



Role of Communication Strategies in Cause Marketing Initiatives

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cause marketing, communication , branding, differentiation

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ABSTRACT *In this age of worldwide competition, deteriorating brand differentiation, and growing mass media, organizations are reaching beyond the conventional marketing tools to enhance the value of intangible assets. During the past few decades a move from function centric branding to emotion centric and value centric branding is visible. The external communication used by organizations for gaining recognition through these cause-related campaigns can become a relevant strategic marketing tool. This paper studies the Cause Marketing initiatives of three well known organisations of which one is a private firm, another an NGO and the third one an entrepreneurial initiative turned cause marketing company. Through this qualitative research, the role of external communication in marketing campaigns as a whole and specifically on these three different kinds of organizations is compared.*

What is cause marketing?

Cause Related Marketing (hereafter referred as CRM) can be described as “strategic positioning and marketing tool that links a company or a brand to a relevant social cause or issue, for mutual benefit”. American Express had first proposed the concept of “Cause Related Marketing” in 1983 during a fund-raising exercise for restoring the Statue of Liberty in New York City. (S.P., 2007) It refers to promoting social issues through efforts such as sponsorship, licensing agreements and advertising. CRM can be distinguished from corporate giving or philanthropy as the latter entails an explicit donation that is tax deductible. It can be described a marketing relationship that may not be necessarily based on a monetary contribution. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cause_marketing

Corporate social responsibility is distinct from CR. CSR is when an organization tries to give back to the society what it gains from it. When a firm invests its resources towards a particular cause it is called CRM. These organizations often lend monetary support to an NGO which is devoted towards a specific cause. This method can be used by the organization to improve its image and demonstrate positive brand affiliations. However, the two terms are used inter-changeably in many instances.

CRM can yield two advantages – Improved social responsibility or higher business benefits because of relations or both can be the consequence of cause related initiatives. Moreover, if a firm sustains a cause it further increases its brand equity through recognition. Thus the quality of benefit that cause related marketing can have towards the organization as well as the shareholders should be determined first.

<http://www.marketing91.com/cause-related-marketing/>

As corporate become involved in philanthropic or socially related causes, cause-marketing has grown across the world. To put into effect their social responsibility and build more positive images, many firms now align with worthwhile causes. The stress is laid on aligning the community's corporate strategy of involvement with social issues that are related to their business.

Cause Marketing is a joint venture which can be created between organizations and non-profit organizations to raise funds and brand recognition. Businesses perceive CRM as

“an opportunity to enhance their corporate reputation, raise brand awareness, increase customer loyalty, build sales and increase press coverage”. (S.P. 2007)

Areas ventured into by companies

CRM can be in the form of product, service, or transactions, promotion of a common message, product licensing, endorsements, and certifications, Local partnerships, and employee service programs. A cause-related programme of marketing spreads awareness and lets the people know that this enterprise is socially sensitive and responsible.

Campaigns of CRM have flourished over the past few years and can appear in interesting varieties such as product sales, Licensing and cobranded programmes.

Successful international cause marketing initiatives

In 1981, American Express started a campaign which contributed funds to many diverse non-profit firms as part of the San Francisco Arts Festival. Every time someone used an American Express Card in the area, a 2 cent contribution was generated and each time new members applied for a card a larger donation was made. Card usage was believed as having boosted and associations between American Express and their merchants became better due to this campaign.

Yoplait's “save lids to save lives” campaign packaged particular products with a pink lid that consumers turned in. Yoplait donated 10 cents for each lid.

The American Heart food certification program allowed the use of its “Heart Check” icon and name to dozens of cereals and juices signifying that product met the Associations' standards of low-fat, low-cholesterol.

In 2007, Singapore Airlines launched a cause marketing promotion drawing over 35 million distinctive visitors across 23 countries to alert Doctors without Borders. With the start of the world's first A380, Singapore Airlines—with the help of Vonality Inc—initiated an online auction for all seats on the historic first flight all in support of charity. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cause_marketing

Focus on india

CRM has also flourished significantly in the Indian market. Some notable cause-marketing works by companies operating in India are:

Kellogg's

Kellogg's promotes campaigns that spread awareness about the diseases linked with deficiency of iron.

Johnson & Johnson

J&J supports campaigns to spread awareness about eye-care and sponsors eye-care camps across the country. The company donates a percentage of its sales revenue from the 'Acuvue' and 'Vistavue' brands to institutions providing eye-care services.

MRF Tyres

MRF sponsored a campaign to promote stress-free driving on the roads and roped in eminent people for the same. The half-page paper ads highlighted the importance of a smile on the roads. (IBS Case on cause-related marketing – Maruti Udyog)

In a CRM program, donations to the non-profit entity are based on exchanges that provide revenue to the donor, i.e. sales. Hence a specific objective of all CRM programs is sales and a promotion campaign is undertaken to leverage the right to the association. For example, ITC launched a nationwide campaign for water conservation. Dubbed 'Aashirvad - Boond Se Sagar', this initiative has over the years put into place 31,000 acres of life saving irrigation system benefiting over 40,000 people. (Sundar 2007)

Communication: An inevitable tool in Cause Marketing

Companies engaged in cause-marketing campaigns extensively operate in the public spotlight. Hence, they are compelled to evince more about themselves to the world and to justify their activities. (Riel, Fombrun, 2007) Pressured by investors, consumer activists, journalists, companies reveal more information about their financial, social and environmental activities. This societal call for transparency and openness is best addressed by personifying the company through a corporate brand. Some organizations begin with what is interpreted as ethical action and such initiatives get transformed into a cause that is often campaigned in the form of CRM.

**Cause-Marketing initiatives of the organisations studied
Child Rights and You (CRY) (An NGO)**

Child Rights and You (CRY), founded in 1979, is dedicated to restore to deprived Indian children their basic rights to food, shelter, health and education. For every CRY item that is bought, it donates money for the protection of children's rights.

Campaigns

Launched at various intervals & for specific purposes, CRY campaigns range from influencing child-friendly policies to rehabilitation efforts in disaster and natural calamities to creating awareness on the situation of children.

Direct Mail

CRY introduced direct mail as a method to raise funds all over India. Personal appeals to individuals got encouraging responses in a very short period. The success of this approach is in accessing the mail list to target the appropriate people and regular communications with supporters.

'My School' Campaign - West

The My School Campaign asked 750 children from the poor section of rural India, across Maharashtra and Gujarat to draw or write their thoughts on postcards on what they thought their ideal school would be like since their access to schooling was limited to the public schools. Following the collection of these postcards, CRY held a series of exhibitions. The first exhibit was done on Sep 7, 2010 (at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminal, Mumbai) and 8th (at the Thane station) to mark the occasion of International Literacy Day. Blank postcards were left for visitors to leave their messages.

Sabko Shiksha Samaan Shiksha

The government passed The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, for the Right to Education in 2009. While hailed as an important legal step, there were critical gaps which may affect the lives of more than half of India's children. The campaign took CRY's demands to the people before submitting it to the then President of India, Mrs. Pratibha Patil.

Maharashtra Floods Relief efforts

Rains and floods in Maharashtra on July 26, 2009 and their aftermath left many families homeless. CRY partner NGOs supported individuals who wanted to help in this cause by connecting them.

Aravind Eye Hospitals

Aravind Eye care is a cause driven hospital. Aravind treats 65% of its patients (who do not have access to and money for treatment) free of cost. Only 35% of the people are charged for the services, with the criteria being their ability to pay. (S.P., 2007) Previously this institution undertook several surgeries free of cost. However, when it was found that people had started taking advantage of this free service, it communicated an effective message by segmenting its patients into two categories: One who cannot pay and the other who pay a little more than the cost of their surgery so that they can support the treatment of those who cannot afford it. Aravind hospital is passionately connected with the cause – the cause of serving the poor which is integrated with the marketing strategy of the organization. (S.P., 2007)

The hospital has been able to retain employees and recruit the most dedicated doctors as it is a matter of pride to be associated with Aravind. It has built greater community networks as local volunteers support the activities of the hospital. The government supports the doctors there as each doctor is paid some amount for every surgery conducted. The hospital offers consultancy services to those who wish to understand the Aravind System for application in their hospitals. Its auxiliary units – Aravind Medical Research Foundation and Aurolab – support research programs.

Maruti Udyog Ltd.

Established in the early 1980s, this organisation is one of the earlier participants in Cause-Marketing from Indian companies.

'Maruti-Suzuki Innovative Traffic Beat' was done in Delhi in June 1995 and later at Chennai in July 1999. It was a program aired on 'All India Radio – FM' where information about traffic situations on major routes was collected and compiled by traffic policemen and routed to the Traffic Police Headquarters. The data was relayed to the radio network which aired the information on their channels. By listening to this, travellers could take alternate routes and avoid the rush areas.

36 short films were released by the company in 1996 to provide information on driving habits, safety measures, traffic rules and environment and pollution. These infomercials were aired on 'Doordarshan', and prominent satellite television networks. MUL received the 'London International Advertising Festival Award', the 'Bombay Advertising Club Award', the 'A & M Award' and the 'C & G Award' for these initiatives.

In January 1999, MUL sponsored three traffic interceptor vehicles to assist the Delhi Traffic Police in maintaining a check on traffic violations in the city. These vehicles were equipped with sophisticated surveillance equipment to enable city traffic control authorities to apprehend violators immediately.

In 2000, MUL announced the launch of a specially designed version of its 'Zen' for people with physical handicaps. No promotional campaigns were undertaken for boosting these models since they were being released as a part of the company's social initiatives. MUL launched a professional driving school,

the 'Institute of Driving, Training and Research' in 2000.

The 'Handbook of Safe Driving' in both English and Hindi languages was launched and circulated for free of cost in Delhi and Chandigarh. Posters were circulated in over 300 schools across the cities of Delhi, Chandigarh and Kolkata to spread traffic awareness among children. The company sponsored traffic safety and environmental awareness related quizzes and painting/drawing contests in schools to increase interest in such causes among children. It supported blood donation camps and health camps across the country. The 'DPS Maruti Shiksha Kendra' offered education to underprivileged children and adults in the district of Gurgaon. The firm advocated the use of 'cleaner' fuels and sponsored free pollution control camps.

Comparison of communication strategies in promoting the causes:

Many firms deploy diverse strategies of persuasive communication in order to promote their brand. However, this is not the end objective for all. In order to strike the right balance between endorsement and education, communication strategies should create campaigns to target the main audiences and deliver immediate and effective results. It is not enough to partner your product or brand with a cause. One must genuinely put the cause first, then clearly communicate the impact the efforts will make on the case. Only then will one realize a positive impact on one's brand, reputation and bottom line.

The below table gives details on the Communication Strategies used by the three companies under study:

Forms of external communication	Aravind Eye Hospitals	Child Rights & You	Maruti Udyog
Public Relation Events	external communication through the Community Outreach Division		DPS Maruti Shiksha Kendra' - education to underprivileged children and adults
Broadcast / Online Communications	interactive animated DVD on Vitreo Retinal surgical techniques - 2008 video on Glaucoma to spread awareness		'Maruti-Suzuki Innovative Traffic Beat' 36 short films on safe and socially responsible driving habits
Print	volume in Tamil Kannae Nal-amaa written by Dr.R.Ramakrishnan, Chief Medical Officer at Aravind Eye Hospital – Tirunelveli	Dos and Don'ts Communication Guidelines. newsletters, brochures, envelope backs, posters, print and other mass media	Handbook of Safe Driving' in English and Hindi

Conclusion and recommendation

CRM has often been interpreted as "more a strategy for selling than a strategy for giving". Companies using CRM might find themselves a fine line between increased sales and an improved image, and facing charges of exploitation." (Kotler et al 20010). If the initiative is well organised and properly undertaken, CRM can be advantageous to both the company and the cause. Cause-marketing relationships require consumers to believe the companies they patronize are serious about the cause and that their contribution will be used prudently. (Stuart et al 2007) A charitable organization (like CRY) gains higher visibility and imports new sources of funding and support. Through their diverse methods of external communication like PR, organization of public events and print and electronic publications, Maruti Udyog and Aravind Eye Hospitals have been able to achieve benefits through favourable publicity while CRY receives much needed funds. Cause marketing communication can differentiate one brand from another, increase consumer acceptance of price increases, generate favourable publicity and win over sceptical officials who may have an impact on the company. But, Cause marketing involves much more than just associating with a social issue and it demands time and effort. (Belch et al 2010)

Note: as the primary purpose of any cause marketing initiative is societal benefits, the strategy applied can work across time and therefore, the dates and years when some of these activities were conducted is not taken into consideration, keeping in mind that the society at large would benefit from these at any given point in time.

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