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The Impact of Service Ethics on Organizational Competitiveness in India - A Primary Approach to the Startup and Emerging Service Enterprises

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Abstract *Ethics concern an individual's moral judgments about right and wrong. The decision to behave ethically is a moral one; employees must decide what they think is the right course of action. This may involve rejecting the route, which would lead to the biggest short-term profit. It seems the larger a corporation gets, the slimier their actions become. When big profits are a company's largest and only concern, their employees and the world in general tends to suffer. Here are companies, which have engaged in terribly unethical business practices and are, fortunately, being called out for it. Many a times, business houses get involved in unethical business practices to increase their profits or improve their capability in market. Such practices were carried out throughout the world. This calls for studying the matter. Approaching towards our Focus Group, i.e., Indian Service Sector, which is the youngest and the fastest-growing sector of Economy as well as has the largest share in the structure and growth of the economy, is the foremost tool of growth and development of nation, we can have. However, this sector in recent past many a times, especially in India, has been accused of its service failures and incompetence, arising out of irresponsible behaviour / treatise of management or professionals at various levels. Now, in this research that focuses on Emerging and Start-up Indian Service Sector Corporates, the status of ethics in their practices and the need and possibility of its revival has been studied.*

Keywords: *Ethical Business Practices, Organisational Competitiveness, Services Sector*

INTRODUCTION

Business management scholars have been searching for a business case for corporate social responsibility (CSR) since the origins of the concept in the 1960s. The CSR of the 1960s and 1970s was motivated by social considerations, not economic ones. Codes of ethics are often not supported by training in ethical practices for employees. It is not clear whether confidential reporting lines are used effectively and, in many cases, no senior manager is clearly designated to handle ethics issues. In the last decade in particular, empirical research has brought an evidence of the measurable payoff of CSR initiatives to companies as well as their stakeholders. Ethical Codes in the Indian Context have not been subjected to much scrutiny. A culture that is conservative in monetary terms attaches a very high value to created wealth, in turn, leading to business practices bringing change in lives of many and ensuring the process of wealth creation. Most of the well-established firms have a well-written ethical code of conduct and they strictly follow it. These firms are successively increasing their participation in the CSR activities. Small startup firms stress on revenue collection. Until present, most of the regulations regarding business ethos, good governance and CSR are only focused on large public-listed companies. This brings up a gap between the ethical scenarios of nation. Hence, more empirical and theoretical research work is needed in the sphere to firm up the exact modular relationship between the societal culture and business ethics, in context of the untapped segments. All these reveals us that many a times business houses got involved in unethical business practices to increase their profits or improve their capability in market. Such practices were carried out throughout the world. This calls for a study on the matter. Approaching towards our Focus Group, i.e., Indian Service Sector, which is the youngest and the fastest-growing sector of Economy and has the largest share in the structure and growth of the economy, is the foremost tool of growth and development of nation, we can have. but this sector in recent past many a times, especially in India, has been accused of its service failures and incompetence, arising out of irresponsible behaviour/treatise of management or professionals at various levels. Now, in this research that focuses on Emerging and Start-up Indian Service Sector Corporates, the status of ethics in their practices and the need and possibility of its revival has been studied.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND (RECENT RESEARCH)

Mulla (2003) observes, "efficacy of corporate initiatives in the ethical regard in Indian Environment remains to be

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seen". He exclaims, "employees' personal initiative and dynamic leadership for a sustainable moral ethical character will work for".

Seshadri, Raghawan, and Hedge (2007) expands: "business ethics are also about creating an ethically sound working environment within organization and about modeling ethical behavior by leadership. It makes good long term business sense to be ethical".

Jalil, Azam, and Rahman (2010) interprets, "ethics and ethical behavior are issues which are increasingly being focused". As per the study, "organizations are crossing red zone of ethics and ethical behaviors". They also acknowledge, "organizations are constantly surveying and evaluating the unethical practice in business organizations worldwide". They recommend, "it is very essential to have a code of business ethics in every business organization and having the code implemented in the organization in objective and effective way".

Mishra and Sharma (2010) interprets, "effective CSR Policy within specific industries and companies is becoming increasingly accepted, but its implementation varies all across".

Smart, Barman, and Gunasekera (2010) is of view that "corporate communications and reporting on sustainability need to do more than just pay lip service to the green agenda" and "ethics must be embedded in business models, organizational strategy and decision making processes". As per them, "governance structures should include people with appropriate skills to scrutinize performance and strategy across social, ethical and environmental issues".

Labbai (2013) stresses, "companies must adopt and disseminate a written Code of Ethics, build a company tradition of ethical behavior, and hold its people fully responsible for observing ethical and legal guidelines". He recommends, "companies able to innovate new solutions and values in a socially responsible way, are most likely to succeed".

Husssaini (2014) carried out a research on top Indian IT companies. She emphasized for a "strong need to formally address the ethical issues with all seriousness". She argues, "ethical and compliance policies are not in place in Indian IT Firms and there is a strong need to improve up to reach up to global standards, if they wish to succeed in global market over a long term". She recommends, "a standard for measuring and reporting ethical behavior in business should be adopted to validate the claims of it being ethical".

Mishra, Dalvi, Sahni, and Verma (2014) stress, "most of the well established firms have a well written ethical code of conduct and they strictly follow it". According to them, "these firms are successively increasing their participation in the CSR activities". In contrast, they comment up on the small businesses saying, "small startup firms stress on revenue collection".

It is empirically proved that "ethical practices in business help to create favorable relationships with other organizations and establish long-term positive relationships with existing and potential future customers" and hence "grow and sustain in long run".

RESEARCH GAP AND IMPORTANCE

Theoretical review has found only a "least or negligible research on the phenomenon with regard to Indian service sector firms in a rigorous manner". Only a few reports or papers have been found on this matter. Ethical failures are substantially observed in services. Still the service sector is the most growing sector of the economy. It has been theoretically urged that "small startup firms stress on revenue collection". Further, the current studies in India are mostly focused on large firms, and are based on the secondary information. The present study has attempted to cover the same research gap by using different data sources relevant to the study. The problem is of substantial importance because of the corporate governance practices opted by Indian firms as a part of global economy as well as not as such significant work being done on the aforesaid phenomenon. This study is significant, as it tends to give a clear picture of the collective scenarios of Indian businesses in this context and makes a useful contribution towards the phenomena (Kanda, 2017).

OBJECTIVES

- To identify the ethical practices followed by Indian service corporates
- To find the impact of ethical business practices (EBP) on the competitiveness of service sector in India (Kanda, 2017)

SCOPE

This research regarding the existence and practicability of ethical conduct in the present competitive business environment is prepared for the period starting from the date of project inception to the project conclusion. Therefore, this project presents an overview regarding the Indian business practices in service sector for this period and other allied data. In addition, this report also gives us a brief view of the global trend and the situation of the Indian economy in the present competitive scenario (Kanda, 2017).

HYPOTHESIS (FOCUSED ON)

- Degree of Indian service corporates' recognition of the existence of ethics in today's competitive business environment
- Degree of relationship between organisational and business growth and EBP (Kanda, 2017)

RESEARCH DESIGN / METHODOLOGY

Being a qualitative research, design opted for this research is descriptive research design, where survey was used as the primary method of data collection. For the purpose of primary data collection, structured data-collection design of survey method has been used with the majority of close-ended alternative design of questions in the questionnaire. For the purpose of interviewing, primarily personal interviewing with a supplement of telephonic & electronic interview techniques of interviewing, has been used depending upon the reach and availability of sample. In some cases, observation has been used as a supplementary source of data collection whenever applicable. A pilot survey on 10% of the sample, i.e., 20 organizations, was initiated in inception to leash out the anomalies left, which is followed by main research survey, after corrections, in the respective sub-sectors. Methods for the data collection from the above sources included sample survey, observation, expert opinion and secondary data analysis as appropriate with a sample size of 0.50% (all India sample of 200 concerns out of total 39,971 concerns in Indian service sector*), adjusted based on adequate representation of the industry and region. For the purpose of sampling, companies/other registered organizations in service sector, having their span of operations in India, were considered as population. For the purpose of primary data collection, a sample size of pan-Indian 200 service concerns was taken into consideration. There was a three-tier survey. Key personnel(s)/official(s) of the these organizations were interviewed/surveyed by the earlier modes of data collection, as their internal stakeholders. They were asked about the existence of EBP in corporate world and their organisation, the details of EBP opted by their concern for its service delivery, and the impact of such EBP on the organisational and business growth of their organisation. Customers in reach, nearby observers, government representatives, independent company auditors, independent research organisations, research groups, CSR/corporate governance organisations, etc., with questions about EBP in service delivery quality and service failure handling, as the external stakeholders. Besides, an independent study (not interpreted) about ethical services delivery had been conducted from the general public available at public places, with a minimum sample of 60 respondents each from the given three corporate-cum metropolitan regions of Bengaluru-Hyderabad-Chennai, Delhi-NCR, and Mumbai-Pune-Ahmedabad (Kanda, 2017).

MEASUREMENT, SCALING AND ANALYSIS

As per Objective 1, based upon a pilot survey of 10 enterprises in NCR, the following dimensions of EBP in services have been identified and considered for measurement (measured on ten-point scale; each comprising of 10 variables each):

- EBP1 - Sales and After Sales Handling;
- EBP2 - Public Relations;
- EBP3 - Social Cause;
- EBP4 - Public Disclosure;
- EBP5 - CSR & Governance;
- EBP6 - Product Quality;
- EBP7 - Organisation Citizenship;
- EBP8 - Service Failure Handling;
- EBP9 - Grievance & Redressal; and
- EBP10 - Other Factors (Stakeholders' survey)

Dimensions also measured on business competence and cost-effective strategic business model (officials and industry expert / confederation opinion / reports) [not disclosed here].

Based the earlier business studies and measures of corporate performance, organisational competitiveness is measured for last 5 years (2011–2016), based on following criterion, which jointly made OCFY for the covered 5 years (OCFY1, OCFY2, OCFY3, OCFY4, and OCFY5), measured on a 10-point scale:

- OC1 - Business Image, Stakeholders' Opinion and Social Entity (in concerned region)
- OC2 - Financial Performance and Administrative Efficiency (in the Industry)
- OC3 - Employee Morale and Organisational Corporate Citizenship (In general)
- OC4 - Business Turnover and Marketing Costs (Industry, Sectoral and National Average)
- OC5 - Quality Assurance, Product Utility and Other aspects (based on Segmental Standards)

Weighted averaging has alike: OCFY = (OC1*5 + OC2*4 + OC3*3 + OC4*2 + OC5*1) / 5

For large corporates, if taken in some instances, sample has been taken more than once, considering regional variation. For questioning throughout the different segments of survey, rating scales were used for the purpose. Dichotomous questioning was also used for some questions. Structured Equation Modeling & Path Analysis, including others, has been used.

KEY ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

Hypothesis Testing

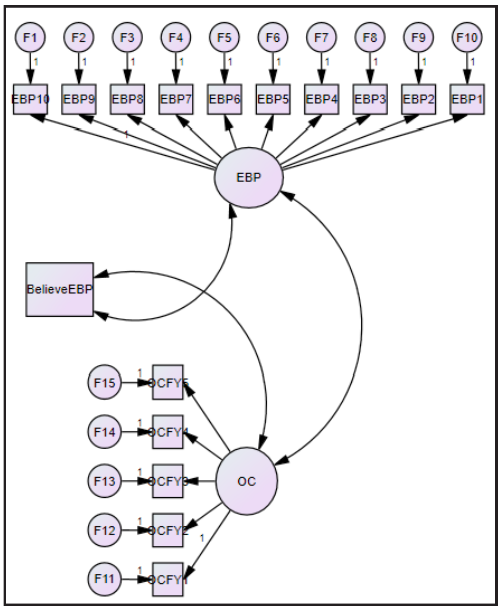
Hypothesis 1: Believe in Ethical Business Practices (T-Test)

Outcome: The variable Believe EBP is observed having a normal distribution with a mean of 0.58, having a standard deviation of 0.49. It means that 58 % of observed sample has a good belief in ethics in general. Further, the observed T-Value is 2.342, which is higher than the critical value 2.326, at 202° of freedom, having a significance level of 0.020. Therefore, the null hypothesis has been rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted, i.e. Indian service corporates sampled have shown considerable belief in EBP.

Hypothesis 2: Organisational Competitiveness and EBP.

Outcome: Structural Equation Modeling and Path Analysis using SPSS have been used for this purpose. Both these tools confirm the relationship as follows:

Structural Equation Modeling



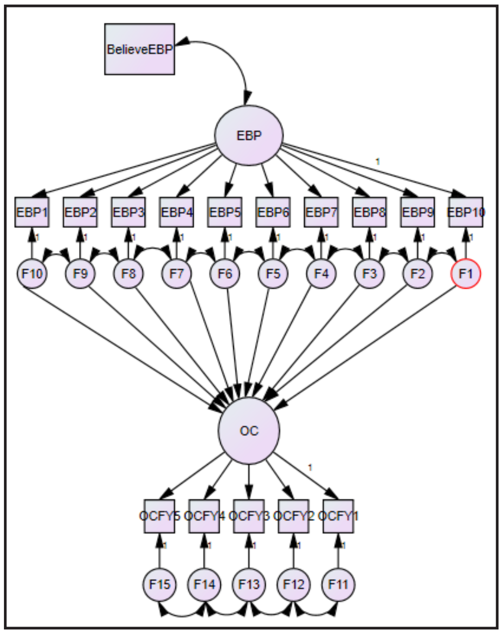
Source: Author’s calculations using SPSS AMOS.

Fig. 1: Diagram depicting Model Interpreted Using Structure Equation Modelling

Output and Interpretation

Minimum was achieved at Chi-square value of 332.469, at degrees of freedom 102. GFI is more than 0.8. It depicts the model is fit to use. Having CFI value more than 0.8, the model confirms the fit. Further, RFI and NFI as values more than 0.9 and it also testifies the model validation. The RMSEA value is less than 0.5, which also confirms the model fit. Thereby the Null Hypothesis is Rejected and there is a strong degree of relationship between organisational and business growth and EBP, as was proposed in the Alternate Hypothesis. To further analyse the situation, path analysis has been done as follows:

Path Analysis Modelling



Source: Author’s calculations using SPSS AMOS.

Fig. 2: Diagram Depicting Model Interpreted Using Path Analysis

Output (Default Model)

Minimum was achieved, Chi-square = 237.468, at degrees of freedom 82. GFI and CFI are more than 0.8. It confirms the model fit. RFI and NFI with values greater than 0.9 also testifies same. RMSEA is less than 0.5 and it also confirms the model fit. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and path analysis confirms the flow of existence of EBP from the corporate belief in ethics and the further flow of organisational and business growth from the measured dimensions of EBP, accepting alternate hypothesis. Inter-relationship between the variant dimension of EBP has been observed. Likewise, inter-relationship between the organizational competitiveness of succeeding years has also been observed, confirming existing theoretical background.

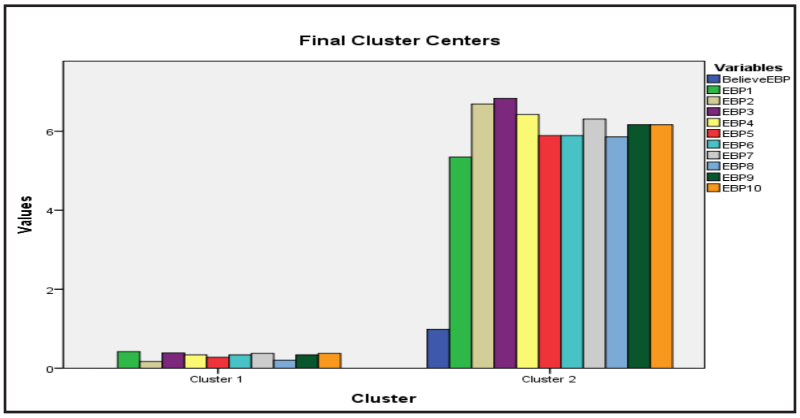
CLUSTERING ANALYSIS

Based upon the study results, the sample firms have been apportioned between two clusters. Cluster 1 firms have observed a minimal belief in EBP and associated very low values in case of all EBPs. Resultantly, sample from Cluster 1 has observed having slightly low values of OCFY from the inception of analysis period, with an initial increase, but a later declining trend, coming back to a position they were holding in year 1, on an average. Hence, Cluster 1 firms can be named as ‘Low Ethics Less Growing Start-ups’. On the other side, sample from Cluster 2 has observed a strong belief in EBP and associated considerable values in case of all EBPs (ranging from 5.35 to 6.83), having highest for EBP3 (Social Cause) and lowest for EBP1 (Sales and After Sales Handling). Social Cause related marketing is a very common tool for a corporate house to raise up its social image. Corporates across world in recently have started focusing on cause related marketing to improve their business prospects. Cluster 2 firms having the lowest values for EBP1 confirm the reporting of low diligence of services in case of Sales and After-Sales Handling. Sample from Cluster 2 has observed having slightly high values of OCFY from the inception of analysis period, with a throughout increase, reaching a position around twice they were holding in year 1 approx. Hence, Cluster 2 firms can be named as “Highly Ethical Fastly Growing Start-ups”.

Low Ethics Less Growing Start-ups are maximum in case of Maharashtra, followed by Punjab, Delhi NCR, Karnataka, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Himachal, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Kerala, represented maximum from Mumbai-Pune-Ahmedabad (MPA) Region, followed by Delhi-Calcutta (D-NCR) Region, Bangalore-Hyderabad-Chennai (BHC) Region and are maximum in case of Finance Industry, that is a common observation in case of many small start up finance firms, followed by Business Services, Construction/Trading, Real Estate and Renting (RER), Community, Personal & Social Services (CPSS)/Others, Insurance, Transport, Storage and Communications (TSC) Industries.

Highly Ethical Fastly Growing Start-ups are maximum in case of Karnataka, followed by Maharashtra, Tamilnadu, Telangana, Delhi NCR, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala/ Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh/ Jammu and Kashmir/ Odisha, represented maximum from BHC, followed by MPA, DNCR and are maximum in case of Business Services (BS) Industry, followed by Finance, Trading, Construction, Real Estate and Renting, Community, Personal & Social Services (CPSS), Others, Transport, Storage and Communications (TSC), Insurance Industries.

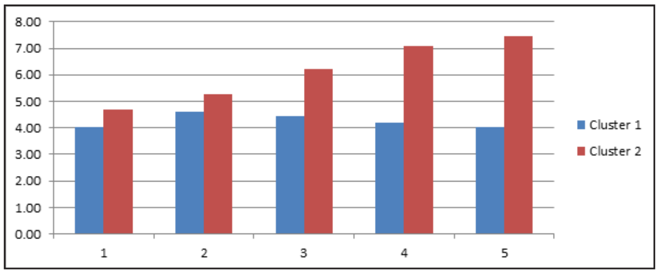
The following figure gives an overview of the analysis results:



Source: Author’s calculations using SPSS.

Fig. 3: Diagram Depicting Scenario of Belief in Ethics and Existence of Ethical Business Practices Across Clusters

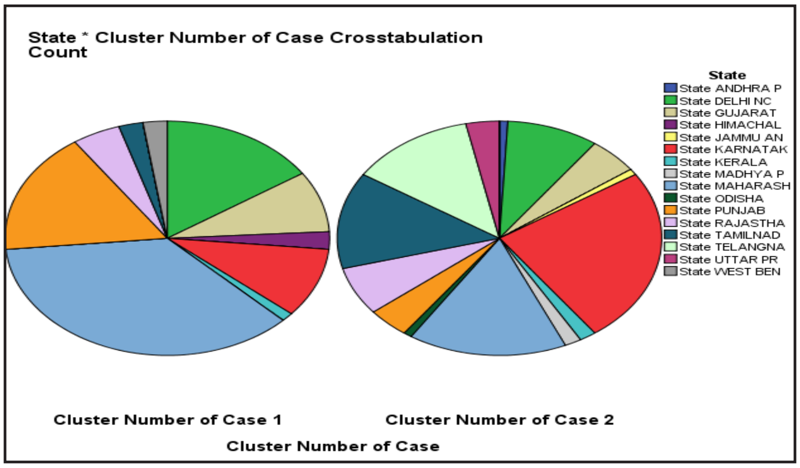
Interpretation: Sample from Cluster 1 has observed having a minimal belief in EBP. Whereas, sample from Cluster 2 has observed having strong belief in EBP. Sample from Cluster 1 has observed having very low values in case of all EBPs (Below 0.5), having highest for EBP1 (Sales and After-Sales Handling) and lowest for EBP2 (Public Relations). Based upon the graph, it can be said that Cluster 1 Firms are more focused on business handling only and have a very less focus on its relations with its stakeholders and society. Whereas, sample from Cluster 2 has observed having considerable values in case of all EBPs (ranging from 5.35 to 6.83), having highest for EBP3 (Social Cause) and lowest for EBP1 (Sales and After-Sales Handling). Cluster 2 firms having the lowest values for EBP1 confirms the reporting of low diligence of services in case of Sales and After-Sales Handling.



Source: Author's calculations using SPSS

Fig. 4: Diagram depicting scenario of Successive Organisational Competitiveness across Clusters

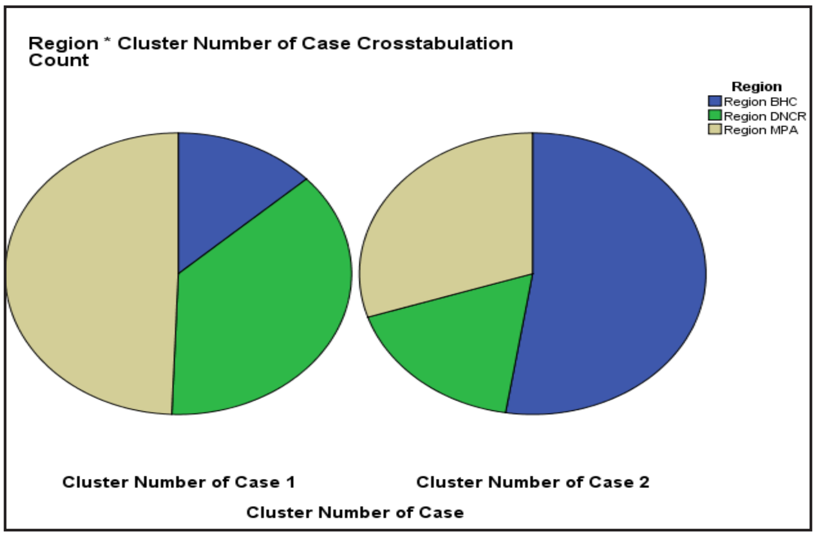
Sample from Cluster 1 has observed having slightly low values of OCFY from the inception of analysis period, with an initial increase, but a later declining trend, coming back to a position they were holding in year 1, on an average. Sample from Cluster 2 has observed having slightly high values of OCFY from the inception of analysis period, with a throughout increase, reaching a position around twice they were holding in year 1 approx.



Source: Author's calculations using SPSS.

Fig. 5: Diagram Depicting States Scenario Across Clusters

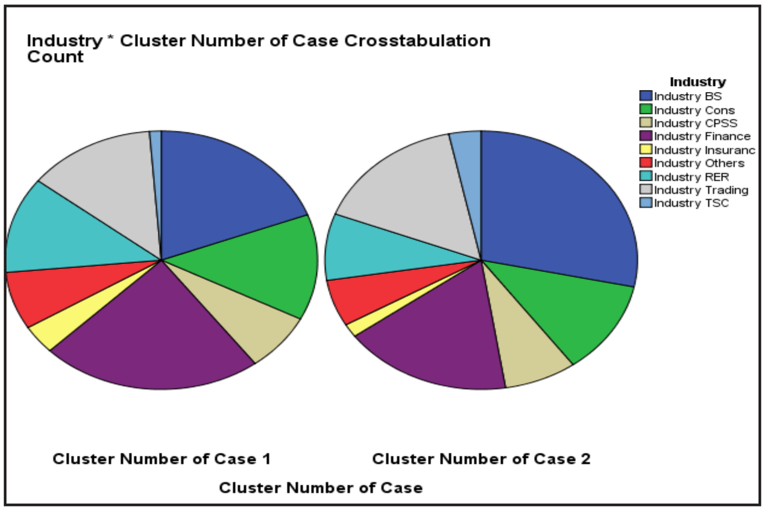
Interpretation: Sample from Cluster 1 is maximum in case of Maharashtra, followed by Punjab, Delhi NCR, Karnataka, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Himachal/ Tamil Nadu/ West Bengal, Kerala. Sample from Cluster 2 is maximum in case of Karnataka, followed by Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Delhi NCR, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala/ Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh/ Jammu and Kashmir/ Odisha.



Source: Author's calculations using SPSS.

Fig. 6: Diagram Depicting Regional Scenario Across Clusters

Interpretation: Sample from Cluster 1 is maximum in case of MPA, followed by DNCR, BHC. Sample from Cluster 2 is maximum in case of BHC, followed by MPA, DNCR.



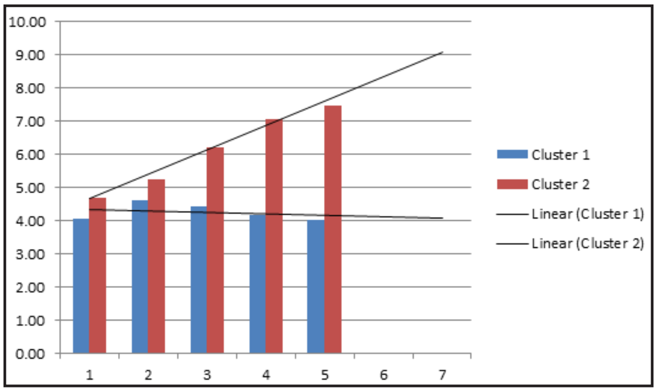
Source: Author's calculations using SPSS.

Fig. 7: Diagram Depicting Industries Scenario Across Clusters

Interpretation: Sample from Cluster 1 is maximum in case of Finance, followed by BS, construction/trading, RER, CPSS/others, insurance, TSC. Sample from Cluster 2 is maximum in case of BS, followed by finance, trading, construction, RER, CPSS, others, TSC, and insurance.

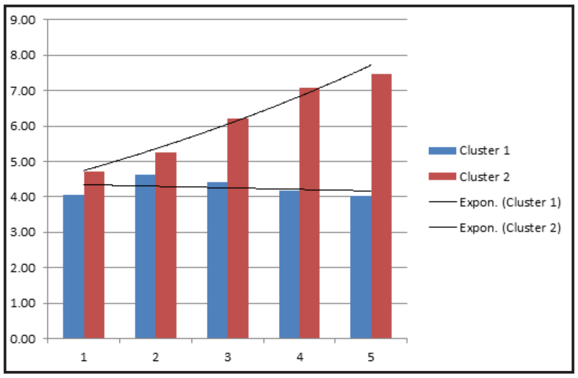
APPLIED ANALYSIS

Linear Forecast Trend Line



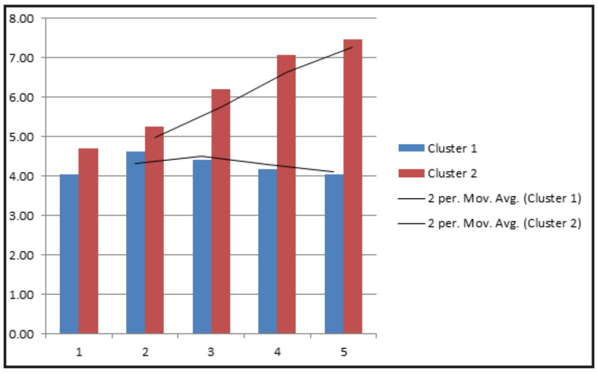
Interpretation: Linear forecast trend line for Cluster 1 observed a declining trend through the period. Linear forecast trend line for Cluster 2 has observed a linear increasing trend.

Exponential Trend Line



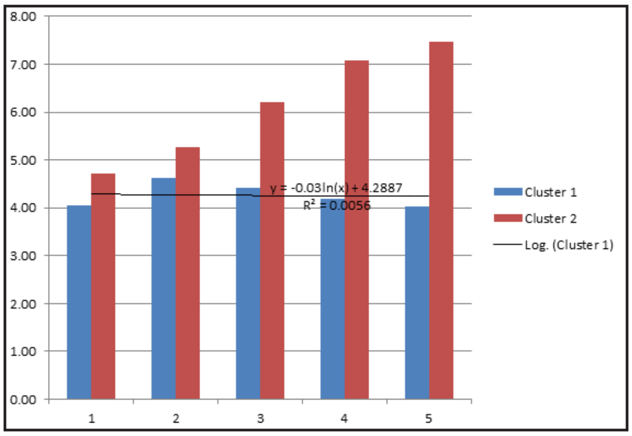
Interpretation: Exponential trend line for Cluster 1 observed a declining trend through the period. Exponential trend line for Cluster 2 have observed a scantly growing trend.

2 Period Moving Average Trend Line



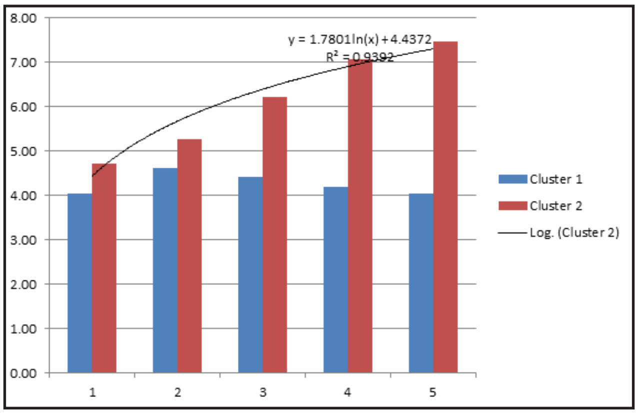
Interpretation: The 2-Period moving average trend line for Cluster 1 has observed an initially growing trend until third year, followed by a declining trend from third year onwards. The line for Cluster 2 has observed a growing trend, with a small trench in growth of year 5.

Logarithmic Trend Line (Cluster 1)



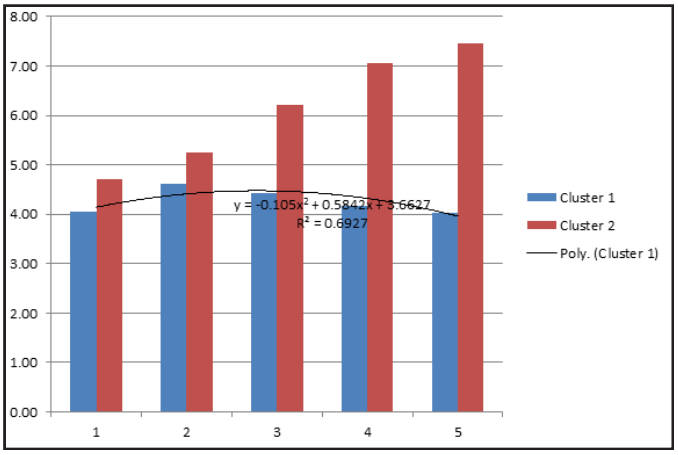
Interpretation: Logarithmic trend line (Cluster 1) that explains real growth gives us a picture of no change throughout for the sample coming under cluster 1.

Logarithmic Trend Line (Cluster 2)



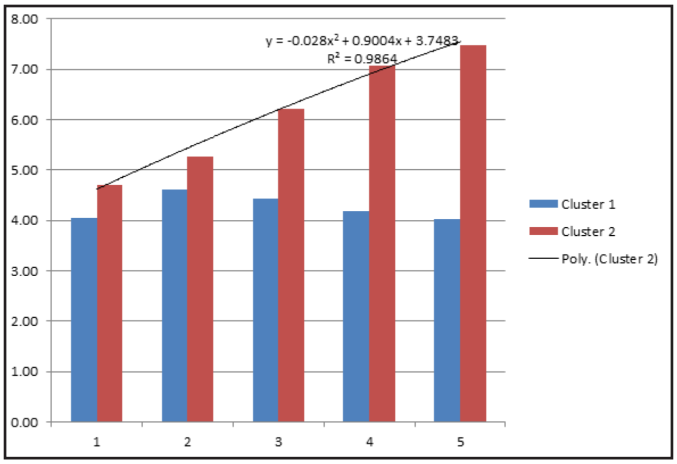
Interpretation: Logarithmic trend line (Cluster 2) has an increasing trend, having a declining rate of growth year on year change throughout for the sample coming under cluster 2. The line has a R^{2} Value of 0.939.

Polynomial Trend Line (Cluster 1)



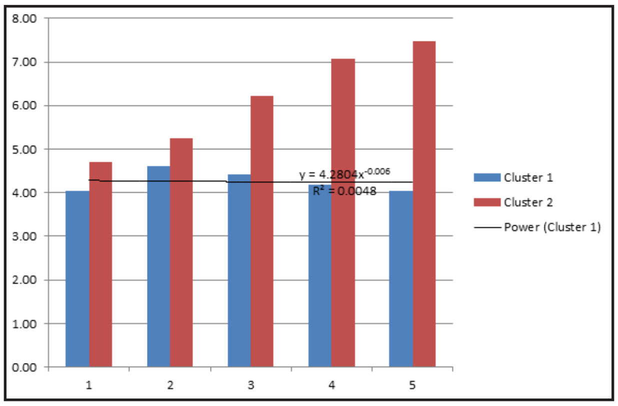
Interpretation: Polynomial trend line (Cluster 1) has an initial increasing trend until third year, having a declining rate of growth afterwards. The line has R2 0.692.

Polynomial Trend Line (Cluster 2)



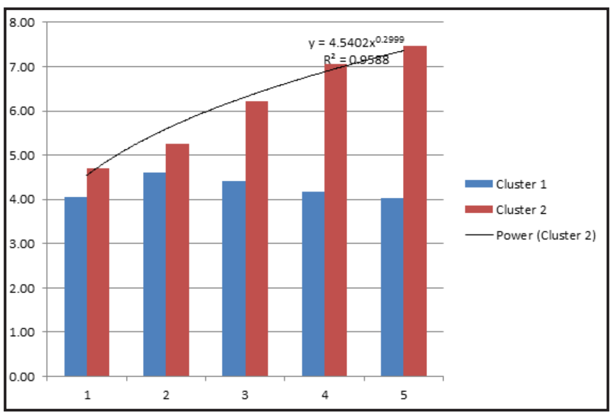
Interpretation: Polynomial trend line (Cluster 2) had a linear increasing trend throughout. The line has R2 value of 0.986.

Power Trend Line (Cluster 1)



Interpretation: Power Trend Line (Cluster 1) has observed no change throughout.

Power Trend Line (Cluster 2)



Interpretation: Power trend line (Cluster 2) has an upward trend, having a declining rate of growth year on year change throughout for the sample coming under cluster 2. The line has R2 value of 0.958.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The dissertation held from this study is that regions with lesser development in general, in terms of business, infrastructure and economic development and lower or negligible development in particular, in terms of service sector have more significance in existence of EBP, as well as have a strong belief that EBP have positive impacts on business growth & organisational competitiveness. Exceptions to this statement are duly acknowledged in the detailed analysis of study. The null hypothesis 1, i.e., small startup firms stress on revenue collection (Mishra, Dalvi, Sahni, and Verma, 2014) has been rejected and the alternate hypothesis, that is, Indian service start-ups considerably recognize the existence of ethics even in today's competitive business environment, has been accepted by the study results. The null hypothesis 2, that is, there is no/an imperfect relation in between organizational and business growth and ethical services delivery management practices in India, has been rejected and the alternate hypothesis, "there is an exponential & directly influencing relationship between organizational and business growth and ethical services delivery management practices in India", has been accepted". It reconfirms to the empirically proved statement that "ethical practices in business help to create favorable relationships with other organizations and establish long-term positive relationships with existing and potential future customers". Hence, it is recommended especially for the sampled start-up segment in service sector that "companies must adopt and disseminate a written Code of Ethics, build a company tradition of ethical behavior, and hold its people fully responsible for observing ethical and legal guidelines to become able to innovate new solutions and values in a socially responsible way, are most likely to succeed" (Labbai, 2013). It is "very essential to have a code of business ethics in every business organization and having the code implemented in the organization in objective and effective way" (Jalil, Azam, and Rahman, 2010). "A standard for measuring and reporting ethical behavior in business should be adopted to validate the claims of it being ethical" (Husssaini, 2014). "Highly Ethical Fastly Growing Start-ups" cluster has observed a comparatively low diligence of services in case of Sales and After-Sales Handling and observed a declining growth rate. Firms above are thereby recommended to more focus on Efficient and Ethical Sales and After-Sales Handling, to ensure and strengthen their long run business sustainability, since without the satisfaction of key business segment no business sustainability can be prospered for long.

LIMITATION(S)

Being a relative analysis, the research does not tend to present the relationship between ethical practices and business growth in absolute terms; rather, it expresses a relative relationship between both these variables. Hence, it may be a limitation for future budgetary forecasting. Further, as this research is only on Emerging and Start-up Indian Business Houses in Services; hence, this will not comment out upon its need and status around the globe as well as remaining sectors in India. A further research on Asian perspectives on growth and scenario of services may be an eye opener. Further, other business sectors may be explored.

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