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The Case of Bangladesh Government Banning Japanese Manga Cartoon Show Doraemon: The Antecedents of Consumers' Avoidance

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The Case of Bangladesh Government Banning Japanese Manga Cartoon Show Doraemon: The Antecedents of Consumers' Avoidance

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Abstract- The purpose of this paper is to find the antecedents of consumers' avoidance towards the Hindi-dubbed Japanese manga cartoon TV show 'Doraemon' in Bangladesh. Being the 5th densely populated country in the world, Bangladesh has exposed its inhabitants towards the wide international culture of the whole world. However, the major adoption of foreign culture takes place largely in the city areas. Due to the ease of availability, lack of alternatives and mass appeal, Bangladeshi kids got enormous exposure towards this Japanese manga (animates cartoon character) cartoon show 'Doraemon' (Quddusi, 2012). Due to over exposure and the perceived negative impact of this show by the parents and guardians on the kids of Bangladesh, recently Bangladeshi government banned the telecast of Doraemon Cartoon Show in Bangladesh. Through in depth interviews and grounding theory, this paper came up with three major themes or antecedents for parents' avoidance towards this particular cartoon show. In generic words, this case analysis answers what motivated the parents to express against this show which eventually required Bangladesh government to ban this TV show from the satellite TV channels.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Manga or Japanese animated cartoon characters were inspired by the American comic culture and originated specifically during earlier 19th century (Fusanosuko, 2003). Up until 1980, it did not earn its vast popularity throughout the world. In 1991, STAR TV (Satellite Broadcasting for Asian Countries) launched programming service and this boomed the anime industry followed by immense popularity and demand for manga cartoon shows throughout the world. Shiraishi (1995) claimed that Japanese popular culture is becoming the popular culture in Asia.

Among many popular manga characters, quite a few became true international figures capturing audiences and fan followers from both Southern and Eastern part of Asia. One of this very popular Japanese manga cartoon characters is Doraemon, created by manga artist Fujiko F Fujio in the year 1973. Doraemon symbolizes a robotic cat that travels back in time from

the 22nd century to help a pre-teen boy, Nobita through its wonder gadgets. Because of its worldwide growing popularity, Tokyo's foreign ministry selected Doraemon as its first "anime ambassador" in 2008 so that foreign interest gets inclined towards Japanese culture (National, February 2013)

With the growing popularity and frequent TV shows broadcasted through different satellite channels, children got exposed to this manga cartoon show in Bangladesh. Lack of entertainment, scarcity of alternatives leveraged this TV cartoon show to get massive viewer's exposure particularly from this country (Quddusi, 2012). However, recently Bangladesh Government has banned the broadcast of this cartoon show which was being aired in a Hindi dubbed version. (AFP, National, bdnews 24.com, 2013). As information minister Hasanul Haque Inu explained to the media that Bangladesh government does not want children's education atmosphere to be hampered by Doraemon. While, kids were hooking over the TV for his Hindi dubbed widely showcased cartoon show, a lot of them were hurdling with learning their native Bengali language. Being inspired by their favorite cartoon character Doraemon, kinds comfortably were adapting Hindi as a mode of interpersonal interaction (Quddusi, 2012).

This situation created massive awareness among public and private media and a lot of local dailies reported about the negative impact of overexposure of this Hindi-dubbed cartoon show on the kids (bdnews24.com). Hence, parents and family members started restricting the kids of their family from watching Doraemon cartoon show. The purpose of this paper is to carefully focus on the case 'Doraemon Cartoon Show' by scanning through the brand elements in order to find out parents' perception about the brand. This paper also aims to find out that the triggers of parents' dissatisfaction which lead Bangladeshi government to ban this cartoon show from the satellite television network. This paper will be able to conceptualize the unanticipated or foreseen dimensions of brands which can potentially prove to be hazardous for the brand equity development. Hence producers and managers will be able to better develop the brand

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identity and nurture secured brand association which goes in favor of the brand.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

a) *Globalization of Japanese manga culture: 'Doraemon' fever*

According to the recent report published about the sales level of Japanese manga cartoon show, Fusanosuke (2003) reported that the gross sales from manga publishing were 2.3 trillion yen. Other sources of manga cartoon proliferated after 1980s when this form of entertainment started receiving popularity from all around the world. Fusanosuko (2004) reported that the globalization of Japanese manga can be broadly categorized into two major regional areas, Asia, and Europe and the United States of America. Doraemon was a classic manga in Eastern Asia particularly in Singapore, Taiwan, Korea, Hongkong and China. Though Doraemon was being aired in some areas of Europe, the level of popularity was not as high as it was in East Asia. To add on, some Western TV stations restricted the broadcasting of this show as they grew concern about whether the western viewers will feel the cultural resemblance with this unique show or not (Fusanosuko, 2004).

However, despite this concern, Doraemon got its popularity all over the world through its Chinese made merchandise. Allison (2002) reported that Doraemon has been one of the most popular sign or symbol for Japanese population and both kids and adults use Doraemon imprinted merchandise. Many stores, carnival stalls, shopping malls, restaurants, airlines, schools, and neighborhood meeting venues are using the phenomena of the brand Doraemon for developing the exterior or interior decoration. Doraemon face imprinted merchandise like cell phone accessories, notebook covers, other stationeries, fashion apparel have become a significant hype in the market which has quite an important impact on the economy (Allison, 2002). This cultural hype is not only bound within the geographical territory of Japan, rather it went beyond and covered almost all part of Asia and some part of European and American market. Particularly in East Asia and South-East Asia, Doraemon is the new big thing among kids and young youths. This global hyperbole of the brand Doraemon actually justifies the Tokyo government's decision to declare Doraemon as the anime ambassador for Japan (National, February 2013)

b) *Consumer brand avoidance*

Olivia et al (1992) first explained the term brand avoidance as a mean for consumers' brand switching. Later on Lee, Motion and Conroy (2009) referred the concept of brand avoidance as a deliberate purposeful rejection of a particular brand by the consumers. Lee (2009) explained three different kinds of brand avoidance namely- experiential avoidance, identity

avoidance, deficit-value avoidance and moral avoidance. First hand negative experience with a particular brand leads to experiential avoidance. Identity. Avoidance can be explained through psychological construct of self-concept and consumer culture theory (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Sirgy (1982) also supported this concept that consumers buy those products more, which has image congruity with consumers' self-concept. Sometimes consumers avoid purchase of certain brands because certain reference groups with whom they have negative association are using these brands. Hence to avoid using brands, which these group members use, they avoid these brands (White and Dahl, 2006 and Englis and Soloman, 1995).

Brand avoidance is necessarily not similar to anti-consumption (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006). Hence, understanding the different aspects of lessening the consumption is important too. Brand avoidance leads to declined purchase rate of specific brands where strong motivational factors works.

III. METHODOLOGY

In order to retrieve some descriptive statistical information on the level of exposure and felt association with the brand 'Doraemon' from parents' perception, a questionnaire was developed. 200 questionnaires were distributed towards the parents of both Bengali medium and English medium school going kids. Convenient probabilistic sampling method (Malhotra, 2008) allowed free flow of data collection and also attracted interested respondent with relevant responses. Total number of respondents for this study, N=200. Among 200 filled questionnaires 185 were usable for data collection. There was an option given in the end of the questionnaire to allow the researcher to contact with the respondents for further information regarding this research. 40 persons from the total respondents showed their interest about further contribution to this research.

20 respondents were carefully chosen based on their responses, which were closely relevant to the study context. A grounded theory methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) was utilized for this study in order to gather and utilize qualitative data. The chosen respondents were invited to join in-depth interviews. 5 concerned respondents came over and expressed their apprehension against the household exposure of Doraemon. Table 1 shows the demography of the participants. Each interview lasted for an hour and the primary language of discussion was Bengali, which was transcribed and translated by two experts with careful consideration.

Table 1: Participant demographics

Name	Age	Location	Occupation	Kids	Relation
Amira	31	Dhaka	Engineer	1 (5yrs)	Mother
Romel	33	Dhaka	Engineer	1 (4 yrs)	Father
Salim	32	Dhaka	Business Manager	1 (4 yrs)	Father
Ruma	40	Dhaka	School Teacher	3(9yrs,8yrs,2yrs)	Mother
Iqbal	45	Dhaka	CEO of own company	1 (9 yrs)	Father

While identifying the emergent themes, the coded incidents and categories were being compared frequently (both within and across participants), to ensure data fit. As advised by Spiggle (1994), very similar themes were distorted together into higher arrayed themes. To ensure the credibility, two expert judges reviewed the process which finally gave birth to this conceptual theory of why parents decide on

restricting children from certain brand usage which are generally developed and positioned for the kids.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This descriptive qualitative study came up with three alarming behavior of this Doraemon brand which is particularly aimed towards the kids. Table 2 displays the three main categorical reasons of brand avoidance by the parents for the kids.

Table 2: Reasons for brand avoidance

Main Categories	Themes	Sub- themes
Exaggeration of Brand Character	Over usage Excessive exposure	Dominance of fantasy over logic
Brand Character Personality Incongruence	Undesired personality	Negative personality preacher
Brand Content Quality Deterioration	Content delivery mode	Language invasion
	Content details	Message quality

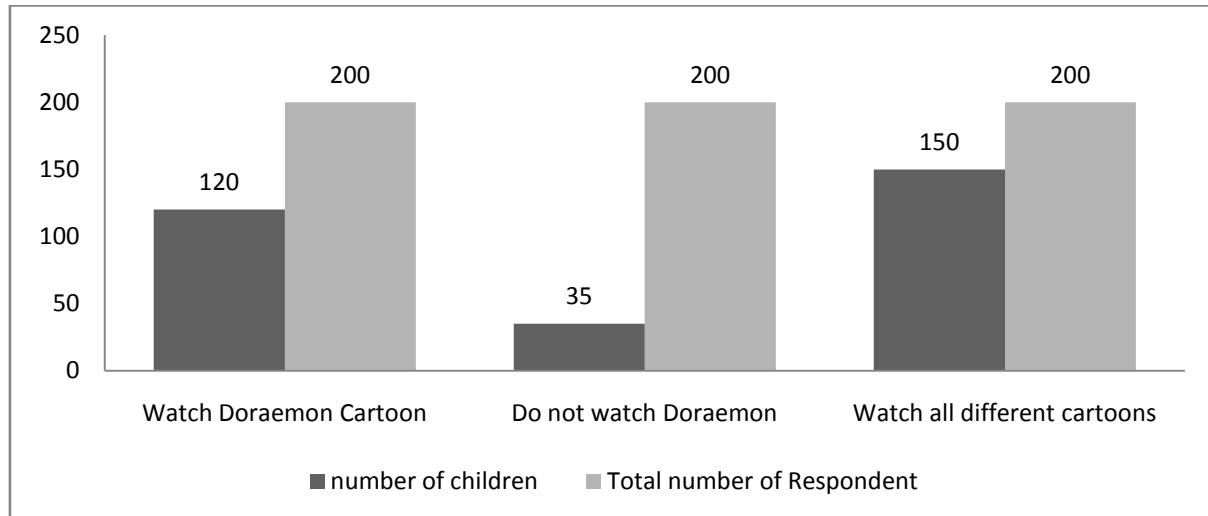
In the first category (exaggeration of brand character), participants reported avoiding tendency due to massive usage of central brand character which parents believe creates negative impact on the kids. The second category (brand character personality incongruence) motivates brand avoidance when participants avoid certain cartoon show which contains characters carrying personality incompatibility with the ideal personality portfolio that the parents want their child to have. Third category (brand content quality deterioration) motivates the participants to avoid brands which contain content with perceived lower quality.

Content quality and content messages here would determine the perception of content itself.

Through the questionnaire, parents were asked about the information regarding their kids' exposure towards satellite television channels. As Thompson and Zerbinese (1997) explained that kids from the age of 18 months till 9 years prefer cartoon to other TV programs, exclusion was made for the respondents who were parents of children over 9 years old. Also, based on available exposure towards TV, parents of non-exposed household were excluded from the sampling process.

An alarming situation was noted when 100% of the respondents reported that, there was no control over the television viewing in their household and children choose what they want to watch. 130 respondents expressed their failure to control their children's choice of TV programs and 80 contributor confirmed that their

children communicate with each other using Doraemon inspired phrases and dialogues. From the questionnaire responses a comparative chart can be graphically represented explaining the choice patterns of the average Dhaka city children's choice of TV shows:



From the in-depth interview sessions, the participants were asked to explain all about what they are concerned of in context of the Hindi-dubbed version of Doraemon cartoon show. All the interviewee reported that they have seen few episodes of this cartoon show along with their kids and all of them had something negative in their mind about this cartoon show. Some of them did not like the theme of the show, some of them think that this cartoon show is good for the kids as long as it is dubbed in English or local Bengali language.

a) *Exaggeration of the brand character*

Majority of the participants expressed concern about their felt exaggeration of the brand character Doraemon. Parents urged that the core magnetism of the cartoon show is the wonder gadget pocket owned by the main character Doraemon. They think, the concept of a wonder gadget pocket can enable the children to be creative in problem solving, to be helpful to others, to nurture the notion of converting impossible things into possible stuff. However, the peril is they might start believing in shortcuts and start looking for imaginary impossible solutions to real problems. Aakar and Fournier (1995), identified brand character as an important element of brand personality which enhances the brand value. This is why reasonable and responsible positioning of brand characters can add to the brand value and a hyperbole can rapidly be pulled out by the stakeholders to expose the discrepancy (Miles and Covin, 2000). However, Polonsky and Jevons (2006) claimed that it is not very easy for any brand to be responsibly positioned from every front and thus complexity in careful maintenance is inevitable.

In this case, Doraemon cartoon show depicts a central character of a robotic cat which carries repulsive personality for the children. This show inspires the kids to believe in this exaggerated tech-savvy brand character 'Doraemon' and Parents expressed their sheer concern regarding this:

"The other day, my son came to me and articulated that he can fix the electricity power cut problem using the Doraemon gadget pocket. When I asked him that where he would find this pocket, (he replied) definitely in market...you can buy everything of Doraemon in the market" (Romel)

"I think this is incredible that how children live in absolute world of fantasy, but everything has a limit. It does not make my child ingenious when he wants to use his imaginary gadget pocket to do his next morning school homework on his behalf. It rather creates lunacy which can be extended to have greater impact further (in his future life)" (Salim)

"My 9 years old totally believe that a gadget pocket (of Doraemon) can be bought from overseas countries and whenever I am up for a business meeting (overseas), she asks me to bring a wonder gadget pocket. Definitely, I disappoint her each time. I wish this 'Doraemon' did not happen to her, I probably could be able to bring her a (real) thing." (Iqbal, 45)

b) *Brand character personality incongruence*

One of the salient reasons of Doraemon cartoon avoidance was brand character's personality incongruence. Concerned parents explained that they wanted the children to avoid this cartoon show totally as they believed the characters of this cartoon show carry

such personalities with whom they have negative association. Hence, parents want to limit the exposure of this show towards their kids to avoid adopting those personality traits. As explained by Lee et al (2009), Identity avoidance leads to brand avoidance. This means, consumers avoid those brands, which has association with negative reference groups (Englis and Solomon, 1995). To avoid a specific negative identity, consumers tend to build self-concept (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2001), which refers to the adoption of role expectations of the ideal self. Bhattacharya and Elsbach (2002) argue that consumers often develop self-concept to maintain originality of a genuine reference group's role expectations by disassociating themselves with negative reference groups.

Participants in the group widely reported their personal commitment against negative reference group association. They expressed their opposition to these cartoon characters as in:

"...Doraemon often lies to provide shelter to Nobita...I know this is a lie for good but I do not want my children to learn the concept of learning lie from cartoons!" (Ruma, 40)

"Main rivalry to Nobita (Friend of Doraemon) comes from Suneo, the spoilt kid. Suneo often blackmails Nobita. Suneo also shows off his parents' money, uses the power in negative ways. I think my baby is too young to face this kind of negative influence of social strata. So, I really want him not watch this cartoon show." (Romel, 33)

"I have seen some episodes and have already identified the characters of the show lying to each other, taking advantage of the less strong pupils, making each other feel low, doing crazy things like entering into washroom while someone is taking a bath and so on. I think, a kid aged less than 9 should not be exposed to reality or the adult shows as in cartoon characters. This is ridiculous and also dangerous how they are writing the story of the cartoons for the kids! (Amira, 32)

Here all of them talked about brand character personality with which they have negative association. Mode, nature and quality of interpersonal interaction between the show characters was Amira's main concern. She wants her child not to grow with the identity of that group of child who fight, lie, devalue emotion and behave like Doraemon cartoon show. On the other hand Salim believes that Doraemon is influencing his son to go with the flow and he does not want his son to be typical. He wants his son's personality to develop in such way that as he grows old, he should keep on thinking different and that is why he would like his son not to watch the Doraemon cartoon show. Hence, it can be said that both of them want to disidentify their children from certain negative reference group and thus they want their children to avoid Doraemon cartoon show.

c) *Brand content quality deterioration*

Content quality is an important determinant factor for the brand association and equity development of any TV show. Participants widely reported against the hegemonic effect of the generalized typical concept usage while developing program content. Stratsburger, Wilson and Jordan (2007) explained the importance of television program content quality in the growth of children's overall psychology and personality. Lee et al (2009) explained about moral avoidance where consumers avoid brands with which they have ideological incompatibility. This refers to brands which are using such elements in creating brand association that does not have ideological support from the primary target market of this product.

In this particular case, parents expressed extreme antagonism with the use of Hindi language as a primary mode of content delivery of this cartoon show. Television network channels which telecasted Doraemon cartoon show used to show it throughout the day. Hence the number of episodes which were being exposed to the kids was naturally higher. This left a great impact in shaping the kids' behavioral pattern and this also influenced their interpersonal communication style. Participants expressed their agony against issues related to the content of the cartoon show:

"I would not mind if my babies would learn a new language from any TV show or any interactive program...but I mind it when I see three of them talk to each other using Hindi language....it is like, they prefer Hindi over Bengali language. This is not at all acceptable by me or my other family member." (Ruma, 40)

"This Doraemon and his friends use contemptible shallow dialogues which are catchy and can be easily picked up by the kids. It pisses me off when I hear my little kid is using Doraemon inspired phrases, words, dialogues with his teachers, friends and also to his family members. (Salim, 33)

V. LIMITATION AND SCOPE

This study has got few limitations of its own as it is a case based study, generalization of study finds can bring biased insight about the consumer brand avoidance antecedents of television shows particularly aimed towards kids. Hence, it is very important to find that whether these antecedents of Doraemon cartoon avoidance leverages avoidance for other similar TV shows or not. Future conceptual framework can be developed to quantify the impact of each identified antecedents on more generalized TV shows made for the kids. This study also fails to understand the overall picture of the country due to lack of willing participant on such perceived trivial issue. Again, a cross cultural comparative analysis of the perception of parents'

avoidance towards this brand could clearly identify which antecedent plays dominant role in shaping brand hatred or avoidance in Bangladesh.

VI. CONCLUSION

Parents, all over the world want their kids to have all that they want. No parent wants to disappoint their loved offspring to the most possible limit. However, there are things that can be flashy and appealing things which kids love to enjoy but do not have positive impact on their growth and development potential. Parents definitely would not want their kids to use or be in touch with those products or services. Hence, parents might keep their kids apart from such influential things. Regardless, this avoidance cannot be done without a reason and a purpose. Parents must understand why they do not want their babies to buy, use or get habituated with certain products or service. Particularly, almost everyone tends to generalize that cartoon shows are meant for the kids but as being educated parents, couples must realize the long term impact of such cartoon shows. This study finds can help the managers of Doraemon cartoon show to rethink their brand associations which they have created in the minds of the viewers. Also they can recreate the South Asian version of the show by incorporating local cultural elements more with the show characters to reduce the cultural invasion concern of the guardians.

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