

Socio-Economic Environment and its Influence on Cosmetics and Fragrance Preferences

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INTRODUCTION

We have seen how social and economic happening shape character and personality of human beings. This becomes all the more apparent when we trace the life of popular consumer products over the years. Looking back, one will realise how ordinary products became memorable, and later integrated itself to identify to the culture of those times. As creators and marketers of consumer products, we should clearly understand the importance of social and economic trends of our current times and its relevance to consumer preferences, if we have to achieve a certain level of success. In this paper, we discuss the world socio-economic environment in the last millennium, when the modern women is said to have emerged, its influences on fashions, cosmetics and fragrance preferences and so predict the near future we have in store for our industry.

The early 20th century

Female emancipation became an organised movement worldwide. Adult franchise gained prominence in the developed democratic world. World War I influenced business and economy. Driving became a pastime among the rich classes. Dust & waterproof clothes made its mark. Women's skirts revealing feet and ankles became popular, making skin creams that protected skin from the hot sun, wind and dust, much used. Chypre fragrances by Coty's reflected the spirit of those times. The freshness, richness, and earthy quality of the Chypre family symbolised women's emancipation and the sweet floral and slightly powdery fragrance types, that controlled women until that time, lost the race. As the world progressed, newer inventions

like heavy machinery, automobiles and airplane fascinated and drew respect from people. Jazz became popular. Lady's skirts became shorter. Shapeless clothes, without bust or hips, boyish looks with heavy makeup, darkened lips, mascara, plucked eyebrows, kohl lined eyes, huge earrings and hats became fashions. Synthetic ingredients debuted in fragrance creation. Chanel used aldehydic notes and imparted a radiant quality to fragrances that one could never imagine before.

Thirties to end of World War II

Zipper was invented. Mass production of synthetic fibres by end of the decade helped creating well cut clothes easily affordable by the common people. Elastic fabrics and vinyl silky dresses became popular. Femininity returned. Women sported long hairs, and dressed to show body curves and boost male morale. Clothes with stark yellow, green, blues & browns, unique colour combinations like cocoa brown, mustard and grey became common. Annual vacations, sun bathing, wearing swimsuits and evening gowns became popular. Film stars like Joan Crawford, Jean Harlow & Greta Garbo inspired cosmetic manufacturers. Black and white films of the thirties required facial definition. Film actors to augment their beauty plucked their brows, coloured them with pencils, and used strong lip colours and mascaras. Oriental fragrances intensely warm and feminine like "Schiaparelli's shocking", and rich expensive floral's like "Patou's Joy" suited the feminine attributes and fashion requirements. World War II bought out many issues to the fore. Nylon became scarce and remained so until the end of war. Textile dyestuff were rationed and as dark colours

used up more dyes, pastel colours, lime, cherry red and pink, mauve, peacock blue, light green, yellow and grey became popular. To keep up the morale of female workers engaged in war, Britain started a special allowance for women to purchase high-grade talc and foundation. Lana Turner, Betty Garble, and Jane Russell became pin up girls. The war also influenced fashion greatly. Short and slimmer silhouettes were preferred. Military styles, brass buttons, trim braids, square shoulders and jackets were style. Silk for hosiery was unavailable, so women used makeup pencils to camouflage dress seams. Hollywood continued to hold its sway on fashions. People copied Dorothy Lamoure's two-piece swimsuit, Loretta Young's elegance, and Ginger Roger's white collared working girl's, dress. Although one can consider the period from the turn of the 20th century to the end of World War I as the Golden Age of Perfumery, the period starting from the 1930s to the outbreak of World War II was no less memorable for the century.

A new beginning & fifties

With the end of the war, fabric restrictions too ended and the baby boom began. New look, long full shirts, snug bodices, jackets, teenage fashions like bobby socks, saddle shoes, sloppy Joe's sweaters, oversized shirts became glamorous. Nail enamel, matte finish, lightly powdered make ups, deep red lips, eyes lightly brushed with mascara came in vogue. During wartime, fragrance consumption was less, but with the war fading and consumer goods becoming easily, available women opted for softer prettier scents. Floral family types like "L'Air Du Temps", "White Shoulders" and "Fracas" were introduced.

The end of war austerities led to an optimistic fifty. People wanted political and social change and move away from the unhappy past. Although a sort of renaissance for arts, fashion and fragrance took place, the Berlin wall did rise, Vietnam fell and the cold war began. Primary colours became modern. Years of war separation made people yearn for relationship and togetherness with family and friends. People focused on living comforts. Suburban housing development, shopping centres, and comfortable lifestyles, became important. Autos and airplanes services started. 'Sputnik I' took off and the space age began. Pin up girls, Bridget Bardot & Marilyn Monroe transformed themselves into sex symbols. Automated household appliances changed the life of millions of women. Televisions in households started influencing people creating new heroes.

People swung to rock & roll. Tight pants, Elvis Presley haircuts & sideburns, James Dean & Marlon Brando, tee shirts and leather jackets became popular. Women dictated fashions with full skirts, matching tops, sweater sets, mother-daughter dresses, baby doll pyjamas, suits and stiletto heels, Capri pants, Bermuda shorts, and flat shoes. Colourfast turquoise dye for cotton made pink shirts hot and fashionable. Audrey Hepburn & Fred Astaire, who sported pink in the colourful movie 'Funny face,' drove people crazy pink. Heavy makeup, strongly marked brows became fashionable, doe eyed eyes with curved corners, emphasised a growing range of eye shadows. America became affluent and influenced fashions. Typical male and female roles were clearly defined. Chypre and oriental fragrances gained popularity. Fragrances like, "Youth dew", "Intimate" and "Royal Secret", all of them having a common aggressive fragrance note evolved and dictated fashions among women. Designers became more artistic and creative, and the fragrance bottles themselves became works of art.

Tumultuous sixties

The baby boom of the forties gave rise

to the chaotic sixties dominated with teenage youth culture that was all-powerful and influential. Fashion, music, clothes and attitude, were all rebellious and anti-establishment. Beatles, drugs, hippies, communes, open free sex and contraceptive pill changed the environment. Mini skirts, lacy panty hose, white leather boots, were introduced simultaneously in the US and Europe. Pop art, Sassoon hair cuts, hippy ethnic looks, Afghan dresses, African kaftans, Indonesian batik shirts, Peruvian peasant costumes, dangling pierced earrings predominated fashions. Rock artists and Levis sneakers were fashion trendsetters. Paco Rabanne designed mini dresses in geometric shapes with metal, leather and plastic. Beatle's yellow was the new colour, psychedelic drugs, hippy movement, long multicoloured dresses, contrasting flower prints epitomised the modern generation. Minis became micro mini; micromini soon became midis causing a great deal of confusion. Midis drove women to wear pants and suits generally worn by men. Soon unisex clothes took over and finally culminating in the ubiquitous Jeans. Pale lip colours and frosted lip-gloss, heavy dye makeup, false lashes, painted twiggy lashes, bright eye shadow, became popular. The young teenage rebellious generation mistrusted all over the age of thirty. Obviously, fragrance preferences evident among the younger lot were the trendsetters. Musky, incense type classics and flowery fragrances like "Fidgy" & "Norell" became popular.

Quiet seventies

Compared to the sixties, the new decade was quiet with economic recession hovering all over the globe. The seventies can best be described as a period of transformation. After the "free love" generation of the hippies, the '70s were aptly named as the "Me" generation of the yuppies. People became conscious about their health and body. Jogging, playing, exercising, roller-skating, consuming health foods, started. Disco dancing was born. Pants,

suits, tight jeans, jogging suits, jump suits, were the biggest fashions. Unisex clothing became common. More and more women joined the industrial work force. During the seventies, feminism, gay movement, punk, neo-romanticism with clothes with several lifestyles and reflecting the owner's attitude in life and views emerged. Conservatism became common in regular lifestyles and in cosmetic and fragrance usage. Make-ups were subdued and the natural look was in. Brown eye shadow, beige foundation, colourless lip-gloss, brown and terracotta lipsticks and nail enamels, became popular. Use of natural ingredients in cosmetics products became a rage. The seventies really did not produce any new family of fragrances. The fragrance character however did change in line with the changing attitude of women, now liberated from the bonds of a homemaker. They expressed their liberation with their liking for floral green fragrance types like "Chloe", "Jontue", "Alliage" and "Charlie". "Charlie" personified the "Me" generation - strong, determined and ready to be heard women of the seventies and became the runaway success of the times. Many successful Chypre fragrances hit the shelves. Stylish signature fragrances from famous fashion labels flooded the market, opening the door for trendy fragrances of varying genres at all price points. Small perfumeries that sold products solely on their reputation dwindled. Instead, large distributors who looked for famous fashion names and flashy advertising campaigns entered the market to sell fragrance as fast and as much as they could, ending the innocence of the fragrance industry.

Conservative eighties

The conservative economies of the eighties, made consumer purchases tend towards the classic timeless products reflecting quality rather than quantity. Unlike the seventies, the fine fragrance market made waves on its own. The teens of the sixties matured and eventually tried to achieve what their parents also did at the

same age. Good education, settling down well in career, marrying late and hence later children became new values. Different lifestyle options, speciality boutiques, special interest magazines, body fitness clubs, nutrition, and health food cult that had emerged in the seventies became more pronounced. Individual success of young professional caught on with the industry, creating exclusive fragrances for males. Femininity and masculinity thus became well defined. Distributors and advertisement campaigns grew larger and became more elaborate. Consumer base grew exponentially. As the decade progressed, photography publicity campaigns became essential and big budgets were allocated for launchings and promotions. Eloquent brand names offering exclusive styles developed. Product lifestyle became shorter. Fashionable clothing, soft dresses, softer fabrics and tailoring that provide easy movement and fluidity became essential elements to live life. Cosmetics for every occasion were produced and marketed. Purple and wine coloured cosmetics became classics. A balanced makeup during the day and fantasy makeup as the day wore out became the norm. Although the eighties stimulated the fifties in terms of attitude, values, patriotism, and conservatism, it was also very different from it in other ways, making this decade a very complex one. Popular scents included florizontals like "Oscar", and "Vanderbilt" to pure oriental like "Opium" and "Obsession" having a fantasy appeal. Spicy floral "Chanel", "Paris", "Poison", "Eternity" and "Samsara" were other popular fragrances.

Globalised materialistic nineties

Economic crisis, conflicts and confrontation, among nations in the eighties led independent nations to become interdependent. Communications, energy conservation and environmental concerns, became crucial. The will to survive in these tiring times made commercial coexistence on one another necessary. Commercial economic power was valued more than brute military strength. Economic construction began, in developing nations, particularly witnessed in India, China, and countries of the erstwhile Soviet Union.

The large population in these nations also emerged into major marketing opportunities for all marketers. The "free love" generation of the hippies, popular in the west in the sixties came to India in the seventies and likewise the fashion trends. Can you forget Zeenat Aman's westernized outfits and Dev Anand's "Dum Maro Dum" of the seventies? To be precise until the nineties fashion trends and lifestyles of the west took at least a decade long to be introduced in India. However, the nineties set the trend of Globalisation, written with a capital "G." German reunification and the fall of the Berlin-Wall epitomised globalisation. Globalisation became important to all organisations and establishments that had the desire to survive. The textile, cosmetic, fragrance industries were no exceptions. Globalisation opened the pathway for free access across the world market and proved to be a blessing to those who realised the available opportunities. Some, overwhelmed by the greater challenge of a bigger and tougher market competition, suffered. Prior to globalisation, testing and launching a new fragrance in one market and then after having succeeded there introducing it in another market was common. All this changed. Instead, launching it simultaneously in all the target countries was a smarter thing to do.

Greater challenges and tougher competition of the nineties created stress in people. Perfumes that induced a soothing, calm and quiet fragrance was the need of the hour. In this decade, many fragrance launches took place. In a span of one year, 1991 alone, more than 60 new fragrances were unveiled and most were fresh scents. An important trend one noticed was that consumers depending on their mood used more than one fragrance at a time. This, in turn, reduced a fragrance's life span to less than three years. Celebrity endorsement became more fashionable and profitable. People started buying perfume from the Internet or via home shopping. Selling a perfume in combination with the image of a film or sports star became one of the smartest media campaigns. Lancôme's

"Trésor", Issey Miyake's "Eau d'Issey", "Angel", by Thierry Mugler became popular. Unisex fragrance made its appearance again. "CK One", from Calvin Klein revolutionised the sector where most products earlier had strictly been classified as 'feminine' or 'masculine'. By mid-nineties, light scents, sheer oriental and florizontals dominated. Chanel launched "Allure", which was a fresh oriental.

Year 1997, was International women's year. Women looked for freedom to express their individuality as wives, mothers, and businesspersons and tried to define femininity their own way, with either gentle scents or returning to oriental fragrances. Classic re-launches of '80s scents, with a newer creative fragrant interpretation for young women who live life in their own time, with their own standard looks took shape. Companies extended their product lines to essential body collections. Sexy but mystic, romantic but sophisticated, was what women wanted to be by the late '90s. Women wanted their fragrances to evoke these feelings when worn. Even though the classic scents continued to rule the senses, one had to sell it in a lighter version, or possibly introduce it through new personal care product.

The new millennium

The Gulf War, clandestine terrorist attacks by misguided religious groups, the Afghan conflict and AIDS are the major happenings in this new millennium. It has brought into focus the fears and concerns of society. Materialism has faded with men and women yearning for a purer world. All this indirectly translated in safety concerns of the various products used. Research Institute of Fragrance Materials (RIFM) through the International Fragrance Research Association (IFRA), European Union cosmetics directive, and other Government bodies, have become very active in regulating the use of fragrance materials, keeping in mind the welfare of the consumers. To move out from an increasingly materialistic world, people are cocooning themselves or embracing the new age lifestyles, looking for fragrances that reflect a new freshness. The internet is expanding, touching every aspect of our lives and giving rise

to a webbed interplanetary settlement. The so-called macho men have started to open up to their emotions and are exhibiting it so openly. Aldehydic floral notes that were popular in earlier decade made a comeback with a twist of exotic fruits and spices to appeal to a younger audience. Fragrances that reminded the gentle, tender memories of our childhood, linking taste and smell in the creamy, sweet notes of vanilla, caramel, milk have also returned. Fragrances that smell of fresh water, as if to quench our desire for purity evoking the sea, water, plants and flowers, creating a natural feel, and eventually refocusing on the basics: earth, fire, water and wind are now appealing to this modern generation.

A promising future

The future holds great diversity. Alternative lifestyles, varied segmentation and specialisation will continue to expand, presenting a golden, opportunity for robust growth. The rural demand particularly in developing nations will impel marketers to broaden their reach by increased penetration, innovative strategies, proper positioning, a strong brand promotion, effective communication, a good distribution network, providing superior quality products at an affordable purchase price. Unprecedented demand in a growing environment will help marketers create new positioning, for their creations that will appeal and explore newer avenues for sales growth. Innovation in a business function is critical for development, for beating competition and for increasing market share and profits. Newer ideas, means and methods that can excite consumers will have to be adopted that not only induce them to use the product, but also make them use in copious amounts. Today the cost of entry is high and this will only increase in times to come. As consumer needs keep evolving, marketed products will also have to change and keep up with the times. Consumers will move from a product with a single benefit to products that will provide multiple benefits. The industry will have to rise up to this challenge to produce products accordingly and

market it at an affordable price. If one is ready to launch an interesting innovative product with good advertisement and promotional support then several modest success, a few major hits, and a multitude of failures is guaranteed. Some will survive the test of time and become classics, some more will have a modest lifetime of 2-3 years and many will disappear without leaving a trace. Physical fitness will continue to be a part of our living style. Outdoor activities, walking, jogging, swimming, running, body-building and exercising to keep one fit and fine will increase among consumers. Developing nations in Asia and Africa are becoming westernised and this will become faster day-by-day. Marketers will explode the market with cosmetics, fragrances and other lifestyle consumer products and aggressively market it to the young who are less inclined to deep-rooted cultural habits and product usage. Electronic items, machinery and computers have already entered our life in office and our homes. In the coming decade, it will totally permeate every aspect of human existence. Time is not far off when personalised handcrafted products made specific to individual requirements are available. Every person will have his or her own one of the kind signature products, fashion clothing, cosmetics or fragrances created exclusively for them. Aromatherapy based products using all naturals will blossom and grow stronger. Scented cosmetics that repel mosquitoes from biting you, but attract the opposite sex, while keeping the stray dogs away may become a reality.

The new ideas list can be endless. In the era of growth, it is important that innovative creations, move outside the limits of the now existing fragrance types, thereby extending the existing product lineage. This is most likely to happen in the near future.

CONCLUSION

The sense of smell depends on other human senses. As such, it is not surprising that our psychological and emotional needs directly determine our fragrance choices.

Fragrances like the colours and clothes we wear, not only gives us a chance to identify and emphasize our moods and feelings, but also help us project the moods and feelings we so desire. Fragrance manufacturers and marketers all these years have done much research on the psychological impact of fragrance and they will continue to do so.

The future of the cosmetic and fragrance fashion industry will depend on the level of creativity we foster and support. Industry encouragement necessary to all practitioners to achieve a high level of originality without too much, shackles of practicality and compromise will have to be provided to achieve success. Every statistic, trend and social happening in society has an impact on consumer behaviour, as it could turn out to be the root to develop an important marketing concept directed towards a small segment or special interest group. Great ideas are not very easy to get. One will have to discard more than twenty ideas to identify one that is practically achievable and has a potential for success. It is important to initiate an idea and develop it and if it is meritorious then opportunities to market it successfully will be many.

We are aware how our sense of smell affect us either subliminally or overtly, fascinating us with its magical mystery. With every passing day, we gain additional knowledge and as we unravel the secrets of the unknown the fascination and excitement, it brings forth only increases. Creativity in every facet of life is the driving force for effecting change, and future will only bring continuous change. Sant Kabir said, "Kal Kare So Aaj Kar, Aaj Kare So Aab", i.e., "What you intended to do tomorrow, do it today. What you want to do today do it right now!" Perhaps, today, we can all contribute in moulding our own future, giving shape to all potential happenings in right earnest by breaking the boundaries of creativity; we have set for others and ourselves. Let us make this happen!

After all, "Tomorrow begins today."