PERSPECTIVE STUDY ON BRANDED PRODUCTS AND THEIR CULTURE

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 Abstract:

People consume to reflect their sense of self identity. It reminds us of the socially assigned meaning to goods, often tied to desirable attributes for certain identifiable groups in specific contexts. It refers to the meanings conveyed by goods or other consumables, such as apparel, food, living, entertainment, leisure activities, cultural practices, and group membership in a broader social group. People purchase, use, and display. Consumption has been addressed primarily not only in consumer studies, but also in anthropology, sociology, economics, marketing, human ecology, and social psychology. It is very important for every brand to understand the culture of the customers in which ever place the brand sells. For example, A popular saree brand cannot aim to set up its market in Europe or USA with the aim of capturing the untamed market. This is because it is not their culture to wear a saree. While this is a very broad example, there are very intricate issues that affect the customer and make them decide whether or not to purchase the product. This research focuses on the influence of culture on consumers".

Key words: Assigned, Consumables, Market, Purchase.

I.   Introduction

Culture is one of the most important determinants of business in today's world, and is also is a primary determinant of ethical decision-making. The culture affects how a person perceives the ethical problems, alternatives, and consequences. ―Culture influences ethical decision-making basically in two ways: directly and indirectly. was the first to distinguish the importance of the function of culture in ethical decision making in marketing. He notes that, contrasting cultures of different societies produce different expectations, and become expressed in the dissimilar ethical standards of those societies. According to his model, cultural factors such as law, respect for individuality, nature of power and authority, rights of property, concept of deity, relation of the individual to the state, national identity and loyalty, values, customs, and state of the arts, are the most basic determinants of ethical standards of a society. A fundamental premise to study the role of culture as a determinant of marketer's decision-making is an understanding of the process of decision-making itself and its diverse determinants. Such an understanding might be attained through a review of Culture as subject of study was closely associated with anthropology and sociology for about last one and half century but in recent decades it has gained importance in disciplines like management (Ganesh 2005). Despite the problems in defining, conceptualizing and operationalizing culture, it has been increasingly acknowledged as important for organizations (Groeschl and Doherty 2000). Each culture has its own norms, customs and expectations for behavior, so any manager who ignores culture puts his organization at a great disadvantage (Bateman and Snell 2003). The cultural variable is accorded an important place in international marketing, despite the difficulties in isolating its various elements (Usunier 2000). Marketing has contributed significantly to the improvement of the society (Wilkie and Moore1999).The Philosophy of this contributor is seeing the ―products and services through the eyes of the customer (Lilien, Kotler and Moorthy 1991).

II.   Objectives

The study aims to get an understanding of how the cultural factors in any situation, for example in the Indian scenario, factors such as traditions, parent's expectations, societal taboos, natural inhibitions etc, play a role in making the consumer decide whether or not to purchase a product.

To identify specific set of cultural factors influencing selection of branded products.

(i)   To understand the cultural reasons for the selection of. Branded products.
(ii)   . To understand the sub-cultural reasons for the selection of cosmetics
(iii)   To examine the relation between brands, culture and symbolic consumption.
(iv)   To recommend the strategies required by certain brands for planning necessary consumer adaptation on consumption.

III.   Research Methodology

The tentative design for research would be:

To first understand symbolic consumption and the key aspects intended to be studied such as the factors affecting it and the extent of its existence in the real world and also to understand the impact of culture on the same. And second to make a literary survey of the topic and analyze the previous and existing work in symbolic consumption and related studies like consumer behavior and factors affecting consumer behavior etc. And this research is based on secondary data only.

Culture:

Culture has a profound influence on all aspects of human behavior. Its impact may be subtle or pronounced, direct or oblique, enduring or ephemeral. It is so entwined withal facets of human existence that it is often difficult to determine how and in what ways its impact is manifested. Adding to the complexity of understanding the impact of culture is its inherently dynamic nature. Cultural influences change and culture evolves as political, social, economic and technological forces reshape the cultural landscape. Culture is a pervasive influence which underlies all facets of social behavior and interaction. It is evident in the values and norms that govern society. It is embodied in the objects used in everyday life and in modes of communication in society. The complexity of culture is reflected in the multitude of definitions of culture. According to Herskovits (1955) culture is the "manmade" part of the environment – i.e. what distinguishes humans from other species. Studies have shown that different cultures react differently to new product and technological innovations (e.g. Mahajan and Muller, 1994; Maitland and Bauer, 2001; Takada and Jain, 1991; Tellefsen and Takada, 1999; Tellis et al., 2003; Van Everdingen and Waarts, 2003).

Meanings, values, ideas and beliefs of a social group are articulated through variouscultural artifacts, such as products, (Hasan and Ditsa, 1999). Douglas and Isherwood (1979) posit that people from different cultures use products as a means of communication. According to McCracken (1989), in a consumer society, cultural meaning moves from the culturally constituted world (the original location of cultural meaning) to consumer goods (carrying and communicating cultural meaning) and then from these goods to the individual consumer. The nature of cultural influence can be seen as a circular process from which meaning is created, maintained and transmitted within a society (McCort and Malhotra, 1993).

There are over 160 definitions of the culture alone.Basically the characteristics of culture are identical in almost all the instances. Hofstede (1991), Trompenaars (1993), and Czinkota, M.R. and Johnston, W.J. (1981) all agreed that culture is based on languages, economy, religion, policies, social institutions, class, values, status, attitudes, manners, customs, material items,

aesthetics and education, which subsequently influences managerial values.   Cross-verging across culture has different aspects such as attitude, communication, conflict and negotiation, performance and compensation, which explain the ethical issues and how to appraise them.

IV.   Related studies

[i] Today, the demand for luxury goods is increasing gradually since the individuals can acquire more revenue and enjoy more consumption opportunities thanks to the conditions of the modern era (HusicandCicic 2009: 231). In recent years, the concept of luxury has expanded from materialism to time and passion, and become eventually more available. As consumers satisfy their feelings of pleasure and gratification through the luxury goods, the available luxury products will also continue to enhance its charm for consumers (Yeoman 2011: 50).

[ii]Globalization has a lot to do with consumers. Consumers in India are now becoming More informed, sophisticated and demanding. India is one of the youngest countries in the world, and the attitudes of the Indian consumers are changing at a rapid pace. With Globalization more and more Indians are becoming aware of westernized products and they feel that possession of global brands in front of their social groups (friends and Families) gives them a sense of status and prestige. It is therefore proposed that products and possessions seem to have more of symbolic attributes rather than functional attributes. This study therefore focuses on the reasons as to why consumers in emerging markets particularly India prefer foreign brands over local brands and it also proves that consumption is carried out for reasons such as symbolic consumption, materialism and depiction of high status and image. However this study is restricted to purely to the upper middle classes.

[iii]According to geographic proximity, linguistic similarities, population migration and historic Developments, European cultures can be grouped into three main cultures Germanic, Romance and Slavonic. Research shows that the origin of this cultural typology is not quiet clear because of its ancient roots. Some researchers refer it to ancient Romans (Carlton 1965, Edcock 1960), others to St Bede, a British writer of 735, one of the first history writers (Bede, Webb and Farmer, 1996):

[iv]Green products are increasingly becoming popular in India as a fashion statement. Yet, limited attention has been given to understand why users of green products associate themselves with green brands in India. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the applicability of brand personality to green products. Thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions of green product consumers revealed six dimensions of green brand personality (GBP). GBP is a set of human characteristics associated with a green brand. By focusing on the green brand personality dimensions discovered in this paper,

marketing managers can better understand why people buy green products. Companies can use this enhanced understanding to promote their green products in order to enhance sales and encourage/attract non-green product customers to switch to green products.

^v Consumers' assessment of brands and assigning meaning to them would be dependent upon Cultural values based upon conditioning. The contention that ancient differences in tastes and Lifestyle between countries are being modified to resemble more global values has occupied The interest of researchers for years (Bearden, Money, and Nevins 2006; Bond 2002; Gouveia, Clemente and Espinosa 2003). This might be attributed to global branding and marketing endeavors instigated by multinational companies in the interest of understanding consumers in Different countries (Aaker and Williams 1998). The present research is an attempt to understand the nature of collectivist and individualist values and lifestyles in Indian society and their impact on brand meanings among Indian university students. Hofstede (2001) defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another." Indian culture encompasses many subcultures, religions, and regional dialects. The fundamentals of group values, family orientation, feminine traits, and self-identity predominate Indian cultural values (Banerjee 2008). Culture comprises shared values, understandings, and goals that are learned and transmitted from one generation to another and passed on to succeeding generations (Banerjee; Deresky 2003). The questionnaires developed by Sun, Horn, and Merritt (2004) for measuring lifestyle and values in collectivist and individualist cultures and for measuring the meaning of branded products developed by Strizhakova, Coulter and Price (2008) were used for the research. Factors like brand quality, group and family influences, national heritage, and self-concept were taken into consideration. The youth population was selected as the sample as youths represent a large consumer market for global branded products in India, and changes in lifestyle are more apparent in their case. The first section of the article covers the theoretical background to the study; this is followed by the research methodology, findings and discussion, marketing implications, limitations, and future research directions.

^vi Culture and consumption have an unprecedented relationship in the modern world. The rapidly increasing importance of international marketing has led marketers, practitioners and academicians alike, to seek a deeper understanding of how consumers and markets differ around the globe. The world economy is becoming increasingly cross-cultural. During the next decades, as marketers enter new international markets, an understanding of how culture influences consumer behavior will be crucial. Culture is a powerful force in regulating human behavior. Consumption decisions made in the market cannot be viewed as an independent event – these are closely related with values and social relationship and cultural allegiance. According to past research, national culture has considerable influence on consumer behavior (Jaishankar, 1998). National culture of any country, as outer stimuli, influence on the diffusion of products across countries (Kumar et al., 1998). With globalization, culture becomes predominantly important strategic issue in market that has to be faced and properly managed. People of each country possess a distinct „"national

character"". Countries are a source of a considerable amount of common mental programming of their citizens (Hofstede, 1991). Core values of any country shape its national culture. Culture can be conceptualized as dynamic production and reproduction of meaning by concrete individuals" activities in particular contexts (Kashima, 2000). It ensures a set of behavior patterns transmitted symbolically through language and other means to the member of a particular society (Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983). Culture generally refers to those aspects of human activities that are symbolic and meaningful and identifiable. Bartlett (1923) defined culture as a part of two components: firstly, cultural elements which denote material behavior and objects and secondly, cultural materials that cover forms of cultural practices, artifacts, social and religious rituals, customs. This article presents a framework that integrates and reinterprets current research in culture, sub culture and cross-cultural consumer behavior. The framework also serves to identify areas that need further research and can be used as a template for those cosmetics marketers who seek to understand their consumers.

[vii]The purpose of this paper is to examine the nature of family purchase decision making at the Bottom of the Pyramid (BOP) using a study of BOP consumers in India. The primary objective is to identify the purchase approach of BOP consumers for Fast Moving Consumer Good (FMCG) products depending on the role of each family member and the types of roles assumed by different family members, given the constraints they face in the dynamic environment that characterizes the BOP. The paper qualitatively investigates the family decision making or FMCG products based on the model prosed by Engel et al., 1973 and also includes the children's influence and participation at specific stages of the decision making process. Moreover the unique point of differentiation of the research is the comparative study between the people living in rural and urban areas of Jammu, J&K (India). Although the results highlight the dominance of the husband in the purchase of products in BOP markets in India.
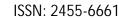
V. Related findings

Cultural Factors come from the different components related to culture or cultural environment from which the consumer belongs. These have a deep lying effect on the behavior of the consumer towards brands and buying the products.

a. Culture and Societal Environment:

Culture is crucial when it comes to understanding the needs and behaviors of an individual. Throughout his existence, an individual will be influenced by his family, his friends, his cultural environment or society that will "teach" him values, preferences as well as common behaviors to their own culture.

Brands need to understand the cultural factors that are inherent to each market or each situation so that the product gets adapted to the customers and this will help brands in preparing their

very own and unique marketing strategy. These cultural factors play a role in the perception, habits, behavior or expectations of consumers.

McDonald's is a brilliant example of adaptation to the specificities of each culture and each market. Well aware of the importance to have an offer with specific products to meet the needs and tastes of consumers from different cultures, the fast-food giant has for example: a McBaguette in France (with french baguette and Dijon mustard), a Chicken Maharaja Mac and a Masala Grill Chicken in India (with Indian spices) as well as a Mega Teriyaki Burger (with teriyaki sauce) or Gurakoro (with macaroni gratin and croquettes) in Japan.

While all the ingredients used by McDonald's in arabic and muslim countries are certified halal. The fast food chain not offering, of course, any product with bacon or pork.

b.   Sub-Cultures :

A society is composed of several sub-cultures in which people can identify. Subcultures are groups of people who share the same values based on a common experience or a similar lifestyle in general. Subcultures are the nationalities, religions, ethnic groups, age groups, gender of the individual, etc..

These subcultures are often considered by brands for the segmentation of a market in order to adapt a product or a communication strategy to the values or the specific needs of this segment.

For example in recent years, the segment of "ethnic" cosmetics has greatly expanded. These are products more suited to non-Caucasian populations and to types of skin pigmentation for african, arab or indian populations for example.

Brands often communicate in different ways, sometimes even create specific products (sometimes without significant intrinsic difference) for the same type of product in order to specifically target an age group, a gender or a specific sub-culture. Consumers are usually more receptive to products and marketing strategies that specifically target them.

c.   Social Classes:

Social classes are defined as groups more or less homogenous and ranked against each other according to a form of social hierarchy. Even if it's very large groups, we usually find similar values, lifestyles, interests and behaviors in individuals belonging to the same social class. We often assume three general categories among social classes : lower class, middle class and upper class.

People from different social classes tend to have different desires and consumption patterns. Disparities resulting from the difference not only in their purchasing power, but, according to some researchers, behavior and buying habits would also be a way of identification and belonging to its social class.

Beyond a common foundation to the whole population and taking into account that many counter examples naturally exist, they usually do not always buy the same products, do not choose

the same kind of vacation, do not always watch the same TV shows, do not always read the same magazines, do not have the same hobbies and do not always go in the same types of retailers and stores.

For example, consumers from the middle class and upper class generally consume more balanced and healthy food products than those from the lower class. They don't go in the same stores either. If some retailers are, of course, patronized by everyone, some are more specifically targeted to upper classes such as The Fresh Market, Natures Basket etc., while others, such as discount supermarkets, attract more consumers from the lower class.

Some studies have also suggested that the social perception of a brand or a retailer is playing a role in the behavior and purchasing decisions of consumers.

In addition, the consumer buying behavior may also change according to social class. A consumer from the lower class will be more focused on price while a shopper from the upper class will be more attracted to elements such as quality, innovation, features, or even the "social benefit" that he can obtain from the product.

d.   Cultural Trends:

Cultural trends or "Bandwagon effect" are defined as trends widely followed by people and which are amplified by their mere popularity and by conformity or compliance with social pressure. The more people follow a trend, the more others will want to follow it.

They affect behavior and shopping habits of consumers and may be related to the release of new products or become a source of innovation for brands. By social pressure, desire to conformity or belonging to a group, desire to "follow fashion trends" or simply due to the high visibility provided by media, consumers will be influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by these trends.

For example, Face book has become a cultural trend. The social network has widely grown to the point of becoming a must have, especially among young people. It is the same with the growth of the tablet market. Tablets such as iPad or Galaxy Tab have become a global cultural trend leading many consumers to buy one even if they had never specially felt the need before.

For a brand, creating a new cultural trend from scratch is not easy. Apple did it with the tablets with its iPad. But this is an exception. However, brands must remain attentive to the new trends and "bandwagon effects".

VI.   Conclusions

- Multinational companies that are able to market their brands according to the local Differences and cultural peculiarities would find greater acceptance among youths. The brands Should symbolize modernity with traditional values to gain acceptance with

them. Marketing And advertising would entail promoting products according to the global norms of quality, status, And modern values coupled with Indian family traditions.

- According to consumers while selecting branded items, culture influences their selection. Branded items are selected in the framework of personal culture and rituals performed. Along with that the language and symbol on the package influences their selection. Consumers are of the opinion that their subculture influences.

- Selection and they have derived subculture from the culture of the state and religion to which they belong.

Consumers are also getting influenced from cross-culture of different countries. Today's globalization has converged the global teenage category tastes and preferences, as a reason global teenagers influence is on our country's teenagers.

- As a result of that consumers would like brand because they know that global brands fulfill the needs of their customers through quality products. For the inclusive growth of the country "economy understanding sartorial growth is important.

- This research is carried out to study the general perspective of consumers understanding of culture. The study would have been more interesting study would have been made still more interesting by comparing emphasize on culture.

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