

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Psychological conditioning upon discovering potential business concepts: Lens from small and medium entrepreneurs

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurial success is not solely dependent on financial resources and market conditions but is also shaped by psychological factors that influence decision-making and risk assessment. This study explores the role of cognitive bias, emotional resilience, and fear of failure in shaping the entrepreneurial mindset of small and medium-scale business owners. Using an exploratory qualitative approach, data were gathered from 25 entrepreneurs across various industries in Biliran Province through semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that cognitive biases, particularly optimism bias and confirmation bias, influence how entrepreneurs evaluate business opportunities, often leading to miscalculations in risk assessment and strategic planning. Emotional resilience emerged as a critical factor, allowing business owners to adapt to setbacks, view failures as learning experiences, and persist despite challenges. In addition, fear of failure was identified as a significant barrier, preventing some entrepreneurs from taking calculated risks while motivating others to adopt structured decision-making strategies. The interaction between these psychological factors plays a crucial role in entrepreneurial sustainability and adaptability. Addressing cognitive biases, strengthening emotional resilience, and managing fear of failure, entrepreneurs can improve their ability to navigate uncertainties and enhance business success. This study highlights the importance of psychological conditioning in fostering entrepreneurial growth, suggesting that mentorship, business training, and strategic risk management can further support entrepreneurs in making informed decisions and overcoming psychological barriers.

Keywords: psychological conditioning; discovering; potential business concept; small and medium entrepreneurs

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is a multifaceted process that involves decision-making shaped by both cognitive and emotional factors. The ability of small and medium entrepreneurs to identify and develop potential business opportunities is influenced by their psychological conditioning, which affects how they perceive risks, opportunities, and challenges^[1]. Among the psychological aspects that impact their decision-making and risk-taking behavior are cognitive biases, emotional resilience, and the fear of failure^[2].

Cognitive biases shape how entrepreneurs assess business opportunities. Optimism bias often leads to an overestimation of success, while confirmation bias causes them to seek information that aligns with their existing beliefs^[3]. Entrepreneurial decision-making occurs in environments characterized by high uncertainty,

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ambiguity, time pressure, and emotional anticipation^[4]. These biases can influence judgment, sometimes leading to poor choices or missed opportunities. They affect an entrepreneur's confidence, strategic planning, and willingness to take calculated risks when pursuing new business ideas. Similarly, research in managing complex technology projects has used insights from third-party professionals, such as information systems auditors, to understand how cognitive biases impact decision-making^[5,6].

Emotional resilience also affects how entrepreneurs respond to setbacks. Examining an entrepreneur's resilience provides insight into their motivation to persist and their ability to rebuild after failure^[7,8]. Many business owners face unexpected difficulties, such as financial losses or market downturns, yet those with strong emotional resilience perceive these setbacks as opportunities to grow rather than insurmountable obstacles^[9]. Entrepreneurs who demonstrate resilience recover from challenges by using them as learning experiences, allowing them to refine their strategies and sustain long-term business growth. Previous research has focused on resilience and growth as primary approaches for ensuring business sustainability^[10-13]. This study further explored how emotions, including fear and excitement, influence entrepreneurs' ability to remain committed to their business goals despite adversity.

Fear of failure is another psychological factor that can prevent entrepreneurs from taking advantage of new opportunities^[14]. Hesitation to take risks due to financial concerns or fear of public failure may limit business growth and innovation. Entrepreneurs struggling with this fear may delay critical decisions or avoid pursuing business ventures altogether. However, failure is a common reality for new businesses, and an essential aspect of entrepreneurship is the ability to learn from failure and find the motivation to try again^[15]. This study examined how business owners navigate and overcome these fears through psychological conditioning, which strengthens their confidence and ability to manage risks. A deeper understanding of these psychological factors offers valuable perspectives on how small and medium entrepreneurs build resilience and make informed business decisions.

2. Literature

Entrepreneurs encounter various obstacles when identifying and developing business opportunities, and their ability to navigate these challenges is shaped by psychological factors. Motivation, risk perception, tolerance for uncertainty, self-confidence, stress management, and social support influence entrepreneurial decision-making^[16]. Successful entrepreneurs often have an internal locus of control, meaning they believe they can influence their own outcomes^[17]. While financial resources, market conditions, and industry knowledge contribute to business success, cognitive and emotional processes also affect decision-making and risk-taking behaviors^[18]. The discussion below explores three key psychological factors—cognitive bias, emotional resilience, and fear of failure—and their influence on entrepreneurial success and sustainability.

2.1. Cognitive bias in entrepreneurial decision-making

Cognitive biases shape how entrepreneurs assess risks and opportunities. Entrepreneurs often display overconfidence, which leads them to overestimate the likelihood of success. Similarly, confirmation bias causes individuals to seek information that supports their existing beliefs while disregarding contradictory evidence^[19]. These biases can result in flawed decision-making, as entrepreneurs may ignore critical market feedback, place excessive value on personal insights, and dismiss alternative strategies that could enhance business performance.

Entrepreneurial traits and cognition theory examine how individual personality traits, the need for achievement, control focus, and risk-taking tendencies influence entrepreneurial behavior^[20-22]. However, entrepreneurial cognition differs among individuals, as personal judgment and thought processes vary

significantly^[23]. There is a need for further research on the differences in cognitive processes among entrepreneurs. Zhao and Die^[24] suggest that entrepreneurship cognition theory should focus on cognitive characteristics and their impact on attitudes, intentions, and behaviors while considering the role of contextual factors. Recent research suggests that small businesses may have an advantage over large corporations during crises, as they can quickly reassess and capitalize on emerging opportunities^[25,26]. However, most studies on small business responses to crises focus on macroeconomic factors, such as the overall impact on economies, organizational strategies, and government policy responses^[27].

2.2. Emotional resilience in overcoming business challenges

Emotional resilience determines how well entrepreneurs cope with setbacks and recover from failures. Entrepreneurs with strong resilience tend to view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable obstacles^[28]. They analyze their mistakes, implement necessary adjustments, and reattempt their ventures with improved strategies. Research suggests that the recovery process following business failure is shaped by emotional responses and psychological conditioning^[29]. The steps taken by entrepreneurs after a setback often define their long-term success, as they identify factors that contributed to failure and refine their business approaches accordingly^[30].

Studies indicate that resilience is developed through exposure to challenges, mentorship, and a growth-oriented mindset^[31]. Entrepreneurs who cultivate emotional resilience are better equipped to handle financial difficulties, operational disruptions, and market uncertainties, ultimately increasing their likelihood of long-term sustainability. Psychological resilience theory emphasizes the ability to recover from negative emotions under pressure^[32], adjust business strategies to manage setbacks^[33], and achieve business growth through continuous learning^[29].

2.3. Fear of failure and its impact on entrepreneurial behavior

Fear of failure is a psychological barrier that prevents many entrepreneurs from taking necessary risks. Entrepreneurship involves navigating uncertainty while assuming various financial, reputational, and operational risks^[34,35]. Many individuals hesitate to start or expand a business due to concerns about financial loss, reputational damage, or public scrutiny. Given the unpredictable nature of business, failures are common, particularly among new ventures^[36]. This fear often leads to procrastination, excessive caution, or reluctance to pursue innovative ideas.

While caution is necessary in business decision-making, excessive fear limits progress and prevents entrepreneurs from capitalizing on promising opportunities^[37]. Research suggests that entrepreneurs who effectively manage their fear of failure do so by gradually exposing themselves to risk, engaging in strategic planning, and building strong support networks. Managing this fear requires a combination of self-awareness, adaptability, and persistence.

2.4. Cognitive bias, emotional resilience, and fear of failure

The relationship between cognitive biases, emotional resilience, and fear of failure influences entrepreneurial behavior. An entrepreneur with high optimism but low resilience may struggle to recover from setbacks, while someone with excessive risk aversion may miss out on valuable opportunities. Entrepreneurs who acknowledge their biases and actively seek diverse perspectives tend to make better-informed business decisions.

Throughout their entrepreneurial journey, business owners frequently encounter economic, political, technological, and cultural challenges^[38]. These external factors require adaptability and strategic decision-making. Entrepreneurs who successfully pivot their business models and implement radical adjustments

increase their chances of business survival and growth^[39,40]. The ability to adjust strategies in response to changing circumstances is essential for long-term success^[41,42].

Understanding the psychological aspects that shape business decision-making can help entrepreneurs develop strategies to mitigate risks, enhance resilience, and overcome mental barriers. Business training programs, mentorship, and practical experience contribute to refining an entrepreneur's ability to make well-balanced decisions, navigate uncertainty, and persist despite setbacks. Entrepreneurs who recognize and address cognitive biases, strengthen their emotional resilience, and manage fear of failure are more likely to build sustainable businesses in competitive environments.

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

This study employed an exploratory research design to gain a deeper understanding of how psychological factors—cognitive bias, emotional resilience, and fear of failure—affected entrepreneurial decision-making. This approach was suitable as it allowed for an open-ended investigation into the thought processes, behavioral patterns, and emotional responses of entrepreneurs. Exploratory research served as a foundation for more definitive studies and helped refine research design, sampling strategies, and data collection methods^[43]. Since limited studies had examined the psychological conditioning of entrepreneurs from a firsthand perspective, this research approach was effective in identifying underlying themes and patterns that quantitative methods might have overlooked. Rather than attempting to confirm a pre-established hypothesis, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive perspective on how psychological factors influenced business decisions. Through qualitative inquiry, it captured the subjective experiences of entrepreneurs, offering valuable insights into the mental and emotional processes guiding their actions^[44].

3.2. Participant and sampling

The study included 25 small and medium-scale business owners in Biliran Province, selected using purposive sampling. This method ensured that participants had direct experience in managing businesses and making strategic decisions, allowing for data collection from individuals actively involved in entrepreneurship. Purposive sampling enhanced the richness of the data by incorporating diverse entrepreneurial experiences, making it a widely used technique in qualitative research^[45,46]. Focusing on small and medium-scale entrepreneurs was essential, as they operated in environments that required adaptability and decision-making under financial and institutional constraints. Unlike large corporations, these businesses had to deal with market uncertainties with limited resources, making their psychological conditioning a key factor in their success^[47]. Their experiences highlighted the cognitive and emotional adjustments necessary to sustain and grow a business over time. **Table 1** presents the information of the selected participants interviewed in the study.

Table 1. Summary information of business owners who participated in the interview.

Name	Sex	Age	Business Industry	Responsibility in Business
Juan	F	34	Retail	Owner & Manager
Maria	F	28	Food Services	Owner & Head Chef
Pedro	M	40	Manufacturing	Owner & Operations Manager
Liza	F	36	Technology	Co-Founder & IT Director
Carlo	M	45	Retail	Owner & Finance Manager
Ana	F	30	Food Services	Owner & Marketing Head

Name	Sex	Age	Business Industry	Responsibility in Business
Miguel	M	38	Manufacturing	Owner & Production Supervisor
Rosa	F	32	Retail	Owner & Sales Manager
Jose	M	50	Technology	Founder & CEO
Elena	F	29	Food Services	Owner & Product Developer
Daniel	M	41	Manufacturing	Owner & Logistics Manager
Carla	F	33	Retail	Owner & Customer Relations Head
Mark	M	37	Food Services	Owner & Operations Head
Ivy	F	27	Technology	Co-Founder & Software Engineer
Noel	M	48	Manufacturing	Owner & Business Strategist
Erika	F	31	Retail	Owner & Supply Chain Manager
Samuel	M	39	Food Services	Owner & Quality Control Head
Jessa	F	26	Technology	Co-Founder & UX Designer
Alex	F	35	Retail	Owner & Inventory Manager
Katrina	F	42	Food Services	Owner & Finance Director
Rico	M	46	Manufacturing	Owner & Compliance Officer
Julia	F	30	Technology	Founder & Data Analyst
Franco	M	44	Retail	Owner & Marketing Strategist
Nina	F	28	Food Services	Owner & Brand Manager
Oscar	F	51	Manufacturing	Owner & Marketing Manager

Table 1. (Continued)

3.3. Instrumentation

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to facilitate data collection while allowing flexibility in exploring emerging themes. The questions were designed to align with the objectives, focusing on three key psychological factors: cognitive bias, emotional resilience, and fear of failure. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to reflect on their experiences and provide detailed responses. In qualitative research, semi-structured interviews are widely recognized for their effectiveness in capturing in-depth perspectives and experiences^[48,49]. As shown in **Table 2**, the interview guide included inquiries on how entrepreneurs perceived risks and opportunities, how cognitive biases influenced decision-making, and what strategies they used to counter flawed judgment. In addition, it explored the role of emotional resilience in overcoming setbacks and maintaining motivation in challenging situations. Fear of failure examined how concerns about financial loss, reputational damage, and uncertainty shaped entrepreneurial decisions and risk-taking behaviors.

Table 2. Final interview guide.

Objectives	Interview Questions
To explore the psychological conditioning processes that small and medium entrepreneurs undergo when identifying and developing potential business concepts.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you describe a specific experience where you felt mentally or emotionally prepared to pursue a business concept? What influenced your mindset at that time? 2. How do you condition yourself psychologically when evaluating potential business ideas? Can you provide an example of a technique or habit you use? 3. Have there been moments when you had to reframe your thinking or adjust your mindset to fully commit to a business opportunity? Can you share an example?

Objectives	Interview Questions
To analyze how cognitive and emotional factors influence decision-making and risk-taking among small and medium entrepreneurs during the discovery of business opportunities.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you share an example of how emotions, such as excitement or fear, have influenced a business decision you made? 2. What mental strategies do you use when faced with uncertainty or risk in pursuing a new business idea? Can you recall a specific instance? 3. Have you ever hesitated to act on a business opportunity due to psychological barriers? What was the situation, and how did you overcome it?

Table 2. (Continued)

3.4. Data gathering procedure

Data collection in this study was carried out through one-on-one interviews, either in person or via online platforms, depending on participant availability^[48,50]. A structured interview framework was used, which adhered to ethical protocols, informed consent, confidentiality, and systematic questioning^[51,52]. To maintain methodological rigor, guided interviews were conducted, allowing for open yet structured conversations that revealed deeper insights into the participants' experiences, viewpoints, and actions^[53,54]. The process began with defining study objectives, developing thematic questions, and reviewing relevant literature to establish a solid foundation for investigation^[55,56]. Probing techniques were employed to extract underlying meanings and enrich the responses^[55,57]. A positive atmosphere was cultivated throughout the interviews, encouraging participants to express their thoughts freely, including in their preferred language, to reduce potential linguistic barriers. The interviews were digitally recorded with participant permission, using encrypted mobile devices, and significant themes along with preliminary insights were logged in a Microsoft Excel file for further analysis.

3.5 Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, a qualitative method that allows for the identification of recurring patterns and themes within the dataset. This approach was chosen because it offers flexibility and an iterative process in which themes evolve as deeper insights emerge. Transcriptions from one-on-one interviews were systematically examined and categorized to identify significant patterns and shared experiences^[57,58]. The application of thematic analysis ensured a structured evaluation of the data, revealing common perspectives among participants. Utilizing reflexive thematic analysis, this study provides a structured yet adaptive approach to interpreting the psychological conditioning of entrepreneurs. This method enables a thorough exploration of decision-making processes, emotional responses, and cognitive tendencies, ensuring that the findings accurately reflect the lived experiences of participants^[59].

4. Results

Objective 1: To explore the psychological conditioning processes that small and medium entrepreneurs undergo when identifying and developing potential business concepts.

Thematic analysis revealed significant concepts behind psychological conditioning process that entrepreneurs encounter: (1) Observation, (2) Researching, and (3) Pressure. These mechanisms for conditioning contribute to how entrepreneurs make decisions and manage challenges in business ventures.

Participants often reflected on their past experiences, whether in previous jobs or personal projects, which triggered a desire for change. Through observation, entrepreneurs honed their awareness of potential business pitfalls and better understood how to differentiate their ventures from those they had experienced or witnessed.

Entrepreneurs emphasized the importance of taking the time to learn about their industry, competitors, and market conditions before pursuing business ventures. For them, research sought knowledge, not only

about their products and services but also the broader market environment, in order to avoid hasty decisions that could undermine their success.

Participants shared how challenging circumstances, such as job loss or product failure, acted as catalysts for innovation and growth. While pressure could be overwhelming, it often pushed them to become more creative and resourceful.

Theme 1: Observation

The process of observation led to psychological conditioning which shapes the entrepreneurial mindset and methods. For example, witnessing poor decisions and inefficiencies in previous workplaces, the individual was conditioned to seek better solutions, which prompted them to take proactive steps toward entrepreneurship. This conditioning, developed through observation, led to an in-depth awareness of careful planning, ethical business practices, and the value of understanding different perspectives, which then guided their future business decisions.

“I kept seeing my previous company make poor decisions that hurt both employees and customers. I knew I could offer better service and create a more ethical business model. So, I saved up, learned the ropes, and started my own boutique.”

Similarly, some business owners feel the excitement of pursuing a new business venture. But for them, while excitement for a new product or idea is natural, rushing to launch without conducting sufficient market research can lead to unforeseen problems. This entrepreneur learned from observing others that successful product launches require a thorough understanding of the market, customer needs, and competition.

“...excitement for the new product made other people rush the launch without enough market research, which led to some unexpected issues. It showed how important it is to balance excitement with proper planning and research.”

Furthermore, engaging with individuals from different backgrounds—whether in terms of culture, industry, or life experiences—helped identify blind spots and stimulated innovative thinking. Entrepreneurs learned that collaboration with others sparked new ideas and revealed aspects of their business that they might have overlooked. Likewise, engaging with individuals from different backgrounds allows entrepreneurs to observe perspectives and ideas that they may not have considered on their own business ventures.

“I’ve found that talking to people from different backgrounds really opens new perspectives and challenges the way we usually think.

“Connecting with other people helps to spot areas in business concepts that we might have missed before.”

With observation, some individuals come to realize, after spending years working for someone else—particularly in a corporate setting—that they are contributing to someone else’s vision rather than pursuing their own aspirations. The individual feels as though they are contributing to the success of someone else’s vision rather than pursuing their own aspirations. This observation serves as a turning point where they recognize the desire to create something for themselves, leading them to consider entrepreneurship as a path toward self-fulfillment.

“I had been working in corporate for almost a decade when I realized I was just helping build someone else’s dream.”

Essentially, observation as conditioning refers to how individuals' perceptions and actions are shaped by what they witness in their surroundings, leading them to adopt certain behaviors or mindsets. The process of observation builds a mindset that adapts, learns, and grows from past experiences, both personal and observed in others, which then shapes entrepreneurial decisions and behaviors.

Theme 2: Researching

Entrepreneurs conditioned by research tend to prioritize gathering relevant information before launching any venture. This research-driven approach helps entrepreneurs understand market dynamics, customer behavior, and industry trends, which in turn shapes their decisions and strategies. For example, an entrepreneur might have observed that jumping into a new business without sufficient market knowledge can lead to failure, so they condition themselves to take their time, study competitors, and track market trends before moving forward.

“I had been interested in online selling for years but didn’t want to rush into it.”

“I found that inadequate market research can lead to product failures.”

“I’m not someone who jumps into things blindly. I spent months researching before launching my online store.”

Entrepreneurs conditioned by this process spend months preparing and experimenting with various strategies, like test ads or small-scale experiments, to design their approach before making large-scale investments. Such entrepreneurs also understand the importance of financial planning, often saving up enough resources to sustain the business during initial stages.

“I took time to understand digital marketing, supplier management, and logistics before launching my store. I also ran test ads and small-scale dropshipping experiments to understand the demand.”

With repeated exposure to market fluctuations and competitor strategies, the entrepreneur has internalized the importance of preparation, adaptability, and financial security, ensuring they approach business decisions with a calculated and resilient mindset.

“I tracked market trends, studied competitors, and saved up enough to cover six months of expenses.”

Researching served as a form of conditioning by reinforcing the habit of careful preparation and informed decision-making. Entrepreneurs who consistently engaged in research before launching a venture developed a mindset that prioritized data collection, trend analysis, and strategic planning. Over time, they became conditioned to approach business opportunities with caution, recognizing that inadequate research could lead to costly mistakes. This conditioning was evident in how entrepreneurs deliberately studied market dynamics, tracked consumer behavior, and analyzed competitor strategies before committing to a business plan.

Theme 3: Pressure

Pressure conditioned individuals to develop resilience, adaptability, and problem-solving skills. When faced with challenging situations, entrepreneurs learned to adjust their mindset and strategies to overcome obstacles. Repeated exposure to high-pressure circumstances reinforced behaviors such as persistence, innovation, and strategic thinking, shaping how individuals responded to future difficulties.

“When business slowed down, I felt the pressure to make quick changes, but it also forced me to be more creative and adaptable.”

For example, losing a job created financial and emotional pressure, but instead of succumbing to it, the person used the situation as an opportunity to explore new ventures. The pressure of unemployment conditioned them to become resourceful, leading them to experiment with their skills and share their work online.

“When I lost my job during the pandemic, I had time to experiment and post my creations online.”

Similarly, financial strain forced the individual to take action, but as they saw positive results, the pressure transformed into motivation. The need to survive conditioned them to continuously improve their products, reinvest profits, and eventually turn what was once a necessity into a passion-driven business.

“Orders started coming in, and I reinvested every peso into improving my products. What started as a desperate move became a business I now love.”

Instead of viewing a failed product launch as a complete loss, the entrepreneur conditioned themselves to see failure as part of the growth process. This shift in perspective encouraged resilience and continuous improvement, reinforcing the habit of analyzing mistakes and making necessary adjustments.

“I experienced a significant setback when a new product launch failed to meet sales expectations. Instead of perceiving this as a failure, I reframed it as a valuable learning experience.”

“After the first few rejections, I almost gave up, but I kept going because I knew I had to make it work.”

Pressure becomes psychological conditioning because repeated exposure to high-stress situations reinforces adaptive behaviors, shaping how individuals respond to future challenges. When faced with financial, professional, or emotional pressure, people develop coping mechanisms that become ingrained over time. These experiences condition them to react with resilience, creativity, and persistence, ultimately influencing their long-term mindset and decision-making strategies.

Objective 2: To analyze how cognitive and emotional factors influence decision-making and risk-taking among small and medium entrepreneurs during the discovery of business opportunities.

Thematic analysis revealed three major factors that influence decision-making and risk-taking among entrepreneurs: (1) Stress, (2) Optimism, and (3) Environment. These factors mainly aided the conditioning mechanisms by reinforcing positive behaviors and adaptive strategies that entrepreneurs could rely on when faced with new business opportunities.

Stress can act as a signal for growth, making entrepreneurs more aware of the need for new strategies and adjustments in their business. Managing stress allows entrepreneurs to stay focused and make clearer decisions while minimizing burnout. With effective time management and delegating tasks, entrepreneurs can reduce stress and stay productive.

Optimism enables entrepreneurs to stay motivated and resilient, helping them face challenges and setbacks with a positive mindset. Viewing failure as an opportunity to learn, rather than as an obstacle, encourages entrepreneurs to persist and approach new opportunities with confidence, even in uncertain situations.

A supportive environment, including mentors and peers, provides entrepreneurs with guidance, emotional support, and valuable business insights. Surrounding themselves with encouraging individuals

builds confidence, motivates decision-making, and encourages taking risks by creating a positive atmosphere for growth and exploration.

Theme 1: Stress

Stress became a critical factor in decision-making and risk-taking for entrepreneurs because it directly influenced their ability to manage challenges and make informed decisions. When entrepreneurs experienced stress, they often saw it as a sign of business growth rather than a setback. The feeling of being overwhelmed indicated that the business was expanding, prompting them to develop new strategies to delegate tasks and improve efficiency.

“I view stress as a sign of growth rather than failure. Feeling overwhelmed often means the business is expanding, requiring new strategies for delegation and efficiency.”

For example, one entrepreneur realized that managing stress effectively was crucial for long-term success, and they began to view it as an opportunity to adapt to their business processes rather than something to avoid.

“By accepting stress, I became more aware of its impact and developed actionable plans to manage it.”

“Managing stress is key for me. It allows me to stay calm and focused, which helps me think through risks and opportunities without getting overwhelmed.”

In the face of stress, entrepreneurs learned to create actionable plans to manage it. By acknowledging its impact, they could take proactive steps to avoid burnout and maintain productivity. One entrepreneur, for instance, hesitated to move forward due to the pressure of long hours but learned to plan their time carefully and delegate tasks to maintain balance. This ability to plan and delegate helped them reduce stress and stay focused on pursuing their ideas and growing their business.

“I hesitated because of the long hours and stress, but I managed it by planning my time well and delegating tasks to avoid burnout.”

Further, entrepreneurs who experienced stressful situations learned to manage their emotions by taking a step back and focusing on solutions. This strategy helped them stay clear-headed, enabling better decision-making under pressure. Consequently, some entrepreneurs also learned that poor time management could lead to burnout, so they prioritized efficiency to avoid overwhelming themselves.

“When things get stressful, I take a step back and focus on finding a solution rather than panicking. It helps me stay clear-headed and make better decisions.”

“Poor time management often leads to burnout, so entrepreneurs prioritize efficiency.”

Stress became a conditioning factor for entrepreneurs because it directly shaped their responses to challenges and influenced their decision-making processes. Over time, entrepreneurs conditioned themselves to recognize stress as an inherent part of business growth, rather than something to avoid. The pressure and overwhelming feelings they faced became signals that their business was expanding, which prompted them to develop strategies to manage growth effectively.

Theme 2: Optimism

Like effective stress management, entrepreneurs who maintained an optimistic outlook were better able to navigate uncertainties and setbacks. Optimism helped them to view obstacles as opportunities for growth, rather than insurmountable barriers. This positive mindset conditioned them to push forward, even when faced with difficulties, and to take calculated risks that might lead to future opportunities.

For example, one entrepreneur conditioned themselves to celebrate even small achievements, recognizing that these moments were steppingstones to greater success. Acknowledging progress not only helped maintain a positive outlook but also boosted their confidence, reinforcing the importance of focusing on gradual growth rather than immediate, large-scale success.

“Taking time to acknowledge and celebrate achievements, no matter how small, helped me maintain a positive outlook and increased my confidence.”

When confronted with failure, some entrepreneurs conditioned themselves to view it as a learning experience rather than a permanent setback. This shift in perspective enabled them to learn from their mistakes and adjust their approach in the future.

“The thought of my business failing paralyzed me. I realized I needed to view failure as a learning opportunity rather than a dead end.”

Optimism also allowed them to combat fear and doubt by focusing on small, manageable goals, gradually building confidence with each success.

“To combat fear, they focused on small, manageable goals, allowing for gradual progress and building confidence with each achievement.”

Optimistic entrepreneurs were more likely to embrace new ventures, even when the outcomes were uncertain, as their belief in success helped mitigate the fear of failure. The act of celebrating small wins, regardless of scale, reinforced their resilience, boosting their confidence and encouraging a positive mindset. Each achievement, whether big or small, became an opportunity to reaffirm their potential and foster a sense of accomplishment, which empowered them to tackle the next challenge with even more determination.

“I’ve always been optimistic about my business ideas. It gives me the courage to pursue opportunities, even when things seem uncertain.”

“Staying positive helps me push through tough times. It makes me believe that even if one opportunity doesn’t work out, there will be another one right around the corner.”

Optimism becomes a key factor for conditioning because it influences an entrepreneur's mindset and decision-making, enabling them to approach challenges with resilience and confidence. This mindset helped them persist through difficulties, take risks, and seize new opportunities without being paralyzed by fear or doubt.

Theme 3: Environment

The environment in which an entrepreneur operates was also necessary in shaping their decision-making and risk-taking behaviors, conditioning them to develop the resilience and confidence needed to overcome challenges. A supportive environment, particularly one that includes mentors, peers, and a positive work culture, build both emotional and practical support, which helps entrepreneurs navigate uncertainty and setbacks more effectively.

“Surrounding myself with mentors and peers who encouraged and supported me was essential in overcoming the fear of failure.”

Having mentors and a network of supportive peers helped entrepreneurs to condition themselves to approach challenges with greater assurance, knowing that guidance and encouragement were readily available. This environment allowed them to view obstacles as manageable, reducing the fear of failure and encouraging them to take calculated risks.

“Engaging with fellow entrepreneurs, mentors, and industry peers provides emotional support and practical advice.”

“An experienced mentor makes it easier to overcome challenges by giving advice on business, risks, and personal growth.”

Creating a work environment that nurtured creativity and collaboration further reinforced this conditioning. Entrepreneurs who consciously cultivated a positive and collaborative workspace found that it promoted innovation, motivation, and openness to new ideas. This environment reduced the stress and isolation that often come with entrepreneurship, making it easier to adapt to new opportunities and take risks.

“I make sure to create a work environment that encourages creativity and collaboration. This helps me stay motivated and open to new opportunities.”

“Having a positive work environment makes it easier to take risks. When I feel supported, I’m more willing to explore new ideas and opportunities.”

Fundamentally, the environment helps in conditioning as it reinforces positive behaviors and attitudes that shape one’s approach to challenges and decision-making. When they are surrounded by encouraging people and a culture that values innovation, they are conditioned to take risks and persist even when faced with difficult decisions or opportunities.

5. Discussion

This paper proposed the application of psychological conditioning in entrepreneurial mindsets and business ventures. This study observed that entrepreneurs develop cognitive and behavioral patterns through repeated exposure to challenges, decision-making processes, and social reinforcement. Psychological conditioning was essential in shaping their ability to manage stress, maintain optimism, and use supportive environments to manage uncertainties and risks effectively.

The study of Robbins^[60] was deeply rooted in cognitive-behavioral theories, which propose that thoughts shape emotions, ultimately influencing behavior. At its core, neuro-associative conditioning enables individuals to rewire cognitive responses by associating pain with counterproductive habits and pleasure with constructive actions. This aligns with the neuroscientific principle of Hebbian plasticity^[61,62], which states that “neurons that fire together wire together.” In the context of entrepreneurship, repeated exposure to stress, optimism, and environmental influences strengthens neural pathways that condition individuals to respond effectively to challenges, reinforcing resilience and develop adaptive decision-making.

Robbins^[60] highlighted the principle of state-dependent functioning, which asserts that an individual’s emotional and physiological state significantly influences their decision-making, creativity, and overall performance. This means that an entrepreneur’s mindset at any given moment can determine their ability to take risks, solve problems, and seize opportunities. For instance, the study found that entrepreneurs who practiced visualization techniques before making critical business decisions felt more confident and prepared to take calculated risks.

Spina^[63] published a book about deprogramming subconscious mind explaining that deliberate cognitive conditioning can reshape neural pathways. The study emphasized that individuals could enhance neuroplasticity, improve emotional regulation, and develop cognitive adaptability by actively deprogramming subconscious beliefs through techniques such as journaling, energy diagnostics, and guided meditation. These insights contribute to a broader cognitive-neurobiological framework, suggesting that entrepreneurial success is not solely determined by innate traits or hormonal predispositions but is actively shaped by mindset training, belief reinforcement, and adaptive neurobiological processes. Entrepreneurs who conditioned themselves to replace fear-based thinking with constructive, goal-oriented mental frameworks exhibited greater innovation, risk tolerance, and resilience in their ventures.

One core component of decision-making and risk-taking in pursuing business ventures was the ability to engage in deliberate actions, which involves sustained effort, strategic planning, and adaptive learning. Entrepreneurs who actively conditioned themselves to view challenges as opportunities rather than setbacks demonstrated higher resilience and innovation in their decision-making processes. Likewise, this reflects the ability cope with adversity and recover from failure, requiring high levels of self-awareness, strong emotional regulation, and additional psychological strengths^[64].

In sports, deliberate practices were strongly influenced by individual motivation and attitudes as such practices help individuals compensate for weaknesses and build upon their strengths^[65]. Ford et al.^[66] found that how individuals interpret mistakes influenced their commitment to continuous learning and improvement. In pursuing business ventures, a positive perception of errors and a willingness to take risks were essential in maintaining self-directed deliberate practice, reinforcing the importance of adaptability in entrepreneurial success. Entrepreneurs who consistently engaged in psychological conditioning were able to strengthen their problem-solving skills, make calculated decisions, and manage risks more effectively, leading to sustained business growth and innovation.

This study contributed to understanding how psychological conditioning influences entrepreneurial decision-making and risk-taking behaviors, with a focus on how entrepreneurs use cognitive and emotional strategies to manage challenges. The findings revealed that entrepreneurs who consciously conditioned themselves to view challenges as opportunities rather than setbacks exhibited greater resilience and innovation, supporting the importance of mindset in entrepreneurial success. The study also highlighted the role of supportive environments, such as mentorship and positive work cultures, in reinforcing these cognitive patterns, further enhancing the entrepreneur's capacity to navigate uncertainty. These findings emphasized that entrepreneurial success is not merely determined by innate traits but by the active conditioning of the mind and emotions to adapt and thrive in dynamic business environments. The ability to regulate emotions, engage in critical thinking, and take well-calculated risks differentiates thriving entrepreneurs from those who struggle to maintain business viability^[67].

6. Conclusion

This study highlighted the influence of psychological conditioning in shaping entrepreneurial mindsets and business ventures. The findings suggested that entrepreneurs who actively engaged in cognitive and emotional strategies to manage stress, optimism, and decision-making were better equipped to navigate uncertainties and risks. Through conditioning themselves to view challenges as opportunities rather than setbacks, entrepreneurs exhibited resilience, creativity, and innovation. Essentially, the study emphasized that success in entrepreneurship was influenced not only by inherent traits but by the ability to actively shape one's mindset and emotional responses. Entrepreneurs who cultivated these psychological skills were more likely to make well-informed decisions and sustain business growth.

Despite the contribution of the study, there were several limitations that needed to be considered. The research primarily focuses on theoretical frameworks and observational data, and its findings may not fully capture the complex nature of entrepreneurial decision-making. Future studies could explore longitudinal data to examine the long-term effects of psychological conditioning on entrepreneurship. Also, expanding the research to include different entrepreneurial sectors and cultural contexts could offer a comprehensive understanding of how psychological conditioning affects various types of business ventures. Empirical studies that involve experimental interventions could further validate the impact of specific psychological techniques, such as observation or positive self-talk, on entrepreneurial performance and decision-making.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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