



FEMINISM IN RELATION TO MULTINATIONAL COMPANY PRODUCTS

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ABSTRACT

Concept related to women empowerment and gender equality can effect urban household consumption behavior regarding MNCP. However these effects are likely to be pronounced only when women's ethnocentrism, women's innovativeness – susceptibility level are of high level. “The largest growing economic force in the world isn't China or India -- it's women. The earning power of women globally is expected to reach \$18 trillion by 2014 -- a \$5 trillion rise for current income, according to World Bank estimates. The epistemological foundation of feminism and feminist identity historically has been the eradication of inequalities. Thus, feminism is diametrically opposed to consumer practices which support the dominance of global capitalism: a system which thrives on the exploitation of labor, theft of resources, and facilitates vast accumulation of wealth among a tiny percentage of global elite, while simultaneously impoverishing the majority of the world's population. Research found that regarding gender the dominant view is that women are more consumer ethnocentric with the increase in MNCP information package, products goal congruency expenditure pattern, income level of women's MNCP use segmentation had resulted in increase in level of susceptibility- innovativeness.

KEYWORDS: MNCP---Multinational company products, Ethnocentrism-Receptiveness of consumers towards foreign made products.

INTRODUCTION

Women's position within the globalized era is an extremely complex story. Women's are affected in different ways by the operation of economic systems depending on their class, race, nationality, religion, language, disability, sexual preference and education. The growing affluence of Indian society has merged seamlessly and conveniently with the arrival of prestigious global brand. Contemporary times are driven by technology. Because of the WTO/GATT efforts there has been a significant lowering of tariffs and dismantling of other barriers, leading to the free flow of goods, services and capital across the borders of countries. Today we have array of choice due to global competition in the production and supply of durable consumer goods. The products supplied by MNCs are customer friendly, provide greater customer values, make the customer more demanding, and build up customer awareness, empowered women. Judith Cardona (1990) stated that growing global interdependence of the resources and the production of consumer products is affecting the Culture, economic, political and social wellbeing of women and family. The economic empowerment of women is one of the most remarkable revolutions of the past 50 years. Women has increased spending power per the intersection of feminism and consumerism. The earning power and spending power of today's women is increasing very fast. Economists, product designers, and marketers are turning to women as the consumers who can perpetuate capitalist growth in this post-economic crisis moment. Women's continuing evolution combined with their increasing buying power has created an explosive business opportunity in the consumer products industry. Women in the world, though once “powerless,”

are now “powerful,” in that they buy or influence eighty percent of consumer decisions (FemmeDen 2009a).

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Feminism is a collection of movements and ideologies that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve equal political, economic, cultural, personal, and social rights for women. This includes seeking to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. A **feminist** generally self-defines as advocating for *or* supporting the rights and equality of women. Feminist theory, which emerged from feminist movements, aims to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women's social roles and lived experience; it has developed theories in a variety of disciplines in order to respond to issues such as the social construction of sex and gender. This heightened attention to women's purchasing power comes at a time when discourses that link women's independence to consumption abound in popular culture. Today's television line-up, heavy in “reality” programming focused on celebrities and wealthy women, serves this intersection to millions of viewers on an everyday basis. Wealth and the ability to consume are routinely celebrated and held up as exemplars of the most current iteration of the Indian consumer Dream, which today is illustrated as a lifestyle display rather than a particular set of achievements. Although popular entertainment media has historically represented and focused on the lives of men, now women's lives can be found at the front and center as stars of a narrative in which they are modern day “heroes of consumption” (Lowenthal 1961). In an age in which women's independence and achievement are often framed by and articulated through consumer discourses and practices, what does this mean for the future of feminism

and feminist identities? We wonder about such consequences precisely because the consumer lifestyle, as the cultural logic of capitalism, is a fundamentally *unfeminist* thing. The epistemological foundation of feminism and feminist identity historically has been the eradication of inequalities. Thus, feminism is diametrically opposed to consumer practices which support the dominance of global capitalism: a system which thrives on the exploitation of labor, theft of resources, and facilitates vast accumulation of wealth among a tiny percentage of global elite, while simultaneously impoverishing the majority of the world's population. Further, since consuming is a singular act of identity formation and expression, we question whether women's empowerment through consumption at the individual level undermines the possibility of gendered social change at the collective level. In responding to these questions in this research paper we critically interrogate the intersection of discourses of women's independence with discourses and practices of consumption, with an eye for contemporary attitudes toward and definitions of feminism.

Consumer Unity & Trust Society (1996) stated that dramatic changes have taken place in Indians market in recent years. At one end of the spectrum, even poor Indians are shopping up various consumers goods in millions every year. At the other end, thrift is no longer a virtue even among middle class Indians. Buy now pay later culture has taken roots in India, mainly due to innovative marketing strategies and aggressive advertising. The consumption patterns of Indians are slowly moving towards unsustainable levels, while resources as domestic savings are depleting of an alarming rate.

The concept of women's independence in the India has long been tied to discourses about wealth, and the accumulation of material goods and wealth, primarily due to the dominance of patriarchal hierarchy in our society. The gendered control of wealth has its roots in the gendered division of labor that emerged in the context of early hunter-gatherer societies. During this context, women cared for children due to the biological reality of breast-feeding. As nomadic hunter-gatherer societies transitioned into settled, agrarian communities, the established familial division of labor sustained and became taken for granted as social constructions of gender and the ideology of patriarchy emerged and intersected. In settled societies the concept of property was born and as men were expected to handle familial business outside of the home, they were granted the title of property owners and wealth managers, and thus were able to accrue status unavailable to women (Lorber 1994). In these circumstances women were economically disenfranchised, which set the stage for the development of the modern world in the capitalist context.

Within this patriarchal context women were forced into a model of economic dependence on men. Even in the case of women who worked outside of the home, they could not own property, and on this basis were excluded from the political franchise as well. Thus, it makes sense that early critiques of gendered power relations and gender roles focused on women's economic disenfranchisement and the prohibition on women working outside of the home (Gilman 1998; Woolf 1998). Poor women, often women of color, have historically been required to work outside of the

home in order to support themselves and their families, confined primarily to domestic and service sectors. Women employed in the paid workforce beyond these sectors is, broadly speaking, an achievement of feminism. However, it is also a function of increased production under industrialization and later phases of capitalism. What is often framed as an achievement of the women's movement must also be recognized as a condition both required for and stimulated by growth of capitalist production.

The invention of the television heightened the practice of product advertising, and as television spread throughout Indian households during the 1950s and 1960s, a consumer society became the norm (Marcuse 1964). Many scholars have argued since this time that the act of consuming, or more specifically, of acquiring goods, is a primary medium for crafting and expressing identity and group affiliation (Baudrillard 1981; Jameson 2000; Dunn 1998). Sociologically speaking, identity formation is generally understood as a social process that necessarily unfolds in relation to other individuals and groups that exist in the world (West & Zimmerman 1987; Taylor 1989). Thus, consuming goods allows for one to chart an identity based on appearance and lifestyle which both illustrates personal distinction from and sameness to others (Lasch 1979; Bourdieu 1984).

In the patriarchal model that has dominated normative conceptualizations of family during the twentieth-century in the India, women, in the roles of wife and mother, have been charged as managing daily household functioning, which includes shopping for themselves as well as for their family. Women historically have been consumer-in-chief in this dominant model. This trend continues today, as recent research shows that women either decide or influence eighty percent of purchasing decisions for goods or services (FemmeDen 2009a). Advertisers long ago recognized the significance of the patriarchal model and targeted product advertising to women for a multitude of products. Historically speaking, advertising targeted to women has tended to emphasize a woman's role as caretaker of a husband or family (in the case of household appliances, food and beverage, and cleaning products, for instance), or as an unmarried person seeking to land a man (as with beauty products and clothing).

Niche marketing trends that rely on gender tropes continue today, but of course have evolved as norms and conceptions of gender have. The older model of advertising to women as caretakers still exists, but newer models have emerged. Recognizing the gains of the feminist movement throughout the middle and latter half of the twentieth-century, advertising today interpellates women as strong, independent decision makers and money makers, and as sexually driven beings. These trends interact with another key trope deployed by advertising: that consuming allows one to express and articulate one's individuality. Thus, a trend that we see in today's advertising, and in popular discourse in society more generally, is that women are independent social actors who express their identities and independence through consumption.

What we find troubling about this trend is that the notion of women's independence, as articulated in this particular way, is premised on participation in the system of global capitalism, as opposed to aligned with feminist

epistemologies of equality. It is not about having freedom from patriarchal control in society, it is about having the freedom and power to acquire the goods that one wants in service of projecting an independent image and lifestyle. Problematically, for most women consumers today, as with most consumers of any gender, consumption is hardly an act of empowerment, but rather an act that creates debt and further binds one to the exploitative system of global capitalism and finance. This is represented and perpetuated in part due to widespread attention in popular culture today to celebrity lifestyle. Its luxurious and expensive trappings fuel the consumer desire for goods, both expensive and cheap.

However, the increase in representations of women expressing independence through consumption has generated new discourses and representations that conflate independence and consumption. Indeed, in the spirit of ensuring feminism's relevance to a new generation of women, third wave feminists have argued that contemporary feminism is about "judgment free pleasure." To these feminists, such pleasures include shopping at retail stores such as Calvin Klein, without the guilt that previous generations of feminists often felt if shopping or otherwise supporting patriarchal businesses or exploitative consumer goods (Richards & Baumgardner 2000)

Acculturation has been studied widely by focusing on immigrant's acculturation, which occur after immigration. However, with the development of international communication, global trade and the internet, mass communications may also lead to acculturation in particular, with the development or global communication, people may hear foreign music's and plays they might enjoy foreign music and even download it from the internet with the expansion of international trade, consumers are able to purchase, consume and develop preferences for foreign products. Therefore, people may be influenced by foreign cultures in the midst of their own countries and some degree of acculturation may develop accordingly.

Contemporary marketers and advertisers are well aware of the trend conflating women's independence and consumerism, and capitalize on it. The things that make women distinct from male consumers, ranging from body-shape to brain size and chemistry, and how these differences should be addressed by product designers and marketers in order to better design for and market to women (FemmeDen 2009a; 2009b). This renewed interest in marketing to women coincides with the rise of discourses that links women's independence to consumption

What we find troubling about this trend is that when discourses of consumption and women's independence intersect, they do so in a manner that equates independent womanhood with consumption. The conflation of women's independence and consumerism raises important questions about the shifting nature of feminism and feminist identities. The implications for this changing terrain of feminism are exhibited in many third wave feminists' embrace of consumerism as both a choice and a source of

women's empowerment. This is a fundamental problem for feminism, since consumerism, as the cultural logic of capitalism, is the ideological and practical means to reproducing hegemonic domination of the exploitative and oppressive system global capitalism. Although feminist identities are multi-dimensional, nuanced, and often times individualist, consumption in a capitalist context is a fundamentally un-feminist thing. Because we are in a time period during which the relevance of Indian feminism is continually contested and undermined, we feel such discourses and representations are significant, and warrant critical sociological attention.

Hence the overall developmental goals of the economy would be under the thereof of getting totally submerged under the band wagon of global consumerism strengthened through the provisions of the GATT. The implications of these changed aimed of bringing about by a more liberal participation of the MNCs in the economy, would be far-reaching. Apart from causing displacement of local production and distribution causing larger unemployment, this process would add we additional dimension of distortion throughout capacity to influence people's aspiration and life styles, and the value systems of the invaded societies as a whole. Tensions between the different strategy societies would increase on account of change in the lifestyles and the demonstration effect in the range of products and brands in the consumption baskets of the consumers. These inimical consequences would get confounded by the inevitable rise in unemployment, as mentioned earlier. According to Berry (1990), acculturation at the individual level is refitted in "behaviour identity values and attitudes. Therefore measure of acculturation variables might assess the behaviours engages in e.g. consumption of food, movies and clothing. Swapna Banerjee Guha (2992) studied that Globalisation has materialized as a basic process by which life and economic activities of people have been shaped and rush opened all over the world.

METHODOLOGY

The study was exploratory in nature. The locale of the study was the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad for the State of Andhra Pradesh. The sample for the study comprises 300 urban homemakers as respondents 100 each belonging to three income categories viz. HIG, MIG & LIG. The samples were selected by using stratified random sampling techniques.

This study has been taken up with the following objectives.

1. To identify the products of multinational companies (MNCs) consumed and source of information for the same.
2. To examine the influence of products of MNCs on urban homemakers consumption behaviour.

Two types of variables were considered for the study namely dependent variables and Independent variables. The independent & dependent variables considered in the present study were

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable
Types of occupation	Market Segmentation Use related Segmentation Usage Situation Benefit Segmentation
Age	Personality Innovativeness Susceptibility
Education	Perception Product Perception Perceived risk
Monthly Family Income	Enculturation & Acculturation
Family size	Product Information
Type of Family	Expenditure Pattern

In depth interview technique was adopted to collect the data for the present study. For gathering information pertaining to Dependent Variables five scales were developed. Data was coded, tabulated and analyzed using frequency percentage mean differences 'T' Test, regression correlation etc.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

The Findings of the study are as follows: -

Profile of the respondents

The largest percentage of respondents (64 percent) were in the age group of 18-35 years. Only one fourth of the respondents (25 per cent) were 'Post Graduate'. Most of the respondents (84 percent) lived in nuclear family.

Table: Enculturation acculturation level among consumers

S. No.	Level	LIG		MIG		HIG		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Low (26-60)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2.	Medium (61-95)	88	88.0	31.0	31.0	40.0	40.0	53.0	
3.	High (96-130)	12.0	12.0	69.0	69.0	60.0	60.0	47.0	

It was specified from the data that nearly cent percent of the homemakers (8%) from LIG had Medium level of enculturation & acculturation. Majority of the homemakers

from MIG & HIG were having high level of enculturation - acculturation.

Table : MIG of Enculturation & Acculturation among Consumers (HIG, MIG, LIG) through step down regression

S. No.	Variable	Regression Coefficient (SEB)	Standard error of B	't' value
1.	Age	3.286	0.666	4.933**
2.	Income	3.457	0.391	8.845**
3.	Family Type	-1.987	1.199	-1.657
4.	Family size	1.022	0.943	1.084
5.	Respondent's Education	-0.106	0.343	0.308
6.	Respondent's Spouse Education	-1.764	0.362	4.877**
7.	Respondent's occupation	-1.824	1.187	-1.625
8.	Respondent's spouse occupation	1.682	1.101	-1.527

The above table presents the Determinants of Enculturation - Acculturation among Consumes (HIG, LIG, MIG). The above regression model with 3 variables listed in the table is significant (F = 27.464, P< 0.01). The table explains 27 percent of variance caused by the 3 variables (out of 8 variables) i.e. age (t = 4.933), Income (t= 8.845) and homemakers's spouse education (t = 4.877) were found to be related to enculturation - acculturation among

consumers. The variables such as age, Income were positively related and respondent's spouse educations were negatively contributing to enculturation- acculturation. It means with the increase in age, income there was also increase in level of enculturation - acculturation. But the respondent's spouse education status was high, and then the enculturation - acculturation level was low.

Table: Relationship between Enculturation - Acculturation and dependent variables:

S. No.	Variable	'r' Value			
		LIG	MGI	HIG	Overall
1.	Susceptibility and innovativeness	0.067	0.141	558*	0.015
2.	Ethnocentrism	-.330**	-.525**	-.271	-.416**
3.	Information package	0.020	0.005	-0.167	0.058
4.	Goal congruency	0.102	-0.071	-.393**	0.014
5.	Expenditure Pattern	0.167	-.280**	0.032	.170**
6.	Product Influence on Attitude	-.463**	-0.040	.397**	-.140*
7.	Shift in consumption	-0.086	-0.116	0.009	-0.101
8.	MNC concern for Customer's Satisfaction	0.020	-.298**	-.232*	-0.067
9.	Quality of Indian Product visa-vis MNC	-0.069	-0.127	.621**	.210**
10.	MNC Attributes in Comparison with Indian Products	-0.099	0.025	0.092	-0.026
11.	Multinational Company Product Use Segmentation	-.317**	-0.193	-.258**	.169**
12.	Origin of Product	.077	0.141	.330**	0.090
13.	MNCp appropriateness	-0.11	-.223*	0.090	-0.026

The above table presents the relationship between Enculturation - Acculturation and other dependent variables among homemakers. Among dependent variables expenditures pattern, Indian product Quality & MNCp use segmentation was positively & significantly correlated with enculturation - acculturation, Ethnocentrism and Product's influence had negative significant relationship with Enculturation - Acculturation. Better expenditure pattern scores, better quality of MNCp and high level of MNCp use segmentation indicates high level of Enculturation - acculturation. Further observation of the above table reveals with the increase in Ethnocentrism level and

product influence, there was decrease in level of Enculturation - Acculturation.

It can be concluded from the above result that out of 14 dependent variable only 5 was having significant relationship with Enculturation - Acculturation. These 5 variables were ethnocentrism, expenditure pattern, product influence on attitude, product Quality & MNCp use segmentation. The result shows that because of the consumption of MNCs there is shift in the position of women in our society. It may be because of their change in economic status and social status.

Table: Relationship between Independent Variable & Enculturation & Acculturation among Consumers.

S. No.	Variable	'r' Value			
		LIG	MGI	HIG	Overall
1.	Age	0.194	0.046	.353**	.333**
2.	Income	.215*	0.144	-0.071	.487**
3.	Family Type	-0.098	0.093	-0.042	-0.004
4.	Family size	.334	.259	-0.150	.169
5.	Respondent's Education	-.274	0.015	-0.057	.249
6.	Respondent's Spouse Education	-.220	-.150	-0.118	.151
7.	Respondent's occupation	-0.058	0.083	-0.035	-0.009
8.	Respondent's spouse occupation	-0.120	0.004	-0.043	-0.070

The relationship between independent variables and enculturation - acculturation among homemakers, was elucidated from the data in table. It was very interesting find that homemaker's occupation and homemaker's spouse occupation variables were having negative significant correlation with enculturation - acculturation. Among 7 independent variables five were found positive significant correlated with enculturation - acculturation among homemakers.

The variables age, Income, family size, respondent's education, respondent's spouse education were having positive significant correlation with enculturation - acculturation. It shows that with the increase in age, Income, family size & educational status there was increase

in the level of enculturation - acculturation among consumers. It can be concluded from the result that women's decision making power has been uplifted.

CONCLUSION

More than half of the respondents had medium level of enculturation acculturation. It is the sign of feminism in consumerism. Age, income and respondents' spouse educational status were positively contributing towards level of enculturation - acculturation. When the level of expenditure pattern, MNCp use segmentation and Indian product quality level started increasing than it had resulted in high level of enculturation acculturation. The variables age income family size and educational status were

positively correlated with level of enculturation - acculturation

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