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Reform towards Acceptance in the Social Fabric and use of Transgender Protagonist in Communication: A Correlation Study of Effectiveness on Youth Perception

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Abstract: The LGBT community in India has always been looked upon with tremendous apprehension. There seems to be a lack of right information and therefore several cultural and social implications to the issue gathering controversies and hence finds little application in consumer behavior and marketing communication studies. With the evolution of digital and social media the awareness about transgender as a third gender has suddenly assumed significance. This is evident from the fact that in the last couple of years, marketers have been forth right and shown an inclination towards embracing the third gender as a prominent TG in their communication. Existing studies on this community especially in the Indian Perspective emphasizes on the perceptual aspects, health related issues, discrimination and psychological perspectives and general attitude towards them, there are limited studies about their role in Brand communication and resultant consumer decision making. This study aims to investigate the perception of Indian youth while using the third gender as the main protagonist for communicating a brand.

Key words: transgender, communication, youth, perception

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

While Segmentation and gender influences have always been a very prominent area of study in the Marketing domain, social acceptance and the freedom to express themselves openly has eluded and been a long-drawn struggle for the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community in the country. Commonly referred to as the Third gender, the transgender community more specifically has been used more as a caricature and a filler in advertisements and films to provide that much needed entertainment quotient rather than play an important role as a prominent protagonist. A Transgender as mentioned in the protection of rights, Bill 2016 is a person with intersex variations and gender-queers.

In India a transgender has always been looked upon as a community born to bestow blessings at signals or clap in railway compartments for a living.

However, in recent times the Government has woken up and become more vocal to the cause of this community, with definite initiatives. One of them with the active involvement of the ministry of social justice and empowerment is the launch of an umbrella scheme to facilitate better education to transgender kids and also provide a financial assistance to those Trans genders without employment. This initiative expected to be launched in the next financial year. Yet another initiative in this direction by the IRCTC is the inclusion of transgender as a third gender in the options along with male and female for reservation and cancelation of tickets in the form.

The Odisha government has been among the first State bodies to have provided social benefits like pension, housing and food to the community. The Tamil Nadu Government has also taken a step by absorbing the community members in the home guard force.

According to a report in the Hindustan Times (**Chaudhuri, 2017**), the transgender community has received lot of attention in the state of Bengal as well. While in 2015 the state government had established a transgender development board. A very definitive step was taken by appointing Manabí Bandyopadhyay as the maiden Principal of India's first transgender college principal. 29-year-old Joyita Mondal Mahi, was nominated as the state's first transgender judge of a Lok Adalat. With a view to bring the city's transgender population into the mainstream and support the Central government's efforts, Kolkata Municipal Corporation roped, representatives from this community as judges to select the best pujas in town.

In order to give members of the transgender community their rightful stake in the society, the Government of Kerala Owned Kochi Metro Rail Ltd, employed 23 transgenders in the workforce on different profiles (**Paul, 2017**)

Other states are also waking up to the cause and committing initiatives for Trans genders. This has given a new dimension to the study of segmentation in the Marketing domain which is currently untapped and under researched.

Organizations like P&G and Hindustan Unilever Limited have considered the social need to include transgenders in their media campaign to create an awareness. These brands believe in making this world a more welcoming place by diffusing socially awkward situations. The mini-movie advertisements aim to create a social impact by providing a base for creating an equal world for all. These advertisements advocate for gender equality and also try to associate their products with the social cause.

The underlying message of these commercials have been, in a contemporary society that it is essential to be inclusive of everyone and accept the universality of care with love and empathy. The following research throws some light on the impact of such a brand communication style on today's youth. How have they perceived this idea of inclusion of a transgender in communicating a brand?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the current scenario, Government initiatives and growth of social media has brought in a tremendous awareness about the LGBT Community. There are many efforts being made to bring transgender in particular into the mainstream and give them recognition as a third gender.

Transgender as a community have played a pivotal role in ancient Indian culture. Important positions were held by them in Mughal courtyards, epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata also have a mention. But, they were still looked up to as social offenders and deprived of their rights. It was only after the landmark Supreme Court decision of 2014 that Transgenders in India were recognized for equal rights and opportunities in the society (**Agoramoorthy & Hsu, 2014**).

The Transgender person's protection right bill is likely to impact approximately 4.8 lakh transgender population in India. The bill has allowed a transgender to identify himself as a man, a woman or a transgender. The essence of this bill is that gender by birth may no longer be the gender one would want to associate with or belong to. It specifically aims at providing healthcare along with education prospects for the community. Precisely the bill re-affirms our moral onus towards defending discrimination in the society (**Nair, 2016**).

A recent study by (**Witeck, 2014**) covering cultural changes in LGBT community observes that there has been a remarkable shift in the attitude towards gay, lesbians, bisexual and trans genders, many nations around the world appear to be embracing more inclusive view of family life. The study also points towards a substantial change in the rights given to the LGBT community and the approach towards them in the form of a positive treatment.

Studies conducted earlier on media and the role of LGBT community (**Doty, 1993; Jenkins, 2004; Weiss 1993**) debate that LGBT addressees have an intrinsic desire to self-identify and hunt for people "like themselves" (Despite when images and text are depicted in a heterosexual perspective).

Studies reveal that that gay consumers displayed an inclination for advertisements presenting homosexual male couples in contrast to conventional heterosexual couples (**Bhat Leigh and Waldrow, 1996**).

Findings of one of the studies conducted by **Gagné, Tewksbury & McGaughey (1997)** on identity formation and proclamation reveal gender as an integral constituent of the social infrastructure which at an individual level is proficient in striking an interaction with others, the study establishes how gender interactional challenges are deficient to challenge the system of gender.

With an objective to explore how the identity categories of sexuality, gender, race, and class are enacted in advertising and what sociocultural and marketing ideologies shape these representations.

With an unparalleled prominence gained due to the growing gay and lesbian political movement in the United States around 1990's, the gay and lesbian segment arose as an influential and potential niche market (**Chasin2000**).

Though a purposeful marketing to homosexual was considered to be virtually illegitimate prior to 1958, Yet in US companies have been advertising to homosexuals for over a century whether or not they consciously intended to do so (**Branchik 2002**).

Tsai (2010) tries to investigate subgroups that are featured most frequently while textually examining the mutual plots, iconography, and appeals used to signify portrayal of LGBT characters in advertising.

Hester and Gibson (2007) discovered that consumers with a higher acceptance towards the community are likely to have more positive attitudes towards brands that used ads portraying Homosexuals

or a homosexual lifestyle. Marketing, being a route for transformation, has the potential to usher in social acceptance as it has the appropriate tools for prompting progressed attitudes in society (**Kaur, 2016**).

Kille (2015) credits the changed scenario of how we advertise, buy and sell commodities to the rising application of technology while making purchases of both products and services. This according to the author has led to a rise in unconventional sexual content advertised on the Internet and its implications on the transgender community.

Whitaker (1999) reasons that targeted gay marketing is a contemporary occurrence and emphasizes that it could only be possible once the LGBT community emerged out of their closet and their inhibitions with regards their lifestyles and cultures manifest.

The study highlights the assumptions that marketers generally hold about gay and lesbian consumers and the negative stereotypes that need to be thwarted and the positive ones to be considered. The research also effectively addresses the role definition of marketers beyond mere business, as specialists, mentors, and reformists

There are some research findings that indicate towards consumers who attached a greater degree of acceptance towards gays tend to display a much positive attitude towards Ads of Brands which used homosexuals or a certain homosexual routine (**Hester and Gibson 2007**).

There are studies which find that when products are considered to be marketed specially towards them gay consumers demonstrated higher levels of attentiveness with a greater inclination towards purchase (**Smith and Malone, 2003; Um 2014**). Apart from a specific targeting, those brands with a higher degree of engagement quotient is something that is highly appreciated by the community (**Dotson, Hyatt and Thompson, 2009**).

There is still quite a bit of hesitation, if not outright trepidation, on the part of many marketers when it comes to targeting the LGBT community using mainstream media (Oaken full & Greenlee 2008)

Though there are some references about the role of Gays and lesbians in marketing and mainstream media yet literature does not have significant references of the transgender community and its role in the overall marketing strategy. Literature also has limited references with respect to the perception leading to effectiveness and hence the overall social viewpoint of commercials and advertisements featuring transgender in particular. This research aims to address the same.

THEORETICAL RELEVANCE

Effectiveness of any advertisement is more a result of the perception of the target audience towards it than the actual reality. Enough research is available on the aspect of gender influences on perception and attitude towards a brand and its communication, but with the emerging third gender a new dimension can be added to the study of segmentation and marketing management in particular.

THE TRANSGENDER MARKET IN INDIA

An official estimate the third gender in the country as per the last census conducted in 2014 census is over 4.9 lakh. Activists in the transgender community estimate the numbers as 6-7 times higher than the published figures.

This points towards an untapped potential in the segment. There are several studies which focus on the influence of Gender and strategies thereof, however it is very recently due to increased government intervention in the form of some concrete policy implementation that Transgender is gradually evolving in the form of a Third Gender giving way to studies not just in segmentation but also other interesting areas in branding and communication.

As per an estimate by Commercial Closet Association (2010) around 35% of organizations had targeted LGBT community through Commercials in developed countries like US and UK by year 2004. However, it is still in the infancy in our country.

The inclusive initiatives of corporates and brands have added a fresh lease of life to marketing studies. Apart from Organizations like IBM India starting a 'first-of-its-kind' consortium of more than 30 companies to discuss LGBT inclusion and transgender empowerment or even Mc Kinsey and Bain and company making way for recruitment and retention strategies. Godrej and other conglomerates are supporting the community by sponsoring special events like Festivals designed for them. Big brands have started looking beyond males and females and are now seen effectively leveraging the third gender as an important protagonist in their Brand positioning and communication. **(Bhushan and Verma 2017).**

CAMPAIGNS COVERING TRANSGENDER PROTAGONIST IN INDIA

Lack of awareness about the community had given rise to a peeved attitude among consumers resulting in a sense of discomfort upon encountering a transgender in different context. Till recent times, transgender have been used in Indian Commercials but only to the extent of providing a humor element. There was no serious and responsible discussion about the community or representation of them as a significant part of segment. It is this aspect that led to the research and understanding of these identities that were treated as aliens until now.

Brand Vicks Vaporub's Commercial with transgender protagonist Gauri Sawant or Red Labels Six Pack band (2016) featuring Sonu Nigam and other celebrities is certainly a substantial step in this direction.

While Brand Vicks through its "Touch of Care" positioning revolves around the transgender rights and the emotions of motherhood portrayed in a complete new light. The campaign effectively brings out a social message "motherhood has no gender" giving a strong recall for the brand as well.

Addressing culture shift and gender inequality Unilever's campaign "Brooke Bonds Red Label 6 pack Band aspires to break stereotypes by highlighting a maiden band of

Transgenders with aggressive social media promotions.

However what needs to be seen is whether the consumers are getting affected by commercials with a transgender protagonist. How do they look at such Brands? Is there a comfort level while watching ads with a third gender protagonist?

RESEARCH PURPOSE

This study aims at addressing the above questions by quantitatively validating the effectiveness of commercials with a Transgender protagonist especially among the young generation. The objective is to define the

influence of a third gender on the perception of the youth and what will be the subsequent effect of the same.

METHODOLOGY

Drawing from the objectives of the research, the methodology chosen is quantitative in nature. The research employs multiple linear regression modeling for testing predictive relationship. A closed ended questionnaire based on Likert scale is used. Online questionnaire was developed and pilot tested. Data is collected online through a questionnaire prepared on website of Question Pro. The final questionnaire with appropriate scale is developed and administered to 150 respondents, but after filtering a total of 147 valid responses are analyzed. Data analysis is conducted using statistical software SPSS to study out the impact of the advertisements on the social stigma on transgender person.

Data analysis, Interpretations and Findings. Through the survey data is gathered from a total of 151 responses, out of which 147 were valid responses. 101 respondents were male while 46 respondents were female. The age of respondents varied between 20 years and 40 years. Multiple linear regression modeling is used for testing predictive relationship. The model is based on one dependent and two independent variables.

The proposed alternate hypothesis for the study is;

H₁: There is a predictive relationship of effectiveness of the advertisement and Viewpoint towards transgender in social life with action taken after viewing advertisement

Dependent variable for the study is ‘Action taken after viewing advertisement’, while independent variables are ‘effectiveness of an advertisement depicting a transgender’ and ‘view towards transgender in social life’.

**Table 1
Regression Model Summary**

<i>Model</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>Adjusted R Square</i>	<i>Std. Error of the Estimate</i>
1	.579a	.336	.326	.49163

From the Table 1, the value of R square is 33.6%. Thus, it can be inferred that 33.6% of the action taken by an individual after watching an advertisement depicting transgender can be related to effectiveness of the advertisement depicting the transgender and view towards transgender in social life. The 33.6% value of R square indicates that the model does not explain all the variability but acceptable level of variability is found.

**Table 2
Model Significance: ANOVA**

<i>Model</i>		<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
1	Regression	17.468	2	8.734	36.136	.000b
	Residual	34.564	143	.242		
	Total	52.032	145			

From Table 2, F significance value of 0.00 is less than 0.05; and rejects the null hypothesis H_0 . Therefore, going by alternate hypothesis, indicating predictive nature of relationship between the action taken by an individual after watching an advertisement and effectiveness of the advertisement and view towards transgender in social life. From Table 2, hypothesis H_1 is accepted which implies model is good.

From table 3, regression model can be suggested as,

Action taken after viewing advertisement	
=	1.088
+	(0.270) Effectiveness of the advertisement
+	(0.285) Viewpoint towards transgender in social life.

From the Table 3, we can infer that both the variables Effectiveness of the advertisement & Viewpoint towards transgender in social life are significant hence kept in the model. Variables are checked for multicollinearity, VIF values implies no multicollinearity.

Figure 1 depicts a residual plot. The dependent variable is the action taken after watching the advertisement. The residual plot is almost near to a normal distribution curve. The residual analysis shows that there is near normal distribution of data, indicating a good data.

Table 3
Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Collinearity Statistics		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	1.088	.261		4.166	.000		
Effectiveness Gross	.270	.063	.320	4.291	.000	.835	1.197
Viewpoint	.285	.057	.370	4.966	.000	.835	1.197

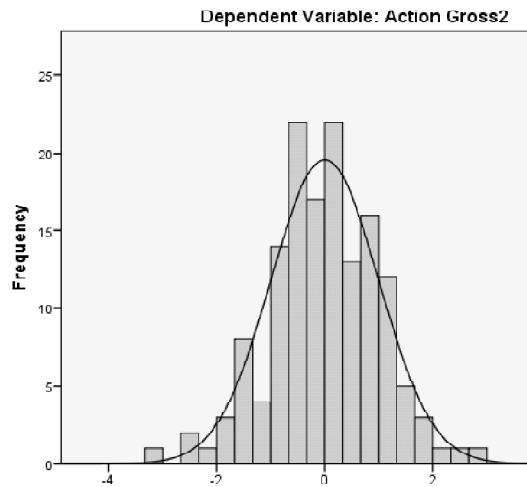


Figure 1: Regression Standardized Residual

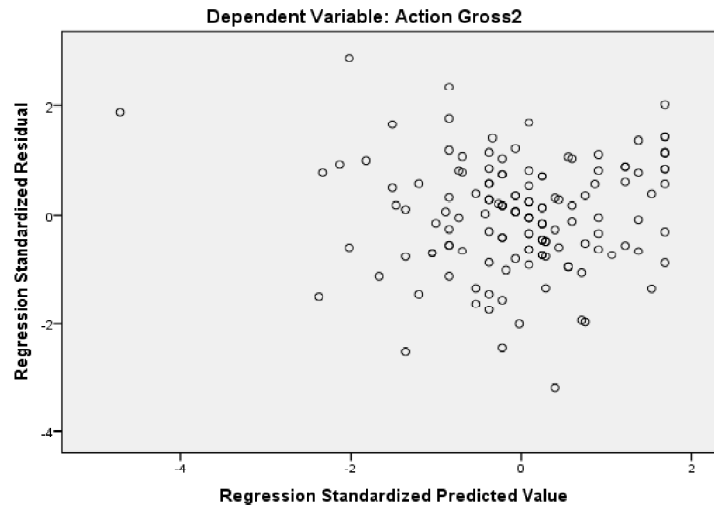


Figure 2: Residual Scatterplot

Further residual analysis (Figure 2) indicates that there is no specific pattern in the data which indicates that the data is good.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The traditional methods of segmentation divide the market into broadly two genders -male and female. Most of the strategies are centered around these genders. But the emergence of transgender as a third gender in the current scenario is much beyond corporate social initiatives.

The transgender community is gradually becoming a significant part of the mainstream segment and communication strategies are being designed around it. The research also proves that using a transgender as a protagonist can add to the overall brand worth and apart from creating a social impact it has created a new potential untapped market which in the long run can deliver economic benefits to the country as well.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Transgender as a community has always been a part of the corporate social responsibility. However, it is only recently due to the numerous positive initiatives taken by the government and the launching of some campaigns that the community has become more visible and more vocal about their gender and sexuality. Various corporate organizations by promoting equal rights for all and patronizing transgender through their corporate social responsibility have helped to create a sense of awareness about this community. The path breaking decision of the Supreme court of declaring transgender as third gender and granting them equal rights has further strengthened the cause. More Brands are expected to create their communication campaign with transgender protagonists and target themselves specifically at this community.

LIMITATIONS & SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:

The sample size and the demographic profile was limited to upper middle-income students in a particular age group and vicinity, for further research we can consider a wider Demography and then do a correlation between different age groups for sharper outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed at understanding the relationship between the effectiveness of Ads depicting a transgender protagonist and view towards its social implications on the action taken after viewing such ads and the research shows a predictive relationship. The results show an enhanced visibility for the community and also a recall for the product being advertised. With sustained efforts the action can be more direct. Transgender in today's scenario is a huge untapped market. Marketers can leverage transgender protagonists in communication and target a wide variety of products.

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