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Corporate Social Responsibility & Ethics in Marketing

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ABSTRACT

This Article explains the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Ethics in Marketing and Identifies and Analyses the points such as to what extent the academicians in the B-Schools are imparting to their budding marketing managers, the importance of Social responsibility and Ethics in their marketing subject or as a separate course & How far the practicing marketing managers in India giving importance to the ethical aspects and to what extent MNCs operating in the developing countries like India taking care of the ethical and social responsibility aspects while operating their business.

Keywords : Conflict, Stakeholders, Corporate Citizenship, Ethnic marketing, Green marketing, Social marketing, Ethical Values.

INTROCUITION

There is a growing trend among academicians and professionals (Indian Marketers and MNCs operating in India started realizing the importance of CSR and ethics in marketing and their role in conducting the business which takes care of the society's interest at the same time optimizing the profit of their organizations. Corporate social responsibility is the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large". Here society meaning customers and people at large. It is an expression used to describe what some see as a company's obligation to be sensitive to the needs of all the stakeholders in its business operations. A company's stakeholders are all those who are influenced by, or can be influenced by, or can influence, a company's decisions and actions. These can include (but are not limited to): employees, customers, suppliers, community organizations, subsidiaries and affiliates, joint venture partners, local neighborhoods, investors and shareholders (or a sole owner), Government and Media as per the Diagram-1. A variety of terms are used – sometimes interchangeably – to talk about corporate social responsibility (CSR): business ethics, corporate citizenship, corporate accountability, sustainability. In its simplest terms it is: "what you do, how you do it, and when and what you say. Social responsibility and ethics are blended together and applied in various discipline of management such as HR, Finance, computer etc. Here the author is concentrating on CSR and marketing ethics and its impact on the society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When we start talking about Social Responsibility or Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Ethics in marketing the marketer needs to know the concepts of Corporate Social Responsibility, how is it applicable in the field of marketing and ethical conflicts faced by the marketers, the concepts of Consumerism, Social responsibility and ethics in Marketing. The Natural Environment, Green Marketing, Cause Related Marketing, Social Marketing, Ethnic Marketing and its relationships in Marketing Ethics. In the following paragraphs the author explains about each aspect in length. As Weeden has noted, the relationship for social marketers has shifted from begging to partnering (Weeden 1998, p. 14). However, this shift is not without its perils for both sides. Businesses find that venturing into social enterprise can pose important risks

to the firm's reputation when it is found to step over ethical bounds (Sarner and Anderson 1996). At the same time, non-profits organizations have found themselves in new partnerships and networks where

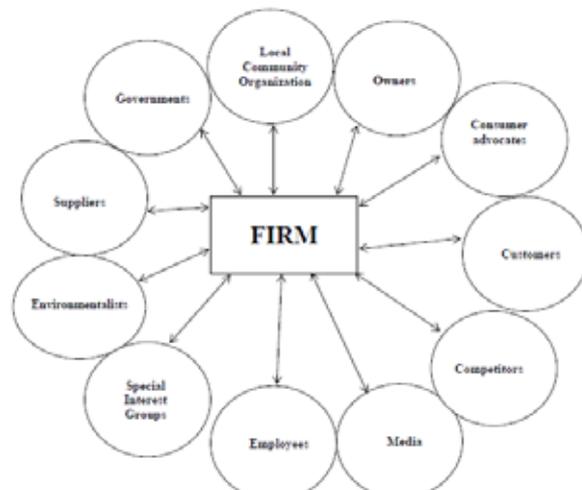


Diagram-1 STAKEHOLDERS OF A FIRM
Source: Freeman Edward R (1984)

International Marketing Conference on Marketing & Society, 8-10 April, 2007, IIMK 19 the norms of behavior are unclear and the non-profits are at risk of being exploited intentionally or unintentionally by more powerful and more sophisticated commercial partners. In this context, we need to identify the need for ethics and social responsibility in the Marketing field. In this article, the author outlines -- with examples -- the motivations and character of what Drumright, Cunningham and Berger (2000) have called "social alliances," partnerships between for-profit and non-profit organizations and distinguish them from strategic alliances among purely for-profit organizations. We then discuss ways in which social alliances can present ethical challenges for one or both partners. Finally, we discuss the alternatives available to social marketers to both detect and resolve ethical dilemmas in social alliances. Therefore, social responsibility and ethics in marketing is more relevant with motivations and partnerships.

MARKETING ALLIANCES

At the outset, it is critical that we define what we mean by "marketing alliances." A marketing alliance is a formal or informal arrangement between organizations where each seeks through marketing activities gains that would not be available to either without such an alliance. In our view, the term alliances encompass two of the three types of marketing exchange characterized by Gundlach and Murphy (1993). Also the concept of ethics and social responsibility in marketing should be understood by the institutions in the field of academic as well as industry. These authors distinguish among transactional, contractual and relational exchanges. A typical transactional exchange is a one-time event where, for example, A sells to B. A contractual exchange is where A and B agree to a joint undertaking for some fixed period of time, for example, where A and B agree to carry out a six-month promotion of complementary product lines. A relational exchange is one that theoretically has no limits, as when A and B conduct a joint venture to market Product Y in Country Z. The last two may be considered "alliances," differing mainly in their time frame and, by extension, the attitudes, intentions and behaviors of the parties. In the commercial sector and academic sector also such alliances may involve equity investments by one or -- more typically --- all parties (cf. Varadarajan and Cunningham 1995).

THE CONCEPTS OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)

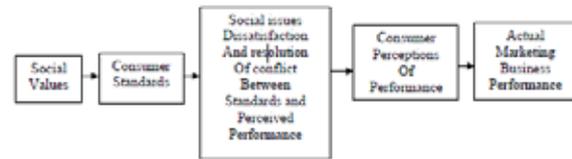
CSR is viewed as a comprehensive set of policies, practices and programs that are integrated into business operations, supply chains, and decision-making processes throughout the company – wherever the company does business – and includes responsibility for current and past actions as well as future impacts. The issues that represent a company's CSR focus vary by business, by size, by sector and even by geographic region. In its broadest categories, CSR typically includes issues related to : business ethics, community investment, environment, governances, human rights, market place and workplace .CSR goes beyond charity and requires that a responsible company take into full account of the impact on all stakeholders and on the environment when making decisions. This requires them to balance the needs of all stake holders with their need to make a profit and reward their shareholders adequately. For the new generation of corporate leaders, optimization of profits is the key, rather than the maximization of profit. Hence, there is a shift from accountability to share holders to social responsibility to customers and other stake holders. In today's competitive global marketing, ethics play a vital role, because we are dealing with human values and beliefs. Business spreads beyond boundaries. The marketer has to deal with cross country culture. Many MNC'S like Mc Donald and Nestle had faced lot of problems because of neglecting ethical issues in their marketing practices. They have incurred billions of dollars in monetary values and above all losing thousands of valuable hybrid customers due to the adaptation of unethical advertising & promotional strategies. According to experts, marketing is viewed as human conduct and is subject to academic analysis and public scrutiny. Ethics is the study of the moral principles that guide the conduct. Historically, there have been two points of view on the study on ethics in marketing. The first is " Part I – Social Responsibility, Ethics & Marketing International Marketing Conference on Marketing & Society, 8-10 April, 2007, IIMK 20 Let the buyer beware". From these points of view, the rights of the seller are central. A company has little regard for customer's needs and wants. The other point of view is " let the seller beware". Here, customer satisfaction is taken to an extreme. No matter what the customer does, it is ok. Which position is correct? How do we resolve the inevitable conflicts brought by these competing viewpoints?

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) AND ETHICS IN MARKETING

Kotler and Levy, in their book, Corporate Social Responsibility define corporate social responsibility as "a commitment to improve community well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources". Some of the benefits of being socially responsible include

- (a) enhanced company and brand image
- (b) easier to attract and retain employees
- (c) increased market share
- (d) lower operating costs and
- (e) easier to attract investors. A socially – responsible firm will care about customers, employees, suppliers, the local community, society, and the environment. CSR can be described as an approach by which a company

Flow chart-1



- Focus entirely in profits (and profitable firms typically serve society well)
- Explicitly incorporate social responsibility into its day-to-day marketing decisions to minimize negative effects on society and enhance positive effects
- Go even further and engage in social projects that are unrelated to the corporate mission and even detrimental to profits (which could net out to be socially undesirable)
- The Success strategies of a Business formed out of abundance and grounded in ethics and cooperation are powerful and long-lasting and they help you feel good about yourself even while bringing in profits (Shel Horowitz Management must decide which of these three levels of social responsibility to adopt and which social issues are relevant to its business.

ETHICAL CONFLICT FACED BY THE MARKETERS

Marketers must be aware of ethical standards and acceptable behavior. This awareness means that marketers must recognize the viewpoints of three key players: the company, the industry, and society. Since these three groups almost always have different needs and wants, ethical conflicts are likely to arise. Ethical conflicts in marketing arise in two contexts : First, when there is a Social Values Consumer Social issues Dissatisfaction And resolution Of conflict Between Standards and Perceived Performance Consumer Perceptions Of Performance Actual Marketing Business Performance Part I – Social Responsibility, Ethics & Marketing International Marketing Conference on Marketing & Society, 8-10 April, 2007, IIMK 21 difference between the needs of the three aforementioned groups (the company, the industry, and society) a conflict may arise. Second and ethical conflict may arise when one's personal values conflict with the organization. In either case, a conflict of interest is a possible outcome An example of the first type of conflict is the tobacco industry. Cigarettes have for many decades been a lucrative business. So, cigarette and tobacco marketing have been for companies and good for the tobacco industry. Many thousands of people around the world are employed in the tobacco industry. So, the world economy has been somewhat dependent on cigarettes and tobacco. However, cigarettes are harmful to society. There is documented proof that cigarette smoking is harmful to health. This is an ethical conflict for cigarette marketers. An example of the second type of conflict, when one's personal values conflict with the organizations occurs when a leader in the company seeks personal gain (usually financial profit) from false advertising. "Cures" for fatal diseases are one type of product that falls into this category of ethical conflict: In their greed to make a profit, a marketer convinces those who may be dying from an incurable disease to buy a product that may not be a cure, but which a desperately ill person (or members of his or her family) may choose to purchase in an effort to save the dying family member suffering. Promoting and marketing such products violates rules of marketing ethics. Ethical dilemmas facing marketing professionals today fall into one of three categories: tobacco and alcohol promoting, consumer privacy, and green marketing. Standards for ethical marketing guide business in efforts to do the right thing. Such standards have four functions: to help identify acceptable practices, foster internal control, avoid confusion, and

facilitate a basis for discussion.

SOCIAL MARKETING AND ETHICS

Social Marketing is defined as the use of marketing principles and techniques to influence a target audience to voluntarily accept, reject, modify, or abandon a behaviour for the benefit of individuals, groups or society as a whole. Social marketing is usually done by a non-profit organization, government, or quasi-government agency. The goal is either to steer the public away from products that are harmful to them and / or society (e.g., illegal drugs, tobacco, alcohol, etc.) or to direct them towards behaviors or products that are helpful to them and / or society (e.g., having family meals, praying together, etc.).

ETHNIC MARKETING AND ETHICS

Another aspect the marketer has to know about Ethnic Issues while going for global marketing and still take care of Ethics. Culture plays an important role in defining ethical standards because dissimilar cultures socialize their people differently, according to what is acceptable behavior. The potential significance of ethnic groups for marketing justifies inquiry into the moral judgments, standards, and rules of conduct exercised in marketing decisions and situations arising from decisions whether or not to focus on individual ethnic groups within an economy. Identifying and targeting ethnic groups for marketing purposes are tasks fraught with many ethical difficulties. In a multicultural society consisting of a dominant group and many diverse, minority groups defined by ethnicity, these problems can be expected to increase substantially. Consequently, marketers may include minority ethnic consumers in their mainstream marketing programs. In itself, this has ethical consequences. Alternatively, if marketers seek to target individual minority ethnic groups within the same economy a further set of ethical consequences needs to be considered. The international environment is recognized as attracting more difficulties for marketers (Kotler et al., 1998, p. 833) because their "ethics" parameters may not match the notion of "good" in the foreign country where they wish to operate. This is a problem because it may compromise successful international market penetration, that is, a firm's ability to compete in the international market. To the extent that international operations are part of an overall competitive strategy (either because of a firm's need to have a presence where its main customers operate, or because the firm must needs to follow its competitors) this also can influence a firm's ultimate survival in its domestic market. Ethical concerns are thus clearly important both in the parent country and also in the host country. One possible approach to ethnic marketing ethics within one country, understood as ethics applied to marketing practice targeting minority ethnic groups, is to apply the same procedures that firms use to deal with ethics problems in the international context (Kotler et al., 1998). Ethnic minority consumers, particularly in their first time of settlement in a new country, may be inexperienced in relation to what is available, where, and for how much, as well as being unaware of market dos and don'ts. This justifies their possible reliance on referral or recommendation by others they trust, eventually their minority ethnic group of affiliation, particularly when communication difficulties limit the number and range of accessible secondary sources.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF BUSINESS BY MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES IN INDIA

In the last twenty years, MNCs have played a key role in defining markets and influencing the behavior of a large number of consumers. Globalization and liberalization have provided a great Part I – Social Responsibility, Ethics & Marketing International Marketing Conference on Marketing & Society, 8-10 April, 2007, IIMK 26 opportunity for corporations to be globally competitive by expanding their production base and market share. Recent years have seen many progressive

organizations in our country keenly playing a social role. In some of these organizations the approach has been to take up only business-centric activities, i.e., which are directly relevant to their business. The guiding philosophy in these organizations is that social reasonability is good only if it pays. This approach benefits both the organization and the stakeholder. Thus, ITC has been afforesting private degraded land to augment the supply of raw material for its paper factory. Similarly, Hindustan Lever which requires good quality water for the manufacture of its food products has been improving the quality of water in many communities. Companies like Cadbury India, Glaxo and Richardson Hindustan are helping farmers to grow crops which serve as raw materials for them. Lipton in Eath district of Uttar Pradesh has started veterinary hospitals in the region from where it buys milk. British Gas (which sells compressed natural gas to India) has recently started teaching unemployed youngsters how to become mechanics for gas-based auto rickshaws in Delhi. In some other organizations the approach has been to take up such philanthropic activities in which they can make a difference. Coca – Cola As one of the largest and most global companies in the world, Coca – Cola took seriously its ability and responsibility to positively affect the communities in which it operated. The company's mission statement, called the Coca-Cola Promise, stated: "The Coca-Cola Company exists to benefit and refresh everyone who is touched by our business." The Company has made efforts towards good citizenship in the areas of community, by improving the quality of life in the communities in which they operate, and the environment, by addressing water, climate change and waste management initiatives.

CONCLUSION

Several forces are driving companies to practice a higher level of corporate social responsibility: rising customer expectations, changing employee expectations, government legislation and pressure, the inclusion of social criteria by investors, and changing business procurement practices. Companies need to evaluate whether they are truly practicing ethical and socially responsible marketing. Business success and continually satisfying the customer and other stakeholders are closely tied to adoption and implementation of high standards of business and Part I – Social Responsibility, Ethics & Marketing International Marketing Conference on Marketing & Society, 8-10 April, 2007, IIMK 27 marketing conduct. The most admired companies in the world abide by a code of serving people's interests, not only their own. The following are the suggestions that the society must use the law to define, as clearly as possible, those practices that are illegal, anti-social, or anticompetitive. Next, companies must adopt and disseminate a written code of ethics, build a company tradition of ethical behavior, and hold its people fully responsible for observing ethical and legal guidelines. And, individual marketers must practice a "social conscience" in their specific dealings with customers and various stakeholders. The future holds a wealth of opportunities for companies. Technological advances in solar energy, online networks, cable and satellite television, biotechnology, and telecommunications promise to change the world as we know it. As the same time, forces in the socioeconomic, cultural, and natural environments will impose new limits on marketing and business practices. Companies that are able to innovate new solutions and values in a socially responsible way are the most likely to succeed. It is my belief that good marketing is ethical marketing. Good marketing is about satisfying and developing a long-term relationship with our customers. Caring about your customers not only results in profits (or achieving your organization's objectives if an organization is not-for-profit), it is the ethical thing to do. Deceiving customers may help a firm's profits in the short-run, but is not the way to build a successful business. The same goes for social responsibility. A firm has to care about all stakeholders: customers, employees, suppliers and distributors, local communities in which they do business, society, and the environment.

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