

The Emerging Concept of SOHO- A New Dimension in Gender Diversity

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Abstract

The availability of resources, like the credit sources, information variety and a wider knowledge of the industry is always easily accessible by a gender diverse workforce. This highlights the role of women entrepreneurship in business world. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, SOHO stands for Small Office, Home Office, especially in someone's home. They are in the form of small businesses run by one or two people from their home. Random sampling technique is used to select a sample size of 145. Nearly 88% of the surveyed population were found to be women entrepreneurs. The reasons behind the development of Small Office Home Office can be manifold. For most of the surveyed population, the primary goal is not monetary but self-satisfaction and community involvement. If their surroundings have a better understanding of their struggle, the better chance of their success. However, the young women entrepreneurs are doing exceptionally well in their endeavours, having significant yearly turnovers and capturing a truly wide market. There should be certain developmental programmes to target this group of women and girls who are considered to be a mine of human resource potential. It is therefore necessary to formulate appropriate strategies for stimulating, supporting and sustaining their great efforts in this direction.

Keywords: gender diversity, SOHO, self-satisfaction, community involvement, endeavour, strategies.

Introduction

Gender diversity is the medium to promote different skills and potentials of women and men in their diversity to be equivalent. It refers to the fair representation of people of different genders in an institution or a workplace. The availability of resources, like the credit sources, information variety and a wider knowledge of the industry is always easily accessible by a gender diverse workforce. Securing parity for women in leadership teams is not just the laudable goal but also it makes the bottom-line business sense. A company's financial

performance can be enhanced by a demographically diverse workforce. This highlights the role of women entrepreneurship or the role of women in business world.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, SOHO stands for Small Office, Home Office, especially in someone's home. They are in the form of small businesses run by one or two people from their home. They can include a variety of professions. SOHO is a term used to distinguish small business units from the large and medium sized ones. Technically they have minimum employees, although many of them are one person business.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to

- understand the concept of SOHO and
- study the role of SOHO in gender diversity.

Methods Used

The paper heavily relies upon the mixed method- that is both qualitative and quantitative. The data used in preparing the article is both primary and secondary. The methods followed in this study relates to the collection of primary data from various places of South Kolkata, namely, Gariahat, Naktala, Hazra and Garia, through survey by means of a closed questionnaire, as well as secondary data from sources like newspapers, magazines, books, journals, articles in the internet. Random sampling technique is used to select a sample size of 145. The data are represented by cartographic methods for easy analysis. The data are collected over a period of five months from April to August, 2019.

Development of the concept of SOHO in India

SOHO is considered as a microenterprise where the owners are self-employed. By the mid-1980s, the advent of personal computers and fax machines and breakthroughs in telecommunication created opportunities for office workers to decentralize. Many consultants and members of such professions as lawyers, real estate agents and surveyors in medium and small sized towns started operating from home offices. They are mostly white collar professionals who have a dedicated formal office within their home. There has been a positive evolution of the concept of small office home office as the internet has given easy accessibility to anyone to work from home, globally. Technology is removing the limits of traditional design

planning, and there is much work to be done to discover just how physical space must respond to support uncharted behaviours. Few Indian start-ups which are worth million by now, started from home office, though they are from Delhi and Bangalore. India is experiencing a paradigm shift in the attitude of people towards women entrepreneurship. Given the high risk factor in starting one’s own venture and the high cost of living in metro cities, more women are stepping up to take the plunge. Some men prefer a secured job letting the wives to test the entrepreneurial water. Besides having a personal growth, women finds it a better way to be busy. With the fast spreading concept of nuclear families and single parenting, SOHO is seen as a convenient option to keep oneself occupied and generate income without increasing overhead cost or compromising with domestic responsibilities.

Discussion

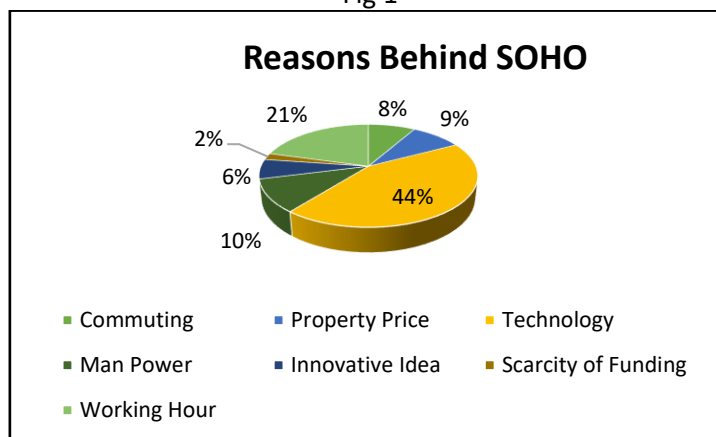
The reasons behind the development of Small Office Home Office can be manifold. However, the main reasons outlined in the questionnaire survey reflected the fact that in the study area, commuting, property price, man power, flexible work hours are the main factors.

Table 1

Commuting	Property Prices	Technology	Man Power	Innovative Ideas	Scarcity of Funding	Working Hours	Total
12	13	63	15	9	3	30	145

Source: Primary Data collected at site

Fig 1



Commuting: The respondents are of the opinion that traffic movement at peak hours in the city is pathetic. Public transport has its own set of problems. The decade old infrastructure is not

able to cater the increasing population. This is taking a toll on human health and people are in a huge stress.

Property Prices: Property prices have become both unfeasible and unaffordable. This is also one of the reasons why people have started working from home.

Technology: With the advent of technological revolution man is equipped with Skype, video conferencing, Whatsapp. Communication has grown lot easier and cost- effective. It is a convenient way to reach out to anyone at any point of time. It reduces stresses of constantly working from the same place.

Man Power: Machines have replaced man and this holds true to the present time where man is reaching the clouds. The facilities of online banking, online shopping, and online filing of returns have made life easier. So, the manpower requirement can be reduced and this accrues to profit in the organisations.

Innovative Ideas: India is emerging successful in innovative ideas of business by the younger generation. In SOHO concept, one's ideas remain intact in the environment as she is helped by none other than family members.

Scarcity of Funding: It is always difficult for a small business unit to get funds and it requires a lot of paperwork in banks and financial institutions. As a family business, it requires small fund initially. The turnovers in the subsequent years serve as the capital for business expansion.

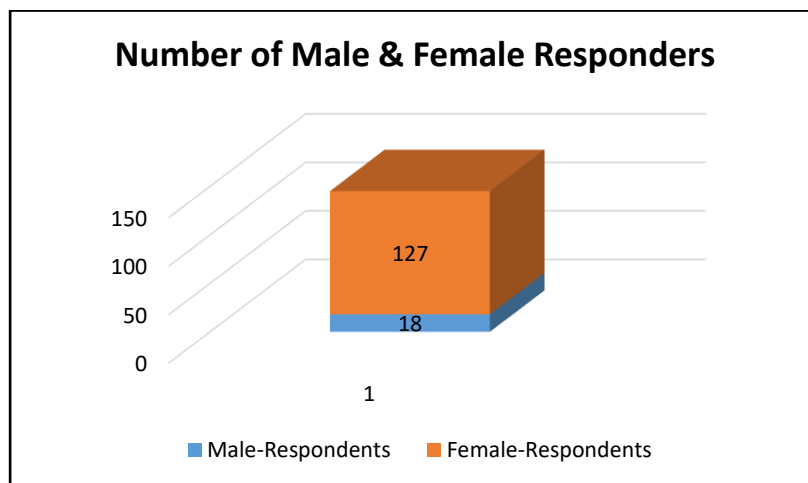
Flexible Working Hours: At present people are engaged in a lot of cross border interactions, transactions and communication. In SOHO the working hours are flexible and this gives the entrepreneur to carry on the other social and cultural norms of the family and the society as well.

Table 2

	No. of Respondents
Male	18
Female	127
Total	145

Source: Primary Data collected at Site

Fig 2



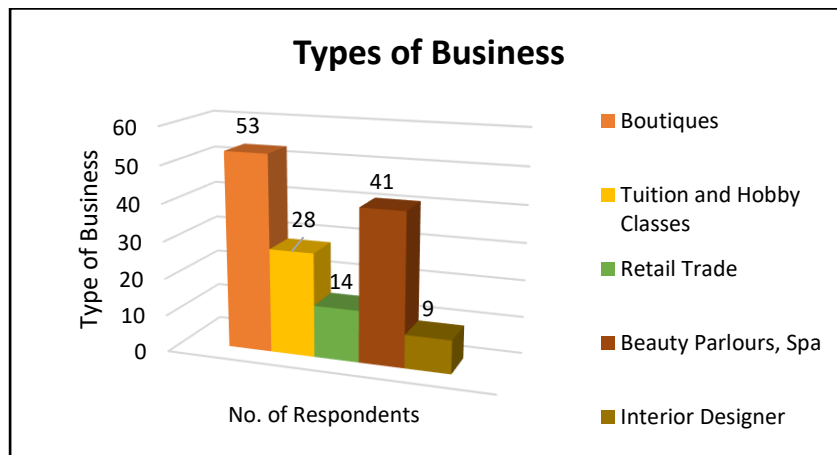
Nearly 88% of the surveyed population were found to be women entrepreneurs.

Table 3

Type of Business	No. of Respondents
Boutiques	53
Tuition and Hobby Classes	28
Retail Trade	14
Beauty Parlours, Spa	41
Interior Designer	9
Total	145

Source: Primary Data collected at Site

Fig 3

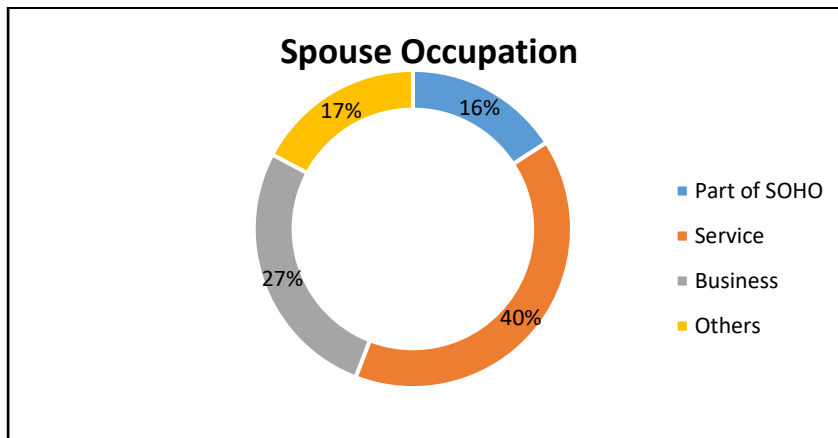


36.55% respondents are engaged in their own boutiques having a large variety of clothing and fashion jewellery for both men and women. 28.27% of respondents are engaged in Tuition classes which are for study related courses, specialised courses and hobby classes like dance, drama, musical instruments. 9.66% are engaged in retail trade of dress materials, bags etc. 19.31% of the respondents own beauty parlours, massage centres and spa. Only 6.21% of the surveyed population provide services for designing homes and offices.

Table 4

Spouse Occupation	No. of Respondents
Part of SOHO	23
Service	58
Business	39
Others	25
Total	145

Fig 4



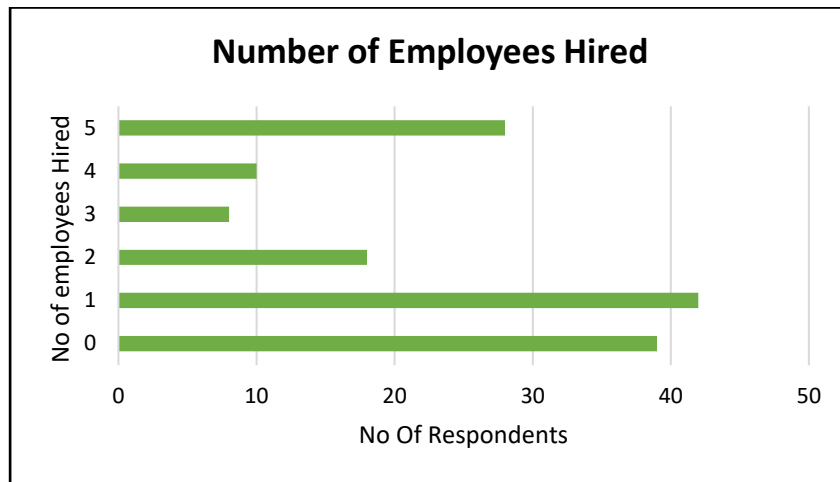
15.86% of the entrepreneurs are assisted by their spouses in their SOHO activities. Nearly 40% of the spouses are in service, 26.9% are engaged in their own business and 17.24% are engaged in other activities like freelancing, photography, multimedia, and acting.

Table 5

No. of Employees Hired	No. of Respondents
0	39
1	42
2	18
3	8
4	10
5	28
Total	145

Source: Primary Data Collected at Site

Fig 5



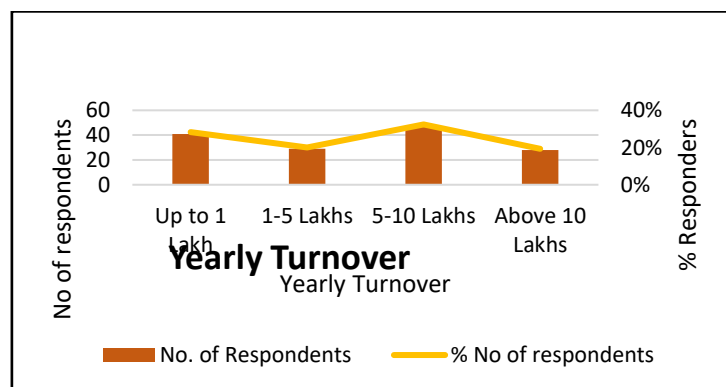
26.9% of the respondents did not hire any employees and run the business on their own, especially those involved in tuitions and other classes. 28.97% hired only one employee. The largest number of employees hired is 5 which is found among 19.31% of the respondents involved in spa and parlours.

Table 6

Yearly Turnover(in Rs)	No. of Respondents
Up to 1 Lakh	41
1-5 Lakhs	29
5-10 Lakhs	47
Above 10 Lakhs	28
Total	145

Source: Primary Data Collected at Site

Fig 6



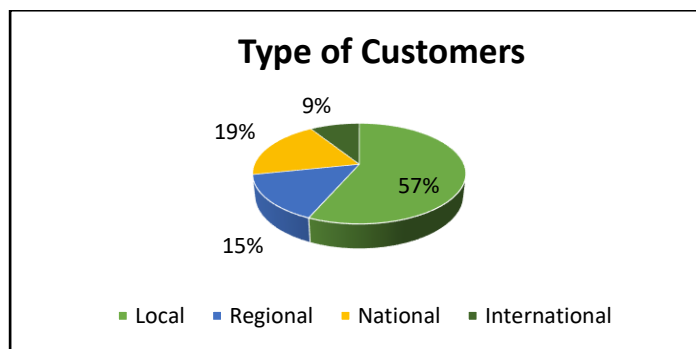
Majority of the entrepreneurs running SOHO earn an annual turnover of Rs 5 to 10 Lakhs. Though smaller offices are also found to be operating with less than Rs 1 Lakh turnover, yet some are found at the higher end of the scale with huge turnovers.

Table 7

Customer Base	No. of Respondents
Local	82
Regional	22
National	28
International	13
Total	145

Source: Primary Data Collected at Site

Fig 7



90% of the offices cater the local customers, while % have customers across the state. Most of the Small offices do have internet connections and their individual websites which help them to reach the national and international customers.

Findings

The gender stereotypes ling prevalent in Indian society is breaking slowly. The role of women in our society is drastically changing for the better. They are breaking free from the traditional, gender specific roles and venturing in to the business world. The steady rise in female entrepreneurs are due to many reasons, most of which share the same rational as their male counterpart. SOHOs have encouraged women who have become a strong driving force of economy in today’s world. Women entrepreneurship is therefore an important strategy to deal with rural and urban poverty. Not only they can equalize motherhood and their own identity as an entrepreneur, but also have emerged successful in SOHO. For most of the surveyed

population, the primary goal is not monetary but self-satisfaction and community involvement. Some of them are the founders of their organisations and are not interested in the scale of their work, but are attached to it as a part of life. Some of them are quite business oriented looking for good turnovers at the end of the day. Some do it as a part of their extra time they have after doing the household chores. Some of them faced lots of problems like lack of education, social barriers, legal formalities, high cost of production, male dominated society, limited managerial ability, and lack of self-confidence. But most of them are of the opinion that they are assisted by their partners or other family members.

Suggestions

Women entrepreneurs may be defined as the confident, innovative and courageous women desiring economic independence individually and stimulating employment opportunities for others as well. SOHO has been a pathfinder in this regard. There should be certain developmental programmes to target this group of women and girls who are considered to be a mine of human resource potential. The suggested steps can be-

- ❖ motivational drive activities
- ❖ conducting training programmes for them
- ❖ creation of common marketing exposure centres
- ❖ use of mass media
- ❖ consider women as specific target groups for development programmes
- ❖ better educational and training skills to be extended
- ❖ adequate training programs on management skills
- ❖ vocational training to make them understand the production process.
- ❖ better access to finance
- ❖ access to business support and information
- ❖ self-motivation and positive image building sessions to be held by professionals
- ❖ raising awareness at the public and private level to create true opportunities and not that which stay on paper only

Customer care and negotiations are the soft skills needed by female entrepreneurs to run their business smoothly. While life skills like family planning, nutrition and self-confidence make it possible for her to run the SOHO at all. Much of their success is dependent on their families and societies. If their surroundings have a better understanding of their struggle, the better chance of their success. When women are paired with mentors or given access to other

entrepreneurs with similar experiences, they benefit from exposure to useful public, private and peer resources. Networking within the clusters help them to gain advantage through labour pooling and better access to finance. Access to finance is one of the greatest challenge faced by them.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion it can be said that the young women entrepreneurs are doing exceptionally well in their endeavours, having significant yearly turnovers and capturing a truly wide market. Though the study is based on a small group of people in a restricted area, still it gives an encouraging picture of today's world. While they have already demonstrated their potential, the fact remains that they are capable of contributing much more than they already are. They are exploring the new dimensions of enterprises, undertaking risks, introducing innovations and coordinating administration. It is necessary to formulate appropriate strategies in order to give impetus and stimulate their growth and development. But the strategies should be adopted keeping in mind the field realities and the challenges that the young women entrepreneurs face each and every day to pursue their dreams.

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