

Are Modern Day Marketers Indulging In Cultural Genocide By Changing Consuming Pattern?

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INTRODUCTION

A common complaint that one often hears from the elders is the shift in cultural values that the younger generation is trying to adopt. Is it a cultural genocide that they are talking about, and if so, how would one define the term “*cultural genocide*?” It is the systematic destruction of traditions, values or language, which makes one group distinct from the other.

The recent wave of globalization has been characterized by a pervasive phenomenon known as “*decommodification of international trade*” (Yotopoulos and Romano, 2007). This feature of world markets, characterized by a trade of high-value differentiated (not only) agricultural products, has been boosted by a complex set of institutional and technological changes. When one talks of globalization of commodities, it is meant to homogenize the product for use in different continents. But are the present day marketers forcing the consumption of products with innumerable product offerings to the younger generation, so as to increase the materialistic consumption and destroy the uniqueness of cultural identity?

Dr. Frank Morales, in his article, “*The Death Of Traditional Hinduism*” brings out his opinion on cultural genocide, citing changing values of traditional Hinduism to neo-Hinduism. “*The classical, traditional Hinduism that had been responsible for the continuous development of thousands of years of sophisticated culture, architecture, music, philosophy, ritual and theology came under devastating assault during the 19th-century British colonial rule like at no other time in India's history.*”

But during the British rule, these traditional practices were replaced by the supposedly educated Indian community, by a neo-tradition just to please their masters, which reflected in their dress, eating habits and living style. “*Neo-Hinduism was an artificial religious construct used as a paradigmatic juxtaposition to the legitimate traditional Hinduism that had been the religion and culture of the people of India for thousands of years.*”

As the result, the Indian community slowly made convenient adjustments in their traditions through slightly twisted cultural habits and changed consumption pattern. As the culture was undergoing changes, though not phenomenally, marketers saw an opportunity to bring in diverse product ranges from different cultures, tempting the confused Indians with more offerings, because of which, one has witnessed the following practices by the marketers to change a culturally rich land like ours into a waste land.

Let us begin with the costumes.

The traditional costumes are getting replaced mass customized dresses of European/ American origin, produced in millions by innumerable factories in India. Except for special occasions, where traditions demand a particular costume to be worn, all other times, Indians wear what is generally considered to be a non-Indian dress. The youngsters have gone a step ahead in aping their counterparts by wearing torn jeans as fashion statement.

Traditional restaurants have been replaced by fast-food restaurants serving salt and cheese rich pizzas and fattening burgers, which pose a danger to the health of the consumers. So, one finds that even restaurants which earlier boasted of serving pure traditional food, have started including pizzas and burgers to their original menu in order to survive the onslaught by other chains, forcing more traditional customers to taste the other varieties and make them habitual consumers. While one can argue that variety is the spice of life, don't these varieties easily take away the spice from our culture?

Traditional music is undergoing a lot of changes with a generous mix of instruments and notations from other cultures. Sometimes, it becomes difficult to even understand the mixed music and definitely one feels that the traditions are slowly slipping away. The younger generation has taken to western music and dance style so much that one finds

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western dance training centres cropping up in every nook and corner to exploit this market. On the agricultural front, the traditional varieties are being replaced by generic variations, which many experts point out are inimical to health and are resulting in environmental degradation. It is no wonder that thousands of families migrate to urban slums and consume what marketers offer as affordable products.

It is against this background that the researcher decided to conduct a research to find out the degree of cultural degradation (or genocide, if one prefers that term) among youngsters in Southern India, especially Bengaluru, the city where there is a generous mix of various cultures.

An elaborate survey, involving three hundred and fifty six respondents was conducted to measure the degree of cultural shift from traditions to neo-cultures and also to verify whether modern-day marketers are responsible for the "genocide", if there was one. It is interesting to note what Diana Jue observes in her article *"In-Between Cultures, Cultural Immersion In Bangalore, India"* : *The global economy is characterized by the cross-national exchange of goods, and inevitably, ideas, values, and cultures. New city developments were built for a global audience to attract foreign investors and gain worldwide recognition. Bangalore had Brigade Road, where I stopped by McDonalds for lunch; Shanghai had a downtown that was accurately painted as a New York-like city. As a result, these developments were more Western, and would not seem out of place in the United States.*

"Today, the youth are in complete control. They take on innovation, do things not done before and are audacious." (Preethi Chamikutty, Brand Equity, page 4, Economics Times, 15th December 2010).

This observation gives the impression that the developments one witnesses in the cities in India are mainly focused towards fulfilling the requirements of the expatriates and yet, many of the youngsters from the host population seem to be highly attracted towards these new developments.

Are the marketers successful in achieving the intended cultural genocide, is what the researcher was trying to establish through the findings while conducting the research in Bengaluru, India. Bengaluru was chosen mainly because of its metropolitan nature and persons belonging to various cultures, and traditions were cohabiting without any differences. The research was based on the consumption pattern of persons aged between 15 and 40, and the changes in their pattern in the last decade. It also examines the consumption behaviour and its effects on traditions, neo-traditions and deviation from such traditions as far the consumption practices go.

The present generation's perception about maintaining traditional practices and whether the marketers' attempt to bring culturally not acceptable products to the tables of these youngsters are really yielding fruits are some aspects that are explored through this study.

The first set of questions was on the respondents' consumption pattern of food. The number of respondents who were dependent on imported varieties of food, which is different from the traditional food were taken for discussion first. Most of the youngsters showed a lot of interest in experimenting with food, but a very few responded that they had changed to different food habits from their traditional ones, and stopped consuming traditional food. While different varieties of packaged food could vet their appetite for tasting food from different cultures, the youngsters firmly believed that the burgers and pizzas could at best be fill ins and were not the items which were found regularly on their dining table. However, they also agreed that modifications in their tastes were being made to accommodate various styles of cooking from different cultures. The respondents preferred home-cooked foods, but with some variations from different cultures to make eating a more interesting exercise.

Traditional dresses or modern dresses, especially borrowed from other cultures were preferred with equal enthusiasm. The youngsters felt that dresses are more for convenience, and style, rather than for catering to traditions. However, during festivals, only traditional dressing was appropriate, they opined. They were also thrilled to wear the traditional dresses identifying with their respective cultures and were definitely more inclined in exhibiting the traditions and values from each culture. When they were asked whether they would prefer modifications in their traditional style of dressing, a majority of respondents answered in the negative and said that they would prefer to maintain the same traditional dressing styles without any modifications. However, a minority felt that the dresses could be modified to reflect a mixture of cultures during festivals.

Watching television channels for product information is not unusual. But the products that are advertised in different channels may influence the buying preference of the respondents. Especially, when more foreign channels are viewed for products or service consumption, the buyer is likely to be tempted to buy products consumed by people of different cultures and, therefore, try to shift from one's own culture. When asked whether more local channels were watched in preference to foreign channels, 70 % of the respondents said that they watched more local channels for product

information. Some of the telemarketing products were received with cynicism, and the respondents opined that those products may not be good for their culture. The other 30 % were comfortable in watching both and buying whatever interested them, irrespective of whether they were accepted by their culture or not. While respondents were fond of watching Hollywood movies, they were totally against those movies being dubbed in the local language and shown on local channels and agreed that it would be a mismatch of culture to accept as such. They preferred to watch those movies as part of an alien culture and habits, rather than mixing them with our culture, showing a strong bond for their respective cultures.

Are the present day marketers forcing products of alien culture on the youngsters and the gullible ones, through teasing promotions and tempting offers? Can Barbie dolls teach a totally different culture to our kids? The respondents felt that the marketers do try to bring in various products from different countries, but are often unsuccessful if they presented the products exactly in the same way that they were selling in their native places. Many respondents quoted the famous KFC case of using beef paste in India, and how they were forced to change the mix. Even well known products were made to adjust to local customs and tastes.

The research raised many questions as regards to cultural traditions, adaptation, acculturation and assimilation. While one talks of traditions, following local culture to the 't' and completely eschewing any practices from foreign culture, the adaptation allowed people to borrow a few things from foreign cultures and tweaking some of them to suit local tastes and practices. Culture acculturation results when the immigrant minorities or the local population get accustomed to each culture and start practicing the customs and habits (Table 1). When the immigrant population totally follows the host country's customs in preference to their home country's customs, then total assimilation takes place. In assimilation, following of a foreign culture is very high; ignorance of the home culture occurs, and that is when it results in cultural genocide. When the foreign culture is totally forced on the local population, the local habits and customs are given a go by, and this results in cultural genocide.

Table 1: Classification Of Cultural Adjustments			
S.No.	Cultural Adjustments	Local Culture	Foreign Culture
1.	Tradition	very high	very low
2.	Adaptation	high	low
3.	Acculturation	low	high
4.	Assimilation	very low	very high

What is happening here among our younger generation is perhaps borrowing few things from other cultures without ignoring one's culture.

This is aptly summed up by Diana Jue in her article *"In-Between Cultures, cultural immersion in Bangalore, India"* during her visit to India to study the cultural practices : *"Every Friday and Saturday evening, my host's father, Prabhakara, sat cross-legged on the rug in front of his television to watch his favorite show, Indian Idol, India's version of American Idol. For the next two hours, our house teemed with the powerful, fluctuating Hindi vocals of young Indian Bollywood star wannabes. The show's emcee and judges spoke Hindi smattered with English; I understood every five words on an average. Here was a national pastime based on the global singing competition phenomenon. However, Indians adapted it to local flair through music, tongue, clothing, dramatic filming style, and public behavior such as display of emotion and affection between men. This wasn't the culture clash I had envisioned. The local culture expressed its national identity by giving new meaning to an element of global culture. There was no cultural genocide, cultural sharing, or cultural selling out. Indian Idol was a prime example of a cultural adaptation - locally initiated effort, that was all Indian and hopefully, an example of development to come."*

CONCLUSION

Globalization has opened the markets worldwide and products from different continents are flooding the markets. As the purchasing power among youngsters is on an increase, the consumption of products that originally did not belong to the Indian culture are also being consumed now. Burgers come with Cutlets, Samosas and Badapavs, while Pizzas have toppings from Indian spices. Most of the products imported from foreign cultures are consumed after

modifications suiting our culture. Cultural genocide is the systematic destruction of traditions, values, language, and other elements, which make one group of people distinct from other groups. Thus, one can safely conclude that there is no cultural genocide, but the process of adaptation is on. There is no danger to the local culture in spite goods from other cultures flooding the markets.

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