Factors Driving Perception towards Social Branding in Indian Context

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Abstract

This paper attempts to identify the factors that influence the perception of consumers towards Social Branding campaigns. In modern marketing environment, gone are the days when smart taglines and emotional messages would be enough to connect with the audience, i.e., potential customers. Today customers need to believe that the brands they follow have the same beliefs and values and they position themselves behind such values through social initiatives and branding thereof. Studies such as (Hornik, 2002) show that the ultimate criteria of effectiveness of campaign communication in behavioural influence is often extremely hard to detect and attribute to precise causes. While social marketing and its tools have been extensively studied and used, these have not been explored in relation to the effects these have on driving the perceptions of the customers so as to influence a change in their behaviour. Within the conceptual theoretical framework of branding based on the available published literature in the existing discourse, we analyse the data from case studies. Therefore, this paper takes into account how certain factors of social branding affect the perceptions of customers in Indian context.

Introduction

Marketing is the activity, set of institutions and the processes for creating communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners and to society at large (American Marketing Association Board of Directors, 2013)[1]. In the modern era, marketing is an effective tool in creating presence and generating a loyal consumer base. The ultimate objective of marketing of the generic type is to influence behaviour of consumers(Vijayarani .S, 2016)[2].

One of the key aims of marketing i.e., proving to be very influential in the modern world, is social marketing. "Social marketing" is a process that applies marketing principles and techniques to create, communicate, and deliver value in order to influence the behaviors of target audience for social benefits (public health, safety, the environment, and communities) as well as the target audience." (Philip Kotler, Nancy Lee, and Michael Rothschild, 2008)[3].

Various marketing campaigns carried out under the flag of 'social marketing' tend to give out an illustration about all the values and ideas the brand stands for and its beliefs. It helps the campaigners drive the preconceived notion envisioned by the consumer. In simpler words we call it 'Social Branding'.

The significance of this paper lies in exploring further the elements that help these notions on consumers regarding social branding and ensure the success of a social branding campaign to the fullest. A detailed study of the campaigns throughout the years shows us a pattern of elements or factors that play crucial role in driving the perception of the end customer about the brand as a whole, which in turn would influence the desired behavioural change. Studies such as (Hornik, 2002)[4] show that the ultimate criteria of effectiveness of campaign communication in behavioural influence is often extremely hard to detect and attribute to precise causes.

Success of any social branding campaign depends on the ability to define the target behaviour. In order to induce desired behaviour on customers we need to evoke the correct perceptions of the campaign message. A detailed study of the drivers of those perceptions is required. While the objective of the campaign is a targeted behavioural change, it is necessary to understand the working behind it, measure the effectiveness and find causal attributes so that we can replicate the campaigns efficiently in the future for similar audience or objective.

Research Methodology

Within the broader principles of qualitative research approach, we have used the research method of case studies to identify the factors that influence on driving perception on the target audience of social branding campaigns. Four different social branding campaign case studies were explored and studied inside the premise of the existing literature on concepts of branding and perception formation theories. This inductive approach was used to find the drivers of perception formation of commercial marketing in social marketing campaigns. The case studies are social marketing drives from the Indian market that document varied social behavioral change targets. This approach was chosen to explore if the principles of branding and perception drive can be extended in case of social issues branding as well, as these have different behaviour targets as compared to commercial branding campaigns.

Case Studies

Lifebuoy "Swasthya Chetna": Unilever's Social Marketing Campaign [5]

Hindustan Lever Limited, the Indian subsidiary of the FMCG major, Unilever launched a program to educate around 200 million people in rural and urban areas about the importance of adopting good health and hygiene practices in 2002. It was called Lifebuoy's "Swastha Chetana". The objective of the program was to spread awareness about the germs and their adverse effects on health and how proper health and hygiene practices could prevent diseases like diarrhoea. According to HLL, this was not a pure social activity. This was a marketing program that intended to leverage a social issue.

Research Analysis

HLL saw an opportunity to grow Lifebuoy brand by marketing to the masses that have never used soap before. The people in these villages were educated through lectures, demonstrations, visual ads because of the negligible media penetration. HLL attempted to carry out a behavioral change in the population by information. Teaching the benefits of soap and hygiene and how it can prevent diseases and then putting forward their product so as to get a consumer base. This program resulted in a 20% growth in sales by 2003-04 and a brand growth of 10% with the projection for the growth to last till 2006. The campaign was considered a massive success and also received a lot of positive media attention.

Social Marketing in India - A Case Study of Condom Awareness [6]

The government of India launched a condom brand called "Nirodh" under the Hindustan Latex Limited (HLL), as early as 1966, in an attempt to provide good quality condoms for the Indian consumers. A widespread marketing campaign was launched to spread the use of condom and create demand for it on all mass media like TV, Radio and Print Media for "Nirodh". The stated aim was to create demand for condom in the Indian market and start dialogue about safe sex in the Indian community.

Research Analysis

However, the desired behavior change was not obtained easily. Marketers soon realized that the perception towards the concept of buying and using condoms were not being influenced in the desired direction through exposure to the information and availability of the product only. Unwanted perceptions such as condoms are meant for unmarried couples only or they are targeted at sex workers only began to hinder people from even speaking about condoms and seeking to buy them at retail stores. The taboo created around condoms was a failure of the marketing campaigns and had to be rectified. A joint initiative of Corporate Voice Weber Shandwick (CVWS), United State Agency for International Development (USAID) project Private Sector Partnership - One, ICICI Bank and the Union Ministry

for Health and Family Welfare launched a campaign that positioned condom usage for married couples with their slogan "Ek Duje Ke Liye" and encouraged husbands to pay attention to the sexual health of their wives. By making the messaging more explicit towards their target audience, this campaign helped condoms be perceived to be used within marital relationships.

Another earlier barrier to condom usage was the embarrassment attached with saying the word "condom". In response to this, a campaign was launched with the slogan "Condom - Bindass Bol" with the aim to initiate a conversation around safe sex. The campaign featured characters such as policemen, lawyers and coolies. With the use of such characters, the marketers wanted to normalize the conversation around condoms and initiating it through reliable sources such as the policemen helped drive the information home, especially in the rural parts of North India. The campaign won the UN Grand Prize awarded by the UN Department of Public Information and International Public Relations Association in 2007[7].

Dove Campaign for Real Beauty [8]

In 2004, Unilever launched the Campaign for Real Beauty globally following a study, *The Real Truth About Beauty: A Global Report*, which found that only 2 percent of women around world found themselves attractive or beautiful. Unilever promoted Dove under this campaign with the stated aim to create dialogue surrounding the perception of beauty among women and to challenge the beauty standard in the existing popular culture and media.

Research Analysis

By using non models and "real women" for the branding campaign, Dove attempted to include their consumers in the popular culture who otherwise were left out in the marketing space of beauty products that featured picture perfect models only. Dove leveraged the social issue surrounding the insecurities of women regarding their self-perception by branding themselves as a brand that cares about its customers and their needs.

The change in stance and messaging of a beauty product brand campaign was taken positively by the consumers and by 2014, the sales has jumped from $2.5 billion to $4 billion since the campaign's start according to Ad Age [9]. Involving the consumers through campaigns such as Real Beauty Sketch, initiating conversation on Social Media through polls and hashtag trends can be attributed to the success of the campaign.

Social Marketing: Times of India's 'Teach India' Campaign [10]

The Teach India campaign was launched on July 6 2008 by Times of India (TOI). It was one of its social marketing initiatives. According to TOI, the feedback that they received from the lead India campaign was that India would not be able to lead unless its populace was literate. It was due to this reason "Teach India" campaign was launched. The campaign consisted of two counterparts

1) This phase included inviting citizens from the country to voluntarily collaborate with an NGO and spend 2 hours a week teaching underprivileged children.
2) This phase started at the end of 2008. It included inviting some of the most gifted minds in the country from top educational institutes from all over the country who were willing to give 2 years to teaching the underprivileged.

The campaign was promoted through almost all channels.

Research Analysis

While the campaign received lots of praise, awards, and traction, paradoxical opinions emerged from the experts whether as to TOI was taking a genuine approach towards initiating social change in the literacy sector or was it just a marketing stunt so as to strengthen their brand image. The TOI group with the 'Teach India' campaign attempted

to shift the focus of the customer to divert the 'Yellow Journalism' allegations. Regardless of the criticism of, it was a huge success than it was allegedly made out to be. The campaign's understanding of the social issues that hindered it's business to grow i.e. literacy forged a clear path towards the objective and the target of the campaign. According to the times group the 'Teach India' program created a lot of hype within three weeks of it's launch. 88,710 people responded and 55,035 applied for the program. United Nations praised TOI by saying *"Teach India is certainly the largest campaign of its kind. It has given ordinary Indians the unique and spontaneous chance to channel their willingness and desire to do something good for the country through volunteering".*

Research Findings and Discussion

From the analysis above, we have come to realize that there are certain factors that are key in influencing a behavioral change for any social branding campaign. While these factors are not uncommon from those that influence commercial branding campaigns, their influence is subtler in comparison. And hence, it is difficult to identify these elements. Also, the pre existing notion regarding the social issue or the conversation around the target behavior change plays a crucial role in creating perception towards the campaign. In the Condom Awareness campaign, the preconceived idea and taboos around the subject made the campaign messages to be interpreted in a very different way than it was intended. However, such notions can be broken down with well designed information and awareness campaign over time, as proved by the Lifebouy "Swastha Chetana" campaign. Introducing a whole new behavior over a large population might requires a widespread perception change. The messaging needs to be very closely administered and monitored over an extended period of time to induce lasting difference. In the process, HLL earned a valuable consumer base which remained loyal to them. In case of the Real Beauty Campaign of Dove involving consumers through various feedback channels such as polls, experiments, etc.in deciding the direction of the campaign conversation proved very effective.

Managerial Implications

Leveraging the above found factors or elements effectively will help a business to successfully run a social branding campaign. Managers can make informed decisions if they take an effort to study these factors. Replication of such campaigns can be done more productively as we now understand, to an extent, what kinds of elements drive perceptions in social branding campaigns and the contextual phenomena that play a role in influencing the target behavior. Campaigns would be less likely to fall in the same potholes as the previous campaigns did and the success of campaigns can be attributed to identifiable factors.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of Social Branding campaigns have been led in a different way than commercial branding in the Indian context, often targeting masses with low media penetration and low level of literacy. This is mostly due to the fact that social marketing and branding efforts are done for products and causes surrounding social issues that are relevant to these demographics. The effectiveness of such campaigns become even harder to measure and success even more vague to attribute to certain factors. From the above study of some very successful social marketing and branding efforts in the Indian market, one can infer that the factors that drive perception towards such campaigns is not limited to awareness or information only. Much like commercial branding, we can find some common factors as listed below:

1. In case of lack of media penetration, use of direct marketing and consumer involved information dissemination can help people change behavior or establish a new behavior as in the case of Lifebuoy's "Swastha Chetana" campaign.
2. Branding against certain socially taboo subjects or products such as condoms, contraceptives, honor killing, LGBTQ issues, etc are often either very vague or are not strategic enough to drive the point home. Social branding messages should be explicit and bold enough to break through the taboo surrounding the social issue to evoke correct perception.

3. It was observed that campaigns that have inclusive strategies and emotionally motivated campaign design connect with audiences quicker and are more widespread like the Real Beauty Campaign of Dove and the 'Teach India' campaign of Times of India.

Future Scope of Research

The existing literature on branding of social marketing efforts and the perception driving phenomenon of such efforts are not extensive. Social Marketing as an area of discipline is very recent and the underlying marketing theories for this area is yet to be explored. This study has taken very limited cases in the Indian context and there's a need to study it extensively on a global stage as the factors driving perceptions roots back to the psychological aspect of the consumers which differs from one region to the other. Another direction could be taken towards studying the various elements of the branding process and its messages, the structure and strategies best suited for marketing social issues.

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