

ASSESSING PREFERENCE OF COMMUNICATION STYLE IN INDIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract: It is an inveterate fact that communication style is one of the critical influencer in all sorts of the personal and public dealings. The aim of this study is to observe the effect of religion and gender on communication style preferences in National Capital Region (NCR) of India. The communities of NCR Hindu, Muslim & Sikhs are considered for study. A comprehensive survey was conducted and a specifically designed communication questionnaire was used to collect data. The respondents ($n = 915$) consists of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh community. The gathered data was analysed and interpreted by using Hierarchical multiple regression method. The interaction terms were incorporated in regression model in order to understand the marginal effect of independent variables. This comprehensive study provides an understanding on how religion and gender inculcate different communication approaches. The finding of this study can be of interest for communicators to understand and take into consideration the criticality of religion and gender while interacting in a business setting. This is one of the unique study on the influence of religion and gender on communication style preferences.

Keywords: Communication, Culture, Religion, Regression, Business.

INTRODUCTION

Business transaction failures are usually linked with ineffective communication. To make the communication effective it is important to have the understanding on the cultural inclination of the person involved and the influence of demographic factors. Previous researchers also have pointed out that culture plays an important role in communication ((Varner (2000), Bjerregaard, Lauring & Klitmoller (2009), Ellis & Maoz (2003)). Culture largely influences the way people interact, communicate or deal with other people. People belonging to different cultures communicate differently. Unawareness of the culture of other people may lead to miscommunication and misinterpretation while interacting. Barbash & Taylor (1997) stated that culture also include religion apart from other factors. India being a secular nation, different religions are followed and practised here. Religion census (2011) indicates that Hindu, Muslims and Sikhs are the major religions of India. As per the census Hindu community is 79.8% ,Muslim community is 14.23% and Sikh community is approximately 2% of the total Indian population. Also Female gender comprises of 48.5% and Male gender 51.5% of total Indian population.

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Past studies have suggested that Indian behaviour is largely influenced by religious beliefs and gender roles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the modern competitive business world, effective communication is considered to be utmost important for maximizing gains from a business deal. Verma & Pandey (2016) has stressed that communication these days has become an important long-term strategic tool. Dainton & Zelle (2005) stated that “communication is the process by which people interactively create, sustain and manage meanings.” Apart from maximizing gains, effective communication also plays an important role in relationship building. Everyone has one predominant style of communication while other remaining styles are sporadically present. Norton (1978) opined that “Communication style is the way one verbally or para-verbally interacts to convey how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or understood”. Salerno (2002) claimed that communication style is the form of putting across one’s feeling to get the desired effect. In this study communication style is considered as people’s preferred mode to send and receive information. If people involved in business transaction have better understanding about each other’s predominant communicating style, better results and satisfaction are expected from an interaction.

Communication style of an individual reflects the thought process, behaviour and values of an individual. Ibrahim and Ismail (2007) have stated that because of individual inclination, perspectives, recognition and developments of social reality the styles of each individual may differ. Heffner (1997) have grouped the communication styles into aggressive, passive, and assertive (Ibrahim and Ismail, 2007). Kubiak & Donald (2009) have further elaborated Heffner’s work and added one more communication style which was Passive aggressive style. Based on the review of literature on Assertive style of researchers (Lazarus (1973), Pipas and Jiradat (2010) and Nagyová (2011) as cited in Korenková (2014)) we can say that assertive style is the way of communicating with other people in which an individual expresses his genuine feelings and views in an appropriate manner while considering the feelings of others. Also as per the review of literature on Aggressive style of researchers (Davidhizar and Shearer (1993) and Scharlau (2010) as cited in Korenková 2014) we can say that aggressive style is the way of communicating with other people in which an individual considers his needs are of utmost importance and doesn’t mind behaving in a rude, threatening and controlling manner to achieve his goals. With the knowledge gained on Passive style by reviewing the literature of researchers ((Raudsepp (2005) and David (2002) we can say that passive style is the way of communication in which people do not communicate their actual feelings as they have the fear of getting rejected. On the basis of review of literature on passive aggressive style of researchers (McIluff & Coghlan (2000) and Whitson (2010)) we can say that passive aggressive style is the way of communicating with

other people in which an individual communicates his disapproval in an indirect manner by delaying, forgetting or not performing efficiently.

Culture comprises “all learned behaviours and values that are transmitted through shared experience to an individual living within the society” (Cellich and Jain, 2004). As religion is one of the important dimensions of culture and Indian citizens majorly associate themselves with their religion it will be interesting to find that does belonging to a particular religious group leads to selection of any preferred communication style. Literature focussed on Heffner’s communication styles with respect to religion in Indian context is very limited. Therefore for effective communication it becomes important to understand the cross-religion differences and how it leads to selection of a communication style. Also various researchers (Gray 1992; Mason 1994; Mulac, Bradac and Gibbons, 2001) suggested that men and women communicate differently. Therefore, it is of interest to identify the preferred communication style based in gender and religion.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With the knowledge gained through literature review, we can suggest that it will be relevant to understand the influence of religion on choosing a communication style by the considered religious groups. Keeping this in mind following research questions were framed:

Q1: Which is the preferred communication style based on religious orientation (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh) in India?

Other than observing the impact of religious orientation, it will be interesting to know the impact of gender on choosing a communication style. Therefore, the next research question is based on influence of gender.

Q2: What is the influence of Individual’s gender on communication style preference?

Two hypotheses were framed to get answers to our research questions. They are:

HA-1: There is significant difference in preference of Communication styles based on religion.

HA-2: There is significant effect of gender on exhibiting a Communication style.

Quantitative study was conducted to obtain answers to the formulated research questions.

DATA COLLECTION

Extensive literature review for each communication style helped in formulating a questionnaire for collection of data. Respondents were requested to give demographic particulars like Name, Gender (Male/Female) and Religion (Hindu/ Muslim/ Sikh/

Others). The coding for collected data was done. Male was coded as 1, Female was coded as 2, Hindu Religion was coded as 1, Muslim Religion was coded as 2, Sikh Religion was coded as 3 and Other Religion (Jains, Christians and Buddhists) was coded as 4. Shuter's (2008) suggests that the cross-cultural researches are generally not replicable as they fail to understand the distinctiveness of particular perspective of culture. Keeping this in mind authors decided to construct a new scale to identify preferred communication style for Indian context. Simple 38 statements were framed based on the existing communication scales. In the next step, content validity of the developed scale was tested. For the evaluation of questionnaire, an expert panel consisting of twenty communication experts and ten academic experts was formed. Based on the feedback from experts, only those questions were retained in the survey tool for which at least 19 experts (above 60%) out of the panel recognised them as suitable for the study to be taken. This process resulted in a scale of 24 questions, i.e. 6 questions for each style. To further confirm the questionnaire, pilot study was carried out. 200 participants were randomly picked for pilot study and they were requested to fill the questionnaire. To gather the responses 7 point Likert scale scale (1-Extremely Unlikely to 7-Extremely Likely) was used. With the collected data, reliability of the scale was checked and .83 was the Cronbach's Alpha which seemed to be acceptable for the study to be taken to the next phase.

After checking for the validity and reliability of the questionnaire we decided to gather more responses from National Capital Region (NCR). NCR comprises of Delhi and some districts of neighbouring states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. NCR has better infrastructure and facilities compared to other cities which have attracted many multinational companies to set up their businesses in this belt. As a result, many people from different parts of India have shifted to NCR for better job, education and business prospects. Communication is required for every business deal ranging from small monetary to large value transactions. Therefore NCR becomes the perfect location for examining communication styles as we have mix of population belonging to different religions in this zone. Simple random sampling technique was used for data collection. For the purpose of data collection, we used simple random sampling technique. We were able to get 915 complete responses. The breakdown of participants is 245, Male Hindu (26.7%), 173 Female Hindu (18.9%), 167 Male Muslim (18.25%), 107 Female Muslim (11.6%), 144 Male Sikh (15.7%) and 79 Female Sikh (8%).

RESEARCH MODEL

Using hierarchical linear regression approach following three multiple regression model were constructed for each communication style as dependent variable to test research hypothesis:

$$Y (\text{communication style}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ male} \quad (1)$$

$$Y (\text{communication style}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ male} + \beta_2 \text{ Muslim} + \beta_3 \text{ Sikh} \quad (2)$$

$$Y (\text{communication style}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ male} + \beta_2 \text{ Muslim} + \beta_3 \text{ Sikh} \\ + \beta_4 \text{ male} \times \text{Muslim} + \beta_5 \text{ male} \times \text{Sikh} \quad (3)$$

Hierarchical regression analysis here tests that does predictor variables (Gender and Religion) significantly explain the variance in Communication style (dependent variable). The purpose is to assess that does with the addition of variables, the value of R square and adjusted R square improves every time or not and on the basis of this we can decide which model explains the significant amount of variance. The predictor variables considered for this study are categorical variables and so appropriate dummy coding is done for the respective variables. Religion was coded with 'Hindu' as the base group, and gender was dummy coded with 'female' as the base group. Interaction of gender and religion was included in the regression model, to understand the effect of relationship between two independent variables on dependent variable. Three different models were made for each communication style. First model consisted of only male as independent variable, in the second model Muslim and Sikh religion was included and it resulted in increased R square, in the third model interaction term of male and religion was added which again resulted in improvement of R square. All the three models for passive and passive aggressive style were significant and model 2 and model 3 were statistically significant for Aggressive and Assertive communication styles. Model 3 for all the four communication styles was chosen as it predicts maximum variance of dependent variable (Refer Table 1 only chosen model is shown). An important point to be noted here is that though some individual variables in the model are not statistically significant but all the variables are mutually significant when we consider the *p* value of F. Thus all variables of model 3 were considered for interpretations. In model 3, Y (communication style) is the dependent variable (Communication style), β_0 is the intercept, β_1 is the regression coefficient associated with Male, β_2 with Muslim religious identification variable and β_3 with Sikh religious identification variable, β_4 with MaleMuslim, β_5 with MaleSikh. Please refer Table 1 for model 3 of all communication styles.

RESULTS FOR RELEGIOUS IDENTIFICATION

After conducting hierarchical regression analysis, we can say that variable Muslim significantly influences all communication styles. Values for Aggressive (0.839^{***}), Assertive (-.676^{***}), Passive Aggressive (-1.777^{***}), Passive (-1.079^{***}) suggests that Muslims are more probable than Hindus to incline towards Aggressive communication style and less probable than Hindus to incline towards other communication styles. Variable Sikh significant influences all communication styles. Values for Aggressive (-2.052^{***}), Assertive (-2.254^{***}), Passive Aggressive

(1.536^{***}), Passive (1.707^{***}) suggests that Sikhs are more probable than Hindus to incline towards Passive and Passive Aggressive communication style and less probable than Hindus to incline towards other Communication styles. Based on this data we accept hypothesis HA1.

TABLE 1: MODELS OF COMMUNICATION STYLE

	<i>Aggressive</i>	<i>Assertive</i>	<i>Passive Aggressive</i>	<i>Passive</i>
	<i>Model-3</i>	<i>Model-3</i>	<i>Model-3</i>	<i>Model-3</i>
(Constant)	5.318 ^{***}	5.761 ^{***}	3.417 ^{***}	3.601 ^{***}
Male	-0.239	0.117	0.575 ^{***}	.616 ^{***}
Muslim	0.839 ^{**}	-0.676 ^{***}	-1.777 ^{***}	-1.079 ^{***}
Sikh	-2.052 ^{***}	-2.254 ^{***}	1.536 ^{***}	1.707 ^{***}
MaleMuslim	0.37	-0.218 [*]	-0.6 ^{***}	-0.399 [*]
MaleSikh	0.404 [*]	-0.156	-0.330 [*]	-0.499 ^{**}
F	266.213 ^{***}	338.730 ^{***}	301.413 ^{***}	257.328 ^{***}
R 2	0.594	0.651	0.624	0.586
adjusted R 2	0.592	0.649	0.622	0.584

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$, *** $p < .0005$

RESULTS FOR GENDER VARIABLE

Gender variable had significant effect for two communication styles, Passive Aggressive (.575^{***}) and Passive (.616^{***}). so we can say that overall males are more Passive and Passive Aggressive as compared to females. Based on this data we accept hypothesis HA2 for Passive Aggressive and Passive communication style and reject it for Assertive and Aggressive communication style.

INTERPRETATION OF INTERACTION

To understand the effect of religion is modified by gender or nor, the interaction graph was plotted. The Y axis indicates the dependent variable (communication styles) and X axis indicates two categories of gender i.e. male and female. For Aggressive style, as shown in Table 1 Male Muslim is not significant but Male Sikh is significant. As shown in Figure 1, the effect of gender and the effect of religion are independent of each other. Therefore, it can be interpreted that they do act independently on the mean aggressive style. Also, we can interpret that for religious communities, Hindu and Muslim, both the genders have almost the same degree of likelihood for adopting this style. As shown in Table 1 Male Muslim interaction term is significant for Assertive style. As shown in Figure 1, the effect of gender and the effect of religion are independent of each other. Therefore, it can be interpreted that they do act independently on the mean assertive style. Also, we

can interpret that for religious communities, Hindu and Muslim, both the genders have almost the same degree of likelihood for adopting this style.

Table 1 suggests that the interaction terms are significant for Passive Aggressive style. Figure 3 shows the effect of gender and the effect of religion is dependent of each other. Therefore, it can be interpreted that they do act dependently on the mean Passive Aggressive style. Also it is observed that within a religion, both the genders have almost the same degree of likelihood for adopting this style. As shown in table 1, the interaction terms are significant for Passive style. Figure 4 shows the effect of gender and the effect of religion is independent of each other. Therefore, it can be interpreted that they do act independently on the mean Passive style. Also it is observed that within a religion, both the genders have almost the same degree of likelihood for adopting this style.

SUMMARY

India is a distinct nation, where diverse religions are followed and the convictions related with these religions to a great extent impact the general conduct of people. The major population of the region NCR consists of three religious communities Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. For various business transactions, people of these communities interact with each other and therefore it is interesting to know the inclination of people from these religious groups for a communication style. The study here focuses on indentifying the preference for a specific communication style over other styles on the basis of religion and gender. Empirical analysis suggests that Muslims prefer aggressive style more than Hindus. The orientation for this style can be attributed to the fact that Muslims being a minority community have fear of being suppressed. In the past, Muslim community have been marginalised and are considered as economically weaker section and discriminated on cultural and social grounds (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1997). Because of this belief carried by themselves and other communities within the country, there is a likelihood that they lack trust on others when involved in a business deal and so adopt to be aggressive to achieve their goals. The findings also suggest that the passive style is the most preferred style for Sikh community. Till year 1590, Sikh religion was a peaceful religion but due to atrocities given by Mughal Emperors Jahangir and Aurangzeb people of this community started opting for self-defence (Björkqvist, 1994). In the contemporary times, when conditions for Sikh community have normalized they might want to gel in with the majority community. In NCR, the Sikh community is in minority and people of this community have usually come from neighbouring states for business purposes. Being the minority community and different in cultural and religious beliefs there is a possibility that they are unsure about how to deal with people of other community and so they decide to opt for passive style in order not to lose the business deals. On the basis of findings, it can also be suggested that

assertive style is the preferred style for the reference group Hindu community. The reason behind following this style could be that Hindus try to look for a solution that involves everyone concerned and also try to satisfy them (Moran & Stripp, 1991). This tendency by Hindus can result in trying to be considerate about feelings of others and also comfortably expressing their opinion as they are majority group.

There was no influence of gender on preference for Assertive and Aggressive communication styles. However, findings suggest that there is an influence of Gender on Passive and Passive Aggressive communication styles. Males are more Passive and Passive Aggressive as compared to females. This could be due to the fact that females are considered to be high on emotional expressiveness when compared to males (Kring & Gordon 1998). Therefore, females comfortably communicate their feelings in an effective manner as compared to males and so are less passive than males. Similarly they are less passive aggressive as they do not hold their feelings within in case of a disapproval while communicating. They verbally or non-verbally express themselves better than males.

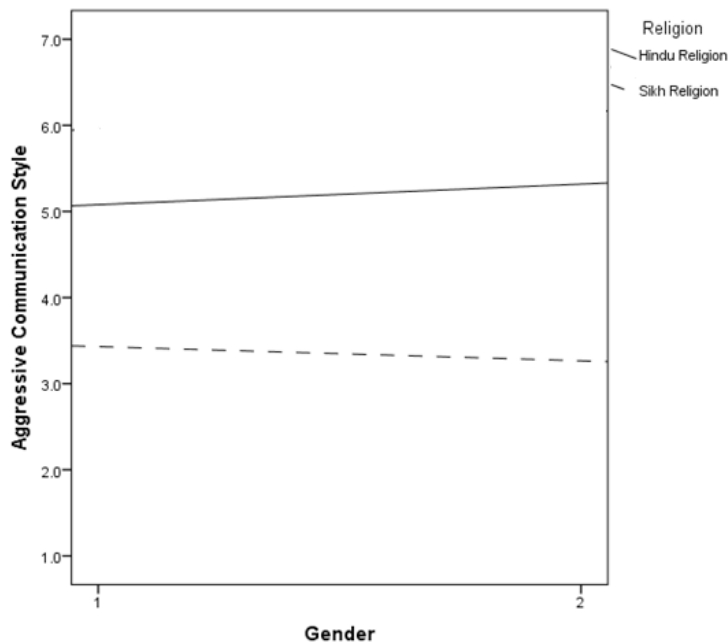


Figure 1: Interaction for Aggressive Communication Style

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER SCOPE

There are certain limitations in the present study. The assessment of communication is done in National Capital Region of India and Hindus are in majority in this belt. Therefore we cannot overlook the possibility that some of the findings could be

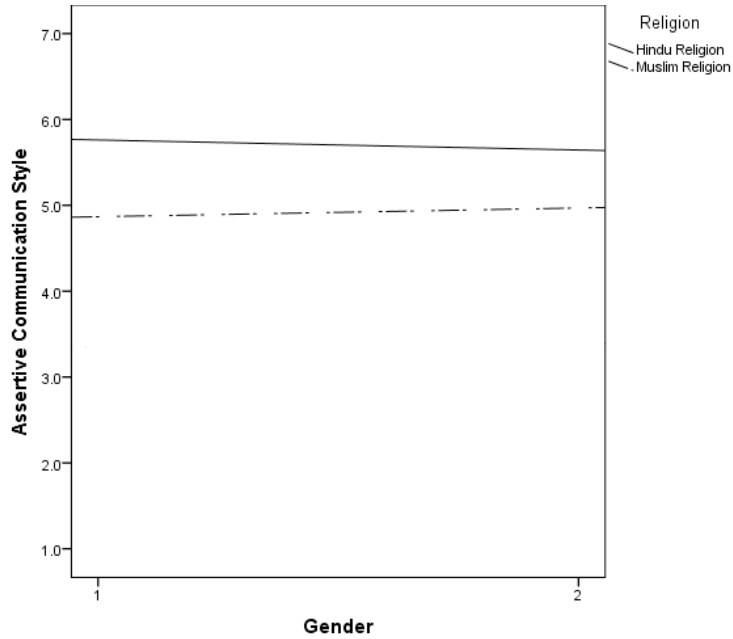


Figure 2: Interaction for Assertive Communication Style

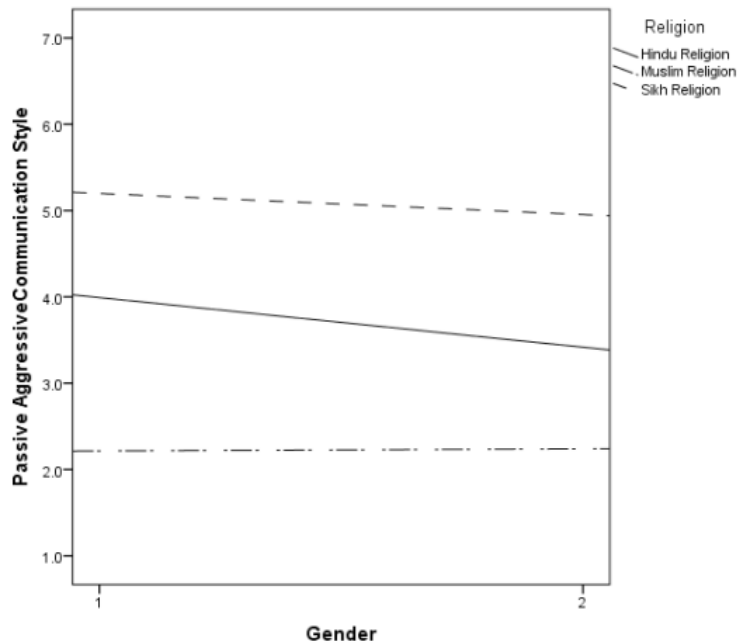


Figure 3: Interaction for Passive Aggressive Communication Style

influenced by majority/minority dynamics. Also the study was conducted on a big sample size still there is a chance that sample is not an overall representative of NCR population. The study can be cross-validated with a much bigger sample size and the study can be replicated in other regions of India as well. Also other religious communities can be included to enhance knowledge of religion wise preference of communication style.

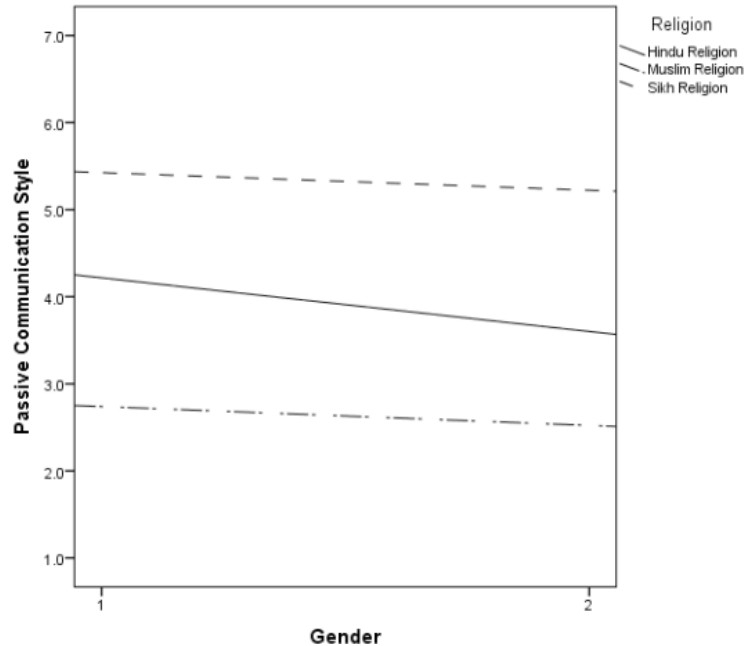


Figure 4: Interaction for Passive Communication Style

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