

BRANDS AS MORAL COMPASS– ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract: Brands have upped their ante, as new breed of brands and advertisements are exhorting, educating and engaging the consumer through moral appeals and user imagery addressing various issues as part of brand or corporate social responsibility. Brands such as Aerial, Surf Excel, All out, Cadbury, IdeaCellular, Tata Tea, XXX detergent, have used moral appeals and thus educating and engaging customers towards various issues and underlining the importance of brand Samaritans. The research paper attempts to explore underlying dimensions of communication of select brands using moral appeals. There is a paradigm shift from what you are and what you buy, to what you do. Brands also being sensitive to the environment are espousing social responsibility by taking up various social issues and imparting moral lessons to the customers. The nature of social issues raised and solution shown, linkages with usage and usage imagery and impact on Brand Personality as part of the communication have to be examined.

Key word: Moral values, brands, moral appeals, social issues

INTRODUCTION

Organizations spend enormously for brand differentiation and brand preference; it is imperative for them to spend on the social responsibility. Given the brands enormous cultural and financial clout, growing importance of the triple bottom line, gives lot of opportunity for social responsibility. Some brands are using advertisements using moral appeals and usage imagery to inform social responsibility and also in subtle manner highlighting the key features of the brand. There is also some linkage between brand values and values espoused by the brand through moral appeals.

Bo Edvardsson and Bo Enquist S and Michale Hay (2006) in their study examined four types of “values” in the example of IKEA: economic, social, environmental, and communication-based. These are incorporated into the model. These values create customer value for the customer and also contribute to the corporate identity.

Levy (1959) in the study has identified the symbolism and people purchase things which reflect utility and their meaning. The concept of brands as social signals is accepted and agreement between brand and user self-image influencing in consumer choice (Belk, 1983; Sirgy, 1982).

Lannon and Cooper (1983) observed that Brands express self-identity, choices, and essential part of our lives and similar to language spoken by the customers. Durgee (1988) observed that the purpose of advertising is for information and offer excitement. Johar and Sirgy (1991) differentiated advertising based on different appeals namely functional, symbolic and image. The image strategy involves creating user imagery. The utilitarian appeal involves informing consumers of the product benefits that are useful to the customers. There are two approaches to persuasion namely functional congruity and self – congruity.

Issacet.,al (2009) examined the theories of citizenship and role of leadership and possibility of ethical society. Theories of citizenship involved in two directions personal and social perspectives.

Research into commercial organisations (Collins, 2001; Collins and Porras, 2005; Jensen, 2002; Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 2007) indicate that lack of ethics carry dire economic consequences and might eventually lead to the disintegration of the organisation. In addition, behaving unethically might seriously damage the psychological integrity of the practitioner ranging from moral deterioration, emotional paralysis and disengagement (Diamond and Allcorn, 1984) to other psychopathological phenomena such as neuroses, depression and schizophrenia (Frankl, 1986).

Ethical issue is not exclusively the problem of citizenship theories; we can find it elsewhere, such as leadership (Mostovicz et al., 2009b), organisation (Ashforth et al., 2008) and marketing (Gummesson, 1996). Copper and Gulick (1984) observed that the wide view moved beyond the legal definition and saw the citizen getting involved in building the social fabric and sustaining community through voluntary organizations and community involvement.

The long-term view is theoretical only and is advocated by some scholars who define the ultimate goal of citizenship theory to be sustainability (Porter and Kramer, 2006; Schaefer, 2004) or meeting the current needs of the society without compromising the needs of generations to come. Based on ethical considerations, it holds that a citizen’s responsibility should be past, present and future oriented Weiss (2005). Jhon potter (2002) summarizes the purpose and education of citizenship in schools and its implication for government, education sector and schools.

Crick report (1998) reinterprets Marshalls definition and describes citizenship education comprising three things, related and mutually dependent ie, social and moral responsibility, community involvement, and political literacy.

Deception in advertising has always sustained criticism. Carson et al, (1985) an advertisement is considered misleading if knowledge is not good enough to make proper decision. The utilitarian appeal involves giving information about the functional benefits of the product. It tends to mislead the viewer by providing incorrect or insufficient information, with the deliberate initiative to result in a sale.

Advertisers increasingly try to immerse their commercial messages in other forms of communication, thus obfuscating the distinction between communication whose primary function is information, and communication whose primary objective is persuasion (Jeurissen and Veen, 2006). Immersive advertising is many a time deceptive as it misleads consumers into thinking that advertising material presented to them as content is indeed information, because the characteristics it displays correspond with what a reasonable person expects from content, but not necessarily from advertising (Spence and Heekeren, 2005).

OBJECTIVES

1. To study the use of moral appeals in advertisements of select brands and map with respect to Brand Personality.
2. To discuss the managerial implications for the same.

Brands and the moral appeals

Surf Excel

Surf Excel detergent from HUL takes a positive stand on failure with “Haar ko harao campaign” and social experiment “The failing test” which showcases failure is stepping stone to success. It is in line with previous campaign of dirt is good. In an achievement orientation country it is imperative to highlight the positive approach towards failure.

Ariel

Ariel, removing the stains of gender inequality has managed to build a social property, #ShareTheLoad and brought in an amalgamation of their brand identity and an ideology of their belief, started in India went later became global going viral in 22 countries in 16 languages. Women have tough task in having work life balance and men avoid some household chores such as laundry and consider it as women’s job. This advt exhorts men to share the load similar to washing machine which makes health family.

Bajaj Avenger

In one of the advt, biker of the motorcycle refuses to pin the national flag on the occasion of the Independence Day but he goes to place where the event is celebrated and cleans the place by removing the garbage. This shows that true celebration of Independence Day lies in fulfilling ones responsibility.

All out

The SC Johnson owned mosquito repellent brand All Out’s new campaign highlights that we must lend support to tough moms who act tough against erring children before it gets out of control. It goes with the line spare the rod and spoil the child. The digital film got 15 million views on Facebook and seventy thousand views on streaming.

Cadbury Kuchaccha ho jayae

Cadbury is not mere sweet but also a platform for sharing happiness and sacrifices, generosity and kindness. All other campaigns focus on the occasions but this gives an opportunity for daring and happiness ones get for being generous.

XXX Detergent brand

XXX Detergent brand a popular brand in Andhra Pradesh, Bharati soaps works connects with consumer, communication you focus on humanity and our soap focuses on the stains. It shows in one of the advertisements, person lies on the road and is bleeding, nobody comes forward to help and take him to hospital and finally young man arrives and takes him to hospital. The voice over says “you focus on humanity and we (our soap) focuses on stains”, XXX detergent a soap with values”. The brand and its communication exhort to discharge our duty.

Nokia C2-00

In this TVC, one student gets a message in his mobile Nokia C2-00, that question paper is leaked. His friend is very happy and gives him the paper. However that he dislikes the idea of using leaked question a paper and admits we lose self-respect and sends it to press. The exam is cancelled and both friends feel happy. The TVC depicts features of 3G application for the benefit of society.

Mahindra Duro Gearless power scooters

The friends driving on Mahindra Duro find somebody dropping the water bottle from the car and leaving. However the Duro drivers chase them and drop the bottle in his car. The brand subtly depicts the power, grip and break functioning of the vehicle.

Tata Tea jaago re campaign

Tata Tea, India’s largest tea company by volume, today has joined hands with Janaagraha, a Bangalore based not-for-profit organisation that has been doing pioneering work in the areas of urban advocacy and governance. The Jaago Re! one billion votes campaign which was initiated (with Janaagraha Bangalore based NGO) to create a platform that will motivate the vast numbers of Indian youth to participate actively in the electoral process of the country. From challenging the qualifications of a politician to run the country, the campaign now seeks to empower the youth to influence polity by exercising their right to vote. www.Jaagore.com is an online registration platform with call to action, provides information dissemination or the new voters and reaching out to 30 % of urban population. The campaign seeks to partner with other corporates, media groups, academic institutions and civil society organizations to make this India’s largest ever effort on voter registration.

IDEA Cellular

Idea Cellular initiated the following campaigns, which were well received.

1. Walk and talk campaign
2. Education for all
3. Governance
4. Save paper campaign

IDEA Cellular the leading GSM service provider has launched a new campaign Walk & Talk, to bring forward people across different walks of life, age-groups and societies and get them to walk for fitness. IDEA plans to initiate a countrywide movement on Walking & Talking, and expects that 'Ek Idea pe chalpadega India'. In one of the campaign Abhishek Bachchan playing Doctor advocates walking while talking for fitness. All the IDEA campaigns have powerful social messages for the rural and urban people.

The Idea advertising campaigns have pivoted around ideas which have impacted society and our living. The ideas include 'Walking & Talking' for staying fit. The preceding campaigns around 'Participative Governance'; 'Education for All'; 'Championing a world in which no one suffers from the disability to communicate'; and 'Championing a world without Caste' have been huge hits amongst the audiences, use mobile to save paper, making its tagline 'What an Idea, Sirji!' a popular metaphor. The campaigns – 'Championing a world without caste'; 'Championing a world in which no one suffers from the disability to communicate'; 'Education for All', 'Participative Governance', 'Walk When You Talk', and the recent 'Use Mobile, Save Paper' campaign – all abide by the essential brand promise of providing a simple, fresh and imaginative solution to a complex problem of the society. Idea's advt campaigns based on the theme of 'Democracy'; 'Championing a world without caste'; 'Championing a world in which no one suffers from the disability to communicate'; and 'Education for All', have been a huge success amongst all categories of audience. The advt questions the qualifications required for the politicians (considering politics as profession to run the country) requires qualifications and empowers youth to vote.

In all these campaigns, the protagonist connects with the audience cutting across social classes, Such as 'close aide' of the political leader in our Democracy campaign; or the 'Sarpanch' trying to get rid of caste wars; or the 'Tourist Guide' with a foreigner at Taj; as 'Priest' who has the vision of Educating One and All—each time the character has sprung up with an innovative 'Idea' which provides a simple solution, by using the mobile phone. The testimony of the success of the campaign is reflected from the rapid growth of IDEA's subscriber base in the country. The Aditya Birla Group is third largest Private GSM operator with over 40 million subscribers across India.

Table 1 shows the list of brands and issues tackled using moral appeals.

Table 2 shows the moral dimensions and the positive impact on Brand Personality.

Table 1

Brands	Advt / Advt Campaign	Social issue	Impact on Brand Personality
1. Surf Excel	Hark Ko Harao	Perception towards Failure	Usage and User imagery using moral appeal
2. Idea	Idea	Education for all, casteless society, governance, save paper, family planning	Usage and User imagery using moral appeal
3. Aerial	#Aerial share the load	Gender inequality	User imagery
4. Bajaj Avenger	Social values /Advt	Civic responsibility	User imagery
5. All out	#All out stay tough moms	Parenting	User imagery
6. XXX detergent	Social values /Advt	Human values	Usage imagery using moral appeal
7. Tata Tea	Tata jagoore	Franchising education	User imagery and moral appeal
8. Mahindra Duro	Social values /Advt	Civic responsibility	Usage imagery and moral appeal
9. Nokia 200	Social values /Advt	Leakage of question papers	Usage and user imagery and moral appeal
10. Cadbury	KuchAcha Ho jayee	Generosity	Usage and user imagery and moral appeal

Table -II

Positive Impact on Brand personality	Moral dimensions	
Sincerity	Family values (Ex-Parenting) (All out tough moms)	Civic responsibility Voting (Tata Tea Jaggore)
Competence	Individual values	Good governance (IDEA)
Excitement	Generosity and empathetic ,Integrity	
Ruggedness	(XXX detergent ,	
Sophistication	Cadbury kuchaccha ho jayee)	

CONCLUSION

Several countries have cultural, social, economic differences and it the responsibility of organizations to address various social issues (which also may cut across international barriers) to the extent possible. Brands are critical assets for the organization and increasingly they are seen as potent forces with a moral compass rather than mere platform for delivering economic value to the customers. Thus we see brands are delivering moral lessons to the customers using moral appeals with advts, films etc. and delivering social value to the customers. This may to lead to strong emotional relationship with customers and impact brand equity in the long run. Organizations in the marketing communications with their advertisements, films, and other activities are addressing several social issues and attempting to bring social transformation. Brands are sincere in addressing various social issues and exhibit competence by offering solutions.

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