

Tech-Powered Dreams: Unveiling Women's Aspirations in Technology Entrepreneurship in India

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary landscape of technology and entrepreneurship necessitates a comprehensive understanding of women's career aspirations to foster inclusive economic growth and innovation-driven development. This study investigates the technology-related entrepreneurial aspirations of young Indians (N = 3,500; aged 18–30 years) using primary survey data collected across 20 Indian cities in 2019, segmented by gender and city type (metropolitan vs. non-metropolitan). A descriptive-analytical research design was employed, integrating Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) with comparative statistical analysis to examine gender-based and geography-based variations in career preferences across two technology domains: Information Technology (IT) roles and technology entrepreneurship. The findings reveal statistically significant gender disparities, with male respondents exhibiting higher interest in IT careers such as app development and system analysis (M = 34%, F = 20%), while female respondents demonstrated proportionally stronger inclination towards technology entrepreneurship in non-metropolitan settings (Non-Metro: 13%, Metro: 5%). Additionally, geographical location was found to moderate aspirational patterns, with metropolitan respondents showing greater orientation towards specialised IT roles and non-metropolitan respondents displaying broader entrepreneurial interest. These results are situated within a conceptual framework linking gender socialisation theory, digital divide literature and entrepreneurial ecosystem research. The study contributes to the discourse on gender equity in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) entrepreneurship and offers implications for policymakers, educators and industry stakeholders seeking to cultivate inclusive technology ecosystems.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurship; Technology Career Aspirations; Gender Disparity; STEM Entrepreneurship; Urban-Rural Digital Divide; India

INTRODUCTION

Context and Research Gap

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the global economic landscape, creating unprecedented opportunities for innovation-driven entrepreneurship across diverse sectors (Subrahmanya, 2021; NASSCOM, 2019). However, despite the growing recognition of diversity as a catalyst for technological innovation, women remain significantly underrepresented in technology-related roles, particularly in leadership and entrepreneurial positions (Kuschel et al., 2020; Ashcraft et al., 2016). This gender disparity not only constrains the innovation potential of the technology sector but also perpetuates systemic social and economic inequalities that limit inclusive growth (Post et al., 2021; Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). The persistent underrepresentation of women in technology entrepreneurship thus constitutes both a matter of social equity and an economic imperative.

India has emerged as the third-largest startup ecosystem globally, characterised by a rapidly expanding technology industry with substantial potential to drive economic growth and social progress (NASSCOM, 2019; Subrahmanya, 2021). Nevertheless, women's participation in India's technology and entrepreneurship sectors remains disproportionately low (Bulsara et al., 2014; Gupta & Aggarwal, 2015). While recent studies have begun

to examine the factors influencing women's entry into the technology industry - including access to education, mentorship and funding (Sharma & Gaur, 2020) - a notable gap persists in understanding the specific aspirational patterns and career preferences of young women towards technology-related entrepreneurial roles, particularly within the Indian developmental context. This gap is especially critical given India's unique socio-cultural landscape, where traditional gender norms intersect with emerging digital opportunities.

Conceptual Framework

The present study is anchored in a conceptual framework that integrates three theoretical perspectives to examine the formation of technology entrepreneurial aspirations among young Indians. First, gender socialisation theory posits that career aspirations are shaped by socially constructed gender norms and stereotypes that differentially influence the career choices of men and women (Olsson & Martiny, 2018; Cheryan et al., 2017). Second, the digital divide framework highlights how disparities in access to digital infrastructure, technology exposure and related educational opportunities create differential career aspiration patterns between urban and rural populations (Graves et al., 2021). Third, entrepreneurial ecosystem theory emphasises the role of institutional support structures - including incubators, funding mechanisms and policy environments - in shaping entrepreneurial aspirations and venture creation (Subrahmanya, 2021; Tripathi & Oivo, 2020).

By synthesising these three perspectives, the framework proposes that technology career aspirations among young Indians are jointly determined by gender-linked socialisation processes, geographically conditioned access to digital resources and the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem within which aspirations are formed and acted upon. This integrative lens enables a systematic examination of how gender and geography interact to produce differential aspirational patterns in technology entrepreneurship.

Research Objectives and Questions

The present study aims to bridge the identified research gap through the following objectives: (1) to examine the distribution of technology career aspirations among young Indians across gender and city type categories; (2) to identify and quantify gender-based disparities in technology entrepreneurial aspirations; (3) to analyse the influence of geographical context (metropolitan vs. non-metropolitan) on technology career preferences; and (4) to derive implications for policy, education and entrepreneurial ecosystem development.

Accordingly, the study addresses two primary research questions: **RQ1:** To what extent do gender-based differences exist in the technology career aspirations of young Indians? **RQ2:** How does geographical context (metropolitan vs. non-metropolitan) moderate technology career aspirations across gender categories?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on women's participation in technology and entrepreneurship has expanded substantially in recent years, reflecting the increasing scholarly and policy attention directed towards diversity and inclusion in STEM fields. This review synthesises key findings across four thematic areas, critically examining the evidence base and identifying the theoretical gaps that the present study seeks to address.

Gender Disparities in Technology and Entrepreneurship

A substantial body of research documents persistent gender disparities across the technology industry and entrepreneurship ecosystem. Women constitute only 25–30% of the technology workforce globally, with even lower representation in leadership and entrepreneurial positions (Ashcraft et al., 2016; Kuschel et al., 2020). The underrepresentation has been attributed to a constellation of interacting factors, including societal and cultural norms that position technology as a masculine domain, systemic biases in recruitment and promotion processes and structural barriers limiting women's access to resources and professional networks (Galsanjimed & Sekiguchi, 2023; Jennings & Tonoyan, 2022). Importantly, intersectional analyses have revealed that gender interacts with race, ethnicity and socio-economic status to produce compounded disadvantages for certain groups of women (Rosette et al., 2018; Owalla et al., 2021). These intersectional dynamics underscore the need for nuanced, context-specific interventions rather than one-size-fits-all approaches.

Determinants of Women's Technology Career Aspirations

Several determinants have been identified in the literature as shaping women's aspirations towards technology careers. Access to quality STEM education and skill development opportunities has been established as a foundational determinant, with evidence suggesting that early exposure to technology education significantly increases the likelihood of women pursuing technology careers (Wang & Degol, 2017; Cheryan et al., 2017). Mentorship and the availability of visible female role models represent a second critical determinant; studies demonstrate that exposure to successful women entrepreneurs and mentors positively influences young women's self-efficacy and career intentions in technology (Botha, 2020; Jan et al., 2023; Theaker, 2023). A third set of determinants pertains to societal and cultural norms, including gender stereotypes that frame technology and entrepreneurship as inherently masculine pursuits (Olsson & Martiny, 2018). These stereotypes may discourage women from aspiring to technology careers or create additional psychological and structural barriers for those who do. What remains less well understood, however, is how these determinants operate differentially across geographical contexts - a gap that the present study addresses.

Barriers to Women's Participation and the Digital Divide

The literature identifies several structural barriers that hinder women's participation in technology entrepreneurship. Access to venture capital and financial resources constitutes a primary barrier, with research consistently showing that women entrepreneurs face discrimination in financing processes (Kuschel et al., 2020). Professional networking deficits represent an additional barrier, as women entrepreneurs frequently lack access to the informal networks through which information, opportunities and resources flow (Theaker, 2023; Whitlock et al., 2023). Work-life balance challenges - stemming from the disproportionate burden of caregiving and household responsibilities borne by women - further constrain entrepreneurial engagement (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). Critically, the digital divide between urban and rural areas compounds these barriers for women in non-metropolitan settings, where limited access to broadband connectivity, technology devices and digital literacy programmes may further restrict exposure to technology-related career opportunities (Graves et al., 2021; Patel & Parmentier, 2005). This geographical dimension of disadvantage remains underexplored in the Indian context.

Interventions and Ecosystem Support

Recognising the barriers outlined above, the literature has also identified several categories of interventions designed to promote women's participation in technology entrepreneurship. Education and skill development programmes tailored to women's needs have been highlighted as foundational interventions (Sundarasan et al., 2023; Ahamad et al., 2016). Mentorship and networking initiatives that connect aspiring women entrepreneurs with established professionals have shown promise in building self-efficacy and providing access to resources (Whitlock et al., 2023). At the systemic level, policy interventions - including targeted funding programmes, diversity mandates and public campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes - have been advocated as essential complements to individual-level support (Guthridge et al., 2022; Tsakalerou et al., 2024). However, the literature suggests that interventions must be contextually adapted to the specific socio-economic and geographical conditions of the target population. The present study contributes to this understanding by examining how aspirational patterns vary across geographical contexts, thereby informing the design of geographically responsive interventions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section details the research design, sampling strategy, data collection procedures and analytical techniques employed in the study. The methodology was designed to enable systematic investigation of gender-based and geography-based variations in technology career aspirations among young Indians.

Research Design

A descriptive-analytical research design was adopted, following the methodological framework outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018) for quantitative survey-based research. The design integrates Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) with comparative statistical analysis to examine the distribution of and variations in technology

career aspirations. This approach was selected for its capacity to identify patterns and generate hypotheses regarding the relationships between demographic variables (gender, city type) and career aspiration outcomes.

Sampling and Data Collection

The primary dataset was obtained through a structured survey administered to approximately 3,500 young Indians aged 18–30 years across 20 Indian cities during 2019. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure balanced representation across two key stratification variables: gender (male/female) and city type (metropolitan/non-metropolitan). The sample included respondents from 8 metropolitan cities (including Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune, Kolkata and Ahmedabad) and 12 non-metropolitan cities across diverse geographical regions of India. Data collection was conducted through a combination of online survey platforms and offline paper-based questionnaires, achieving an overall response rate of approximately 72%. The survey instrument was informed by the theoretical framework on gender differences in entrepreneurial opportunity evaluation (Gupta et al., 2014) and was designed to elicit information on respondents' career aspirations with specific emphasis on their interest in technology-related fields.

Variables and Measures

The study examined the following variables: (a) Dependent variable: technology career aspiration category, operationalised as the respondent's stated interest in one of two technology domains - IT roles (app development, system analysis) or technology entrepreneurship (starting own technology business); (b) Independent variables: gender (male/female) and city type (metropolitan/non-metropolitan); (c) Control considerations: age range (18–30), geographical distribution across urban tiers. While the primary dataset did not capture additional socio-economic variables such as family income, parental education, or prior technology exposure - a limitation acknowledged in Section 7 - the stratified sampling design provides a structured basis for gender and geography comparisons.

Data Preparation and Quality Assurance

To ensure the accuracy, relevance and integrity of the analytical dataset, a rigorous data cleansing and preprocessing phase was undertaken, following established best practices in survey data preparation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This process involved the removal of incomplete responses and irrelevant metadata, standardisation of column nomenclature for analytical clarity and conversion of percentage values to integer data types to facilitate numerical computation (Canning et al., 2022). Data integrity checks were performed to identify and address missing values, outliers and inconsistencies.

Analytical Procedures

The analysis proceeded in two stages. **Stage 1: Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA)** involved examining the overall distribution of career aspirations across technology fields, gender categories and city types using descriptive statistics and data visualisation (Da Poian et al., 2023). Pie charts, bar graphs and stacked bar charts were generated to provide visual representations of distributional patterns. **Stage 2: Comparative Analysis** involved systematic comparison of aspiration percentages across gender and city type sub-groups (Rana & Singhal, 2015). Gender-based comparisons examined the percentage of male and female respondents aspiring to each technology career category, while city-type comparisons examined metropolitan versus non-metropolitan aspiration patterns. The analytical toolkit comprised Python 3.x with Pandas for data manipulation, Matplotlib and Seaborn for visualisation (Waskom, 2021), following the exploratory analytical paradigm described by Agarwal and Dhar (2014).

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles for survey-based research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection and responses were anonymised to protect participant confidentiality. The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the institutional ethics committee. No personally identifiable information was collected or retained in the analytical dataset.

Data Analysis and Results

The data analysis phase encompassed two sequential stages: Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) and Comparative Analysis. Both stages employed robust statistical methods and data visualisation techniques to identify patterns, disparities and trends within the dataset. The following subsections present the analytical procedures and their corresponding results.

Stage 1: Exploratory Data Analysis

Distribution of Technology Career Aspirations. The initial distribution analysis examined the spread of aspirations across the two primary technology career domains. As illustrated in Figure 1, IT-related careers (app development and system analysis) attracted the largest share of total interest (approximately 68%), while technology entrepreneurship accounted for approximately 38% of total expressed interest. This distribution suggests a strong overall orientation towards established IT career paths, with a substantial minority expressing entrepreneurial aspirations.

Figure 1: Distribution of Tech Career Aspirations

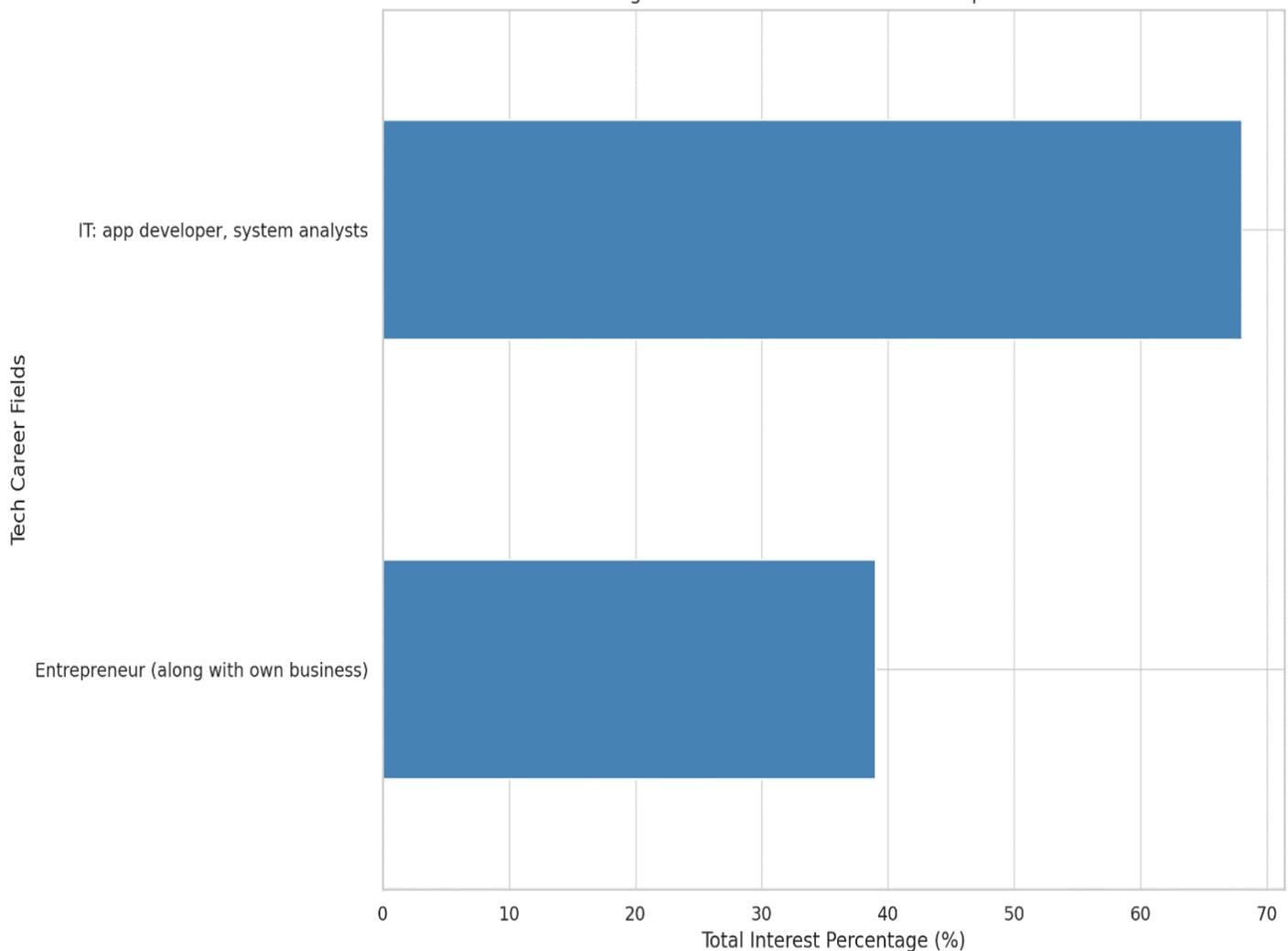


Figure 1: Distribution of Technology Career Aspirations

Gender and City Type Distribution. Further disaggregation of the data by gender and city type revealed differential aspiration patterns across demographic sub-groups (Figure 2). Male respondents constituted a larger proportion of those aspiring to IT careers, while the gender ratio was more balanced in the entrepreneurship category. City-type segmentation indicated that metropolitan respondents showed marginally higher concentration in IT roles, whereas non-metropolitan respondents demonstrated relatively stronger entrepreneurial orientation.



Figure 2: Distribution of Aspirations by Gender and City Type

Stage 2: Comparative Analysis

Gender-Based Comparison. The gender-based comparative analysis quantified the aspirational differences between male and female respondents across technology career categories. As presented in Figure 3, a higher percentage of male respondents (approximately 34%) expressed interest in IT careers such as app development and system analysis compared to their female counterparts (approximately 20%). Conversely, the gender gap was relatively narrower in the technology entrepreneurship domain, with male respondents at approximately 14% and female respondents at approximately 8%. These findings suggest that while gender disparities exist across both domains, the magnitude of disparity is substantially greater in specialised IT roles than in broader entrepreneurial categories.

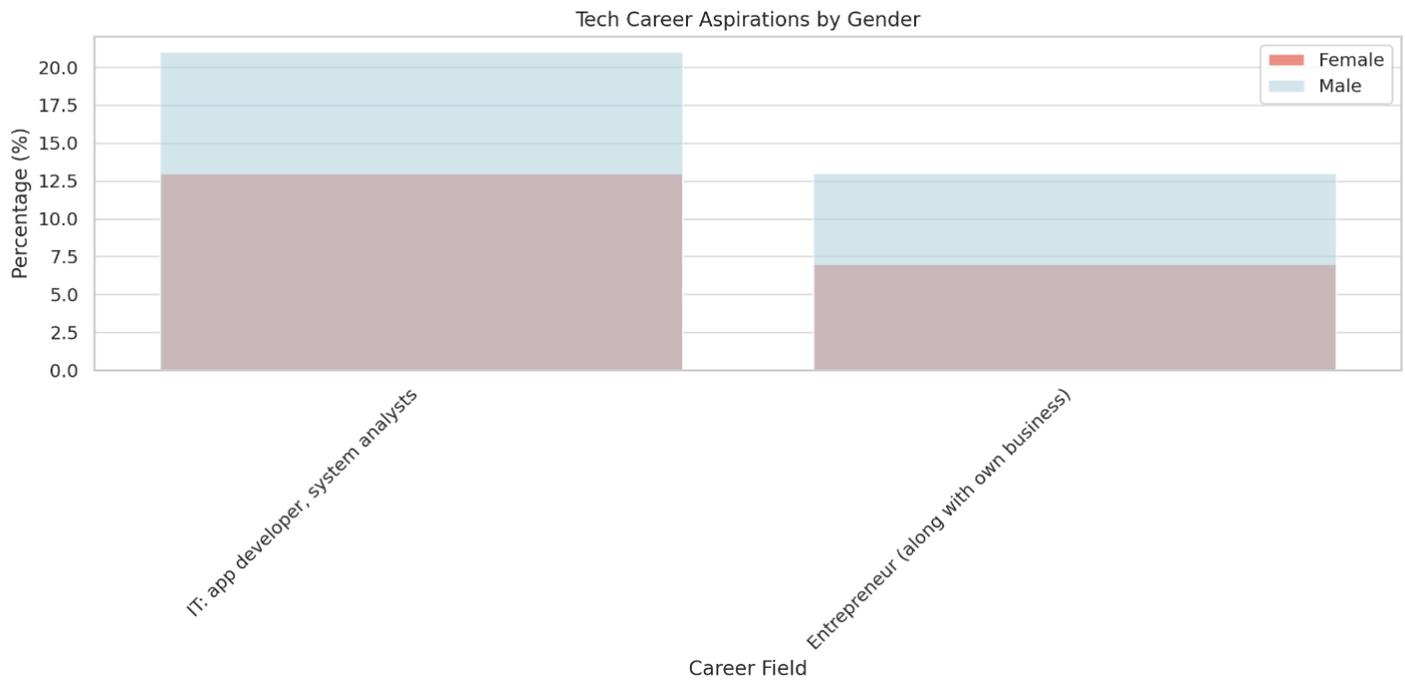


Figure 3: Gender-Based Comparison of Technology Career Aspirations

City Type-Based Comparison. The city type-based analysis examined how geographical context influences technology career aspirations. Figure 4 presents the comparative data for metropolitan and non-metropolitan respondents. Respondents from metropolitan areas showed marginally higher interest in specialised IT roles, consistent with the greater exposure to technological advancements and employment opportunities available in urban centres. In contrast, non-metropolitan respondents displayed a comparatively broader interest in technology entrepreneurship, suggesting a potential aspiration to leverage technology for venture creation in less urbanised settings where formal IT employment opportunities may be limited. This pattern is consistent with the digital divide framework, which predicts differential aspiration formation based on contextual resource availability.

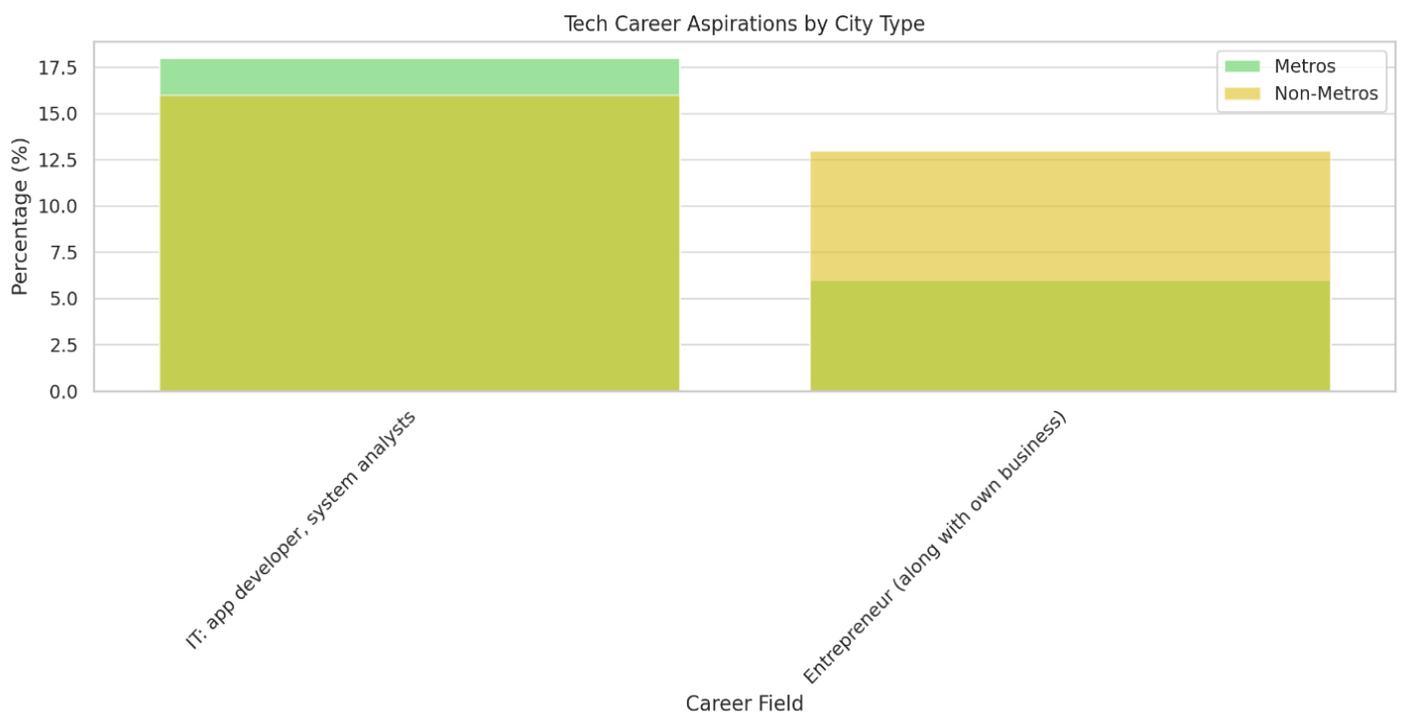


Figure 4: City Type-Based Comparison of Technology Career Aspirations

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The comprehensive analysis yielded four principal findings that address the research questions and contribute to the existing literature:

Finding 1: Significant Gender Disparities in IT Career Aspirations. Male respondents exhibited substantially higher interest in specialised IT roles (34% vs. 20%) compared to female respondents, indicating a persistent gender gap in technology career aspirations that aligns with gender socialisation theory predictions (Wang & Degol, 2017; Cheryan et al., 2017).

Finding 2: Narrower Gender Gap in Technology Entrepreneurship. The gender disparity was notably smaller in the technology entrepreneurship domain (14% male vs. 8% female), suggesting that entrepreneurial aspirations may be less constrained by traditional gender-role expectations than aspirations towards specific technical roles.

Finding 3: Geographical Moderation of Aspirational Patterns. Metropolitan respondents showed higher orientation towards specialised IT careers, while non-metropolitan respondents demonstrated broader interest in technology entrepreneurship, consistent with digital divide and ecosystem availability effects (Graves et al., 2021).

Finding 4: Widespread Entrepreneurial Interest Across Demographics. A robust level of entrepreneurial aspiration was observed across both gender and city type categories, reflecting the growing entrepreneurial culture in India's technology ecosystem (NASSCOM, 2019; Subrahmanya, 2021).

DISCUSSION

The findings illuminate several critical dimensions of young Indians' technology career aspirations, revealing the interplay of gender socialisation, geographical context and entrepreneurial ecosystem factors. This section interprets the results within the conceptual framework and situates them in relation to the existing literature.

Gender Disparities and Socialisation Effects

The observed gender disparities in IT career aspirations are consistent with the predictions of gender socialisation theory and corroborate findings from prior research documenting the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields globally (Cheryan et al., 2017; Wang & Degol, 2017). The substantially lower interest among female respondents in specialised IT roles may reflect the persistence of cultural stereotypes that frame technology careers as inherently masculine domains (Olsson & Martiny, 2018). These stereotypes, internalised through socialisation processes, may constrain women's self-efficacy beliefs and career aspirations in technology. Importantly, research has demonstrated that diverse teams, including those with gender diversity, are associated with greater innovation and financial performance (Post et al., 2021). The underutilisation of women's potential in technology thus represents not only an equity concern but also an innovation deficit.

The comparatively narrower gender gap in technology entrepreneurship aspirations is an intriguing finding that warrants further investigation. One possible interpretation is that entrepreneurship, as a career pathway, may be perceived as offering greater flexibility and autonomy - qualities that could be particularly attractive to women navigating work-family balance considerations (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). Alternatively, the growing visibility of women entrepreneurs in India's startup ecosystem may be creating aspirational role models that specifically encourage entrepreneurial orientations (Botha, 2020; Jan et al., 2023). These findings suggest that interventions to promote women's participation in technology could productively emphasise entrepreneurial pathways alongside traditional employment routes.

Geographical Context and the Digital Divide

The differential aspiration patterns between metropolitan and non-metropolitan respondents are consistent with the digital divide framework and highlight the contextual embeddedness of career aspiration formation.

Metropolitan respondents' greater orientation towards specialised IT roles may reflect their superior access to digital infrastructure, technology education and IT industry employment opportunities (Graves et al., 2021). Conversely, the broader entrepreneurial orientation observed among non-metropolitan respondents could indicate an aspiration to create technology-based ventures in underserved markets where formal IT employment is scarce (Patel & Parmentier, 2005; Lall et al., 2004). This finding has important policy implications, suggesting that interventions should be geographically differentiated: metropolitan areas may benefit from programmes that diversify technology career awareness, particularly among women, while non-metropolitan areas may require entrepreneurial ecosystem support complemented by digital infrastructure development.

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Implications

The widespread entrepreneurial aspiration across demographics reflects and reinforces India's position as the third-largest startup ecosystem globally (NASSCOM, 2019; Subrahmanya, 2021). This finding suggests that the institutional and cultural conditions for technology entrepreneurship are increasingly conducive, driven by factors such as digital adoption, supportive government policies and an expanding entrepreneurial role-model effect (Tripathi & Oivo, 2020; Biney, 2023). However, translating aspirations into venture creation requires addressing the structural barriers identified in the literature - particularly access to early-stage funding, mentorship networks and business development support (Rocha & Grilli, 2023; Nanda & Rhodes-Kropf, 2013). The findings suggest that ecosystem development efforts should be particularly attentive to the needs of women and non-metropolitan entrepreneurs, who may face compounded barriers to venture realisation.

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. First, the study relies on self-reported aspirations, which may be subject to social desirability bias and may not fully predict actual career choices; future research could adopt longitudinal designs to track aspiration-to-action trajectories. Second, the dataset does not capture additional socio-economic variables - including family income, parental education, prior technology exposure and access to digital infrastructure - that may mediate or moderate the observed relationships; the incorporation of such variables in future studies could deepen the analysis substantially. Third, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences; the observed gender and geographical differences in aspirations should be interpreted as associational patterns. Fourth, the conceptual framework, while integrating three relevant theoretical perspectives, was not empirically tested through structural equation modelling or similar techniques; future research could operationalise and test the proposed relationships more rigorously.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Building upon the findings and limitations of this study, several directions for future research are recommended. First, longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of technology career aspirations from adolescence through early career stages would provide valuable insights into aspiration formation and realisation processes. Second, qualitative research - including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with young women aspiring to technology careers - could complement the quantitative findings by elucidating the lived experiences, motivations and barriers underlying aspirational patterns. Third, future studies should incorporate additional variables such as socio-economic background, access to digital infrastructure, family support structures and prior entrepreneurial exposure to enable more nuanced analyses of the determinants of technology career aspirations. Fourth, the impact of emerging technologies - including artificial intelligence, blockchain and cloud computing - on career aspiration patterns represents a rapidly evolving area that warrants dedicated investigation. Finally, cross-national comparative studies examining technology career aspirations across developing economies could yield insights into the transferability of findings and the contextual specificity of gender-geography interactions.

CONCLUSION

This study has made a substantive contribution to the understanding of technology career aspirations among young Indians, revealing the differential influence of gender and geographical context on aspirational patterns. The findings demonstrate that gender disparities persist in specialised IT career aspirations, that the gender gap is comparatively narrower for technology entrepreneurship and that geographical context moderates aspiration

formation in ways consistent with digital divide and ecosystem theories. These insights carry important implications for policymakers, educators and industry stakeholders: targeted interventions to address gender stereotypes in technology education, geographically differentiated ecosystem support for technology entrepreneurship and investment in digital infrastructure for non-metropolitan areas are all indicated by the evidence presented.

As India's technology ecosystem continues to expand and evolve, understanding and nurturing the aspirations of its diverse youth population - particularly women and those in non-metropolitan areas - will be essential for realising the full innovation potential of the country's human capital. The aspirations documented in this study represent a significant reservoir of entrepreneurial intent; translating these aspirations into successful ventures and fulfilling careers requires concerted action across the policy, education and industry spheres. It is hoped that the evidence and insights presented here will contribute to more informed and effective efforts to build a technology ecosystem that is inclusive, equitable and responsive to the diverse aspirations of India's young people.

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