Branding for Impoverished- A Systematic Literature Review of two Decades

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Abstract

Since 2004, the emergence of a new emerging market called 'bottom of pyramid" has been heart of discussion and analysis for viability. Prahalad and Hart being profounder of Bottom of pyramid concept gives the status of Bottom of pyramid consumer to those who live on less than $2 a day. They estimate this market to be of 4 billion people across the globe. It is a viable number but question is about seeking profitability from impoverished. There are various companies who tried strategies to cover this market and create brand loyalty among them. But not many have secured good positions while a few succeeded. This paper reviews the literature related to Branding in Bottom of pyramid consumers.

Keywords: Branding, Bottom of pyramid, systematic literature review.

Introduction

The concept of Bottom of pyramid was propounded by C K Prahalad in 2002 (Prahlad 2002). It was later elaborated by C.k. Prahalad in 2005 in his book "Bottom of Pyramid: eradicating poverty through profit". This concept sought attention and became a potential topic of research to explore and further develop. Prahalad and Stuart used approach of Economic Pyramid in their work. In this approach global consumers are divided in four tiers based on wealth distribution and income. Top layer of the pyramid represents the population of wealthiest consumer 75-100, who are earning per capita more than 20000$ annually. Second and third layer reflects the 1500-1750 million who are earning 1500-20000$ per capita annually. The third tier or the base of pyramid consists 4000 million population of impoverished people who are earning less than 1500$ per capita annually. These people mostly are dwelling in urban slums, rural areas or unauthorized colonies and often live with fear of evacuation.

Prahalad and Hart (Prahlad and Hart 1999) argue that theses 4 billion people can be transformed into consumers if MNCs work with such orientation. Their argument opened up the whole school of debate over MNC's role in society. Moreover, in almost each state, its responsibility of the state to uplift the impoverished and see for equality in society. But with their argument Prahalad and Stuart has entrusted this responsibility to see the poor, strategize accordingly and alleviate poverty. (Karmani 2007) questions the size of impoverished market and also the viability to sell each assortment. He further states that poor will be exploited. (Hammod 2007) argues this number to be 4 billion across the globe. In India this market is widely distributed in urban and sub-urban slums, rural areas and villages (Anderson and Markides 2007). As per McKinsey (2017) report impoverished population in India in 2005 was 1.06 billion people, whose average income was 2l lakh per year or less. With varying

opinion and orientations its two decades passed and much is written about BoP. This paper tries to develop a deeper insight into literature relating to branding in BoP segment,

Branding and the impoverished in India (poor and rising middle class number of Upper Bottom)

The NHFS-5 (2019-23) data reflects that 14.96% of people are multidimensional poor in India. It is utmost important to understand the evident factors behind consumption of BOP. In India where poor live in urban and sub urban slums depend heavily on informal economy. Often they have no title to home or vehicle. Hence for buying they depend heavily on local retailor who is accessible (Vishwanathan 2007). Hart (2009) suggests that regular marketing mix will not be effective for BoP consumers and companies need to strategize to reach out to this segment. William (2009) extends this thought by referring VFBOP (Value framework for Bottom of Pyramid). Recent Business models suggest to create a market at BOP than exploring. (Schuster 2012) argues that BOP consumers heavily depend on compensatory compensation which states that poor consumers would indulge in buying alternate products instead of status goods (Pitta 2008). This theory very well elaborates the reason behind buying Branded luxury products from branded stores and also negative products such as alcohol or tobacco. Various study (Midha 2012) affirms that low-income consumer's spare expenditure on branded products and services along with owing house, vehicle and indulging in expensive marriages. Also, at the same time BOP are regarded as producers of food grains, dairy and cottage products.

Firms do fear the devaluation of brand in marketing to poor along with fear of viability of market size (Silverthone 2007). Whereas in India firms like Tata, HUL, ITC have strategized and earned substantial stake of revenue from poor. As per Asish Karamchandani, Mike Kubzansky and Nishant Lalwani in their work, 'Is the bottom of the pyramid really for you?' (Karamchandani 2011), there are few considerations before entering this market and firms before entering the market should address. Like long term commitment, branding and packaging, impact over organizational culture etc. are grave considerations which a firm should be heading in prior.

Since the 1990s, the role of brands has transformed significantly—from being viewed as mere identifiers or tools to boost product sales (Oh et al., 2020) to becoming companies' most valuable intangible assets (Keller 2009). Branding, as a phenomenon, is inherently dynamic, evolving over time (Luciano et al., 2018). Foundational works by Aaker (1997) and Keller (1993) established brand loyalty and brand image as key dimensions of brand equity, defined as the added value a brand brings (Oh et al., 2020). Since then, researchers and practitioners have focused on defining, measuring, and leveraging these dynamic concepts. This synthesis of empirical studies examines brand equity, brand loyalty, and brand image both as independent constructs and through their interrelationships. While these concepts are distinct, they also serve as interconnected dimensions of brand equity. Like other dynamic concepts in management and psychology (Langley et al., 2013), these constructs have evolved and been theorized in various ways over time.

However, brand equity, brand image, and brand loyalty were initially conceptualized during a pre-internet era with vastly different market realities. Despite being the most studied branding concepts of the 21st century, the literature reveals inconsistencies in how they are defined and measured. Synthesizing existing research highlights their multidimensional, dynamic, and interdependent nature. Following best practices from the measurement literature, the authors

propose precise definitions and actionable measurement approaches to unify and advance the field. Recognizing these branding concepts as evolving constructs ensures they remain relevant in today's complex marketplace.

The hyper connected world of today has blurred and expanded the boundaries of branding (Swaminathan et al., 2020). Marketing is increasingly expected to drive societal good (Chandy et al., 2021), and brands are now held accountable for their broader societal impact (Crockett and Grier, 2020; Rust, 2020). Through Systematic literature review this paper seeks to deepen understanding of branding in context of BoP consumers —while offering a forward-looking framework suited to an evolved marketplace. This marketplace has shifted from solely maximizing shareholder profit to delivering value for diverse stakeholders who co-create, co-own, and demand brands to be socially and politically conscious, fulfilling responsibilities to people, the planet, and profit (Hunt, 2019; Lehmann, 2020; Swaminathan et al., 2020).

According to C.K.Prahalad, a Bottom of the Pyramid (BOP) consumer is an individual who lives less than $2 per day. He represents a large, untapped potential market with substantive purchasing power. This group comprises billions of individuals, often in developing and underdeveloped countries, who are seen not just as recipients of aid, but also as potential customers with the capacity to contribute in economic development.

Research Questions
For systematic literature review it is important to eliminate bias. A method is adapted from the medical sciences to eliminate bias (Parris and Welty Peachey, 2013) in which review is guided by research questions. For present study following research questions are framed; -

RQ 1-Who are the most cited authors across database?
RQ 3-What are the major themes of branding lying in BoP segment?
RQ 4-What are the most studied constructs of branding in BoP segment?
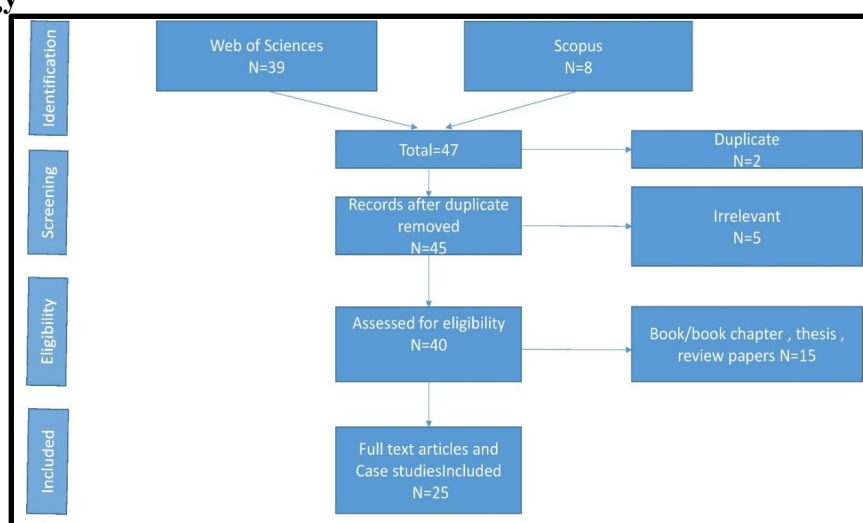RQ 5-What is the contribution of journals in publication of case studies and articles?

Methodology

Figure 1. Flow diagram of studies included in the systematic review
Source created by author based on PRISMA framework

Data Source and Data Collection Strategy

Guidelines for systematic literature review were followed as suggested by Rowley and slack (2004).The search process began by focusing on the keyword "Branding," aligning closely with the study's objective and ensuring precise, relevant information for analysis (Sharma et al., 2018). Quotation marks were utilized to refine and enhance the accuracy of database search results (Liu et al., 2013).

The keyword "Branding" and "Bottom of pyramid" were used to conduct a search across two major databases: Scopus and Web of Science. These databases were chosen due to their relevance and widespread use in the fields of social sciences and management. Boolean operator: And: and: Or: were used to refine the search. The selection was informed by previous studies with similar focus areas (Sousa et al., 2022; Ochoa Jiménez et al., 2022; Capobianco-Uriarte et al., 2019). Scopus and Web of Science are recognized as the largest citation databases globally. The researcher relied on these sources to analyze peer-reviewed literature, including scientific publications, conference proceedings, and books. Scopus is known for its extensive document coverage (Sweileh et al., 2017), while Web of Science offers more comprehensive citation tracking from various sources. The study considered various publication types, including journal articles, book chapters, review papers, and conference proceedings indexed in Scopus. The publications span included all the papers ranging from 2004 to 2024. The Scopus search was further refined to include only research within business management, accounting, economics, econometrics, finance, social sciences, and decision sciences.

The keyword search yielded 8 articles from Scopus and 39 articles from Web of Science (Total 47). Separate CSV and Excel files were downloaded from Scopus and Web of Science on November 29, 2024. These files were then merged and two duplicate articles were removed. In total 45 articles were found in the initial screening process. In total 45 there were 9 case studies,16 research articles,1 SLR paper,12 thesis/dissertation and 2 book/book chapters.

Analysis Strategy (Inclusion and exclusion criteria)-PRISMA Framework

For systematic literature review PRISMA framework has been prime guideline (Prasad 2022). In order to achieve research objectives inclusion and exclusion criteria was followed as delimiting helps in screening the most relevant content from the complete dataset. As affirmed by (Ramos-Rodríguez and Ruíz-Navarro, 2004), Only published articles and cases are to be considered as 'certified knowledge". Following the same guidelines published content only was taken for final analysis. Book chapter, review papers, thesis, dissertations and irrelevant content due to scope were excluded.

Data analysis

Finally included 16 research papers and 9 case studies were reviewed minutely to understand the themes emerging over time. Thematic analysis was conducted to organize and develop a broader framework of BOP consumers. It allows for categorization of data (Gibbs 2007) and further exploring the research scope. Via deep analysis of research papers, we understood the research gap and converted them into research questions.

Results

Constructs found common in studies are Consumer behavior, consumer culture, brand recognition, purchase patterns, purchase criteria, brand awareness, brand growth, brand loyalty, brand performance, brand penetration, brand credibility, brand connections, emerging market, market segmentation in BOP segment, retailing, social media, motivations behind purchase, frugal innovations, functional illiteracy, buying decision, willingness to buy. With expert's opinion these constructs are then screened for common themes and thematic coding is done. All the constructs are then grouped into 5 major themes in table 1 below.

Table 1. Thematic Coding of constructs

Sr no	theme	construct	No of Article	No of Case Studies
1	Branding	Brand loyalty, Brand recognition, Brand awareness, Brand growth, Brand performance, Brand penetration, Brand credibility, Brand connection,	6	7
2	Consumer Behavior	Global consumer culture, functional illiteracy	4	
3	Market Segmentation	Psychographic segmentation,	2	1
4	Purchase decision	Buying decision, willingness to buy, motivations behind use	4	
5	innovation	Frugal innovation		1

Contribution of Authors

During literature review we found total 16 articles and 9 case studies since 2004.Table 2 reflects the contribution of authors in exploring this emerging market using citations. Articles at least having one citation were included in formation of table, thus two articles which had zero citations were excluded from tabulation.

Table 2. Contribution of Authors

Sr no	Authors	Citations	Title
1	Cross, Jamie	77	The 100th object: Solar lighting technology and humanitarian goods
2	Mukherjee, Srabanti; Datta, Biplab; Paul, Justin	52	The phenomenon of purchasing second-hand products by the BOP consumers
3	Ehrnford, L; Andreou, P; Felix, CA	52	Are Low-Income Consumers Willing to Pay for Fortification of a Commercially Produced Yogurt in Bangladesh
4	Yurdakul, Dicle; Atik, Deniz;	43	Redefining the bottom of the pyramid from a

	Dholakia, Nikhilesh		marketing perspective
5	Rajagopal	33	Branding paradigm for the bottom of the pyramid markets
6	Streimikiene, Dalia; Ahmed, Rizwan Raheem	16	Corporate social responsibility and brand management: evidence from carroll's pyramid and triple bottom line approaches
7	Ozsomer, Ayseguel	10	Some recent influences on global consumer culture Digital networked technologies, emerging market brands and bottom of the pyramid consumers
8	Singh, Devinder P.; Paul, Justin; Sharma, Pooja	10	Segmenting the Bottom of the Pyramid Consumers: Theoretical Approach
9	Nagy, May; Bennett, Dag; Graham, Charles	9	Why include the BOP in your international marketing strategyf
10	Kumar, Jitender; Katiyar, Gagan; Mehrotra, Ankit; Attri, Rekha; Vishnoi, Sushant Kumar	8	Connecting BOP consumers and retailers: What drives small-time retailing through social media?
11	Banerjee, Shubhomoy; Sreejesh, S.	4	Role of word-of-mouth communication in consumer brand relationship initiation and maintenance: insights from the bottom of pyramid markets
12	Lappeman, James; Bundwini, Nqobile; Chikweche, Tendai	2	From individual to household decision-making: A practical perspective on the base of the pyramid consumer
13	Moo, Lee Myung; Kim, Juyoung	1	A Lifestyle Study for Market Segmentation at the Base of Pyramid (BoP) in India
14	Mukherjee, Srabanti; Datta, Biplab	1	Counterfeit conundrum: Insights into bottom of the pyramid consumer behavior in India

Contributing Cases

Table 3 reflects the contributing cases of various multinationals. There are a substantive guiding benchmarks in the case studies to take away from their learning. Table also includes the string highlight of the case along with publication sources for vivid picture

<div align="center">Table 3. Contributing case studies</div>

Sr No	Title	Case	Source	Publication
1	The Road to Becoming a Market Leader by Penetrating the Bottom of Pyramid Market: A Case Study on LG	LG	Academy of Asian Business Review	Academy of Asian Business
2	Creating a brand community at the bottom of the pyramid: the case of a Cameroonian music platform	Brand community, Cameroonian	Journal of marketing management	Taylor & Francis

		music company		
3	Designed for the bottom of the pyramid: a case study of a Chinese phone brand in Africa	Itel-a Chinese low end mobile company	Chinese Journal of Communication	Taylor & Francis
4	Doing well by doing good - case study: 'Fair & Lovely' whitening cream	Fair & Lovely	Strategic Management Journal	Wiley
5	Big Hit Entertainment: Soar with Multi-Labels Integration, Social Platforms and Innovations	Big Hit Entertainment (Globally rebound company)	Academy of Asian Business	Academy of Asian Business
6	Sahaj Crafts: the challenge of alleviating poverty in Western Rajasthan	Sahaj Craft	Emerald emerging market case studies	Emerald Insight
7	Pepsodent: marketing strategy at the bottom of the pyramid	Case-study-7 Pepsodent	Emerald emerging market case studies	Emerald Insight
8	Frugal innovation for the BoP in Brazil - An analysis and comparison with Asian lead markets	Food and energy sector in Brazil	International Journal on technology management	Inder Sciences
9	Marketing information technology to the bottom of the pyramid market case study: The Aakash tablet	Aakash tablet	International Journal on technology management	Inder Sciences

Contribution of journals in Research articles and case study publication
Table 4 focuses on contribution of various journals in publication of research articles and case studies. It includes the number of articles and cases published in journals. This analysis is helpful to understand the major journals allocation shelf space to BOP content.

Table 4. Contribution of journals in Research articles and case study publication

Sr no	Journal	No of articles	No of case studies
1	Academy of Asian Business Review		2
2	Journal of marketing management		1
3	Chinese Journal of Communication		1
4	Strategic Management Journal		1
5	Emerald emerging market case studies		2
6	International Journal on technology management	1	2
7	International marketing review	2	
8	Technological and economic development of economy	1	
9	Journal of retailing and consumer services	3	

10	International journal of emerging markets	1	
11	Journal of material culture	1	
12	Marketing theory	1	
13	International journal of market research	1	
14	Journal of consumer behavior	1	
15	Journal of Channel and Retailing	1	
16	Journal of social marketing	1	
17	Food and nutrition bulletin	1	
18	Measuring Business excellence	1	

Scholarly implications

Brands and branding keeps evolving with time. Case studies of previous multinationals gives an exclusive understanding of successful strategies. At the same time if any substitute product is planned for the same market, previous practices can be referred for meta-analysis. Successful branding reflects itself through marketing communication, expressing corporate and brand value system, contributing to the community and internal marketing.

Future Research directions and limitations

Researcher affirm that there can be no study free of limitations and improvements. This study is limited to Bop consumers in context of Branding literature and serves the specific researchers group and multinational companies. Further researchers in future can explore emerging
techniques like semantic analysis, machine learning, and text mining for real-time
analysis.

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