

Brand Cultism, Is It Possible?

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Abstract

Customer mind is flooded with the brands. When the brands delight the customers, they build the brands. In case of dissatisfaction, the customers tear the brands down. So marketers should make the customers to be passionate about their brands. This article study how a brand can be made as cult brand in the market. This study has chosen "The Hindu" English newspaper as an example to study the concept of brand cultism in south India.

Keywords: *Cult, Brand Cult, Cult Branding, Brand Loyalty*

1. Introduction

Building cult Brands is a widespread strategy now across global. This concept is relatively new and its gaining importance in the Indian market. Indian brands are now concentrating to attain cult status. The Hindu^[1] has started in 1878 as a weekly, became a daily in 1889 and from then on has been steadily growing to the current circulation of over 900,000 copies and a readership of over 3 million. It has achieved third largest English Newspaper in the Readership. This study analyses how much and to what extent, The Hindu fit the frame work for cultism based on the seven rules as mentioned by Mathew Raga.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cult

A cult in general notion is a sect or group or a faction. Like religious cult that attracts thousands of devoted disciples, certain brands have magnetic characteristics. They attract die-hard customers who will be devoted to the brand.

2.2 Brand cult

Brand cult is defined as a phenomenon where customers display an unusually strong emotional involvement with a particular brand; thus lending the brand

an exceptionally high degree of customer loyalty, along with an amplified sense owning the brand^[2].

2.3 Cult branding

Cult branding creates an experience, a feeling an aura of a group identity- involving the customer in a way the employs them. Consumers become passionate and empowered about the cult brands. If a product or a brand fulfills this desire of a person, the customers become a core loyal to the brand/product. This serves as the basis for Brand cultism. Some of the remarkably successful and powerful cult brands are Harley Davidson, Apple computer, vans shoes, etc^[3]. Bullets, Ambassador, AMUL, and Khadi are some of the commonly referred cult brands in India^[4]. All the cult brands have the customers with fiery passion and fierce loyalty towards the brand.

2.4 The Seven Golden Rules of Cult Branding^[5]:

Building cult Brands is a widespread strategy now across global. This concept is relatively new and is gaining importance in the Indian market. Indian brands are now concentrating to attain cult status. Matthew Ragas suggest the following rules to select cult brand.

1. Consumers want to be part of a group that's different.
2. Cult brand inventors show daring and determination.
3. Cult brands sell lifestyles.
4. Cult brand will make the customers as Brand evangelists.
5. Cult brands always create customer communities.
6. Cult brands are inclusive.
7. Cult brands are 'sharing' and 'collaborative'

2.5 Brand loyalty score

Brand Loyalty is the essential element for any brand to make the mark in the Market. Cult Brand should have strong loyal customers. They should be hard-core loyalist of the brands and they should not switch the brand^[6].

There are two different approaches for measuring brand loyalty: the downstream one, based on observing

consistent purchases of a brand over a period of time and the upstream approach, which focuses on the motives that are behind a repeat purchasing of a brand^[7]

After reviewing fifty-five definitions/measures employed in various research efforts over several years and arrived the following definition. Brand Loyalty is defined as Biased(i.e., non random), behavioral response(i.e., purchase)expressed over time by some decision making unit with respect to one or more alternative brands and is a function of psychological (decision-making) processes^[8].

Based on above definition, the following formula was developed which links attitude toward the favorite brand and purchase behavior.

Brand loyalty = $(\sum \text{attitude towards favorite brand} / 40) \times (\text{Proportion of purchase of favorite brand over the last ten occasions})$

The following attitude statements are evaluated on five point likert scale reflecting the

Readers attitude toward their favorite Newspaper are:

1. Highly reliable & credible source
2. Unbiased News presentation
3. I am enhancing my language /fluency by reading this paper
4. Wide coverage of political& sports news.
5. More entertaining and colorful pictures
6. High Print quality and easy to read
7. I love this Newspaper
8. I will recommend this paper to my friends/relatives

The behavioral component of brand loyalty can be found by calculating the proportion of buying the Newspaper. This method has taken both attitudinal and behavioral component together.

3. Objectives of the Study

- To find out whether 'The Hindu' has achieved the "cult brand" status
- To measure the brand loyalty level of 'The Hindu' customers
- To suggest suitable strategies for 'The Hindu' to attain cult status.

4. Research Methodology

Research Approach : Descriptive Research

Sampling Technique : Convenient sampling

Methods Of The Data Collection: Survey method using the questionnaire

Sample Methodology: The Total sample size is 350. Samples have been collected from the six corporations of Tamil Nadu ^[9] (South India).

Corporations	Sample Size
Chennai	100
Madurai	50
Coimbatore	50
Tiruchirappali	50
Salem	50
Tirunelveli.	50

5. Analysis

The major objective of Cult Brand analysis is to find whether customers perceive "The Hindu" as Cult Brand. This can be done based on following essential elements of cult brands.

1. Brand Loyalty score
2. Fulfilling the seven golden rules of Cult Branding.

5.1 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty scores are calculated from the above formula. Customers who are having the loyalty score less than 20%, called as switchers.

Table no: 1 Classification of Loyalty scores

Loyalty scale	Loyalty scores
Least loyal customers	20 – 39%
Less loyal customers	40-59%
Loyal customers	60-79%
Strong loyal customers	80-100%

Table no: 2 Brand Loyalty Score of "The Hindu" across Tamil Nadu

Regions	Loyalty Score	Loyalty Scale
Chennai	62.24%	Loyal Customers
Madurai	80.31%	Strong Loyal Customers
Coimbatore	83.81%	Strong Loyal Customers
Tiruchirappalli	82.71%	Strong Loyal Customers
Salem	72.12%	Loyal Customers
Tirunelveli	71.06%	Loyal Customers

The Hindu is getting the benefit of strong loyalty of its customers from the Major cities except Chennai. It is having the strong hold among customers in Coimbatore followed by Tiruchirappalli.

Madurai city is enjoying the loyal customers of The Hindu with 80% of loyalty.

Chennai Market will be the concern for The Hindu, as it is showing the relatively less loyalty towards the brand. But, The Hindu is still dominating the Chennai Market by having the circulation of 2,67,349 copies.

5.2 Brand Cultism

Cult status of “The Hindu” is tested based on the seven rules. Percentage Analysis is used to check whether the customers perceive “The Hindu” as a Cult.

Seven Golden Rules	Score	Percentage Analysis
Consumers want to be part of a group that’s different	2752/5250	52.42
Cult brand inventors show daring and determination.	4856/5250	92.50
Cult brands sell lifestyles	3772/5250	71.85
Cult brand will make the customers as Brand evangelists	4420/8750	50.51
Cult brands always create customer communities	4998/10500	47.60
Cult brands are inclusive and Universal	7523/8750	85.98
Cult brands are `sharing' and `collaborative'	6581/8750	75.21

Table No. 3 Brand Cultism according to the rules

Rule 1: Consumers want to be part of a group that’s different.

Only half of the (52.42%) of the customers felt that they wanted to identify themselves with “The Hindu” These customers would like to discuss about the issues published in “The Hindu” regularly.

Rule 2: Cult brand inventors show daring and determination

The Hindu can be proud of having the image of daring & determined Newspaper. 92.50% of the customers felt that “The Hindu” is showing daring and determination. They identify the brand as a journalism of courage and they strongly believe that The Hindu will face all oppositions boldly.

Rule 3: Cult brands sell lifestyles

Majority (72%) of the customers strongly believe that “The Hindu” has changed not only their lifestyles but also their friends’ life style. Only 28% of the customers believe that the brand has not changed their life styles.

Rule 4: cult brand will make the customers as Brand evangelists

50% of the customers will convince their friends to buy “The Hindu”. They consider the brand as one among member of their family. They don’t even consider other newspaper to read. Remaining half of customers (50%) of the customers dont share these views. They don’t want to be evangelists of The Hindu.

Rule 5: Cult brands always create customer communities.

The Hindu does not have any organized customer club or community. But 47% of the customers will prefer to become the member of customers club and having the discussions with the other readers of The Hindu.

Rule 6: Cult Brands are inclusive.

Majority of the customers (86%) feel that “The Hindu” gives News for all ages and across various income and occupation categories. Most of the customers agreed that the brand is universal and inclusive. They do not identify with the particular group.

Rule 7: Cult brands are `sharing' and `collaborative'

75% of the customers have felt that “The Hindu” represents customer opinions & beliefs through its writing and it always response to readers voice. They strongly validate that The Hindu is functioning in sharing and collaborative mode.

6. Conclusion

The Hindu is going on right direction in attaining the cult status because of the following reasons:

The Hindu is having the strong loyal customers in the region of Coimbatore, Trichy and Madurai. Strong Brand loyalty is the basic constituent of cult Brand.

The Hindu satisfies four rules among seven golden rules of Cult Branding. Majority of the customers (More than 60%) are validating the four rules.

The Hindu could not be called as Cult brand now, but it is one among the eligible brands to reach the cult status in future. As it is having the strong asset of it strong loyal customer base in TamilNadu, it may become the Cult Brand in future.

7. Suggestions

“The Hindu” is going on right direction in attaining the cult status. The Hindu should make the loyal customers into strong loyal customers by designing and effective implementation of **Loyalty Development Programmes** throughout South India.

As it is the biggest player in Media in TamilNadu, It may consider initiating the **Reader clubs or forum** to strengthen their affectionate towards the brand. It has to

take immediate steps regarding the facts of Chennai market as it is having relatively less loyal customers in Chennai.

The above strategies may definitely help Hindu to strengthen their loyal customer base.

But, it has to travel long distance to reach the magic destination of “Cult Status”

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