

Mis-fitting Menstrual Hygiene Products: An Examination of Advertisements to Identify Gaps in the Diffusion of Innovation

Arpan Yagnik
Pennsylvania State University, Erie, USA

Abstract

This research examines advertisements for menstrual hygiene products to discover the roadblocks in the diffusion of innovation of menstrual hygiene products. The objective is to evaluate the advertisements to comprehend the cultural relevance of the diffusion, justify the rate of diffusion of innovation, identify the bottlenecks prohibiting the diffusion, and suggest ideas for a successful diffusion of innovation. A convenient sample of 75 television advertisements and print advertisements of sanitary hygiene products was selected for analysis. Using thematic analysis this research identifies and extracts themes that are the potential bottlenecks to successful diffusion of innovation. The main themes identified were the assumption regarding the knowledge of usage, knowledge of disposal, knowledge of sharing, existing clothing standards, affordability, role of woman, and comfort with insertion. The discovery of themes not only demonstrate ignorance and incompetent market research but also give us a sense of the glacial diffusion of menstrual hygiene products in the recipient country.

Keywords: advertisements, menstruation, market research, innovation, adoption

In-depth understanding of a culture and the cultural relevance of a product is not something that can be ignored, if one wants to sell products or services in a new culture. If the new product is culturally irrelevant then the marketing of such a product is difficult. The importance of cultural relevance is explicated here by taking the example of sanitary hygiene products. We will utilize advertisements of sanitary pads to examine their cultural relevance. Sanitary pads are one of the many new innovations/technologies that are transferred internationally. Globally, there is a constant transfer of new innovations and technology from the financially and technologically advanced nations to the ones less so. The explicit philanthropic transfer is a seemingly benevolent deed to empower and uplift the underprivileged nations. However, on closer inspection it becomes evident that such innovation transfer puts immense pressure on the recipient nation. Transfer of new innovations and technology, resulting from the monologic assessment of the market and pro-innovation bias, is more likely to create confusion and chaos in the existing cultural habitat. The reason for such confusion and chaos is explained by Pilotta & Widman (1986) where they assert that the export of new innovations and technology is equivalent to the export of meanings. Meanings are derived from one's history and culture. So when one culture exports its meanings to another culture with different meanings the likely result is confusion and chaos, which in turn impedes the adoption of the new technology/innovation.

Menstrual hygiene products (sanitary pads) were introduced in India in the 1990s. Prior to the introduction of sanitary pads and even after the introduction of sanitary pads Indian women have been reported as using pieces of cloth, cotton wool, ash, husk, sand, bark, and polythene (Mahon & Fernandez, 2010). It is over two decades since the introduction of an innovation to deal with the discharge of liquid, mostly blood during menstruation (sanitary pads) and despite all the promotion efforts and length of time the adoption of sanitary pads is no more than 10% among the total female population in India. Varying with research, an average range of 7-10% females out of a total of 591 million females in India have actually been reported as users of sanitary pads (Dasgupta & Sarkar, 2008; Fernandez, 2010; Mahon & Fernandez, 2010; Sinha, 2011). This is a disturbing statistic compared to the other prominent nations of the East. In Singapore and Japan 100% women use sanitary napkins. In Malaysia 88% women use sanitary napkins and in China 64% women use sanitary napkins. Such a stark difference in the numbers is indicative of a problem in the understanding of the target market. A thematic analysis of the TV advertisements and print advertisements was conducted to examine the major themes responsible for the glacial march of sanitary pad adoption in India.

To provide a context for the research, the author examines the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) of menstrual hygiene products from the commercially and technologically advanced culture of United States to the less commercially and technologically advanced culture of India. When sanitary pads were introduced to the Indian market in the 1990s, the major multinational fast moving consumer goods manufacturers from that era figured out that there was a massive market potential in India. This is an entirely new market with almost zero penetration of the product. All that was needed was to generate awareness and knowledge about the existence of sanitary pads. Every woman wanted to feel clean, fresh and on top of things when menstruating. Thus, this product would be an instant hit. This was one of the best opportunities to make profits. Heavy investments were and are being done to promote this product widely in India. However, monologic market assessment and pro-innovation bias limit robust comprehension of culture. Therefore, major brands continue to struggle to make a substantial place for themselves in this new culture. This study is important because it brings forth the issue of cultural relevance of a product to its market.

The theory of Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) provides a solid theoretical framework for the study. Everett Rogers popularized DOI. DOI is widely accepted as a theoretical framework in numerous scholarly disciplines such as marketing, communication, sociology, psychology, health and development, and many more. DOI adopts a two-stage process wherein, the first stage involves mass communication tools and the second stage involves interpersonal communication (Rogers, 1995). The former creates awareness and knowledge required for the diffusion as a mass level and the later pushes for adoption at an individual level. DOI is relevant as a framework for this study because it allows the author to clearly comprehend the diffusion of sanitary pads as an innovation, study the first stage of mass communication based advertising to unearth the likely reasons for the failed diffusion of sanitary pads. Definitions of some of the major terms are, “Diffusion is a process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over a period of time among the members of the social system (Rogers, 1995). “Innovation is an idea, practice, or object that is perceived to be new by an individual or other unit of adoption” (Rogers, 1995). Knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation are the five stages of adoption. Adoption is at an individual level and diffusion is a mass level. Adopters are the individuals that engage with the innovation and depending on how soon or later they engage with the innovation they are divided into the following: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards (Rogers, 1995). Major criticisms of the DOI theory are its inherent exogenous bias, top-down approach, and pro-innovation bias. Despite its criticisms, DOI has been one of the most influential theoretical frameworks because of its applicability in various disciplines and contexts. Thus, DOI provides a thorough framework to understand the cultural and psycho-social aspects playing a vital role in the individual adoption and mass diffusion of sanitary pads.

Method

In this study, 75 television (TV) advertisements and print advertisements were selected using convenient sampling for the analysis. Advertisements were chosen because they are a reflection of the culture that menstrual hygiene product manufacturers come from and are trying to establish. Based on that information, the misfit between donor and recipient culture was identified. Manufacturers assumed greatly about Indian market and ignored essential intercultural dissimilarities, whereas; they should have relied on dialogical market assessment instead. Their assumptions were based on the understanding of their own culture. An in-depth dialogical market assessment prior to the transfer would have alerted these manufacturers against unknown and unexpected challenges in the adoption and diffusion of sanitary pads. Advertisements were retrieved for the analysis from the archival collection of the Knowledge Exchange and Information Center (KEIC) at Mudra Institute of Communications, Ahmedabad (MICA). Out of 75, 50 were TV advertisements and 15 were print advertisement. The advertisements were chosen arbitrarily from a time period of 1990 until now. The criteria for selection for TV advertisements are provided in Table 1.

Criteria	
Brands	Promoting menstrual hygiene products
Aired on	Doordarshan, Sony TV, Star TV, Zee TV
Languages	Hindi and English
Version	Uncut
Target consumer	Indian women (15-40 years)
Length	No longer than 2 minutes

Table 1: Criteria for selection of TV advertisement

The print advertisements were also selected from the archives of KEIC-MICA. All the print advertisements were in English language or Hindi written in English language. The print advertisements were selected from popular women's magazines such as *Femina*. The author watched all the advertisements to familiarize with the data. After repeated watching of the advertisements patterns started emerging. Advertisements were watched again for examining if these patterns were indeed prominent and recurring themes. Major themes that emerged from the advertisements are discussed in detail in the results and discussion section.

Results and discussion

The major themes that emerged from the thematic analysis are each explained in detail in this section.

Superior replacement

The first theme that emerged was of the donor culture assuming that the new innovation being introduced in the recipient culture was the best choice for its people. This assumption is greatly problematic. Blind faith in one's product is dangerous to sustain healthy sales and profit ratio in a new and multi-cultural environment. It leads to a tension between the existing cultural product and the new innovation being introduced, and eventually a greater tension between the two cultures for superiority and survival.

A new cultural product should be presented as an option to the existing one and not as a superior replacement indicating the abolishment of the prevalent product or in this case the method to deal with menstruation. A piece of cloth, as mentioned earlier, is still the most commonly used method to take care of the menstrual flow followed by other alternatives such as ash, sand, husk, tree bark, and more. We can clearly observe in the TV commercials that the most prevalent option is targeted and a distinct message is disseminated on mass communication mediums about sanitary pads being superior and pieces of clothes have to be replaced.

A Whisper TV commercial begins with the entering of a female in the age range 35-40 years with a folder in her hand. She is shown entering what appears to be a medical lab with many jars filled with fluids and a microscope in front of her. She is wearing a sari but on top of it she is wearing a lab coat and she is also wearing glasses. Wearing glasses in India is usually symbolizes indulgence in reading and scholarly activity. Clearly, the ad establishes that this female is a doctor. She is a doctor in Allopathy or the Western medical science. And further in the commercial she says that old methods like using cloth are not advisable. Cloth does not have very good absorbency and this can lead to the proliferation of germs due to wetness. And this is not only spoken verbally but also reinforced visually. She folds a white cloth and places

it adjacent to a sanitary pad. A liquid, which is blue ink, is poured on both of them. She puts a paper on both and presses it. She lifts the papers and shows it to the camera. The paper pressed on the cloth has more blue ink as compared to the sanitary pad and thus proving her point that the absorbency rate of cloth is poor when compared to that of sanitary pad. Hence, the underlying message is that existing traditional methods such as cloth piece should be discarded. The advertisement also emphasizes that other lady doctors and gynecologists also recommend it. A seal with the text, “Most lady gynecologists use and recommend Whisper” is shown to enforce this external expert opinion. This tactic creates cultural tension on two ends. Firstly, it creates confusion about the existing product or method and the users start questioning the efficacy of the product. And secondly, allopathic doctors are not traditional doctors in India. India has ancient forms of medicinal practices such as Ayurveda and Homeopathy. These have been in existence for thousands of years and majority of Indians have grown up using Ayurvedic and homeopathic medicines. Numerous Indians look down upon Western medicine because it believes in alleviating the pain and not treating the root of the disease. So even the status of a Western doctor as an expert is compromised. Thus, it is clear that Indian culture is not robustly represented in such advertisements. And the belief that a foreign cultural product is the best choice is forced upon the target audience, which as a tactic is questionable.

Yet, in another Whisper TV commercial, a girl wearing white pants and a sleeveless shirt says, *“pehle paise bachane ke liye I used cloth at home, lekin geelapan staining ka tension, no concentration, mistakes hi mistakes”*. Here the girl asserts that to save money she used cloth at home but the lack of dryness, and the tension of clothes being stained constantly kept me distracted, and I would end up making mistakes all the time. Concurrently, in the video she is shown taking a wrong print out, which she has to throw it in the trash to visually reinforce her mistakes. Later in the same advertisement, after she finds a new product i.e. Whisper sanitary pad, she is shown to make no mistakes because she is less distracted. The advertisement ends with the dialogue, *“aur kapda iska karti hoon sahib istamaal...”*. These seven words translate into, “now I use cloth in the right way”. To depict the right way, she is shown wiping her computer screen with a cloth. These are some clear indications that cloth is inferior and should be used only to dust and wipe computers and furniture. And for menstruation one should only use sanitary pads. The strategy of displaying absolute disregard for the prevalent cultural product is not unknown of but also at the same time not a sustainable one.

Other visual discrepancies in the advertisement are the white pants and shirt of the female and the presence of all white furniture in the house. In India majority of the population tries to stay away from white for two reasons. The first reason is practical. India has tremendous amounts of dust and dirt so wearing white clothes becomes a cumbersome maintenance issue. The second reason is cultural. Hindus (80% of the population) wear all white when mourning the dead and other similar unfortunate occasions. Again, it is distinct that the promotions depict a culture that is not an accurate representation of the Indian culture.

How to

The donors of the new innovation/technology (sanitary pads) assumed a pre-existing knowledge of how to use the product among the target market in India. While introducing a new product in the market, it is almost fatal to assume that the potential new consumers are already aware of how to use the new innovation. Additionally, menstruation, being a controversial and tabooed topic, poses limitations in terms of less access and acceptability to discuss and learn about the usage of sanitary pads. If not used appropriately, sanitary pads do not yield satisfactory results, which foster a negative word-of-mouth about the product among the users.

There are several delicate nuances about the correct usage of a sanitary pad. These also vary depending on the brand and the type. An example of an assumption and weak market research is to expect a new or a to be customer to have accurate information about the duration of time one should wear a sanitary pad. Sanitary pads have to be worn for a few hours depending on their absorbing ability and then changed. Any one sanitary pad should not be worn for an entire day. Depending on the menstrual flow one needs to either change the pads quickly or otherwise. Sanitary pads cannot be reused. There are several types of sanitary pads available in the market in terms of size, features, and usage guidelines. A female does need some level of knowledge to be able to figure out the right size, and features. It is not realistic to assume this level of knowledge from a new customer. It is also culturally insensitive to expect a female who is currently using sand and is also illiterate to get all the required information from a print advertisement or a TV advertisement.

While analyzing the advertisements, expectation regarding the preexisting knowledge of how to became evident. In a Whisper Ultra commercial, a female in the age group 16-20 years is shown in traditional Indian clothing. The advertisement's narrative here is that it is her elder sister's wedding and therefore she will be busy with preparations the entire day. She specifically uses the phrase, "morning to evening". It is greatly reinforced that she has to help out with all the preparations and stand by her sister on her big day. In the next scene she says "ab second day hai to hai, Whisper hai to possible hai". It translates to, 'although it's the 2nd day, but its (hard work from morning to evening) all possible because she has Whisper'. This narrative does not emphasize on how many sanitary pads will she be required to change. On the contrary, the phrase "morning to evening" furthers an incorrect impression that there is no change of pad required. The advertiser assumes certain base level knowledge of the consumer. None of the ads explicitly specify the duration for which a pad can be worn because of the expectation that the consumer already knows such information.

Disposal

The norms of garbage disposal and treatment in different communities are different, especially when comparing USA with India. Disposable water bottles serve as a fine example to start discussing cultural differences. In USA, after drinking water from a disposable water bottle, individuals crush their water bottles and dispose them in a recycle bin or garbage. Whereas in India and especially rural India, water is scarce and conserving water is of great importance, every utensil that can store water is of importance. Thus, plastic bottles, instead of being dumped in recycle bins; find their way into people's homes.

Similarly, in the case of sanitary pads after their use they have to be disposed off properly. A sanitary pad is made up of polymers, other chemical fibers, and absorbents. Exposure to menstrual discharges from the body, dampness, and moisture do not, exactly, make them eco-friendly after their use. Thus, they need to be disposed off systematically. Unlike the USA, required infrastructure and facilities for disposal are neither common nor available in the rural and semi-urban parts of India. A major norm is to dump all the garbage in a common location near the village and is left to degrade biologically or a garbage van will come and pick it up once in a week. Most of the waste produced by the village folks is biodegradable. However, the new innovation of sanitary pads is not easily biodegradable. Improper disposal fosters the growth of harmful germs, and in turn increases health hazard if the dumping area is closer to the village. Sometimes, the villagers also dig and bury their waste. The traditional belief is that it will dissolve inside and be converted into natural manure, which is true for traditional items. However, such transformation does not happen with plastic products. This can lead to the decrease in the fertility level of the soil or increase of the toxicity levels.

Such expectations from the recipient culture are unsustainable and harmful for the product category. It is easy for the manufacturer based out of the United States to not realise the differences in disposal management. The post-adoption hazard evaluation is a key analysis evaluating the aftermath of the transfer. However, this is, mostly, ignored. The ignorance is also evident in the promotional content. Neither TV advertisements nor the print advertisements had any mention about the proper disposal of sanitary pads. There was no explicit or implicit, or a verbal or nonverbal reference to the issue of disposal of the sanitary pads in both the mediums. This leaves it to the user to figure out the right disposal method. A major issue among the females that had access to toilets was of clogged drains and sewer system. Females, due to the shame and stigma associated with menstruation, preferred to flush their used sanitary pads. And in certain areas the sewage water is processed chemically for reuse. The dissolving of sanitary pads in the water made the water treatment and processing difficult and less reliable.

Clothing standards

Clothing standards is yet another expectation that brings out the lack of cultural knowledge and poor market research on the part of marketers and advertisers. Sanitary pads are designed essentially for females that wear undergarments. It is very unlikely to come across a female in the USA that does not have access and the option to wear some form of undergarment. Based on that default knowledge, sanitary pads were designed in such a way that the undergarment supports it and keeps it in the right place.

However, in India there are women that do not wear undergarments. It is simply not a part of their social culture or norm. For centuries they have never realized the need and thus never worn an undergarment and they still do not. Females living in stark poverty in India cannot even afford a second meal. These women have only one piece of cloth that they use to wrap around their body. The concept of underwear just does not exist among these women. Introducing a product that essentially assumes the existence and usage of undergarments to these women is like giving solid food to an individual assuming that he or she has a healthy set of teeth when they do not. Even if you provide sanitary pads free of cost to these women what will they do with it. It is like giving a comb to a bald person. We may find humor in the simple follies of these marketers. But these follies put immense pressure on the recipients to adopt a newer way of life. And when the recipients are unable to adapt and adopt these new innovations, they are blamed as being traditional, backward looking, superstitious and thankless.

Secondly, to keep the sanitary pad in its proper place, the elasticity or the firmness of the undergarment is critical. Different washing and drying practices affect the elasticity and firmness of the undergarment. Loosened elasticity causes issues with the displacement of the sanitary pad and results in the failure of the product. Women in India do not normally change their wardrobes as frequently as women in USA. For many women buying new undergarment is an occasion that comes once in a year. So it is likely that majority of the women that have access to and wear undergarments are still not best suited for using sanitary pads.

In several TV advertisements this was the implicit theme. The advertisements began by putting down use of cloth by graphically showing two imaginary strips and placing a cloth and a sanitary pad on those imaginary strips. The shape of this strip was designed to look similar to that of an undergarment. This practice increased especially when the manufacturers started promoting sanitary pads with wings. Those wings were responsible for keeping a sanitary pad stationed as opposed to it being displaced like it did previously with the cloth pads or sanitary

pads. Even after several new versions and variations of sanitary pads were introduced what never changed was that graphic of the imaginary undergarment on which the sanitary pad was placed. This, again, is an example of the arrogance or the ignorance of the donor culture, which assumed that undergarments are a universal concept. It also reflects the poor research that was done prior to the launching of these products and TV advertisements.

Affordability

The latest A.C. Neilson survey reported that 70% women in India do not use sanitary napkins because they are unable to afford them (Sinha, 2011). Affordability of sanitary pads is a concern everywhere. Even in certain communities of developed nation like the USA, there are females that cannot afford sanitary products. With that said, there are also some cultural elements that play a role in prioritizing sanitary pads over other contesting items. In a collectivist society, ones family and societal needs are placed higher than the individuals needs. India is a collectivist society. Joint family system is highly prevalent in rural and semi-urban areas. When on a tight budget, a female tend to sacrifice her needs and wants more than a man, and therefore sanitary pads do not make the cut many a times. This is usually not the case in individualistic societies.

In certain instances, women, actually, cannot afford sanitary pads. According to the estimates of United Nations Development Programme 2010, 37% of the Indian population lived under the national absolute poverty line in 2010. It is impossible for these women to even think about purchasing sanitary pads. Even if we consider the population other than the 37%, the class of people that is just above the poverty line and is earning meagre income also cannot afford it. The advertisements analyzed mostly depict females making necessary adjustment in their monthly budgets to accommodate sanitary pads for them. These advertisements highlight the reduced price point, and then show females liking, comparing or sharing this price point. However, at the end, a female ends up buying sanitary pads either because of its reduced price point or because of its incomparable utility. Adjustments that are possible in advertisements are not always possible in real life. Thus, a reduced price point does not help these women in being able to make that decision to make adjustments in the monthly budget.

Prevalent cultural method adjacency

The prevalent cultural method guides in the advancement of the technology and there are stark differences in the prevalent methods of dealing with menstruation in the USA and India. Sanitary pads have been around since 1880s in the USA and the UK. Whereas, even today, in India the prevalent method is a piece of cloth (Mahon & Fernandez, 2010). Sanitary pads do have close adjacency to cloth pads. So for females using cloth pads switching to sanitary pads is not that difficult. But for women that use ash, husk, sand, tree bark, and nothing it is difficult to switch to sanitary pads. Although not a large percentage, but there is still is a significant percentage of women using these methods and a switch to an alien product and a way to manage menstruation is daunting and stressful.

Women in the USA, from a certain era, still shiver at the mere utterance of Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS). Chemicals used mainly in the tampons and at times in sanitary pads, unknown to the producers, acted as toxins and resulted in the deaths of several women in the USA. However, tampons primarily caused TSS. 5296 cases had been registered between 1979 and 1999. As a result, sanitary pads were classified under a special category by federal regulatory agencies and the manufacturers were forced to go through rigorous testing of the products before introducing them in the market.

Sharing

Sharing of the products that are meant for personal hygiene is not at all a norm in the USA. Most individuals in the USA and some urban communities in India have the luxury of having their personal bathroom and toilet space. Majority of Indian population does not have that kind of luxury. In rural areas women sometimes do not even have access to toilets. Fernandez (2010) reported that 37% of respondents in his study did not have access to toilets. They use open spaces that are secluded to urinate and defecate. Railway tracks are infamous among Indians for the occurrences of such activities.

In collectivist cultures, sharing is an integral characteristic of any individual. More than one woman uses the same cloth pad for menstruation. After the first woman uses it the cloth is then washed, dried and kept aside. Other women in the family then use the same cloth as and when needed. Using the same sanitary pad can be harmful and even fatal. The use and throw culture is not the default culture in India. Instead, the repair or reuse culture is the prevalent culture in India. Traditional societies have thrived by reusing and ensuring sustenance. The marketers of the USA assumed the one time use or disposable culture in the recipient Indian market as well. This hindered the innovation diffusion and can lead to internal conflict within families over the ownership and usage of the product.

In one of the Stayfree commercials, a busy make up room is shown. A female is getting her hair done and the hairdresser uses a comb and then when she needs both her hands puts it in her mouth for a second. Another hairdresser needing the comb pulls the comb out of her mouth and attempts to use it on another artist's hair. This is when the frame stops and that particular artist prevents her hairdresser from using that comb, which was used earlier and also put in the mouth. She instead removes her personal comb, and hands it to the hairdresser to use it on her. There were two other Stayfree ads that dwell on similar topic. In a culture where sharing is caring, if one member in family denies another person to use her belongings then that family member will be looked down upon. In real life women in collectivistic cultures are not easily able to say no to requests of sharing her sanitary pads, which may not even be the right sanitary pads for another female. The insistence on personalized use of sanitary pads foster values of individualization that are not very highly regarded in Indian culture. Also, using a sanitary pad that you are not used to using or is not right for you lead to dissatisfaction and discomfort towards sanitary pad and the brand. In a Whisper commercial, a woman had to use her friends pad due to an emergency at her party. The narrative furthered that she felt very uncomfortable and restless using other pad and did not enjoy the party at all.

Role of woman

The role of a woman differs from society to society. In the USA the majority of women go to work and there is nothing unusual about it. Sanitary pads are designed to ensure that workingwomen do not face any condition wherein they have to be embarrassed. It becomes all the more important to be well protected against unnecessary awkwardness when the woman is outside and on the go. In the workplace it is unlikely for other women or men to take over somebody's responsibilities for three to five days because she is menstruating. One is expected to do ones own work and meet the deadlines.

Compared to in the USA, the role of woman in India is more of a homemaker. There are working women in urban India. But the majority of women stay at home and tend to household duties. When a female is in her own home, it is easier to get things under control when facing a menstruation related issue. Also, since a woman is not in a designated workplace she has more opportunities to take rest and, if needed, baths more frequently. In a joint family system,

other women of the family take over the responsibilities of the menstruating women. The role and social support system are very different in the two cultures and hence the cultural logic and relevance of a sanitary pad is different to different cultures.

In a print advertisement of the brand She, the text suggests of a husband preparing breakfast for his wife. He does the dishes and clears the table too. This is not the cultural norm in rural or semi-urban India. The last place Indian men want to enter is a kitchen. Traditional roles are closely followed. Men don't cook food and do the dishes. It is either the wife or the maids that do the cooking or dishes. The visual, in the same print advertisement, is of a female aged between 20 and 30 years and is jogging. Now this would be considered an anomaly in the Indian culture. If a woman is well enough to go for a job, she is surely well enough to cook and tend to other chores. Homely duties take precedence in the priorities of things to do. These values are ingrained in females since their early childhood. I, personally, do not advocate what is acceptable or right in this research. All I argue is whether the lifestyle depiction in the advertisements is in sync with the reality of the Indian society or not.

Comfort with insertion

Tampons, altogether, pose a different set of challenges for females in India. In traditional cultures, virginity of a girl is of great importance. Let me be clear, tampons do not have the magical powers to deprive a female of her virginity. However, due to the prevalent misconceptions regarding the insertion of any foreign objects into a vagina in the society it put tampons in an awkward category. There are accompanying misconceptions regarding the looseness of the character of a woman. Tampons are also associated with the aspect of deriving sexual pleasure. Such cultural bottlenecks are absent in the donor culture (USA). Thus, it is plausible that marketers will not consider such issues while strategizing their introduction into a recipient culture. Such lack of insider knowledge makes it challenging to tackle the stigma, overcome it, and then succeed in accomplishing the sales goal.

Conclusion

All the themes – superior replacement, how to, disposal, clothing standards, affordability, prevalent cultural method adjacency, sharing, role of woman, and comfort with insertion – that emerged from analysis are the likely factors for the glacial adoption and diffusion of sanitary pads and tampons in India. It also indicates that the formative assessment or market research conducted prior to introducing the innovation was incompetent. When the market research is inferior, the advertisers do not have accurate information to base their decisions and therefore, they end up making decisions based on their hunch without evaluating or examining their assumptions. Assumptions, in this study, refer to the preconceived notions or biases that the manufacturers and marketers of the new innovation have about the recipient culture. In most cases scholars have criticized assumptions because of their inherent characteristic of ignoring cultural nuances and sole focus on profit seeking. Gonzalez and Bradley (1990) support the argument by forwarding the underlying objective of the technology transfer is to enhance and maintain the economic welfares of the structures that are funding the research. Yet another argument focusing on the acceptance of the innovative technology brings out the arrogance that accompanies anything coming from the scientific west. Since “technology is rooted in scientific detachment, the values implicit in it are assumed to have universal validity” (Pilotta & Widman). Gonzalez and Bradley (1990) criticize the manufacturer for assuming that the unconditional and unchallenged acceptance of the innovation/technology is essential and good for the recipient irrespective of its consequences on the prevailing indigenous culture. Stewart & Nihei (1987) argue that despite the façade of benevolence the meaning and motive of

innovation/technology transfer is direct foreign investment and replication of the technological model in other locations while increasing and providing opportunities for the experts. Vested interests like mentioned above hinder the sustainable and quick export of innovations in new markets. Most of the times these transfers are like major hostile takeovers however, in some cases when the transfer is based on too many faulty assumptions it can prove to be a costly mistake. Also, the process of transfer of new products is believed to be symmetric and linear and not a dialogic or two-way transfer. This reflects in the understanding of the recipient culture that the manufacturing culture possess and the way they introduce the product. The presuppositions do not restrict to the technical knowhow but are also extended to the required social adjustments on the recipient culture's part.

After analyzing all the advertisements, and extracting the major themes depicting the faulty assumptions and their deceptive portrayal, it is not an exaggeration to assert that product transfers are cultural transfers and they misunderstand the recipient culture to be similar to theirs when in reality it is not. In this case the manufacturers of the sanitary pads are clearly ignoring the nuances of the Indian culture. Manufacturers are introducing, rather forcing, their products by either shaming the prevalent means or by depicting inaccurate cultural lifestyles. When the home market (USA) starts nearing saturation, it becomes important for the superstructures to retain and increase the economic profits of the corporations. To do so they explore and enter foreign markets with arrogance and insufficient knowledge about the host culture. They have deep pockets and that does give these superstructures an upper hand in terms of being able to promote their products using expensive mass media. However, their promotions are based on the type of promotions that were successful back in their country, which increases the chances of failure of these promotions in new and different cultural settings. Simple and easy to discover cultural nuances are ignored due to which not only the product adoption is delayed but also their financial resources are wasted. The assumption that women wear undergarment is a good example of inaccurate market research and resulting ignorance. Another example is the use of a Western medicinal expert that sometimes holds little to no credibility, to promote a Western product in an Eastern market. It does not require one to incur large expenditures to learn about the prevalent and creditable medicinal systems in a nation. But ignoring such details does reflect in the bottom-line of the company.

In this study, the aim was not to look down upon the cultural transfer or sanitary pads. The aim, instead, is to problematize and bring out the psycho-social and cultural loopholes in the process of adoption and diffusion. The themes that emerged provide a platform for understanding the impeding factors in the acceptance of sanitary pads in India. This study was important because it not only extracts the major themes but also corroborates them with the promotional elements (TV advertisements and print advertisements), which aids foreign manufacturers comprehend their mistakes made in marketing and promoting their product in India. This is also the first stage in the DOI consisting of mass communication to create awareness. Something to note here is that many a times, due to the bandwagon effect, hiring of the same agencies, subscribing of the same faulty market research, and lack of creativity some Indian brands that manufacture sanitary pads too promote their pads in a similar fashion depicting cultural anomalies. A thorough dialogical assessment of the psycho-social variables and cultural setting is pivotal before introducing any product into an alien cultural ecosystem. There are examples of big retail giants having to fail and withdraw their operations from countries. Walmart is a good example. Walmart was compelled to withdraw its operations from a couple of countries because of the cultural and psycho-social misfit in regards with the shopping practices, behaviors, and usage trends. This definitely hurts the profit-seeking motive of the superstructure and fosters indifference and estrangement towards other cultural transfers.

Indian culture is a progressive culture and is open to new innovations/technologies and products but it is important to present these cultural and innovative/technological goods in a manner that makes them a good fit with in the dimensions of the Indian culture. The approach of converting a culture into a market suitable for the sale of one's products is inappropriate and most unlikely to succeed. The simple reason being that the culture has survived without that very product for centuries. The innovation will succeed in selling in good numbers only when there is a real time need for it. However, designing a product suitable for the needs of a particular culture is always the appropriate approach.

As far as the adoption gap of the sanitary napkins is concerned, the depiction of accurate Indian culture in the advertisements is a starting point. That can happen only when an in-depth understanding of the cultural nuances is attained. This is the necessary and sufficient condition a manufacturer should adhere to. Unsuccessful transfers also can lead to political tensions between two nations. To maintain positive diplomatic relations, it is crucial that one culture does not force-feed another culture its excess produce. I will not say that is the case for menstrual hygiene products. Sanitary pads are useful and important for females. With proper understanding they do prove to be better than some other means of managing menstrual discharge. But claiming them to be by far superior to all the prevalent cultural means is not strategic and points out the pro-innovation bias. A thorough assessment of the sanitary needs of women in different geographies in India is critical along with the in-depth knowledge of the psyche of that region. Glocalization is a key concept in the intercultural transfer of menstrual hygiene products from USA to India. Glocalization not only in the product design aspect but also in the promotions aspect of the product is the key.

Displaying US life with Indian faces does not do much for the Indian audience. The depiction of culture that Indian audience can relate to at a conscious and a subconscious level is crucial for persuading the audience in buying the product. The main problem is that the product ads reflect and provide for the needs of women in US. They do not address the needs of women in India. There is a stark contrast between the reality of women in US and India and their needs. The effort of introducing an innovation should be free of the recipient blame bias. Thus, intercultural innovations/technology transfer is beneficial to both the donor and the recipient only and only if both are equally engaged and involved in the process. There has to be power parity in participation and interaction. A power disparity may result in losses for both the parties involved.

As a result of reading this research the readers are expected to realize the importance of cultural relevance in a commercial setting. This research also highlights the limitations of monological market assessment and argues for a dialogical market assessment. Having a dialogue with the potential customers and stakeholders, and including them in the diffusion process as equals rather than recipients that know nothing better and are in need of help is a smarter and sustainable formative strategy. In other words, glocalizing (global products with local twists) ones offering is a useful strategy. This article also highlights the need to include sociological and anthropological studies during formative assessment. The field of psychology can also prove useful in comprehending psychological variables that can influence the diffusion of innovation. In general, this study is important for researchers and practitioners in fields such as communication, psychology, and sociology along with marketing and advertising.

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Corresponding author: Arpan Yagnik

Email: arpanyagnik@gmail.com