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Women and Consumer Behaviour in the Cosmetics Industry: Analysing the Impact of Intersectionality

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Abstract

Increasing awareness of beauty products, rising personal grooming premium, changing consumption patterns, and improved purchasing power of women are forecasted to boost the Indian cosmetic industry by 25% to \$20n billion by 2025 (Economics Times,2019). Through this paper, the authors attempt to analyse and understand how psychological, social, and economic factors have influenced the consumer behaviour of women, in terms of cosmetic products, and contributed to this boost. Approaching the topic from an intersectional perspective, the study analyzes the role heteronormative beauty norms have played in establishing a culture that rewards 'femininity', and its consequent impact on the psychology and cosmetic buying behaviour of women. Our research serves the purpose of interpreting how the intersection of colour, caste, race, religion, and other social characteristics creates variability in the cosmetic purchase behaviour of women while simultaneously analysing the inclusivity of the cosmetic industry. The paper provides evidence of how the cosmetic industry capitalises on women's insecurities and contributes to gender socialisation and inequality. The direct correlation between the profitability of the cosmetic industry and the manipulation of women is substantiated by the gender-based pricing of products. The paper delves into how beauty standards and patriarchal norms have willed women into paying a higher price than men for the same cosmetic product, thereby aiding their own economic subjugation. Therefore, through this research, the authors aim to understand the cosmetic consumer behaviour patterns exhibited by women, the role intersectionality plays in these consumption patterns, and the additional premium paid by women to be deemed attractive.

Keywords: *consumer behaviour, women, intersectionality, cosmetic industry, gender-based pricing, consumption patterns*

1.0 Introduction

The consumer behaviour of women while purchasing cosmetics is substantially different from that of other genders, primarily men. The historical systems of patriarchy and 'feminine' beauty standards have most definitely had a role to play in the propagation of the narrative that to be perceived as 'attractive', women must spend exorbitant amounts on the purchase of cosmetics products. Approaching the term 'woman' from an intersectional

perspective, it is of crucial importance to understand the influence of beauty standards on trans women, specially-abled women, women from a different class, caste, religion, and other social characteristics, and the consequent variability in their cosmetic purchase patterns.

1.1 Consumer Behaviour

Consumer Behaviour refers to the consumption patterns displayed by individuals, organisations, and groups while undertaking activities related to the purchase, use and disposal of goods and services. The decisions that precede and proceed with a particular purchase are a direct outcome of consumer behaviour and influence consequent consumption patterns. According to Kotler and Keller (2011), the study of how individuals, communities, and organisations buy and sell goods, services, ideas, or experiences to meet their needs and wants is known as consumer buying behaviour. Also referred to as ‘Buyer Behaviour’, consumer behaviour is determined by the amalgamation of several cultural, social, economic, personal, and psychological factors (Clootrack, 2020).

1.2 Intersectionality

In 1989, a professor at Columbia Law School, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term ‘Intersectionality’ in an attempt to bring to light the oppression of African-American women. In today’s context, ‘Intersectionality’ seeks to understand how race, gender, class, caste, and other individual characteristics ‘intersect’ and affect an individual's privilege, standing and perception in society (Intersectional Feminism: What It Means and Why It Matters Right Now 2020). As defined by Professor Crenshaw, “A lens through which you can understand where power originates from and collides, where it interlocks and connects, is intersectionality.” (Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later, 2017)

In this research paper, the term ‘women’ is viewed from an intersectional perspective and is inclusive of all individuals who identify themselves as ‘women’, taking into consideration the difference in experiences of women belonging to varied caste, class, race, religion, and other societal constructs. Through an intersectional approach in analysing women’s experiences, the paper acknowledges that women’s social identities overlap and intersect, creating augmented and distinct ordeals of discrimination.

1.3 Sub-Industries in the Cosmetic Industry

The Cosmetic Industry refers to the industry responsible for the manufacturing, production, distribution and sale of cosmetic products. The term ‘Cosmetic Industry’ is inclusive of industries, brands, companies and manufacturers that deal in all forms of:

- Skincare: Skincare is inclusive of moisturisers, cleansers, face washes, facemasks and all other skin-lightening, skin-cleansing products.
- Makeup: Makeup is inclusive of foundation, highlighter, mascara, eyeliner and other facial feature enhancing products.
- Toiletries: Toiletries inclusive of soaps, wet wipes, toothbrushes, toothpaste and other articles used in taking care of and washing one’s body.
- Haircare: Haircare is inclusive of shampoos, hair masks, hair dyes, conditioners and other products responsible for beautifying and maintaining hair quality.

In specification to our research, the term ‘Cosmetic Industry’ is also inclusive of all brands, companies and organisations that are providers of beauty-related services like salons, dry cleaning, massage, cosmetic surgery, and others.

1.4 Women and Consumer Behaviour in the Cosmetics Industry

Rigid beauty standards have, for centuries, influenced women’s perception of what is deemed to be attractive, massively increasing the profitability of the cosmetics industry. The success of the cosmetic industry is accompanied by a consequent decrease in women’s self-worth, confidence and value. In this research paper, we analyse the consumption patterns of women and elucidate the factors responsible for such a huge differentiation in the consumer behaviour of women and men, with respect to the cosmetics industry. The paper approaches the question of women’s consumer behaviour from an intersectional approach and elaborates on how societal structures of caste, class, race and religion influence their buying behaviour. It attempts to understand how capitalism has facilitated the exploitation of women in the name of beauty and benefitted the cosmetics industry.

2.0 Intersectionality in Women and Notions of Beauty

Feminism has over time targeted issues affecting white-upper class women. The idea of intersectionality adds the nuance of the interconnected nature of social categorizations,

such as race or gender, which can create overlapping systems of privilege and discrimination. When applied to the idea of feminism, the movement takes cognisance of the experiences of women who happen to be discriminated against across various social dimensions. Understanding societal and self-perceptions of beauty, we see that economic class, social history and physically uncommon characteristics have influenced a lot of social stereotypes that we have inherited in our culture.

2.1 Trans vs Cis Women

A trans woman is someone who identifies as a woman but is assigned male at birth. Trans women may experience gender dysphoria and transition which involves hormone replacement therapy and sometimes sex reassignment surgery. Representations of women in U.S. media and society are highly cisnormative, as transgender women are “underrepresented, stereotyped, or assimilated” and cisnormative ideals are reinforced (Capuzza 2014). These act as a reference point from which transgender women are judged and correspondingly treated by society. While the community has long experienced higher rates of discrimination (e.g., verbal harassment, physical assaults and/or attacks, and unequal treatment), the stakes are raised higher for individuals whose transgender identity is more visibly discernable or who have disclosed their transgender identity (Grant et al. 2011). As a natural consequence, many individuals feel pressured to adhere to societal beauty standards as a means to pass, to avoid being misgendered, and to ensure their safety (Monterio et al., 2019). In India, the transgender community is home to a wide range of identities, ‘*hijras*’ being one. Limited data estimates the population of the community to be between half a million to two million in the country (Agrawal, 2018).

The community has been enshrined in Indian literary epics, and members are often invited to bless many families during important events such as births or weddings. However, the transgender community remains oppressed on many accounts, resorting to sex work, dancing, or begging to make ends meet. They’re often seen dressed in bright coloured saris, with their faces coated in makeup, as they move about in the streets (Hylton et al., 2018). While makeup application and grooming are their preparation for having their basic needs met, it also contributes to their psychological and social well-being by acting as a means of self-expression of their identity and recreation from their daily schedules.

2.2 Economic Disparity

Economic class is commonly divided into upper classes, middle class and lower class, based on accumulated economic assets. Each class is distinguished by a set of interests, lifestyle choices and attitudes, reflected in their everyday behaviour. However, people from lower classes often find an upper-class lifestyle aspirational, finding the means to achieve the power and status that comes with it. The upper classes favour expenditure in vanity products, choosing high-end prestige goods and brands, which reflects a preference for sophistication. The middle-class purchases items taking into account the costs involved and the functionality and quality of the product, irrespective of the brand value. The lower class can only afford items of necessity (Social Class and Mobility, Lifestyle Analysis, n.d.).

Marketers realise the desire for upward social mobility and try to incorporate symbols that convey the message in their products and services. Even shops, markets and malls are located and designed keeping in view the segment that frequents them. Considering the beauty market, Indian brands (both regional and national) have a sizable presence in the mass category, while premium markets are largely dominated by the international brands, which create products that are perceived as a lifestyle enhancement (Consulate General Of Israel, Mumbai - Economic Department & Ministry of Economy and Industry, Foreign Trade Administration, 2018).

Factors Expected to Drive the Rural Market are:

- The growing awareness of beauty consciousness, especially among young adults.
- Rural lifestyles are slowly starting to resemble urban lifestyles due to media and economic growth.
- General lifestyle shift from homemade to commercial products.

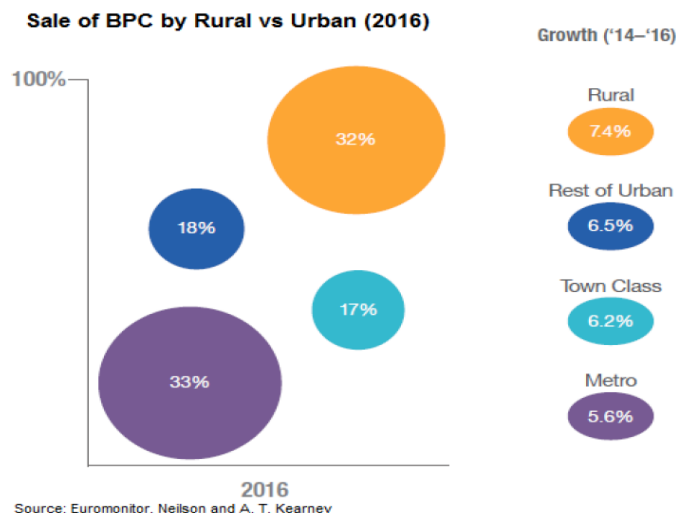


Figure 1.0: Sale of BPC by Rural vs Urban(2016)

Source: Consulate General Of Israel, Mumbai - Economic Department & Ministry of Economy and Industry, Foreign Trade Administration, 2018.

2.3 Colour and Caste

India covers many regions with variations in climate, culture and social history, affecting the beauty standards. In northern India, the idea of a ‘beautiful woman’ is someone who is domesticated, fair-skinned and demure in demeanour. In southern India, where complexions are darker, prime importance is given to highlighting facial features and hair (Seth, 2019). As a country with a long history of having been colonised by Mughals and British, which had fair-skinned rulers, the preference for fair skin is not just about looks- it implies dominance, privilege and possibly superiority to some. The caste system is a form of segregation and discrimination which has been prevalent since ancient times in India. These rigid social groups are created on the basis of occupation and social status.

The complex intermingling of colour and caste is associated with the invasion of the Indian subcontinent by fair-skinned Aryans, who established supremacy over dark-skinned Dravidians. Lighter-skin colour came to be associated with ‘upper castes’ and vice versa. This can also be seen practised amongst many communities today, such as between Vadakalai and Thenkalai castes of Tamil origin. Another proposition for the interconnection between caste and skin colour comes from the accounts of British historians that mention how labour

demands forced many lower castes to work under tedious conditions outdoors and be exposed to sunlight for long periods, unlike their upper-class counterparts. As a result, a metric for assessing one's caste simply by physical appearance became one's skin colour (*Colourism In India*, 2019).

2.4 Disability

Historically in India as elsewhere in the world, persons with disabilities are viewed as medical anomalies, helpless victims and a lifelong burden for family and society. While there has been some progress in enhancing commuting, educational and employment opportunities, topics such as their sexual needs, lifestyle and aspirations are more or less invisible (Addlakha, 2007). Body positivity and diversity campaigns opened up the space to celebrate beauty in all its different forms, with social media serving as a means to headway equal and realistic representation. People with disabilities have made appearances on runways, television, and print media, slowly gaining representation in an industry they were mostly excluded from.

Yet, very few products are adapted to meet their needs. While the fashion industry has been making some progress, the cosmetic industry has ignored this consumer group. There have been limited innovations that can counter the visual and movement dexterity challenges that conventional makeup application poses (Lawson, 2021).

2.5 Religion

Religion is a set of theological beliefs and rituals of worship which are a central part of a follower's identity. These may be indicated through the rituals, accessories, scriptures or places we chose to visit. There are individual differences with respect to how people define their connections to their religion. While some may believe in the set of ideals propagated by the religion, some may also adopt various customs and practises the religion entails (*Religion and Identity*, n.d.). Earlier research has shown that displays of one's religious identity, in terms of attire or behavioural practises, resulted in a significant decline in attractiveness ratings by participants irrespective of whether they belonged to the same religion. These stereotypes also extended to the women's perceived intelligence levels (Beane et al., 2016).

3.0 Consumer Behaviour in Cosmetics Industry in India

3.1 Where do Women Buy?

According to a report by Avendus, the global beauty and personal care industry is forecasted to reach a whopping \$725 billion by 2025, with the Indian market touching \$28 billion by then (Mittal, 2021). In 2020, the Indian Cosmetics Market size was \$13.19 billion and is projected to show a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 16.39% by 2026. The increase in the size of the cosmetics industry is believed to be accompanied by a shift towards e-commerce beauty, an outcome of the emergence of online beauty retailers, making cosmetics accessible at the click of a mouse. The primary outlets for the purchase of cosmetic products for women can be classified into:

- 1) E-Commerce
- 2) Malls/Retail Outlets
- 3) Local Markets

3.2 What do Women Buy?

Research conducted in the UK, Spain, Italy, France and Germany questioned over 1,500 women about their purchase decisions and buying behaviour to derive conclusions about what cosmetic products women use the most. The respondents stated 'lipstick' (59.1%) as the most essential, followed by face mask (57.4%), allowing us to gain an understanding of the consumer behaviour of European women, in terms of beauty. The survey further analysed what factors are of primary consideration for European women while purchasing a cosmetic product, and 'skin sensitivity' and 'cruelty-free production' emerged at the top (S.L.,2019).

In the Indian context, 'kohl' or 'kajal' continues to be one of the most widely used and popular make-up products, with continued links to the country's traditional perception of women. As a testament to the quintessential long, black, silky Indian hair, 'hair oils' continue to be of utmost importance to cater to the Indian beauty standard (Bruculieri,2019). However, with the emergence of Gen-Z and an attempt towards rejection of 'fair is beautiful', there has been a shift in the buying behaviour of Indian women. As a consequence of the recognition of the colourism prevailing in the country and Bollywood celebrities refusing to advertise 'fairness' products, there has been a slight decrease in their consumption. Also,

while ayurvedic beauty brands have been local skincare frontrunners for decades, clinical skincare is on the rise in India (Sachar,2020)

3.3. When do Women Buy?

As per a survey by ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, taking into account the experiences of 138 women, the average age when most women felt the pressure to resort to the usage of makeup was 15-16 years, with a median and mode of 15.00 years. 63% of the responses were concentrated between the age group of 13 to 16 years, providing a clear indication of the implication of beauty standards on adolescent girls (Kelley, 2019). According to the CEO of MyGlamm, Darpan Sanghvi, the company witnessed a 30% increase in sales during the festival season, indicating that festivals facilitate a significant rise in the consumption of cosmetics amongst women. As per a Mint report, during its Diwali sale, online beauty store Purplle.com witnessed a three-crease expansion in its total sales, in contrast to September. About 70% of these orders came from tier 2 and tier 3 urban communities. Mamaearth too witnessed a higher sales contribution during the festival season (Bansal, 2020)

3.4. Brands

According to research conducted on women in Coimbatore, 21 per cent of the respondents used cosmetic products of the Lakme brand, 17 per cent used Himalaya, 13 per cent used L'Oreal, 10 per cent used Maybelline, 9 per cent used Revlon and MAC, 7 per cent used Colorbar, 5 per cent used Boutique and VLCC, and 4 per cent of the respondents used Elle. In a few other research studies, conducted across various cities of India, Lakme emerged as the most used cosmetic brand among female consumers (Rajasekaran, 2020).

3.5. Case Study - Nykaa

It is a widely accepted and recognised fact that industries have been completely transformed since the inception of technology, online shopping, and the digital age; the cosmetics industry, too, is one such industry. The demography of Gen-Z and millennial women have opened up their wallets to establish an entirely new lucrative business segment of beauty and cosmetics, as a result of increased disposable income and economic

empowerment. The shift in consumer behaviour of women from retail shopping of cosmetics to e-commerce platforms began around the 2010s, leading to the birth of online beauty products retailer 'Nykaa'. By understanding how to effectively bridge the gap between e-commerce and the cosmetic industry, along with having a nuanced understanding of the cosmetic consumer behaviour of women, Nykaa has been able to establish itself as the first women-led profitable unicorn in India. On the verge of launching its IPO, Nykaa is preparing to file for an initial public offering having a valuation of more than \$4 billion. As India's most successful e-commerce cosmetic startup, Nykaa has played a crucial role in improving the accessibility of cosmetics for women and also attempted to make beauty products inclusive. To banish the clichéd single standard of beauty, embrace colour and empower women with products that address real issues, Nykaa launched a foundation in 15 different shades, with a primary focus on dusky skin, to celebrate and spread the message of inclusivity, rejecting fairness as the ideal beauty standard. With a focus on making beauty about 'CelebratingYou', Nykaa released a video titled 'Qaid', starring India's first transsexual model, Nikkiey Chawla, with an aim to redefine beauty and gender identity and analyse the influence of patriarchy in our rituals. Nykaa also attempts to have all kinds of brands co-exist on its online platform, be it global brands like Huda, and Innisfree or local brands like Sugar Cosmetics and Lotus Herbals, thereby allowing women from all classes and income groups to buy cosmetics through Nykaa.

4.0 Notions of Attractiveness: A Stimulus for Purchase

Since time immemorial, people have been using tools to enhance and highlight their physical features. However, in the present day, makeup has come to signify a lot more for people and the industry continues to produce items that can temporarily/permanently change one's entire appearance. From being considered unacceptable and promiscuous in polite society, to wearing red lipstick during the Women's Suffrage movement as a symbol of strength, power, and liberty, women who choose to wear makeup have been subjected to a lot of opinions, some rather unsolicited. Today, makeup use is not just used for public figures but is worn by the masses, including both men and women on an everyday basis.

4.1 Self-Perception

Subjugation, especially if occurring on multiple levels, leaves a far-reaching impact on one's mental health and self-perception, and by covering bodily flaws and enhancing one's interpersonal acceptance, makeup may serve as a means of self-soothing. Makeup involvement may involve two factors: pleasure pursuit and trend pursuit. Positive self-esteem leads to a desire to follow leading makeup trends, whereas negative self-esteem seeks pleasure through makeup and transforms one's feelings of inferiority and sadness into positive emotions (Lee & Oh, 2018).

4.2 Social Desirability: Youthfulness and 'Pretty Privilege'

Good looks are considered to be symbols of health and fertility, with most attractiveness standards leaning towards women who either have "childlike features" consisting of large, widely spaced eyes and a small nose and chin, or the other category with mature features like prominent cheekbones, high eyebrows, large pupils and a big smile. As social and sexual creatures, we're trained to seek out attractive people because we tend to associate good looks with higher chances of survival and in propagating our species, by adding to the gene pool (Baron et al 2010). This bias also explains why we associate good looks with other attractive characteristics such as empathy, developing a 'halo' of extrapolated positive attributes around a conventionally pretty woman, which is termed as 'Pretty Privilege'.

Society tends to show a preference for conventionally attractive-looking women either implicitly or explicitly. Matrimonial ads show a preference for a fair, slim woman who is 'homely'. Looking a certain way also impacts one's recruitment chances in job interviews, or even the industry one is a part of. Being conventionally attractive also gives a boost to one's self-esteem which gets reflected in communication and social skills that raise their wages (Markman, 2021).

4.3 Need for Power

Social class is the amount of status the members of a particular class have, in comparison with members of other social classes. The stratification into varied social classes is done on many bases, such as wealth (economic assets), power (ability to exert influence

over others) and prestige (recognition received) (Social Class and Mobility, Lifestyle Analysis, n.d.). Personal luxury goods convey status and a pampered life –a “luxurious life” (Thomas, 2007), and are sought after by the booming upper-middle-class of society (D’Arpizio et al., 2014) as can be seen by its consumption rate, which has been the highest in India (Assocham, 2016). Brands like Chanel, Lancome, Dior, Elizabeth Arden, Giorgio Armani and MAC carry a sense of prestige due to their association with competencies such as creativity, exclusivity, craftsmanship, precision, high quality and innovation, all offered at a high economic cost. Purchasing such products gives a sense of satisfaction and association with the competencies the brands stand for, enhancing one's self-esteem by bolstering a feeling of belonging to a high-status group of ‘a chosen few’. Additionally, owning an expensive product could help them draw attention to themselves, their physical and facial appearance acting as a personification of their power in the society (*The Attitude and Purchasing of Female Consumers towards Green Marketing Related to Cosmetic Industry | Emerald Insight*, 2018).

4.4 Self Expression

While consumers put some effort into self-maintenance and enhancing one’s appearance, makeup has often been understood with a notion of vanity and inauthenticity. A contrary narrative involves exploring how makeup application works as a means of self-expression. Makeup for many women is associated with the nostalgia of watching their mothers get ready, while for some the entire ritual is transformative and therapeutic in nature. It also serves as a tool for creative self-expression, thereby boosting one’s self-efficacy and overall emotional health.

5.0 PESTLE Analysis of Consumer Behaviour from the Perspective of Intersectional Feminism

5.1. Political

5.1.1. How do Policies and Opinions of the Ruling Party Affect Consumer Behaviour of Women in the Cosmetics Industry?

In 2020, after the election and continued victory of the current government, the administration in India rolled out ‘Vocal for Local’ policy, causing a shift in consumer

behaviour and an increase in the purchase of organic cosmetics from home-grown brands, in the country. The continuation of the political party in power and launch of the 'Vocal for Local' campaign, therefore, indirectly influenced consumer behaviour towards sustainability. The government's attitudes towards vegan and cruelty-free makeup also largely influence the supply and consequent consumer behaviour of women (Srinivasn, 2020). Trans women's buying behaviour of cosmetics is also greatly affected by the opinions of the ruling party on the LGBTQIA+ community. A government hostile to the queer community encourages citizens who retain the same hostility, creating an unsafe environment for trans women to express their true selves through colour cosmetics and other beauty products, leading to a decrease in their consumption of such goods.

The promotion of colourism in a country is also greatly influenced by government attitudes towards skin colour. In 2020, India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare finalised an amendment to ban advertisements promoting fairness creams, with the possibility of jail time for offenders. If the bill is passed, the sale of fairness creams is expected to drop significantly, since advertisements play a crucial role in influencing women to consistently purchase such creams. Therefore, the opinions of the ruling party most definitely have some impact on women's buying behaviour (India Raises Penalties for Ads Promoting Fair Skin, 2020).

5.2 Economic

5.2.1 How does Income and Gender Wage Gap Affect the Consumer Behaviour of Women?

There has been a considerable increase in the consumption of cosmetic products since the increased participation of women in the informal and formal sectors. On analysis, a direct correlation between the income of women and their cosmetic consumption expenditure can be identified. A survey conducted in 2014 observed that working women were likely to spend 57% of their savings on cosmetics, whereas non-working/non-earning women were likely to spend only 43%. The statistical method applied to arrive at this observation showed a correlation of 0.537697 between disposable income and women's cosmetic consumption, indicating a positive and direct correlation, thereby concluding that the income of women moderately affects their consumer behaviour in the cosmetics industry. (Shreya Tewari et al,

2014).

It is a widely known fact that women often get paid less than men for the same amount of work and this phenomenon is referred to as the 'Gender Wage Gap'. Despite being underpaid in a considerable number of industries and earning less than men, women's cosmetic expenditure is much more than that of men. According to the UN, men's average wages are higher than women's in both rural and urban areas, and women, globally, contribute to 37% of the economy (UN Women, 2012). However, despite the pay gap, women's consumer spending accounts for 80-90% of the cosmetics industry (Elsesser, 2019).

5.2.2. How much are Women Willing to Spend on Cosmetics?

According to research conducted in India in February, 2019, 43.88% of respondents were willing to spend up to Rs.700 on cosmetics, 18.92% were willing to spend between Rs.700 and Rs.1,700, 8.57% were willing to spend between Rs.1,700 and Rs.3,500, 3.4% were willing to spend between Rs.3,500 and Rs.7,000, 1.24% were willing to spend between Rs.7,000 and Rs.10,000, and only 0.93% were willing to spend more than Rs.10,000. Therefore, while Lakme continues to be the most widely used brand in the country, most women are not willing to spend more than Rs.700 on cosmetics (Statista, 2021).

5.2.3. Is Disability-Friendly Makeup Accessible?

The beauty industry is gradually attempting to become more inclusive and accessible, creating an environment that celebrates diversity and the power of makeup. With disabled models owning the runway for multi-million dollar brands like L'Oreal, it becomes necessary to understand and tackle the challenges makeup poses for women with visual impairment and limited dexterity. Disability-friendly makeup aims to make the task of applying makeup easy for women with precision grip difficulties, low vision, and the inability to keep forelimbs steady. Kohl Kreatives is a brand specialising in creating beauty products for people with impaired motor limbs. Their Flex Collection includes five free-standing brushes with easy-grip handles and totally bendable heads for increased precision and comfort when applying makeup. Grace beauty is another brand that started as a virtual platform for makeup enthusiasts with disabilities like arthritis and has now shifted its focus on creating disability-friendly makeup tools (Jackson, 2019)

However, there aren't any popular Indian brands taking the disability aspect into consideration and creating makeup tools to make the lives of women with special needs easier. Brands like Kohl Kreatives and Grace beauty aren't easily accessible in India, and shipment is bound to cost a whopping amount, thereby preventing the middle class and low-income groups from purchasing disability-friendly makeup, and making their access an elitist space for women in India. The price of Kohl Kosmetic beauty starts from \$9, which is almost Rs.660, and adding the shipping charges, a small brush is bound to cost \$17.5, i.e., around Rs.1200. Therefore, disability-friendly makeup is currently accessible and feasible only for the higher income and elite class of the country, ignoring women with disabilities who don't have the finances to afford such expensive cosmetics.

5.3 Social

5.3.1 Influence of the Societal Environment on Purchase

Increasing literacy levels, penetration of satellite television, growing urbanisation and greater beauty awareness among women have resulted in Indian consumers shifting from 'merely functional' products to more 'advanced and specialised' cosmetic items. However, in rural areas, people still prefer to stick to their trusted brands due to low product awareness and the aggressive price competitions from local and regional players offering better trade margins and heavily discounted products (Nair, 2007). Experiential accounts mention that seeing the rise in social mobility when women from a low-income background do prioritise cosmetic products, there's the fear of being ridiculed for being a 'modern' and 'working class' woman (Richardson, 2018).

The amount of money spent for purchasing cosmetics varies depending on whether the consumer belongs to a town or a suburban area and within economic groups, with the upper-income group living in towns spending about Rs.201-300 compared to an amount less than Rs. 100 in rural areas (Ajitha et al, 2017). As stated in multiple anecdotal accounts, a possible reason for the same could be growing up in a family where finding money for basic meals was prioritised over basic hygiene- expenditure on makeup is often viewed as a non-basic self-indulgence.

5.3.2 Have Inclusivity Efforts blurred the lines in Consumer Purchase Preferences?

Persons with Disabilities in India, in accordance with the social model of disability, face sociopolitical perils of being labelled as ‘dependent and weak’, even in their daily interactions with others. The experiences of disability and self are intertwined with other forms of subjugation, such as social class or gender in an intersectional and diverse society like India. Females have lower status than males within their families and castes (e.g., Adlakha, 2007; Rao & Kalyanpur, 2015). Like a double-edged sword of being a woman and a person with a disability, they are either under-sexualised due to their physical conditions or over-sexualised as can be seen by the many instances of sexual abuse, sometimes perpetrated within their own family. Qualitative studies reflect how these women desire the ‘right to look beautiful’ and ‘purchase cosmetics, earrings, bangles’ to ‘look nice’ (*Adjusting the Āselfā in Social Interaction: Disability and Stigmatization in India*, 2019). The introduction of disability-friendly brands such as Kohl Kreatives in the Indian market provides some hope to meet this lifestyle need in the near future.

Fairness cream advertisements by business giants such as Unilever, Johnson & Johnson, and P&G sell the notion of dark-skinned women experiencing professional, personal, and emotional difficulties, driving the consumers to add-on to an industry estimated at \$432 million a year and growing by 18 per cent annually in 2010, according to AC Nielsen (Pathak, 2015). There is limited research done on purchase patterns of transgender women in India. With available data, it can be proposed that the community views grooming and makeup as a means of self-expression for their identity and professional reasons. Recently, there has been an influx of trans-friendly beauty parlours and salons that offer services at half the price of the market rate, which makes grooming services accessible to a gender that experienced transphobia at mainstream places and resorted to using cheap quality products for daily wear (Agrawal, 2018).

5.3.3 Grooming Gap and the Experiences of Trans Women

The silent expectation surrounding the appearance of women, having its own significant costs, is called the ‘Grooming Gap’. The ‘Grooming Gap’ concludes that the appearance of women has material consequences on their earnings. Women that are deemed attractive as per societal standards, look feminine, have their nails done and hair styled, are

considered more professional, and earn more. Physically attractive people earn more than average-looking workers, according to sociologists Jaclyn Wong and Andrew Penner, but this association is lost when grooming in women is taken into account. In other words, if women invest in the correct clothes, makeup, and haircut, they can earn more money.

For transgender women, the ‘grooming gap’ is an added layer of work, stress, and self-consciousness. In an article written by a trans woman for *Feminism in India*, the woman recounts her struggles with looking feminine and is quoted saying, “The first experience I had with body shaming came from a trans woman. The woman who did it contrasted me to a friend who was slimmer and fairer-skinned, protesting that black people couldn't be beautiful, and obese people couldn't be feminine.” (Alam, 2017). Autumn, another trans woman, also said that she quickly realised how much time and energy it takes to demonstrate femininity for work. The time taken by her to get ready for work increased from 20 to 45 minutes since transitioning. Autumn also said that she has to do things that cis women don't have to like tucking and dealing with facial hair. She claims that she hasn't faced any enforcement because she poses as incredibly femme, but other women workers around the country have been penalized and even dismissed for being insufficiently feminine. Nat, also a trans woman, said that she didn't feel like she was allowed to be a woman if she liked masculine things, delaying any kind of self-reflection about gender and identity (Institute for Public Affairs, 2020).

5.4 Technological

5.4.1 Are Online Retail Stores Benefitting Every Element of Intersectionality?

Shifting to online stores has provided both nascent stage brands and international brands to compete with popular ones in India, spoiling the consumers' choice by providing products suited for women across ages and skin types. The economic trends show a lot of scope for growth, and brands will be compelled to outperform on the level of quality or marketing. Recently, the use of items such as hyaluronic acid and retinol in beauty products has been facilitated due to small players coming in with specific proportions (Mittal, 2021). Consumer awareness is shifting from TV to digital avenues, with 33% of beauty consumers engaging digitally every day, 50% every week, and 93% every month. In India, tier I and tier

II city consumers are fast catching up with their peers from the metros when it comes to purchasing personal care products. Tier I cities show similar engagement levels with digital touchpoints at 83% and metros at 81%. However, price comparison and purchase conversions stand at almost a 50% split (*Digital Emerging as the Top Channel for Indian Beauty Consumer: Connected Beauty Consumer Report, 2020*). As consumers get more tech-savvy, it is also noticed that most of the purchase decisions taking place in the discovery and understanding phase now happen online. Two-third of the total consumers admit not being loyal to one brand. Going forward, beauty brands need to leverage technology such as virtual reality (VR) to mimic offline experiences such as trying on lipstick on digital (Tewari, 2020).

5.5 Environmental

5.5.1. Who is Purchasing Cruelty-Free/Green Makeup?

While global trends show an inclination for herbal-based products, Indians are moving from home-based remedies and are looking to international brands. It is interesting to explore the relationship between one's religion and cosmetic purchase behaviour, compared against a backdrop of increasing international brands in the market and makeup's influence on one's self-esteem. Studies analysing consumer decisions with respect to cosmetic products indicate no significant influence caused by advertisements on the purchase behaviour of Christians, Muslims and Hindus in Bangalore, India. Further, it shows, religion and mother tongue were again, not influential in customer preference towards cosmetic products (Kazim et al, 2015). However, the rising awareness among Muslims against using cruelty-free products has led to the rapid growth in demand for halal cosmetic products around the globe. For the cosmetic and personal care market, brands like Iba, BodyShop, Shahnaz Herbals, Aroma Magic, Himalaya products, Vicco, Biotique and Lotus are trying to fill the gap for the vegan and halal consumers in India.

Most women are strongly against compromising their religious beliefs, willing to pay a bit higher for safer products. Considering the global shift towards vegan/cruelty-free brands, many women take pride in their religion being in accordance with such a shift. Despite that, the major hurdle mentioned by the respondents about the consumption of halal cosmetic brands was a lack of knowledge of such brands in India, even in premium shopping malls.

Even though India accounts for the highest population of Muslims in the world, still this segment is left ignored, and consumers resort to travelling to Dubai/Saudi Arabia or depending on their friends and relatives to send these products. There is also no halal certification on most products in India (Shahid et al., 2018).

It has also been found that income level plays a major role in determining preferential attitude towards green cosmetic products' pricing and recommendation of it, more than age and educational levels. Various considerations taken into account are product packaging, product location and pricing and/or recommendation (Singhal et al, 2018). Bhati (2020) surveyed the customer preference towards popular makeup brands in India. It was found that customers preferred Lakme over Revlon and the other cosmetic brands due to the reasonable price of products provided by the Lakme brand. This proves the consumer inclination towards more economical brands.

5.6. Legal

5.6.1. Are Policies made at the National Level leaving any Impact?

The nature of the regulatory environment for cosmetic and personal care products that is emerging provides further grounds for optimism for the fast-growing industry. Cosmetic legislation is driven through the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, and the legislative body is the Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation (CDSCO) headed by the Drugs Controller General of India. Mandates on local manufacturing, import, and cosmetic finish product standards are also included in this act. Some of these practices may include- limitations on the use of hexachlorophene on imported products; lead, arsenic, and mercury compounds not being allowed in finished formulations and a ban on animal testing. Additionally, labelling requirements are governed by Rule 148 of the Drugs and Cosmetic Act (Singh, 2018). Yet, major loopholes exist with respect to the regulatory scenario. There are multiple authorities involved in the approval process, with inconsistency amongst different authorities for interpretation of any issue. This makes the entire process time consuming and cumbersome, increasing the scope of lack of implementation of guidelines under CDSCO and Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) regulations (Verma, 2020).

5.7 Ethical

5.7.1. Are Consumers Checking Ingredient Lists of the Items they Buy and their Possible Impact?

Despite the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 undergoing frequent amendments to ensure quality produce, cosmetics manufacturers continue to use substandard raw material, which is aided by little to no check over the chemicals used in the cosmetics (Pathak, 2015). Studies on consumption patterns reveal little awareness of chemical composition and suitability to one's skin type. Customers are influenced by the price of the product and also the promotional activities are undertaken by the brand, such as free samples, discounts, etc (Bhati, 2020). For many Muslim consumers, 'Halal' cosmetics are a shift towards a better lifestyle, which reduces the uncertainty of many Muslim women. They are also well informed about the harmful effects of the ingredients prohibited in their religion. Respondents in Focus Group studies state awareness of the drying effects of alcohol on the skin, which can fasten ageing and lead to skin-related problems (Shahid et al., 2018b).

6. Pink Tax

6.1. What is the Pink Tax?

Pink Tax refers to the invisible cost incurred by women to purchase and access products specifically designed and marketed for them. The phenomenon brings to light the gender-based pricing of products, proving that women often pay more than men for equivalent commodities. The word 'Pink' in 'Pink Tax' is symbolic of the premium charged on female-oriented products and evidence of the unfair pricing standards that women are subjected to (L. Stevenson et al, 2017). The pink tax is applicable not only on goods but also services, with female dry-cleaning fees, oil changes, etc., is priced higher than those for men. Since many are oblivious to the reasoning and persistence of this tax, it is also branded as a 'hidden' tax. Pink Tax, therefore, contributes and further elevates the already existing gender disparity, all while capitalising on women's insecurities (Lafferty, 2019).

6.2. Pink Tax and its Correlation to Women's Consumer Behaviour

Despite being severely unnoticed, the Pink Tax subconsciously influences women's buying behaviour, and its success is tied intrinsically to women's perception of beauty and

self-worth. The notion, ‘shrink it, pink it and women will buy it at a higher price’, substantiates the standing of the pink tax and identifies how the minds of women are manipulated to purchase products that are perceived as ‘feminine’ (Lafferty, 2019). The willingness of women to pay this premium can be attributed to the societal conditioning of having to look a certain way, and to achieve that ‘look’, most women are more than ready to pay an additional charge. This desire of women to look a certain way can be attributed to ‘gender socialisation’, which is the process by which people learn how they should act based on their sex. The belief that the use of women-specific products will increase their femininity and consequently perceived attractiveness in society contributes to the persistence of the pink tax. Therefore, the greater a woman’s desire to be seen as ‘feminine’, the more willing she is to pay a higher price for a cosmetic product.

Signaling theory can be considered as another reason for the existence of the pink tax and women’s willingness to bear with it. In signaling theory, one group sends out a message, which is subjectively interpreted by the receiving group (L. Stevens et al, 2017). Consumers may utilise signaling theory to understand how they establish their status (e.g., wealth, influence, intelligence). Therefore, when one woman conforms to the pink tax and purchases products deemed ‘feminine’, it initiates the domino effect, pulling in the entire gender. Familiarity with the pink tax also greatly affects the consumer behaviour of women. Women that comparison shops tend to be aware of the existence of pink tax and therefore, deeming it unfair, make a conscious attempt to evade the tax. However, ‘cosmetic products’ are considered as essential ‘necessities’ for women, making their demand for the female gender somewhat inelastic, thereby leaving little space for women to materialise this attempt (L.Stevens et al, 2017).

6.3. Luxury Tax

Pink Tax also manifests itself as a tax on essential, menstrual products for women like sanitary napkins and tampons. Up until 2018, India charged a 12% Goods and Service Tax on menstrual goods, and after much havoc and criticism, the tax was lifted in 2018. The removal of the tax increased the sale of sanitary napkins and the consequent reduction in price, also increased the attendance of women in schools, leading to improvement in their education (Banerji, 2018).

6.4. Gender-Based Pricing of Products

The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs conducted research titled "From Cradle to Cane: The Cost of Being a Female Consumer," which analysed the pricing of 800 products and concluded that personal care products for women cost 13 per cent more than those for males (Chakraborty, 2019). In fact, in the United States, women are predicted to spend more than \$1400 a year due to gender-based pricing (Forbes,2012). A field study conducted by IIM Amritsar students compared the prices of 64 products for men and women in different categories, revealing the gender-based pricing of goods. The results showed that while in some cases the price difference was minimal, in others it crossed the thousand rupees mark. However, irrespective of the product, all goods were priced higher for women than men (The Hindu Business Line, 2018).

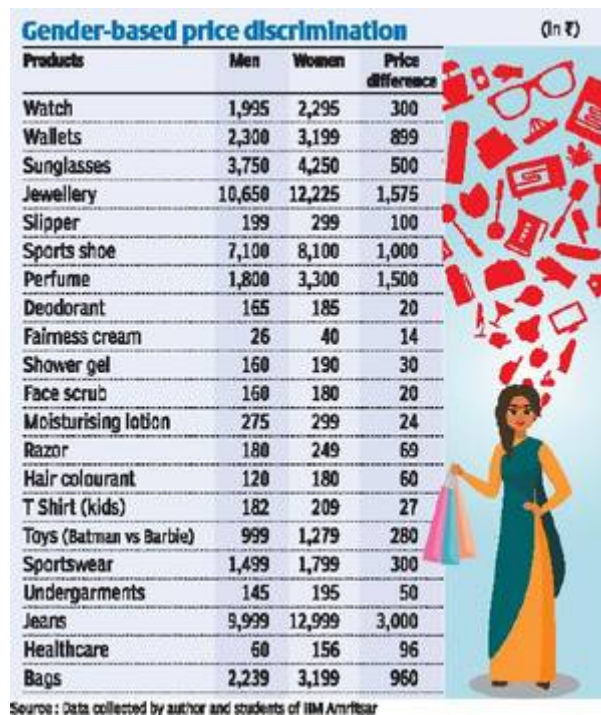


Figure 2.0: Gender-Based Price Discrimination

Source: Hindu Business Line, 2018

6.4.1. Case Study - Gillette

The materialisation of gender-based pricing of products and manoeuvring of women’s minds to increase profitability is visible in something as minuscule as a razor. Removal of

hair, for ages, has played a critical role in deeming a woman 'attractive' and 'beautiful', subjecting them to diverse and sometimes terribly painful hair removal methods. Women are expected to meet such high standards of beauty that the prevalence of something as natural as body hair can lead to societal shunning, and that is exactly what cosmetic brands capitalise on. Gillette India Ltd, incorporated in 1984, is a leading manufacturer of personal grooming and oral care products in India. Despite being categorised primarily as a men's brand, in 2013, Gillette launched Venus Razors in India, in the presence of Bollywood celebrities like Chitrangada Singh, Neha Dhupia, and Esha Gupta. The presence of these perceived 'attractive' Bollywood actresses validated the existence of Venus razors, encouraging other women to purchase them, instead of ordinary men's razors.

However, what went majorly unnoticed was that despite being structurally similar to the men's razors, the Venus women's razors were priced significantly higher. Gillette's one-time use razor for men cost around Rs.30, while the same razor built for women in 'pink' packaging cost double the amount, around Rs.60. In fact, a pack of 5 Gillette razors for men costs approximately Rs 88, while a similar pack of 4 Gillette Venus razors for women costs around Rs 280. Such price differences can be attributed to women's willingness to pay a higher amount to achieve societal 'beauty standards', and purchase products targeted specifically to their gender. This gender-based pricing proves how 'beauty' is much more important for women than men and clearly reveals how consumer behaviour of women in the cosmetic industry is much more inelastic than that of men, convincing women consumers to pay the extra premium.

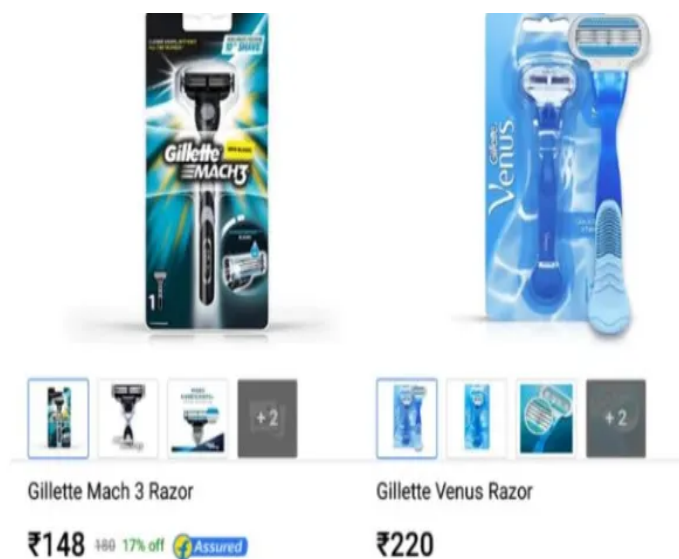


Figure 3.0

Source: E-commerce website, Flipkart

6.4.2 Case Study- Hair Salons and Haircuts

Women pay almost double for haircuts than their male counterparts. A common argument made in defence of the same is that women's hair tends to be longer than that of men. That brings us to a pivotal question: why are short-haired women required to pay more for haircuts than men? A journalist at Print India shared her experiences of undertaking haircuts as a short-haired woman and the consequent price disparity. As an experiment, she went with men for haircuts, only to realise that they both get charged differently, at the same salon, for the same length of hair and style. The reasons given to her to justify this gender-based pricing fail to be deemed of any substantial significance. At a plush salon in Green Park, the journalist was informed that her haircut was more expensive than that of her male counterpart because women's hair requires more care and styling. At the parlour at Ashoka University, she was told that women's hair is of a different quality than those of men, and at Connaught Place, she was charged Rs.800 for trimming because women's hair is cut with scissors instead of a razor (Chatterjee, 2018). This rendezvous of the journalist provides enough evidence to testify the fact that short-haired women do, indeed, pay more for haircuts than men. The reason for this disparity again traces back to beauty norms and the willingness of women to pay. According to basic economics, the profit markup is determined by the

willingness to pay and demand elasticity. Women, even in terms of haircuts, have more inelastic demands than men, providing us with insights into their consumer behaviour. Men are likely to refuse a haircut if they feel they are being unfairly priced, while the inelastic demand shown by women makes it harder for them to say 'no' to a deal that's more expensive than the one being offered to a man, forcing them to contribute to their own economic subjugation.

7.0 Recommendations

- E-commerce websites such as Nykaa are filling the gap and making beauty products inclusive and diverse. Such brands are growing to establish their stores, while smaller brands that use organic products are developing their presence in the Indian market, which is a promising change. Economic and political policies should encourage such inclusive and accessible growth. There is also a need for legal amendments that prevent regulatory mismanagement while checking for safety standards for cosmetic products alongside spreading awareness about the side effects of the chemical compounds used on consumer skin as well as the environment. The inculcation of a legal provision to prevent similar products from being priced differently according to the gender of the target group is also necessary.
- Brands also need to constantly reinvent themselves according to the growing awareness of the consumer. Moving away from the 'dark is apathetic' narrative in advertisements, and adding products that meet halal certification and are disability-friendly will not only make the consumer happy but also provide an economic boom to the industry.
- In the context of the pink tax, as mentioned earlier, women that were familiar with the tax made a conscious attempt to evade it. Therefore, emphasis on education and awareness about the pink tax is of utmost importance, to bring about a collective revolution and consequent tangible change (Mehra, 2021).
- Most importantly, there is an immediate need for recognition of the root cause of women's manipulation by the cosmetics industry: rigid, patriarchal beauty norms. This recognition must be accompanied by the rejection of such standards by not just women, but society as a whole, and the subsequent acceptance of all bodies, skin

colour, and other physical characteristics as ‘attractive’ and ‘beautiful’, thereby promoting a culture that doesn’t capitalise on women’s insecurities.

- Lastly, the future scope of research work should include behaviour towards cosmetic surgeries and the self-care industry apart from facial or colour cosmetics. Keeping up with the times, these studies should include an intersectional sample of women, using the term ‘woman’ for anyone who identifies themselves as a ‘woman’.

8.0 Conclusion

The study aimed at understanding the relationship between women and their consumer behaviour, majorly with respect to the Indian cosmetic industry. ‘Women’ includes all individuals who identify as one, taking into consideration the difference in experiences of trans women, women with disabilities and those belonging to various castes, classes, and religions. Consumer behaviour is influenced by several cultural, social, economic, personal, and psychological factors. Women coming from the five dimensions have been subjugated by various structural forces in the society and view makeup as a means to ensure their survival by fitting into the crowd; a way of self-expression and self-soothing; to appear youthful and socially attractive in a male-gaze dominated world or to exhibit a sense of power/status in the society.

There are, however, differences in the type of product they choose based on their price, brand, usability, and accessibility. Items are mostly purchases from shopping malls and local markets, with e-commerce brands such as Nykaa slowly becoming a preferred choice by improving the accessibility of cosmetics for women, and also attempting to make beauty products inclusive. A PESTLE analysis was conducted to assess the impact of the general societal preference for conventionally attractive looking women (shown either implicitly or explicitly) on women of diversity.

Due to its vast political history, Indians associate fair skin with dominance, self-worth and privilege. While there have been bills proposing banning advertisements that promote fairness cream in a bid to reduce the widespread colourism in India, the market continues to grow at a steady rate with minimal fluctuations. Most dialogues regarding the living status of persons with disabilities in India neglect their needs regarding their quality of life. Studies

indicate that women coming from such places desire the right to look beautiful and own items that make them feel nice. Yet, the cosmetic industry has mostly overlooked this consumer group, with most affordable and accessible cosmetics not adapted to meet the visual or movement dexterity challenges people may encounter. Recently, some trans-friendly beauty parlours and salons have been cropping up that offer grooming services at half the price of the market rate, a far cry from most mainstream salons where the community often experienced transphobia. Studies highlight the additional amount of time required for a transgender woman to groom herself into a feminine ideal, which is an added layer of stress and self-doubt.

Studies indicate that the Indian consumer shows little awareness about the raw materials/chemical suitability and environment-friendly aspect of cosmetics, going for the price of the product as a major determinant factor for purchase. Women report a fear of being ridiculed for prioritising their appearance and spending on makeup even after overcoming economic restrictions, having grown up in an environment where basic survival essentials aren't guaranteed. tier-I and tier-II city consumers show similar digital engagement rates as compared to people from metros in the personal care products section. However, price comparisons vary significantly. In rural areas, people prefer to stick to their trusted brands due to low awareness of new products and regional players offering better price margins. There is no significant influence caused by advertisements on the purchase behaviour of Christians, Muslims, and Hindus, as assessed from a study conducted in Bangalore, India. There are similar results found for the role of mother tongue and general customer preference. The rising awareness among Muslims against using cruelty-free products has led to the rapid growth in demand for halal cosmetic products around the globe, however, it remains an untapped market in India.

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