

Changing Roles of Women and the Implications on Retail Strategies

Abstract

No longer is “customer a king”. It is time to realize that “Customer is a Queen”. Today’s women consumers are independent, influencing, empowered and have purchasing power. She takes her own decisions not only in house hold areas, but also in non-traditional avenues like real estate, investments, technological products and automobiles. Most of the women in India are educated and transformed as a working force from mere housewives. It has changed her lifestyle and shopping behavior to a great extent. The long working hours, the double income in the family has resulted in the need for new products and services. Retailers have come out with various strategies on the 4 Ps of marketing to tap this new opportunity.

Dr.K.S.Chandrasekar

Professor and Head
Institute of Management in Kerala
University of Kerala
Trivandrum

K.G.Prasanna Sivagami

Assistant Professor
Hindustan College of
Arts and Science
Coimbatore

Introduction

The Indian consumer market has higher disposable income, modern urban lifestyle and increase in consumer awareness. This has changed the consumer behaviour. Buying power has also expanded to new consumer segments be it youth or Women. Women have undergone a dramatic change with her way of dressing, spending on beauty products and fitness. The working women started spending more on accessories, technologically advanced consumer durables and to the surprise she is now spending on mobile phones and laptops too.

The various studies conducted in the consumer behaviour with special reference to gender have come out with new findings such as women and men shop differently and she enjoys shopping more than men. Women and men have different roles to play and they would make different decisions such as women do shopping and men are taking decisions related to monetary issues. A woman in India spends most of her shopping time buying grocery items for her home, because she does spend a lot of time making sure her family gets a good meal. Women’s role as caregiver persists even as women’s professional responsibilities mount. This responsibility contributes to women’s more acute shopping awareness and higher expectations.



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Across different life cycle stages women have different needs and their shopping behavior is also subject to change. The influence of different media and the respect and support from male counterparts of the family converted her as a consumer who has more knowledge about products, brands and she is tough to satisfy. Women are naturally giving more importance to the feelings and values and they are mostly taking decisions by listening to their heart. Women think of shopping as an inter-personal, human fashion and men treat it as more instrumental. Women clearly dedicate a lot of time to make sure they find the best deals and the most suitable items for their needs. Women spend more than eight years of their lives shopping, says a study. Studies have shown that women whether working or at home played the role of silent influencer towards the decisions regarding the purchases for the family. Marketers cannot ignore the newly gained purchasing power which made her a new and attractive consumer segment.

Literature Review

Rosemary Polegato , Judith I. Zaichkowsky (1999) conducted a study to develop comprehensive food shopping profiles of career-oriented, income-oriented, and at-home wives. Discriminant analysis revealed distinct profiles for the career-oriented and at-home wives. However, income-oriented wives were similar to career-oriented wives regarding some demographic characteristics, shopping patterns, and some shopping strategies, and similar to at-home wives for other shopping strategies. Income-oriented wives were more likely to have husbands who shared the food shopping role.

Bakewell & Mitchell (2003) found that young female consumers have been influenced by several environmental factors that separate them from older shoppers. Young females have been conditioned into consuming earlier than previous generations and have been socialized into shopping as a form of leisure. They have been developed in an environment that provides more reasons and opportunities to shop as well as additional consumption opportunities such as television, the internet, and traditional catalog based shopping. Furthermore, young females are more apt to have become accustomed to media that depict affluent and opulent lifestyles.

Barletta (2003) discussed that marketing to women delivers a better return on the marketing through both higher customer acquisition and greater customer retention. Because women are more inclined to long term brand relationships, enhanced loyalty means every marketing investment is for acquiring female customers' results in a higher retention rate.

Gary Mortimer & Peter Clarke (2006) found that 'females' appear more objective in their approach to important grocery store characteristics. Females tend towards price, discounts, value for money, consistent and competitive prices as well as low, everyday prices. Apart from the money management aspects, females tend toward the nurture and caring aspect because hygienic, high quality food handling processes and store cleanliness are equally important characteristics. Ch. J. S. Prasad and D. Raghunatha Reddy (2007) identified that the working women create a huge demand for timesaving products and services. The Intrinsic factors such as needs, motives, perceptions, attitudes, interests, opinions, activities and lifestyles had mostly influenced the consumer behaviour in a rapid changing retail environment. Personal and social motives were the most influential in increasing consumerism and creating necessity for modern retail formats that cater to meet the needs and preferences of consumers. Organized retailers should exercise caution in serving the utmost needs, wants and preferences of potential and existing consumers in order to acquire and retain.

Women in Different Life Cycle Stages

It has been explored that women as a consumer segment, are less homogeneous. Each woman is unique and more conflicted as a consumer group compared to the Indian men. Different life cycle stages of women are identified such as pre teen, teenage girls, working women, to be married, Newly married, moms to be, women with new born, moms with toddlers, moms after 30 with teenagers, elderly women and also single women,, divorced, widows etc. If these stages are observed closely, we can understand her needs, wants and demands across each stage. Her time available for purchase, priorities and the shopping companions are also changing according to the stage where she is in.

For example a 'pre teen' who was depending on family members and influence by them becomes choosy and take emotional decisions and shows more interest in fashion trends when she reaches the 'teenage'. In the 'working women' stage she enjoys the economic freedom and invests her money wisely and she becomes more informative and a knowledgeable consumer spends less time in shopping but indulges in surfing the internet regarding product information. She spends on technological products like cell phones, laptops and automobiles. In the next stage of 'to be married', she is ready to open her purse widely to spend on apparels, jewelry, house hold appliances and beauty products and services.

A 'newly married' spends on weekly outings, tours, designer apparels and spends lot of time in shopping during honeymoon and after honeymoon. She purchases furniture and household appliances and spends a lot in interiors of the house. She bubbles with energy, time and in this life cycle stage she is the best shopper ever and make sure to spend all disposable income yet wisely. Unlike before the life cycle stage as 'Mom to be' women wants more comfortable apparels specially designed for pregnant women. She needs prenatal care center services, yoga for normal delivery, purchases for the baby and the list is more. At this stage, she couldn't spend more time on shopping but make sure her needs are fulfilled.

'Women with newborns' shop heavily for her baby and concentrate on post natal care and fitness. She expects services like baby sitting rooms, comfortable trolleys to carry her baby while she wants to go for shopping. 'Moms with toddlers' are taking decisions for them also and sometimes it is other way round such as kids influence her purchasing list. They are very much health conscious and don't compromise on quality. 'Moms above 30' are the ones start enjoying their freedom again and invest heavily on beauty product and services, spends on anti wrinkle creams, weight reducing potion, new makeovers or even complete change of their wardrobe. She takes important decisions such as insurance, investments for child education and also plans for her retirement. Mostly she takes rational decision and analyses and discuss heavily about the features and availability of the products. 'Women at her elder age' have different needs and wants and the other stages like single women, widow or divorcee has unique requirement for products and services.

Life style trends and their implications for marketers

Table 1 : Life style trends and implications

Lifestyle Trend	Implication for marketers
Women becoming assertive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women oriented durables • Advertising appeals to satisfy the ego of women • Providing children play area and baby sitting rooms to make the mums have comfortable shopping. • Neat and attractive ambience and clutter free display of merchandise • Providing more varieties and ensure offers and discounts are given as promised.
Time pressure on women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time saving durables like high tech kitchen products like micro wave ovens, induction stove, veg-cutters, dish washers etc. • Food products like ready to cook food, cut vegetables, easy to cook masalas, peeled onions etc. • Providing essential food products round the clock, comfortable billing system and best customer service in retail outlets • Parking areas and easy to reach location of the retailer
Working couple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick-fix meals, takeaways to cater the need of eating out and weekend kitchen holiday of women at home • Weekend offers, sales and Expos to attract the weekend purchasers. • Crèches/day care centers • Holiday packages, tourist services • Specialty services and customized products and services.
Looks oriented career females	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hair dryers, cosmetics like age reduction ant-wrinkle creams, lipsticks which are nonstick, waterproof eyeliners, all in one face creams, range of hair colors and perfumes and deo's. • Fitness centers, beauty saloons, spas • Designer apparels and jewellery. • Fitness products, health drinks • Branded western apparels and • Lightweight jewelry. • Bags, footwear and goggles. • Retailers provide more trial rooms in apparel showrooms. • Providing accessories in apparel showrooms to purchase matching accessories.

New Needs on her New Changes

New products are designed and services are rendered keeping in mind the changing needs of women. Women started spending more on ready to eat, ready to cook products. They have invested in high-tech kitchen products and consumer durables. She is spending more on lifestyle products and becomes more fashion conscious. More than before women are showing interest in beauty and fitness products and services like fitness centers, Spas, beauty saloons etc. certainly there is a change in her purchasing behaviour with reference to apparel, jewelry and accessories purchase.

While there is little data on the amount of money women spend on themselves, estimates based on secondary data by GSK Consumer Healthcare suggest that women belonging to SEC A and B (the top socio-economic classes) in the top 23 cities in India spend approximately Rs800 crore each year on “looking and feeling good.” This would essentially include spending on cosmetics, apparel, health food and the like. Women now purchase more western wears and frequency of purchase has also increased. She shows interest in designer apparel and jewelry. Especially in jewelry women like light weighted jewelry which she would like to wear for work and also new one every day. Women want to go for more fashion jewelry after the huge rise in the price of gold. She wants more varieties to match her entire wardrobe. She spends more on accessories like bags, foot-wears, bags, goggles etc.

New Roles and the New Rules

Women have taken more avatars as good mom, wife, and employee. She takes decisions on her own and takes decisions for her kids also. She influences the decision of male counter part in decisions related to investments in insurance, real estate, shares and automobiles. As an earning member of the family she enjoys the power to take decisions on these areas. Women are attracted and persuaded by appeals in advertisements which satisfy their ego and prefer products and services which ensure her independent intellectual image. Women have become so assertive that if any promises like a discount or offer like free gifts are not available she may even change her retailer to get that offers and discounts.

Being a tech-savvy woman she surfs in the internet and collects product information and compares brands and also expresses her views to her friends and relatives. She is not the so called house wife simply accepting the choice of male counterpart but she is in her own and visits retail outlets analyses and takes decisions. Especially women go for test drives of vehicles and try different models of cell phones and other technological products. More women use two wheelers to commute to their work place. This has created a huge demand for two wheelers. Being on wheels facilitates frequent shopping visits rather than waiting for the hubby to take her for shopping.

She is Fast and Furious

The long working hours and busy schedules has reduced her time spent on shopping now she wants to finish of her purchase of daily needs like vegetable, milk and other groceries without any delay and search for the products. She desires fast billing counters comfortable display of merchandise and availability of products round the clock. She is not ready to compromise on quality, price or good service. She prefers a retail outlet which is conveniently located with ample parking area.

Women with kids expect playing area and baby sitting rooms in malls and shopping outlets. As a customer she expects more and it is tough to satisfy her as always. She updates on trends and expects entire new range of merchandise every time she visits. Women love personal recognition and direct mails and messages regarding offers and arrival of new merchandise. She

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loves the special attention and enjoys the help of the counter sales executive. She admires neat and clean store ambience. As a dutiful mother she goes in to details regarding products and service related to children. From eatables, health drinks, toys, books, special classes, daycares to foot wears she ensures comfort, quality and value for money.

Implications for Marketers on the 4 Ps of Marketing

Given the huge opportunity that is coupled with challenges of tapping the women shoppers in India, marketers should identify innovative strategies in order to reap solid benefits from this segment. The following table puts forward the recommendations of the authors with few examples from the Indian context:

Products and Services to Woo Women Consumers

Marketers have realized that it is high time that they should provide products and services which are fitting the needs of women and products and services design should be with features that are appealing to women. Even they have come out with brand names which are feminine. The table of Indian examples show that marketers are on the way to make use of this opportunity .It is expected that they will explore more in the coming days.

Table 2 : Implications for marketers on the Products and services

MARKET OFFER – PRODUCT/SERVICE	
Market Initiatives	Indian Examples
Products that are fitting the needs of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From a family health-drink platform, Horlicks introduced mother's Horlicks and women's Horlicks exclusively for her. • Sula Vineyards recently launched Dia—a sweet, low-alcohol content wine specially for women. • UB Group launched Pinky Vodka. • Meow 104.8 FM, a radio station for women which was launched in Delhi in 2007. • HDFC woman's Gold credit card made specially for women.
Product features that are exclusively for women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magazine, Newspaper Supplements for women. Exclusive TV/Radio shows for women.
Product designs that are appealing to women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile phones with option to change the outer panel color (Samsung Corby) • laptops with attractive designs, colors and graphics(SONY-VAIO) with option to change the outer panel matching to the mood or dress) • Even TATA introduced 'Nano for her' with a feminine touch and feel right from color, upholstery, features etc.,
Product/brand names that are attracting women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail store Brands like Divya, 'Raga' range of watches from Titan have names that are feminine.

Price to Persuade Women Consumers

Women in India are still value conscious and compares price and love to go for a good deal. She boasts on her right decisions taken and value received comparatively lower than her friends and relatives. Marketers can persuade her to purchase the products through pricing strategies like value pricing, price bundling, and Odd pricing.

Table-3 Implications for marketers on the Price

MARKET VALUE - PRICE	
Market Initiatives	Indian Examples
Price bundling	pricing strategy to give various products in a bundle at a special price.- DOVE,PONDS, Johnson & Johnson
Value pricing	To satisfy the expectation of women to get value for the money – BIGBAZAAR(lower price challenge)
Odd pricing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pricing the products in odd numbers comparatively lower than the competitors-Rs.22 pricing of WHISPER CHOICE regular and Rs.26 for WHISPER CHOICE Wings.

Promotions to please Women Consumers

Women loves pampering and special attention, She always listens if her talents are recognized and treated as a intelligent person. Women get impressed by the advertisement appeals which satisfy her ego such as reaching heights in her career or the image of successful and independent women in the advertisements. Women like Slogans which send the message of freedom and make her feel important. Women are attracted by the various offers and gifts on her purchase. Particularly women are pampered by the marketers on festival occasions and important days such as Women’s Day, Mother’s Day etc. Corporate are organizing campaigns through their foundations to empower women and this definitely boost their image among women consumers. If part of the price paid to the product is going for a good cause they are the first to prefer that product /service.

Table 4 : Implications of marketers on Promotion

MARKET COMMUNICATION – PROMOTION	
Market Initiatives	Indian Examples
Advertisement appeals to satisfy the female ego	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Fair and lovely advt. asking why women are not young after 30.but men are young after 30 • New LIC advt. promoting policies for women presenting women gaining power to decide on their own,decide on their retirement and health expenses with the support of LIC policy. • Jewelry brand Asmi-presenting women as successful, unique and precious. • Stayfree-”this thought should change”(intha ennathai than mathanum)Showing women selecting her groom by spending time with him and selecting a career in armed forces. • Brooke Bond Tazza tea depicting women who take up careers like catering manager, event manager, dance class teacher, fashion designer by rediscovering their talents after being housewife and a mother • ICICI insurance advt. wherein wife asking her husband to sign the forms and convinces him that it is important for their future.
Slogans which favor women individuality and freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Why should boys have all the fun?”-Hero Honda pleasure. • “Because you worth it” –L’oreal products.

Offers and gifts which attracts women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free gift of kitchen utilities and free facial treatment for purchase above certain bill amount-BIGBAZAAR. • Add on cards to spouse provided by all credit cards to make the women enjoy the power of plastic money while they shop.
Celebrating women hood during valentines day, Womens day, Mothers day and akshayathrithyai.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JET AIRWAYS celebrated women's day with special offers as part of "celebrating womanhood" initiative, woman guests offered 5% discount on their fair. unique fund raising drive for NGO working for women issues. • AIRTEL offers free mobile alerts for women's day-tip on beauty, fashion, cooking, housekeeping, fitness and home remedies for 30 days. • MTS telecom offered special tariff vouchers to women with 15 days validity to make free local , STD talk and free SMS
Free services for women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complementary free tickets given to the wife of the frequent travelers of jet airways. • Gangofgirls.com website of HUL for personalized suggestions and beauty queries.
Organizing campaigns to promote girl child education, prevent female infanticide and domestic violence against women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hindustan Unilever under Fair & Lovely foundation give Scholarship to women for higher studies. Various projects are initiated for the empowerment of women. • Crompton Greaves helping rural women to form self help groups and provide free training and sewing machine. Training given to prepare snacks, liquid soap, candle to empower women by taking simple steps.

Place to Pamper Women Consumers

Women make sure they get good experience while they shop. She wants to enjoy the whole process. Being women, she has her own constraints like shopping with toddlers and sometimes with new born. Since she finds it difficult to concentrate on the shopping as well as on her child she prefer a place wherein she enjoys those comforts like baby sitting rooms, play areas and rooms for feeding mothers. She prefers a shop wherein she can just walk and take the product without any search for the product. Marketers can make her purchase easy by proper display of inner wares and personal hygiene products to avoid the embarrassment of asking that to the sales person.

Table 5 : Implications of marketers on Place

Conclusions

This new revolution in the Indian market has created new opportunities and challenges to marketers and provided good services and products to the consumers. Today's customer is not a single man but a family who has successful woman with him. The days of customization is nearing an end and the era of personalization has begun; The age of traditional strategies for women is over and the hi-tech, lifestyle retailing has arrived; The time of passive women shoppers has gone and an active, demanding and experience-oriented women shoppers become common these days.

Under these circumstances, the retailers need to evolve their strategies to modify and make it suitable for the market, retain and manage the 'new Indian shoppers'. Some marketers are

MARKET CONVENIENCE PLACE	
Market Initiatives	Indian Examples
Special arrangements to make the shopping comfortable for women.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baby sitting rooms, rooms for reading and still there is a lot of space to go looking for clothes. Playing web approved for PZLAHU
special preference given for women.	Separate compartments and special reservations for women travel by train.
References	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keeping the cut vegetable, sprouts, milk, vegetable and other daily products that offer convenience on large urban female consumer buying behaviour. <i>Management Development Institute, India © Monash Business Review</i> Providing the display of winter-wear and personal hygiene products to avoid the embarrassment of asking for that with the sales person.

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