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"The Politics of Gender and Consumerism in the Global Context"

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With the rising tide of global consumerism, the question of gender in the global context has become much more critical as an area of inquiry for consumer researchers. First, the transnational corporations have become very powerful and activist in the diffusion of global consumer culture. In the name of global consumer welfare, these agents of economic change have also become de facto agents of cultural change. I would like to propose that this sort of global consumerism aided by transnational corporate activism is having a major impact on local consumer practices and consumer tastes. Here, my focus will be on the role of advertising in establishing new cultural identities. Second, the consumer goods themselves play a major role in cultural transformation. New domestic technologies and the technologies of packaged consumer goods are having an impact on consumer lifestyles and aspirations. They are also redefining the social structural elements of which gender is a major component. Third, through the diffusion of popular culture and other art forms, consumer tastes are changing quite radically.

My purpose here is to examine the cumulative impact of all these forces on global consumerism, and in particular, on gender identity. Here I look at gender in a broader context that includes the establishment of social identity, and the (re)(de)construction of self through consumer images and popular culture. I will include in my discussion appropriate theoretical and epistemological questions pertaining to the study of gender issues in the global context. My empirical work is based on India, but the implications of my work can be extended.