Image Advertising: The Advertising Strategies of Pepsi and Coca Cola in India

In a crowded product market, as companies are increasingly falling short of ways to differentiate their products from those of the competitors, Image Advertising seems to be a way out. This article highlights the major tenets of Image Advertising, by looking at the advertising strategies adopted by PepsiCo and Coca Cola in India. The model developed herein seeks to understand, among many other things, the evolution of a brand, and its role as an integral part of a company’s brand portfolio.

Contrary to popular belief, advertising is as much a science as it is an art. As the primary mode of communication between a company and its prospective customer, an advertisement must connect to the consumer, and create in his mind an attractive image of the brand. The average consumer gets lost in the vast sea of information, and is unable to differentiate one product from another. Notwithstanding the scientific inputs that go into designing an advertising campaign, some campaigns make history while others fail miserably. Why?

Ads are no longer informative tools, but, as Poisez aptly points out, there has been a “shift in attention away from the physical aspects and functional benefits of products to their symbolic associations, expressiveness”. Marketing has ventured into the emotional, the behavioural, and the cognitive. Today, the primary objective of the ad is to create an image. The fierce competition between cola giants PepsiCo and The Coca Cola Company (henceforth, Coca Cola) – and the advertisement strategies adopted by them in India to establish their respective brand images – offers an interesting insight into Image Advertising.

Brand Identity

The first step in understanding Image Advertising is to understand the image being created, i.e. Brand Image. Brand Image is consumers’ perception of the brand in question. This perception might actually be different from what the brand actually embodies – the Brand Identity. Advertising bridges the gap between Brand Image and Brand Image.
Exhibit 1: Kapferer’s Prism

There are a number of tools available to explore the identity of a brand. One such tool is Kapferer’s Prism (Exhibit 1). As shown in the exhibit above, there are many facets to a brand. Kapferer identifies six key characteristics that together define the brand:

- **Physique** – the physical attributes of the brand
- **Personality** – the personification of the brand
- **Relationship** – the relationship between the consumer and the brand
- **Culture** – the core values of the brand
- **Reflection** – the way consumers want to be perceived when using the brand
- **Self-Image** – the image that consumers have of themselves when associated with the brand

A combination of these characteristics can be used to identify what the brand ultimately stands for. These exercises were performed on a few brands each from the stables of both PepsiCo and Coca Cola; Exhibit 2 depicts the results of these exercises.
Identity to Image – Evolution of Strategies

A closer look at the brand identities of each of the brands helps assess how successful their advertising campaigns have been in creating a brand image in tune with it, while being sensitive to the value system of the target audience.

PepsiCo’s Campaign

The analysis of Pepsi, 7 UP and Mountain Dew from the portfolio of PepsiCo puts forth some interesting aspects about the evolution of these brands. Pepsi was one of the first products to Indian markets after the economic reforms of 1991.

Pepsi

Pepsi began with the Yehi hai Right Choice Baby campaign, which has been one of the most memorable campaigns of the brand, featuring celebrity endorsers such as Shah Rukh Khan among others. The focus, as is clearly evident, is on the product with the youth as its target segment. Yeh Dil Mange More and Yeh Pyaas Hai Badi were some of the later campaigns.

Yeh Dil Mange More campaign was again a great success, having balanced the emotional as well as the functional appeal of the product. Featuring Sachin Tendulkar and many other leading stars at that point of time, this was also one of the longest campaigns carried out by Pepsi. The company however failed to maintain the trend and leverage it. Instead of moving on to a complete emotional appeal platform, the company decided on a product based promotion campaign. Though there is still some amount of emotional appeal to its campaigns, the principal focus is on the product - it being a preferred thirst quencher.

7 UP

In its early days, 7 UP inherited the global Fido-Dido campaign for promotion in India as well. However, with changing times and a contextual difference in India, a much more focused campaign was required. This led to the Keep It Cool campaign, which was targeted primarily at the youth and the teenager segment. Hence the appeal was at a more subtle, emotional level,
which was meant to convey a potential lifestyle statement. The recent campaign of Bheja Fry essentially leverages on the same emotional appeal where the Keep It Cool campaign has been somewhat tweaked to have a local appeal.

**Mountain Dew**

Mountain Dew is the latest entrant in the product portfolio. This product too has the appeal of being the drink of a daredevil or the No Fear personality. The campaigns launched include Do the Dew and Dar Ke Aagey Jeet Hai. The initial campaign was unclear in terms of its appeal and the target segment, as a result of which the brand suffered some jolts in the beginning. However, the latest campaign captures the No Fear or the Macho Man image. In this sense, the brand directly competes with Thums Up from the Coca Cola Stable

**Coca Cola’s Campaign**

The Coca Cola campaign in India, however, has been different from that of Pepsi, even though they both share similar product traits. Coca Cola had a presence in India before 1977, but was subsequently forced to exit the Indian market. When the company returned to India post liberalization, it came up with an innovative communication and advertising strategy. Coca Cola has essentially been following the principle of differentiation.

**Coca Cola**

*Jo Chaaho Ho Jaaye*, Coca Cola Enjoy was one of the company’s first campaigns in India. It was remarkably well executed, and appealed both at a product level as well as at an emotional level. These ads featured celebrities such as Hrithik Roshan and Aishwarya Rai. The target segment for Coca Cola in its initial days was the youth segment and this campaign clearly connected well with the segment. However, the next advertising campaign of Thanda Matlab Coca Cola was launched with an objective to have a mass appeal. The campaign leveraged the product platform rather than the emotional platform that it had established earlier.

It is however, important to note here that Coca Cola made some exceptions for India. The company has similar marketing strategies across geographies and usually doesn’t depend on celebrity endorsements. But given the great fan-following, and in adapting to the Indian context, the company had to initially deviate from its set charter. However with the current campaign of Open Happiness, Coca Cola seems to have achieved both an emotional as well as a mass appeal. There is a very natural connect with the target segment, that of celebrating every day, and sharing small moments of joy with our loved ones, irrespective of any barriers.

**Sprite**

Sprite - the other brand from the Coca Cola stable – began its journey with the campaign titled All Taste No Gyaan. This appealed greatly to the youth who don’t like to be preached and relish their sense of ownership and decision making. Sprite has never depended on celebrity endorsements as a way to gain brand recognition or consumer recall. The ads are designed to be very witty, and generally connect very well with the target audience by capturing every day
moments. *Seedhi Baat No Bakwaas* - its next campaign – instantly connected with the target audience by coming across as a brand that was different from the other, one that focused on the individuality of the consumer. The emotional appeal is much stronger and shows a clear sign of maturity of the campaign.

**Proposed Framework**

This analysis brought to light the roles played by each brand in the company’s overall advertising strategy. Not every brand took the centre-stage: some were the core brands, while others were used as defensive shields and offensive attackers to fight off competition. The following framework helps classify different brands based on the roles each of them plays:

- **The Core Brand** – the flagship brand of the company
- **The Cover Brand** – acts as a cushion to the core brand; soaks up competition
- **The Stand-Alone Brand** – neither core nor cover; independent

**Brand Portfolio Analysis**

The brands in the portfolio of Pepsi and Coca Cola play an important role in terms of the overall impact they have on brand recall and consumer loyalty. The framework developed herein attempts to identify the importance of each brand in the portfolio and the role it plays.

In the case of The Coca Cola Company, Coca Cola is the core brand or the flagship brand. The focus, therefore, is on capturing the maximum value that the brand can generate. In this case, Sprite plays the role of a cover brand (Exhibit 3). Any spoof or threat on Coca Cola is countered by Sprite. However, off late, Sprite is moving up the ladder to become a core brand in the portfolio. The importance of a cover brand is that it allows for maintaining a planned advertising strategy. This builds brand value and creates no confusion about brand proposition.

![Exhibit 3: Brand Roles](image)
In case of PepsiCo, Pepsi is the core brand or the flagship brand. However, Mountain Dew and 7 UP have played the role of standalone brands. Therefore, Pepsi has to constantly respond to spoofs and threats from other brands by tweaking or changing its planned advertising strategy. This strategy may lead to confusion in minds of the consumer about the brand proposition. Such a situation can be critical with regard to the connection a brand establishes with its target consumer segment. Recent trend suggests at Mountain Dew taking up the role of a cover brand in the PepsiCo brand portfolio.

Questions

1. Is it necessary that image of the brand must be consistent, why?

2. What is the impact of shift of advertisement from information to image displays?