

Navigating the Legal Landscape: Rights Awareness and Success in Migrant Entrepreneurship

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Abstract: Legal awareness, which includes knowledge of personal, economic, political, cultural, and social rights, plays a fundamental role in entrepreneurial success yet remains underexplored in the context of migrant entrepreneurship. This study examines how multidimensional legal awareness influences the perceived entrepreneurial success of interstate migrant entrepreneurs in Kerala, India. Drawing on Institutional Theory, legal awareness is conceptualized as a vital internal competency that reduces uncertainty, facilitates strategic decisionmaking, and enhances access to institutional resources. Using a quantitative survey of 298 migrant entrepreneurs, the study employs Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze the direct effects of different legal-rights dimensions on entrepreneurial success perceptions. The findings reveal that legal awareness significantly contributes to entrepreneurs' ability to navigate complex regulatory environments, build social legitimacy, and sustain their ventures. Economic rights awareness emerges as a particularly strong driver by providing entrepreneurs with protections that underpin business stability and innovation. Cultural and personal rights also play crucial roles by fostering community acceptance and ensuring operational autonomy. Political and social rights, while less direct, empower entrepreneurs to engage with governance and maintain resilience through social inclusion. This research advances Institutional Theory by demonstrating that knowledge of formal legal rights is not merely contextual background but a key resource actively leveraged by migrant entrepreneurs to achieve success. The study provides practical insights for policymakers and support organizations, highlighting the importance of targeted legal education, culturally informed entrepreneurship programs, and accessible legal resources to empower migrant entrepreneurs in emerging economies. These findings contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the legal dimensions of entrepreneurial success and offer actionable strategies for fostering inclusive and resilient migrant entrepreneurship.

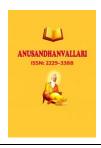
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1. Introduction

Legal awareness plays a critical role in the entrepreneurial success of businesses in India, especially by helping entrepreneurs navigate the nation's complex legal and regulatory landscape. As entrepreneurship increasingly serves as a major driver of economic growth and regional development, the ability of entrepreneurs to comprehend and comply with diverse legal requirements has become indispensable. Yet, despite its importance, current research on entrepreneurship often overlooks this vital link between legal awareness and entrepreneurial success, particularly in the context of migrant entrepreneurs who face unique challenges in adapting to new legal and cultural environments (Fisher, 2014; Solano, 2023).

Migrant entrepreneurs contribute significantly to regional economic integration, introducing innovation, creating jobs, and fostering cross-cultural exchange. However, these entrepreneurs frequently encounter difficulties in understanding local laws, regulations, and market norms that govern business operations. For newer generations of migrant entrepreneurs, success increasingly depends on informed decision-making based on legal and market





knowledge rather than solely on traditional social networks or community ties. Legal awareness, a facet of legal consciousness, equips entrepreneurs with a nuanced understanding of their personal, economic, political, cultural, and social rights. This understanding enables them to anticipate and manage legal risks, safeguard their ventures, and leverage institutional frameworks effectively (Chavan & Taksa, 2017).

Personal rights—including protections against discrimination, and the right to privacy and security—are fundamental to ensuring operational autonomy and fostering resilience in business activities. Economic rights, encompassing property rights, contracts enforcement, and intellectual property protections, form the backbone of business stability and innovation capacity, offering legal assurances that encourage investment and expansion (Redford, 2020; Brandtstädter et al., 2013). Moreover, in India's culturally diverse society, cultural rights are crucial for migrant entrepreneurs to adapt their offerings to local traditions and build social legitimacy, which is often a decisive factor in community acceptance and market success (Brandtstädter et al., 2013). Social rights, such as access to healthcare, education, and social security, play an equally important role in maintaining the personal well-being of entrepreneurs—a factor closely linked to sustained business continuity and growth (Carrasco-Monteagudo & Buendia-Martinez, 2015; Vesan et al., 2021). While political rights may not directly determine entrepreneurial outcomes, they nonetheless empower entrepreneurs to participate in governance processes, lobby for favorable policies, and influence regulatory frameworks that affect their enterprises (Audretsch & Fiedler, 2022).

Despite the intrinsic value of these diverse rights, the collective influence of legal awareness remains insufficiently studied, particularly for migrant entrepreneurs in Kerala—a state celebrated for its cultural plurality and entrepreneurial dynamism. In this setting, migrant entrepreneurs must concurrently navigate a complex web of legal requirements and socio-cultural nuances to succeed. This study seeks to bridge this research gap by examining how the dimensions of legal awareness—including personal, economic, political, cultural, and social rights—interact and contribute to perceived entrepreneurial success among migrant entrepreneurs in Kerala. By addressing this multifaceted relationship, the study aims to enrich our understanding of how legal literacy and rights awareness serve as foundational drivers of entrepreneurial performance and adaptation in emerging economies characterized by diversity and complexity.

2. Literature Review

Legal Awareness and Entrepreneurial Success

Legal Legal Awareness and Entrepreneurial Success

Legal awareness is widely recognized as a core component of legal consciousness, embodying a deep understanding of one's personal, economic, political, cultural, and social rights. This knowledge not only enables entrepreneurs to mitigate risks and capitalize on opportunities but also empowers advocacy on their own behalf and for their ventures (Kannan & Pillai, 2007; Audretsch & Moog, 2022). For migrant entrepreneurs, such as those in Kerala, legal awareness plays a vital role in navigating multifaceted socio-political, economic, and regulatory landscapes that significantly influence entrepreneurial outcomes.

Personal rights guaranteed by Article 21 of the Indian Constitution—including protections of life, liberty, and personal security—enable entrepreneurs to overcome personal and business operational challenges (Brandtstädter et al., 2013; Jakšić & Jakšić, 2018; Banerjee & Chaudhuri, 2022; Anrma, 2023). These rights safeguard operational autonomy, protect against undue interference or discrimination, and foster resilience essential for sustaining entrepreneurial ventures. For instance, migrant entrepreneurs aware of their personal rights tend to better address local bureaucratic hurdles and societal biases, which can otherwise stifle business growth. Economic rights, covering property ownership, contracts, and intellectual property, form the legal backbone for



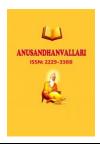


business stability and innovation. Enforcement of these rights is crucial in protecting entrepreneurs from ownership disputes, taxation complications, and infringements on proprietary knowledge (Redford, 2020; Carbonara et al., 2018; Rajagopalan, 2013; Audretsch & Moog, 2022). A deficiency in awareness of economic rights increases vulnerability to legal disputes, thereby impeding expansion efforts (Redford, 2020; Sotska et al., 2023). Moreover, these rights encourage formalization of businesses, enabling access to financing and market opportunities, which are critical for the scalability of migrant-led enterprises. For entrepreneurs engaged in shaping policies and regulatory environments, political rights such as voting, freedom of speech, and the right of association are essential (Goltz et al., 2015; Goel & Nelson, 2023). These rights facilitate participation in governance processes and can result in favorable local business legislation (Welter, 2007; Solano et al., 2023). However, research indicates that entrepreneurial success is not exclusively contingent on exercising political rights; informal networks, economic security, and cultural integration often compensate effectively for limited political participation (Audretsch & Fiedler, 2022). Cultural rights, enshrined in Articles 29 and 30 of the Indian Constitution, support migrant entrepreneurs in aligning their business practices with local traditions, thereby fostering community trust and social legitimacy (Brandtstädter et al., 2013). In culturally heterogeneous regions like Kerala, enterprises that visibly incorporate inclusivity and heritage conservation typically receive greater market acceptance (Vollhardt, Nair & Tropp, 2016; Mischenko et al., 2021). This cultural legitimacy serves as a strategic resource for migrant entrepreneurs, enabling them to penetrate local markets and establish competitive positioning. Social rights—including access to education, healthcare, and social security—play a critical role in building entrepreneurial resilience by promoting dignity and social inclusion. These rights support personal wellbeing, which is closely linked to sustained business performance and community development participation (Carrasco-Monteagudo & Buendia-Martinez, 2015; Vesan et al., 2021; Lenka & Agarwal, 2017; Sharma, 2020). Entrepreneurs who enjoy robust social protections are better equipped to withstand operational uncertainties such as health crises or economic downturns.

Despite the recognized importance of these individual legal-rights dimensions, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding how they collectively influence perceived entrepreneurial success (PES). Most existing studies tend to isolate specific rights—often economic or political—without examining their combined or interactive effects (Goltz et al., 2015; Redford, 2020). This gap is particularly significant in Kerala's milieu, where migrant entrepreneurs constantly negotiate complex legal and regulatory frameworks while simultaneously adapting to diverse socio-cultural dynamics (Audretsch & Moog, 2022; Kannan & Pillai, 2007; Solano et al., 2023). For instance, the interactions between economic, political, and cultural rights remain underexplored, even though such combinations may unveil multiple pathways to entrepreneurial success (Rajagopalan, 2013; Brandtstädter et al., 2013; Carrasco-Monteagudo & Buendia-Martinez, 2015). While political rights provide avenues for governance participation and policy influence, the absence or limitation of such rights does not necessarily diminish entrepreneurial success, as entrepreneurs may compensate through strong economic stability and cultural adaptability (Audretsch & Fiedler, 2022). This highlights the context-dependent and multifaceted nature of legal awareness's effect on entrepreneurship.

Adopting a multidimensional approach to legal awareness that integrates personal, economic, political, cultural, and social rights is therefore critical for comprehending entrepreneurial outcomes in relatively understudied contexts like Kerala (Chavan & Taksa, 2017; Solano, 2021). Additionally, focusing research on the interplay between legal awareness and regulatory challenges—particularly in domains such as political economy and intellectual property rights—could yield valuable insights for supporting migrant entrepreneurs more effectively (Troilo, 2011; Kshetri & Dholakia, 2011). Such investigations would provide a nuanced understanding of how legal awareness equips migrant entrepreneurs with the capabilities to navigate institutional barriers and ensure sustainable business development. Ultimately, this integrated perspective can inform policy formulation and entrepreneurial support programs aimed at fostering inclusive economic growth in culturally diverse and institutionally complex emerging economies.





Based on the literature review, the following research questions were raised:

Research Question: How does legal awareness—operationalized through personal, economic, political, cultural, and social rights—affect the perceived entrepreneurial success of migrant entrepreneurs in Kerala?

3. Theoretical Framework

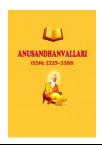
Institutional Theory serves as the guiding lens for this study, which investigates the direct influence of legal awareness on perceived entrepreneurial success (PES) among migrant entrepreneurs in Kerala. According to Institutional Theory, formal structures—laws, regulations, and policies—reduce uncertainty and transaction costs by establishing clear rules of engagement within an economic environment (Li & Bosma, 2024). In the Kerala context, codified personal rights (Article 21 protections), economic rights (property, contract, and intellectual property safeguards), political rights (voting and expression), cultural rights (Articles 29 and 30 protections), and social rights (access to education, healthcare, and social security) collectively comprise the institutional framework that shapes entrepreneurial behavior (Brandtstädter et al., 2013; Redford, 2020; Carrasco-Monteagudo & Buendia-Martinez, 2015). Legal awareness is defined as an entrepreneur's informed knowledge of these rights and their practical applications. This multidimensional construct enables entrepreneurs to anticipate regulatory requirements, secure legitimacy, and navigate bureaucratic challenges, thereby fostering resilience and innovation (Rajagopalan, 2013; Vesan et al., 2021). Empirical evidence from emerging economies indicates that heightened familiarity with institutional provisions translates into enhanced strategic decision-making and smoother operational execution, which in turn bolsters business performance (Li & Bosma, 2024). By positioning legal awareness as a unified antecedent with five distinct dimensions, the conceptual model aligns with the strengths of PLS-SEM, allowing simultaneous estimation of multiple direct paths to PES. This parsimonious framework provides a solid theoretical foundation for testing the hypothesized positive effects of each dimension of legal awareness on entrepreneurial success without invoking additional moderation or mediation mechanisms.

4. Research Methodology

This study examines how legal awareness related to rights, such as personal, economic, political, cultural, and social rights, shapes Perceived Entrepreneurial Success (PES) among migrant entrepreneurs in Kerala. The quantitative descriptive design aims at comparing the relationship between legal awareness and perceived entrepreneurial success. Structural equation modeling (SEM) is used to address Research Question, which focuses on testing direct relationships between the variables. Drawing from Fisher et al. (2014), perceived entrepreneurial success is measured using individual- and macro-level indicators, including personal satisfaction, business growth, financial success, and contributions to the community. Perceived entrepreneurial success is assessed on a 7-point Likert scale, allowing responses to range from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.'

Legal awareness serves as the primary independent variable and is operationalized through the Legal Awareness section of the Legal Consciousness Questionnaire (LCQ) developed by Molotova et al. (2023). Each item is evaluated using a 7-point Likert scale, enabling respondents to express agreement, disagreement, or neutrality regarding their awareness of these legal aspects.

Questionnaires had been structured; responses had been collected from migrant entrepreneurs. The Ernakulam district of Kerala was chosen to represent a region with high levels of migrant entrepreneurial activity and a heterogeneous composition of interstate migrants who have settled there. The target population was interstate migrant entrepreneurs who have relocated to Kerala and have set up their businesses in the region. The purposive sampling was used, focusing on expanding the sample using a snowball sampling technique in which respondents



were asked to name other migrant entrepreneurs within their network whom they thought could contribute valuable. The sample size in the study was 298 respondents, which was adequate for analyses using SEM and fsQCA to come up with strong, generalizable results (Hair et al., 2012).

5. Results

The analysis of the measurement model confirmed that the constructs of Legal Awareness (LA) and Perceived Entrepreneurial Success (PES) were reliable and demonstrated convergent and discriminant validity. Reliability was established through Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.7, indicating high internal consistency, and composite reliability measures surpassing the 0.7 threshold (Hair Jr., J. F., Matthews, L. M., Matthews, R. L., and Sarstedt, M. 2017). Convergent validity, assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE), exceeded the minimum standard of 0.5, confirming that the constructs explained the majority of variance in their indicators (Fornell et al., D. F. 1981).

Table 2: Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach' s alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Legal Awareness	0.915	0.926	0.937	0.750
Perceived Entrepreneurial Success	0.943	0.944	0.959	0.854

Discriminant validity was verified using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT), where the value between LA and PES was 0.633, below the acceptable threshold of 0.85, ensuring satisfactory discriminant validity.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity

	Legal Awareness	Perceived Entrepreneurial Success
Legal Awareness	0.866	
Perceived Entrepreneurial Success	0.633	0.924

The structural model analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between LA and PES, with a path coefficient of 0.633 and a p-value of less than 0.001. Entrepreneurs with greater awareness across dimensions such as Cultural (CR), Economic (ER), Personal (PR), Political (PoR), and Social Rights (SR) demonstrated superior capabilities in navigating regulatory challenges and achieving entrepreneurial success.

Figure 1: Structural Model Evaluation





Table 3: Structural Model Evaluation

Path	Path Coefficient	p-value	Effect Size (f²)	Decision
LA -> PES	0.633	< 0.001	0.669	Significant

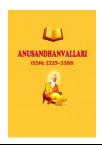
7. Discussion & Implications

The present study examined how legal awareness—operationalized through personal, economic, political, cultural, and social rights-directly influences perceived entrepreneurial success (PES) among migrant entrepreneurs in Kerala. Consistent with Institutional Theory, the structural model revealed a strong, positive effect of overall legal awareness on PES ($\beta = 0.633$, p < .001), accounting for 40% of variance in success perceptions. Among the five dimensions, economic rights awareness emerged as the most potent predictor, underscoring the critical role of property and contract protections in reducing transaction costs and shielding entrepreneurs from ownership disputes and taxation pitfalls (Rajagopalan, 2013; Redford, 2020). Cultural rights awareness followed closely, highlighting how alignment with local traditions and heritage fosters market legitimacy and community trust—conditions that enable migrant entrepreneurs to establish reputational capital in Kerala's diverse business environment (Brandtstädter et al., 2013). Personal rights awareness, grounded in Article 21 protections, also contributed significantly to PES, suggesting that entrepreneurs who understand their fundamental right to security and freedom from discrimination feel more empowered to navigate bureaucratic hurdles (Brandtstädter et al., 2013). Political and social rights, while exhibiting smaller path coefficients, were nonetheless significant; voting and free-speech knowledge facilitated policy engagement and advocacy (Audretsch & Fiedler, 2022; Solano et al., 2023), and social rights awareness—access to education, healthcare, and social security—enhanced resilience by safeguarding entrepreneurs' well-being during operational uncertainties (Carrasco-Monteagudo & Buendia-Martinez, 2015; Vesan et al., 2021).

These findings extend prior research by demonstrating that legal awareness functions not merely as a passive backdrop but as an active resource that migrant entrepreneurs mobilize to secure strategic advantages. By empirically validating five distinct legal-rights dimensions within a single PLS-SEM, our study confirms that institutional provisions do more than shape external environments; they become internalized competencies that entrepreneurs deploy to navigate complex regulatory landscapes. This theoretical contribution deepens Institutional Theory's application to entrepreneurship by foregrounding how knowledge of codified rights directly translates into perceived performance gains.

From a practical standpoint, the results highlight targeted opportunities for policy intervention. First, strengthening economic-rights education should be a priority. Training modules—co-designed by NIESBUD, NEN, and the Ministry of Skill Development—could focus on property registration procedures, contract negotiation techniques, and intellectual property filing processes. Subsidies or tax credits for entrepreneurs who complete certified workshops would lower financial barriers to participation and amplify the benefits of economic-rights awareness. Second, enhancing cultural-rights literacy can accelerate market entry and community acceptance. State-level business development agencies should produce case-studies and multimedia toolkits in Malayalam, Hindi, and English illustrating successful integration of cultural norms into product design and marketing strategies. Third, personal-rights clinics—offered through partnerships with legal-aid organizations—can counsel entrepreneurs on navigating bureaucratic systems, combating discrimination, and asserting their Article 21 protections. Fourth, political-rights engagement platforms—such as online forums and mentorship circles connecting migrant entrepreneurs with local legislators—can facilitate advocacy skills and foster a more inclusive policy dialogue (Audretsch & Fiedler, 2022). Finally, social-rights support networks, integrating microfinance institutions with





social-service providers, can ensure entrepreneurs maintain access to healthcare and education, thereby sustaining personal well-being and long-term venture viability.

In sum, by elucidating the direct pathways through which each dimension of legal awareness influences PES, this study offers a clear roadmap for both scholars and practitioners. Theoretically, it reinforces Institutional Theory's assertion that formal institutions matter not only as environmental constraints but as internal resources when their provisions become widely understood. Practically, it identifies actionable levers—economic, cultural, personal, political, and social rights education—that policymakers and development agencies can employ to empower migrant entrepreneurs, catalyze inclusive growth, and foster resilient small-business ecosystems in Kerala and similar emerging-economy contexts.

8. Limitations and Future Directions

This study explored how legal awareness—operationalized through personal, economic, political, cultural, and social rights—influences perceived entrepreneurial success (PES) among migrant entrepreneurs in Kerala, India. While the sample included interstate migrant entrepreneurs from multiple states, the exclusive focus on Kerala limits the generalizability of findings to other regions with differing legal, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts. Future research should extend this investigation to diverse geographic settings to better capture regional variations in legal awareness and entrepreneurial outcomes. Such cross-regional studies could reveal how local institutional dynamics shape the relevance and impact of legal rights on entrepreneurial success.

Another important limitation is the cross-sectional design, which constrains the ability to assess how legal awareness and entrepreneurial success evolve over time. Longitudinal research designs are needed to understand the temporal dynamics and causal directions in the relationship between legal awareness and PES, particularly given that entrepreneurs may acquire greater legal knowledge as their ventures mature and face new challenges (Shaukat et al., 2023).

Methodologically, this study relied solely on quantitative surveys, which may overlook the nuanced ways entrepreneurs perceive and operationalize legal rights in daily business activities. Future studies should incorporate qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups to offer richer, in-depth insights into how migrant entrepreneurs interpret legal frameworks, navigate institutional barriers, and respond to regulatory challenges (Solano, 2021). Such mixed-method approaches can help uncover contextualized mechanisms behind the observed statistical relationships and generate practical recommendations for legal and entrepreneurial support systems.

Finally, expanding research to include a broader range of migrant groups across multiple legal systems will enhance understanding of how various socio-legal environments interact with entrepreneurs' legal awareness to influence success. This can guide policymakers in tailoring interventions that account for both universal and context-specific needs of migrant entrepreneurs. Collectively, these future directions promise to deepen theoretical understanding and practical guidance on fostering legally informed, resilient, and successful migrant entrepreneurship.

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