Corporate Societal Marketing and the Process of Building Corporate Brand Equity: The Case of Malayala Manorama

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Abstract

Building corporate brand equity for one's own is considered as one of the most important governance responsibilities by most of the Indian companies today. This paper is an attempt by the authors to identify the factors that drive the process of corporate brand equity building up via the societal marketing route. For the exploration purpose, it has been decided to use the case study method. To start with, the authors attempted to capture and document an interesting initiative by the Malayala Manorama group of publications (referred to hereafter as *Manorama*), the largest newspaper network (in terms of reach and readership) operating from the South Indian state of Kerala. The present paper reports the preliminary outcomes of this study.
Keywords: Marketing Philosophies, Corporate Societal Marketing, Corporate Brand Equity.

Introduction

Marketing can best be described as a "social process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering, and exchanging products and value with others" (Kotler,2000). Modern conceptions of the marketing philosophy are usually traced back to the early part of the twentieth century. Many marketing theoreticians have concurred that there are five distinct eras in the development of marketing theory, viz. a production orientation, a product orientation, a sales orientation, a market orientation, and the societal marketing orientation (Keith, 1960; Dawson, 1969; Bartels, 1974; Kotler and Keller, 2006). The various perspectives on the development of marketing theory are in reality the differences in perspective, with some researchers viewing it not simply as a managerial and economic activity but also as a social process (Bartels, 1970; Bartels, 1974; Hunt, 1976; Kotler, 2000].

Can profitability be added to the societally desirable actions? The answer to this question has led to serious academic cum practitioner debates in the past (Hunt, 1976; Marsden, 2005). A number of ways to add profitability to the socially desirable actions are known; and others could well be developed for the benefit of the stakeholders concerned.

The concept of Corporate Societal Marketing

The quintessence of the marketing concept which reached its apotheosis in the early 1960s has been described by Kotler and Keller (2006) as a "customer orientation backed by integrated marketing aimed at generating customer satisfaction as the key to attaining long-run profitable volume." It was Bell and Emory (1971) who first identified its three basic elements as a customer orientation, an integrated effort, and a profit orientation. By the 1970s, however, as it became clear that society's resources were finite and its environment damageable, some authors became critical of the emphasis on material consumption without consideration of the societal benefit (Dawson, 1969; Feldman, 1971; Kotler and Levy, 1971). Some writers saw the main problem as arising from the ambiguity of the term 'customer satisfaction'' (Bell and Emory, 1971; and Kotler, 1972).

Kotler (1972) cited cigarettes and alcohol as classic products that provide immediate satisfaction, but may be detrimental in the long run. The inadequacies of the marketing concept thus centre on its short-run operational focus on profit, with the satisfaction of the consumer not a goal in itself, but merely a means to this end. The obvious choice was between a marketing philosophy with an emphasis on the material consumption with due consideration of the long-run societal impacts and a narrow stress on the individual with the gratification of immediate and selfish wants without concern for long-run consumer interests. The real alterations to the original marketing

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philosophy therefore lie in the addition of the objective of attaining long-run consumer welfare, which is consistent with the long term goal of profitability (Kotler, 1972; Feldman, 1971).

Authors like Kotler (1972) and Dawson (1969) have implicit faith in the theory that what is good in the long run for society is good for business. This principle is in fact the basis on which most proponents of societal marketing expound their views (Bell and Emory, 1971). Other aspects of the societal marketing viewpoint are its emphasis on communication between the business and its environment in the form of feedback mechanisms, consultations and negotiations between competitors, consumers and government agencies. The validity of the societal marketing concept has been explored further in the subsequent researches, which have taken this notion of societal marketing further (Takas, 1974; El-Ansary, 1974; Abratt and Sacks, 1989; Carrigan, 1995; Hoeffler and Keller, 2002; Ward and Lewandowska, 2006).

The use of corporate societal marketing (CSM) appears to be on the rise in accordance with the increasing recognition of the vast potential of CSM programmes (Drumwright, 1996; File and Prince 1998; Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). *Corporate societal marketing* can be defined to "encompass marketing initiatives that have at least one non-economic objective related to social welfare and use the resources of the company and/or one of its partners" (Drumwright and Murphy 2001, p.164). One factor driving this growth in CSM is the realization that consumers' perceptions of a company as a whole and its role in society can significantly affect the corporate brand's strength and equity.

CSM could be used to satisfy multiple objectives. Goals for companies that implement successful CSM programmes include "creat(ing) a differential advantage through an enhanced corporate image with consumers" (Lichtenstein et al, 2000, p.4), and "differentiat(ing) themselves from the competition by building an emotional, even spiritual, bond with consumers" (Meyer 1999, p.29). Although the potential benefits of CSM programmes are plenty, in our research, we focus on the specific benefits of CSM programmes that would lead to the shaping of corporate brand equity. Corporate societal marketing programmes are poised to play a more important role in creating brand equity (Aaker, 1989; Saji, 2002[b]). For that to happen, however, marketers must understand what to expect and what not to expect from CSM programmes (Saji, 2002[b]). The present paper identifies these expectations with the help of a real life business case study.

The Process of Building Corporate Brand Equity

Brand Equity is a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to the brand's name and symbol, which can subtract from as well as add to the value provided by a product or service and provides value to the customers as well as to the firm (Aaker, 1992). David A. Aaker through his seminal work (1991) explains the seventeen different ways with which the brand equity could extend value to the firm. In one another work, Aaker (1996) illustrates the five building blocks to the process of creating corporate brand equity, viz. brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived brand quality, brand associations (other than the perceived quality), and other proprietary brand assets (like patents, trademarks, channel relationships etc.).

Corporate brand equity once established in favour of the firm could be expected to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the firm's future marketing programmes and projects (Aaker, 1989; Saji, 2002[b]). Corporate brand equity will usually provide higher margins for the firm's product offers by permitting premium pricing and reducing reliance on promotions (Saji, 2002[a]). In many contexts, the elements of corporate brand equity serve to support premium pricing or to resist price erosion (Aaker, 1992). In addition, a brand with a disadvantage in corporate brand equity will often have to invest more in promotional activity just to maintain its position in the market. The corporate brand could also provide a platform for growth by brand extensions and distribution equity (Aaker, 1989; Saji, 2002[b]).

The Case of Malayala Manorama

In order to identify the factors that drives the CSM programmes, it has been decided to conduct a detailed explorative study on the recent initiative undertaken by the Malayala Manorama group of publications (referred to hereafter as *Manorama*), the largest newspaper network (in terms of reach and readership) operating from the South Indian state of Kerala. The mission of the programme was to build awareness among the Keralites, who live in both rural and urban areas, regarding the ideal behavior toward the concepts of waste disposal and recycling. The CSM programme initiated by *Manorama* has several components in it.

The programme got conceptualized at the corporate headquarters of *Manorama* in 2006. The various marketing communication vehicles that have been tried very effectively for the successful operation of the programme include 'video on wheels' and 'road shows from one end of Kerala state to the end. Besides these below-the-line promotion tools, *Manorama* has also used its own TV channel and newspaper vehicles for promoting the very cause of the programme.

The state of Kerala has certain peculiar traits in-terms of reach, penetration, and leadership of newspapers and exposure to visual media channels. The idea generator had a clear-cut strategic objective in place. Hinging on a broader social purpose, *Manorama* termed it as a programme of public participation for making Kerala, *A Clean Kerala*; and the programme was given the name 'Sukrita Keralam'. This section highlights the approach taken by *Manorama* and its associated strategic features.

In order to meet the objectives of the programme, *Manorama* has sought public participation through its newspaper network for addressing for one of the most important emerging social malaise - increasing waste and decreasing sensibility to suitably dispose this waste or process them. The strategic role of this CSM programme and the possible extensions of the same to other socially desirable projects in the corporate brand equity building up process is the fundamental research problem that the researchers are trying to address.

This is not the first time *Manorama* is going for this kind of CSM programmes. In 2003, *Manorama* in their efforts to community development has come out with an innovative concept called '*Ente Keralam'*. The project emphasizing on the conservation of the natural resources has got wide spread acceptance in Kerala. The project '*Palathully*' that stressed on the need for 'rainwater harvesting' was successfully implemented in Kerala. As an extension of the *Ente Keralam* programme, in 2006, Manorama introduced the *Sukrita Keralam* programme meant for waste recycling and management.

Kerala christened as "God's Own Country" is blessed with so many natural resources, water bodies, flora and fauna. However, the very calm and serene vegetation of Kerala are of late getting affected with the increasing population and the changing lifestyle of the people of Kerala. Waste disposal and its efficient management has become a menace to the Government and municipal authorities of the state. Disposal of wastes openly in the public places not only takes away the serenity of the place, but also leads a lot of diseases. Towards the end of 2006, the outbreak of the *chikun guinea epidemic* took away many lives in Kerala. This was mainly due to the unhygienic and dirty surroundings, especially in the urban areas. Hence effective management of wastes has become a necessity as it is hazardous to human beings. This prompted Manorama to introduce *Sukrita Keralam* for effective waste disposal and recycling.

The *Sukrita Keralam* programme aims to alleviate all the worries in waste management. The programme, while trying to solve the problem of waste disposal, has also come out with a concept in waste recycling. Waste recycling is a process, where wastes will be processed and made reusable again. Organic and biodegradable wastes can be processed and converted into biogas (an organic fuel for cooking), electricity, and manure (compost and vermi compost).

As part of the promotional campaign of the CSM programme, *Manorama* introduced road shows from Thiruvananthapuram (South of Kerala) to Kazargode (North of Kerala), for creating awareness among the public about the necessity of effective waste disposal. Road shows were

shown in 300 centers throughout Kerala from South to North. According to *Manorama* sources, it is estimated that about 100 – 500 people have viewed such road shows at each spot. Therefore, approximately 90000 people have got exposed to the campaign so far, which would certainly have the Word-Of-Mouth effect too. The promotional campaigns stressed on both decentralized waste management and solid waste management.

The role of Manorama does not end by merely creating awareness; they also provide a platform for the public to interact with the waste management technology providers. In each of the fourteen districts of Kerala state, they do provide *demo shows* on various waste recycling techniques, whereby various useful byproducts such as biogas, electricity; compost and vermi compost are made. Seminars and open forum discussions are also being organized simultaneously with the active participation of the constituents of the society. *Manorama* meets at their own all the basic expenses of their *Sukrita Keralam* programme. Apart from decentralized waste recycling, *Manorama* as part of their venture for community development has also introduced awards upto Rs.10 lakhs for the best panchayat / municipality/ corporation which implements their programme. Also, there is an award of Rs.1 lakh for a panchayat in each district, adding to a total of Rs.14 lakhs for this specific promotional tool.

In Conclusion

The present paper tries to capture the efforts of *Manorama* in implementing their *Sukrita Keralam* programme in the state of Kerala. It would be interesting to compare and contrast the *Manorama*'s CSM programme with any similar CSM programmes that had taken place elsewhere in the world. A minimum of two to three such cases would help the researchers build a research framework in order to explain the factors that drive the process of building up corporate brand equity via the societal marketing route. Once the research framework is ready, we propose to conduct an empirical study for validating the research framework proposed.

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