

Resilience as a Sustainable Personal Brand: A Case Study of a Self-Made Transgender Beautician in India

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Abstract

This study explores how resilience functions as a sustainable personal branding strategy among marginalized individuals, focusing on a self-made transgender woman working as a beautician in South India. Despite persistent gender minority stress, social exclusion, and economic precarity, the participant has established a sustainable livelihood through service-based entrepreneurship. Using a mixed-method single-case design, quantitative data were collected using the Gender Minority Stress and Resilience (GMSR) scale and the Transgender Resilience Scale (TRS), complemented by an in-depth narrative interview. Results indicate moderate-to-high minority stress alongside high resilience, highlighting adaptive coping, identity affirmation, and relational trust as critical resources. The qualitative findings reveal how authenticity, consistency, and community engagement translate resilience into a credible personal brand, enabling long-term customer loyalty. The study contributes to sustainable marketing literature by demonstrating how marginalized identities generate value through authenticity-driven branding. Implications for inclusive marketing, social sustainability, and ethical entrepreneurship are discussed.

Keywords: Transgender resilience · Sustainable marketing · Personal branding · Inclusive entrepreneurship · Case study · India

I INTRODUCTION

Sustainable marketing increasingly emphasizes ethical value creation, inclusivity, and long-term social impact. Marginalized entrepreneurs, particularly transgender individuals, remain underrepresented in marketing research despite their lived expertise in resilience and adaptability. In India, transgender persons often face systemic exclusion from education, employment, and formal markets, pushing many toward informal or self-made professions. This study positions resilience not merely

as a psychological outcome but as a market-facing resource that supports sustainable livelihood creation. By examining a transgender beautician's lived experience, the paper bridges social sustainability and marketing scholarship.

Review of Literature

Sustainable and Inclusive Marketing

Inclusive marketing integrates marginalized voices into value creation, fostering trust and long-term relationships. Authenticity and ethical alignment are key drivers of sustainable brand equity.

Transgender Entrepreneurship and Market Exclusion

Existing research highlights discrimination, limited capital access, and stigma as barriers. However, few studies examine how transgender individuals actively construct market credibility.

Resilience as Brand Capital

Resilience enables consistency, emotional labour management, and customer engagement—critical components of personal service branding.

Theoretical Framework

The study integrates:

Minority Stress Theory - Minority Stress Theory explains how individuals belonging to stigmatized social groups experience chronic stress arising from social prejudice, discrimination, and structural exclusion. Originally proposed by Meyer (2003), the theory posits that stressors such as enacted stigma, anticipated rejection, internalized stigma, and concealment of identity accumulate over time and adversely affect mental health and well-being. For transgender individuals, minority stress manifests through social marginalization, violence, employment discrimination, and lack of institutional support. Importantly, the theory also recognizes resilience resources—such as community support, identity affirmation, and adaptive coping—that can buffer the negative impact of stress. In the present research, Minority Stress Theory provides a foundational framework to understand the persistent adversities faced by transgender individuals and the psychological context within which resilience and sustainable livelihood strategies emerge.

Resilience Theory - Resilience Theory focuses on an individual's capacity to adapt, cope, and thrive despite exposure to adversity, trauma, or chronic stress. Rather than viewing resilience as a fixed personality trait, contemporary perspectives conceptualize it as a dynamic, context-dependent process shaped by personal strengths, social relationships, and environmental resources. In the context of transgender lives, resilience includes identity acceptance, emotional regulation, problem-solving skills, and the ability to maintain purpose and hope amid systemic discrimination. Resilience Theory shifts the analytical focus from vulnerability to

agency, emphasizing how marginalized individuals actively negotiate challenges. In this study, resilience is treated as a core psychological and functional resource that enables transgender individuals to sustain professional identity, economic participation, and social legitimacy.

Sustainable Marketing Orientation - Sustainable Marketing Orientation refers to a strategic approach to marketing that balances economic performance with social equity, ethical responsibility, and long-term stakeholder value. Unlike traditional profit-centric models, sustainable marketing emphasizes inclusivity, authenticity, trust-building, and societal well-being. It aligns marketing practices with broader sustainability goals by integrating marginalized voices into value creation and consumption systems. In service-based and personal branding contexts, sustainability is achieved through consistent quality, ethical engagement, and relationship-based marketing. Within this research, Sustainable Marketing Orientation provides a lens to examine how resilience-driven authenticity and inclusive practices contribute to long-term customer loyalty and socially sustainable livelihoods, particularly among marginalized entrepreneurs such as transgender professionals.

Resilience is conceptualized as a mediating construct between stress and sustainable market participation.

Methodology

Research Design

Mixed-method single-case study.

Participant

One self-made transgender woman beautician operating independently.

Instruments

Gender Minority Stress and Resilience Scale (GMSR)

Transgender Resilience Scale (TRS)

Semi-structured interview

Results

Quantitative Findings

GMSR: Moderate-to-high minority stress

TRS: High resilience levels

Qualitative Findings

Themes identified:

Identity affirmation through work - For self-made transgender individuals, work functions not only as a means of income but also as a critical space for identity affirmation and self-validation. In contexts where gender identity is frequently questioned or invalidated, professional competence becomes a powerful counter-

narrative to social stigma. Through skilled labour and consistent service delivery, the individual asserts legitimacy, visibility, and self-worth. The workplace thus transforms into a site of resistance where marginalized identity is redefined through ability rather than deficit. In the present study, the participant's work as a beautician enabled alignment between self-identity and social recognition, reinforcing confidence and psychological resilience. This process of identity affirmation strengthens motivation, reduces internalized stigma, and contributes to sustained engagement in market activities.

Trust-building with clients - Trust-building emerged as a central strategy for overcoming stigma and sustaining customer relationships. In service-based professions, repeated interactions, reliability, and interpersonal warmth play a crucial role in shaping client perceptions. The participant consciously emphasized professionalism, punctuality, and respectful communication to counter preconceived biases associated with transgender identity. Over time, consistent service quality facilitated trust, shifting client focus from gender identity to skill and dependability. This relational trust enabled customer retention, word-of-mouth promotion, and social acceptance. From a sustainable marketing perspective, trust operates as relational capital, allowing marginalized professionals to embed themselves within local market networks despite structural exclusion.

Economic independence as dignity - Economic independence was experienced not merely as financial stability but as a source of dignity, autonomy, and social legitimacy. For transgender individuals who are often excluded from formal employment and family support systems, earning through self-made work represents freedom from dependency and social vulnerability. The participant associated income generation with self-respect, decision-making power, and the ability to contribute to family and community life. This sense of dignity reinforced resilience by reducing exposure to exploitative relationships and enhancing perceived self-efficacy. Economic independence thus functioned as both an outcome and a driver of resilience, enabling sustainable livelihood and psychological empowerment.

Emotional labour and adaptive coping - Emotional labour formed an integral part of the participant's daily work experience. Managing emotional responses to discrimination, microaggressions, and client discomfort required sustained self-regulation and adaptive coping. The participant employed strategies such as emotional distancing, positive reframing, humour, and selective disclosure of identity to navigate challenging interactions. Rather than internalizing negative experiences, emotional labour was strategically used to maintain professionalism and protect mental well-being. This adaptive coping capacity allowed continuity in service delivery and prevented burnout. Within the resilience framework, emotional labour emerges as a skill that supports long-term occupational sustainability under conditions of minority stress.

Discussion

Findings demonstrate that resilience operates as personal brand capital, enabling sustainable customer relationships despite structural exclusion. This reframes resilience as a marketing asset rather than solely a coping mechanism.

Implications for Sustainable Marketing

Inclusive branding strengthens social sustainability - Inclusive branding extends beyond symbolic representation to actively integrating marginalized identities into value creation processes. When transgender entrepreneurs are recognized as legitimate market actors, branding becomes a tool for social inclusion rather than mere visibility. Inclusive branding challenges dominant market norms by normalizing diversity and reducing stigma through everyday consumer interactions. In the present study, the participant's sustained professional presence contributed to gradual attitudinal change among clients, demonstrating how micro-level branding practices foster social cohesion. From a sustainability perspective, inclusive branding supports long-term societal well-being by promoting equity, reducing exclusion, and expanding access to economic participation for marginalized groups. Such practices align with the social pillar of sustainability and contribute to ethical market ecosystems.

Authentic narratives enhance customer trust - Authenticity emerged as a critical driver of customer trust in service-based sustainable marketing. Rather than relying on constructed brand images, the participant's lived experiences of struggle and perseverance shaped an honest, transparent professional identity. Clients responded positively to consistency between personal narrative and service delivery, which strengthened relational trust over time. Authentic storytelling humanized the brand, reducing prejudice and increasing emotional connection. In sustainable marketing contexts, trust built through authenticity supports customer loyalty, repeat engagement, and positive word-of-mouth—key elements for long-term viability. This finding suggests that authenticity-based branding offers a powerful alternative to transactional marketing models, particularly in marginalized contexts.

Marginalized entrepreneurs offer scalable ethical marketing models - Marginalized entrepreneurs, through necessity-driven innovation, often develop ethical and relational marketing practices grounded in empathy, accountability, and mutual respect. The participant's approach emphasized fairness, consistency, and relational engagement rather than aggressive promotion. Such models prioritize human connection over profit maximization, making them inherently sustainable. Importantly, these practices are scalable across sectors, particularly in service-based and community-oriented markets. By centralizing dignity, trust, and inclusion, marginalized entrepreneurs demonstrate how ethical marketing can coexist with

economic sustainability. Their lived strategies provide valuable insights for businesses seeking socially responsible and inclusive marketing frameworks.

II.CONCLUSION

Resilience-driven personal branding provides a viable pathway for sustainable livelihoods among transgender entrepreneurs. Future research should explore comparative models across sectors.

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