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Diversity And Inclusion 4 Min Read

# Why India's most consumer-centric companies are rethinking diversity, inclusion and equity

The article offers a perspective on why inclusion is increasingly becoming a business and growth imperative for the consumer goods sector in India. Overall, it attempts to highlight how inclusive workplaces and diverse representation are no longer just cultural priorities but strategic business drivers enabling FMCG brands to better decode India's evolving consumer landscape and build long-term relevance in an increasingly diverse and aspiration-led market.



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## Highlights

- Inclusion is becoming a key business strategy for India's consumer goods sector.
- Women-led businesses are reshaping the consumer journey across India.
- Brands are moving towards diverse representations beyond traditional stereotypes.



A diverse team collaborating on consumer products, reflecting India's cultural variety and inclusion in the workplace.



A few years ago, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in India was largely viewed as a “good-to-have” people initiative linked to workplace culture and employer branding. For decades, marketing across categories often relied on broad stereotypes around gender, beauty, family roles and purchasing behaviour.

Today, especially in the consumer goods sector, that thinking is rapidly becoming outdated.

In an industry built around understanding people, aspirations and behaviour, inclusion is an integral long-term business strategy.

India's consumer economy is becoming more fragmented, regional and experience-driven than ever before. The next wave of growth is being driven not just by metro consumers, but by smaller towns, Gen Z buyers, women-led purchasing decisions and increasingly diverse lifestyle preferences across India.

As India aspires to become a \$5,000 per capita economy, significantly higher labour participation, especially among women, will be critical to sustaining growth. For consumer goods companies, this demographic dividend can deliver long-term business and economic value only when complemented by a strong representation where voices across genders and socio-economic backgrounds meaningfully shape products, marketing and workplace policies.

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This creates a critical challenge for businesses. How do you build products, campaigns and experiences for a market as culturally layered as India?

The answer lies in the teams and ecosystems behind those decisions. As women's labour participation rises, women-led Kirana stores, retail businesses and frontline sales networks also continue to grow, making the consumer go-to-market ecosystem more locally representative. This reflects in government data showing women now head nearly 27% of proprietary establishments in India, with strong participation across manufacturing and local enterprises.

This, in turn, influences how products are marketed, sold and purchased,

with women increasingly shaping the consumer journey as consumers, retailers and sales professionals.

In the consumer goods sector, where even small behavioural insights can shape brand success at scale, this becomes a significant competitive advantage.

Global and Indian brands alike are increasingly moving beyond fairness-led narratives toward celebrating diverse skin tones, gender identity, regional identities, textured hair and individuality.

The rise of plus-size fashion and beauty is a strong example. Brands such as Zivame have consciously moved away from conventional stereotypes by building campaigns around body positivity and inclusivity. Kay Beauty has focused on more realistic and inclusive representations of beauty through diverse skin-tone ranges and non-stereotypical beauty communication.

What was once considered a niche segment is now emerging as a significant market in itself, driven by consumers seeking representation rather than aspirational stereotypes.

The larger takeaway is clear, inclusion drives stronger consumer understanding.

Indian companies are also increasingly recognising that DEI directly influences customer experience and brand perception. When consumers see themselves reflected across the ecosystem, it builds familiarity, trust and stronger emotional connection with brands.

The LaLiT Suri Hospitality Group, one of India's leading hotel chains, has emerged as a pioneer in LGBTQIA+ inclusion by extending health insurance benefits to queer partners and building a recognised zero-discrimination workplace for the queer community, strengthening its perception amongst consumers as an LGBTQIA+-friendly hospitality brand. Similarly, Lemon Tree Hotels has been recognised for creating employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, illustrating how visible inclusion can build stronger consumer trust and brand affinity.

Industry research shows that women were barred from working in underground mines in India. This long-standing prohibition was not lifted until early 2019, reflecting how several sectors were built around restrictive workforce assumptions. Companies such as Tata Steel and Vedanta Group are changing the scenario by deploying women in underground mining roles, introducing transgender-inclusive workplace policies and redesigning industrial infrastructure to support a more diverse workforce in traditionally male-dominated sectors.

When companies expand access, they unlock new talent pools. India's growth outlook is closely tied to raising women's labour force participation towards 55% by 2050, making it critical to sustaining long-term GDP growth.

FMCG brands are increasingly contributing to building a more inclusive and representative India through employment, innovation and consumer engagement, recognising that inclusion cannot be approached through a single lens or driven solely by global frameworks.

Inclusion in a factory in Tamil Nadu may look very different from inclusion in a sales office in Lucknow or a digital team in Mumbai.

Ultimately, the organisations that will lead India's next phase of growth will not necessarily be the ones with the loudest DEI messaging, but the ones embedding inclusion into how they hire, innovate, market and grow. In a country as diverse as India, businesses that fail to understand diversity eventually fail to understand consumers themselves.

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