

How design process for the Base of the Pyramid differs from that for the Top of the Pyramid



Santosh Jagtap and *Andreas Larsson*, Department of Design Sciences, Faculty of Engineering, Lund University, P.O. Box 118, SE-221 00 Lund, Sweden
Viktor Hiort, Product and Production Development, Chalmers University of Technology, SE-412 96 Gothenburg, Sweden
Elin Olander and *Anders Warell*, Department of Design Sciences, Faculty of Engineering, Lund University, Sweden
Pramod Khadilkar, Centre for Product Design and Manufacturing, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, India

The base (BOP) and the top (TOP) of the world income pyramid represent the poor people and the people from developed countries, respectively. The design of products for the BOP is an important ingredient of the poverty reduction approach that combines business development with poverty alleviation.

However, the current understanding of the design for the BOP is limited. This study, using a protocol analysis, compared design processes for the BOP and TOP markets. The results indicate the difference between the design processes for these markets in terms of the design strategy employed by the designers (i.e. problem driven, solution driven strategy), their requirements handling behaviour, and their information behaviour.

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The world income pyramid can be divided into three segments (see [Figure 1](#)). The top of this pyramid, called the Top of the Pyramid (TOP), includes people from developed countries ([Pralhalad & Hart, 2002](#)). The middle segment consists of the rising middle class from developing countries. The base of this pyramid, generally called the ‘Base of the Pyramid’ (BOP), consists of poor people. About two-fifths of the world population can be categorized as poor. Their income is less than 2 dollars per day ([Karnani, 2011](#)). About a fifth of the world population is classified as extremely poor with income of less than 1.25 dollars per day.

Corresponding author:

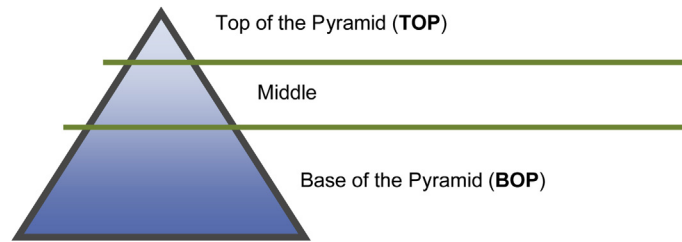
Santosh Jagtap
santosh.jagtap@design.lth.se
snjagtap22@gmail.com

Poverty is a trap because children born to poor parents are likely to grow up to be poor adults. Mahatma Gandhi often said – poverty is the worst form of violence. It is important to alleviate poverty. There are ways (i.e. approaches) to alleviate poverty (e.g. microcredit, granting formal property rights to the poor, etc.). In recent years, a poverty reduction approach that combines



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Figure 1 The world income pyramid (Prahalad & Hart, 2002)



business development with poverty alleviation has received attention (Prahalad, 2004). Private sector firms continually search for new business opportunities. Saturated markets and a highly competitive business landscape motivate companies to search for new markets to increase profits. This has led companies to pay greater attention to opportunities at the BOP (London & Hart, 2010; Nakata, 2012). While companies are beginning to address the product needs of the BOP, there is limited practical and theoretical knowledge to support them (Nakata, 2012).

In the approach of combining business development and poverty alleviation, the poor at the BOP are considered as producers and consumers of products. Design of products is an important ingredient of this market-based approach. Furthermore, some universities have begun to offer courses and/or design projects in the area of the design for the BOP.¹

The research in the BOP domain has been carried out by several authors from different disciplines (Prahalad, 2004; UNDP, 2008; Whitney & Kelkar, 2004). While design research is important in understanding and improving design practice and education (Blessing & Chakrabarti, 2009), design researchers have given little attention to the field of the design for the BOP. Most of the design research has been carried out in the context of developed countries and relatively affluent markets (Jagtap & Larsson, 2013; Jagtap et al, 2013; Viswanathan & Sridharan, 2012). There has been little empirical examination of the design for the BOP, and this limits our ability to develop tools and methods for improving current practice and education of design for the BOP. It is therefore important to develop an understanding of design for the BOP.

This study aims at exploring the differences between the design processes for the BOP and TOP markets, where designing for the TOP is a baseline. The sharp contrast between the BOP and the TOP makes the distinctions clear. The intent of the study was not to determine the differences between the outcomes of these design processes. Rather, it was to empirically explore the differences between these design processes. The design processes are compared

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