

Cultural norms, fair and lovely, and advertising assignment

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(1) Generally speaking, selling a product that is not or only slightly effective, while pretending that it is efficient, is unethical. Particularly, in case a vendor is cheating on the customer and capitalizes on people's misery. However, the question of good or bad ethics in this context depends very much on the setting and the cultural circumstances of producer and consumer as well as on the product itself. The present case dealing with HLL as well as CKL, the established vendors of skin lighting cream on the Indian market for many years, illustrates a situation in which the producer encounters the consumers' strongly culturally positioned desire of fair skin, by offering a skin lighting product, which is from a dermatologist's point of view considered to be ineffective ("reaches only the upper layer of the skin", "does not affect melanin production") or at least short-lived ("whitens facial hair and not the skin"). Nevertheless, Indian women keep on using these products for years, but will never notice lasting effects. So, while considering the consumers' point of view we need to understand that they use the product to fulfil their desire for societal recognition, particularly by their peers.

Therefore, it is less the use of the product but more the psychological effect that the product provides to the consumer. As a matter of fact, several sell levers cannot be considered as unethical. From a managing point of view the advertisement's aim is to present the product at its best aspect, i. e. it is the marketer's objective to stress the strengths of the product and gloss its weaknesses. (2) From a marketing point of view, there are three main strategies to market a product: demographically, geographically and psychographically.

The psychographical aspect is based on the cultural norms and values of the target. From a marketing point of view it is basically not unethical to promote a product by using the cultural norms to satisfy the needs and desires of a target group. On the contrary, from a managerial approach, social responsibility and political correctness have to be taken in account. The modern society is highlighting the ethical aspect of companies, in the majority due to the internet and telecommunication progress, everything is transparent because of easy access to information.

In the present case, the promotion based on cultural norms and values can be criticized because of the discriminative aspects towards the women's role in the Indian society and the racist aspects illustrated in the advertisements. It cannot be appropriate to enhance the cultural norm in a discriminative way. Thus, exploiting the cultural norms and values by being discriminative is absolutely unethical. Additionally, this kind of promotion shades a negative light on the brand's reputation. (3) The advertising of Fair & Lovely is definitely demeaning to women.

It illustrates a sheer son preference and suggests that women can only be successful by conforming to the Indian ideal of beauty in having fair skin. With this advertisement, HLL presents an image of women which detracts from equal opportunity, undermines the role of women in the economy, and thus is completely inappropriate for a developing democratic country like India. It exploits common Indian perspectives towards women being in a subordinate role, thereby even enforcing it. In addition, HLL contributes to a

trend of Indian women pursuing a (westernized) image, they can hardly achieve.

At the same time, these women encounter the risk of giving up their own cultural values, which is a pity for society as a whole, since the skin color is closely related to a person's race and culture. To sum it up, HLL, obviously only interested in financial success, shows a lack of social responsibility. These forms of racially unethical advertisements are not common in the cosmetic industry, at least in Western countries, where companies focus on the beauty and health aspect itself without exploiting cultural values in a discriminative way in terms of their marketing activities.

It is furthermore important, that the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, as an official Indian institution, agrees that the charges are demeaning and intervenes, since India is one of the fastest growing countries in the world and is getting more and more significant. That is why the country has to be not only aware of the picture it presents in the world, but also able to ensure its economic success. (4) Regarding AIDWA's charges, the response of HLL by launching the Fair & Lovely Foundation can be considered as a perfect strategy.

The foundation plays a social role, and thus, is able to generate loyalty from their young female customers who aspire to get a chance on education and a better life standard. In other words, this social role is clearly a form of institutional marketing that intends the improvement of the brand image. Moreover, the launch of the foundation attracts both media and public attention, what will, in the long run, consequently have a positive impact on

the brand's image. So, on the one hand the launch of the foundation is really profitable for the image of the company, on the other hand it will help to diminish the social troubles generated by the past advertisements. (5) HLL was harshly and officially criticized by AIDWA for their racist and misogynic advertisements. Since the company has to struggle with such sensitive themes in public a damage of the company's image will be very likely and almost unavoidable. Therefore, urgent actions are to be set in motion to limit the damage of the product and brand image.

In the present case an immediate relaunch of the product would be appropriate to ensure long term credibility throughout the consumers. (Here, they relaunched a year after the forced withdrawal of the advertisements.) By slightly modifying the product and its packaging a new promotion campaign should give up the " fairness-theme" as the central advantage of the product. Instead of this the promotion should focus on the innovative and natural technologies linked to the product.

The promotion should furthermore concentrate on a " healthy" benefit and point out the multivitamin and sun protection effects to furthermore generate an image of a natural, high-technological product at a reasonable price. Even though the strongest competitor in the market CKL with its " Fairever" will continue to stick to the " old-fashioned" way of promotion, HLL should reinforce their new promotion strategy to create a new, modern and cosmopolitan image in order to gain competitive advantages.

In doing so they should also emphasize the activities of the company's foundation and their contribution to female society and education. (6) More

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over, the company should create a marketing program that contributes positive effects to build up a new product and brand image. In doing so the company has to make sure that they will not return to old traditions by promoting their product in terms of the “ fairness-theme”. First of all new advertisements have to be created that promote a modern and cosmopolitan image and draw a picture of a self-conscious and promising women’s role in society without the issue of skin color.

The media campaign should be more over flanked by promotion activities that take place at different public places as well as at the points of sale. These activities should be unique and creative, attending dark and white skinned hostesses who distribute free samples in the cities and at drugstores for example. HLL? s foundation could also take over a leading position as a communication platform in public, particularly to attract the young generation to transfer the new message quickly to one of the most important target groups.