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Beauty vs. health

Comparative Study of Suburban Housewives' Approaches towards Beauty Soap and Dish Wash Bar

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Abstract

India is a country of near about 125.1 million populations. There is no doubt that India is a lucrative market for any business house. In India, people and their culture, lifestyle, society is varied from one space to another. So it seems very important for the business houses to analyse the consumer typology before marketing any product in Indian market. In Indian society gender is a very important issue. Even some products or consumption material are specified for a particular gender group, men or women. In Indian society, women are always appreciated for their beauty rather for their wisdom. It is very unfortunate but true that in our country society has forced women to become beautiful. It is social rules and customs which provoke them to use expensive beauty products instead of eating healthy and nutritious foods. Now day women actively participate in economic, social and political activities. But a huge no. of women still spends their livelihood inside the four walls of their house as housewives. As they are far away from public place, societal norms; tradition and customs controlled their lifestyle and perception more than working women. Beauty soap and dish wash bar are two consumption materials which are directly connected with their regular livelihood. Where quality of beauty soap affects their external beauty, dish wash bar has an important connection with their internal health and hygiene. Through my study; I have found that their approaches towards these two soaps are different. They are very conscious about their beauty soap but in case of dish wash bar they are ready to compromise. Fragrance and colour are the two important criteria for their selection of beauty soap whereas low price and longevity are the important criteria of their selection of dish wash bar. Though it varies according to their class and education and age. Advertisements have an important impact on their selection. In my paper, I want to analyse how the traditional concept of "external beauty" affects the consumer behaviour of suburban housewives. How this concept is created by society and how far better education and social awareness is useful to change this concept. Interviews were taken from selected suburban housewives of one of the oldest neighbourhood (Bidhanpally) of Madhyamgram Municipality. Then data were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively.

Introduction: India has its population about 125.1 million at present time. There is no doubt that India is a lucrative business market for every business house. In India, every person is bound to its own society. In India, a society is divided in to several communities and social groups based on their race, class, caste and gender. So it is very important for the business house to know the basic features of Indian consumers before marketing their products in Indian market. In India, society always creates a difference space for men and women. Here a person is first identified by their gender identity as male or female. From ancient time, consumption goods are specified for these two groups separately. In Indian society, women are always considered as consumption material of men. External beauty is the first and foremost criteria to judge a woman's beauty or eligibility from bridal sitting to job interview in multinational companies. In India a huge no. of educated women are housewives. They have spent their lives depending on their husbands. Though in urban and suburban areas they have done almost every housework alone from cleaning utensils to marketing, it cannot be said that they are free to take their own decision or their concept about traditional societal concept has been changed. Even in media and advertisement, their approaches are represented differently from their working sisters. Through my paper, I have tried to analyse the consumer behaviour of suburban housewives. "Why do they have different approaches towards beauty soap and dish wash bar? What is more important for them- internal health or external beauty?"

Study area: I have collected data from twenty housewives of a selected ward of Madhyamgram municipality. This ward is known as Bidhanpally-the oldest neighbourhood of Madhyamgram area. Most of the married women of this ward are housewives. As Madhyamgram is a flourishing suburban area of greater kolkata, residents can enjoy every facilities of urban area. Families mainly belong to middle class groups. Most of the people are involved in tertiary sector service. Women are engaged in different social, political and cultural groups. Their movement is not restricted in to their own house. They are influenced by many membership group like family, friends, clubs, organisation. So that we can say that their consumer behaviour actually portray the consumer approach of the women of the entire society.

Methodology: I have applied random sampling method to collect the primary data. Then data have been interpreted qualitatively and quantitatively.

Research question: How does the society influence the consumer approach of the suburban housewives?

External beauty or internal health –which is more important for them?

- **Objective:** I want to analyse the influence of society on the consumer behaviour of housewives.
- I want to highlight the influence of media on their consumer behaviour.

- I want to highlight- why they have given more importance to external beauty instead of external health.

Literature review: In this part, I mainly try to highlight the history and markets of body soap and dish wash bar in India. In ancient time people mainly use turmeric and sandal paste, Besan, clay to clean their body (Mahabharata). In Mahabharata, draupadi carried her own beauty kit when she disguised herself as saurandhri. During the British period, Lever brothers (England) introduced modern soaps by importing and marketing them in India. North West Company created the first soap manufacturing plant in Meerut in 1897. In India; Lux was the first international beauty soap. It was launched in the year 1933 (www.blogspot.com).

The most popular brands of beauty soap is Unilever (Lux, lifeboy, hamham, rexona, Breeze, Dove, pears) Godrej (Cinthol, Fairglow, Nikhar, All care), Wipro (Santoor). Among these brands Hindustan Unilever has the highest share (54.3%). (www.iffexpress.com)

In India region wise, people prefer different types of beauty soap. In northern region people prefer pink coloured soap whereas in south people prefer ayurvedic soap. After food brands with highest consumer reach points includes toilet soaps Life boy and Lux (www.studymode.com).

William Hesketh Lever was determined to revolutionise Victorian England standard of cleanliness and hygiene. So he created Vim soap in 1885. This product is sold in 20 countries. 60% consumer market in India is occupied by Vim bar.

According to Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller (Kotler, Keller, 2007) consumer behaviour can be controlled by different social and cultural and personal factors. A consumer behaviour is influenced by social factors such reference groups, family and social roles and statuses. Men and women respond differently to marketing messages. One study showed that women valued connection and relationships with family and friends and placed a high priority on people.

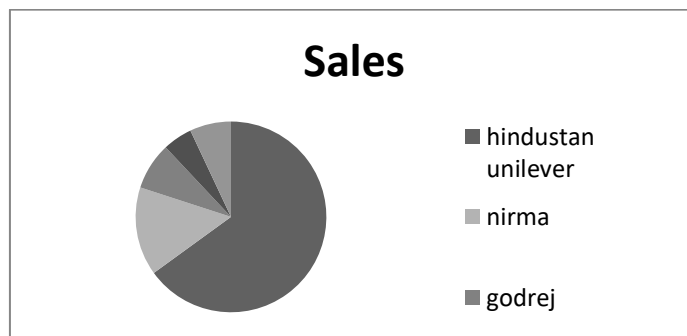


Fig-1: consumer market occupied by different companies (source: www.brandfootprint-ranking.com)

Demographic characteristics of the sample group: The housewives are at middle age.35% is below 40 years,25% is in between 40-50,40% is above 50 years old.35% of them have not completed secondary education, whereas 35% have completed graduation course.55% women can speak in Bengali and Hindi. They have learnt Hindi to see the TV serials in Hindi channels.75% women belongs to nuclear families. Most of the housewives are general caste. They belong to middle income group. Monthly income of their husbands is in between 12000-15000.

Research hypothesis: From this data, we can get an idea that the family income, family type, stage at lifecycle, linguistic structure can be the most influential parameters to determine their consumer approach. As they are at middle age it can be said that their experience influence their judgement capacity. As they understand Hindi and Bengali they must have good idea about the local and national brand. They belong to middle income group, so it is not possible for them to use luxurious consumption material in their regular life.

Consumer approach of housewives:

Body soap: In this area housewives prefer both the antibacterial soap and beauty soap for use. The ratio is 1:1.Most popular brands are Dettol, Margo and Vivel.Some of them has used different soaps in different season. They mainly prefer Dettol and Margo in summer and pears in winter. In festive season they use beauty soap like vivel, Cinthol.Middle aged housewives who are highly educated, mainly prefer beauty soap like fiama, vivel, lux.Whereas less educated housewives prefers mainly antibacterial soap like Dettol and Savlon.It does not mean that educated women do not have proper knowledge about hygiene.They actually use Dettol, Savlon, and Sudol on their skin to avoid skin problem. Less educated housewives who also belong to lower income group prefer antibacterial soap because it is not possible for them to buy extra lotion or soap for skin care. The housewives who belong to joint family have no specific reason for choosing their beauty soap. Whatever their elder members have decided to buy, they use it.

Reason for choosing Beauty soap: 60% housewives prefers soaps which have better fragrance and which are white and pink in colour.30% housewives choose their body soap which is useful to prevent rash and other skin problem.10% housewives use moisturising soaps to keep their skin smooth and soft.

So here we can see that most of the women give importance to the beauty soap. 'Fragrance and colour'-the two things which is not permanent and do not have any permanent impact on their health, are the main criteria for their selection. Here we can find the impact of societal belief of external beauty on their selection. In our society a beautiful skin means a white, glowing skin with beautiful fragrance. It has been often heard in filmy songs and stories that the surroundings feel with beautiful smells when the heroin appears in the scene for the first time. Even in social gatherings we are often talking about the fragrance of perfume or soaps. It has been seen in the advertisement of Lux and Vivel that boys become faint to smell the fragrance of the beauty soap which is used by the heroin. In

our epics and ancient stories, we have seen that women used different natural things like(Kamasutra,mahabharata) flowers,turmeric,sandal to make themselves beautiful and attractive .Now a days it seems difficult for a women to prepare their body pack in their home. So they prefer body soap for their regular use. Women, who lived in rural areas before marriage, use this kind of homemade beauty pack and use antibacterial soap for regular use. Some housewives have said that they used different beauty soaps and homemade packs before marriage but now they don't find any importance for this. It means that the beautiful skin is just a temporary necessity for women and important criteria to become ideal bride. Even in bridal gift, people also send beauty soap in toilet kit separately for bride and groom.

Dish wash bar: Vim is the most popular dish wash bar among the suburban housewives.75% housewives has used it. In case of dish wash bar,50% housewives are unable to explain the reason behind their selection.35% have selected this soap as it clean the utensils and rest of them select the dish wash bars which are huge in amount and lasted for long time.

We all know that germ free clean utensils is very important for our better health but housewives do not mentioned the germ factor in the opinion. Cleaning utensils is a regular housework for women, so it seems very important for them to clean them quickly. In our society and education system, the concept of hygiene is not properly demonstrated among common men. They do not have idea about microscopic bacteria and germs. Even they keep their dish wash bar in an untidy place without cover. Even they are not aware of any qualities of dish wash bar. They only know that vim has the power of 100 lemons. From ancient time lemon has been used for cleaning utensils, so they adopted this idea. As they do not read English properly they cannot understand the ingredients or quality of the soap. Most of them had started using this dish wash bar when they started using oven instead of traditional "Chula" for cooking. They think that dish wash bar has no impact on our health. Here we can find the impact of our society on their consumer behaviour. They are never told to use proper dish wash bar by their elders because internal effect is invisible and it can be seen as a long term effect. So in our society, anything which is internal and which does not have short term effect is not counted by anyone.

Comparative study of these two approaches: We have seen a huge difference between these two approaches. In case of beauty soap, they are aware of the qualities of soaps. They are not ready to use any unknown soap. For them glowing and soft skin is the main priority. In case of dish wash bar, they cannot explain differences between any soaps. They even do not know the ingredients of their own dish was hbar. For them the clean and shiny, oil free utensils is the main priority. They are not bothered about the antibacterial factor.

They are ready to adjust with any dish wash bar. They do not have problem to use ashes or clay as the substitute of the dish wash bars. Very few of them are ready to use any substitute of their body soaps. For them body is more important than anything else. Here we can see the body oriented gender concept. It also represents their wrong concept of body

which consist only external part rather internal organ. So in every month, one of their family members has to face the problem of internal health.

Effect of advertisement: In case of both these two kind of soaps, the impact of advertisement is partial. Only 10% housewives can remember the advertisement of their favourite beauty soap. In case of beauty soaps, advertisements mainly focus on the teenage unmarried college going girls. So the housewives find no interest. In most of the advertisements bollywood heroines are the models, so the housewives who mainly watch local cinema and mega serials, can't recognise them.

In the advertisement of antibacterial soap, the mother-child relationship is depicted. Housewives (10%) find interest in those advertisements.

In case of dish wash bar, 40% can remember the advertisement properly. Advertisement of vim presented by Ram Kapoor (serial actor) is very famous among them. Whereas none can recognise the advertisement of Exo dish wash bar (antibacterial) presented by famous TV actress Shilpa Shetty.

Conclusion: There is no doubt that body soap and dish wash bar both are very essential consumption goods in our regular life. But the concept of beauty and health should be reframed in our society. We have to become conscious about the body soap as well as dish wash bar.

Recommendation:

- We have to reframe the concept of beauty.
- Ngo and government organisation should come forward for campaigning this issue.
- Companies can make local TV actor or actresses as their model.
- Beauty soap companies can offer free antibacterial dish wash bar with their product.
- Advertising agencies should make some logical advertisement where a woman can be appreciated both for her beauty and good sense of hygiene i.e(Exo)
- Qualities and ingredients should be written in local dialect on the rapper of the soaps.

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