

Cultural Values as Business Strategy in Product Marketing: A Study of Select Indian Toothpaste and Body Soap Brands



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ABSTRACT: The consumers in the Indian society are vastly influenced by religion, societal values, belief system, and rootedness in the core tradition. These core values are strongly embedded in their sub-conscious mind and sub-culture. Keeping in mind of the need of each set of customers, several FMCG brands are cautious about launching of their brands in India. The cosmetics and personal care industry is one of the fastest growing consumer products sectors in India. The buying behaviour of the consumers is greatly influenced by the culture and its apparent homogeneity of preferences. Not many studies were undertaken by the researchers on the influence of cultural values and its impact of the consumer preferences and behaviour in India. The aims and objectives of the present study are to determine the importance of the cultural values that contribute, shape the consumer behaviour in the Indian context for the select brands of toothpaste and body soap.

KEY WORDS: Consumer behaviour; cultural values; cultural orientation of consumer; Indian toothpaste and body soap industry

1. INTRODUCTION

The influence of culture on the consumption of consumers in FMCG brands attracted the marketers in the international marketing of their brands. The past studies on consumer behaviour had put emphasis on individual decision making based on social and cultural values. India being a multicultural society, the influence of culture plays a pivotal role in buying decisions of consumers in FMCG products. This put Indian and Asian markets as unique as compared to western world. The culture in the context of consumer behaviour is consisting of "collective values, customs, group norms, arts, social institutions and intellectual achievements of a particular society which express its principles, standards and priorities" (Schiffman et al., 2019). The culture expresses and satisfies the needs of the society. It provides direction, purpose for solving the day to day problems in the society through "tried-and-true" methods of satisfying personal, physiological and social needs. The culture also dictate what to drink, what to eat and what to wear.

Role of culture in the consumer behaviour

The culture plays an important role in behavioural dimension of Indian customers. But the some past research on consumer behaviour suggests that the influence of culture as a determinant is dynamic in nature but it plays an important role in the decision making of the consumer (Briley et al., 2000). The research undertaken by McCort and Malhotra proved the fact that "culture impacts virtually every construct "of marketing (McCort and Malhotra, 1993). They argued for understanding culture with more rigorously both in its nature and its relationship to cognitive processes and social behaviour.

Marketing research is awakening to the impact of culture on consumption. Consumer behaviour is influenced by culture which includes the perception of the customer, his or her motivation and memory, group influence, demographic factors, social class; attitudes change (Usunier, 1996). There is a need to focus on the interrelation of different behavioural factors in its societal environment to understand the social fabric of customs in the region which shape the consumer behaviour (Douglas et al., 1994).

Cultural Orientation of the Customer in the society

A four stage of paradigm which helps the marketers to identify the major factors in the buying behaviour of the customers as developed by P.S. Raju, a professor of Marketing, University of Louisville in early 1990s. These four stages are (a) Access; (b)

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buying behaviour; (c) consumption characteristics; and (d) disposal as given in Fig.1 below. Under the 'C' stage i.e. consumption characteristics, specific product or services that are bought or consumed by a customer may differ from each culture. The cultural orientation of a customer in a society i.e. traditional or modern outlook and social class among other factors would greatly influence or determine the consumption patterns within that culture where the consumer belongs (Raju, 1995).

Fig.1 : The A-B-D-C Paradigm of Consumer Behaviour and its Application

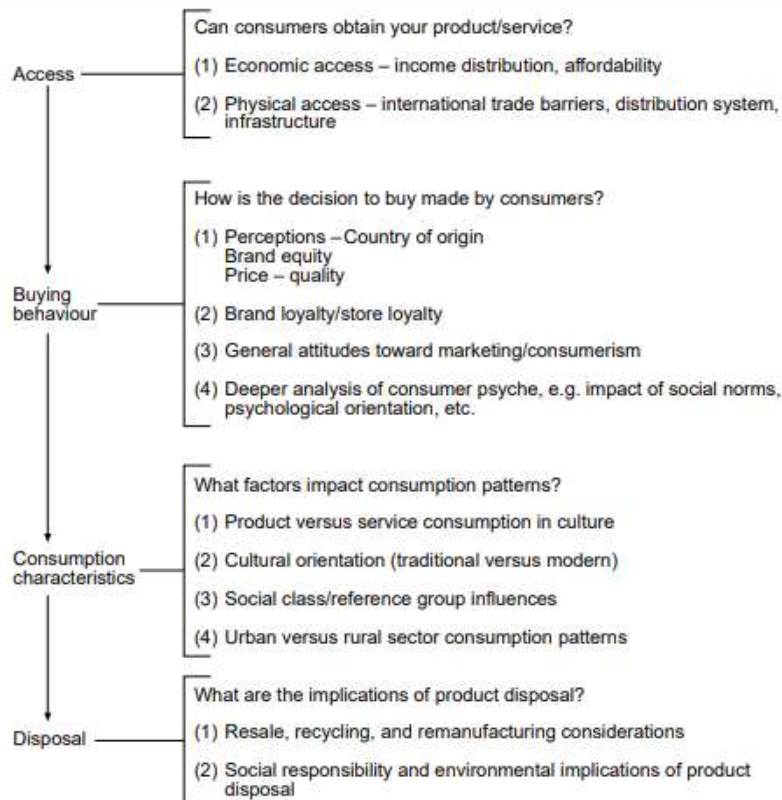


Figure 1. The A-B-C-D paradigm

Source: P.S. Raju, 1995, Consumer Behaviour in Global Markets: The A-B-C-D Paradigm and its Application in Eastern Europe and the Third World

2. INDIAN TOOTHPASTE MARKET OF NATURAL PRODUCTS

The Indian toothpaste market is having seventy percent of the total oral care market share India with an estimated market size of Rs.10.00 crore as per the Industry estimate at the end of the year 2021. The Colgate-Palmolive India (shortly CPIL) has been dominating the oral hygiene market which include varied variety of toothpaste, tooth powder, tooth brush and mouth wash. The CPIL first started its campaign in the late 1930s in India and was successful in its efforts to persuade rural and urban Indians to abandon the *neem* or *meswak* twigs for toothpaste and tooth brushes. The Colgate became the synonymous with toothpaste. However, in the recent past the stronghold of Colgate is changed because of new entrants in the toothpaste market like VICCO Vajradanti, Dabur and Patanjali by successfully exploiting cultural values and Indian ethos in positioning their products.

Though the Colgate has fought back by introducing herbal and ayurvedic variants in toothpaste to counter the Patanjali, yet the market is witnessing an increased traction in sales of toothpaste varieties based on Indian based Ayurvedic ingredients.

2.1. VICCO Vajradanti Toothpaste

The VICCO Vajradanti launched its product of toothpaste and tooth powder in 1990s and the company promoted its products through T.V. Commercials sponsored through Doordarshan, targeting urban and semi-urban family. The VICCO vajradanti TVC and Radio jingle was most powerful tool which promoted their brand among the customers of all ages. However, it shifted the target audience from family to young millennials by roping in Alia Bhat in 2020 who is a bollywood actress.

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2.2. Dabur –Meswak

Dabur-Meswak (also known as Miswak) was initially launched in the year 1998 by Balsara Hygiene products Limited and the said brand was taken over by Dabur group and re-launched in 2005. Dabur is claims through its website (www.dabur.com) “Dabur Meswak - One of the Best Herbal toothpaste for Overall Oral Care Protection and a pure extract of the Miswak plant (Salvadore Persica) which protects the to reduce tarter & plaque fight germs & bacteria, prevent tooth decay & bad breath ensuring healthy gums & strong teeth”. The alvadora persica is known as toothbrush tree native to India, Middle East and Africa and extensively used by Muslims because it was reportedly practiced by Prophet Muhammad (Saha et al., 2012). Because of the above reason the brand also have some negative perception among the consumers other than Muslims in India but at the same time the brand has acquired acceptability and popularity among the buyers from the Muslim community. The Dabur also has also accepted the fact through its website that the use of Miswak is a pre-Islamic customs and greatly recommended by Islam.

2.3. Dabur- Red

The Dabur-Red toothpaste was launched by the Dabur group in the year 2001, mainly targeting the typical working middle class as the demand for the tooth powder was slowly waning out in the Indian market. Dabur Red uses cultural diversity to break category codes through its advertisement campaign. It advertisement depicts ordinary persons from across the geographical region (north-south; west-east), from armed forces person to auto driver; home maker to maid. The brand proudly announced that “no dentist is recommending the brand” and it is not even promise to fight gems or whitening teeth. The punch line for these series of advertisement campaign is ‘Desh ka Lal’, indirectly glorifying the armed forces personnel who are serving to the nation. The Dabur-Red is widely popular in Defence Canteens because of its affordable price as compared to its other brand Dabur-Meswak and ayurvedic based toothpaste. The Dabur-Red has recently roped in Amitabh Bachchan, the famous Bollywood actor through its latest TV Commercial, commissioned by Ogilvy, the advertisement agency.

2.4. Patanjali –Dant kanti

The Patanjali had launched its Dant kanti toothpaste in the year 2015 with targeting its loyal customer base using the name of Patanjali. The website of the Patanjali claims through its website that its ‘dant kanti’ is a natural toothpaste containing herbs and ayurvedi ingredients with essential oil. It prevent and reduces pain in the gums and teeth and regular use of the ‘dant kanti’ prevents from pyria, gingivitis etc. Baba Ramdev, the popular yoga guru in India and also the one of the promoter Members of the brand had claimed that the ‘dant kanti’ toothpaste had generated a net revenue of Rs.450 crore during the financial year 2015-16 (Economic Times, 2016). In 2017, the colgate-palmolive had launched a new variety of its toothpaste ‘Cibaca Vedshakti’ priced at Rs.50 of 175 gm pack to counter the Patanjali’s Dant kanti and it was a bitter battle in the corporate India to capture to retain the dominance by the CPIL. The CPIL had claimed its Cibaca Vedshakti toothpaste is 30% lesser than the ‘dant kanti’. The following Table shows the select brands of Tooth paste, marketed by VICCO, Dabur and Patanjali in Indian market by using cultural constructs to promote their brands:

Table-1: Tooth Paste Brands based on cultural values in India

Brand Name	Target customers/ Audience	Cultural construct used by the brand to influence minds of the customers	Tagline used by the brand	Brand Ambassador
VICCO Vajradanti	Young Urban and Semi-urban customers	Turmeric with anti-ageing properties and to combat odour with sandalwood smell.	“VICCO Vajradanti Daant gungunaye” through TVC. “Ayurvedi Medicine for gums and teeth”	Alia Bhatt (Top Bollywood Actress)
Dabur – Meswak	All age group of urban and rural population	Floride free with extract of the Miswak plant 'Salvadore Persica'. Miswak is believed to have astringent and anti-bacterial to reduce tooth decay.	“Complete oral care with rare miswak Herb”	Bipasha Basu (Bollywood Actress)
Dabur Red	Common man and working	Uses cultural diversity using visuals	‘Desh ka Lal’	Amitabh Bachchan

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	population and armed forces personnel			(Famous Bollywood actor)
Patanjali - Dantkanti	Rural and semi-urban family predominantly from northern part of India	traditional Indian medicine with 13 Ayurvedic ingredients like clove (laung), spearmint (pudina) and Tomar	<i>“Improve oral health with Dant Kanti’s tested herbal ingredients”</i>	Baba Ramdev, a popular yoga guru and one of the main promoters of the Patanjali group.

3. AN OVERVIEW OF THE INDIAN BODY SOAP MARKET

The Indian body soap or bath soap market has reached US\$ 2694 Million in the year 2021 as per the market survey report by IMAC group and it may touch US\$ 3973 Million by the year 2027 with a compounded annual growth rate of 6.53% during the above period. The premium products occupy 60% of the market share and the remaining 40% are categories as mass products in the body soap market. While MNCs brands like Lux, Dove, Pears etc dominating the luxury soap market and the non premium market is occupied with the products like Santoor, Pathanjali, Lifebuoy (HUL), Dettol (Reckitt), Chintol (Godrej). The Mysore sandal line products also occupy among the premium segments especially in the southern states of India. For the present study, the researchers have taken three brands namely Santoor, Mysore Sandal and Patanjali – Haldi Chandan Kanti because of its positioning on the basis of cultural values.

3.1 Santoor- Sandal & Turmeric

The Santoor brand of bath soap was initially launched in the year 1985 by Wipro Consumer Care, positioning itself with an affordable price targeting urban middle class young women. Presently it has four variants– Sandal and turmeric; Almond soft; Aloe fresh and Gold but the sandal and turmeric variant is the dominant one in the market. The TVC produced by the Santoor to promote Santoor soap with the theme of “ageless skin” portraying young married urban women about two decades back. Over a period, the advertisement campaign helped the brand to capture the urban market (Business Standard, 2013).

The brand has a good market share especially in southern states and Maharashtra where the population of working women is more as compared to northern states. Sandoor was the only Indian soap brand to be among the Rs.2000 crore plus consumer brands as per the industry report in 2022 (ET Now, 2022). The success of the brand could be attributed to the fact that the brand has equally targeting the audience from north, west, south by roping in three leading cinema actors viz. Varun Dhawan (for northern and western states), Telugu actor Mahesh Babu (for A.P, Telangana and Karnataka) and Tamil movie star Karti (for Tamil Nadu and Kerala).

3.2 Mysore Sandal

The famous brand of Mysore sandal soap was launched about 104 years ago in the year 1918 by the Government Soap factory under the erstwhile Mysore state under the patronage of Maharaja of Mysore also known as Mysuru. The city of Mysore is also known as ‘Fragrance Ambassador of India’ because it produces the world’s best natural sandalwood oil. The technology of manufacturing the soap using pure sandalwood oil was standardised by the soap factory in India. The soap factory was converted into a public sector enterprises by the Government of Karnataka in the year 1980 under the name of Karnataka Soaps and Detergents Limited (KSDL). In its 101st year of its establishment, the company achieved its highest turnover of Rs.672 crore in the year 2019. The company is also facing shortage of raw materials to produce the sandalwood soap and unable expand its manufacturing capacity. It follows a high pricing strategy and targeting premium customers and High Net worth Individuals (HNI).

Over the period, the KSDL diversified its products and entered into by-products like detergents, agarbatis, cosmetics, handwash etc. The KSDL was perhaps the first soap brand which started offering colourful Mysore sandal soaps in a gift packs with a tagline of “A golden gift for golden skin” with a mixture of its sandal soap varieties.

The Mysore sandal soap also carries the Geographical Indicator (GI) tag for the sandalwood soaps from Mysore, Karnataka. The Brand got its Geographical Indications tag in the year 2006. The brand has become the pride of kannadigars and still using its founder members of the Maharaja of Mysore – Wodeyar and Diwan of the Mysore State Vishweshwaraiah. Though, the

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Kerala Soap factory was founded in the year 1914 which produced a similar kind of sandal soap now under the banner of Kerala State Industrial Enterprises (KSIE), the Kerala sandal soap could not match the market share of the Mysore Sandal soaps.

3.3. Patanjali Haldi – Chandan Kanti

The brand is in existence in the Indian market from 2012. The earliest review about the product is available on the social media from the year 2013. The brand claims “it is an antiseptic and moisturizing action due to its added active ingredients and protects from germs and provides relief from dryness of skin”. The brand is targeted the low income group from working class from semi-urban and rural areas predominantly from the northern states of India. Like any other Patanjali products, the Haldi-Chandan Kanti is also attained popularity among the followers of Baba Ramdev. As per a Market report, the Patanjali herbal soap segment mopped up a revenue of Rs.574 crore in the year 2018 (The Economic Times, 2018).

Table 2 below depicts the details of Target customers, cultural constructs, taglines and brand ambassador of each of the three brands of body soap undertaken for the present study to give a fair understanding to the readers.

Table-2: Indian Body Soap Market of select natural products

<i>Brand Name</i>	<i>Target customers/ Audience</i>	<i>Cultural construct used by the brand to influence minds of the customers</i>	<i>Tagline used by the brand</i>	<i>Brand Ambassador</i>
Santoor- Sandal & Turmeric	Young mothers For younger and youthful glowing skin	Made with sandal and turmeric	Sandoor: The secret of younger looking skin	Shaif Ali Khan, Varun Dhawan (bollywood actors) Mahesh Babu (a successful Telugu actor) and Karti (a leading Tamil actor)
Mysore Sandal	High net worth individuals predominantly from the Southern states and parts of the erstwhile Nizam State .	Natural sandalwood using sandalwood oil and other natural extracts like Palm Rose, Vetivert, Patchouli, Geranium, petitgrain etc.	“Only soap with pure sandalwood”	Being Government of Karnataka enterprises, the brand is dependent upon the popularity of erstwhile rulers of the Mysore state who first started the factory and government machinery. Some time back it roped in the Cricketer M.S. Dhoni but it did not work
Patanjali Haldi – Chandan Kanti	Low income group from rural and semi-urban population from northern India	Turmeric with Ayurvedic components like <i>Neem, Amla, Tulsi, Manjistha</i> etc.	“Cleanse and purify the skin”	Baba Ramdev, a popular yoga guru and one of the main promoters of the Patanjali group.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research which is based on secondary data viz. past studies, market surveys, reports, sales promotional campaigns of the brands and products taken for the study, Television Commercials released by the brands through social media and websites.

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5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Though the majority of the Indian consumers are westernized of late because of modern jobs, yet they are still rooted in the old customs and belief system. They are influenced by cultural consciousness. The joint family system which is part of the Indian culture also plays an important role in their purchase behaviours and choosing a product. The vibrant Indian festivals by each community in different part of the country also affect the purchase choices. The Indian way of living and heavy dependence of rural population on the nature, ayurveda make some obvious purchase choices and oral and body care products such as toothpastes and body soaps by women folks, and their family members.

The select brands of toothpaste and body soap produced by Indian companies vastly relied upon the cultural values of their target customers and earned a niche for their products amidst the dominant players. The growth story of these products amply proves the point that companies which want to market their products in India has to pay adequate and minute attention towards various cultural settings and values before launching their products. Though the cultural choices of a consumer can be shaped through a stimulus which could attract such a customer but some time, it can backfire or exclude certain group of customers. While in the case of Dabur-Meswak brand, the unique selling proposition (USP) of the product is based on Islamic culture of using meswak stick. Some time it may keep away the customers from other faith. Recognising the dynamics involved in the brand, Dabur had to launch ayurvedic toothpaste viz. Dabur dant rakshak targeting the customers from other faiths too. The present study is a unique in nature which collects the constructs associated with the culture of each brand and its sales promotional strategy, targeting the segments of the consumers.

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