

A Study on impact of fairness-based advertisements on consumers and consumer perspective on advertisement ban

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ABSTRACT

Fairness cream has become common household for most people in India. It is reached even remote villages. In a quest for capturing skin care segment in India, skin and personal care companies spend huge on advertisements in mass media promoting lighter skin and fairness-based products. There are so many ad campaigns promoting products and treatments which lighten skin. Often people are misled into buying these products due to advertisement impact. Also, in country like India, where there is a greater number of people with dark skin, these fairness-based advertisements also create skin colour-based discrimination in the society. For years, advertisers of skin-lightening creams and other products have shown people — mostly women — with dark skin as having problems when it comes to finding jobs, getting married and generally being accepted by society. Indian governments health ministry has recently passed a bill “Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) (Amendment) Bill-2020”. This bill cracks down on misleading fairness cream ads with a punishment up to five years in jail and a hefty fine of Rs 50 lakh. The quest for light skin is still alive in India, as demonstrated through various Google searches and this ban could be positive step against fairness advertisement campaigns. The ban is also very important from health perspective as many people in India have toxic relationship with fairness creams. This work studies the impact of fairness-based advertisements on the consumers and to analyse its influence of Colourism on customer attitude. This work also analyses the factors affecting consumer perspective on the misleading advertisement ban by Indian health ministry.

Keywords

Colourism; Fairness advertisements; Consumer perspective, Attitude impact.

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Introduction

According to India Fairness Cream & Bleach Market Overview (2018-2023) Indian fairness market was worth Rs 3000 crore in 2019 and it is expected to reach Rs 5000 crore by 2023. Skin lightening products take up half of India's skincare market. There is a stiff competition among HUL, P&G and L'Oréal, brands like Nivea, Olay, Pond's, Dove, Neutrogena and Garnier to dominate the industry. High literacy rate, demand from single working women, beauty pageants at national & international level, pressure of society, marriage issues, desire to look beautiful and fair, etc. are some of the major factors which have pushed the market of women's fairness cream in India.

There's always been a crazy obsession in Indian women for fair-toned skin (Neha misra et al 2015). Dusky ladies are often subject to racial discrimination in their own country. There are lots of advertisements prevailing in the country since many years, which give preference to the fair skin only. For years, skin-lightening creams and other products have depicted people mostly women

with dark skin as having problems when it comes to finding jobs, getting married and generally being accepted by society. Fairness cream ads emphasize on belief that a person's calibre is directly proportional to his/her skin tone through various ads. Repeated fairness advertisements in mass media have increased the obsession with fair toned skin (Christina, 2006). It has also increased the mindset of superiority complexes and racial prejudices. Feared by colour degrading ads, many women have resorted to repeated use of these fairness products (Nina, 2019). Extreme use of fairness creams can rather lead to severe skin damage. Fairness creams contain harmful bleaching agent such as hydroquinone, mercury, lead, nickel, chromium and high levels of steroids that cause harm to skin over long run (Jose et al 2018).

There has been long standing debate over advertisements promoting fair skin. Indian governments health ministry has proposed a Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) (Amendment) Bill, 2020. The bill bans advertisements of products that promote fairness creams, enhance sexual performance, cure

premature aging and greying of hair, improvement in height of children or adults, increase in brain capacity and memory, improvement in strength of teeth and vision, change of foetal gender by drugs. This work is carried out in this background, about the consumer perception towards fairness products and how they view the ban. The goal of this work is to discover whether the fairness commercial persuades society's opinion about racism, and increases obsession and fantasy for fair skin, as the stereotype ads portrays fair skinned people as powerful and highly influential personality.

It also analyses the consumer perspective over the ban and it is in right step towards ill effects created by the fairness advertisements so far. Following are the objectives of this work

- To study the perceptions leading to belief system of the youth about fairness creams as portrayed through commercials
- To study the effect of colourism as a driver for consumption of fairness products
- To study the effect of advertisement in propagation of colourism
- To study the consumer view on advertisement ban

Literature Review

To delve deeper into the previous literature on the subject we read Sindhushree et al. (2018) where they had applied quantitative research to analyze the social opinion over the persuades of fairness commercials. Primary data for this study was obtained through a structured questionnaire that was filled by 500 respondents between age group of 18-30 in Mysore area. The survey had included both male and female population to get a holistic view. The work had detailed the questionnaire response distribution to for qualitative opinion but it did not propose or proved any hypothesis for a quantitative approach. The study found out majority of people adopted fairness products due to commercial persuades. Taking this research forward we read the work of Jha B et al(2016) who explored the quest for fairness in India from a socio-cultural marker of contemporary society through the semiotic analysis of select advertisements. The study concluded that the social pressure of feeling non-beautiful due to dark skin is leveraged by whitening cream manufacturers in India. Lightening of the skin

tone becomes a social norm due to persuasion of the advertisements and it psychologically compels consumers to follow the trend. Further study by Das et al(2013) analyzed consumers' perception towards fairness creams in India. This work also examined the factors influencing consumers in perceiving various brands of fairness creams. The study was conducted among 250 respondents in Srikakulam area of Andra pradesh. The study found out that among multiple factors advertised by fairness advertisement, fairness is top most preferred factor by the consumers and most adopted it for the respect and personality appeal it creates in the society.

But to find a quantitative study to measure the impact, we studied the paper by Mohanty et al(2012) where they identified a few customer preferences for selecting different fairness brands in India. The study was conducted with 200 respondents from Cuttack and Bhubaneswar area of Orissa. The study through, statistical analysis, had found that the most influential factor in selection of fairness product was advertisements. From the different appeal of advertisements, fairness is the top most factor which influenced the consumers. To give a qualitative angle to this increasingly popular subject, Suraj et al(2017) made an attempt to understand consumers perception towards fairness advertisements and how advertisement influenced brand choice of consumers. Descriptive research was conducted with 25 respondents. Most of the respondents had a strong urge to get instant fairness results and this was the single most important factor in selection of brands. Shroff et al (2018) made an attempt to assess people's beliefs about fairness and reasons for using or not using these products in India. The study was conducted with a self-reported questionnaire from 1992 respondents including both men and woman. The study found that television advertisements were the most common prompts for using fairness products followed by friends and family. The study also found that Men were significantly more likely than women to endorse beliefs about fairness being more attractive and were more likely to perceive family and peers as viewing fairness as beneficial for cultural capital. Jumping into a different geography we read the work of Ahmed et al(2019) who explored the social issues caused by fairness cream advertisements in Pakistan. The study revealed that the advertisement raised and

reinforced negative values in the society and hurts the self-esteem of women. The advertisements presented white skin superiority and white colour as criteria for judging female beauty. Similarly Ismail et al(2015) also studied the variables that contribute to obsession for fair skin colour in Pakistan. Modelling obsession as dependent variable, independent variables considered in the study are inferiority complex, social pressure and advertising. A questionnaire response collected from 250 respondents was analyzed using multiple linear regression technique. The study found a higher correlation between the dependent and independent variables.

Raja et al(2014) made a study to find the preference level of men towards fairness cream and factors motivating them to purchase such cream. Simple percentage analysis, annova test of variance, Klolmogorov smirnov test are used for questionnaire response of 300 subjects. Study found that the quest for fairness cream is more in age group of 18 to 24. Kayhan et al(2014) made a cross sectional study focussing on impact on attitudes, subjective norms and consumer innovativeness due to use of cosmetic products. Author explored with different models for conceptualization of complex behavioral and social process by which individuals adopt new products. Mall intercept questionnaire response was collected and test of significance was conducted to analyze the impact of the variables on intention to purchase of cosmetic products. Agyemang et al(2019) studied the prevalence and socio-demographic factors associated with the skin toning practices among female university students in Ghana. The responses were collected from the students using a closed-ended questionnaire. Inferential analysis was conducted on the questionnaire response to find the association between the social-demographic characteristics of the respondents and the use of skin tone products.

Sreedevi et al(2018) studies the brand preference towards face cream among college students. The study investigated various factors like quality, package, price, fragrance etc which influenced the brand preference. Samples selected using simple random sampling were provided with a structured questionnaire with each influential factors ranked on Likert five point scale. Ranks of the influential factors were done based on the responses. Mukherjee et al(2020) investigated the issue of

colorism augmented by television commercials of men's fairness products in India. A combination of multimodal analysis, critical discourse analysis and advertisement analysis is done to analyze the impact of fairness advertisements. The study found that television commercials reinforced the colorism in Indian society. Nagar et al(2017) analyzed the impact of skin color in the context of marriage. Subjects for the study were mothers of individuals of marriageable age group. They were presented with photos of fair and dark skin tone profiles. Participants were asked to rate the profiles. Fair skinned profiles received higher ratings compared to dark skinned profiles. The study found that color of skin has the potential to overpower other traits like general competency and physical attractiveness in both men and women. Nagar et al(2018) studied the impact of exposure to fair and attractive images in Indian media among woman. The purpose of the study is to examine if media's idealization of fair skin color has psychological consequences for young adult women. The study found out the exposure to fair and attractive images has fueled negative emotions among women. Glenn et al(2008) examines the yearning for lightness and skin lightening practices in various societies and communities. The work also analyzes how the desire of lighter skin is fueled by advertisements in print, internet and television.

In an attempt to understand the subject matter more precisely, we studied the work of Huang et al(2020) who examined the effect of skin care habits on development of rosacea in Chinese population. Here the Questionnaire was designed that had demographic characteristics, socioeconomic data and daily skin care habits included in it. Questionnaire responses were analyzed using chi-square test and t-test. The study also proposed a multivariate linear regression analysis to predict rosacea. The literature provided by Rauff et al(2019) explored the women's perception regarding fairness creams advertising practices and their harmful results. His work was a collection of results through semi-structure interviews, which acted as a source of primary data for the research. The study found that skin fairness cream advertisements were one of the major factor disempowering women as beauty standards portrayed in advertisements were unrealistic and unachievable by women. The study also found that advertisements strengthen

negativity in society and hurts their self respect. Connecting the dots in the Indian subcontinent we studied Pathak et al(2015) who elaborates the undesirable and unethical practices followed in fairness cream advertisements in context of Indian television. Laws and codes already in place to vigil the fairness cream advertisement are detailed with gaps and recommendation to prevent the ill effects of these advertisements in the society. Another dimension we looked into was the impact of Workplace colourism and we studied Sims et al(2015) who analyzed the impact of colourism in workplace and address the inequalities created in workplace due to colourism. The study emphasized the need for educating the HR professionals about the implications of colourism, particularly in countries where woman empowerment against cultural beliefs is still a challenge. To check the response to a certain type of advertisements propagating fairness, Sylvia(2014) used an unobtrusive method of content analysis to analyze how fairness advertisements in Indian media embody hegemonic whiteness. Content analysis was done on ten advertisement commercials. From the analysis, there themes were identified. Advertisements used language to equate whiteness to perfection and beauty. Celebrity endorsement was used to create association between hegemonic whiteness and success. Darkness was portrayed as a problem. Therefore after reading the above mentioned literatures we realized that we wanted to understand the impact of fairness-based products, their advertisements and driving factors to use such products through a quantitative factor analysis that would capture the psychological impact of fairness ads with respect to propagation of colorism, influence of Colourism on customer attitude and to understand the implications of the recent ban by Indian Health Ministry, Government of India on Fairness-Based product advertisements with the factors affecting consumer perceptiveness on the ban.

Procedure

Questionnaire was distributed to the respondents and asked to respond to the questions in front of research assistant. Since the data collection did not involve any vulnerable participants or funding source, the research study did not need any approval from any ethical review board. All the participants were well informed that the purpose of the study. Participants were not given any

compensation for taking part in the study and there are no known risks in survey participation. Anonymity of participants is kept and no identifying information is collected from the participants. The questionnaires were administered in English. For Students category, the survey was done in their collage. For professional category, survey was done in the IT Park. For home maker category, survey was done in nearest apartment complexes.

Result and Discussion

A sum of 400 respondents participated in this research study with women in different age category from Pune, India. The survey was conducted in shopping malls and colleges in Pune. Woman in different age categories were distributed with questionnaire and their responses were collected. The survey provided complete privacy to the subjects and did not collect any identity related information from them. The study was conducted with following population characteristics with responses from women who never used fairness products being excluded. Detailed analysis of their responses and discussion on the same is henceforth.

PROFILE ANALYSIS

Age of samples	16 to 60 years	
Age Distribution of Samples	16 to 25 young	42.25 %
	26 to 40 middle	40.5 %
	41 to 60 old	17.25%
Occupation distribution of samples	Students	27.5 %
	Professional	29.5 %
	Business	25.5 %
	Home maker	17.5 %
Distribution of users of Fairness products	Uses regularly	69.25 %
	Uses sometimes	30.75 %
Skin tone distribution	Dark	49.5 %
	Medium	33.0 %
	Fair	17.5 %
Reason for usage	Fair Complexion	50.75 %
	Scar removal	34.25 %
	To maintain beauty	15 %

Young (16 to 25 YO) and Middle (26 to 40 YO) aged respondents made a total of 82.75% (42.25% and 40% respectively) contribution to the study against 17.25% Old aged respondents.

We found that the number of respondents were in similar proportions for each occupation with Professionals constituting the major part of the segment at 29.5% followed by students at 27.5%, businesswomen at 25.5% and Homemakers constituting a mere 17.5%.

From the total users, 69.25% fell in the group of regular users whereas 30.75% of total users claimed that they used fairness-based products sometimes only. Respondents who did not use such product were excluded from the research as we only wanted to understand the impact of fairness-based products from a user perspective.

49.5% of the respondents believed that they came under the dark skin tone category, while 33% respondents believed that they fell under the medium skin tone and only 17.5% respondents believed that they had a fair skin tone.

The reason for usage was categorised into three categories with the highest number of responses at 50.75% for attainment of fair skin tone while 33 %people used these product for scar removal and the rest 17.5% people used it for maintenance of their skin tone and complexion. This occurred by coincidence. Since there are no existing well-defined scales to analyse consumer perspective, this work defined four scales of corelation between influence of advertisement on colourism, Dark skin tone bring social pressure, familial and social persuasion and opinion on ban. The question falling in these three scales and their mean score of responses on a five-point Likert scale is shown below.

Mean Score for Scales

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.589
Bartlett's Test of Approx. Chi-Square	633.513
Sphericity df	55
Sig.	.000

According to Hadi et al. (2016), the sampling for this investigation is satisfactory or adequate if the estimation of Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) is

Scales	Questions	Mean (1-5)
Influence of advertisement on colourism.	Q6-Q7	2.1
Dark skin tone brings social pressure.	Q8, Q10, Q12	2.1
Familial and social persuasion.	Q9, Q11, Q13	2.2
Opinion on ban	Q14-Q16	1.7

Lower mean scores for influence of advertisement on colourism indicate most people agree there is an increasing polarization towards colourism and higher score indicate that most people don't agree to the increasing polarization towards colourism. Lower mean scores for Dark skin tone brings social pressure indicates most people agree that they feel immense social pressure due to their dark skin tone in their personal and professional life that makes them feel dejected and underconfident and higher scores indicate that most people disagree that their skin tone does not make them feel societal pressure. Lower mean scores for Familial and social persuasion indicate most people agree that they are strongly influenced in their social circles to adopt fairness products and higher scores indicate that most people disagree there are being influenced in their social circles to adopt fairness products. Lower mean scores for Opinion on ban indicate that people have reacted positively to ban and higher score means their consumers don't have positive attitude towards ban.

Data Analysis using Exploratory Factor Method

higher than 0.5. Our study generated a value of 0.589 KMO, which implies that sampling for this analysis is satisfactory.

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity generated significance of .000 that means the null hypothesis is rejected, and there is some correlation between factors and decision.

Both results, that is, the KMO statistic and Bartlett's test of sphericity, indicate an appropriate factor analysis model.

Merenda (1997, p. 158) on accountability of thumb rule has stated that "for the number of 'real' factors and components, the proportion [of variance accounted for] should be at least 0.50." The study generated a sum of the first five variables as 59.940 % (that is 0.59) of the overall variation. Lastly, the item landing cut off was set at 0.505, and all the docks were above 0.4 ensuring no duplication.

Thus, there are four criteria, each with its Eigenvalue surpassing 1 for the consumer

behaviour on usage of fairness-based products. Extraction is appropriately carried out because we could streamline the number of decision-making variables. (i.e., from 11 theories to 4 factors involved).

The level of variation clarified by factor one individually is 17.601 %, and that of 2, 3 and 4 are 17.270 %, 12.666% and 12.403% respectively. As there were multiple factors, traditional section element inquiry with varimax rotation and Kaiser standardization was incorporated in this case. The factor analysis includes four components that were identified to social pressure, persuasion, Influence of advertisement on colourism, Opinion on ban and the regular identity of the interpretations has established the elements.

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings	
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.065	18.772	18.772	2.065	18.772	18.772	1.936	17.601	17.601
2	1.869	16.988	35.760	1.869	16.988	35.760	1.900	17.270	34.871
3	1.404	12.762	48.523	1.404	12.762	48.523	1.393	12.666	47.537
4	1.256	11.418	59.940	1.256	11.418	59.940	1.364	12.403	59.940
5	.942	8.561	68.501						
6	.761	6.921	75.423						
7	.724	6.580	82.003						
8	.612	5.565	87.568						
9	.529	4.805	92.373						
10	.436	3.964	96.337						
11	.403	3.663	100.000						

Factors Extraction Matrix (Rotated Component Matrix)

Rotated Component Matrix	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Influence of advertisement on fairness propagation			.808	
Colourism is propagated by advertisements			.841	

Dark skin tone made you feel inferior / less privileged / disgrace	.753			
Fairness ads give fear of rejection personal and professional life				.700
Feel underrated in professional and social gathering	.839			
Persuade your friends and family members to use fairness cream.				-.530
Social pressure is forcing you to use fairness products	.786			
Friends and family members persuade you to use Fairness cream.				.735
Fairness advertisement need to be banned		.797		
fairness advertisement ban would limit its use		.815		
fairness advertisement ban will reduce obsession with fairness		.751		

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.^a

a. Rotation converged in 4 iterations.

We have four factors for our study evidently from the Exploratory Factor Analysis. The four factors the influence the decision of women to use fairness products, the impact of advertisements on their usage and their opinions on the ban of such advertisements:

1. Dark skin tone brings social pressure: The first extracted factor is the psychological and behavioural impact of having a Dark skin tone, creating social pressure to become fair using fairness products. This factor includes the emotional and psychological impact of having dark skin tone resulting in feeling inferior, less privileged or even a disgrace, feeling underrated in professional and social gatherings and thus using fairness creams due to such social and psychological pressure. It contributes to a variance of 17.601 %. In our study, we found that a mixture of components of emotional, social and psychological as part of the factor played a pivotal role in deciding factor of using fairness-based products.
2. Opinion on ban: In the light of the recent stringent ban on advertisements of Fairness based

products this factor was crucial with attributes that aimed at understanding consumer point of view towards this decision, its impact on limited usage of such products and reduction of colourism. This exploration recognized the opinion on the ban as the second most significant factor for respondents involved in the study and it contributes to the study with a variance of 17.270 %.

3. Influence of advertisement on colourism: Attributes related to public belief that advertisements run by Fairness product brands propagate the belief that fair skin will fetch success in personal and professional life. The attributes considered in this factor are; related to the impact of advisements on the importance of fairness in one's life and their impact on propagation of colourism in the society. This factor has emerged as the third most crucial factor of this investigation with a variance of 12.666 % The research suggests that Advertisements of fairness-based products affect the perception of consumers towards dark skin tone and propels one to believe that fairness products will help them attain the level of fairness they desire to lead a better

life filled with opportunities and social acceptance.

4. Familial and social persuasion: An essential determinant of this study was the understanding the external influences that propel respondents to look for fairness products. This factor with a variance of 12.403%, involves attributes such as Fairness ads give fear of rejection personal and professional life and if their Friends and family members persuade them to use Fairness cream or Vice Versa. This factor is an essential indication that the respondents who are largely persuaded by their near and dear one's to use fairness-based products feel that fairness ads instil in them a fear of rejection in personal and professional life whereas such respondents have a negative correlation when it comes to persuading others to use such products.

Conclusion

From the above user profile and factor analysis, we can clearly see an obsession over fairness in the society and people quest for fairness products could not be completely stopped because of ban. Even though ban can make selection of fairness products difficult, it will not completely prevent people grace for fairness products. But ban will definitely help reducing the disgrace caused on low complexion people and also reduce the social persuasion. Ban alone is not sufficient to correct the imbalances and social divide created due to fairness superiority in India, as even before fairness products, there was a widespread obsession with fair skin in India. Right education must be followed up along with this ban. Social movements like "Stay Unfair, Stay Beautiful", "Dark is also beautiful" is in right direction.

Compared to existing works, this work is very comprehensive one and achieves significance as it is done at time ban is proposed on advertisement ban in India.

In conclusion, this study analysed the perceptions about fairness advertisements on colourism and social persuasion. It also analysed the consumer opinion over fairness advertisement ban. India is

one of biggest global market for fairness products. Advertisement and Social persuasion are the two most important factors influencing women to use these products. Over the years advertisers have exploited the obsession for fair skin in India and they have strongly reinforced fair skin superiority. The consumers are often misled and misinformed about usage of these products. As a result, many consumers use it repeatedly without any idea on their harmful effects due to repeated use. Also, the advertisements have created a wide social divide, the effect of which could be aggravate in coming years. Ban on fairness advertisement is a right step, but this alone is not sufficient as the quest for fair skin is still prevalent and this is being the single most important reason for grace on fairness products as revealed in this study. This work, recommends social education through various movements is needed on long term to eradicate the obsession for fair skin among Indians. Without it, the ban would be only a temporary arrangement as with wide variety of communication channels, colourism can still be spread.

Amit et al made a systematic study on voter preferences for candidate skin colour in India. The respondents were randomly administered one of three treatments based upon candidate skin tone: fair, wheatish (medium-brown), and dark. The study found that the fair candidate is supported more than the dark and wheatish candidates, but at only marginal significance levels.

Parameswaran et al analysed the cultural politics of gender, nation, beauty and skin colour in the persuasive narratives of Indian magazine advertisements and television commercials for fairness cosmetics and personal care products. The study finds that the advertising's compact stories of ideal femininity within the sociology of colourism's transnational links to hierarchies of race, gender, caste, ethnicity and class and the rapid economic growth in the skin-lightening cosmetics sector in India over the past decade.

Krishen et al made a study on the problem of skin tone tension among the diverse Asian samples in united states. The study compared the Caucasian to Asian reactions to a model's skin tone in the print advertisements.

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