Empowering Women Consumers: Breaking the Social Norms using Stereotypes Advertising

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ABSTRACT

India’s consumption-led growth, driven by favorable demographics gave a new boost to the economy and articulated in various reports. A large young Indian population with rising levels of affordability, changing consumer habits and shifting spending patterns is driving the acceleration in consumption of goods and services. India is a diverse country with a vastly differing cultures as well as disparities. A generational shift among the consumers defines new elite consumer class. Attitudes of women consumers and education of children, especially girls are changing and confirm our views to emerge as a strong consumer class. Men and women are willing to look at alternate buying options for goods and services including entertainment, leisure, tourism and retail sectors quite unlike the old generation, some of the erstwhile social taboos are no longer prevalent according to the new-age consumers. Marketers and advertisers are using innovative advertising strategies to convince these consumers by breaking the social norms. This paper explores the stereotype advertising to the consumers with the new way living to empower the women consumers and providing better opportunities for both the consumers and the marketers.

Keywords: Advertising, Stereotype, Women, Social norms.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many global multinational corporations (MNCs) view India as one of the key markets from where future growth will emerge. The favorable population composition and rising disposable incomes drives the growth in India’s consumer market. According to McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), if India continues to grow at the current pace, the average household income will be triple over the next two decades and it will become the world’s 5th largest consumer economy by 2025.[1] Indian consumer’s lifestyle and shopping habits are rapidly evolving across various sectors. The discretionary spending witnessed an 18% increase for the urban middle class. In India the middle-class population of approximately 250-350 million with growing purchasing power, reflected by the remarkable increase in the purchase of goods and services by the consumers. Lifestyle habits are shifting from austerity to complete self-indulgence and Indian are now unapologetic about spending lavishly on non-essential goods such as luxury watches, cars, hi-tech products, etc. There is an easier acceptance of luxury and an increased willingness to experiment with mainstream fashion. Expenditure on personal care – lifestyle accessories and clothing has increased manifold. Similarly with new shopping malls offering multiplexes, restaurants and bars, video game centers, etc. in both large and small cities, shopping has evolved from a need-based activity to a leisure pastime. Therefore, expenses for activities, such as watching movies and eating out, have increased considerably. With the growth of middle class families, home textiles and electronics/consumer durables are increasingly becoming a means to demonstrate prosperity while at the same time creating a comfortable home environment. Indian consumer purchasing habits and preferences are evolving towards a strong prediction for brands. Consumers equate brands with an intangible value for which they are willing to pay premium prices.[2]

Given the current stage of India’s demographic cycle, consumption will remain the mainstay of GDP growth and, thus, a strong investment theme in the coming years. Leisure and entertainment (a chain of restaurants, multiplexes, amusement parks, airlines, hotels, media, wine and beverages), health and beauty (health and beauty clinics,
gymnasiums, hospitals, health and natural-food producers) and lifestyle (real estate, financial services, auto, and retailing) should be some of the fastest-growing segments. A buoyant economy and improving incomes have clearly helped to drive consumerism in India. The generation, born after liberalization, is growing up with no guilt about consumption - and they will drive the next leg of the consumption growth story. Changes are also evident in the emergence of women from their traditional roles. The changing attitude is well reflected in the importance families are giving to women’s education. More women are gaining an education, pursuing professional careers and marrying later. With increasing economic independence and responsibilities, women’s say in spending as well as women’s expenditures are rising. The emergence of urban women as a working class is also driving the need for convenience goods. It is not just about women having a greater say in decision making in the family. Children also are the major influences of their families demanding where families eat out, what clothes they buy, where the family takes a holiday and what car the family buys.

With the increasing propensity to consume, increasing pressure to keep up with the peer group and increasing desire for a better lifestyle today are resulting in strong growth in retail services. And so, credit friendliness, a drop in interest rates and easy availability of loan/finance schemes has changed the mindset of this segment. Expenditure such as jewellery, houses and cars is shifting to becoming redefined as consumer revenue expenditure of the globalized consumers. Also, the use of plastic money increasing from 2000-2005, the number of credit cards issued touch 15.5 million (7% urban middle class) consumers showing that the elite consumers spending in shopping malls and online e-business portals. India’s overall credit card penetration is 1.51% of total population and it is still very low as compared to US and UK because of 40% illiteracy rate and it will take 3-4 decades to change the situations according to Consumer Outlook 2005.[3] There are a number of domestic and MNCs are promoting their brands with effective marketing and advertising strategies for luring the consumers. Stereotype advertising is widely used by the advertisers and marketers to promote their goods and services. For advertisers and marketers it is easier to establish rapport with the prospective customers by using societal stereotypes in commercial advertisements.

A stereotype is a fixed impression of a group of people through which we then perceive specific individuals. If we use the characteristics of a particular person and generalize it to the whole group, then we are stereotyping. Stereotyping is a very basic and necessary human behavior. Stereotypes most often are negative, although they can be positive. Recently, Tanishq has set the benchmark in the advertising industry by highlighting the social is empowering women’s remarriage. Tanishq has set the benchmark in the advertising industry by highlighting the societal stereotypes exist and are a part of our lives. People act according to these stereotypes because stereotypes are considered socially acceptable and in some communities it is not. This paper focuses on the stereotype advertising to empower women consumers with the new way living and providing better opportunities for both the consumers and the marketers.

2. REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

The idea of stereotype was introduced into English only in the 20th century. Now it is widely used in ordinary parlance as a ‘stereotype’, or ‘stereotyping’, is to condemn what is so characterized. Norms are rules and expectations by which a society guides the behavior of its members. They are standards of action expected of members of one’s group. Norms consist of what the people “ought to do” in their daily routine. According to Paluck (2009), social norms are “socially shared definitions of the way people do behave or should behave”. [4]

Societal norms guided by widely held societal values, norms are guidelines that societies develop to dictate behavior among their members. Society uses social sanctions as a form of control. Society will reward a behavior to encourage compliance or punish to discourage a behavior. Certain norms a person does or does not follow. Breaking or violation of social norms depends on a number of factors and inter-group member relationships. Since social norms are not actual rules because you cannot get in actual legal trouble for breaking them. However, breaking social norms can make people very uncomfortable and can hurt the social lives of those who do it. Prejudice is a negative opinion or attitude held by a person about the members of a particular social group whereas Stereotypes are oversimplifications of a group of people. In many cases they can reflect exaggerated and undesirable characteristics associated with prejudice of a group. Often the terms stereotype and prejudice are confused. Stereotypes are standardized and simplified conceptions of groups based on some prior knowledge. Stereotypes are created based on some idea of abstract familiarity. Prejudices are preconceived judgments formed without grounds or sufficient knowledge. Further, prejudices are claims made without knowledge or familiarity with a person. When prejudice occurs, stereotyping and discrimination may also result. In many cases, prejudices are based upon stereotypes. A stereotype is a simplified assumption about a group based on prior assumptions. Stereotypes can be both positive or negative. Stereotypes can lead to faulty beliefs, but they can also result in both prejudice and discrimination. It is important to reduce prejudice as much as possible in social relationships so that people in the societies have mutual respect of one another and no one is considered “less” than the others.

Stereotypes normally involve not just any generalization about or an image of a group, but widely-held and widely-recognized images of socially salient groups - Jews as greedy, wealthy, scholarly; Blacks as violent, musical, lazy, athletic, unintelligent; women as emotional, nurturant, irrational; Asian-Americans and Asians as good at math

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and science, hard working, a ‘model minority’: Irish as drinking too much; English as snooty, Poles as stupid; and so forth. When we say that group X is stereotyped in a certain way, or that ‘there is a stereotype of group X,’ we generally refer to the recognizable presence in a certain socio-cultural context of salient images of that group-more precisely, of associations between a group label and a set of characteristics.[5]

One of the research study conducted by Pande A. on the university students shows how language and linguistic norms in Indian society are used in perpetuating gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes get constructed as part of a broader process of social differentiation and to a large extent the normal everyday discourse.[6]

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Taking into the consideration with the theoretical, practical and social aspect of the problem under study, an Exploratory Research Study was conducted by using the Social Science Approach. An Extensive literature survey on the subject has been done to get deeper insights into the research issue. This was further substantiated by collecting relevant data from published reports and articles along with the different news reviews on the web and social media. The data were analyzed qualitatively to get the research findings and conclusions. Also some successful stories from business and the author’s own experience in marketing field also have been considered. The primary objective of this research to study marketing and advertising strategies to women consumers that defines the new and the emerging consumer class.

4. INDIA’S GROWING CONSUMERISM AND ADVERTISING MEDIA

Advertising is closely linked with economic development, as it is a vital marketing input, especially at the stage of introduction of a new product. It is an instrument of persuasion and information and the informational role of advertisements consist of providing information about products, their specifications, features, functions and prices to prospective buyers. It is an invaluable aid in the process of market development [14]. Advertising also performs the useful functions like the dissemination of information about innovative technologies, creation of favorable conditions conducive to the consumers in satiating their demands and in making them to accept innovative products and services hitherto to unknown to them. Economic systems are basically constituted by a series of transactions between individuals, organizations and sectors. The relevance of advertising is obvious in all stages of interface between a supplier and a buyer at a micro level and also at the macro-economic context.

Advertisements also play important roles in the welfare of the society. They create awareness among the masses, inform and educate them about socially relevant issues like conservation of natural resources, health, family welfare, literacy, national integration, etc. They aim at communicating social causes, ideas or messages to the people. Moreover, they contribute substantially to the nation’s exchequer by way of scarce foreign exchange. The outstanding contribution of advertising to consumers’ welfare emanates from its part in providing them with innumerable opportunities for satisfying their variegated needs. The chief task of advertisements from a social standpoint is that of encouraging the development of new products to suit the whims and fancies of consumers. They offer a means whereby the enterprises can create an ever-increasing demand for their merchandise, which will justify the investment.

In India, a key driver of the increased penetration and consumerism is the proliferation of media. The media’s reach has increased significantly in the past few years. According to the National Readership Survey (NRS), the penetration rate of cable and satellite TV has increased from 19.6% in 2002 to 26% in 2004. Between 1994-2004, the number of brands being advertised in print and TV has grown at a CAGR of 37% and the number of commercial spots has increased manifold in the 260+ channels that are beamed in India. TV played a significant role in the expansion of consumer values in Indian society, and “children are effectively being groomed to be valued consumer, and that value that was being promoted supported those aims: individualism and the nuclear family” [15]. Another driving force in India is education. People have very high aspirations to reach out to higher levels of prosperity and its trappings. For most people in the 35+ year age bracket, providing quality education to their children is the single most important goal of their life across socioeconomic segments. Education is seen as the surest guarantee for better prospects of earning a livelihood and for a better life. The changing paradigm of the consumers reflects the newness of social livelihood and requires new and innovative way to advertise the brand to the appropriate consumers.

According to American Marketing Association (AMA) the term advertising has been defined as ‘any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor’ [11]. Advertising lies at the juncture where culture and the economy interact and its primary purpose is to sell products and services by stimulating purchasing behavior and it does this by using strategies that rework culture, creating aspirations and new desires for products and services. There are some major environmental factors that impact on advertising - the economy, demography, culture, politics and legal system [10]. Advertising is itself a cultural product which increasingly affects social attitudes, defines social roles, and influences cultural values of the consuming class. Influenced by these factors advertising evolved and developed a particular profile in western industrialized society in the 20th century as a means of stimulating the consumption of products generated by new and expanding industries. In recent decades advertisers from the industrialized nations have increasingly targeted overseas markets, expanding the consumption of foreign products and bringing about widespread cultural change.

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India has a provision for freedom of speech and expression, though commercial advertising was excluded from this provision in a Supreme Court Ruling in 1960 [13]. A number of laws helped define the limitations of advertising. In 1969, the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act included misleading advertising in the definition of ‘unfair trade practices’, including misrepresentation regarding price, quality and also prohibited the practice ‘bait and switches’. In 1954, the Drugs and Magic Remedies Act restricted advertising of some contraceptive devices or those that would facilitate miscarriages, along with the banning of false claims from drugs and medication. In 1986, the Indecent Representation of Women Act endeavored to restrict the exploitation of women by the media and was a response to consumer demands. Other acts restrict the use of certain emblems and names; the conduct of promotions and competitions for prizes (1955); comparative advertising that involves defamation, and financial advertising claims. There are also ethical codes of conduct established by the Advertising Standards Code of India (ASCI) and the India Newspaper Society. In 1993, Advertising Age claims that the government lifted its ban on the advertising of foreign goods such as alcoholic beverages and services including such as banks and financial services and certain other products such as matrimonial services and hair dyes. From April 2001, a number of advertisements took off from broadcasting for being ‘distasteful’ and ‘degrading for women’. The key products that are banned in broadcast media are alcohol, cigarettes and tobacco. According to ASCI Official, “We want to expand the definition of indecency to include stereotyping. Then we will have the legal power to stop such advertisements.” So advertisements that promote dowry, reinforce that marriage is the be all and end all of life and take potshots at “dark” skin could be yanked off air. The National Commission for Women (NCW) alarmed over the spurt in cases of violation of women’s rights and depiction of women in electronic media and plans to widen the definition of “advertisement”.[17]

Advertising is one of the most visible activities of the business. By inviting people to try their products, companies risk public criticism and attack if their advertising displeases or offends the audience or if their products don’t measure up to the advertised promise. Advertising is both applauded and criticized not only for its role in selling products but also for its influence on the economy and on society. For years, critics have denounced advertising for a wide range of sins - some real, some imagined. There are many controversies still swirl around the whole field of advertising both economic and societal. From these economic and social controversies, new questions arise regarding the responsibility for and control of advertising. In recent years, owing to the globalization of markets and production processes, an ever increasing number of marketers have to deal with ethics and social responsibility issues in cross-cultural settings. Business firms produce goods and services by utilizing scarce resources to satisfy customer needs. In their activities, companies should be innovative, cost effective, productive and effective. If they become successful, in the long run, they should contribute positively to the society’s welfare objectives. It requires that companies should be sensitive to the expectations of customers with respect to the social issues and to the environment [12]. For organizations have social responsibility means an organization should concern for the people and the environment in which it transacts business. It is expected that socially responsible firm will somehow financially outperform other less responsible firms in the long run. This might result from customer loyalty, better employee morale and motivation, or public policy favoring ethical conduct.

5. UNDERSTANDING STEREOTYPES: REDUCING PREDISPOSITION

Stereotypes are as old as human culture itself. They reflect the ideas that groups of people hold about others who are different from them. A stereotype can be embedded in a single word or phrase (such as, “jock” or “nerd”), an image, or a combination of words and images. The image evoked is easily recognized and understood by others who share the same views. Stereotypes can be either positive (“men are better drivers”) or negative (“women can’t be a good driver”). But most stereotypes tend to make us feel superior in some way to the person or group being stereotyped. Stereotypes ignore the uniqueness of individuals by painting all members of a group with the same brush. There are three essential aspects of stereotypes. One when we categorize others based on easily identifiable characteristics; there we make a generalization about a group of people. Another when we assume that certain attributes apply to most or all of the people in the category and we make assertions about the characteristics of all people who belong to that category. And the last when we assume that individual members of the category have the attributes associated with the group then we fail to take into account differences among the members of the group.

When we observe the behavior of someone engaged in a situation, we infer the cause of the behavior using “attribution theories.” The personal attribution use when we explain someone’s behavior in terms of his or her personality, motivation, or personal preferences and the situational attribution use when we explain someone’s behavior in terms of unusual circumstances, social pressure, or physical forces beyond the person’s control. Personal and situational attributes can be divided into critical and non-critical attributes. Critical attributes are those attributes we should pay attention to and non-critical attributes are those attributes we should ignore. There are three levels of critical attributes: One is true for everybody of that group, the second is true for most, but not for everybody of that group and the third is at least something that is common enough for most people of that group that we need to be aware of it. There seems to be something in our cognitive processing that over emphasized characteristics of a group.

Stereotypes can aid in prediction using critical attributes. It helps you to “cover your bases” and gives confidence to the person who is stereotyping. The poor prediction of accuracy using non-critical attributes can justify discriminatory
behavior. It often has a “self-fulfilling” effect or prophecy. In other words, we see what we expect to see. You might become “overly” self-confident by thinking you “know” about those people. This might prevent you from being open to learning more about those people. Most people (especially in an individualistic culture) don’t like to be stereotyped, either positively or negatively. We must try to rid our minds of the non-critical attributes and focus on the critical attributes. This will give us the “good” (i.e. “Accurate”) stereotypes. Narrowing the groups helps to eliminate the non-critical attributes. This increases the complexity of and the number of traits in our stereotypes. It is important to change our viewpoint from focusing on the outcome, to focusing on the process of communication. It is important to begin as soon as possible to interact with a person based on his or her own personality and rely less on the stereotypical in our mind. Cultivate a state of “alert and lively awareness” and avoid “mindlessness.”

6. EMPOWERING WOMEN CONSUMERS: BREAKING THE SOCIO NORMS

Stereotyping, in its neutral or harmless forms, was accepted by respondents as an essential tool of advertising. It was understood that without easily recognized stereotypes it would be hard to tell a story, or communicate a message, in the short span of time using advertisements. Stereotypes were seen as ‘short cuts’ which enable people (for better or worse) describe and make sense of their world. Respondents generally did not wish to see regulation which was so strict that the advertisers’ job would be impossible but, at the same time, they felt that some stereotypes could be offensive or potentially harmful. Stereotype advertising is one of the successful orientation strategy to the changing consumerism and cultural norm where there are enormous opportunities to empower women consumers and as well to the marketers to promote their brands in a socio-ethically positive and sensitive way.

One of the recent happening in the Indian advertising industry and a subject of discussion in a number of social media catch the eyeballs of many viewers from nationally and globally by breaking the social norms for promoting the brand ‘Tanishq’ (from Titan the Tata Group), a leading jewellery designer and retailer from India. Tanishq has launched a campaign for its latest wedding collection of jewelleries in October 2013 during festive and wedding season. It took an advertising campaign to talk about women’s remarriage, a subject which fast-changing modern Indian society is yet to embrace completely.[8] The brand is targeting young women who are looking for differentiated designs. Tanishq Jewellery is a trend setter that pushes fashion boundaries in the premium jewellery market in India. The marketer boldly took a business risk by pushing the boundaries of social norms and stereotypes that have plagued South Asian culture in their latest ad. In a culture where fair skin is favored and rewarded and widows and single moms are shunned, Tanishq has embraced both and depicted them beautifully, dark skin, second marriage and all. And the ad has been hit, making all the headlines,[9] Tanishq has very positively highlighted the social issues with an effective brand promotion with the stereotypes. Widow Remarriage is still a taboo in India, particularly rural and tribal parts the country among certain communities.

It was not only the first time in India that the various consumer brands are promoted using stereotypical advertisements by breaking the social norms. In 2001, a popular Indian women’s magazine ‘Famina’ promote themselves using the same societal taboo of Widow Remarriage. Again in April 2013, a leading youth fashion brand Fastrack (from Titan a Tata Group) promoted their fashion accessories to the new young Indian males and females with a ‘Move On…’ TV ad campaign. The campaign was taken off from the media because the brand appeals to LGBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender) community of India challenged the taboo of homosexuality, another social change for gender equality. The other consumer brands like Huggies, Tide and Target go beyond the clichés of old societal norms and empowering urban new-age women consumers. The Indian rural women consumers are far left behind because of the high illiteracy rate, lack of attitude to education and other social problems and prejudices. There is a high degree of differential pricing structure between branded and unbranded goods in India. There are also differences between urban and rural consumer. Rural consumers are economically, socially and psychologically different from their urban counterparts and are definitely more price-sensitive. Social norms are the perceived standards of acceptable attitudes and behavior prevalent within a community. Mass media and other communications techniques are used to change and correct the perception consumers by breaking the old social norms using stereotype advertising.

7. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Marketing and advertising reflect culture but also contribute to the creation and perpetuation of stereotypes. Advertisement is basically a marketing tool, conveys values, attitudes and stereotypes, potentially influencing general behavior beyond purchasing decisions and, in short, proposing an outlook on the world through their cumulative effects. Although advertising depictions of women’s roles in society do evolve as a function of social progress. Women are often depicted in the media in traditional and male dependent roles such as victim, sexual object, sacrificial or as dependent. Stereotypes are simplifications of social origin and social development being transmitted from generation to generation. Some may be universal, but in general, stereotypes are known, used and transmitted inside a certain group or a certain culture. Stereotypes also perform the justifying role: they justify our behavior and the social system or the behavior of a social group with which we identify ourselves. Stereotypes are not essentially negative. They actually help us in understanding complicated processes ruling the social world, reduce uncertainty and provide a sense of security.
Many companies have already begun to recognize that ensuring women’s empowerment and gender equality is not a philanthropic initiative, but integral to organizational culture, good economics and accountability. Women and children are also consumers, so empowered women equates to empowered consumers. It’s sensible for business to invest in the markets. Companies are interested in women’s empowerment because it has a positive financial returns. A common thought was that empowerment starts in the family and the society so the companies will have to look at the social structure to address women’s empowerment.

8. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Stereotypes can appear in the media because of the biases of writers, directors, producers, reporters and editors. But stereotypes can also be useful to the media because they provide a quick identity for a person or group that is easily recognized by an audience. It is sometimes faster and easier to use a stereotype to characterize a person or situation, than it is to provide a more complex explanation. Although most media persons try to be objective and factual in reporting events. Most media reporters and editors are adults who, naturally, see the world from an adult's point of view. They may also assume that their audiences are mostly adults who share similar views. Age-related bias may influence how much importance they attach to issues concerning young people, and the angle they take on such issues.

Attitudes or behaviors based on stereotypes of people. A categorization of people can be according to shared culture, language, or geographic region or based on shared biological traits such as skin color, hair texture, and eye shape. By using stereotypes, the most complex social issues such as violence, race, sex, crime, drugs, death, suicide, etc. can be highlighted very positively to reduce a conflict between “good” and “bad.” Stereotypes of a group of people can affect the way society views them, and change society's expectations. Society may come to view as a reality rather than the old predispositions. The media can be a powerful tool in creating or reinforcing stereotypes by building the positive image of stereotype persons and respect communities with a balanced approach in advertisements to empower them.

Freedom of expression and information is also a fundamental right of our democracies. The right balance therefore needs to be found between the freedom of expression and the need for respect for the reputation of others, and the right to protection of personal data. The media need to be held accountable for the content it publishes, and this is a crucial part of society’s ability to hold it accountable. This is one of the most important reasons why media organisations need to be transparent and accountable.

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