2020) They [NIF] arranged design photographs from Indonesia, as if it was a machine from there. They also made a tie-up with the innovator and prepared an MOU. That is their patent product, but we can develop that over here. (DIG, 2020) The non-stick coating has been tested at the Institute of Chemical Technology, University of Mumbai. For this product, Mansukhbhai was also supported under the Micro Venture Innovation Fund (MVIF) of NIF- India. (CLAY, Web Article, September 2014 Article) We don't have any idea of it as I had received a call from GYAN that there are some Malaysian delegates visiting this April to India, so will you be able to arrange their visit to your factory and show innovations of innovators of our region in my factory, so I agreed. (DIG, 2022)

Annexure 5. Exemplary Evidence: International Mindset through the Gatekeeper

Legitimacy	When I tell someone that I have won this award it does make a difference. (DIG, 2017) After receiving the award and prize money, the traveling expense was also reimbursed by our government, so it was a proud moment for us. We received an award from the president of India and our images also appeared in the newspaper. So, we were motivated in various ways. (DIG 2020) Earlier when I had started, they used to think that I was mad. They used to think that I am barely just producing a Tawa (pan) machine or fridge. Now, daily I have to attend meetings with Gupta Sir and SRISTI. I had a meeting today, yesterday, and the day before yesterday. I am also having a meeting tomorrow. The people now aspire to listen to my inspirational story "Vocal to Local." (CLAY 2020) This year, they [partner in Myanmar] have invited me over there during their season time. They have asked me to look if there's a possibility of developing something new, owing to their soil fertility and crop condition. (DIG, 2021) Those thinking I was mad and crazy, and keeping distance from me and my family, after getting the patent are giving me good respect; now their behavior has changed. (WHEEL, 2021; informal interaction)
Confidence	They have told me in GYAN, SRISHTI, and Honey Bee that I have to train the people below me. To be a successful innovator you have to train people below you so that they can earn. It serves both purposes. Today with proof I can say that about 1 lakh people work under me. That is my role with GIAN, NIF and SRISTI, Honey Bee. (CLAY, 2020) The first author observed that the WHEEL entrepreneur and his son were sounding more confident after they received the patent; as they started talking about how they can approach Tesla and other big companies with their product. (Observation of the first author during the meeting with WHEEL at their house in January 2022) In the last meeting, the person was shocked and could not believe the prototype that we showed. He went through the abstract and read everything about the patent. He said that it looks similar to that of one patented in the US. I said that it is different and ours is different. He compared it with NASA. We said that if you fix it in the machine, it will provide efficiency. (WHEEL, 2022) I told my son to go there [Dubai] and make a presentation of this technology. Maybe it could turn out good for us. Because the Future Energy Prize is declared over there and also, they have established Sustainability City over there. Also, our product fits in that domain. (WHEEL, 2022) NIF had an innovation exhibition "Pushpitech" in Indonesia. They [the NIF] had taken 8–10 innovators to Indonesia. I was one of them and went to Indonesia and met this innovator. When that person had come here at the NIF's exhibition, at that time Mahesh Bhai approached me and asked if I would be able to make the machine or not. He said that it is difficult to make, but with my struggle and hard work, I will be able to make it. Therefore, I took the decision to produce the machine [for the Indonesian client]. All the documents were then prepared. (DIG, 2020)

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