Every two months a young college student in Rourkela, Orissa travels to Kolkata, West Bengal to shop for garments & accessories for himself & his close friends…

A local Shoes trader in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh travels to Delhi every week to observe the latest trends & fashions with respect to footwear; in order to replicate the same designs for his stock of shoes to be sold in Meerut…

The only thing common between them is that they both pander to Aspirational marketing & if studied together; they explain the Cause & effect relationship of a new phenomenon emerging from Aspirational marketing (which we will discuss later in the article).

Aspirational marketing is not new to the world of management; as it has been extensively exploited by the behemoth of Multinational corporations dealing in luxury brands for years.

Aspirational marketing is a management technique that companies worldwide exercise to present their brand to a particular set of people in such manner that people would feel elevated & superior by associating themselves with that brand.

The brand image is created in a way that people look up to that brand for its esteem & prestige; it is done by bracketing that brand with a certain element like a person, sport, Quality, ambition, or human trait that people are in awe of.
‘Raymond’ as a brand has been successful in crafting an inspirational brand by presenting the protagonist as a successful, global man; which people aspire to be (A complete man). The legendary ‘Marlboro Man’ campaign would be more precise an example.

Associating a brand of sports shoes (Nike) with a global celebrity like ‘Michael Jordan’ can also be classified under the genre of Aspirational marketing.

This process is extremely prevalent in developing nations as they have a constant desire to follow the west in fashion & lifestyle, so companies by connecting their brands to the desired elements create an Aspirational image amongst consumers.

The study of Aspirational marketing in context of Indian society and market would help us answer a lot of unasked questions; such as:–

Why does almost every lounge in Indian metros emphasize on English (or western) tracks?

The answer lies in the preference of young music followers as they are severely dedicated towards western music, not because the Hindi music is not peppy enough but because they (or ‘WE’ in many cases) feel pride being in the same class.

Why do Indian apparel brands such as ‘Kuotons’ use foreign origin models for their Brand advertisement in Indian market?

The answer is simple & has already been stated in the above paragraph.
Post Independence, both ‘the good and bad’ of the western lifestyle has influenced the Indian way of living; as ‘Dev Anand’ eloquently portrayed in his cult classic ‘Dum Maro Dum’.

It reached its epitome in 1970’s when everything from Movies to daily wear garments (Bell bottoms) to food (fast food) to music (Disco & break dance) was directly influenced by western culture.

Media after the advent of color television in 1982 & cable television a few years later has played a pivotal role in building this phenomenon from a niche segment to a mass occurrence.

Mass mediums like Internet then gave us more exposure than ever to the global scenario.

Since then The Businessmen of the world have used this concept in daily operations to market & sell their products & services in India.

Otherwise; how would you explain such rapid success of fast food chain like ‘Pizza Hut’ or ‘McDonald’s’ in Indian market?

Good market research & marketing policies! Yes Of-course it is one of the factors.

But isn’t it majorly because the youth of the nation has grown up watching Americans enjoying their hamburgers sitting on the bench with ‘Ronald Mcdonald’…!!!

Aspirational marketing is not just limited to India or other developing nations, it can & it does occur in every society as people everywhere idolize some or the other element like celebrities, quality, form of sport etc, & this process admiration would be used by entrepreneurs to promote their brand by relating it with that particular element of admiration.
It is not just limited to one country or people in that country looking up to a different country & being influenced by their flamboyance. This process has evolved itself in such a way that it is now integrated to different states, cities or regions in any given country, wherein a certain set of people in a certain region looks up to a different section of people in some other region for inspiration.

This gradual evolution of Aspirational marketing has led to a new phenomenon known as Regional Aspirational marketing.

Let’s not confuse this with local marketing as local marketing is to pick a globally successful product, adding a local regional flavor in it & presenting it to the consumers in that particular region. This form of marketing caters to the Pride factor associated with the regionalism, like regional language, food or regional attire.

A nationwide television broadcasting channel playing soaps & movies in Maharashtrian language in Maharashtra for the local customers is a classic example of this phenomenon.

‘Spiderman the Movie’ being dubbed in Bhojpuri for the local industry is another illustration of Local marketing.

Regional Aspirational marketing is when a set of people in a certain region wish to emulate other set of people in different regions & trends followed by them. The businessman in that scenario would connect his products with the later & presents it to the former. So that the former set of people feels proud to be associated with the particular brand.

A businessman operating a restaurant in Agra, Uttar Pradesh, with the restaurant serving Delhi centric cuisines & provides ambience which relates to lifestyle in Delhi can be cited as a case of Regional Aspirational marketing.

Again, let us try to understand this process in the context of Indian society & market.
A quick analysis of cases mentioned in the starting should help us do that.

A college student in Rourkela, Orissa & his friends are inspired by the fashion & culture of the Kolkata (the nearest metro city to Rourkela) & hence they try to follow the same trends being followed in Kolkata & visits Kolkata often to shop for their clothes & accessories.

A local shoe trader in Meerut knows that youth of Meerut is influenced by the Flamboyance of Delhi & given an opportunity they would like to follow their footsteps in regards to fashion.

Therefore the trader goes to Delhi every week to understand the new designs of footwear & try to replicate the same designs in his stock of shoes.

It might also work out well for the youth of Meerut as they are getting what they desire, but at a lower cost than actual price of those goods in Delhi market.

Regional Aspirational marketing in India forms a cycle of admiration, where in people in villages’ looks up to nearest tier 2 or 3 city for exposure, Tier 2 & 3 cities gets influenced by larger metros & the people in Metros in India are inspired by the Western flamboyance.
Just like in case of people in Agra (tier 2), who might be influenced by lifestyle in Delhi (metro) & hence would prefer the Delhi centric restaurant, people in Delhi (metro) would admire Western lifestyle & would prefer to visit a Manchester club thematic Lounge.

The trick is to NOT to miss a link in this chain, if a businessman associates its brand with a western Element & presents it to tier 2 & 3 cities, it might not work out in his favor.

Opening a Manchester club Lounge in Agra (tier 2) might not be the best Idea.

(This is considering that Agra youth might not be as exposed to club Football as Delhi youth)

This technique has been nicely put to use by Vishal Mega mart in its retail concept.

Vishal mega mart’s strategy is to open more outlets in tier 2 & 3 cities & expose them to fashion being followed in Delhi.

The Idea is to offer a consumer (which is majorly youth in case of Vishal) clothes closely imitating the clothes which a tier 2 consumer might see people in Metros wearing & also actors wearing in Hindi movies & soaps (which increases the demand even more).

It works out well for both the customers & The Vishal mart; as the customers are delighted to access these goods at a lower price as compared to the actual price in Metros & Vishal mega mart instead of selling established brands produce their own brands replicating the trend in Metros which offer them economies of scale & thus higher returns in Volumes.
Vishal mega mart is not the only player indulging in regional aspiration marketing, there will be other players following the same concept in business of durables, gadgets, fashion or retail, but the scope is still Humongous.

Considering that purchasing power parity of rural India & tier 2 cities is increasing day by day, companies are lining up to market their products in the given segments. This will lead to cut throat competition amongst different brands as everyone would work out strategies to enhance their market share.

In a scenario like this, victorious would be the one who could relate with the masses well, One who could make them feel proud while spending money, One who would be able to understand their sentiments & what they aspire and to deliver the same to them in different regions of different states of a given country in affordable prices.

This Article has been authored by Nikhil Budhiraja