

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA –
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE
MARKETING PRACTICES – EVOLVING PERSPECTIVES

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Overview

Corporate activities in various industries ranging from textiles, consumer goods, automobiles to healthcare, travel and tourism are now going through a metamorphosis in the Asian continent.

A large textile exporter and retailer in India ('Seasons Furnishings') is collaborating with leading Asian retail chains like Serbantic in Indonesia and Singapore, Fella Interiors in Malaysia and Shell Canvas in the Philippines.

Auto malls entering the retail field seek to satisfy customers by introducing multilayered product portfolio. Korean and Japanese car manufacturers (Hyundai, Suzuki and Honda) have set up assembly plants in India and export the cars made here to many Asian countries apart from sales in our country.

Healthcare industry is also growing at a fast pace. South-East Asia's largest private hospital 'BUMRUNGRAD INTERNATIONAL (BI) in Thailand is entering into a contract with Advanced Medicare and Research Institute (AMRI), Kolkata, for an equity partnership. This will enable BI to manage AMRI facilities in India.

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The field of education and training is no exception. Image Infotainment, a Chennai based company specializing in animation, is considering China for a tie-up for providing basic infrastructure and technical know-how. It will soon be extending digital education programmes to Dubai.

Asian countries have woken up to the immense possibilities of marketing alliances among themselves. The developed nations can no longer disregard the growing purchasing power of millions of people in Asia. Marketing practices are getting fine tuned and exciting developments are on the anvil.

Marketing Practices – Evolving Perspectives

There has been a tremendous growth in the economy of the Asian countries in recent years. It is not an exaggeration to say that a metamorphosis has occurred as a result in corporate activities in various industries. In this paper, growth and development in Asia in recent years has been studied from the point of view of a marketing professional. Marketing practices adopted in the industrial sector pertaining to textiles, consumer goods, automobiles, healthcare, travel and tourism, education and entertainment have been discussed. The exponential growth in the industries mentioned forms the rationale for selecting them.

It is exciting to look at the mind-boggling variety of the goods and services in the sectors mentioned above. A thorough transformation of marketing practices is taking place and this was unimaginable even some twenty years ago. The future is bound to witness several developments in the marketing field that will lead to changes in the altitude and lifestyles of people everywhere. This may be considered as a feature of the globalization process now under way.

The parameters chosen for evaluation of the developments in the industries are: product (quality), price (cost), place (location) and promotion (marketing activities). (Philip Kotler, 1994; Lovelock.C, 1991, Zeithaml,V.A. and M.J.Bitner, 2000). This paper is based on literature review, media reports and information gathered from websites as corroborated by experts in the field, namely entrepreneurs, corporate managers, industrialists and hospital administrators.

TEXTILES INDUSTRY

The textiles and apparel industry in India and the Asian region has registered a phenomenal increase in the manufacturing capacity as a consequence of demand for quality garments. A large textile exporter ('Seasons Furnishings') is collaborating with leading Asian retail chains like Serbantic in Indonesia and Singapore, Fella Interiors in Malaysia and Shell Canvas in the Philippines. In the hosiery sector, a firm Asian Exports (established in 1995) exports garments to various countries. Based in Tiruppur near Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, this firm is engaged in the production of Knitwears (T-Shirts, Polos, Pyjamas etc.) and woven wears (Bermudas, shirts, work wears etc.). Tiruppur is considered the hub of the Indian Knit garment industry and the firm 'Asian Exports' has alliances with reputed brands like J.C. Penny, Pierre Cardin, Woolworth etc. The marketing activities in the textile export area have been increasing and the pay off seems to be worth the expenditure involved.

A leading business company in India, RJ Corp, has entered into a licensing agreement with Disney Consumer Products, a wing of Walt Disney Company India. As a result, RJ Corp will become the exclusive master franchisee for 'Disney Artist' brand products in India and other South Asian markets. Arts and crafts merchandise from other Asian countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Maldives are to be sourced and marketed according to plans. This is

claimed to be a unique retail tie-up for marketing articles including greeting cards and stationery with the Disney character stamp. This brand encompasses products that include toys, apparel, home decors, books and interactive games.

TELECOMMUNICATION

Communication plays a crucial role in all marketing activities. Mobile phones are considered as one of the effective telecom devices used by sales persons and marketers. There has been a spectacular increase in the number of people in the developing countries of Asia who regularly use mobile phones. Indeed this is largely an influence of globalisation. The ever increasing number of mobile phones has also influenced the pricing of handsets. Several countries of Asia are affected as a consequence of a differential royalty structure adopted by Qualcomm, a company based in San Diego (California, U.S.). It is because this structure is skewed in favour of China and South Korea apart from the U.S. As a result, the CMDA handsets are more expensive in India than in China, S.Korea and the U.S. It is noteworthy that India is in the top five list of countries with a subscriber base of over 100 million telephone connections. Taken all in all, the Asian countries provide a very large catchment area for the marketing professionals to sell mobile phones in spite of royalty structures and national regulations. The huge turnover of several companies engaged in this business is evidence enough to prove this point.

ELECTRONICS

India has a fairly strong manufacturing industry base in sectors like auto components, steel and engineering fabrication. But it is in the field of high tech electronic manufacturing that the weak spots are visible. Unfortunately, the country lags behind China and smaller countries like

Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan. It is interesting to note that reputed hardware manufacturing companies like Hewlett Packard, IBM, Apple, Dell, Sony, Motorola liaise with Taiwanese firms for manufacturing several components such as motherboards, LCD panels, routers and even laptops. Taiwan is also strong in the area of semi conductor manufacture. Not only that. The country has invested in developing the manufacturing capacity in other Asian nations like Thailand, Indonesia, and Vietnam. But its expertise is not easily available in India on account of bureaucratic red-tape and bottlenecks in infrastructure. The latter takes the form of logistics, power, ports, warehousing etc. These factors act as an impediment to the flow of investment from Taiwan. Again, marketing of products relating to such items is affected.

Many venues for collaboration among the Asian nations beckon industrialists and entrepreneurs. For instance, semiconductor industry holds promise of a great future. The design market in India with revenues aggregating to U.S. \$ 3.3 billion in 2005 will be able to expand to \$ 43 billion market by the year 2015, according to projections. The industry has the capacity to generate 38 lakh jobs by 2015 and contribute 12% of the country's GDP. The electronics equipment market in India is also not inconsiderable (\$ 363 billion) with domestic production being \$155 billion). Recently, a high level delegation from Taiwan¹ semi conductor industry visited India for collaborative opportunities available here. The visit was at the request of the Indian Semi Conductor Association. It is worth noting that global players like Nokia, Motorola and Flextronics have set up manufacturing facilities in Chennai. Undoubtedly, the marketing of the products made here in other Asian countries will assume great importance in the near future.

1. Taiwan team holds talks with P9 The Economic Times, 29 August 2006

AUTOMOBILES

In some Asian countries including Japan it is common to find quadricycles plying in the roads with four wheel bicycle variants having names like Mitsouka MC-1 and Q-Car. Marketing professionals in this geographical region will have an exciting time when many more quadricycles are turned out of factories.

Automalls in Asia making a foray into the retail field seek to satisfy customers by introducing a multi layered product portfolio. In the last few years, Korean and Japanese car manufacturers (Hyundai, Suzuki and Honda) have set up assembly plants in India and export the cars made here to many Asian countries apart from sales in our country. Several auto component suppliers to feed the Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) are now successfully doing business. These suppliers have their registered corporate companies not only in India but in other countries as well. They establish manufacturing bases here for this purpose. For instance, a Spanish company supplying car roof linings has moved over to Chennai with its manufacturing outfit so as to achieve speed and efficiency in supply to the OEMs like Hyundai, and Ford. It must be noted that Ford had also made its presence in Chennai with a large plant. The marketing professionals are having a field day with the economy looking up and growing steadily.

In the field of automobile production and marketing there has been a remarkable surge of development in the Asian continent. Japan which did not have a diesel car market witnessed the first new diesel car launch in four years when Daimler Chrysler² entered the same recently. The

2. Daimler Chrysler drives back to Japan with diesel power P.17 The Economic Times, 29 August 2006

3. Tata to make use of fiat expertise for projects P.4 The Economic Times, 25 Sept.2006

world's No.5 automaker referred to the fuel efficiency and eco friendliness of diesel powered cars in a bid to dispel misconceptions about diesel vehicles.

The Korean auto company Daewoo's expertise and product platforms are made available to Tata Motors³ of India for integrating into the latter's World truck development plans. Similarly, Tata Motors has proposals to integrate Fiat's product and platform expertise into its passenger car projects under development. The low priced car (cost Rs. One lakh) when finally launched in early 2008 may be marketed not only in India but also in some Asian countries.

Urban transport in these countries calls for major changes since narrow roads and resultant congestion make movement of big automobiles difficult. Small cars and compact vehicles or quadricycles which are eco-friendly will be the ultimate answer to the traffic snarls. The quadricycle⁴ denotes different types of four wheeled vehicles that are small and light. The European Economic Commission (EEC) has given an interesting definition for quadricycle: "a four wheeled vehicle weighing no more than 400 Kg (550 Kg for a goods vehicle) excluding traction batteries in the case of electric vehicles, with a net power of no more than 15 KW (20 bhp)".

ASIAN SCENE – Healthcare Marketing

It is in the area of healthcare marketing that spectacular developments are taking place. These are in tandem with the innovations in medical technology and the state-of-the-art equipment which are all the while becoming necessary for the efficient functioning of hospitals. Competition among the healthcare organizations (HCOs) has also added a keen edge to the marketing

4. Small, bright, green Pleasure Machines; P.62 Business World, 22 December 2003.

initiatives all over Asia. Just like mergers and acquisitions in the arena of manufacturing industry, collaboration and take-over have become common in healthcare industry which is growing at a fast pace.

Thailand's Bumrungrad International (BI) hospital, one of the most modern medical facilities and infrastructure in Asia, is entering into a contract with Advanced Medicare and Research Institute (AMRI), Kolkata, for an equity partnership. This will enable BI to manage AMRI facilities in India. With help desk in 12 countries, BI offers assistance in 13 languages. It has even a helicopter fully equipped with modern facilities for medical emergency care to fly in foreign patients to its Bangkok base. The BI in Bangkok has an added attraction to the foreign patients and their companions – a McDonald's and a Starbucks coffee shop in its campus.

Another private hospital in Thailand, Phyathai Hospital, is coordinating with the British Council⁴ for training its staff besides signing contracts with HCOs in Netherlands and Bangladesh to fly in patients. It is worth noting that Thailand gets patients in large numbers from Japan and Arab Countries.

Medical tourism⁵ provides the greatest opportunities for healthcare marketers. It has grown enormously over the last few years and developments in technology, communication and travel have vigorously helped the professionals. Hospitals in Thailand, India and Malaysia have been treating large numbers of foreign patients – last year alone 600,000, 100,000 and 85,000 respectively were treated in these countries and the clients were mostly from U.S., U.K., Middle East, Japan, and developing countries. It is estimated that the market is U.S. \$ 40 billion and growing at the rate of 20% every year.

5. The Health Travellers; P.30 Business World, 22 December 2003.

Marketing professionals and travel agents are now tapping this potential. They point to the existence of good hospital facilities and competent doctors in the Asian countries; the cost of the medical treatment and surgery is only a fraction of what it is in the U.S., U.K. or European nations. The waiting time for surgical operations is also not long as in the case of the latter. All these factors combined with smooth travel facilities have made medical tourism a huge business.

Yet another emerging perspective relates to the demographic scene. The proportion of the elderly people (60 years and ⁵above) in the total population of countries like the U.S., U.K., Japan, is rapidly growing. The U.K. alone will witness an increase from 16 percent to 25 percent in the next three decades. The healthcare needs of these elderly citizens demand urgent attention; the medical and social security systems can not cope with the pressure of the ageing population. It is but natural that many patients from this segment travel abroad for treatment.

There is no doubt that medical tourism has been given a great fillip by the spectacular spread of internet technology. (Richard K.Thomas,2003). The worldwide web is entirely different from the traditional communication methods used in the past. According to an expert Kevin P.Richardson (2003) “in one multimedia package the web combines the depth of print, the flashiness of broadcast, and the segmentation of direct advertising”. Nice visual images and write-up about a hospital’s facilities for patient care form an essential ingredient in healthcare marketing and will make the prospective client approach the institution for treatment. Hence smoothly navigable websites are being created and utilized by healthcare organization everywhere.

Yet another significant development in recent months relates to a new path highlighted by healthcare organizations (HCOs) and marketers. The HCOs are informing the public that they are

6. Quality Care – The Checkup; P.28 Business World, 18 July 2005.

seeking accreditation from the Joint Commission International (JCI) of the United States; this recognition is considered as the gold seal of quality⁶ in the medical field and coveted very much by corporate hospitals in developing countries. The Apollo Group of Hospitals, Wockhardt in Mumbai, Manipal Hospital in Bangalore and Sri Ramachandra Medical Center in Chennai are already in the process of securing JCI accreditation. It is worth noting that already 17 hospitals across Asia have got the JCI seal which serves to ensure that the hospitals equal the best in the U.S. when it comes to patient care and safety. This may be taken as a subtle method of healthcare marketing and forms part of the emerging scene in Asia.

Corporate hospitals in the Asian continent as elsewhere continuously try to improve their ambience and facilities. Healthcare marketers, through their efforts to spruce up their workplace environment cannot, however, expect dramatic results in relation to profits and brand recognition. It must be admitted that in recent years, a lot of changes have come about. Referring to this aspect, Yezdi H.Godiwalla and his research team (1997) point out “hospitals now have to contend with the dynamics of regulation, market forces, and quality and cost-conscious environments”. The team advocated strategies which emulate the changes pursued by much of U.S. industry after applying Deming’s Total Quality Management (TQM) concepts to hospitals.

The major components of TQM as enunciated by Deming (1982, 1986) are : 1. Visionary leadership 2. Internal and External Co-operation 3. Organizational learning 4. Process management 5. Continuous improvement 6. Employee fulfillment (including training and career growth) 7. Customer satisfaction. Clinical or professional skills alone will not enhance healthcare quality. The latter is enhanced only when the managerial efforts sustain clinical skills.

Professionals from both sides must share a unified set of values and only then an organization can flourish.

The new perspectives in the Asian marketing scene are nowhere so striking as in the healthcare sector. Indeed, there are yawning gaps in the delivery of healthcare when it comes to the developed and developing nations. Healthcare providers and marketers face formidable challenges in luring patients to their corporate hospitals. It is a different story altogether in the case of the hospitals run by governments which are always thronged by large numbers of people with all sorts of ailments. The corporate hospitals, on the other hand, have to overcome the stiff competition from others of their ilk. The marketing managers here advertise their offerings in a persuasive fashion. For instance, the Raffles International Patients Centre in Singapore refers to the friendly and trained customer service which helps patients in the matter of appointments and referrals to appropriate specialists. (Parasuraman. A. et.al.,1997; Charles Zabada et.al.,2001)The services include hospital admission, follow-up care, transportation, and accommodation. The National University Hospital in Singapore makes the claim “We put our patients FIRST” with expert aid from a pool of 3000 professional staff.

The evolving perspectives in marketing practices constitute an absorbing subject for study. Nowhere else in the world developments are taking place so rapidly as in Asia with its teeming population ever eager to buy and do shopping. Fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) provide a happy catchment area for marketers in such a milieu. But of late health has also become an area of concern. It is not surprising that marketing professionals in medical technology sector compete with their counterparts in fast moving consumer goods area. One reason for this is the growing awareness among the general public about the need for proper maintenance of health

and about the crucial role played by sophisticated equipment in hospitals in diagnostics and treatment. A recent conference (The Tenth South Asian Conference on ‘Clinical Ultrasound in Practice’) held in Chennai showcased a variety of medical equipments. These included the items manufactured by not only reputed companies like General Electric (GE), Philips, Siemens but other upcoming firms such as Cimar (CIMAR Medical Networks). Those in charge of the stalls ably highlighted the merits of their companies’ machines like scan systems. Medical practitioners from many regions thronged the stalls and witnessed live demonstrations of the working of imaging equipment. One could see how healthcare marketing has evolved over the years.

Monitoring is inherently boring and is not performed well by humans, especially when a large volume of clinical data has to be sifted in order to detect problems. With the computerization of information monitoring, the task is rendered easier. For instance, smart monitors in an intensive care unit enable doctors to intervene before an adverse outcome occurs (David Bates and Atul A.Gawande, 2003).

Marketing activities in the sphere of healthcare are in a way subtly influenced by quality medical devices and their availability. This aspect has a special reference to the emerging Asian countries whose economies are on the upswing. There are of course regulations for manufacture and import of such devices. Safe and proper use of the latter (including sterile and non-sterile items) must be ensured if patient safety is not to be jeopardized. The cost of the healthcare in a country has a lot to do with the regulatory process for the medical devices and equipment. Japan is the most regulated market and a duly certified mechanical bi-leaflet heart valve sells at \$ 12,000 whereas in the U.S.A. the price is \$ 7,000, in Europe \$ 4,000 and in India \$ 1000. The cost is

naturally passed down the value chain to patients (Neesha Patel, 2006)⁷. The implication is worse. The availability of critical devices becomes a question mark since those devices which do not fetch a minimum revenue to the hospitals to cover the costs are not imported as this does not make business sense.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING⁶

Animation seems to be catching up among the youth as a special and emerging discipline. Those with skills and expertise in this field are able to secure jobs fetching handsome salaries. Hence it is not surprising to find schools and institutions to train students in this area of studies springing up everywhere. The coverage of these schools is not confined to any region but transcends even national borders. For example, the Digital Asia School of Animation (Dasa) based in Bangkok, Thailand, has plans to open 200 centres across Asia in two years. In addition to Singapore and Malaysia, Dasa wants to set up shop in several centers in India, including Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad and Delhi. Smaller metros are to be taken up later on.

Both the franchise and joint venture models are being considered. The total investment may be around Rs.25 crore. The courses offered will encompass animation, gaming, film editing and special effects. A one year diploma in film animation, another in games development, and a three month course in commercial film editing and special effects will be also offered. Already, a campus has been launched in Kolkata.

Another company Image Infotainment based in Chennai, India, specialises in animation and wants to set up shop in places like Dubai, and China. The tie-up with China will involve

7. Implications of Medical Device Regulations; P.8 Express Healthcare Management, September 2006.

provision of basic infrastructure and technical know-how. In fact, the preliminary arrangements for starting the center in Dubai are already complete and marketing efforts are well on the way according to one of the Directors of image infotainment, a first generation entrepreneur. This company has also plans to start a center in London and the talks with the local partners in U.K. are now going on. There are a few hassles with respect to China but even here the roadblocks are gradually being cleared. What is really amazing is the dramatic growth of this company in the last ten years; there are now 30 centres all over India. The centers are offering Diploma courses in Digital Visual Media and E-Learning and Mobile Gaming. In addition, it offers certificate courses in subjects like Graphic Designing, Web Designing, Graphics and Animation, and Visual Effects. The company claims cent percent placement record till date.

Travel and Tourism have always fascinated people all over the world. The Asian countries including India, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand have been quick to seize the opportunities during the last five years. The 'Uniquely Singapore' brochure outlining the events for the whole year (June 2006 - June 2007) illustrates how marketers in this field endeavour to tap the potential. In a lucid account "where businesses find more business", it is pointed out that the excellent legal, financial and physical infrastructure of Singapore makes it a strategic springboard to Asian markets and beyond. The city has the logistical capability to support any business need. Strong trade agreements with the world's key economies enable businesses to penetrate more markets and at competitive costs.

Again, Singapore is regarded as the second most network ready country in the world (Global Information Technology Report 2005-2006). The delegates attending conventions here enjoy superb internet and teleconferencing facilities in most hotels, convention halls and exhibition

venues. The Global Entrepolis 2006, for example, is projected as “an international market place connecting enterprises to funds, markets, partners and technology; it is a dynamic platform for networking opportunities, where large enterprises, technopreneurial startups and the venture capital community can meet, interact and transact. Each group benefits by leveraging on the other’s strengths, and value is created”.

Indeed, it is a novel method of marketing for a small country-city to proclaim: “Singapore is strategically located with 2.8 billion people living within a seven-hour flight radius. Nearly 80 airlines operate a combined 4,000 flights a week from Changi airport, which has consistently been rated as the ‘Best Airport’ in the world. The city offers 37,000 hotel rooms of international standards, with a large number of 3-5 star hotels”. Look at this sample: Singapore may be just a small dot on the global atlas, but it has much more to offer to corporate houses and their executives than most other developed cities.

All these claims are borne out by the diversity of conventions and business gatherings in Singapore. These include : Globaltronics (Asia’s key expo for the electronics manufacturing industry), Integrative Medicine, Labels Asia (Asia’s only dedicated business to business fashion exhibition for trend-setting brands, labels, clothing culture), International Furniture Fair, Asia Apparel Machinery and Accessories Exhibition, Metal Asia (precision engineering, machine tools, metal working) and Semicon Singapore (South East Asia’s premier event for showcasing the latest semiconductor manufacturing technology).

In all these industries, one can detect similarities in the way of their functioning. Consumers give paramount importance to product quality. For example, they spend more money on quality garments giving due weightage to the brand factor. In the case of automobiles or

telecommunication instruments, consumers concentrate on buying quality products without minding the price factor. Similarly, in healthcare industry, when it comes to critical illness, people want to save the lives of their kith and kin irrespective of the cost of medical treatment (Berry, L.L., et. al., 1985; Minjoon Jun et. al., 1998).

Again, goods produced in industries like textiles, telecommunication, electronics, automobiles are distributed through markets in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan and India. Thus, there is a wide availability of products and services which customers want. For instance, Tirupur hosiery items and Ludhiana Knitwear are available in other Asian markets. Honda and Toyota cars are popular not only in countries like India but all over the world. One can witness globalization of marketing activities in all these industries.

Special sales promotional offers are also a common feature here. Consumers expect courteous service in a pleasant air-conditioned ambience wherever they go. Hence there is an effort on the part of all marketers to improve the environment in which goods are sold or services are rendered. (Bitner, M.J 1992). Sometimes, price is a determining variable in certain industries. For example, patients travel from one country to another to get quality healthcare facilities at a lesser cost.

It is clear that Asian countries have woken up to the immense possibilities of marketing alliances among themselves. The developed nations can no longer disregard the growing purchasing power of millions of people in Asia. Marketing practices are getting fine tuned as a result of stiff competition to sell products and services. Exciting developments are on the anvil.

A keen observer cannot fail to draw certain interesting conclusions from the evolving marketing practices. The trend towards mergers and acquisitions will become more accentuated in the future enabling big multinational companies to venture into the markets of developing nations. Also, there will be intense competition among the industries to get the attention of the clients or customers. This is supposed to confer large benefits on the customer but whether it will lead to this desirable result remains to be seen. Another conclusion is that the diffusion of brands across several countries and the adoption of the 'franchising' concept will continue to grow.

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