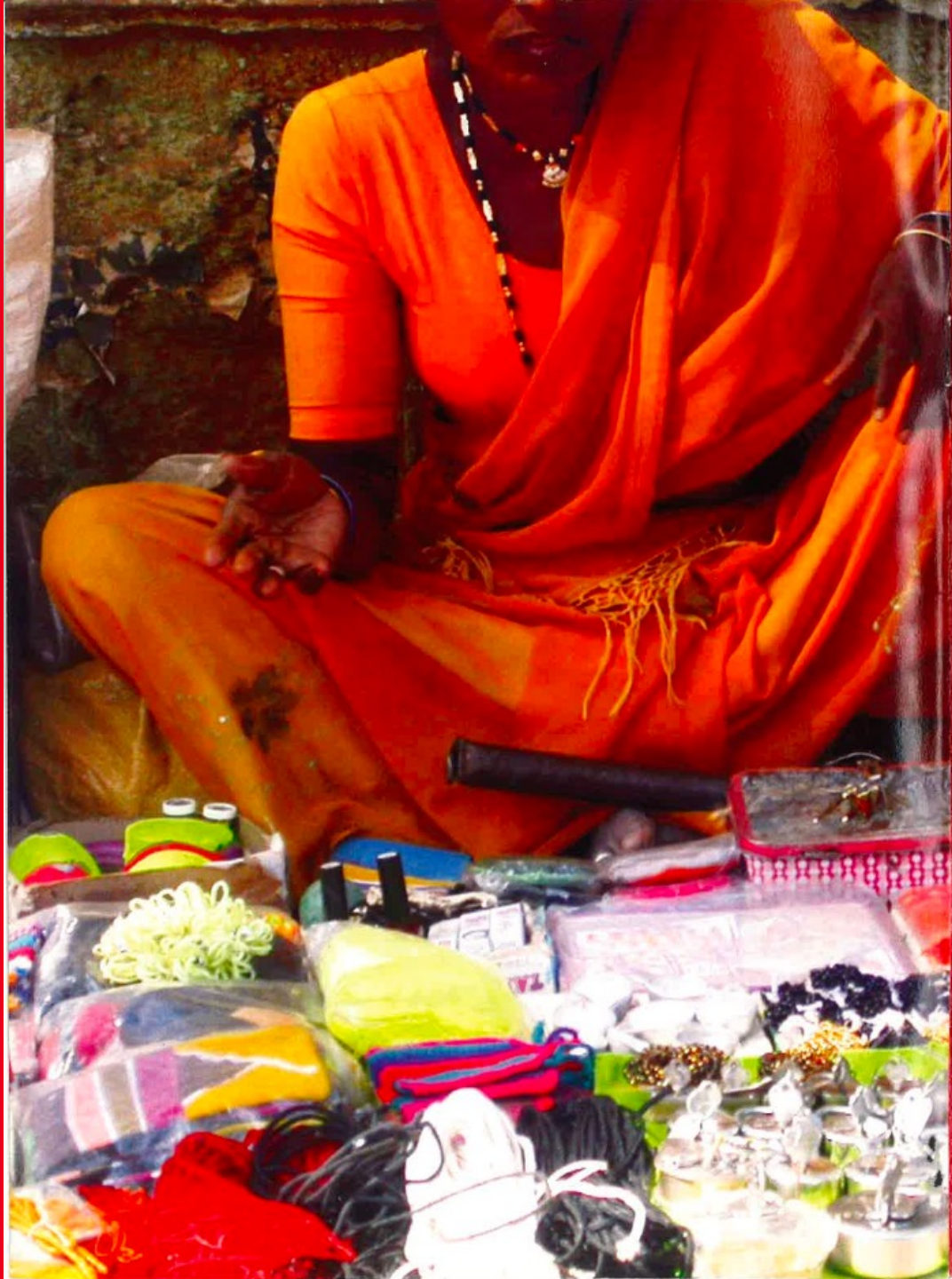


RUNGLLEE? RUNGLIOT?





A NEW MANTRA
FOR BUILDING BRANDS
IN INDIA

SHUVADEEP NAG & K SUBRAMANIAN

Rediffusion | D Y R

CRUDE CLASSIFICATIONS
AND FALSE
GENERALISATIONS
ARE THE CURSE OF
ORGANISED LIFE

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

MASS MARKETING: OR THE BELIEF IN
ONE UNIFIED WORLD

Mass marketing is rooted in the universality of human emotions. It identifies a mainstream emotion and builds brands around it.

Mass marketing relies on mass media networks to reach out to varied consumer segments.

Mass Marketing hinges on the belief that varying stages of sociological evolution and societal norms, cannot be barriers to a unifying emotion.

World solidarity with Nelson Mandela, global popularity of The Beatles etc. add to the faith in mass marketing. It reached out with one worldview / emotion that is assumed to be equally appealing to various people .

Nescafe is a classic example of universal branding. Its signature tune 'the taste that gets me started', has been aired across several markets successfully.

But is mass marketing as optimal today as we thought it to be?



Auto rickshaws are a means of economic public transport in India.
Myth of mass marketing is that people travelling by public transport don't own laptops

THE DEATH OF MASS MARKETING,
AS WE KNOW IT

With brands increasingly spreading across different geographies, the mass marketing belief in a singular, unified appeal was being challenged.

For example, mass marketing of several western brands, did not have the same magical effect in Asian countries. 'Bite the wax tadpole', is what the Real Refresher, Coca Cola said, when it went to China. Kellogg's, the name synonymous with breakfast realised that a healthy breakfast had an entirely different connotation in India. (For Indians, a healthy breakfast is a meal of 'chapattis' - hand rolled bread)

Universal applicability of the single appeal started wearing off, as global brands went out of sync with cultural values, prevalent in other parts of the globe.

A simple example of how people are different across the world - Americans start their day with a cup of coffee, preferably decaf, while Asians typically wake up to a cup of tea.

The Great American Cowboy dream appeals to an individual sense of freedom. It stems from the culture of people residing in the US who romanticise their land. It did not hold the same appeal to an Asian, who is taught to tread the middle path and whose culture has a far greater emphasis on social conformity.

English, the predominant language for marketing, does not present a single unified face to the world. There are at least two prominent schools of grammar and spelling, even if we don't try to count the number of dialects it breaks down into.

TECHNOLOGY: THE JUDAS KISS FOR MASS MARKETING

MYTH - Technology was perceived to be a force that would nullify the diversities of people from different parts of the globe. The power of Internet brought alive the prospect of a sweeping homogeneity. The free flow of information about cultures, rituals and other social practices was expected to aid heterogeneity morph into one homogeneous appeal. Implying that, it would support the mass marketing code, which relies on unifiers to apply its 'One to All' business model.

REALITY - New age technology and media started recognising 'individual needs'. Hence, the need for customisation of products. Technology only added to the segregation of human minds, wants and desires by spewing customisation. World Space Radio, DTH revolution, World Wide Web have started fragmenting markets for customised media alternatives.

This proved to be yet another nail in the mass marketing coffin.



Microsoft Word recognises nearly 12 versions of English grammar and spellings!



PLAYING TO THE MAHARAJA : GOING 'GLOCAL' (OR AN ACCEPTABLE DILUTION OF THE MASS MARKETING IDEA)

Mass marketers realising the fallacy of the 'universal consumer', started adopting local cultural sensitivities in their brand marketing. This was also precipitated by the fragmentation of media and intense competition from local brands, especially in the Asian countries.

There are various examples of such GLOCAL initiatives:

McDonalds, in India, removed beef from the burgers to suit the religious sentiments and introduced Mc Aloo Tikki (Aloo is potato and Tikki is an Indian starter dish, grilled or barbecued).

Nestle introduced 'Dahi' (curd) in frozen form, as yogurt didn't appeal to Indian taste buds.

Shell said 'Namaste Shell' to bond with the Indian consumers. (Namaste is the Indian word for greeting)

'GLOCAL': PROMOTING CULTURAL STEREOTYPES

'GLOCAL' is about promoting cultural stereotypes. It takes a shortcut by creating homogeneous appeals.

'Glocal' marketing strategies seek unifiers in cultural peripherals - symbols of a culture, that (on the face of it), unify mass markets.

Japanese women bowing in their traditional attire 'Kimono', illustrates this approach.

However, by definition, stereotypes operate on the cultural periphery and take into account only the lowest common denominators to arrive at a unifying platform.



Indian Women: Unveiled



Bengalis are equally passionate about classical rock, as Durga Pujal

PROBLEMS WITH PROMOTING CULTURAL STEREOTYPES


Stereotypes tend to minimise the differences rather than magnify the similarities.

For example, the common perception of Germany is austere and precision engineering, while England is stiff, upper lipped with a wry sense of humour. If these stereotypes are the core truth, then how come 'Austere Germany' gifted Heineken beer to the world? And England, with its 'Stiff Upper Lip', gifted 'Beefy Botham'?

How could this stereotyped Germany nurture political polarities, by accommodating two distinct sets of people, subscribing to the communist and the capitalist worldview?


The same is true for England, where every five years, its citizens vote for two very divergent sets of beliefs, the Labour party or the Conservative party and bring either to power.

The truth is that mass marketing (and later, glocal marketing) assumed one universal consumer, primarily created for convenience of marketing efficiencies. It became oblivious of the sociopolitical and economic forces that keep shaping consumers and consumption. It ignored the fact that these forces keep creating dynamic heterogeneity, within a group of seemingly static homogeneous people.



As consumption and consumers become complex, it becomes apparent that there are no universal common desires. Being 'GLOCAL' or being driven by cultural stereotypes was seen as an acceptable progression. But, in reality, this was even worse since it operated only in the periphery.

What could be a stride forward for marketing in this environment of complex consumer desires?



CULTURALLY ATTUNED MARKETING

Culturally attuned marketing is propelled by the fact that heterogeneity is a reality; it's not about seeking an excuse of a homogeneous chord to overcome the heterogeneity.

Deeper inquisitions into local cultures provide insightful discoveries regarding the heterogeneity that exists within. Clusters of very different people are bound together just because of common values / fears / emotions.

As a starting point, geographic proximity need not be necessary or sufficient for arriving at a singular group of people bound by common emotions. Media consumption, political backgrounds, social value systems, or even consumption patterns are perhaps better basis to seek common clusters.

IDENTIFYING, UNDERSTANDING AND CAPITALISING ON HETEROGENEITY

Two neighbouring states from Eastern India - West Bengal and Orissa - are chosen to highlight the fact, that, even contiguous geographic belts have several identifiable sub cultures.

Bengal, along with Orissa and Bihar, formed the Eastern part of the peninsula, and for all practical purposes, was considered one sociopolitical unit. However, culturally Bengalis and Oriyas are two distinct entities.

Whilst the Bengali is extremely proud of his sociopolitical awareness, the Oriya is content leaving everything in the hands of God.

The Bengali sees himself as a global citizen, hence issues such as Iraq or Vietnam are as critical as issues in his immediate surroundings. The Oriya, in contrast, is more preoccupied with minding his own business.

Historically, Bengal has been the barometer to understand the states surrounding it. Even today, most marketers, when targeting Eastern India, use Bengali sensibilities for communication, which is then translated into respective vernacular languages for the neighbouring states.

Is this Bengali view of its neighbourhood just being 'glocal', albeit in a smaller geography?

Are there any fine nuances to the Oriya that can be leveraged differently from the Bengali, for a new order of brand building?

All this hinged on finding out how the two stand apart.



SHAPING IT UP: METHODOLOGY

Three phase study to understand the differences between the Bengali and the Oriya

Phase 1: Desk research

To formulate hypotheses about stereotypes and the perceptual traits about these two sub-cultures. This research included analysis of evolution of various societal facets - political system, literature, social reform, education, art and craft and economic progression.

Phase 2: Primary discussions with culture leaders

The next phase of the study entailed detailed discussions with film writers, journalists, authors, to validate these hypotheses and understand the reflection of these evolutions, through the lens of popular entertainment: media and literature.

Phase 3: Primary discussions with culture-affected

The final phase of the study entailed detailed one-on-one sessions, with local residents, from different walks of life and informal group discussions with students. This was the final filter, to check how these two tiers of hypotheses transcribe to the common man on the streets.

FINDINGS:

#1. Bengalis put a premium on intellectual pursuits whilst Oriyas see education as a means of materialistic enhancement

The spread of education from colonial times (and the Renaissance Movement), in Bengal, has had sweeping effects on social reforms and penetration of literature.

These underpinnings have led to Bengalis attaching a great deal of importance to academic pursuit. Education is perceived as a tool to genuinely liberate and broaden the human mind. Education, for Bengalis is intellectual enhancement.

While the delayed spread of education amongst Oriyas, can be felt by the lack of mass literary content.

Even today, education is a means of attaining esteem and status in society, for the average Oriya. A clear depiction of this attitude is the fact that, parents of teenagers are comfortable letting their children taking up courses like Hotel Management, Tourism Management or even Business Management, which ensure a job and steady income.

In Bengali matrimonial ads, if a prospect has completed his or her Masters from Kolkata University, is highlighted, so that they can meet a match with a similar intellect. Bengalis pursuit for academics is not restricted by geography. In fact Cuttack, a town in Orissa, has a significant proportion of Bengali population and these Bengalis are the leading members of literary societies in Cuttack. Education as a means of materialistic achievements is also demonstrated by the fact that there are several Oriyas who are very successful doctors.



Daily column on educational guidance in a leading Bengali Daily



Out of home advertising- promoting vocational education in Orissa



A weekly travel column in a leading Bengali daily promoting honeymoon getaway



Use of the metaphor of 'Magic Password' (khul ja sim sim), to advertise a discount offer, for a retail outlet in Orissa

#2. Bengalis exhibit dialectical materialism whereas Oriyas exhibit neo materialism

Bengalis exhibit a very different spending pattern compared to Oriyas. Bengalis are slow to adopt consumer durables and modern consumer gadgets. This explains the low level of cellular phone penetration in Kolkata compared to other metropolitan cities. But a visit to the Kolkata Book Fair (a book fair that is comparable in size to the German book fair) an entirely different Bengali showcases. They enthusiastically come in large numbers from far near and spend liberally.

The Oriya, on the other hand, is more prone to use his annual savings on modern - day gadgetries as a subtle statement of arrival on the social stage. With the world opening up in front of him and opportunities coming his way, he seeks to stamp his presence by moving up the materialistic ladder.

A Bengali would not hesitate to carry his dinner in tiffin boxes for train travel, and at a pinch would probably also carry a portable stove, to ward off the food bills at hotels and eating out. This saving gets channelised to ensure that he can afford optimum local sightseeing. Oriyas, on the other hand are a reluctant traveller, not smitten by the Bengali Wanderlust.

#3. Bengalis are cultural chauvinists whereas Oriyas seek inclusive conformity

Sourav Ganguly gave Bengalis a reason to celebrate, by becoming an eminent force in the field of sports. When the spat between Ganguly and Chappell resulted in Ganguly's ouster, Bengalis burst out in protest. So much was their angst that in an India-South Africa match, they actually supported South Africa, to demonstrate their displeasure about Ganguly being dropped.

The Bengali's reaction to an issue is directly proportional to the Bengali sensitivity (an emotional quotient, largely driven by his ego!)

The Oriya on the other hand is not driven by chauvinistic viewpoints.

Shivsunder Das, an Oriya cricketer was dropped from the Indian team. The Oriya were very pragmatic in their reaction. Rather than bursting into a frenzy, they reconciled themselves to the fact that Das needed to lift his game, to get back to the team.

The predominant Bengali population residing there has converted Chittaranjan Park, a prominent area in New Delhi, to a mini Kolkata. A senior journalist in Orissa recounts an incident, when two Oriyas met at a social gathering in Delhi, chose to speak in Hindi (which is the prominent language in Delhi) rather than their mother tongue.



Bengalis celebrating the return of Ganguly into the team



Poster of an Oriya film on national pride and patriotism



Bengalis in a protest rally on the issue of minimum daily wages



Bengalis protesting the US invasion of Iraq

#4. Bengalis are opinionated expressionists whilst Oriyas are reticent observers

Bengalis are proud of their magnanimity and the ability to align themselves to causes affecting mankind and not just their kind.

Their keenness to follow worldly matters and know detailed facts, makes them that much more passionate to express their viewpoints on those issues.

Oriyas, on the other hand, are not so involved in expressing their opinions, on anything and everything that happens under the sun.

Oriyas, in a way, are more concerned about themselves, rather than be an evangelist for social correction. They are more dogged and focused on fending for themselves.

An example of this difference of attitude is seen in the number of rallies that take place in Bengal, regarding atrocities worldwide.

For Bengalis, expression is a mode of self-actualisation.

Natural calamities that have ravaged Orissa since time immemorial, have made Oriyas natural survivors. Which is why they always fend for themselves first.

Any football or cricket match is a sell out in Kolkata, with more than 100,000 sporting aficionados, vocally expressing their expert comments.

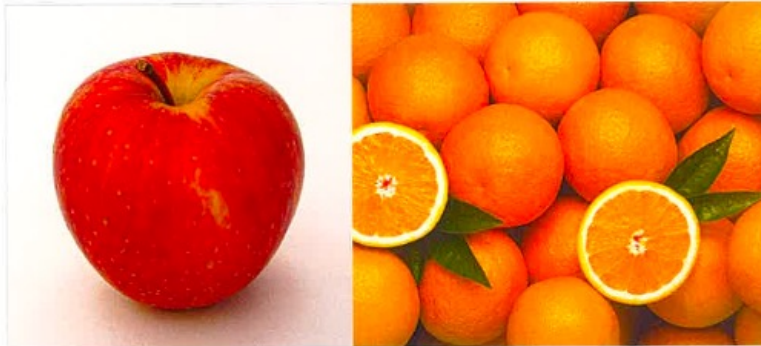
CREATING A NEW MANTRA: MOVING FROM APPLES TO ORANGES

Brands and marketing plans can be approached from two perspectives.

First, the panacea route, literally, or let's call it the 'apple' principle. Because the apple is a homogeneous fruit, uniform in its form from within.

The other, is a more micro approach, where customised brand building plans are drawn, rather than replicating a fixed format. We can call it the 'orange' principle, as different shapes and sizes of the sections form one fruit.

Most of the global brands have been built on the 'apple' principle, where one universal appeal or model of market intervention is used. Brands like Levis, Nokia, Coca Cola, follow a universal format crystallised from a singular belief.



#1. Under the apple approach of brand building, the homogeneity of the model misses out on connecting with varied cultures

A recent Coke commercial is the perfect example of riding on stereotypes. It depicted a Punjabi farmer, in the middle of a sugarcane field. Although the commercial was a big hit in the north, because it used on the road speak 'Ek Thanda Dena', which is the most colloquial way to ask for a soft drink. It did not appeal to sensibilities across the nation. The stereotype of a North Indian farmer was lost in the southern half of the country and the commercial could not be aired there.

#2. The apple approach also fails to perceive the finer motivations of a culture

Bengalis have been stereotyped as 'born rebels'. If marketers treat them as cynics, they would completely miss this audience, maybe even rub them the wrong way. They need to be cognizant of the fact that this attitude stems from deep-rooted beliefs, and not because it's fashionable to be anti-establishment.

Asian Paints, a leading paint brand in India, depicted their understanding of the Bengali sensibility, by a promotion they executed.



The Asian Paint Sharad Shaman ad announcing the various winners

Durga Puja is Bengal's biggest festival, wherein various groups decorate their own 'pandals' (altars where the Goddess is placed). Asian Paints organised a contest - 'Sharad Shamman', to judge the best pandal, idol etc. Focus was on creative talent, something that is very close to the Bengali heart.

The 'orange' principle is based on the fact that heterogeneity is a reality.

Under this approach, marketing and brand building plans are drawn by keeping in mind the finer nuances of sensitivities.

The first example is of Parle, a national brand of biscuits and confectionaries.

Parle created an education centric event, which is revered amongst Bengalis.

Every year, around the end of January or early February, Bengalis worship Saraswati, the Goddess of learning. This festival has its own unique traits; children have a carte blanche that day, including a night out on the eve of the Puja for preparations.

Parle tied up with all the schools in West Bengal, in a programme called "Saraswati Bandana- Saluting the Goddess". The programme was an excellent example of utilising a popular cultural sentiment to gain parental acceptance through peer power.

Another example is Airtel.

Airtel is India's largest national cellular network and it identifies itself with the various cultural belts of India. Airtel operates on the orange theory. The overarching image of Airtel is a result of aggregated interventions in the different cultures.



CONCLUSION:

Regional or local brands in Asian countries mostly follow the orange principle of branding and marketing.

As regional marketers operate within limited geographies, they follow a more culture sensitive and customised marketing programme. This micro focus is the reason why the regional brands are posing serious threats to global brands (traditional packaged goods giants are facing this threat the most).

Chik shampoo is a good example of a local brand challenging large, multinational brands. In the southern states of India, shampoo penetration is very low. Shampoo is traditionally seen as bad for the hair, hence usage is restricted to special occasions or, at best, once a week. For such rare usage, consumers don't want to invest in a 200ml bottle which was the smallest SKU made available by multinational brands. The large outlay also served as a deterrent to trials.

Chik introduced 10ml sachets in the market. It not only generated huge amounts of trials, it also became a weekly purchase for the 'Sunday wash'. Chik took away significant market shares from P&G and Unilever.

The Chik brand was built on the principle of providing a brand at an unoccupied value point.

Britannia is a national brand of biscuits, bakery and milk products.

Bengalis love Marie biscuits with their tea. In a recent commercial the brand has replayed consumer behaviour of dipping their biscuits while having tea. This communication has helped Britannia ward off local competition (who have a definite price advantage) and who sell Marie on the generic platform of crunchy taste or low fat content.



Outcome of the Green Maroon (Mohun Bagan) Red Yellow (East Bengal) match is more critical than winning the National League

With business growing genuinely global and the emergence of Asian markets like India and China as the growth hubs, it's imperative that Western brands adopt the more compatible 'orange principle'. Asian countries exhibit a lot of cultural variances and consumer sensitivities that command recognition.

Western brands, which have been nurtured on the principles of universality of appeals, in order to gain from the opportunities in these markets, need to align their marketing and branding plans in tandem with the diversities.

After all, can Fox Sports sell the entire EPL season with the same emotion as it would be using to sell a Manchester United vs Chelsea match?

Legend has it that a Buddhist monk, in his search for the perfect cup of tea, had said, 'Runglee Rungliot. (a Tibetan expression which translated to English means 'thus far and no further') after he tasted Darjeeling tea. The legend goes on to say that the monk gave up his search thereafter.

This article is an attempt to brew questions in our minds, on whether we can say 'Runglee Rungliot', in terms of brand building approaches that we have adopted.

Well, the jury may still not be out, but opinions are kindly solicited.



Truth is stranger than generalised perceptions!

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