

GENDER-BASED STRATEGIES IN INDIAN PRODUCT MARKETS

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ABSTRACT

Gender-based marketing means marketing of products and services exclusively to men or women as the case may be. It is now widely recognized that men and women have different requirements, and they demand products in a different manner based on characteristics, features, quality, and quantity, and hence a product being marketed universally is an outdated concept.

The latest trend in the markets in the developed nations has been to market products and services by making them exclusive to each gender based on their desires. The concept has well been accepted in developed nations, but as for India it is yet to make a definitive mark. India had remained a male-dominated society until late 1990's. However, since the beginning of the 21st century, India has seen a drastic change in behavioral pattern in Indian consumers. More and more women since then have started joining the corporate world and as on date they hold many key positions of responsibility in business and society.

The present study attempts to find out whether Indian consumers are aware of the concept of gender-based marketing, whether they ready to accept it, and for which product and service categories are they ready to accept it. The implications for marketing are immense. Marketers would have found a new way to appeal to their consumers by making a product or a service exclusively made for a specific gender. Gender-based marketing offers new possibilities in terms of targeting-segmentation-positioning, as well as many new opportunities for product

development and product extension for specific gender segments. In particular, this would mean more effective marketing of products or product lines for both women and men.

To answer these questions, a survey was conducted in Bangalore city, using a structured questionnaire, to evaluate the awareness levels, usage patterns, and acceptance levels of several categories of gender-exclusive products by virtue of age, education, occupation, life cycle stage, and income level. The sample size was relatively small, two hundred respondents, taken from a section of middle-class and upper-middle-class educated adults in Bangalore city. The choice of sample, which was non-probabilistic/ convenient in nature, unfortunately limits the immediate generalizability of the results.

The results of the study showed that the younger generation, who are either students or at the starting of their career, and people who have relatively high disposable income are generally more aware and are more attracted towards the concept of gender-based marketing. Also, the results of the study showed there are several product categories for which gender-based marketing is quite readily accepted by consumers, while there are still some product categories for which gender-based marketing is not so readily accepted.

Of course, for all this to be translated into marketing strategy and action, more detailed study would be required, but the indications are that a new marketing era is about to emerge.

Keywords: gender-based marketing, gender-exclusive products, target-segmentation-positioning, product development, product extension.

INTRODUCTION

India is witnessing a dramatic change in terms of consumer demands. Women are getting empowered more and more to the level of equality with men, not just in terms of population demographics, but also in terms of income levels and education levels. This has led to a change in consumption patterns in both men and women. On the one hand, there has been an increasing trend of men are getting more conscious about their appearance, creating the category of “cosmetics for men,” while, on the other hand, women have a different set of demands and they desire different qualities and features in the products that they buy.

For a marketer, the implication is very potent, as it involves half of the consumers. If women consumers are different from men consumers, having different needs, then should marketers create products catering exclusively to their needs as well? Can this development in the Indian context be utilized by marketers to market their products to women more effectively? If yes, then is it across all product categories or is it specific to some categories only?

This study addresses the issue of whether Indian consumers are ready to accept gender-specific products across various categories of products and services, and also its impact and its acceptance in various categories.

METHODOLOGY

The data for the study was collected from a sample of two hundred middle-class men and women (one hundred of each) in Bangalore city, using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to evaluate the awareness levels, usage patterns, and acceptance levels of several categories of gender-exclusive products by virtue of age, education, occupation, life cycle stage, and income level. The profile of the respondents is presented in the following.

The age-wise distributions of the respondents were as follows: 31% of the men and 36% of the women were aged 18-25 yrs.; 34% of the men and 41% of the women were aged 26-35 yrs.; 24% of the men and 16% of the women were aged 36-50 yrs.; and 11% of the men and 7% of the women were aged above 50 yrs.

The occupation-wise distributions of the respondents were as follows: 22% of the men and 24% of the women were students; 57% of the men and 53% of the women were salaried employees; 18% of the men and 3% of the women were self-employed; and 3% of the men were retired employees, while 20% of the women were housewives.

The education-wise distributions of the respondents were as follows: 8% of the men and 16% of the women were diploma holders; 58% of the men and 62% of the women were graduates; and 34% of the men and 22% of the women were post-graduates.

The lifecycle stage-wise distributions of the respondents were as follows: 35% of the men and 31% of the women were unmarried; 21% of the men and 25% of the women were newly married; 23% of the men and 21% of the women were married and had young children; 18% of the men and 18% of the women were married and had old children; and 3% of the men and 5% of the women were senior citizens.

The income-wise distributions of the respondents were as follows: 24% of the men and 22% of the women had the salary range between 1 lakh-3 lakh; 37% of the men and 42% of the women had the salary range between 3 lakh-5 lakh; 25% of the men and 31% of the women had the salary range between 5 lakh-8 lakh; and 14% of the men and 5% of the women had the salary range above 8 lakh.

FINDINGS

The levels of awareness, brand recall, usage, perception, and preference among the women and men respondents towards gender-specific products are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: awareness, brand recall, usage, perception, and preference among women and men towards gender-specific products

	women	men
Aware of gender-specific products (exclusively for own gender)	79%	73%
Brand recall of gender-specific products (exclusively for own gender)	72%	60%
Usage of gender-specific products (exclusively for own gender)	76%	64%
Perceive gender-specific marketing to be better than conventional marketing.	76%	81%
Prefer to purchase a product exclusively marketed for own gender.	82%	80%

It was found that 79% of the women respondents were aware of the gender specific products and 76% of them already used them. The level of brand recall was comparatively lower at 72%. The implication here is that marketers further need to strengthen their appeal to women while marketing exclusively to them. Some of the most commonly-recalled brands/ products were: Biba, Hakoba, Akruti, jewellery, Tanishq, Gili, DDamas, Veet, Fa Deo, magazines, fitness centers, cosmetics, Revlon, Lakme, Garnier, Avon, and so on. Further, 76% of the women respondents felt that it's a good idea to market exclusively to women, using female exclusive products and services, and 82% said that given a choice they will prefer to buy a gender-specific product. This implies that there exists a huge opportunity to market female-specific products in Indian markets.

It was found that more than 70% of men respondents were aware of gender-specific products. This shows that there is adequate awareness of gender-based marketing among men, and therefore for marketers there is enough opportunity available for further introduction of gender-specific products. There was also a high level of gender-specific brand recall. Some of the most commonly-recalled brands/products were: Raymonds, Gillette shaving products, Axe Deo, cars, gadgets, newspapers, magazines, fitness centers, and so on. Further, 81% of men felt that gender-based marketing is better than conventional generic marketing, and 80% of the men responded positively for gender-specific products, particularly with regard to men's fairness creams and men's motorcycles. The implication from this is that there is adequate knowledge about gender-specific products and gender-specific marketing among men, and accordingly their perception and acceptance of gender-based marketing is also high.

The perception of women and men towards different female-exclusive products and services is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: perceptions of women and men towards female-exclusive products and services

	women	men
Female-exclusive taxi/cabs/autos	99%	91%
Female-exclusive gyms/fitness centres/health clubs	92%	72%
Female-exclusive vehicle service centres	87%	81%
Female-exclusive café/pubs/clubs	80%	68%
Female-exclusive petrol pumps	72%	84%
Female-exclusive holidays/vacations	71%	47%
Female-exclusive shopping centres	65%	44%
Female-exclusive restaurants	61%	36%
Female-exclusive movie shows/multiplexes	56%	51%
Female-exclusive theme parks/recreation destinations	42%	54%

Even though 76% of the women respondents felt that marketing exclusively to women was a good idea, and if given a choice 82% responded they will buy such products, the trend is not the same for all categories of products and services. There was a strong positive response for female-exclusive taxi/cabs/autos (99%), female-exclusive gyms/fitness centres/health clubs (92%), female-exclusive vehicle service centres (87%), female-exclusive petrol pumps (72%), and female-exclusive vacations (71%). There was a moderate response towards female-exclusive

shopping centres (65%), female-exclusive restaurants (61%), and female-exclusive movie shows (55%), and a strong negative response for female-exclusive theme parks/recreation destinations (42%).

Even though 77% of the men felt that marketing exclusively to women was a good concept to attract women buyers, the trend is not the same for all categories of products and services. There was a strong positive response for female-exclusive taxi/cabs/autos (91%), female-exclusive petrol pumps (84%), female-exclusive vehicle service centres (81%), and female-exclusive gyms/fitness centres/health clubs (72%). There was a moderate response towards female-exclusive café/pubs (68%), female-exclusive theme parks/recreation destinations (54%), and female-exclusive movie shows/multiplexes (51%). There was strong negative response for female-exclusive restaurants (36%), female-exclusive shopping centers (44%), and female-exclusive holidays/vacations (47%).

Women respondents were more supportive all products and services categories than men. The most acceptable categories were female-exclusive taxi/cabs/autos, female-exclusive petrol pumps, female-exclusive vehicle service centres, and female-exclusive gyms/fitness centres/health clubs, while the least acceptable categories were female-exclusive restaurants, and female-exclusive theme parks/recreation destinations.

One of the key findings is that the men and women generally have similar acceptance levels, although women tend to be more welcoming to the gender-specific concept. Further, it was found that there exists awareness of gender-specific products predominantly in the age group of 18 -25 yrs, education group of most post graduates and some graduates, occupation group of students and salaried class mostly having incomes of 1 lakh to 3 lakh or above 8 lakh, and the people in the life-cycle stage category of mostly unmarried and few newly married.

Men respondents in older age group were somewhat supportive towards the concept of gender-based marketing, but women respondents in older age group gave a totally negative response.

Finally, brand recall and usage of gender-specific products/brands were mostly found in the young age group of 18-25 yrs., among students or salaried people, unmarried and newly married people, mostly post graduates, with income levels group of 1-3 lakhs.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the study, it is suggested that marketers who intend to market gender-specific can launch those products which are readily acceptable to Indian audiences such as female-exclusive cabs, petrol pumps, service centers, and gyms. Along with the process, they should develop the programs which will help to educate Indian audiences about gender-specific products. The launch of these products must be very carefully done, as these products may even hit on the sentiments of the Indian consumers.

One of the key findings of the research is that, Indian audience is mainly family-focused. As a result, the people who are willing to accept these products are youngsters who are single (students) or who have recently married. These people also include those who have begun their

career and are in the 1-3 lakh income categories. On the other hand, people who fall in the income bracket of 3-5 lakh or 5-8 lakh are mostly family people, and their thinking is bent towards family products rather than individual products.

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