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Integrating Sustainability into MSME Practices in India: Global Perspectives and Policy Pathways

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Abstract

Sustainability has become a fundamental aspect of business strategy, and its adoption is crucial for the long-term success of large business houses as well as Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), mainly in developing economies like India. This study employs an exploratory and descriptive research design to explore and analyses global efforts towards sustainability, identifying key trends, practices, and strategies that can be applied to Indian MSMEs. Through this approach, the paper explores how sustainability can be effectively integrated into MSME operations in India, considering both global and local contexts. The research also delves into the role of the Indian government in fostering sustainable practices within the MSME sector, reviewing various policies and initiatives aimed at encouraging environmental, social, and economic sustainability. By synthesizing global perspectives and examining Indian government interventions, this paper provides valuable insights and practical recommendations for MSMEs to adopt sustainable business models, enhance their competitiveness, and contribute to India's broader sustainability goals. Ultimately, the study emphasizes the essential nature of sustainability for Indian MSMEs and outlines pathways for their successful integration into the global sustainable economy.

Keywords: SDGs, Sustainable Practices, Developing Economies & MSMEs.

Introduction

As Mahatma Gandhi once stated, “India lives in her villages, and unless we rebuild the village economy, the nation as a whole cannot be rebuilt.” From the time of Independence and even earlier India has worked on a holistic vision of development, where growth, secularism, equality, and sustainability are not just ideals but foundational principles. Long before the world awakened to the concept of sustainability and inclusive growth, India had already included these values deep within the soul of its Constitution. From the very beginning, our focus has been clear the empowerment of the grassroots through the development of indigenous and cottage based industries. One of the most iconic example of this inclusive growth is “Khadi” it is not just a fabric, but a symbol of self-reliance, dignity, and sustainable livelihoods. India's journey was never just about industrial growth it has always been about the spirit of accepting the nation from its roots.

India will celebrate its 78th Independence on 15th August 2025, In these 78 years of all-round development today India proudly holds the distinction of having the largest number of registered MSMEs in the world. In terms of sheer numbers, we are leading the global stage. However, despite these bold numbers, there still exist certain critical gaps within the MSME sector specifically in the context of social sustainability.

Social sustainability, from the point of MSMEs industry, refers to building an inclusive and equitable societal environment, where these industries will become the part of social transformation. MSMEs industry drive these changes because they operate at the grassroots levels, and they engage directly with local communities, traditions, and human capital. These enterprises often include the power of local culture and traditional skills, which plays a vital role in preserving community identities and helping to sustain for tomorrow cultural sustainability.

The current research work is an attempt to explore the dynamic intersection of sustainability (Social Sustainability) and the MSME sector in India. The aim is to explore how the intersection of these two aspects drives an inclusive economy. The paper attempts to make a combined analysis of both global and local contexts for the integration of the MSME sector and sustainability. Furthermore, the paper aims to explore the impact of government initiatives on the MSME sector's social sustainability.

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Literature Review

(Khurana, Luthra, Haleem, & Kumar, 2022)

Under the research work the researcher has used descriptive methodology to elaborate the causal relationship between sustainability capabilities at the organizational level through the structural equation modelling method, for the same the research work uses primary data collected from 301 respondent including the owner and the managers of the enterprises, the study reveals that government initiatives influence firm size and technological resources significantly, and financial resources have a significant influence on collaboration capability.

(Lahiri & Banerjee, 2019) Under the Paper the Researcher has used descriptive methodology, the research aims to identify factors that are responsible for development of sustainable brands of MSME sector, the study is based upon primary data selected from 61 sampling unit of specific MSMEs, a total 193 interview from the selected 61 Sample unit were being conducted and upon the same Exploratory Factorial analysis and regression analysis was being performed, the result showcase that there is a limited socio economic acceptance of entrepreneurs in India

(Afdal, Siwi, Kurniawati, & Marwan, 2021) The paper is based upon the summary of previous literatures in relation to linking sustainability with MSMEs. The paper highlights business sustainability is a component of the national economy and contributes substantially to employment, The adoption and optimization of digital companies and product innovation are two supporting elements for achieving company continuity.

(Farajollahzadeh, Noorinasab, & Yazdanpanah, 2016) Under the report the researcher has used descriptive research methodology in order to describe the economic contribution of MSME sector in India, the paper is based upon secondary data mainly collected from the official websites of MSME India the paper highlights that although there is increasing trend in MSME contribution in India but the Sector is still facing technological upgradations, the work highlights that from the side of government there is a need to fill this technological gap and also remove roadblocks (Mainly Regulations) to enable a greater thrust to overall growth and development of the MSME in India.

Research Methodology

Research Gap

While there exists, considerable literature working upon the description of MSME contribution in economy and the evaluating the sustainable marketing impact on consumer perception but there still lies a gap

Pre UDYAM	COVID ERA (UDYAM Implementation ERA)	POST UDYAM
2015-16	2019-20	2021-22
2016-17	2020-21	2022- 23
2017-18	--	2023-24
2018-19	--	--

Data Analysis Techniques

The overall data analysis is divided into three stages i.e. 1) 10 Year Growth Trend Momentum stage. At this stage the past trend momentum is analyzed by the

of evaluating the integration of MSME sector in India with sustainable and holistic development.

Research Objectives

- To determine the difference in Contribution of MSME in Economy between the study period.
- To evaluate the disparity in Women participation in MSME between the study period (SDG-08 & 5.5)
- To assess the variations in Economic contribution by MSME between the study period (SDG 8.1 & 8.2)
- To analyze the difference in the Export contribution by MSME during the period of study (SDG 9.3 & 17.11).

Research Hypotheses

- **H0:** There is no significant difference in the MSME registration during the study period.
H1: There is a significant difference in the MSME registration during the study period.
- **H0:** There is no significant difference in Women participation during the study period.
H1: There is a significant difference in Women participation during the study period.
- **H0:** There is no significant difference in the GDP contribution of MSME during the study period.
H1: There is a significant difference in the GDP contribution of MSME during the study period.
- **H0:** There is no significant difference in the Export contribution of MSME during the study period.
H1: There is a significant difference in the Export contribution of MSME during the study period.

Research Design (Exploratory Design)

Exploratory research is being performed to analysis the contribution of MSME is sustainable and inclusive growth this sustainability is measured on the basis of four aspect growth in entrepreneurship (leading to self-employment), Women participation economic contribution, export contribution.

Data Collection Methods

This research work is mainly based on secondary data from annual reports, industry reports and governments confirmations through PIB, due to certain data unavailability some data points are being estimated using the past data points and data patterns.

Period of the Study

For the purpose of analysis 10-year period is being selected from 2014-15 to 2024-25 the data period for further analysis is grouped into three parts which is represented through the table below:

researcher using the tabular and graphical presentations, the growth momentum is compared using absolute and percentage growth. 2) Statistical Analysis Stage. At this stage Single Factor ANOVA is

implemented to test the difference in the data sets and to prove the research objectives. 3) Direction of Difference Stage. At this the direction of difference is

Data Analysis & Interpretation

Analysis of Global Momentum

Country	Year	Number of Enterprises (Estimated Including Registered and Non- Registered)	Employment Generation	Women-Owned Enterprises Approx. Percentage
		MSMEs	MSMEs	MSME
Brazil	2021	19.3 million	52 million	34
Mexico	2021	4.1 million	16.2 million	36
Turkey	2021	3.2 million	10.2 million	13
Vietnam	2021	0.8 million	5.6 million	21
India	2024	73.4 million	120.6 million	39
Indonesia	2021	64.2 million	117 million	64

Table 1: Table showing analysis of Global Momentum

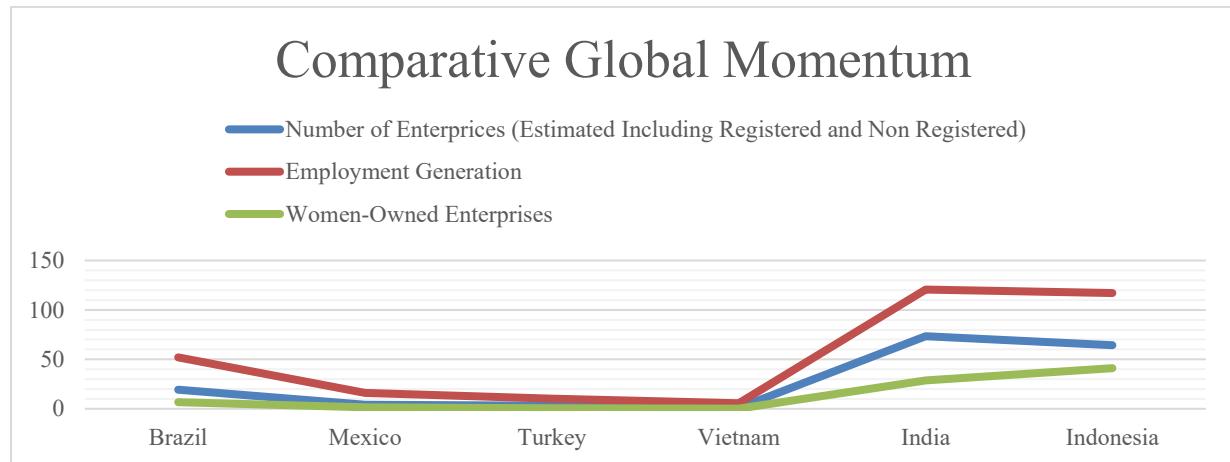


Figure 1: Comparative Global Momentum

Interpretation

It is abundantly clear from the data that India holds a commanding position in the global MSME landscape. With over 39 million MSMEs officially registered and contributing significantly to employment generation, exports, and innovation, India stands as a global powerhouse in this sector. The scale, diversity, and economic impact of Indian MSMEs are unmatched across most emerging economies.

Analysis of 10 Year Indian Growth Trend Momentum (Registration)

Total MSME Registered till 2023-24				
Year	MSME Registered on UDYAM	Absolute Growth	Percentage Growth	Total Cumulative MSME
2015-16	495013	Base	Base	495013
2016-17	2373058	1878045	379.39	2868071
2017-18	1517455	-855603	-36.05	4385526
2018-19	2121545	604090	39.81	6507071
2019-20	1863376	-258169	-12.17	8370447
2020-21	2847544	984168	52.82	11217991
2021-22	5147993	2300449	80.79	16365984
2022-23	8582179	3434186	66.71	24948163
2023-24	15027865	6445686	75.11	39976028
Total MSME Registered till 2023-24	39976028			

Table 2: Summary Table based upon the combine data of PIB and MSME Annual Report

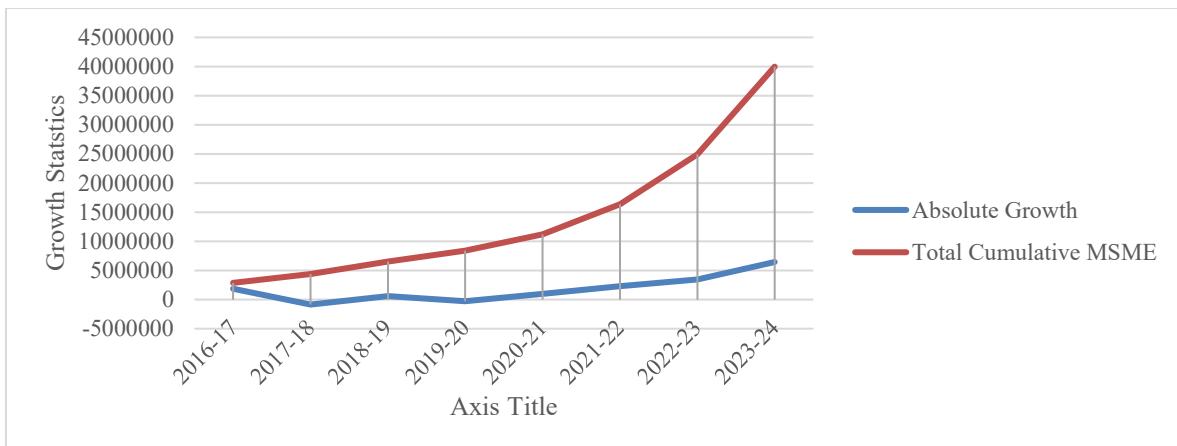


Figure 2: Excel Generated Figure

Interpretation

- During the period of past 10 years there seems to be a robust growth in the MSME Sectors the main reason of growth seems to be the policy and change in approach from the side of government.
- The years 2016 -18 are heat posture of the data where in the year 2016 there is a sharp rise in the registration this may be due to the initiative like Digital India and Startup India, on the other hand

in the year 2018 GST rollout has degraded the growth.

- Although growth started earlier but the year 2020 shapes itself as a turning point in the data with constant and steady growth in the registrations, this may be due to UDYAM initiative.
- Overall MSME registrations show an overall exponential growth trend, with some minor setbacks in 2017-18 and 2019-20.

Gender Based Classification of MSME

Gender Based Classification of MSME				
Year	Male	Female	Others	Total
2015	17335	2794	474884	495013
2016	180091	48665	2144302	2373058
2017	1176437	341018	--	1517455
2018	1666510	455035	--	2121545
2019	1464005	399371	--	1863376
2020	8813677	2404314	--	11217991
2021*	12858319	3507665	--	16365984
2022*	19601109	5347054	--	24948163
2023	31408103	8567925	--	39976028

Table 3: Summary Table based upon the Combine data set of Press Information bureau and MSME Annual Report

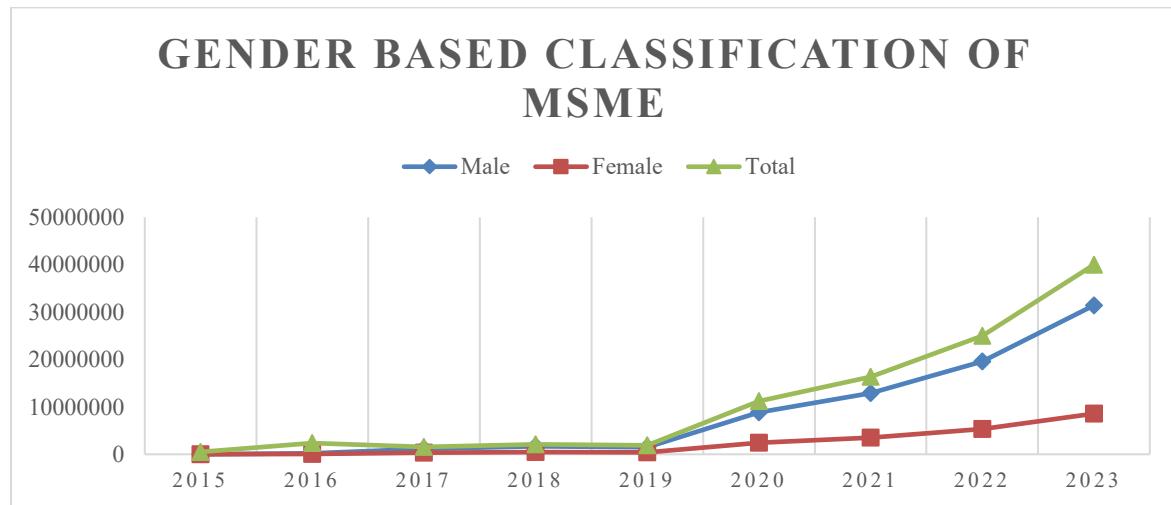


Figure 3: Gender Based Classification of MSME

Interpretation

- Currently India has a male domination in the MSME sector however it is very important to note that 2794 female in 2015 currently India has 8.56

lakh registration this indicate a significant growth in women participation.

- From the year 2019-20 there is a rapid growth in both male and female registered MSME's this rapid growth is the result of various combined government initiative including UDYAM, Skill India.
- Female participation is increasing however the percentage growth of female participation is relatively low this somewhere indicate the challenge of gender disparity.
- year 2021 & 2022 the data points are estimated this estimation is done through the last years' data parts.

MSME Contributions in Economies Growth

Year	MSME Registered on UDYAM	Absolute Growth	% Growth	Share of MSME in GDP of India	Absolute Growth	% Growth	% Share of Export of MSME Related Product	Absolute Growth	% Growth
2015	495013	Base	Base	29.34	Base	Base	44.76	Base	Base
2016	2373058	1878045	379.393	29.48	0.14	0.4772	49.86	5.1	11.39
2017	1517455	-855603	-36.055	29.25	-0.23	-0.7802	48.1	-1.76	-3.53
2018	2121545	604090	39.809	29.7	0.45	1.5385	48.1	0	0.00
2019	1863376	-258169	-12.169	30.5	0.8	2.6936	49.75	1.65	3.43
2020	2847544	984168	52.816	30.5	0	0.0000	49.35	-0.4	-0.80
2021	5147993	2300449	80.787	27.3	-3.2	-10.4918	45.03	-4.32	-8.75
2022	8582179	3434186	66.709	29.6	2.3	8.4249	45.59	0.56	1.24
2023	15027865	6445686	75.105	30.1	0.5	1.6892	45.73	0.14	0.31

Table 4: Excel Generated Descriptive Statistics table

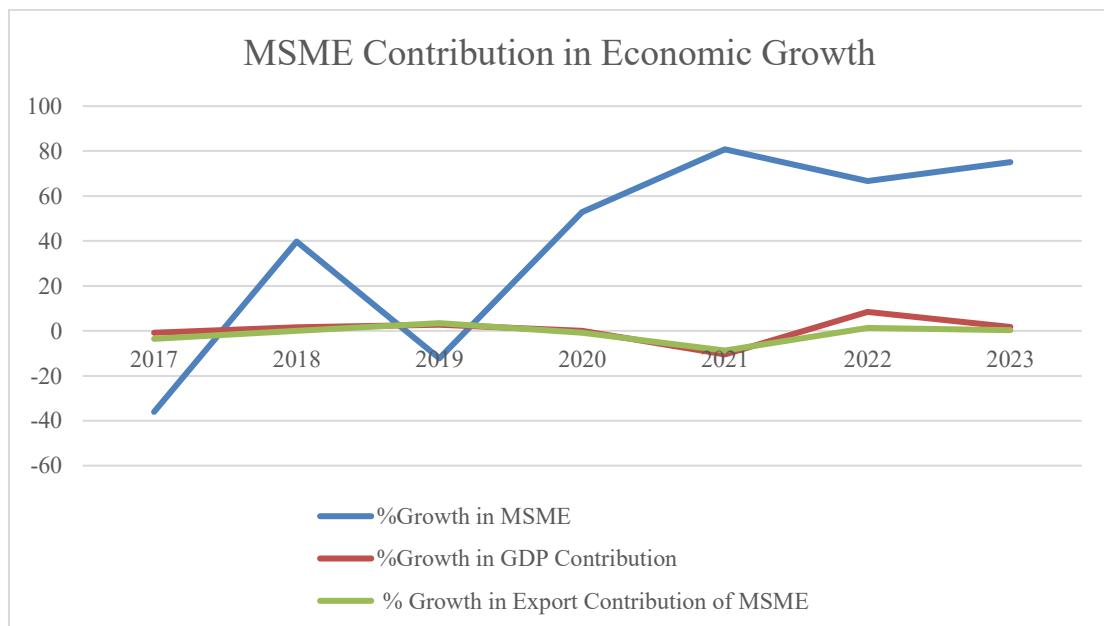


Figure 4: Contribution of MSME in Economic Growth

Interpretation

- Despite MSME explosive growth, economic impact of MSME fluctuated narrowly indicating limited translation of registration to output or productivity this suggest that there are certain lags in government initiatives.
- Export contribution of MSME is falling as in 2016 it was 49.86 currently it is 45.73%, the drop can be a combined effect of COVID-19 and other Geopolitical aspects.
- The growth of MSME didn't give a proportional rise in the GDP growth and export growth, this

indicate that there is a rise in informal or non performing MSME that are registered but are economically inactive.

Stage 2: Statistical Analysis

- ANOVA Application for understanding difference in MSME registration Hypothesis

H_0 : There is no significant difference in the MSME registrations during the study period.

H_1 : There is a significant difference in the MSME registrations during the study period.

**ANOVA: Single Factor
SUMMARY**

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Pre UDYAM	4	6507071	1626767.8	6.98191E+11
COVID ERA	2	4710920	2355460	4.84293E+11
Post UDYAM	3	28758037	9586012.3	2.51587E+13

Table 5: Summary Table of MSME Registrations

ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	1.19792E+14	2	5.9896E+13	6.79397	0.02874	5.14325
Within Groups	5.28963E+13	6	8.8161E+12			
Total	1.72688E+14	8				

Table 6: Excel Generated ANOVA Table

The above table shows that the calculated p-value is 0.02874 which is less than 0.05 i.e. At 5% level with d.f. being v1=2 and v2=6, the above analysis rejects the null hypothesis of no difference in the means. Hence, we may therefore conclude that there is a significant difference between the MSME registration during the study period.

2. ANOVA Application for understanding difference in women participation in MSME:

Hypothesis

H_0 : There is no Significant difference in the Women Participation during the Study Period.

H_1 : There is a Significant difference in the Women Participation during the Study Period.

**ANOVA: Single Factor
SUMMARY**

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Pre UDYAM Women Participation	4	847512	211878	48719022891
COVID ERA Women Participation	2	2803685	1401842.3	2.0099E+12
Post UDYAM Women participation	3	17422645	5807548.3	6.5606E+12

Table 7: Summary Table of Women Participation in MSME

ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	5.59475E+13	2	2.7974E+13	10.9864	0.00987	5.14325
Within Groups	1.52773E+13	6	2.5462E+12			
Total	7.12248E+13	8				

Table 8: Excel Generated ANOVA Table

The above table shows that the calculated p-value is 0.00987 which is less than 0.05, so at 5% level with d.f. being v1=2 and v2=6, the above analysis rejects the null hypothesis of no difference in the means. Hence, we may therefore conclude that there is a significant difference between the women participation during the study period.

3. ANOVA Application for understanding difference in GDP contribution

Hypothesis

H_0 : There is no significant difference in the average GDP contribution among the three-study period.

H_1 : There is a significant difference in the average GDP contribution among the three-study period.

**ANOVA: Single Factor
SUMMARY**

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Pre UDYAM GDP Contribution	4	117.77	29.4425	0.038425
COVID ERA GDP Contribution	2	61	30.5	0
Post UDYAM GDP Contribution	3	87	29	2.23

Table 9: Summary Table of GDP Contribution

ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	2.755125	2	1.3775625	1.80653	0.24315	5.14325
Within Groups	4.575275	6	0.76254583			
Total	7.3304	8				

Table 10: Excel Generated ANOVA table

The above table shows that the calculated p value is 0.24315 which is more than 0.0.5, so at 5% level with d.f. being v1=2 and v2=6, the above analysis accepts the null hypothesis of no difference in the means. Hence, we may therefore conclude that there is a no significant difference in the average GDP contribution across the three period of the study.

4. ANOVA Application for understanding difference in Export contribution

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant difference in the average Export contribution among the three-study period.

H₁: There is a significant difference in the average Export contribution among the three-study period.

ANOVA: Single Factor

SUMMARY

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Pre UDYAM Export Contribution	4	190.82	47.705	4.543033333
COVID ERA Export Contribution	2	99.1	49.55	0.08
Post UDYAM Export Contribution	3	136.35	45.45	0.1372

Table 11: Summary Table of Export Contribution

ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	21.0125	2	10.50625	4.50799	0.0638	5.14325
Within Groups	13.9835	6	2.33058333			
Total	34.996	8				

Table 12: Excel Generated ANOVA Table

The above table shows that the calculated p-value is 0.24315 which is more than 0.0.5, so at 5% level with d.f. being v1=2 and v2=6, the above analysis accepts the null-hypothesis of no difference in the means. Hence, we may therefore conclude that there is a no significant difference in the average export contribution across the three period of the study.

Stage 3: Testing the Direction of Difference

From the above ANOVA analysis, the researcher has found that there lies a significant difference in the MSME registration growth and in women's participation in the MSME sector. For further analysis, it is also important to explore the direction of these differences, so in this part of the research, the researcher has performed a post-hoc test, specifically Tukey's HSD (Honestly Significant Difference) test, to explore this direction.

A) For MSME Registration

MS Within	8.81605E+12
Groups	3
df within	6
Significance Level	0.05
q Value From Tukey Table	4.34

Table 13: Table showing MSME Registration

Honestly Significant Difference

$$HSD = q \cdot \sqrt{\frac{MS_{\text{within}}}{n}}$$

Where:

q value from Tukey Table is 4.34

MS within is 8.81605E+12

n = Harmonic Mean of 4, 2, 3 (i.e. 2.7692308) as sample size per group is different.

So, HSD:

$$4.34 \cdot \sqrt{\frac{8.8 \times 10^{12}}{2.77}}$$

= 7,740,000

Comparison of Pairwise Mean difference

Group	Mean	Comparison	Mean Difference	HSD Value	Significant
Pre UDYAM	1626767.8	Pre UDYAM VS COVID ERA	728692.25	7,740,000	Not Significant

COVID ERA	2355460	COVID ERA VS Post UDYAM	7230552.33	7,740,000	Not Significant
Post UDYAM	9586012.3	Pre UDYAM VS Post UDYAM	7959244.58	7,740,000	Significant

Table 14: Table showing comparison of Pairwise Mean difference

Interpretation

- From the above table, it is evident that the most significant difference in MSME registration lies in the *post-UDYAM* period, clearly indicating that the UDYAM initiative has had a profound and measurable impact on driving formal registrations. This surge reflects a transformative shift in how micro, small, and medium enterprises are engaging with formal economic structures post-2020.
- The marked increase in registration is not just a statistical change—it underscores the effectiveness of government-led reforms in

empowering the MSME sector, enhancing transparency, and integrating these enterprises into the mainstream economy. These outcomes directly contribute to Sustainable Development Goal 8.3, which emphasizes the need to promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, and the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, as well as SDG 9.3, which seeks to increase the access of small-scale enterprises to financial services and integration into value chains and markets.

B) For Women Participation	
MS Within	2.33058333
Groups	3
df within	6
Significance Level	0.05
q Value From Tukey Table	4.34

Table 15: Table showing Women's Participation

Honestly Significant Difference

$$HSD = q \cdot \sqrt{\frac{MS_{\text{within}}}{n}}$$

Where:

q value from Tukey Table is 4.34

MS within is 2.33058333

n = Harmonic Mean of 4, 2, 3 (i.e. 2.7692308) as sample size per group is different.

So, HSD:

$$4.34 \cdot \sqrt{\frac{2.5462 \times 10^{12}}{2.769}}$$

= 4,163,494

Comparison of Pairwise Mean difference

Group	Mean	Comparison	Mean Difference	HSD Value	Significance
Pre UDYAM	211878	Pre UDYAM VS COVID ERA	-1189964.31	4,163,494	Not Significant
COVID ERA	1401842.3	COVID ERA VS Post UDYAM	-4405706.01	4,163,494	Significant
Post UDYAM	5807548.3	Pre UDYAM VS Post UDYAM	-5595670.32	4,163,494	Significant

Table 16: Table showing comparison of Pairwise Mean difference

Interpretation

- From the above table, it is evident that the most significant increase in women's participation in MSMEs occurred during the post-UDYAM period. The difference between post-UDYAM and both the pre-UDYAM and COVID-ERA periods is statistically significant, highlighting a transformative shift in the economic engagement

of women entrepreneurs following the implementation of the UDYAM initiative.

- This notable growth is not merely quantitative; it underscores the effectiveness of government interventions aimed at improving access, visibility, and support for women-led enterprises. The transition marks a broader systemic change, where structural barriers are being reduced and

- digital platforms are enabling greater female inclusion in the formal economy.
- These outcomes strongly contribute to multiple Sustainable Development Goals:
 - ✓ SDG 5.5: By ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership in economic life, UDYAM supports the gender-inclusive growth agenda.
 - ✓ SDG 8.3: Through promoting development-oriented policies that support entrepreneurship and the formalization of MSMEs, especially those led by women.
 - ✓ SDG 8.5: By advancing full and productive employment and equal pay for work of equal value, particularly through the formal integration of women in MSMEs.
 - ✓ SDG 9.3: By improving access for small-scale enterprises, including women-owned businesses, to financial services and value chains.

Findings & Recommendations

Key Findings

- The above research finds that in the recent few years there is a accelerated holistic growth in the MSME sectors, both male and female participation has increased significantly.
- It is important to note the UDYAM & digitalization initiative has a positive impact both upon the MSME registration and on women participation.
- Deregulation is positively impacting the MSME sector, and this impact can be easily observable through MSME Registration.
- The research also uncovers a critical lag between economically beneficial and non-beneficial MSMEs, as evidenced by the non-significant impact on GDP contribution. This disparity suggests that while MSME registrations and participation are rising, their translation into tangible economic output remains uneven.
- This lag could be attributed to disruptive factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and evolving geopolitical tensions. However, it also signals an urgent call for targeted policy interventions.
- The export contribution of MSMEs is grappling with stagnation and even negative growth likely driven by limited global market traction and a lack of industry-wide innovation.

Recommendations

- The government must proactively address this lag effect—through strategic financial support, capability building, and market integration—to unlock the full potential of MSMEs as engines of inclusive and sustained economic growth.
- Initiatives like *Skill India* hold transformative potential to reverse the trend of stagnation and negative growth in export. To truly execute change, the government must intensify the implementation of Skill India at the grassroots level—especially within local colleges and entrepreneurial ecosystems. By equipping youth with globally relevant, innovation-driven skills, India can not only revitalize MSME exports but

also position its small enterprises as dynamic players on the international stage.

- Although the Women participation is increasing but the rate of increase is low to modest as compared to the Male participation government can by financial assistance and non-financial assistance can improve this rate of participation.
- Regular and robust data tracking is a powerful enabler of holistic and inclusive growth. By strengthening mechanisms for real-time monitoring, the government can identify and nurture economically high-performing MSME sectors with precision. Targeted financial and non-financial support to these segments will not only drive sectoral growth but also significantly uplift the morale of innovative entrepreneurs. Empowering data-driven decisions is not just smart governance—it is the catalyst for a thriving, innovation-led MSME ecosystem.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that MSME in India has a huge potential to make the development of India inclusive and holistic, the women participation hike in the recent few years highlights this potential, while there still lies some gaps regarding the technological adoption of MSME sector and the Export participation but government can improve all the aspects through strategical planning and local participation, data tracking for financial and non-financial incentive to performing entrepreneur can be one of these prominent ideas, further it is important to provide the youth specific skills for entrepreneurial development these skills should be a part of formal learning which integrated the concept of holistic education of Mahatma Gandhi.

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Nil.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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