

Branding Unity: Impact of Advertisements on Patriotism, Unity and Communal Harmony

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Patriotism and national unity have become favorite brand positioning propositions for advertisers in India. The paper explores the reasons behind the popularity of these patriotic themes that also embrace notions of nationhood, communal harmony and national unity in commercials and public service advertisements. While these patriotic themes used to be the exclusive domain of the government media in the country, they are being taken up in a big way by private business houses in their public communication endeavors. The research study has examined six frequently telecast advertisements on Indian television networks centered upon the theme of national pride, communal harmony and national unity. While tracing the historical context of these advertisements, the paper also attempts to study their impact upon the public. The primary research for the study comprised interviews with respondents to explore the impact of these advertisements upon the public. The findings of the study show that positioning brands on the themes of national pride, unity and patriotism succeed in establishing a strong emotional connect in public minds leading to brand recall.

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Advertising and marketing managers of the 21st century have to contend with multiple markets, multiple customers, multiple channels, multiple media, advertising clutter, advances in information technology and audience fragmentation among several factors (Schlutz and Kitchen, 2000). This has resulted in the development of the Integrated Marketing Communication approach described as a persuasive communication strategy to strengthen the strategic and tactical power of branding (Clow & Baack, 2004). Integrated Marketing Communication aims at executing persuasive brand communication programmes for long-term relationships with customers. Integrated Brand Promotion (IBP) is a term used interchangeably with IMC since innovation in marketing communication is the reason behind the conception of IBP. Brand image grows out of brand positioning and adds a multi-dimensional character to the brand (Jethwaney & Jain, 2012). A brand is usually a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify and distinguish the goods and services of one seller from those of rival brands. The whole idea behind brand positioning is to imbue the brand with a well-defined identity so that it can carve a distinctive place in the minds of the target group. The aim is to occupy a prime position in the minds of consumers to maximize the potential benefit to the company.

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The branding strategy under study here pertains to patriotism and unity and is akin to that of a 'nation brand'. According to Fan (2006)¹, while a nation brand does not offer any tangible product or service, it denotes and includes a wide range of factors and associations. These associations could pertain to place-geography, natural resources, tourist attractions, people, race, ethnic groups, history, culture, language, political and economic systems, social institutions, infrastructure, famous people, picture or image. Rose (2003) explains that the state plays a vital role in cultivating certain attributes of a democratic citizen. The state plays this role either openly or subtly through the propagation of certain symbols and advertisements that symbolize the nation brand.

Previous studies akin to this topic pertain to Nation branding by Fan (2006), wherein the author explains that in theory, nation branding could help a nation to improve its image. However, Fan (*ibid*) accords only a partial role to nation branding as there are several other factors that impact the image and perception of the country and for branding to yield results the product has to possess good attributes. A similar study by Rose (2003) pertains to government advertising in Canada and the creation of national myths. Rose (*ibid*) has tried to explain that advertising has played a major part in constructing national myths to quell the nation's fragile sense of identity, exacerbated by a vocal minority population. However, in the Canadian case, the study indicates that the government advertisements are speaking at the Canadians rather than involving them in genuine conversation, resulting in further marginalization. Gilmore (2002) discusses the brand positioning of a country and presents a case study of Spain. Gilmore (*ibid*) explains how the core of a country's brand must capture the spirit of its people and how it can be developed into brand positioning.

The present study discusses the branding of national unity, patriotism and communal harmony in commercials on Indian television channels. This kind of positioning which figures prominently as branding strategies in Indian advertisements can be termed as positioning by cultural symbols. Chopra (2010) notes that several marketers make use of deeply ingrained cultural symbols as a brand positioning strategy to identify something very meaningful for the people and to gain an edge over competing brands. Another way to look at such advertising is to link it to creative appeals. It is the way in which an advertising message is formulated in order to provoke the desired response from the target audience. Types of appeal include rational, emotional, product-orientated or consumer-orientated appeals. A creative appeal refers to the approach used to attract the attention of the target group or to exert a positive influence in their minds towards the product, service, or idea. It is something that moves people, speaks to their wants or need, and excites their interest. Advertising communication is often regarded as persuasive communication, based on information or emotional appeals about product benefits, designed to create favorable mental impressions that turn the mind towards purchase. Advertisers attempt to create a unique selling point (USP) to highlight the superiority and unique characteristic of their brand in comparison to rival brands.

In this research study, the genres of advertisements have cashed in on the emotional appeal of patriotic themes which have been classified into three broad categories:

- (i) Public service advertisements (PSAs) telecast by the government media;
- (ii) Corporate social responsibility advertisements (CSRs) issued by renowned business houses; and
- (iii) Advertising commercials for products.

An analysis of each of the above genres of advertisements reveals how they have positioned their brands around the theme of patriotism and national unity. This kind of nation branding approach is a marketing and communications technique used to promote a nation's image. Such an approach, according to Fan (2006) focuses upon a clear, simple, differentiating idea with an emotional message which can be comprehended by diverse audiences.

Methodology

The methodology used for this study involved a qualitative analysis of six advertisements centered on the theme of patriotism and national unity. Interviews were also conducted with 40 respondents to find out the impact that the symbols of nationalism which these commercials projected made upon them. The respondents, numbering 40 were young, college-going students belonging to the age-group of 18 to 20 years. The rationale behind the selection of the youngsters was to ascertain whether branding patriotic appeals created any impression upon their minds and to assess the advertising impact upon their perceptions. India today has a rapidly growing youth population (13-35 years), which constitutes 40 per cent of the total population. The youth population in the age group is projected to increase to nearly 64 percent by 2016. The youth have become a lucrative consumer target group for all brands today as they seek to lure and tap this group of buyers.

The brand recall test approach was applied to ascertain from the respondents if they could recall a set of advertisements that they viewed on television during the period 2010- 2014. The advertisements that were listed for recall belonged to the three categories mentioned above, namely: public service advertisements, corporate social responsibility advertisements and advertising commercials for products. The respondents were asked which aspects of the ads they could recall such as the selling point of the communication, music, brand attributes, tag lines, narratives, images and choreography. Secondary data sources that comprised gleaning into articles on advertising helped to generate views of advertising experts for insights into the rationale behind the use of patriotic appeals in advertisements.

Qualitative Analysis of Advertisements on Patriotism

Public Service Advertisements by Government Media

The Social Responsibility Theory arose at the end of the Second World War after it was realized that the Press ought to fulfill the informational, social and moral needs of society (McQuail, 1987). The Social Responsibility Theory of the Press sets the normative guidelines for the media requiring that the media should not only be socially responsible but should also set the agenda for the society's good. The Indian media set out to operate on the normative model of the development media theory which advocates that in the interests of national development, the freedom of the media needs to be curbed to an extent. According to Mcquail (2010), the mass media in developing societies have to be garnered towards

nation-building efforts with the commitment of these societies to economic, political and social development as a primary national task.

In India, while there are no curbs on Press freedom, there are government controls on the state-owned broadcast media: Doordarshan (Indian Television) and All India Radio where information flow is regulated despite the creation of the Prasar Bharati Corporation in the nineties that had mandated to give more autonomy to the government-run media. The Directorate of Audio-Visual Publicity (DAVP)² functions as a nodal agency for the various Ministries and Departments of the Government of India and has been working as a catalyst of social change and economic growth over the years. The government agency has been working towards creating awareness amongst the masses on socio-economic themes, seeking their participation in developmental activities and for eradication of poverty and social evils. National integration and communal harmony, commemoration of 50 years of India's Independence, figure amongst the several community welfare subjects publicized by DAVP. Social marketing is done by the government to directly address a social problem or cause to change people's behaviour, cognition, values, actions (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Two of the famous social marketing campaigns on national unity that have been regularly appearing on the state-run Indian television network, Doordarshan for over two decades pertain to (i) Spread the light of freedom; and (ii) *Mile Sur Mera Tumhara*.

- (i) 'Spread the light of freedom' is a musical video. The music for this video was composed by Indian music director, instrumentalist and composer, Louis Banks and is based on the soundtrack of the film 'Chariots of fire'. The video became immensely popular in the 1990s and the tune became symbolic of Indian patriotism and unity. The video set to lilting instrumental music showcases Indian sportspersons carrying the torch of freedom to instill a sense of national pride. It is also a tribute to the excellence in sports that these men and women have attained by giving their best performance for the nation.
- (ii) In a similar effort at promoting the message of patriotism, Doordarshan promoted the musical video '*Mile Sur Mera Tumhara*', which brought together Indian achievers from various fields like cinema, music, sports and the arts to instill a spirit of patriotism, national pride and unity. The advertisement aimed at spreading the message of unity in diversity amongst India's different linguistic communities and societies. The lilting vocal rendition of this track, '*Mile Sur Mera Tumhara*', has won nation-wide appreciation, gaining and maintaining almost a national anthem status ever since it was telecast in the late 1980s.

Both the above social marketing campaigns initiated by the government broadcaster, Doordarshan were value campaigns intended to instill a sense of national pride and unity in diversity among the viewers. In keeping with the tenets of the Indian constitution, themes pertaining to communal harmony and unity in plurality are played up regularly by the government media in their patriotic messages to present the secular fabric of the country.

A recognition and recall test of both these advertisements carried out on a group of 40 college-going students revealed that the majority (70 per cent) of the youngsters

remembered the Doordarshan advertisement, *Mile Sur Mera Tumhara*, while 20 per cent could recall the musical video 'spread the light of freedom'.

Social responsibility advertisements use a proactive approach to social problems (Clow & Baack, 2004). Rather than focusing on damage control or giving publicity to the dangers of disunity or disharmony, both the aforementioned government advertisements tried to convince viewers about the positive outcome of unity in diversity and cultivation of a sense of national pride.

Corporate Social Responsibility Advertisements by Business Houses

Many companies engage in corporate social responsibility initiatives so that the public does not perceive them merely as profit-making bodies but as companies that have a concern for community welfare. Social responsibility is the obligation of an organization to be ethical, accountable and reactive to the needs of society and for this purpose socially responsible firms undertake two tasks: eliminating negatives and doing positives (Clow & Baack, 2004). Such cause-related activities make organizations appear as socially responsible and help to create strong bonds with consumers. Keller (2012) points out that CSR can enhance the brand image for a company and transcend normal marketplace transactions with customers.

Sony Television in India took up the social causes of religious unity, patriotism and unity in diversity through CSR advertisements on these themes. This is in keeping with socially responsible and altruistic marketing activities that companies engage in to build a strong company image and for generating brand loyalty. Sony TV has engaged with cause-related marketing by promoting advertisements on the theme of unity. These commercials have worked well for the Sony television channel that has captured the entertainment segment in the country with strong TRP ratings. These advertisements positioned themselves with the most popular Sony TV show, 'Kaun Banega Corepati' based on the famous American show - Who wants to be millionaire? The advertisement used the KBC show format and presented the anchor of the show, Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan as the brand ambassador for propagating the message of national integration. The most popular of these commercials was presented through an emotional drama format that brought out Hindu-Muslim unity wherein a Hindu contestant on the KBC show is helped by a Muslim neighbour via telephone to clinch the answer to a question. The contestant wins the show and the message of brotherhood between two diverse communities is established in the commercial. The emotional poignancy that is brought forth in this commercial has won a lot of appreciation from viewers.

The second advertisement in the same series on Sony TV has brought out the message that the North East state of Arunachal Pradesh is an integral part of India. The context of this ad can be traced to the recent spate of attacks on North East students in some parts of the country. The other context for this advertisement is to reaffirm that Arunachal Pradesh is an integral part of India and can never be a disputed territory that China seeks to capture. Both these messages have again been brought out through a KBC contest format with Amitabh quizzing a North East contestant. This commercial has been popular with a large section of viewers.

'*Vande Mataram*' is yet another television commercial in the series of CSR advertisements. '*Vande Mataram*' is a musical album composed by Indian music composer, producer and singer-songwriter, A.R Rahman commemorating 50 years of India's Independence. Thirty-nine of India's top musicians—from Hindustani musicians that include Girija Devi and Shiv Kumar Sharma to Carnatic maestros like Nithyashree Mahadevan and M Balamuralikrishna, from playback singers like Sonu Nigam and Alka Yagnik to folk singers like Lopamudra Mitra and Lakhkhandas Paul — have sung verses in this album³. '*Jaya He!*'⁴, a limited version of the *Vande Mataram* album, comprising four verses, set to music and produced by *Saregama*, was presented to the nation by The Times of India and unveiled at the 9 pm News Hour on the television channel, Times Now. '*Jaya Hey*' which is based on the Indian National anthem *Jana Gana Mana* has been sung in 39 Voices by top musicians of India. *Saregama*, in association with the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, launched the album *Jaya Hey* to commemorate Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's 150th birth anniversary. India with its rich culture and heritage displays immense diversity; and its national anthem *Jana Gana Mana* written by the Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore articulated his philosophy of universal brotherhood and harmony in five verses written in praise of the nation. The National Anthem is just the first verse out of these. In this album, for the first time, all five original verses have been included.

The maximum recall from the audience in this category of CSR advertisements was recorded for the KBC commercial on Hindu Muslim Unity (61 per cent), followed by 39 per cent for the KBC ad on North East Unity and 25 per cent for *Jaya He*. The results show that Sony TV's CSR ads have worked well in spreading the message of unity since the audience remembered and also appreciated the commercials for the emotional appeal.

Advertising Commercials on Unity and Patriotism

Corporate houses in India are cashing in on the theme of national unity to market their brands. In this category, four advertisements were selected pertaining to four product brands, namely, Bajaj Scooters, Pepsi, Coke and Dalmia Sugar. These four brands have played up the theme of national pride and patriotism in their advertisements.

Bajaj scooters advertised itself as the scooter for modern India with its jingle '*Bulund Bharat ki Bulund Tasveer, Humara Bajaj*'. The Bajaj advertisement presented the brand as a trustworthy and credible brand that has had an unshakeable track record of excellence which is the hallmark of a modern and towering nation. The word '*bulund*', implies, 'towering' and is emphasized for the brand and for the nation in the jingle.

The Pepsi ads drove home the point that they were the Official Sponsor of the Indian cricket team and cashed in on the patriotic sporting spirit with their slogan "Go India go". Pepsi used an authoritative executional framework in the commercial to convince viewers that it is the official sponsor of the Indian cricket team implicitly stating that Pepsi has the superior edge over other brands.

The rival brand Coke capitalized on the happiness quotient that the soft drink provides with the slogan '*Cricket Ki Khushi*' and the Coca Cola advertisement featured the company's 'Happiness Ambassador'⁵, and cricketing legend, Sachin Tendulkar. Coke used Sachin Tendulkar as a celebrity endorsement strategy since the cricketer scores in terms of trustworthiness, likeability, credibility, believability and persuasiveness.

The Dalmia Sugar group cashed in on the strides made by the Indian economy and used the slogan *Mera Bharat Bada Ho Raha Hai* (My India is growing Big). Dalmia Bharat Group is an Indian conglomerate with a legacy and expertise of 75 years in the field of cement, sugar, and power. The advertisement used the informative format to showcase the performance of Dalmia Sugar.

All the above-mentioned brands have positioned themselves as nation brands imbued with patriotism. All the above brands brought in creative copy, ingredients of music, colour and motion to grab the attention of viewers. The audience recall test brought out that the Pepsi ad scored amongst the audience and was most recognized with 67 per cent audience recall, while Coke notched 31 per cent recall. Bajaj scooters with their catchy jingle notched up 33 per cent, while Dalmia Sugar got an 8 per cent audience recall.

The results show that Pepsi captured the zest and enthusiasm of a cricket hungry nation and received the largest share of recall.

Public Perceptions

The AIDA principle in advertising tests the Awareness, Interest, Desire and Action on the part of the consumer after he sees the advertisement. When exposed to advertising stimuli, consumers tend to respond favorably or unfavorably during a particular exposure occasion. These attitudes can be either cognitive wherein the consumer may form attitudes towards the advertisement based on execution criteria like copy and layout. The other dimension is the affective dimension in which consumer forms attitudes based on emotions evoked by the advertisement. It has also been suggested that a consumer's pleasant feelings regarding ads for a new product may provide a key input into her or his over-all global attitude towards the product, and therefore, the probability of choosing the new brand (Shimp, 2000).

The results of the audience survey have shown that noticeability and awareness levels rose in the way brands positioned national pride, patriotism and unity. The responses show that in Category 1 of public service advertisements, the highest recall went to the government-sponsored advertisement, '*Mile Sur Mera Tumhara*'. The respondents said that the advertisement commercial evoked the positive emotions of unity that it aimed to induce. They remember the advertisement for the music which they found melodious and most respondents said that it painted the rich and diverse culture of India.

In the second category of CSR ads, the KBC ad featuring Amitabh Bachchan with the message on Hindu-Muslim unity was most recalled. The audience said they were emotionally moved by the portrayal of inter-religious harmony and brotherhood of humanity.

In the third category of commercial products using the theme of Indianness and unity, the maximum recollection on the part of the audience was for the Pepsi advertisement - Official Sponsor of the Indian cricket team with the catchphrase, 'Go India go'. This was followed by the advertisement for Bajaj Scooters. When asked for the reasons for their recollection, the Pepsi ad stood out for its creativity in projecting the theme of patriotism, while Bajaj won hearts for its jingle that touched an emotional chord with its message of pride in Indian goods.

The results of the study also establish the psychographics of today's youth who were the target group for this study. The respondents who were interviewed came across

as young, enthusiastic impulsive buyers who sought excitement and variety in brands. They stated that they were highly fond of cricket and took tremendous pride in the Pepsi slogan, Go India Go, which emphasized for them India's winning position in the game. The youth were equally buoyed up by the lyrics of *Mile Sur Mera Tumhara*, which actually had its genesis in the 1980s, the eras that belonged to the older generations of their parents and grandparents. Majority of the youth who were interviewed stated that the PSA, *Mile Sur Mera Tumhara* showcased the rich diversity of their country and imbued a sense of national pride in them. Added to this, was the lilting and melodious Indian classical music of the advertisement which they all stated was enjoyable. Majority of the respondents could identify patriotism and unity as the unique selling points of the ads. They commonly discussed these commercials in terms of the following attributes: brand name, music, tagline, celebrities (wherever used) and choreography.

Advertisers are of the opinion that positioning brands around the theme of patriotism work well for brands since they present amazing opportunities to showcase the nation's pride and confidence as being on the top and amongst the best. According to advertising analyst, Esha Guha, 'Connecting the core values of a product/service with the nation's vision and values can be a fascinating and exciting challenge, if leveraged intelligently. However there should be a brand-fit like the patriotic *Hamara Bajaj, Mile Sur Mera Tumhara*' (ibnlive.com).

According to political commentator, Paranjoy Guha Thakurta 'these ads' that project patriotism and national pride 'are doing their job for whatever they are worth. They may not be the most creative, imaginative and professional examples of advertising excellence, but the intent is honourable and well-meaning.' Mathias, an independent marketing professional, believes, 'Should a brand anchor it and establish a relevant and powerful connect with patriotism – like the fabulous Pepsi Freedom ads in 1997 commemorating India's 50th year of independence – then it could result in powerful and memorable communication'⁶. 'Veteran advertising expert, Nargis Wadia also believes that "context is the key" (ibnlive.com).

Discussion

In today's age of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), the emphasis has shifted from the marketer to the consumer and the emphasis is upon creating a continuous dialogue with the consumer, developing strong brand identity and harnessing media effectively for the promotion of products and services (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000). Branding here entails elevating the intangible attributes in the brand. While initially a brand may be synonymous with the product it makes, over time through advertising and influences it can develop a series of attachments and associations that exist over and beyond the objective product. The research study focused on Branding patriotism and unity in advertisements.

The findings of the study point out that positioning the brand on these themes of national pride, unity and patriotism succeeds in establishing a strong emotional connect in public minds. The results of the audience survey establish that the positioning of unity succeeds best in public service advertisements (PSAs) as well as CSR ads. The prime time telecast and repetition of these patriotic on all major national occasions has given these brands a favourable disposition in the minds of the public. As for commercial products, the amplification factor raises chances for brand noticeability. Pepsi, as the official sponsor of cricket is

undoubtedly well positioned in sending across the message of national pride and patriotism for a cricket crazy nation.

Musical jingles succeed in establishing the emotional bonding with the public as was seen in the largest recall for the government PSA *Mile Sur Mera Tumhara*. In an age of advertising wars, patriotism is a theme that advertisers are increasingly turning to for marketing their brands. Such brands are regarded as credible by the public. The bigger the ad blitz the better the chance of success in branding unity. This reaffirms that one single idea-especially if it involves a great brand concept-can change a company's entire future' (Gobe 2009).

The results of the audience recognition test have shown that brand patriotism works best when the advertisement is run during a national event or occasion. The highest audience recall was for *Mile Sur Mera Tumhara*, which is broadcast regularly during national occasions such as Independence Day and Republic Day. Similarly Pepsi as Team India's official Sponsor was timed to coincide with the World Cup Cricket tournament. This naturally gave the brand an added edge since it establishes a strong patriotic connect with the public. This is in line with the view that brand positioning involves establishing key brand associations in the minds of customers and other important constituents to differentiate the brand and establish (to the extent possible) competitive superiority (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

In all these brands, patriotism and unity have been used as the USP, directed towards the excitable state of mind of the target audience. The positive emotional appeals of unity and patriotism have succeeded in establishing the emotional connect with the audience. Branding patriotism is a powerful proposition to attract viewers since the benefit appears credible and distinct. According to Frank (1985), emotion-based appeals and positively framed messages are more effective in older markets. This has been proved in the Pepsi and Bajaj brands since the public recalled them as they were old, strong, established brands. The use of patriotic appeals has invested these known brands further with a set of positive connotations and associations in the minds of the audience. This is in consonance with the branding principles in the 21st century (Bedbury, 2002) which state that great brands establish enduring customer relationships through emotion and trust. Rather than technology or product attributes, branding principles today stress upon relevance, simplicity and humanity (Bedbury, 2002 cited in Kotler & Keller, 2012).

The study has shown that emotional advertising through the use of national pride, unity and patriotism serves to evoke powerful emotions among viewers eventually leading to brand recall. Such a cultural branding strategy helps to build iconic, leadership brands. The emotional connect with the consumer works well when brands tap into inter-religious communion or emotions of patriotism and national pride. This kind of cultural branding makes consumers a part of the 'brand journey, wherein they are beginning to own brands and participate in their creation' (Lafley cited in Kotler & Keeler, 2012). In all these ads a common factor has been the way in which the narrative logic unfolds to include actions, desired experiences, defining events and the celebration of success – all of which contributing to national pride upon which these brands are positioned.

The study reaffirms the perspective that there is a similarity between corporate brands and country brands since both seek stability and prosperity, and the interests of the two are in some respects similar and they increasingly overlap, work in tandem and derive

strength from each other (Gilmore, 2002). All the categories of advertisements discussed in this study showed that patriotism portrayed by commercial brands complement the government disseminated ads and ultimately serve the cause of nation branding.

The study further shows that active positioning of nationhood and unity through branding holds great potential and gives a brand a competitive edge over rival brands if timed well to fit in with historical occasions and mega events.

Notes

- ¹ Fan, Y. (2006). Branding the nation: What is being branded? *Journal of vacation marketing*, 12(1), 5-14, URL bura.brunel.ac.uk/handle/2438/1286, accessed on Oct.18, 2014.
- ² Information on DAVP sourced from the DAVP website www.davp.nic.in accessed on October 2, 2014
- ³ Vande Mataram album cited in www.hindustantimes.com accessed on October 3, 2014.
- ⁴ 'Jaya He' cited in Economic Times issue, August 21, 2011, accessed on October 3, 2014.
- ⁵ "Coca-Cola and Sachin Tendulkar cited from "Open Happiness through cricket!", Adgully, May 29, 2012, accessed on October 3, 2014.
- ⁶ 'Is patriotism just another prop for advertisement makers?' cited from <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/is-patriotism-just-another-prop-for-advertisement-makers/278105-44.html>, accessed on Oct.03, 2014.

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