
Book Review

“We are like that only”

Author: Rama Bijapurkar

Publisher: Penguin books India

By: Prof. Pratima Sheorey

Associate Professor and Head COE - Marketing
SCMHRD, Pune

This is a first in terms of understanding the 'Indian Consumer'. This book will definitely aid marketers who tend to equate India with any third world or developing economy. It would be a good idea to read this book to understand where the head and heart of India is. The author, Rama Bijapurkar, starts this book by explaining the post liberalization consumer behavior and how the market behaved. She also says about the approaches taken by MNCs after liberalization and stating the reasons for its failure.

The author stresses on the importance of the 'Made for India' approach by giving a wonderful example, “Our faith in astrology does not decrease as a result of the rising level of our scientific education; rather as a consequence, we effortlessly move to computerized horoscopy”. This is by way of a clear advise to the multinationals that if they wish to set up 'successful' shop in India then they need to make an India plan separately, much like the Toyota Etios.

The inconsistency of demand and the unpredictable nature of the economic growth of India are highlighted. In spite of this the fact that economic growth rates are on the upswing is also mentioned. This book gives the message that a company that survives in the short run will likely to reap huge profits in the long run, if it stays on course with the myriad landscape, which is India. She reminds us that the Indian market is a strange amalgam of old and new and therefore it is necessary to define your own India to be successful here.

The third chapter details the change in income distribution among lower, lower middle, middle, upper middle and the upper income groups over the years since liberalization. Rama throws light into the change confluence causing the tipping point in consumption, change in consumption comfort and change in consumer confidence.

The fourth chapter gives an idea about consumer India's demand structure. It was

structured as a Premium-Popular-Discount construct. She factually points out the reasons for its failure. She describes the evolution of new market structure construct by value orientation. Basis of division of consumer classes into destitute, aspirants, climbers, consuming class and rich is explained. Dynamics of future growth in terms of value growth and volume growth is also discussed here. This chapter emphasizes on the appropriate mix of strategies that is essential to capture the different sources of market growth.

Chapter five gives an insight into the purchasing power of various income strata and how to deal with each of them. It details the attitude and psychology of each stratum. Rama says counting the Indian middle class has never been accurate; it varies with the conditions used to define the class. Middle class is found to be having the highest purchasing power.

In **chapter six**, Rama repeats, that finding the Holy Grail [market size] of the Indian market lies in understanding its plurality. She suggests the marketers to think of India as being a collection of many discrete islands - each with its distinctive economy, consumer characteristics, demography, distinctive demand drivers and consumption patterns. This chapter talks about the impact of liberalization on India's plurality, and the strategies to define 'My target India'.

Chapter seven is very crucial as far as marketers are concerned. It explains the demographic determinants of consumption by means of socio-economic classifications (SEC) and their relative purchasing power. Rama elaborates on what needs to be kept in mind when defining 'My Target India' in terms of SEC. This chapter also details the psychographic determinants of consumption. The author classifies the population into three generations - post independence, just before and around liberalization [midway children] and after liberalization [liberalization children] and their purchasing behaviors.

Chapter eleven explains, how a big change is

happening in the Indian market, using the formula: Force = Mass * Acceleration. Rama finds that a large mass of people moving with a very small acceleration unleashes a large force of change. She says that the change is not immediately discernible and it happens over the period of time. It is a continuous morphing change like an amoeba changes its shape. Understanding the change needs a deep insight into the psychological, social and cultural behavior of consumers. She says, the only way one can predict future cultural change is to painstakingly construct it by studying age cohorts, by looking at cultural drivers of change and by understanding the process of change and the DNA of the society, which is dynamic.

Chapter ten is a closer look at Young India and Indian Women. It makes us understand young India's demography, psychography and the cultural drivers of behavior. She explains why liberalization children are a powerful market force. The chapter also gives a brief about the various changes that have happened to women post liberalization- change in their role in the family, work and society and how these changes have affected the market.

In **chapter eleven**, Rama explains the changing structure of the rural economy beyond agriculture. She gives a detailed comparison of size and purchasing power of Rural Vs Urban consumer India and most importantly rural India's spending pattern. The author discusses about the shift in the future with respect to liberalizing agriculture and special economic zones. She shares her understanding of what kind of consumer market is or will rural India be, in this chapter.

The author reminds every marketer about the importance of the 'Bottom of the pyramid' consumer. It constitutes 650 million people and accounts for 30 % of the national income. She tells they value all kind of productivity devices that help them earn more. They innovate their own-product solution to make them 'Value- Right'. They are technology embracers not technology rejecters. So she says it is very important to have a generic frame work for understanding the low income, value conscious consumer.

The **last chapter** once again details the strategies and approaches to be taken to enter or sustain in the Indian marketplace. It explains the challenges of getting it right for the Indian market. Rama reminds MNCs to ask the right question: "MNC should not ask what is the size of the Indian market that I can consider? But rather, 'What should my local customized strategy be for the Indian market'" She urges them to recognize and accept that India is a multi-tiered and multi-layered market and needs a multi pronged strategy.

This book is very informative and in true blue market research and consulting style (that is the background that the author comes from) tells us about the complexity of the Indian Consumer. This holds true not just for multinationals but also for Indian companies wishing to enlarge their footprint in India. No company can do away with a robust market metric study covering various aspects like heterogeneity, culture, socio-economic classes, age cohort and whatever is relevant given the product category and service you offer. In short, there are no short-cuts to success with the Indian Consumer. Any marketer will have to go out actively and understand the India that is relevant for them, devise strategies accordingly and then probably have a shot at succeeding.