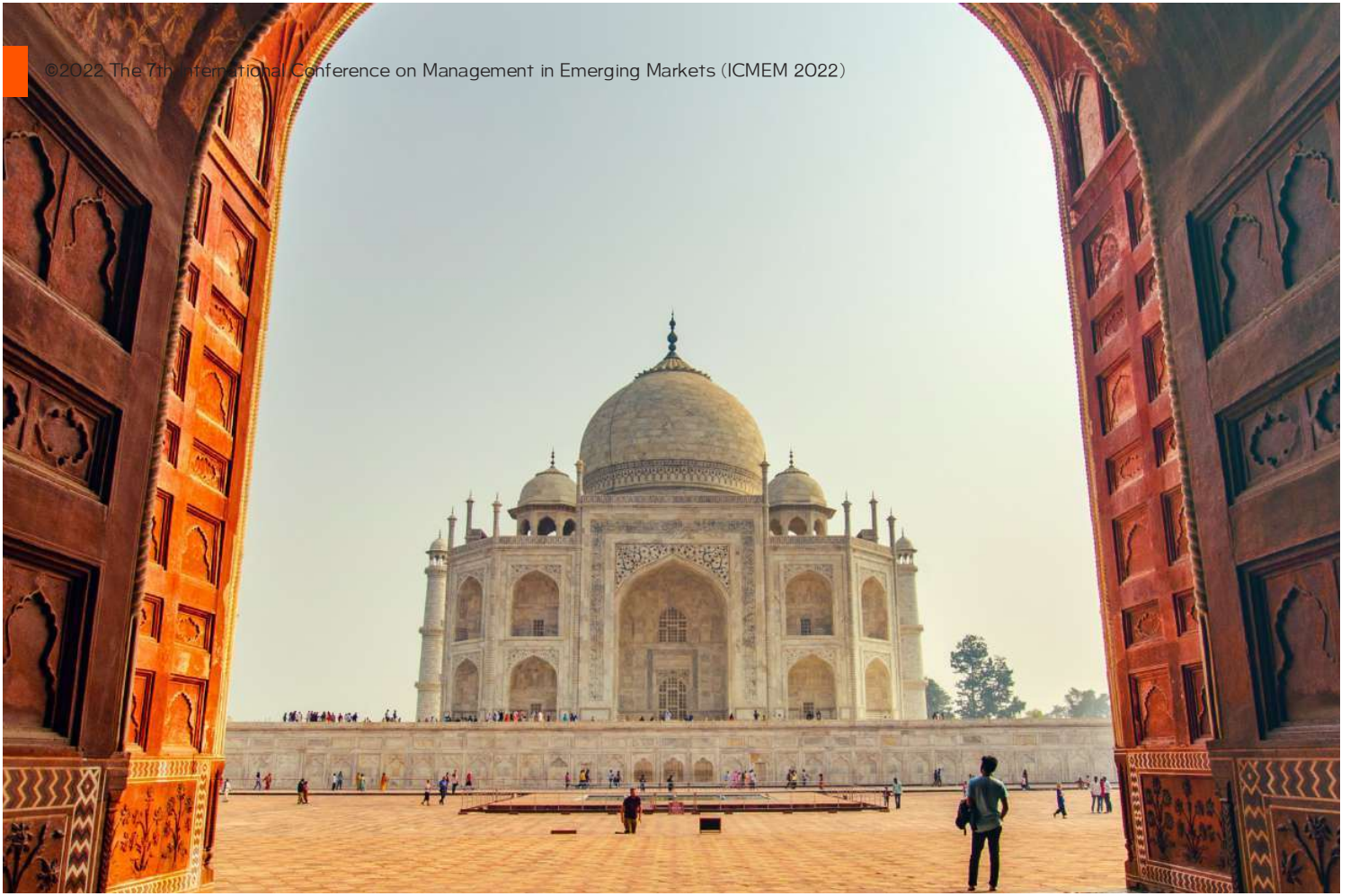




Paper 10

Empirical Study on Understanding the Ethical Behaviour
of Fair and Lovely Marketing Communication in Targeting
Indian Audiences

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Abstract - This research paper focuses on the empirical study used to examine Indian audiences' perspective on the marketing communication of Fair and Lovely. The brand's advertisement lies upon the promotion of beauty ideals constructed on racial standards, the discriminatory sexist stereotypes, and prejudices related to skin colour. Therefore, the question on whether ethical approaches are adopted or if it is dismissed, alongside the impact that it has created for the Indian audiences. A qualitative research method was adopted, hence involving 10 Indian participants through a semi-structured interview. Findings of this research study shows that unethical practices are conducted, these are detected through; brand's false advertisement, false perception, lack of inclusive brand ambassadors, and the shortfall of diverse and inclusive marketing communication of Fair and Lovely. According to the research's conclusions, unethical business practices are linked to India's past history. In recommendations of this research study for Fair and Lovely to have a positive response marketing using appropriate messaging terms, such as promoting healthy skin rather than fair skin will give out a positive delivery of beauty to the Indian audiences.

Keywords - Advertisements, Fair and Lovely, Indian audiences, marketing, marketing communication, racial discrimination, unethical practices

I. INTRODUCTION

Women are continually reminded of what they believe defines beauty. In which, the marketing outlet has contributed to the false perception of beauty by defining beauty as one certain look, the Eurocentric look (Mayorova and Kwan, 2003). Series of advertising continues to convey the blatant message that dark skin is a barrier to women's better work options, and that using skin whitening products may lighten the complexion and thereby transform lives (Karnani, 2007). Thus, riling up critics from groups of women towards the advertisements as 'discriminatory of skin colour on daily basis', 'a disrespect of women's dignity', and 'very racist' (Lestikow, 2003).

Hence, India which is believed to be one of the most diverse countries in the world (Wang and McLean, 2016), as multiples of religion, gender, education, ethnicity, languages, class, social orientation, and generation all come together in this nation. Nevertheless, the battle of

diversity in India has become a challenging issue. Wang and McLean (2016) article, mentioned six challenges connected to organisational diversity, one of which is: racism based on skin colour (Sims and Hirudayaraj,

2016). As mentioned by Sims and Hirudayaraj (2016) in their article, many Asian societies revere light or white complexion as a symbol of status and power, and colourism impacts both men and women's self-perceptions. Suggesting the superiority of colourism and anti-blackness.

This research focuses on the iconic brand Fair & Lovely which reportedly has 70% of India's skin-lightening market shares (Gajanan, 2020). Following significant criticism that it promotes beauty ideals based on racial standards, Unilever and its Indian affiliate, Hindustan Unilever Limited, revealed that by last year intentions to rebrand its best-selling skin whitening product, Fair & Lovely (Gajanan, 2020). Taking into account this phenomenon, I see the urgency to further explore and understand the marketing practice of Fair and Lovely, and assess whether an ethical approach is apparent in the advertisement for the Indian audiences. Thus, this research aspires to achieve the following research objectives:

- o ·To assess the ethical positioning based on the Indian audiences for Fair & Lovely
- o ·To observe how the Indian audiences perceive Fair & Lovely marketing activity
- o ·To explore the Indian audiences level of responsiveness towards Fair & Lovely
- o ·To understand whether Fair & Lovely has affected the Indian audiences positively or negatively

Moreover, this research will conduct an empirical study from the Indian market. Emphasising on the brand Fair and Lovely the research aims to discover whether the brand has deprived ethical marketing to be depicted for the market or not. Therefore, the research question obtained is;

- o How has Fair and Lovely communicated their ethical practice through marketing its product to the Indian audiences?

II. METHODOLOGY

The philosophical methodology which will be adopted for this research study is interpretivism. The stance taken by interpretive research methodologies is that our understanding of reality is a social fabrication by human interactions (Walsham, 1995). According to this viewpoint, the researcher interacts with the human subjects of the inquiry, affecting both side's perceptions (Walsham, 1995). Hence, this is a contrast to positivism which also is a philosophical methodology, that assumes the researcher's 'objective' data can be used to test prior hypotheses or theories, while interpretivism relates with how each tackles the study through exploring and examining human behaviour. Moreover, interpretivism allows a more flexible and wider approach that could be constructed in the research study. Finally, based on the research study it allows the interpretation of Indian audiences of Fair and Lovely perception on the marketing communication which has been depicted by the brand.

In addition, the theory development inductive method is use in this research study. Inductive method allows the researchers to better grasp the relationship between the causes and the effect of the research study (Yom, 2014). The strategies of exploration on specific searchers and more direct methods that are being studied. Additionally, during the study process, researchers will be encouraged to ask how the data which are collected, matched the proposed explanation, with the goal of acquiring a better understanding of observed events (Robinson, 1951). Thus, for this research study, the method of detecting the patterns, forming preliminary hypotheses allows a more exploration of the topic that could be conducted, and allows a more tentative conclusion. Finally, the data collected on the understanding of the brand Fair and Lovely marketing in targeting Indian audiences can be further generalised for conclusion.

In this research paper a qualitative approach will be conducted. Qualitative research gives out a general term that refers to study that emphasises the human experience through exploring opinions, beliefs, values, and experiences (Whitehead, 2007). Hence, through the phenomenological approach of this research paper, seeking to comprehend the significance of events and human interactions is fundamental. Gathering more information and acquiring a better understanding of what data is relevant is acquired, encouraging a more flexible approach that is so important to the qualitative research paper, in which it can change a line of research and move in new directions. Therefore, through the exploratory approach in understanding the brand Fair and Lovely marketing communication for the Indian audiences gaining richer data could be obtained through qualitative research.

Qualitative researchers must strike a balance between the requirement to be brief and the need to preserve their data's richness (Polit & Beck, 2010). Therefore, as this research study follows a qualitative approach it is most suitable to use the NVivo software, which are usually used for researchers that are obtaining qualitative methods for their research study. Through NVivo the data which are collected are analysed by thematic analysis. Thematic analysis enables pattern dictation within the data, thus emerging themes become the categories for investigations (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Data collection will be utilised as a support for the literature review. As the methodology and the analytical strategy used by the researchers influence how the data is used and what findings it can generate (Paradis, O'Brien, Nimmon, Bandiera & Martimianakis, 2016). Therefore, for this research study the data collection method will be interview.

a. Interview:

In this research study semi-structured interviews will be carried out, which takes place in April 2022. Semi-structured interviews provide a structure for the researchers to ask the relevant open-ended questions to enable participants to speak freely about their experiences (Polit & Beck, 2010). The use of open-ended questions are utilised as researchers want participants to elaborate in their own words and point of view, this allows for the collection of deeper and more complicated data (Whittemore & Grey, 2006). Additionally, each interview is set out uniquely, and the quality of the responses acquired from different interviews may vary greatly, the interaction between the interviewer and participant may vary in ways as well (Kumar, 2005). Thus, allowing freedom for the participants to answer the questions the way they desired, along with variation of the way in which each question is asked could happen.

Moreover, five out of ten participants were connection of the researcher; while the other five were recruited by third parties who were also known to the researcher. All the participants were contacted through an instant messaging platform by the researcher, and carried out the discussion on the preferable time for the interview. In addition, prior to conducting the interview, a consent form will be sent out to each participant and agreed upon participating in the research study. Nonetheless, participants are able to withdraw from the interview or not answer an interview question that will make them feel uncomfortable as a sensitive topic is being raised. Moreover, every participant will be asked the same set of questions which are divided into 5 categories that was made based of the literature review:

- o Awareness
- o Safety Issues
- o Marketing Communication
- o Audiences Perspective
- o Effect on Target Market
- o Suggestion

Thus, total of 24 questions on perspective and experience towards the marketing of Fair and Lovely. Finally, each interview will last approximately 20 minutes and will be recorded and transcribed through MS Teams, while one participant prefer conducting the interview through Zoom Meeting. Conducting the interview online allow the participants to feel more comfortable and freely in order to share their opinions and perspective towards the research study.

Moreover, in data analysis it has the aim to minimise, record, organise, and assign credibility to data that are collected. Qualitative researchers must strike a balance between the requirement to be brief and the need to preserve their data's richness (Polit & Beck, 2010). Therefore, as this research study follows a qualitative approach it is most suitable to use the NVivo software, which are usually used for researchers that are obtaining qualitative methods for their research study. Through NVivo the data which are collected are analysed by thematic analysis. Thematic analysis enables pattern dictation within the data, thus emerging themes become the categories for investigations (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Firstly, the data that are collected are transcribed, and move towards coding, analysing the data, evaluation, and end on the validation of the data. The process of transcribing the interviews can aid the researcher in gaining a better knowledge of the subject by allowing the researcher to listen to and read the transcribed interviews multiple times (Conroy, 2010). Once it has been analysed and categorised in an organised way, a theme will occur in which thematic analysis will come in finding the patterns of the collected data and looking for any similarities or differences. Lastly, verification of data, which entails double-checking the correctness of the researcher's understanding by rechecking the transcripts and codes, allowing the researcher to confirm or alter hypotheses already made (Sarantakos, 1998).

III. RESULTS

- A. Awareness
- a. Encounter Ads

All the participants are aware about Fair and Lovely by

encountering it through televisions advertisement in India:

"Yes, I have. I've seen it on TV." (Participant 5) "I came to know about Fair and Lovely through TV advertisements." (Participant 10) Participant 5 had also mentioned that she had encountered Fair and Lovely advertisement from posters and billboards which are placed along the road. Additionally, she had also bring up that sha has seen the brand advertisement through "in some movies also".

Furthermore, the participants thoughts towards the marketing delivering of Fair and Lovely is mainly focusing towards fair skin: "I think the commercial is 1. Like encouraging at their current customers to have fair skin." (Participant 8) "During the advertisements they try to promote for fair skin and light skin tone." (Participant 3) "Advertise a product as something to make you fair." (Participant 5)

- b. Thoughts on Marketing Practice

Moreover, the participants also mentioned that they think the marketing of the brand has shown unrealistic beauty looks for the Indian audiences:

"The advertisement and the videos and the people, the way that people look in the videos are unreal and it's not possible for anybody to look like that." (Participant 5) "I think it is such an unrealistic expectation that people or like society have and everyone watches TV and ads nowadays." (Participant 7)

- B. Safety Issues

- a. Ingredients Impact Purchasing Behaviour

Most of the participants has stated that a product ingredient do impact their purchasing behaviour:

"Well yeah, if I heard it is good review from other people and if it's good ingredients I will buy it. But if the ingredients are bad or harming our skin then why would I waste my money on buying those kind of stuffs." (Participant 1) "Yes they do. Because when I'm buying product, I want to make sure that I'm safe after using it. So that's why I like to look at the ingredients." (Participant 3)

Nevertheless, Participant 4 believe that she only looks at the key ingredient of a product, in which she means "if I want to have a more flowing skin, I would look for an ingredient that contain niacinamide." thus, specifying on her currents need. She further elaborate that "if I encounter several ingredients that are - I know it is dangerous, then I will not buy the products immediately." which Participant 1 also has the same thoughts if she sees any "bad or gaming our skin" she would not "waste my money on buying those kind of stuffs".

- b. Fair and Lovely as a Safe Product

Majority of the participants has mentioned that they do not think Fair and Lovely is completely a safe product:

"No, I do not believe it's a safe product." (Participant 3) "I would not say 100% safe." (Participant 4) "Not really, no. I mean like from what I understand, it's a skin whitening cream. So, there could be long term damages." (Participant 2)

C. Marketing Communication

a. Fair is Beauty

Many participants has shared their thoughts on Fair and Lovely marketing communication and they believe that the brand is classifying fair skin as beautiful among any other skin types: "I feel the underlying message they want to market it as the same, if you have fairer skin, then you're more beautiful." (Participant 3) "Everybody has to be fair to be pretty." (Participant 5)

Moreover, Participant 1 has classified it as a problem in which she said "their problem is giving a message to make your skin look whiter." Additionally, Participants 2, 6, and 8 all have the same perspective in elaboration to the marketing message as fair is beautiful they also think Fair and Lovely is delivering a message that

"If you're not fair enough you don't succeed in your life or like you don't get married or like get a good job." (Participant 6) "To be successful and to be confident, it all comes with how pale your skin is." (Participant 2) "I think the advertisement implicitly saying that in order for us to succeed in order for us to be accepted in society... we have to have lighter skin in order for us to be better." (Participant 8)

D. Audiences Perspective

a. Effectiveness

Among the 10 participants which was interviewed most of the participants mentioned that the product is not effective: "Uh, I do not think it is very effective, or maybe it might make your skin lighter, but I do feel even if it does, it may have negative effects on your skin." (Participant 3) "Umm, I did not see any much difference. Well, I saw some brightening effect in my skin, but after not using it for like 2 weeks and three weeks after that it comes back." (Participant 4)

Participant 5 shared the experience of her relative on using the brand's product and highlighted that it did not give out any changes "my mother was using it and it made no changes.". In addition, participant 10 rated the effective from a scale of 1-10 and gives it a "maybe 3 - 4, it doesn't show the results, how they're shown in TV".

Consequently, almost all the participants excluding

one participants has stated that they are not willing to purchase Fair and Lovely: "I would not buy that product based on what their beliefs are." (Participant 2) "It makes me don't want to buy the product." (Participant 9) "I already like turn my back from Fair and Lovely and I would not buy the brand anymore and would not support them anymore." (Participant 1)

Another participant would also not purchase it because of the brand's history: "I might not be very keen on buying it just because of the history." (Participant 7)

b. New Brand Name

All the participants has different thought when asked about the change of Fair and Lovely name to Glow and Lovely, but most are still unsatisfied with the change of the brand name: "It doesn't make any much difference in my opinion." (Participant 4) "Portrayed them in a bad light, so I feel just because they (Fair and Lovely) came under fire for that, they changed their name." (Participant 3) "It's stupid, it's just that maybe they want it to be in the line of cosmetics. They didn't have any other options, so they just change it to Glow and Lovely" (Participant 6)

c. Inclusivity and Diversity

In contrast to the respond on the change of the brand name where many are still unsatisfied in the transformation, when asked whether this could be an approach to a more inclusive and diverse movement by Fair and Lovely many agree that this could be the first step: "Maybe it is the first step they have taken in future they might." (Participant 3) "Yeah, I would say yes, because glow. I think the word 'Glow' itself." (Participant 4) "Yeah I agree, it is an approach to be more inclusive. Because Fair and Lovely is very limited and specific meaning and goals, right. Whereas, Glow and Lovely has a wider meaning." (Participant 1)

Additionally, Participant 10 agree that it is an approach to a more inclusive and diverse brand however "it all depends on their marketing and advertisement. That's the area."

E. Effects on Target Audiences

a. Negative Effect

Most of the respondents believe that the advertisement of Fair and Lovely has given out a negative effects towards them: "I think from the answers it's quite clear that it's a negative impact. Setting unrealistic expectations for young girls" (Participant 7) "I think it drives me into more negative side than positive, because those advertisement making me feel more insecure." (Participant 1)

Participant 1 continued that the advertisement also effected the beauty standard in India, "it can damaging the beauty standard in India.", in which participants 8 and 9 also mentioned that Fair and Lovely has soon "fit up

to this one standard (fair skin)." (Participant 8). "set a standard for the Indian beauty standard" (Participant 9).

b. Insecurity

As mentioned above by Participant 1 that the advertisement made her feel insecure, this was also felt by most of the other participants: "It makes me insecure with what I already had." (Participant 9) "Messages that they send could be quite harmful to girls or to people who are insecure." (Participant 2) "I mean, even I for a second thought I was not fair enough to be pretty" (Participant 5)

c. Unethical Marketing

All the participants believe that Fair and Lovely has conducted an unethical marketing in the way they promote their brand to the Indian audiences: "I believe it is, yes, it is unethical." (Participant 3) "Yes, I think it is very unethical because it's sort of contradicts the nature of Indian people like their natural skin." (Participant 9) "Yes, it is unethical. It is not right to claim something that is not true." (Participant 5)

F. Suggestion

a. Eliminate False Advertisement

The last question of the interview asked every participants on what Fair and Lovely could do better in the future, which most participants believe that they should remove false advertisements: "No false advertising about how you know if you are pale, you can be successful and that is not how it should be." (Participant 2) "Incorporates more realistic expectations." (Participants 7) "No point in just making false claims" (Participant 5)

Additionally, both participants 8 and 9 also mentioned that they would hope for Fair and Lovely to promoted "healthy skin" compare to fair skin.

b. Inclusive Brand Ambassadors

Three of the participants believe that Fair and Lovely should also incorporate the right brand ambassadors to promote its brand that showcase different skin colour in which the Indian audiences can relate towards: "Choosing the right influencers or the right celebrities to advertise." (Participant 4) "Choosing brand ambassadors that are not just dusky or dark." (Participant 10) "I think they should give like inclusive approach in the future, like by hiring female actress with like different skin colour." (Participant 1)

rather an unethical marketing this is supported by common theme of all the participants in this research study who believes that Fair and Lovely has indeed conducted an unethical marketing as a way in promoting its product to the Indian audiences. As part of the effect towards the Indian audiences, it is also shown that the marketing communication of the brand has mostly impacted the audiences negatively by which it also leads to insecurity that occurs in the audience's perspective as a result of watching Fair and Lovely advertisements that they mostly see on television. Additionally, it also impacted in defining the beauty standard in India that is set to be 'Fair = Beautiful', in which the participants believe to be 'damaging' and completely disagree.

This further correlates with the literature review of this research study, in which the history of India has affected the people today into thinking that fair skin is classified as beautiful and could bring you a great social status. Furthermore, this leads to the way Fair and Lovely has communicated its marketing practices for the Indian audiences that shows a clear racist stereotypes, governing a simple principle that once you have used the skin-whitening product you will be guaranteed with success, social benefits, making your family proud, and above all the ultimate beauty. This tie with the response of the interviewed participants that they feel insecure and limited as to the beauty standard in India as it is only seen as one thing which is 'Fair', without having a lighter skin they are afraid that they could not acquire the happiness and success as portrayed through the marketing communication of Fair and Lovely as a result of purchasing its product. As also mentioned by the literature review above, as a result of the marketing communication by Fair and Lovely that depict prejudice based on race has engages and directs human behaviour, leading consumers to seek escape routes (La tour and Zahra, 1989) by producing worry and tension in contribution to the audiences insecurity after watching the advertisement of Fair and Lovely.

Through the interview findings a consistent theme occurs in which the majority of the participants have shared their perspective that they do not believe Fair and Lovely products are completely a safe product. As a brand that produces and sells skin-whitening products the participants believe there might be harmful ingredients that are incorporated into the product itself, that will allow the consumers to obtain the results as shown by the advertisements. The interview of the findings also shows multiple participants believe that the product could lead to long term damages for the consumers skin condition. Moreover, the findings are supported by the literature review findings, which mentioned that skin-whitening creams or products contain harmful ingredients that could lead to multiple skin health issues and damages in order

IV. DISCUSSIONS

A. Findings

Based on the interview findings above it shows that Fair and Lovely marketing communication towards the Indian audiences does not lie upon an ethical marketing practice,

to acquire the fair skin result.

Additionally, this leads to the effectiveness of the product itself, through the literature review it is believed that Fair and Lovely do not incorporate any dangerous ingredients in the products, but it is stated that without these ingredients the effectiveness of the product comes in question as consumers cannot acquire the expected result as shown through their advertisement without these ingredients being included in production of the products. Hence, another theme that rose up during the interview finding include all the participants of the research study thinks Fair and Lovely is not very effective, many do not see any differences or changes as highlighted by advertisement, furthermore the participant also gives out a rating from 1-10 on the effectiveness and was only given from 3-4 which is placed in the lowest numerical scale.

In consequence, the findings show that most participants are not willing to purchase Fair and Lovely due to the beliefs and history of the brand. Nonetheless, this contradicts with the literature review findings that although there are multiple critics that arose towards the advertisements of Fair and Lovely the annual sales of the brand still holds a major number of more than \$560 million in South Asia (Chandani, 2020).

Moreover, through the literature review findings it is found that Fair and Lovely has recently changed its brand name to Glow and Lovely due to the petition that was created by Chandana Hiran and signed by nearly 15,000 people (Bose, 2020) in order for Fair and Lovely to shift the message of their marketing effort on the skin-whitening product that is encountered by the Indians in their daily lives. In account to this, a striking theme shows that multiple participants are still unsatisfied with the change of the brand name, they believe Fair and Lovely might only change the brand name due to the raging amount of protest from the petition and could not see any difference act that the brand has try to transform in communicating their brand's message, thus the Indian's audience are still unsatisfied regarding the movement the brand has taken.

On the other hand, in contrast to the dissatisfaction of the participants on the transformation of Fair and Lovely brand name, a significant common theme finding was that all participants agreed the change of the brand name is indeed a first step taken by Fair and Lovely in becoming a more inclusive and diverse brand. Hence, this could also be seen through the findings of the literature review which state that embracing inclusivity and diversity could lead to 'high performance' in the industry (Torres and Murray, 2000).

An emerging theme throughout the interview findings shows that in order for Fair and Lovely to communicate its

marketing better towards the Indian audience in the future they should eliminate false advertisement as mentioned through the literature review findings that Fair and Lovely conduct false perception and advertisement for its product. Other than eliminating false advertisement it is also suggested through the finding that Fair and Lovely should adopt inclusive brand ambassadors to promote the brand in a more diverse and inclusive marketing communication. Therefore, based on the findings from both interview and literature review the ethical practice of Fair and Lovely is considered unethical as a way the brand's communication is marketed to the Indian audiences.

V. CONCLUSION

A. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to assess the ethical position based on the Indian audiences for Fair and Lovely, observing how the Indian audiences perceive Fair and Lovely marketing activity, exploring the Indian audiences level of responsiveness towards Fair and Lovely, and understanding whether Fair and Lovely has affected the Indian audiences positively or negatively. In order to investigate the research questions a qualitative approach in the form of semi-structured interviews is conducted. Obtaining the semi-structured interviews has allowed for more in-depth insight into the personal experiences alongside the perspective of the Indian audiences towards the marketing communication of Fair and Lovely. This discussion was able to be held in a more open and honest manner, making the interpretation and analysis of the findings more meaningful. A review of the literature was presented corresponding to the research topic on the ethical behaviour of Fair and Lovely marketing communication towards the Indian audiences. Finally, an interpretation of the findings was presented, as well as an explanation of why the findings were significant to the research, including parallels to previous studies.

Additionally, in response to the research question Fair and Lovely has communicated their marketing ethically yet an unethical approach has been used in the marketing of the brand. Based on the findings of this research, the unethical practices are interrelated and highlight from the history of the India, the portrayal of racial discrimination of the advertisement, the effectiveness of the product, and the effect it has influenced towards the Indian audience in which it leads to insecurity and negative effect. Moreover, this study highlights the further approach Fair and Lovely should take in order for it to obtain an ethical practice in delivering its marketing communication through a more inclusive and diverse approach, as this would increase the performance of the brand.

B. Recommendations

Through the finding of this research study, it suggests the importance of ethical practices towards marketing communication of a brand. Thus, as the finding suggests Fair and Lovely marketing practice is considered to be unethical, the brand should further transform its marketing to a more ethical way. It is believed that inclusivity and diversity is prominent in today's industry. As suggested by the interview findings, for Fair and Lovely to adopt a more ethical marketing they could incorporate inclusive brand ambassadors to promote the brand, thus grabbing more audiences towards Fair and Lovely, obtaining more loyal customers, and allowing a more positive brand image. Alongside, eliminating false advertisement is also a way for Fair and Lovely in delivering the marketing communication ethically, this will allow a more realistic beauty standard for the Indian audiences as well as away from racial discriminations that can threaten or leads to psychological effect such as insecurity and being afraid for the audiences that watches Fair and Lovely advertisement.

In addition, a recommendation for Fair and Lovely to further adopt a more ethical practice includes incorporating safe ingredients in its product, hence leading to a more effective result of the product that can satisfy the consumers along with the audiences. Promoting the product with the right messaging words as a way for Fair and Lovely to communicate its brand to the audiences, such as advertising healthy skin rather than fair skin will place Fair and Lovely a more positive response from the Indian audiences.

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