

Theory building in marketing Rationalising South Asian perspective



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The Ever-changing dynamic world is full of opportunities and challenges. Globalisation of markets seems like a dream on the verge of recent developments such as Covid-19. Another essential perspective is cultural dynamism which is strengthening over time. Once theorised as global consumer culture is now also understood as a local consumer culture. Pragmatically, international brands are trying hard to launch more local culture-friendly brand campaigns in response to rising local consumer culture trends. Global events such as shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand, massacre in Colombo Sri Lanka, War in the Middle East, and even British Brexit are reshaping how theorists conceived globalisation of markets decades ago. The continuous progress of regional and local brands, accustomed to serving the needs of individuals belonging to a particular culture, adds more challenge to understand new forms of brand globalism. Nationalistic campaigns of Governments to promote local trade and business is yet another challenge to the fore. Thus it requires a better understanding of different cultures so that successful marketing programs can be initiated and implemented.

South Asia is home to one of the world's earliest known civilizations, i.e., the Indus civilization. Today it is one of the most densely populated regions on the planet and includes Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, and the Maldives. Due to the distinct characteristics of all the countries in the region, South Asia is an eye candy for business organisations, social activists, policymakers, politicians, educational enthusiasts, media, entertainment and agriculture. Contrarily, the rising middle class with attractive financial pockets, colossal population, friendly people, and several social and political issues demand customised marketing strategies.

The majority of the population in South Asia lives in rural areas and depends on agriculture as a significant source of income and employment. Historically, marketing as an activity in South Asia was performed by agriculturalists. As economies and competition grew, they started promoting their products to consumer segments having some choices. However, South Asian economies have recently observed a rapid change in consumer lifestyle, which requires a shift in consumer culture positioning approaches used by marketers. The socio-demographic and political trends such as urbanisation, materialism, economic turmoil, radical changes in political systems, traffic issues and a rapid decline in population growth are few challenges which require thoughtful research in the field of sociology of these markets.

South Asia paradoxically is both a rich and a poor region due to the mismatch in the education levels, economic instability, rural-urban divide, i.e., opportunities and capacities available to the population living in different states of the region. It is a region where people across borders are culturally and socially interrelated. An area of contrasts marked by optimism as well as pessimism and features many intricacies. Despite income disparities, poverty, contentious politics, social pluralism, natural disasters and many other reasons, South Asia continues to grow and is a hub of labour-intensive manufacturers and service centres. To understand the region's importance for marketing scholars and practitioners, let us scan through business & economics, socio-political-cultural, education and research, media & entertainment and other miscellaneous lenses.

Business and Economic (What makes Business function)

Prospects of an economic rebound in South Asia are firming up as growth is set to increase by 7.2 percent in 2021 and 4.4 percent in 2022, climbing from historic lows in 2020 and putting the region on a path to recovery (World Bank, 2021). It is expected a gradual decline in poverty while exports of goods are being recovered. Accordingly, the further developed local financial viewpoint results from South Asian nations' endeavours to monitor their Covid-19 caseload and quickly carry out antibody crusades. Be that as it may, the recuperation stays delicate since the pandemic is not taken care of, and the immunisation is on the advancement. Numerous organisations need to compensate for lost income. A great many specialists, a large portion of them in the casual area, actually falter from employment misfortunes, falling earnings, deteriorating imbalances and human resources shortfalls. Nations reliant upon the travel industry, particularly Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Nepal, were vigorously influenced by the emergency as their travel industry area could take more than completely recuperate (World Bank, 2021). Further, debt sustainability is in danger as certain nations have become more defenseless against outside shocks, especially the Maldives and Sri Lanka. Hence, the marketing applications/practices of the South Asian countries are different from the other regions to suit the current economic outlook of the region.

Socio-Political-Cultural (What influence Consumer's behaviour)

Several studies aim to explore why South Asian consumers are different. So that Companies can win over their hearts and minds. Most of these studies consider samples from one or a few countries together. But isn't it interesting to understand how this continent manages the expectations of a large population who lie at the bottom of the economic pyramid? What ties them together as a unity in diversity? One of the essential aspects is concerning nationalism in South Asia, and it has been different from the West has also been an important issue. In recent decades there have been deviations in the form and contents of nationalism in South Asia, leading to the trends of sub-nationalism and secessionism. Nationalism has obtained different shapes and expressions in South Asian countries, such as secular nationalism, lingua-cultural nationalism, religious nationalism, linguistic nationalism and aggressive nationalism and so on.

Interestingly, South Asia is the only sub-continent in the world where one can experience true diversity. This market often is labeled as an untapped market. This region is famous for its religions, culture, rituals and customs, ethics, natural resources, intensive and skilled labour and most importantly, growth potential. Contemporary South Asia has covered a long and exciting journey from orthodox to postmodern. A visible change is reflected through various aspects of living standards and style. The journey looks like different continents of peoples' lives, such as religion equality to religion autonomy; gender equality to gender autonomy; people celebrate any culture and it is the world's populous democracy. It symbolises that every business organisation has a chance to tap this market. And it can be successfully achieved if the characteristics of this region are understood fully.

Finally, South Asia's rich history, culture and folklore have not been explored up to its true potential. Frequent socio-cultural events to signal togetherness, rich music to orchestrate voices and rhythms, superstitious beliefs and religious diversity, authoritative yet self-less parenthood, spiritually enriching writings of saints and poets and grandma stories invite scholars to explore this region in an effort to stretch epistemological boundaries of marketing.

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