



Understanding Modern Indian Women - An Attempt to Study the Socio-Cultural Behaviorism from a Marketing Perspective

KEYWORDS

Modern Indian women, psychology, consumerism, marketing perspective

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ABSTRACT

The biggest mystery in the world as most psychologists say, is what women think and want. Taking this question a little ahead from pure psychology to business and attempting to understand the same from a Marketing perspective of consumerism is the present study all about concerning the modern Indian women. There have been various theoretical approaches from several psychologists world-wide to understand the female psychology post Industrialization; however an attempt to study the modern Indian women to understand the future of consumerism and socio-cultural behaviorism in the present age has been done in this study. Today's women know what they want rather than the yesteryear women. They are braver to pursue their goals, are more dynamic, optimistic, smart and ambitious to make their dream come true as a priority over anything else.

Introduction:

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) the most famous psychologist in the world known for his works on Psychoanalysis, dreams, human sexuality, etc said: "The great question that has never been answered, and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my lifetime of research into the feminine soul, is "What does a woman want?" Can we succeed where Freud failed? This study is just an attempt to understand the modern Indian women but from a Marketing perspective to understand the future of consumerism and socio-cultural behaviorism in the present age.

As a young woman of the twenty-first century she has fundamental rights of which women a half a century or so ago could not dream of. Unlike her foremothers, she has the right to vote, to own property, freedom to travel and stay at a place of her choice, chose when and whom to marry. But most importantly, she has space – a space where she can get recognized, a space of her own that only she is allowed to possess. In India, it has been a long-accepted fact that it is the woman in a family who define the environment at home. In the urban cities and even in small towns, they have been the 'silent influencers' for some time now, directing family purchases and expenditures.

It is only recently, however, that the urban woman has come into her own, and today there is no looking back from her newly gained independence. A measure of her growing independence is the changing profile of the urban woman's out-of-home activities

Need for research:

Although lot of work has happened to understand the female psychology all across the world, the focus always has been to study either sexual dimorphism post Industrialization in the psychological perspective or to study the feminine consumer behavior specific to media or product types. The study to understand the modernity of modern Indian women and evolution of new consumerism from their attitudes was lacking. Hence the need was felt to study the same in this research. Today's Indian women go out with each other, a trend that was not seen previously. They are also much more into indulgence and satisfying their emotional self So, whether it is spending time at clubs with friends, pampering herself at the salon, experimenting with cosmetic surgery or enrolling at the fitness centre, the need to look good has now become a priority. In the past five years, there has been a large increase in the product categories specifically targeted towards the urban woman. This brings us to the question: "Just who is

this modern Indian woman? What is she like? What does she think and aspire for?"

Objective:

The foremost objective of this research is to understand how modern is the modern Indian woman of the present time and what do they think and feel about life. The study also has been done from the marketing perspective to understand the evolution of a new consumerism from the attitudes and beliefs of the modern Indian women.

Research design and methodology:

This research has been done by Snowball sampling method of Non-probability sampling involving a sample size of 500 women from SEC B, B+ and A, in the age group of 18-36 years from various urban corners of the country like Mumbai, Pune, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Gurgaon, Lucknow, Indore, Durg, Bhilai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai, Cochin and Panjim. The research was carried out in six weeks period (April –May 2013) and the respondents were interviewed in person, on telephone and through e-mails using a structured questionnaire to collect primary data.

Understanding the modern Indian women

Womanhood began with the birth of Eve and ever since this category of human beings has faced several criticisms, support and reforms. Every culture strives to draw parallels between its women and traditions so as to provide them the desired status and rights. With the advent of each religion, all women were under the authority of the males but now with the passage of time, in the universe of all religions, womanhood has managed to earn respect, honor, status and rights. Even in the early 20th century, the Indian woman was no less than a property that could be discarded whenever the feeling arose. Thus, an Indian woman was pre-ordained to be ruled by the male and was subjected to all kinds of atrocities. Today, in the 21st century, the scenario has become different, with changing times the traditions are facing varied shifts in the society and to promise a much better development rate and to walk out of the third world category, India is trying to improve the position of women as it has been realized the need for men and women being equal in class.

The Boston Consulting Group in 2011 conducted a survey of approximately 2200 women in India as a part of their global "What women do" survey covering various cities and socio economic classes. They found out that Indian women contribute to \$150 billion discretionary spending in India which is on a growth spurge. The women employees in agriculture

sector have declined from 74% to 61% since 1994 to 2010, however the same has grown from 12% to 17% in service sector and other industries. The female literacy also has increased from 37% to 54% and growing more. All these indicate to a fact that women in India are getting modernized not just by the choice of education but by opting for more organized and white-collared jobs that pay more. That study revealed other important facts like Indian women contribute to 44% of the household spending and they spend 8% more than men on clothing particularly. 48% men were found to shop for their clothing along with women which reveals that the modern Indian women are clearly controlling the economy here. In short they are earning, investing, spending and also influencing spends. This is a largely untapped opportunity, women remain dissatisfied with most products and services available today, companies fail to communicate with them effectively, they continue to repeat clichéd messages and price cuts where as women are increasingly going online and they spend more on the emotional appeal. The question therefore arises for marketers: do we understand the present day modern Indian women well in context of the evolving consumerism? The answer apparently is no!

Research findings:

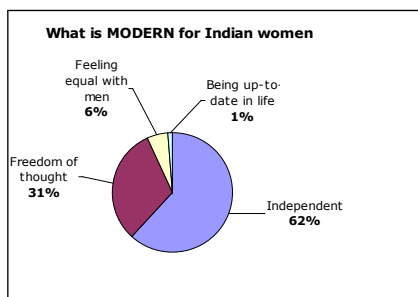
In the research conducted the education and employment backgrounds of the respondents were as under:

Undergraduates	0%	Student	1%
Graduates	3%	Housewife	1%
Post graduates	97%	Service woman	94%
		Independent professional	4%

The respondents were not chosen on the basis of their education or employment however it reveals the fact that the modern Indian woman is definitely inclined for better education and better employment paying more money contributing to better life style.

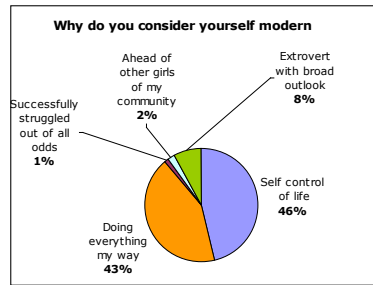
So, how modern is the modern Indian woman

On enquiring about what is the meaning of "modern" for them, most responded as being independent in life is modern and the second most stated remark was having freedom of thought and deed is being modern for the modern Indian woman.



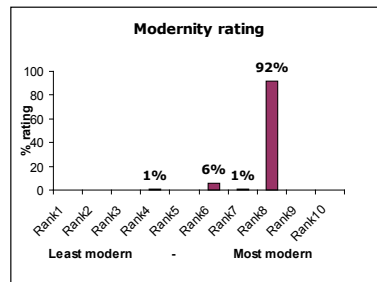
The word modern, first recorded in 1585 in the sense "of present or recent times," we have now invented the word post-modern, as if we could finally fix modern in time, but even postmodern -first recorded in 1949. Since late Latin modernus, "modern," which is derived from Latin modo in the sense "just now," the English word modern -first recorded at the beginning of the 16th century was not originally concerned with anything that could later be considered old-fashioned. It simply meant "being at this time, now existing," an obsolete sense today. The word Modern was being applied specifically to what pertained to present times and also to what was new. Thus in the 19th and 20th centuries the word may have been used to designate a movement in art, lifestyle.

What makes the Indian woman feel modern?



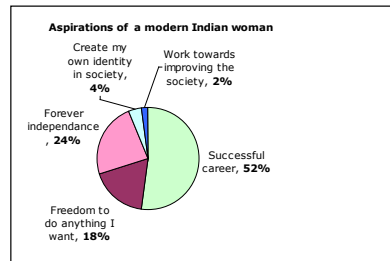
How modern are you ?

Respondents were asked to rate themselves for their modernity in a scale of 1 to 10 and the result showed 92% respondents rating themselves 8, it shows their self-felt modernity based on the definition of modern given by them as above.

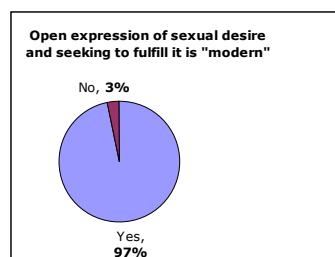


What does the modern Indian woman aspires to do in life ?

Success in career and independence were replied as the first and second most desired aspirations in life for the present day modern Indian woman.



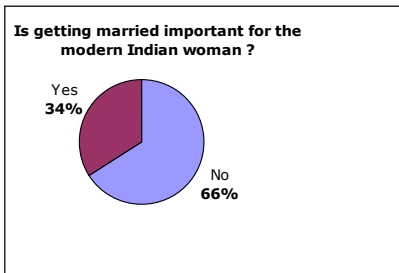
In the modern culture as we see, in India women specifically the target group selected for this study of 18 to 36 years are very extrovert in their sexual expression which reflects in the choice of clothes, choice of language slangs, choice of lifestyle, choice of cinema viewing, etc in daily walk of life. Further taking cues from Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory, Charles Darwin's theory of expression of emotions and Friedrich Nietzsche's comments on shame; all concerning female sexuality, it was asked to the respondents about did they feel about the freedom of openly expressing their sexual desire and seeking to fulfill it "being modern". As the results say, most women



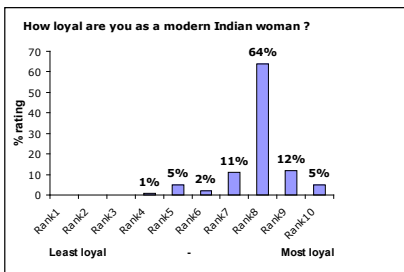
Extending this expression of modernity, it was enquired about their opinion about "live-in" relations which is growing in India mostly in the metropolitan urban areas as choice of modern life-style among people. The results showed that they mostly felt it as modern.



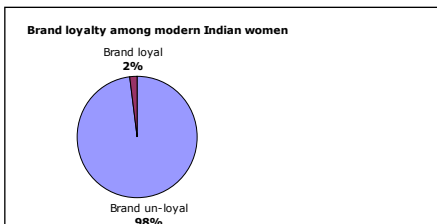
In the quest of modernity, it was necessary to enquire about their preference of getting married. The results are evident as most modern Indian women today prefer independence over marriage as an option in life.



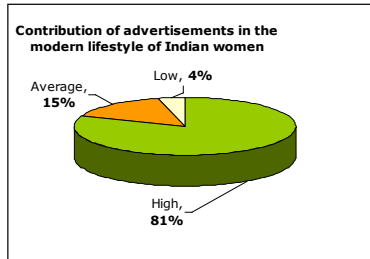
How loyal is the modern Indian woman in life is an important question to understand and most of the respondents in their self proclaimed loyalty gave the following results in their choice of ranking from 1 to 10.



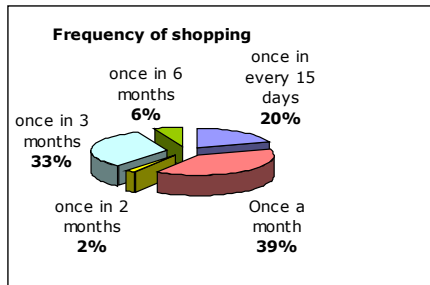
Brand loyalty among the modern women was also enquired and they mostly negated their loyalty towards brands, which complemented rightly to the general assumption of modern culture.



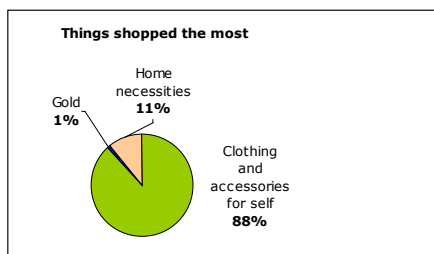
India being dominated by Bollywood and Cricket, it was important to understand the impact of advertisements with celebrity endorsements and allied things contributing to the modern lifestyle of Indian women. The results showed most respondents agreeing to acknowledge the high contribution of advertisements in their modern lifestyle.



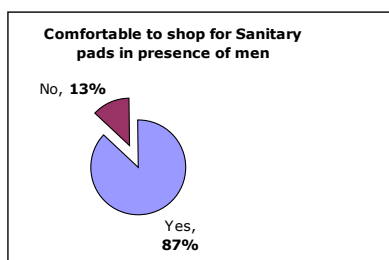
Consumerism understanding can come from shopping habits straight and on enquiring the shopping destinations and frequency. The result of enquiry showed most having shopping malls and online shopping as their preferences and shopping frequency of within every month being the highest.



Extending the quest for shopping habits it was important to understand the self interest and family interest combination in shopping habits and most respondents showed self interest to be the highest from the result of clothing and accessories for self being the most shopped for things.



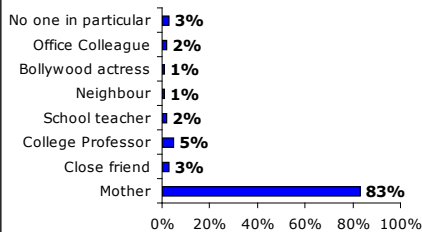
Being bold and extrovert in general is a complementary action of being modern and hence it was asked about their comfort factor of shopping for sanitary pads and undergarments in presence of men around them.



87% respondents appeared comfortable to shop for sanitary pads and 54% were comfortable to shop for undergarments in presence of men. By the law of majority in both cases majority displayed boldness in their attitude but variation in the majority percentage is un-clear and would need further investigation.

Being modern one would definitely have an idol or role model or some one as an ideal example to vouch for and learn from; hence their example of the perfectly modern Indian woman was enquired and it was found that most women liked their own mother as the modern woman role model in life mostly having seen her in every walk of life.

Example of a perfectly modern woman



Conclusion and recommendations:

With the help of findings of the study we conclude that the Indian women, with increasing education and financial power, have a greater discretionary income and utilize it to satisfy their wants. Women in India are now increasingly exposed to education and career choices, gender dimorphisms are undergoing rapid change. They have now greater physical, cultural and social mobility than what their mothers and grandmothers used to have. Today's Indian woman has the freedom to explore new ways of living, peer bonding, handling relationships, and so on. Since they are getting monetarily independent, their choices and preferences in life have become more individualistic and self portrayed with no boundaries or attachments. Her criteria for consumption and choice of lifestyle have been modified by her increased exposure to new ideas and information. Now she is playing a new role as a facilitator.

Previously, the Indian women concentrated on purchases that based on family needs and wants. Her only personal indulgences were items of clothing and adornment. But now she regularly moving to malls for shopping and take her decision herself, she has full freedom to buy and bargain. There are two things happening — one is behavioral change in terms of the consumer and the second is structural change in terms of the retail outlets themselves. Therefore, women are feeling more and more secure that they can go into a store and actually get the product. She also takes interest in advertisement on TV, magazines, newspaper for new products and services. Consumerism is the belief that personal wellbeing and happiness depends to a very large extent on the level of personal consumption, particularly on the purchase of material goods. The idea is not simply that wellbeing depends upon a standard of living above some threshold, but that at the center of happiness is consumption and material possessions. From a marketers point of view gradually the perception that women were looking for products more suited to their physical and emotional needs and wants began to gain ground. Such products got introduced, where marketers in the developed economies started recognizing this fact. Today's modern Indian woman is not only experimenting with her intimate wear – lingerie (undergarments) - but not shying away from talking about it too. Earlier there was lot of shyness among Indian women about their inner wear so they never used to discuss it but the modern Indian woman has come out of the shell and are demanding comfort in their lingerie and hence experimenting with different styles too.

Thus it is high time that the marketers and manufacturers realize, understand and recognize women as a lucrative consumer segment and start developing concepts and create products that are women centric, which reap high growth potential. The need of marketers today is to be in line with this evolved consumerism is to communicate more with modern Indian women and offer specialized products and services to match the emotional appeal, to provide customized products and services, to provide differentiated products to help her balance and match her lifestyle.

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