

Cultural Issues and ‘Mofij’ in Local Business Development: Pragmatic Perspective

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Authors' contributions

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ABSTRACT

A carefully designed study conducted to find out the cultural issues reigning business development in the northern region of Bangladesh. Also aimed at prescribing the possible way outs for organisations to cope up with these issues. Both the quantitative and qualitative research methods have been employed to analyse the collected data from both primary and secondary sources. The study indicated that communication; power distance, management styles, employee autonomy and ways of expressing feedbacks affect the business as a cultural issue. The significant finding is the most popular term ‘Mofij’ which in one sense a big cultural issue on the other, it could be a business brand. Based on these findings, measures should be taken to develop business models which are easy to implement, responsive to these cultural issues and flexible enough to adopt any possible mean to use the cultural differences in favour of the business. The model should be well-equipped with properly derived practical local communication instructions such as term ‘Mofij’ and provide involved parties with appropriate cooperation strategy”.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural Issues in business development are changes in between two or more countries, region and locality influenced by spatial, social, economic, historical and environmental attribute [1]. This paper is mainly focused on cultural issues with consideration of surroundings environmental consequences in pragmatic perspective. Cultural issues are based on differences in customs, race, ethnicity, manners, etiquette, qualities, social status, the psychology of business practices, etc. In addition, values, parenting practices, stereotypes are also considerable. Cultural issue is one of the vital key factors for any business to be successful in today's increasingly competitive markets [2]. Cultural issues are known to influence the communication and success potential of competition in business. Cultural consciousness figures how business firms perform in cross-culturally reflected local markets. Generally, it is recognised that cultural issues act as invisible barriers in business development. Understanding cultural differences is one of the most significant skills for firms to develop to have a competitive advantage in local or regional business. A business firm's success is in part regulated by some factors such as its product's marketing strategies, supply and availability to consumers. However, senior management in many companies working in some cases neglect the significance of invisible cultural issues which may create barriers in business development. Cultural factors play a significant role, functioning as invisible barriers. It is expected that local culture will be a judicious factor affecting economic development, demographic behaviour, and general business policies in nationwide. This paper probes some key elements of cultural issues in local the term 'Mofij' and within the country business communication and provides a framework for creating competitive advantage for firms engaged in business from a pragmatic perspective. The present study is subjected to observe the cultural issues and the scope in a business development in the Northern part of Bangladesh.

2. STUDY RATIONALE

Culture specifies a set of interrelated symbols, codes, and values that direct and justify human behaviour [3]. However, the concept of culture is

treated by the business people very minimal and commonly and in some cases, consumers overlook the depth and importance of the culture and analysing human behaviour [4,5]. Tradition-based cultures emphasise history and established settlement while, modernity-based cultures have weaker ties to tradition. At the same time, settlements are ever-shifting [3,6]. Human behaviours including business take place in the cultural context. However, people can change behaviour within the cultural context that take place [7]. Cultural factors impact people's shopping [8]. Cultural issues are often dominate business marketing [9,10,11]. Hooker (2008) stated, "there is no better arena for observing a culture in action than business [12]. Culture is a challenging issue for many businesses since it is characteristically nebulous and habitually difficult to recognise [13]. Sheer and Chen (2003) examined the influence of cultural and professional preferences on the process in Chinese and Western and their interactions and found significant differences between expectations and strategies [14]. Westerners articulated more importance on adaptation compared to Chinese negotiators. For instance, to succeed in the Persian Gulf, most American franchisers have adapted the flexibility on cultural issues and ensure that their business policy are appropriately operated [15]. Similarly, cultural overtones in business operations derive, to some extent, from consumer preferences [5]. Griffith and Ryans (1995) suggested that "the cultural characteristics of a target market will be responsive to certain culturally bound channel structures, such as local stores, or bazaars..." (p.62). Hamilton stated that trading has a significant place within the culture itself [16]. However, cultural issues are such powerful influencers of behaviour which impact on local business development. Therefore, senior management must work hard to understand that spatial culture and cope into their business. To build and develop of both visible and invisible indicators of local culture is a significant initial step in determining how to manage these key factors in business development [17]. Many previous studies discussed above on cultural issues in business development have been conducted in western countries, but in developing countries very few have done. In particularly none of them have been studied on the northern area of Bangladesh. Therefore, Rangpur was decided as a subjected study area

where the term '*Mofij*' as a cultural issue is well established.

Rangpur, the center of the Northern part of Bangladesh, is a potential newly developed administrative division and developing City Corporation (metropolitan) area. The government of Bangladesh has been financing huge amount of investment in the different sectors in this region. However, it seems, the business development through policy and strategies are affected by cultural issue. For instance, in this area, people are called as '*Mofij*' literally treated as an 'idiot' whereas it could be a Brand as people are rather hard worker, sincere and honest.

The study considers cultural issues as an impact catalyst. The aim of this paper is to analyse and evaluate different cultural issues considering the rational perspective in national and international business environment in this area, to obtain pragmatic realities and possible solution for synchronisation of barriers.

3. METHODOLOGY

Analysed multi-layered both quantitative and qualitative data were adopted to understand the overall situation in the study area. Analysis of macroeconomic indicators is helping to evaluate the overall socio-economic circumstances of the subjected business and entrepreneurship phenomena. In addition, an observational method was also occupied to understand the dimension of a business cycle and obstacle of business development. This method was specified to understand the cultural phenomena as an obstacle. Statistical data as a secondary information from Central Statistical Bureau of Bangladesh was used to understand the differences among employment status, economic growth, financial investment and other business-related issues in the study area. Several formal and informal dialogue, interview, group discussions were arranged as a primary data collection source to interpret the pragmatic situation of the subjected aims of the study [18,19,20].

3.1 Sample Selection

Initial observation suggested significant and distinct wide target groups (strata); such as employees of the public and private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGO), corporate, multinational, local industry and self-entrepreneur. Having identified these potentially

significant groups, each group was sampled according to a sampling plan appropriate to that type of population. Employees of the various hierarchies in the business were subjected. This group was considered to comprise several significant subgroups.

- a) Owner,
- b) managers or senior Officials
- c) Individuals involved directly in production
- d) Individuals involved in product marketing
- e) Individuals working as middleman.

Three types of business firms were considered: self-financed, bank loan financed, and government financed. At each of 21 self-financed, 22 bank-loan-financed, and 26 government financed business were sampled while key participants were chosen from different sections encompassing a wide variety of professional experiences and hierarchical positions included in the study. Thus, a total of 69 questionnaires were administered at 69 business firms among the participants. Participants were selected from each stratum by purposive/authoritative sampling technique and interviewed following a similar approach. Each participant was given a unique code number with sex (Rs1- Rs69). In addition, 10 selected individuals were interviewed as qualitative in-depth narrative case-study to analyse the level perceptions of cultural issues on business development.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher observed the actions and behaviours of selected participants in their usual settings, noting the routine aspects of daily life and nature of work activities. Third person listening approach [10] was used to find an understanding of the interaction between two or more individuals and the social environment impacting on their entrepreneur behavioural attitude. Formal structured interviews were arranged, as judged appropriate in each individual circumstance. The structure was designed in accordance with business entrepreneur and questions divided into sub-groups: questions about type of business, business position, type of business activities, duration of business, professional attitude and behaviour as a cultural uniqueness. An informal dialogue approach was used where formal techniques were not judged appropriate with the selected informants at times and places where the participant's interest could be obtained and retained. Communication policy and strategies

also were observed among the sampled participants.

The sample covered the different target groups, with a wide variety of professional experiences and hierarchical positions from raw materials production level in the field through harvester, collector, media-man, supplier, buyer, finished product introducer, seller to consumer. To understand the perceptions and to extract meaning, textual data were analysed using hermeneutical [21], and discourse techniques and these were combined in a grounded theory approach [22]. The chosen methods acknowledge the complexity of the interactions between and within the different groups of participants and their interactions with the surrounding environment and the general population regarding business activities.

The study was conducted in Bangla and then transcribed verbatim and translated into English. Most interviews were tape-recorded. Three participants refused to be recorded and extensive notes were taken during their interviews. The interviews were coded and categorised by the author, himself as a native person, several times to create a system of thematic classification. A process of theoretical validation was undertaken to ensure that the units of classification (themes, issues, concepts) were sensitive to the informants' narratives. As a first step, the interview transcripts and audiotapes were provided to the informants to give them an opportunity to reflect on their narratives and to correct or add to these in a second brief interview with the author.

Three stages of thematic analysis were conducted. First, themes were extracted from the transcripts; second, these themes were categorised and organised; and finally, an interpretive analysis yielded a theoretical explanation of the cultural barriers in the business sector. Ethics approval for this study was obtained from research committee. Participants were informed that withdrawing from the study is up to them and consent was taken.

They were assured of confidentiality and no identifying information was collected; pseudonyms have been used in this paper.

Besides these strategies, personal experiences and secondary information were used to better interpretation of the primary data and illustration and comparison of the result. The results are presented descriptively after interpretation and discussed by the researcher's own subjective judgment.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The educational characteristics of the sampled populations are presented in Table 1. Most of the participants (58%) were found to be educated college and above. Only 3% were illiterate, and the survey revealed that they were involved not only from financially marginalised background but also from financially strong background. They are involved by their family tradition and applying their inherited knowledge from their senior family members. The participants are highly educated who have been financed by others. This may direct their network through educational and social interactions. On the other hand, none of them were found illiterate who have been financed from others.

One of the most cultural barriers in business development in the study area is lack of communication ability. On the other hand, it may be described the different way of communication due to different cultural background. Communication ability among individuals from different cultural backgrounds can be full of challenges and still in debate. Possibility to fail in communication among different individual with different cultural backgrounds is significant in the business development process. Several barriers of communications are: physical expression, body language, attitude, local culture, perception, motivation to understand, equal lack of competencies, lack of equal reception capabilities, personal emotions, verbal and non-verbal barriers and competition are observed.

Table 1. Educational characteristics of the study subjects

Occupation	Group one: Self-financed (%)	Group two: Bank-loan-financed (%)	Group three: Government-inanced (%)	Total (%)
Illiterate	2 (9)	0	0	2 (3)
Primary	5(24)	5(23)	2(7)	12 (17)
Secondary	6(29)	5(23)	4(16)	15 (22)
College +	8(38)	12 (54)	20(77)	40 (58)
Total	21	22	26	69

Table 2. Knowledge on communication as a cultural issue

Knowledge range	Group one: Self-financed (%)	Group two: Bank-loan-financed (%)	Group three: Government-financed (%)	Total (%)
Not aware	3 (14)	2 (9)	1 (4)	6 (8)
Medium aware	5(24)	4(18)	3(11)	12 (17)
Thinks affected	6(29)	6(27)	6(23)	18 (27)
Fully aware	7(33)	10 (46)	16(62)	33 (48)
Total	21	22	26	69

Table 2 shows the knowledge of communication ability as a cultural issue. The present study revealed that all these issues are influenced by lack of communication ability as cultural features. In the study area, it has been found that most of the respondents are communicative but not with proper manner. Almost 52% participants are not fully aware about knowledge on communication. It refers, that communicative interaction is not practiced appropriately or in a standard manner. In the northern part of Bangladesh, people are easier going without any reservation rather than typical approach which can describe as acquitted. Therefore, it also reflects on their daily life activities. This easy-going innocent approach is in some cases are not workable for entrepreneurship development.

Social interaction is significant to stabilise the business market. Social interaction in business is one of the major cultural aspects in Bangladesh. The present study also painted that social interactions as a cultural issue is another potential problem areas regarding business development in the study area.

One of the most important dimensions in the context of business administration in Bangladesh is power distance. Hierarchy in the local companies is more clientelistic which means that level of participatory management in business processes is irregular. In the study area, there is a subservient structure, with power distance among employees are not structured by the position. Employees can not feel free to communicate with all level managers. On the other hand, they can communicate with the top-level managers due to the subservient clientelistic relation. This practice also varies from entrepreneur to entrepreneur depend on types of business. Some are democratic and open with a good relation among employers and employees, and some are quite structured with bold hierarchy and old-style power distance management. In many cases, most of the managers are separated from employees with own office and closed doors.

Independence of finding solutions to fulfill job duties among associates is subservient. However, people in the study area strongly believe in human labor which is significantly practiced as human credibility. The level of bureaucracy is another strong barrier in Bangladesh which is defined in the present study is administrative culture. This is responsible for the uncertainty of business dimension. At the same time, this also dictates the cultural barriers of the society in case of failure.

To avoid the observed uncertain situations of business barriers, an entrepreneur should plan their business future in long-term and they should not consider any situation as a standard. They should consider their own abilities first and should strongly attach themselves to their traditions and heritage. At the same time, consider the challenges of the future.

In the northern part of Bangladesh, people are not prejudiced. This allows them to achieve their high rate of results in satisfaction figures both in the work environment and in private life. After studying cultural differences of the study area (northern part of Bangladesh) and other parts of Bangladesh, several important cultural issues were defined. The significant and one of the main issue is the communication gap. Peoples express their views directly, pointing to a specific problem, the solution or action, while they are supposed to express their attitude or opinion indirectly.

Culture reflects the way people think and how they are interpreting the surrounding's interaction with them. In every country, every local region, there is a certain way to run the business, manage and develop, and lead, which are cherished by reflecting culture. When asked during the study, most of the individuals (56%) reported they have no training on business dealing with others. They are practicing what they have learnt by hieratically. Among them, 23% are educating from different NGOs. However, literally most (76%) of them are familiar

that they have language problem when they deal with other region traders. Even some of them (11%) are not considering that they need international language to develop their communication. These differences among the local region within the countries can be detected in comparison. Cultural features define direct communication and strong expression of opinion are inappropriate in some cases. Whereas, communication may lead to a situation in a different way even may end up with a positive outcome. Differences can be absorbed in such simple things as office structure (open/closed), eating and greeting habits among the employee and employers, and in other practical things which show differences between different positions.

One of the significant things in the present study revealed is the notable cultural differences between generations in the northern part of Bangladesh. The older generation is more conservative, self-conscious and willing to comply with the hierarchy. On the other hand, the present young generation (88%) in the study area is more open, modern and with no patience for hierarchy. For an outsider from another region, it could be quite a challenge to cooperate with diverse generations. Rangpur division, the northern part of Bangladesh is a unique potential area within the country which is strongly oriented in innovative business with long-term solutions refers sustainable.

One of the most interesting significant findings from this study is people are generally known the local term "*Mofij*" in this study refers a very innocent, honest, sincere, hard worker and easy going. During the study, several numbers of stories myth on the term '*Mofij*' were found. However, extract from all the narrative data, people from the northern Bangladesh are often termed as '*Mofij*', in a somewhat belittling manner, to indicate their so called 'foolishness'. But if one can have a look close enough to discern between the popular belief and the reality, he/she would be able to understand that, these people are not foolish at all. They are simple: simple in the way of living, way of giving, and off course in their behavior but unpopular attitude. They can instantly behave like a close friend to a stranger. They are not accustomed to think critically, so they get the straight words in a straighter way. These attitudes essentially make them look like fool which has made the '*Mofij*' perception a myth!

The present study revealed that most of the individuals are ignoring cultural issues due to job satisfaction and being treated as '*Mofij*'.

The stories below are typical. For example Komol [Male, aged 31] told of how he had attended many interviews without success, but got his job in this small job without an interview. He explained his luck, whispering "*...this is my fate that I have to do this job as I am Mofij*". Another went on "*... I tried to get a good job, but unfortunately I couldn't manage. Now I don't have any interest to think about cultural issue. I had no alternative options. Therefore, I choose this profession*". Alam [Male, aged 45] agreed with Komol, "*.....if we don't get job we have to engage in any kind of work whether we have knowledge or not. After starting this job, day by day I lose my interest. I am not worried about communication.*" Mukim [Male, aged 37] felt he had faced discrimination: "*.....we are discriminated in every step in our life as people treated us Mofij*". Suvash [Male, aged 31] said, "*senior management are not thinking about our skills or improvement, even by the government. Why? Because they think we are Mofij and we are not capable*". Another named Owahed [Male 35] added angrily "*.....unfortunately nothing is needed in our daily life we know how to deal with people.*" He included his voice whispering, "*so how do you think that we supposed to think about cultural issues being Mofij?*".

So, how they look at their lives affects their behavior and transaction much. People from other regions certainly need to take some time to come up with their unique and sometimes weird interaction. Businessmen, bankers, university students and professors, and government officials who come here to serve and be served, find it rather hard to get along. But when they do, they can easily feel at home, because the people here are, like the nation claims it to be, foe to none friends to all.

Variables such as the dominant ideology of society, and effects of socialization and life experiences of groups distinguished by class, education, and income are also important determinants for explaining the causes of cultural issue in psychosocial terms.

Now the argument, what is wrong with the term '*Mofij*' with inheritance of skills as a cultural issue with limited access to education? The problem is the socially affiliated status as "culturally behind" in the eyes of most of the population generally.

Indeed, their hereditary living pattern and traditional attitude towards their lives and occupation are seems to be an obstacles for them to change and improve the quality of life. Is it true? Not really. Nevertheless, since nobody pays attentions to the term '*Mofij*' as a business brand, they also get frustrated and see their life as it is and continuing to be same. Indeed, if the '*Mofij*' communities are properly educated, skilled, trained and supported by alternative financial resources for their subsistence, survival and substantial up gradation of their livelihoods throughout the year with countrywide programs, they are sure to produce more social goods instead of treated as liabilities from which the entire nation would be benefited as a Brand.

The rigid psycho-cultural barriers to continue the business community from generation to generation based on birth made the ways for change and transformation of profession a difficult dilemma. Though there has been the both vertical and horizontal mobility among these different circumstantial, still it is prevalent and damaging for the social, cultural, economical and national dynamics. The prevailing concept and understanding about discrimination based on locally cultural issue has not been duly addressed or even recognized by the scholars belonging to Marxist and neo-Marxist schools of thoughts. But in reality, the life patterns of these work-based generations are very much exploited in urban locations, which this study approves in a befitting manner.

It is evident from the present study that major population of '*Mofij*' face discrimination in almost all spheres of life in the other area of the country. In some case, their access to all modern amenities necessary for sound and healthy social and economical formation is highly marginalized. In addition, access to modern education for better or change their professions and access to power structure for motivating the change is still like a dream for this community being a '*Mofij*'. This study in fact did its best to identify the nature of their livelihoods related to economic marginalization and investigate the extent of beliefs on cultural fatalism through different mechanisms. However, this study could measure the extent to a great deal with a liberal approach based on '*Mofij*' concept as an example of local community. Further, the study objectively delineates that the practice of socio-cultural affiliation and the work-based fatalism of human

being related to poverty in Bangladesh has become an accepted and usual norm for many ethnic groups in the community.

The views of the respondents attributed results showed most of the respondents are agreed (Figure 1) when asked the impression of the term that '*Mofij*' are more likely to blame cultural poverty on the system as opposed to the individualistic or fatalistic dimensions. Respondents' structural explanations of cultural poverty may be influenced by the prevalence of poverty in the government's inability to provide its citizens with essential public services such as health and education, or to set plans for economic recovery for business development.

While previous studies have shown that structural explanations of poverty tend to be influenced by cultural factors (Harper, 1991) or by the dominant ideology of society (Kim, 2000; Morcol, 1997), our findings suggest that social beliefs, fatalism and local affiliation overshadow the influence of ideology and culture. From another perspective, one may wonder why fatalistic beliefs, which are supposed to have been nourished by the social structure of *Mofij* community, are of greater value compared to the structuralist and individualistic attitudes towards business development. This may be that social beliefs that reinforce cultural fatalism in *Mofij* community.

This term '*Mofij*' is the main '*local capital*' which even they do not realize or recognize that they can use for their cultural issues development as they behave like '*Mofij*'. However, it could be presumed that one day this term will be a "Brand" in the international business world distinguished by qualitative discussion along with several business professionals. The product comes with the Brand name "*Mofij*" will dominate and control the market at national and international market if they can promote. At the same time, this area is exceptionally historical and antic within the country. People in this area are a more long-term oriented residence with a flexible opinion for traditions. Attention should be paid to the role of status in the study area. There is strong necessity to have high status as much as possible. However, in Rangpur Division, it is almost opposite - the society in the other part of the country do not like when people express their wealth or success.

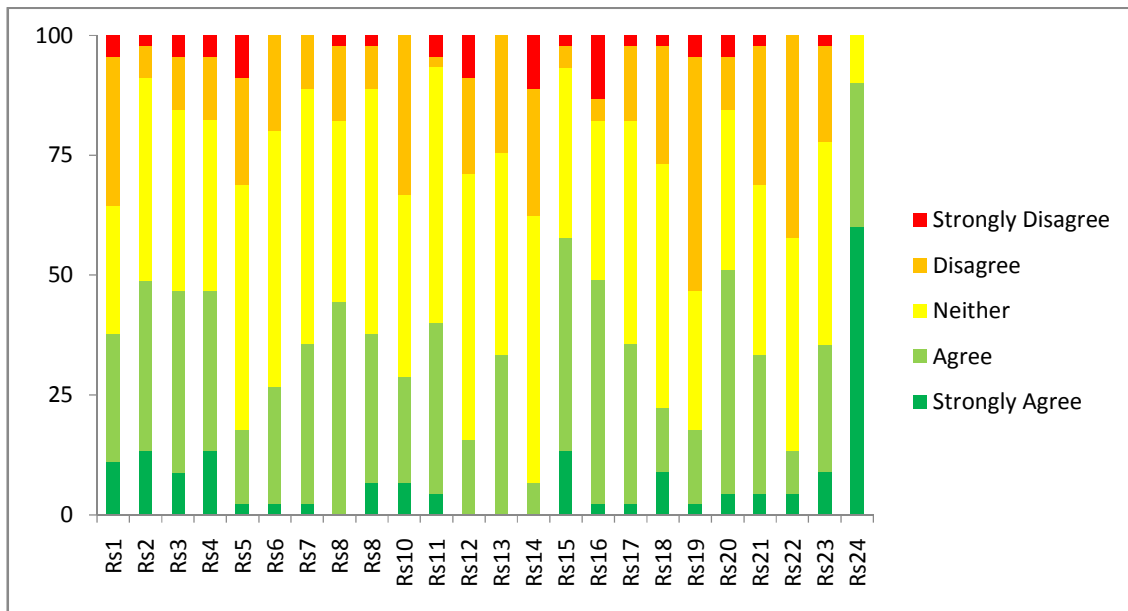


Fig. 1. The cultural poverty as the term Mofij

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

There is no doubt that cultural differences are one of the most significant issues in business environment. The debate is how to get rid of them from a local context. It is time to think about the situation to develop business culture rather business barriers. Research attempt should be focused on development of business model through supply chain management to environmental marketing. Model which is easy and accessible to implement within the organisation can use in their intern environment to eliminate the negative impact of cultural issues. Any other approach should be incorporated which is appropriate for the particular local business. The model should provide involved parties with the cooperation strategy including practical local communication instructions and rules which is applicable. In addition, make sure corporate companies with multilayer practice should be integrated which can help to minimise economical consequences of mismanaged cross-cultural barriers.

From a pragmatic perspective, it is time for a company to appreciate that markets today are wide enough and cross-cultural. Entrepreneur should aware of sensitive cultural issues which is significant for a local business success. Failure to place strategy and policy regarding the cultural context of the country, a well running business

will be impacted [23]. Problems in business often arise when individuals from one culture are unable to understand culturally determined differences in communication practices, traditions, and trading process in another cultural context. Understanding the importance of cultural values in business has great pragmatic value in development. Determining differences in cultural values should guide the formulation of business strategies and policies in the local context.

CONSENT

Participants were informed that withdrawing from the study is up to them and consent was taken.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from research committee.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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