

LGBT: AN EMERGING LUCRATIVE MARKET FOR FASHION AND LIFESTYLE

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Abstract- India is a diversified country with so many sub-cultures holding together, however this diversification and differences in values and beliefs to some degree have led to unequal segregation within. The subject of this paper deals with one of such community which has been facing unequal treatment since perpetually especially in India- 'The LGBT'. Though the scenario has positively changed for them in west but not much progress has been seen in India. Thereby the aim of this paper is to draw the attention of the marketers towards this emerging market which due to its high spending power is lucrative too. Businesses have believed to change the world; thereby changing the viewpoint of the world towards this community via business is what the author has tried to incorporate. However, marketers may confront challenges in achieving this business sector through mainstream advertising because of the 'stigma' attached to homosexuality, which often results in the marginalization of heterosexual consumers. Henceforth certain techniques and communication strategies have been incorporated to achieve the same.

Keywords- Homosexuals, Heterosexuals, India, LGBT, Strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

India being a diversified country has various sub-cultures within. However these subcultures vary not just in terms of values or beliefs but sometimes the way they associate with things, for example- white color is considered propitious for one community whereas considered ominous for another. This belief system has always been followed by a tug of war within various communities, each one trying to be better than another. But there exists one segment which is completely neglected and somewhat underestimated subculture who differ due to their sexual orientation- The LGBT i.e Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender. India being the largest democratic country in the world has about 45 million people falling under this segment (OutNowConsulting, 2013 cited by Staff, 2013).

These are the ones who have openly expressed themselves a major chunk is still behind the closet. Since this segment faces discrimination from their heterosexual counterparts, this has led to poor health, depression, suicides, HIV/Aids, mass emigration, brain drain thus costing Indian economy around 30.8 Million Dollar each year, according to study by World Bank 2014 (Hiscott 2014).

However if well handled this market is very lucrative particularly for Fashion and Lifestyle brands since they are the early adopters and trend setters, due to them belonging to DINK (double Income no kids) category their disposable incomes are also pretty high, thus according to the latest data the estimated population of this community is said to be around 450 million people with spending power of about USD 3.7 trillion. Considering just India in 2009 the estimated LGBT population in India was about 30 million people with approximately holding 1.5 lakh crore (D' Souza and Flock, 2009) whereas in 2013 according to research done by OutNowConsulting

firm, around \$200 billion (6% of total GDP) was earned by 45 million adult population of LGBT.(Staff, 2013).

II. FOCUS OF THE STUDY

The attempt of this paper has been not from the social perspective but from business perspective. It talks about the importance of this community to India, especially in terms of "Pink Rupee", thereby explaining how lucrative this market is and further suggests few techniques to effectively target this market in such a way that the present heterosexual market isn't alienated. A lot of literature has already been done in this area especially in United States but very few researchers have tapped India in this context. This segment in India is battling against law for equivalent rights as well as with the predominant gathering of heteros, which incorporate general public, their family, and their companions.

Being Gay-friendly: Appealing Homosexual Consumers

A study by Bhat, Leigh and Wardlow 1996 cited by Choong, 2014 found that advertisements with homosexual imagery drew positive response from homosexual respondents, when compared to heterosexual imagery. Gudelas suggests that gay consumers are savvy about where, how, and why companies reach out to them as a demographic focus. During the focus group discussions, the LGBT participants identified several means of attributing gay-friendliness to a company, including (1) advertising in gay media, (2) gay imagery in mainstream media, (3) product placement in gay television shows, (4) sponsorship of gay events and charities, and (5) corporate employment policies toward lesbians and gay males. (Oakenfull 2013)

Considering India as the focus now, since the legal structure of the nation doesn't support LGBT

community thereby a large population is estimated to be hiding their identities due to lack of acceptance from the society as well as their families and the fear to face discrimination on the basis of the sexual orientation. Also being Gay in India is somewhat mocked upon thus the advertisements which are overtly gay friendly might lose some of its heterosexual and homosexual consumers as well with a fear of being categorized as gay. However the unsupportive scenario for the community can be tapped as an opportunity for the brands to appeal to consumers emotionally therefore any association formed by the brand with the LGBT will not only target new market and have pink rupee pouring in but will also 'be the change' for the country. Also on having futuristic approach, the situation for this community is not always going to remain the same as Gen Y is much more supportive than Gen X and going back forth Gen X was way more supportive than the baby Boomers. Thereby since Gen Y is soon to be monetarily empowered and the teens of the new generation will born in the scenario where the discrimination will be much less or possibly considered normal in few countries, targeting this lucrative market will be beneficial for the brand in the long terms and short term as well.

4.1 Theories of Generation

The claims of generation differences made above can be supported by two theories which are considered to explain the social changes in accepting homosexuality. The first is the generational-replacement explanation, which proposes that a shift in homosexual acceptance is as a result of the human lifespan, that is, the older, more conservative population are being replaced by a younger population with a higher tolerance of homosexuality (Keleher and Smith, 2012). Thus, in effect, tolerance of homosexuality does not change over time, but rather is replaced in accordance to the human life cycle.

The second theory is the period effects explanation, which attributes the shift in homosexual acceptance to the changes in politics, social norms, and religious beliefs that influence society's tolerance levels (Keleher and Smith, 2012).

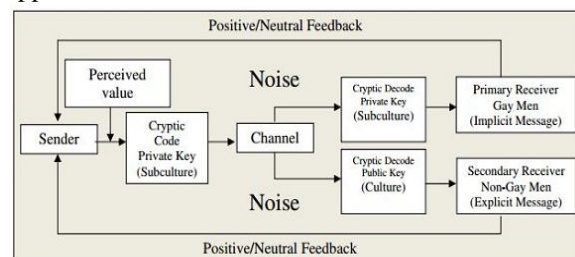
Reaching Homosexuals without alienating Heterosexuals: A common approach

Advertisement is the immense tool to persuade consumers to purchase a product or service (Malmelin 2010 cited by Akermanidis and Venter 2014) and evolves with time. Oakenfull and Greenlee (2006) proposed that within this niche market there is a growing consensus that in order to target female homosexual consumers, female visual imagery should be used. Similarly, targeting male homosexual consumers should make use of male visual imagery.

Cryptic Marketing:

The strategic communication approach investigated in this research is cryptic marketing. Cryptic marketing is the process of sending marketing messages containing deliberate, underlying and implied meanings to specific subcultures or subgroups within a mainstream society who are able to decode and understand (Choong 2010).

This means the use of implicit meaning within the explicit message creates a bond between the gay market and advertiser, without offending the heterosexual consumers who are less likely to identify or understand gay iconography (Oakenfull, McCarthy and Greenlee, 2008). This approach means general consumers will receive only the explicit marketing message and not comprehend the implicit message intended for the specific target group. This paves the way for marketers to target specific subcultures or niche market using mainstream media and avoid probable negative associations by the mainstream market (Oakenfull, McCarthy and Greenlee, 2008; Oakenfull and Greenlee, 2005; Bhat, Leigh and Wardlow, 1998). Following is the proposed communication model, following Cryptic Marketing approach.



Source: Choong, K 2014

Research Problem

In research conducted by Prime Access and Planet Out in 2008, over 5000 gay, lesbian and general population respondents were surveyed on gay and lesbian consumer habits and brand perceptions. The survey revealed that gays and lesbians are overwhelmingly positive towards gay imagery in commercials, but the majority of the general population are not sure or would expect no change in their impression of the company. Nearly a quarter of those surveyed thought gay imagery in commercials would have negative impression on them (Prime Access and PlanetOut, 2008). This may result in the general population avoiding gay associated brands or products in fear of being labelled "gay" (Oakenfull and Greenlee, 2005; Puntoni, Vanhamme and Visscher, 2011; Puntoni, Schroeder and Ritson, 2010; Brumbaugh, 2002; Kates, 1999, 2002 and 2004). Since the paper is in context of India, thus a research was conducted.

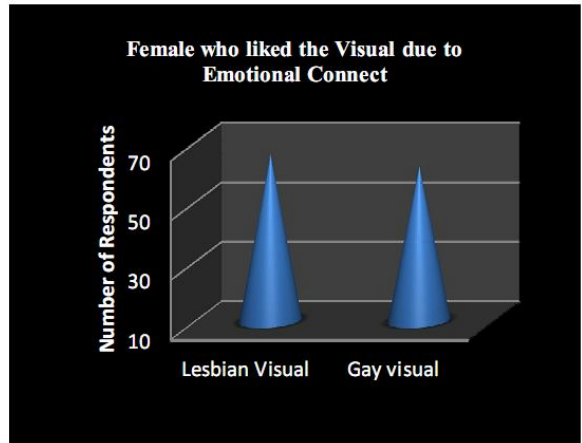
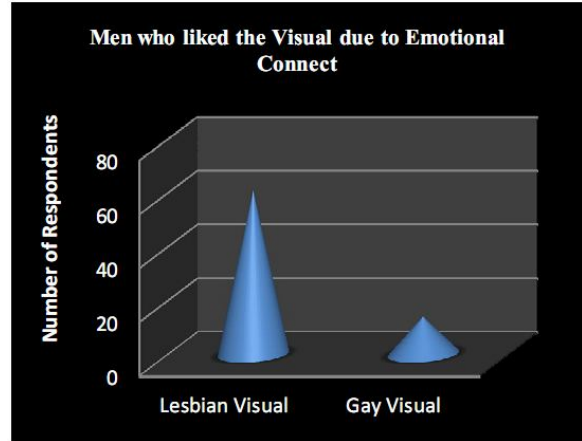
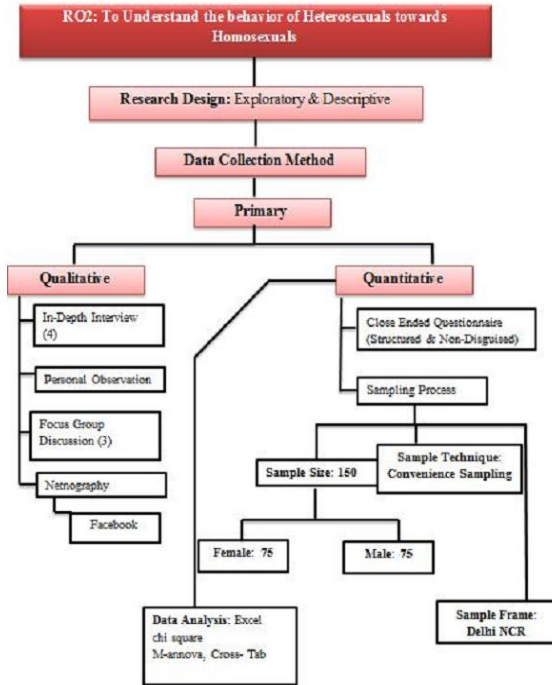
Problem Statement: To understand the behavior of Hetrosexuals towards Homosexuals and further develop the communication model that helps brand to target the niche audience in the main stream media. Subsequently hypothesis statements are as follows:

H1: Heterosexual men have a positive attitude towards lesbian women.
 H2: Heterosexual women are indifferent to lesbian or gay

accepting attitude towards Gay. Females showed positive and accepting attitude towards

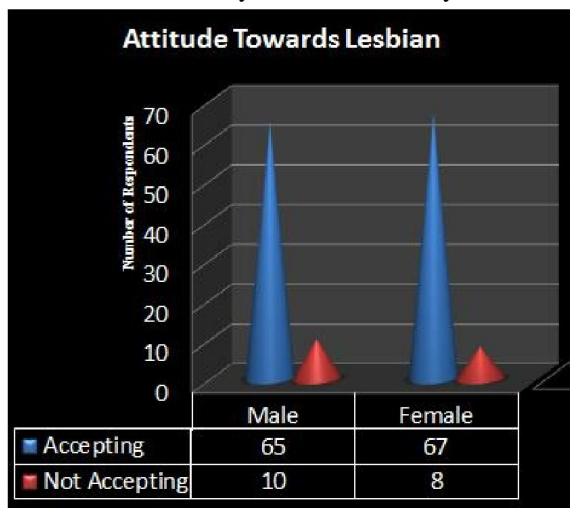
2. Two visuals were incorporated in questionnaire (1. Lesbian imagery 2. Gay Imagery) and respondents were asked to like or dislike the visual, following the same was the reason of liking the visual.

Research Design & Methodology



Consumer Analysis

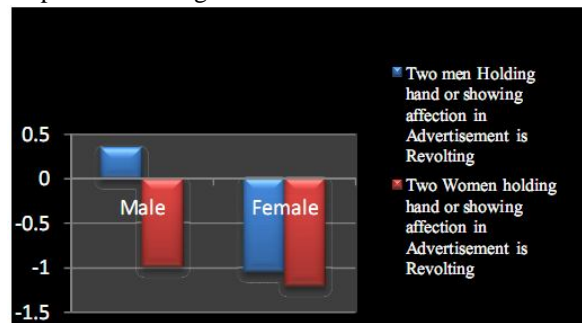
1. The following graph is aimed to analyze the behavior of Men & Women towards Gay & Lesbian, a word association was played with the respondents where they had to mention one word/phrase that comes to their mind when they hear the word Gay/ Lesbian.



Interpretation- Majority of men showed a positive and more accepting attitude towards Lesbian and the words frequently used were- Hot, Sexy, Love whereas on the other hand they showed a non-

Interpretation: From the above graph it is very clear that Gender of a person has a relation with their behavior towards homosexuality. Hence Males show a positive attitude towards Lesbians whereas Females are indifferent and comparatively more supportive towards LGBT community.

3..Another part of questionnaire analyzed the behavior of men and women towards display of affection in advertisement by lesbian and gay couples. Following were the results:



Interpretation: Male & Female respondents disagreed when asked “two women making love or showing affection in advertisement is revolting” which means

that lesbian showcasing affection is acceptable, further referring to the word association where the frequent words used were Hot, Sexy also in the focus group discussion men were asked if they liked visuals/videos of 2 women being together, the response receive was 'Yes'. Whereas on the other hand when the same situation involved gay instead of lesbian the response was slightly different from the hetero males. They shared agreement on the statement that 'Two men making love or showing affection in advertisements is revolting' whereas the female group of respondents were still on the disagreement side. Further referring to focus group discussion with the men, the group believed that if a male likes gay intimacy then he himself might be gay.

accepting towards lesbian visuals, on the other hand interviews conducted with homosexual women revealed that lesbians see themselves with more of masculine traits and like to carry an androgynous, dandy like look. This sounds perfect for a Men's wear brand where a hetero Male will target the audience of same orientation and homosexual women styled with more androgynous, dandy look will target audience of the other orientation. A cryptic code is still necessary in this model since a look won't define the LGBT friendliness of the company but the code will.

Result and Findings

Gender * Write one word/phrase that comes to your mind when you hear the word Lesbian Crosstabulation

		Write one word/phrase that comes to your mind when you hear the word Lesbian		Total	
		Accepting	Not Accepting		
Gender	Male	Count	65	10	75
		Expected Count	66.0	9.0	75.0
	Female	Count	67	8	75
		Expected Count	66.0	9.0	75.0
Total		Count	132	18	150
		Expected Count	132.0	18.0	150.0

Gender * Write one word/phrase that comes to your mind when you hear the word GAY Crosstabulation

		Write one word/phrase that comes to your mind when you hear the word GAY		Total	
		Accepting	Not Accepting		
Gender	Male	Count	35	40	75
		Expected Count	51.0	24.0	75.0
	Female	Count	67	8	75
		Expected Count	51.0	24.0	75.0
Total		Count	102	48	150
		Expected Count	102.0	48.0	150.0

		N	Mean
Please Indicate the following [Two gay men holding hand or showing affection in advertisement is revolting]	Male	75	.37
	Female	75	-1.05
	Total	150	-.34
Please Indicate the following [Two lesbian women holding hand or showing affection in advertisement is revolting]	Male	75	-.99
	Female	75	-1.21
	Total	150	-1.10

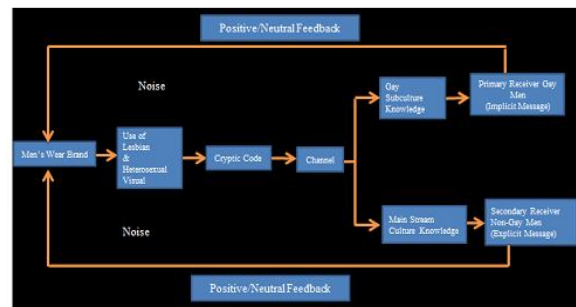
The hypothesis was accepted, hence from the literature and research 2 models are proposed.

Proposed Communication Model

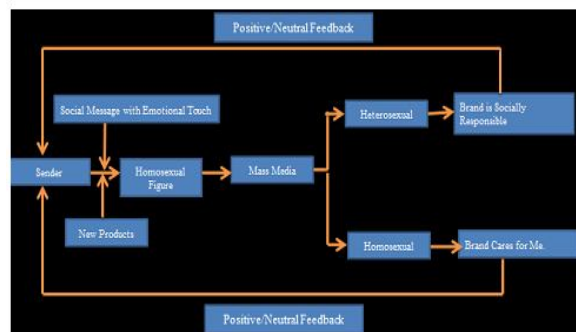
These models are a step ahead of the cryptic marketing model, derived from the research.

Significance of Model 1: This model aims to target 2 audiences at one go, the research discussed above clearly describes that heterosexual men are more

Model 1



Model 2



Significance of Model 2: This model is designed to reach the community explicitly without using codes. The advertisement is designed in a philanthropic manner so that it emotionally appeals to hetero counterparts and ideally the perceived message should be- 'Brand is socially responsible'. However if not followed correctly this approach has higher risk of being backlashed by the homophobians. In an ideal situation the brand via this communicative advertisement should be considered socially responsible by heterosexuals leading to a feeling to belongingness by the homosexuals. Another way out could be having a campaign with 4-5 social issues, one of them being discrimination towards homosexuality. In such a scenario the brand will explicitly approach the community with a decreased risk of campaign being backfired. But the situation could be other way round as well. Getting a positive/neutral feedback is an ideal scenario, a brand should be ready with a backup plan incase of negative feedback. . According to Jenn.T.grace (Professional

Lesbian) a brand should never step back from it's statement once made in an advertisements especially while dealing with such sensitive topics because if the brand takes it's words back it not just upsets the community the brand was initially trying to support but the supporters of the community as well.

CONCLUSION

LGBT popularly known as Dream- market has already emerged as a Lucrative market in the west due to supporting legal laws, however India is still struggling with the law to give equality to this segment of the society. Since India is already loosing on to GDP due to it's legal structure also leading to mass emigration of the community, the brands have started taking the bold move in support of the community. Brands like H&M, Myntra, Fastrack have already started this movement by using lesbian couples. However it is equally important to incorporate Gay couples in the main stream media and thus the model talks about the strategies to do so. The main stream media is using model 2 at the moment but in near future to bring the whole segment Overall this market is lucrative and hence will prove to be beneficial for marketers if reached in a right manner. Although the proportion of homophobias is more than the supporters but if a right message is delivered with a right medium in a right way it will definitely have a positive effect. It was people of India who once believed in untouchability & now the citizen of that country has to an extent successfully removed that concept, it all about educating people, spreading awareness and mass media, advertisements, short-films could be few of the best ways to initiate a race of removing the stigma attached to homosexuality.

Also a very important note to the brand, if they have started supporting then should never back out from what they believe in rather be ready with a back up plan in case of any controversies. This subject gives a wide scope of research as it is completely new subject in India. The implications of the proposed model can be one of the topics of further research, another one could be and in-depth research on "How the intimacy or public display of affection by homosexuals affect the heterosexual behaviour" and hence an improvement in the proposed model can be suggested.

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