Chapter 4

Perfume Consumption in India: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

Perfumes have been important in India for millennia and so have the stories connected with them. The perfume business in India is worth billions. The chapter provides a background from which the Indian perfume industry can be understood in terms of the Berger’s STEPP model, and the chapter shows how the consumers’ cognitive schema and consumers’ behaviors are necessarily entwined with the story of the product, brand and their own stories. Three sets of themes: product perceptions, concerns, and consumers’ lifestyle are identified, each with their own sub-themes that are antecedents to perfume purchasing behavior. Segments in the Indian perfume market are also identified. Each consumer segment has their own behavioral nuances and they consider different aspects of the perfume product taking into account their own income and aspects of the three themes and nineteen sub-themes. It is important for perfume marketing managers to consider each aspect of the STEPPs model in relation to their target markets in order to maintain competitive advantage.

INTRODUCTION

The key objective of the chapter is to show that in the developing market of India there is a product type: “perfume” that contributes in numerous ways to the economy of the country and the market is driven by various consumer behaviors and demands from differing consumer segments. The Indian market is complex and has developed over millennia. It must not be assumed that just because the market is still developing that the consumers’ behaviors there are simple, the behaviors are indeed complex and manifold. The

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consumers of perfumes in India are presented with a vast array of perfume offerings from multinationals, from prestigious brands to fragrances offered by independent manufacturers, with some perfumes produced according to traditional formulae laid out in the ancient Hindu Ayurvedic texts. However, a broad range of consumer behavior literature concerning health issues, halal branding, packaging, gift giving, glocalisation, word-of-mouth endorsements and eco-friendly attitudes, social entrepreneurship coupled with ethical consumption, pricing and celebrity endorsements, that have been well reported in the marketing literature, concern consumers’ behaviors in developing nations, like India. There are other product types that contribute directly and indirectly to the India economy, such as *Indian cuisine*, that was arguably further popularised in Europe by Madhur Jaffrey (1992). Other developing nations have important product types; such as China with silk (Silk Road, 2015), that have been and continue to be important to their economies. Due to the historic abundance of natural aromatic resources in the Indian geographic region, there is a plethora of natural raw materials from which India extracts perfumes and scents. Furthermore, that “natural” industry is augmented by the synthetic fragrance industry. All those products are exported from India to the international perfume houses of the world, as well as being used by a broad segment of local manufacturers.

**BACKGROUND**

Throughout India, from the sole traders of attar (non-alcoholic herbal perfume) on the streets of Hydrabad, to the village of Kannauj’s distilleries in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh and then to the Hindustan Unilever Corporation (HUC) located in Mumbai one does not need to go far to be connected to the perfume industry in India. Arguably, everyone in India has some family member working in the industry or using some perfume. Hence, within the consumer collective each individual consumer has recollections of their own stories: an auntie collecting jasmine flowers, an uncle working in the factory, buying perfume with a friend, or perhaps mother wearing a particular perfume for that special occasion. Each consumer has their own stories within their own cognitive schema: Brewer and Nakamura (1984) and Bartlett (1932) described a (cognitive) schema as “an active organization of past reactions, or of past experiences, which must always be supposed to be operating in any well-adapted organic response”, which would include consumer behaviors. Hence, in this chapter we argue that the narrative of the product type, in this case “perfume” is very important, because through that narrative we can understand how the product is not only already positioned in the minds of particular consumers and consumer segments but is historically embedded in the wider cultural psyche. Berger (2013), argues that there are six things that promote products and things become “contagious” through Social Currency, Triggers, Emotions, Public, Practical Value and Stories (placed under the acronym STEPPS). We argue that each of those six antecedents to a product becoming contagious are connected with perfume in general and it is when the manufacturer can position their own specific product or brand in the mind of the consumer (Reis and Trout, 2001) that the product will take off. At the same time it is necessary to ensure that the product position is closely connected within the existing cognitive schema of the target consumers’ STEPPS. It is then likely that the particular perfume product will gain competitive advantage, the product having been placed not only in the mind of the consumer but also having been placed close to the heart of the positive emotions connected to the stories to which the consumers attach positive value. Thus it is necessary to understand the story of the product type in connection with the cultural melee of the nation, when considering con-
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