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**Women Entrepreneurs and their Perception of Persuasive Communication: A Study in the Odishan Context**

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| **\*Corresponding author**  *Dr Madhulika Panda*  **Article History**  *Received: 21.08.2017*  *Accepted: 28.08.2017*  *Published: 30.09.2017*  **DOI:**  10.36347/sjahss.2017.v05i09.011  **C:\Users\Habibur Rahman\Downloads\SJAHSS.png** | **Abstract:** Persuasive communication is of great relevance as far as entrepreneurship is concerned. It assumes a still greater significance for fledgling entrepreneurs. The paper focuses on the significance of persuasive communication skills for women entrepreneurs in the contemporary business environment of Odisha, with particular emphasis on fledgling entrepreneurs. It attempts to study the areas and the specific situations where persuasive communication is considered most relevant for the entrepreneurs and discuss the problems they encounter while trying to persuade in their day to day business.  **Keywords:** Persuasive communication, Selling, Entrepreneurship, Handling client,  Presentations |
| **INTRODUCTION**  Communication performs a variety of functions in a business enterprise, ranging from establishing and disseminating goals of the organization, developing plans for their achievement, organizing human and other resources in the most effective and efficient way, selecting, developing and appraising the members to leading, motivating and creating a climate in which people want to contribute. Communication in an enterprise can be internal, external or personal. Irrespective of |

the function and category of communication, persuasion forms a major portion of the daily communication activities of a business enterprise. According to Steinberg [1], persuasion is a process of communication in which a communicator voluntarily forms, sustains, reinforces or changes the attitudes or behavior of the recipient in accordance with what the communicator intends by his or her message. Communication in the business world is hardly bereft of persuasion because business, for its success, requires the recipient of the communication process to be persuaded and to agree to the communicator’s proposals. An early Harvard Business School study, on what it takes to achieve success and be promoted in an organization, says that the individual who gets ahead in business is the person who is able to communicate, to make sound decisions, and to persuade others to get things done [2]. Particularly in the present age, when erosion of traditional hierarchy is significantly visible with command and control culture steadily declining, persuasion has become all the more important.

Persuasion is not the act of coaxing or encouraging individuals to accept or do something. It demands understanding of the concerns, positions and objectives of the audience and is the process of finding meaningful benefits and creative solutions. Good persuasive communication skills enable, foster, and create the understanding and trust necessary to encourage others to follow a leader. In fact, no leader can succeed without mastering the art of persuasion. The entrepreneur as leader will need to cultivate a style that revolves around participation, collaboration and persuasion **[3].** The entrepreneur will need to be competent in persuading people to accept responsibility, counsel employees and recruit team members **[4].** Further, he will also need to negotiate and finalize deals. In all these and more, persuasive power is an asset **[5]**. It is a powerful art form that can fetch incredible success for the entrepreneurs of the contemporary times.

A lot of studies have been carried out on the communication skills of women entrepreneurs. Most of these bring home the idea that women have better communication skills than men. Kamberidou argues that women enjoy a slight edge over their male counterparts when group communication skills are concerned [6]. Anita Woolley and Thomas Malone [7] in a study published in the Harvard Business Review, argue that the more women on board the better the results. The study finds that, women excel in communication skills and are better listeners than men.

However, not much study has been carried out to assess the relevance of persuasive communication skills. Any attempt at assessing the effectiveness of persuasive communication would require identifying the situations where persuasive communication might be considered most relevant, studying the perception of entrepreneurs about their relevance and finding out the problem areas. Kim and Tay [8] made such assessment in respect of the entrepreneurs of Singapore. But there has been scant research on the relevance of persuasive communication for Indian entrepreneurs and more particularly women entrepreneurs.

The present paper seeks to make an exploratory study to obtain some insights into this topic. It attempts to study these issues with reference to women entrepreneurs of Odisha. The paper is divided into 4 sections. In section 1, the introduction is given. In section 2, the methodology followed is described. In section 3, the survey results are discussed. In section 4, concluding remarks are made, highlighting entrepreneurs’ perception about the importance of persuasion.

**DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

For the present research, a questionnaire was used as the research tool. It was given to 30 entrepreneurs across Odisha. It was mailed to ten and given by hand to the rest of them. Three responded to the mail, but all others to whom the questionnaire was given by hand responded. The survey consists of 4 parts. The first part provides the profile of the respondents, taking into consideration their educational background, their entrepreneurial experience, the type of industry they belong to, the size of their organizations and their language of business. In the second part, the respondents were asked to rank twelve situations in which persuasive communication could be used. In the next part, the respondents ranked the relevance of persuasive communication in eight specific situations and for this purpose a five-point scale was used with 1 indicating “not important” and 5 indicating “very important”. The fourth part is about the problems encountered by the entrepreneurs during the course of their business. The SPSS software was used to find the means and standard deviations.

**SURVEY RESULTS**

**Table-1: gives the profile of the respondents in the survey.**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Characteristics** | **Distribution** | | |
|  |  | Frequency | Percentage |
| **Age** | Less than 30 | 2 | 8.7 |
| 30-39 | 13 | 56.5 |
| 40-49 | 4 | 17.4 |
| 50 and over | 4 | 17.4 |
| **Language Background** | Odia | 12 | 52.2 |
| Hindi | 8 | 34.8 |
| Others | 3 | 13.04 |
| **Language of Communication in Business** | English | 16 | 69.56 |
| Hindi | 2 | 8.69 |
| Odia | 5 | 21.73 |
| **Education** | Secondary | Nil | 0 |
| Graduation | 7 | 30.43 |
| Post graduation | 7 | 30.43 |
| Professional | 7 | 30.43 |
| Others | 2 | 8.69 |
| **Industry** | Manufacturing | 1 | 4.35 |
| Trading | 2 | 8.7 |
| Construction | 1 | 4.35 |
| Retailing | 3 | 13.04 |
| Services | 8 | 34.8 |
| Education | 5 | 21.74 |
| Others | 3 | 13.04 |
| **Size of company** | 1-20 employees | 19 | 82.6 |
| 21-39 employees | 4 | 17.4 |
| 40-60 employees | Nil | 0 |
| more than 60 employees | Nil | 0 |
| **Experience** | Less than 1 year | 2 | 8.7 |
| 1-10 years | 16 | 69.6 |
| 11-20 years | 5 | 21.7 |
| More than 20 years | Nil | 0 |

Majority of the respondents (56.5%) belong to the age group 30-39. It can be concluded that they must have chosen to become entrepreneurs after 2000. For Odisha, the year 2000 is significant because it is since this year that Odisha has become a destination for the flow of investment, foreign as well as domestic, flow of huge grants in social sector from center as well as international agencies and this was conducive to breed and cause growth in the number of entrepreneurs. Odia is the first language for more than 50% of the respondents. However, a sizable percentage (34.8) does have Hindi as their first language. English happens to be the language of business in many enterprises, though majority of the respondents speak the local language Odia. Most of our respondents are highly educated. More than 90% of them are Graduates or Post-Graduates or professionals. It can be inferred from the survey that services industry (34.8) and education industry (21.7%) draw the interest of a larger percentage (34.8%) of women entrepreneurs. Most of the enterprises taken into consideration are small or medium scale. A large majority of these employ within 1-20 employees. Majority (55.9%) of our respondent entrepreneurs possess experience not exceeding 10-15 years.

**Table-2: Ranking of the use of persuasive communication**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Situation** | **Mean** | **Standard Deviation** |
| Selling Products | 2.34 | 0.98 |
| Dealing with clients | 2.56 | 2.65 |
| Advertising products | 3.34 | 0.98 |
| Counselling staff | 4.08 | 1.64 |
| Dealing with government bodies | 5.21 | 1.97 |
| Hiring employees | 6.73 | 1.05 |
| Dealing with government bankers | 7.52 | 2.88 |
| Recruiting team members | 7.73 | 1.05 |
| Raising seed capital | 7.78 | 1.92 |
| Dealing with suppliers | 8.39 | 3.46 |
| Dealing with lawyers and accountants | 10.30 | 1.69 |
| Dealing with foreigners | 11.65 | 0.77 |

As shown in Table 2, the respondents hold selling the product as the first situation where persuasion is important. The mean clusters around 2.34. It may be that in market economy where selling the product is the ultimate objective, persuasive communication is possibly perceived as an important factor that may lead to larger volume of sale. They consider dealing with clients as the second situation in which persuasive communication is of the utmost importance. The women entrepreneurs hold advertising product as the third situation. They consider counseling staff as the fourth and dealing with government bodies as the fifth situation where persuasive communication is required. The finding is consistent with the study carried out by Buttner [9]. According to him, women entrepreneurs tended to see persuasive communication as essential for managing relationships with employees, governments, or social networks.

Hiring employees figures next to dealing with government bodies. This could be because it is difficult to get people hired for smaller enterprises. The respondents hold recruiting team members as the eighth situation that requires persuasion. They perceive persuasive communication is not as important a tool to be used in raising seed capital as they place it in the ninth position. Lawyers and accountants need little persuasion as they undertake the job on payment. It could be that the situation to deal with foreigners hardly arises for the respondents. So this has been considered as the last situation requiring persuasion.

**Table-3: Importance of persuasive communication in specific situations**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Specific situations** | **Mean** | **Standard Deviation** |
| Selling face to face | 4.47 | 0.59 |
| Making oral presentation | 4.39 | 0.65 |
| Handling a difficult client | 4.30 | 0.76 |
| Collecting Unpaid bills | 4.04 | 1.14 |
| Writing Sales letter | 4.04 | 0.76 |
| Writing a business proposal | 3.95 | 1.02 |
| Designing brochure for projects  or products | 3.52 | 1.47 |
| Refusing a favour request | 2.78 | 0.67 |

Table 3 deals with the use of persuasive communication in eight specific functions.Our respondents perceive persuasion as the most required in selling face to face. This is followed by making an oral presentation and handling a difficult client. This is consistent with the observation in Table 2 that dealing with clients and selling the product are given priority. The respondents place collecting unpaid bills and writing sales letter in the same position. However, they consider persuasion as more relevant for oral as compared to that for written communication is it writing a business proposal or drafting a brochure. Persuasive communication is perceived as the least important in refusing a favour request.

**Table-4: Problems encountered while communicating persuasively**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Problems** | **Mean** | **Standard Deviation** |
| I find it easier to persuade orally than in writing | 3.82 | 1.43 |
| I am not good at writing persuasive messages. | 3.73 | 1..28 |
| I find it easier to persuade an individual then group | 3.30 | 1.52 |
| I am not competent enough to deal with difficult person | 2.86 | 1.60 |
| Old clients are stubborn and so it takes much time to persuade them | 2.43 | 1.37 |
| I am basically shy | 2.21 | 1.41 |
| I am not fluent in English | 2.13 | 1.21 |

Table 4 shows the problems faced by entrepreneurs while communicating persuasively. The respondents agree that it is easier to persuade orally than in writing. This is consistent with their perception as emerges from table 3. Our respondents also agree that it is easier to persuade an individual than a group. But they disagree to the statements they are shy, they lack fluency in English and that they are not competent to deal with a difficult person. It could be largely due to the fact that most of the respondents are quite educated.

**CONCLUSION**

The findings of the paper clearly reflect the perceptions of the women entrepreneurs of Odisha as regards the significance of persuasive communication. It was found that the respondents held dealing with clients and selling products as the two situations that required persuasion the most. Selling face to face and making oral presentations were considered as the most rated specific situations that required persuasion. As far as the problems in persuasive communication were concerned, the respondents found it easier to persuade orally than in writing and an individual than a group and they were not good at writing persuasive messages.

It is quite pertinent that the demand for persuasive communication will grow with the growing number of entrepreneurs. Further study can be carried out in this area by trying to explore the possible solutions to the problem areas in persuasive communication.

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