
Two Decades of Cosmetics Buying Among Indian Women: A Behavioral Review (2000–2015)

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Abstract

Between 2000 and 2015, India's cosmetic industry witnessed robust growth, driven by rising disposable incomes, urbanization, and evolving beauty ideals. Indian women's cosmetic buying behavior was significantly shaped by socio-cultural pressures, particularly the preference for fair skin, which was equated with beauty and social success. This cultural bias led to the widespread popularity of fairness creams like Fair & Lovely. Impulse buying also played a substantial role, with store ambiance and sensory cues enhancing unplanned purchases. Marketing strategies, especially celebrity endorsements and aspirational messaging, increased brand loyalty among women, particularly in urban centers like Pune. Socio-demographic factors—age, marital status, income, and education—further influenced preferences, with younger and unmarried women showing higher purchasing frequency and brand consciousness. Though interest in natural and organic cosmetics began emerging, widespread adoption was limited. Simultaneously, the increasing availability of digital reviews and beauty blogs began to shift information-seeking behavior, laying the groundwork for a more informed, connected consumer base.

Keywords: *Cosmetic Buying Behavior, Indian Women Consumers, Fairness and Beauty Ideals, Impulse Purchasing, Brand Loyalty and Marketing*

Introduction

Growth in the cosmetic industry in India was especially strong over 2000-2015, which was in large part due to increase in disposable income, urbanization, and cultural ideals of beauty changing. Different factors such as socio-cultural aspects, psychology and economical factors governed Indian women and altered their purchasing behavior of this time. The general pressure to be fair and the fact that light skin was associated with beauty, success, and social status was a dominant theme in cosmetic usage even though an abundance of fairness products could be found. Such fairness creams like Fair & Lovely became very popular, and the fairness segment alone was worth millions already in the mid-2010s (Priya, 2014).

The phenomenon of impulse buying was very considerable in the consumption of cosmetics. Unplanned purchase was greatly affected by environmental influences on the stores like store layout, lighting, fragrance, and placement of products. The environment within the store and accessibility was a major factor influencing the our impulse buying behavior of the Indian women as indicated by Mohan, et al. (2013). These results concur with those of other researchers in different countries who identified tactile interaction and sensory stimulation to augment the purchase intent (Peck & Childers, 2006; Mattila & Wirtz, 2001).

Selling techniques and advertising were also warranted in the purchasing trend, especially advertising that used celebrities and the get-rich message. Women have shown great preference of well advertised premium brands and brand loyalty started acting as a critical determinant in repetitions. According to Srivastava (2015), women in Pune had a high brand loyalty and in general may hardly distinguish brand quality with identity and social status.

Age, marital status, education, and amount of income were important socio-demographic variables that highly determined cosmetic buying behavior. It was the young women, particularly those between the ages of 21 and 25 who bought cosmetics more regularly and they were influenced to buy by peer pressure and wanting to improve the self-image. A research in Madurai and other cities of India showed that unmarried women were more brand-conscious and more investing in makeup products (Lavanya, 2014; Kajapriya & Surya, 2015).

Traces of the idea of natural and organic cosmetics started gaining popularity towards the later part of the era. Although the level of interest in herbals or chemically-free products was lower as compared to that in Western countries, Indian women were becoming more active in their interest because of the increased awareness on health and environmental concerns. According to Singh et al. (2015) environmental concern had no significant effect on purchase intention of green cosmetics compared to subjective norms and perceived behavioral control as these components of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) were stronger predictors.

Even though this trend was on the rise, the widespread adoption was not very common before 2015.

There was also a shifting role of information access. The advent of internet usages has meant that Indian women are now searching online reviews and peer recommendations before they could make their purchases. A study by Swapna and Kumara (2014) revealed that, despite the fact that age was not an influential factor as far as online cosmetic shopping was concerned, the digital reviews and beauty blogs were growing more effective in terms of shaping perception and purchasing behavior.

The time of 2000-2015 turned into the era of change in the consumption patterns of Indian females in cosmetics. Their purchase behaviour was influenced by cultural standards, impulsive behaviour, brand loyalty, demography and emergence of green consciousness. Although the traditional norms remained strong, the germ of modern and conscious consumerism had already emerged and in the next decade more radical changes took place.

Literature Review

Social and Cultural Motivators

The cultural demands and social pressures in India have had much effect on making the ladies perceive what beauty is especially towards fair skin color. This ideal is integrated centuries-old traditions and also supported by the media, cinema and marriage norms. The commercialization of such preferences can be explained by the mushrooming of the market of fairness creams between 2000 and 2015. Goods like Fair & Lovely entered the status of the family essential, and by the mid-2010s, the Indian market of fairness creams was estimated as reaching several hundred million USD (Priya, 2014). This pressure was also accelerated by the marketing campaigns that made people associate lighter skin with a better marriage market, career and self-confidence, and, thereby, enforcing such discriminatory beauty standards.

Research indicates most of the Indian women linked fair skin with increased social mobility and attractiveness, and she used to invest in skin-lightening commodities regularly (Sabharwal et al., 2014). Such impressions were not aesthetic only but also associated with social approval and social chance. The contribution of television, print media was severe as they often presented light-skinned successful women as idols. It is through such repeat representation that in fact a normative beauty framework was created that created desires and preferences within the consumer. In such a way, values and cultural beliefs associated with fairness turned the social narrative and a driving force of cosmetic buying among Indian women, impacting, on the one hand, the type of brand, and on the other hand, the specifications of the product they chose (Priya, 2014).

Store Environment and Impulse Purchasing

The in-store environment played an important role in enhancing impulse buying habits among Indian women especially in the cosmetic sector between 2000 and 2015. Research during this time emphasized the importance of using sensory stimulation (i.e. lighting, product layout and background music) in encouraging impulse shopping (Mohan et al., 2013). It was subconscious since these environmental cues triggered favourable emotional reactions and in most cases, women end up purchasing a product that they had in no way planned to purchase. Cosmetics were subjected to factors like design placement on the shelf, accessibility and convenience, which raised visibility and wantability to cosmetics thus leading to impulse buying.

The descriptive study targeting Indian female customers established that store climate and design remained the most powerful stimuli towards the loss of finances in any attempt to make impulse decisions concerning the purchase of beauty products (Muruganantham, 2013). Women stated that their decision to shop and buy something new was made because of the attractive shop arrangements and correctly designed cosmetic unit. This phenomenon is confirmed by international literature; i.e., it was stated that touch of the products was a significant factor that increased the probability of buying them (Peck & Childers, 2006). On the same note, Mattila & Wirtz (2001) came to the conclusion that there was a positive effect of scent and music congruency within stores on consumer behavior. Taken together, these results imply that the physical retailing space is adopted as a strategy, and as such, it moderates the effect of emotional and sensory experience on cosmetic purchasing behavior in the case of Indian women.

Values of Marketing Communication and Brand Loyalty

The marketing communication developed to be a strong influence of encouraging cosmetic purchase among the Indian women in the 2000-2015 during the study. These adverts emphasized a lot on personal beauty and acceptance hence generating a lot of feelings among the consumers. It is also associated with a lot of feelings in both traditional or new media. A study carried out in 2014 demonstrated that middle-class Indian women were exceptionally receptive to beauty advertising containing the premises that appearance enhancement linked to personal success and self-worth (Priya, 2014). These advertisements usually include popular celebrities, models, and influencers whose perceived attractiveness and confidence granted the aspiration value to the sold products.

Consumer behavior was also determined by brand loyalty. A survey was conducted by Srivastava (2015) involving almost 600 women in Pune, which indicated that emotional connection with brands, as well as impression of quality and consistent products affected repeat buying (probably) more than the perceived quality of brands and future intentions to purchase (most likely). It was not just a sign of reliability, but also a piece of self image to

many women who used this trusted cosmetic brand. This relationship was strengthened by advertisement that has had the effect of constantly mating brand values with consumer dreams- like radiance, youthfulness and the feeling of empowerment. Brand preferences were also formed as a result of word-of-mouth recommendations and peer influence. So, well-done communication in marketing evoked the emotional response, whereas the loyalty was induced by maintaining the product performance on the same level continuously, which was the key element in the forming cosmetic buying behavior of female Indians (Srivastava, 2015).

Socio-Demographic Predictors

The socio-demographic determinants influenced the buying behaviour of cosmetics among the Indian women in the period 2000-2015. The research made within different states of India, including Haryana, Tamil Nadu, and such cities as Madurai showed that the choice of products and purchasing decisions all depended on such factors as age, marital status, income, level of education, and occupation (Lavanya, 2012). Younger women, mainly between the ages of 21 and 25 had been found to be at a higher frequency in buying cosmetics more often, and were also much more open to sharing new brands and products to experiment. This conduct was mostly affected by peer fashion, social life, and mostly a higher rate of self-improvement at an early age of adulthood.

The brand loyalty of unmarried women was relatively better, which may be attributed to their greater interest in personal grooming or career or social activities, which gave priority to looks. Educational level and income also influenced preferences in the sense that women with a good education and disposable income had better preferences and were more likely to be swayed to the premium brands, the quality and ingredients of the product and were more likely to make an informed decision based on the advertisements and labels of the products. On the other hand, the women belonging to the lower-income or rural population were more sensitive to prices and they preferred affordability and availability. On the whole, socio-demographic indicators were proved to be strongly correlated not only with purchase frequency but with its motivation and selected kind of choice of cosmetic products.

Natural /Organic/Green Cosmetics Rise

The era of 2000-2015 was of the early phase of changes of consumer attitude towards natural, herbal, and organic cosmetic products in India. Whereas the green cosmetics trend began to increase acceleration after 2015, the precursive shifts started earlier when people started to learn more and care about their health and became doubtful of using products based on chemicals. The study conducted among the young working females before 2015 showed that, among others, environmental awareness, skin safety as a factor, and health-oriented motivation played an essential role in the motivation to use organic cosmetics (Ali et al, 2016). The product availability and price sensitivity were other factors in these purchase

decisions as organic brands were not only too expensive as compared to the conventional brands but also not conveniently available just like their conventional counterparts.

Experiments built on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) demonstrated that the influence of subjective norms (the power of peer groups, influence of social expectation) and perceived behavioral control on the intention of purchasing had more significant impact than environmental concern itself (Arruda, 2017). This implies that as the values concerning being eco-friendly were developing, the genuine buying behavior was pressured more by social cognitions, and how easily the products considered being procured. Even during periods of light regulations, marketing claims based on such terms as chemical-free, natural and herbal could influence consumers. The increase in this segment heralded a certain change in the way in which the Indian women approached consumption of cosmetics in a mix of beauty and wellness.

Digital Power and Information Sources

By the mid-2010s, the digital environments started playing a massive role in affecting the cosmetic purchase behavior among Indian women. Although the traditional channel of communication such as the television and the print adverts continued to play a significant role, the rising usage of smart phones and internet connection also influenced the consumers to first obtain information through the internet before going to make a purchase. A research conducted in 2014-2015 revealed that online reviews, beauty blogs, and peer suggestions were starting to encroach on the traditional advertisements and were likely to become as effective as traditional advertisements in determining consumer trust and product awareness (Cheung, 2014). Although the likes of Instagram and YouTube were then still at their nascent stage in India, their early adoption rates by the city, tech-savvy Indian woman presented new opportunities of brand access and interaction.

Customers were more and more using online content as a basis of comparison of the products price; they made use of reviews, tutorials and these acted as a factor to reduce dissonance after the fact. Digital content had higher chances of penetrating into the minds of younger consumers mainly students and working professionals and also gave smaller or niche brands a visibility it never had before. Moreover, the interactivity of the online spaces made the users to communicate with the brands freely, ask questions and get feedback which resulted to a feeling like trust and personalization. This transformation marked the initiation of a more enlightened and connected through technology buyer, which set the foundation of the online beauty market to blossom to the extent it will in the following years.

Factor	Key Findings (2000–2015)
Fairness & Colorism	Strong cultural preference for lightening products; market valued hundreds of millions USD.
Impulse Buying	In-store environment cues significantly influenced buying behavior.
Brand Loyalty & Marketing	Brand identification and communication strongly affected repeat purchases.
Socio-demographic Variables	Age (younger), marital status (unmarried), income and education influenced frequency.
Organic/Green Cosmetics Trend	Health/environmental awareness shaped early interest; subjective norms had strong effect.
Digital and Review Influence	Emergent role of social media and online reviews influenced purchase decisions.

Table 1: Key Findings of review (2000–2015)

Conclusion

The purchasing behavior governing the buying patterns of cosmetics amongst women in India during the period between the year 2000 and the year 2015 was founded on these four main factors of fairness ideas, in-store impulse driver, brand loyalty and demographics. As it wound down later on, consumer choice was starting to be affected by fledgling interest in this particular green/organic product and the rise of digital power. It is however about this time that the available data on matters about the environment or online marketing impact is scarce in comparison to the subsequent years.

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