

British beauty industry ignoring Asian women consumers

The strength of the 'brown pound' - the term referring to the purchasing power of British Asians - is growing exponentially. But the multi-billion pound British beauty industry largely ignores this important segment of consumers.

Shop owners in areas with large minority of Indian origin such as Southall, Ealing, Harrow and Wembley in London, Leicester, Birmingham and Bradford continue to stock favour beauty products that are imported from the Indian sub-continent. Few prefer to buy mainstream British beauty products.

Products imported from India are endorsed by film stars such as Aishwarya Rai and others and are popular among women with roots in the Indian subcontinent. Recently, a men's beauty product produced in India and endorsed by actor Shah Rukh Khan proved popular in Southall.

A new report by market analyst Mintel reveals that the 3.7 billion pound-a-year beauty industry is failing women from the Indian subcontinent and those of Afro-Caribbean origin. It is also critical of stereotypical advertising featuring American style 'white teeth and big hair'.

The report estimates the market for black, Asian and other minority makeup, skin and hair care to be worth 65 million pounds annually. But there is no indication that the figure includes the large number of beauty products that are imported from the Indian subcontinent. People categorized as 'ethnic minorities' comprise 7.9 percent of the British population.

The report says that women of ethnic origin are big spenders of beauty products, and mainstream brands are starting to recognise this with the introduction of their own specialist ethnic lines. However, major retailers are yet to spot the potential of the ethnic beauty market, which remains concentrated within the independent retail sector.

Analyst Alexandra Richmond said: 'A lack of new product developments on the part of the manufacturers as well as limited availability has undoubtedly been a major barrier in the ethnic beauty market.

'Today there is clearly a demand for products specifically designed for the growing number of ethnic consumers. Although there are luxury beauty ranges for those with darker skin tones, mass-market alternatives on the high street are still few and far between.'

Mintel said in its report that a little investment could turn the ethnic cosmetics and toiletries market into one of the beauty industry's most promising sectors.

It forecast that, with the right investment in new products and advertising, this market could grow by as much as 35 percent in the next five years, and could be worth 88 million pounds by 2012.

Richmond said: 'In today's mainstream market we are seeing ever more products targeting very specific beauty needs, from anti-ageing creams for different age groups to shampoos for any number of hair types.

'There is clearly the potential for the industry to apply this approach to the ethnic beauty market,

which would undoubtedly be welcomed by ethnic consumers and give the market a much needed boost.'

The report also warns that companies are missing out on lucrative business and follows concern that ethnic minorities are under-represented in the visual industries of beauty, fashion and advertising.

Few black or Asian models stride down the fashion catwalk, with the high-profile exception of Naomi Campbell, according to the London Assembly member and former fashion executive Dee Doocey, who has called a conference next year to address the issue.

Non-white people make up more than 20 percent of the population in London yet account for only 1 percent of the models in the city, according to one estimate. The last census by the Institute of Advertising Practitioners in 2003 found that only 4 percent of people in advertisements came from ethnic minorities.

Prasun Sonwalkar (© IANS / India eNews)