



Review

Buddhism and marketing: The blue sky is the cover of the coffin...

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ABSTRACT

When one talks of the Buddha and/or even Buddhism, one seldom thinks of marketing. Well, open the door of your heart to Buddhist marketing; in this article, the practitioner-academician author taps the wisdom of Buddhism/ Buddhist philosophy and applies them to marketing with key marketing lessons and modern-day corporate social responsibility relevance. He speaks of there is need to let go and maintain some form of balance too. And he also presents the essence and inspirations of Buddhism to readers and students of marketing. More specifically, not to be treated as a proselytizing text, the paper argues approvingly, indicating a possible tipping point, of a posture where marketing (business and strategies) should not be dichotomized or treated separately from an ethical posture and attitude that includes sustainable development, ecology, spiritual values and social wellbeing. The paper can thus serve as a springboard for more thinking for a more holistic approach of marketing – if not, Marketing and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in a Buddhist way.

Keywords: Buddhism, compassion/ loving-kindness, doing good, contributing to society, social responsibility, service, branding.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing is defined as “the management process through which goods and services move from concept to the customer”. Marketing includes the coordination of these elements, the 4Ps. It involves identifying, selecting and developing the **Product**, deciding the **Price**, selecting a distribution channel to reach out to the customer’s **Place** and developing and implementing a **Promotional strategy**: is based on thinking about the business in terms of customer needs and their satisfaction (<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/marketing.html>).

Interestingly, when someone mentions the Buddha’s name, it seldom strikes us to think of marketing. This article thus seeks to relate or associate Buddhist thinking

to marketing; the applications of Buddhist thoughts can in fact lead to better, if not, successful marketing.

From the outset, it is good to made it known that there is really not much of writing and more specifically, little academic literature in this area; and this paper is thus intended to be a review research paper. True, critics may also point to the lack of any empirical research; however, the paper’s most obvious methodology consists mainly in establishing how the marketing should be from an ethics and Buddhist moral perspective, and how a practitioner or a practicing Buddhist would see marketing from his or her Buddhist perspective and practice. More so, when such advocates and adherents become galvanized and acted based on whatever Buddhist values they convincingly espoused. It is also to be immediately

declared that this piece of academic writing is not intended to be of a Buddhist proselytizing text. And the author attempted to be as very objective as he can, having spoken to a number of Buddhism advocates and adherents while writing this paper.

Paper's Aim and Objectives

It is the paper's aim and objectives to express the intentions of the author, that is, it is to essentially show and examine that:

1. Buddhist values, having their appeals and being convincingly believed in, can rouse Buddhist advocates and adherents to action.
2. Buddhism has its wisdom, if not, theoretical underpinnings as well as the foundations for smart and socially responsible marketing while promoting values for good living

It is worthy to note that Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy have, at times, been bantered or teased as being negative; and Buddha's words such as "to live is to suffer" or "men can shed more tears than the water in the ocean" are seen as looking at life as if human beings are destined to suffer, and this is one-sided.

On the contrary, Buddhism and its philosophy can be very positive. There is an interesting Chinese saying that goes, "The blue sky is the cover of the coffin. Earth is the coffin. Sorrows and happiness are found within it." It is indeed very much humankind's choice to pursue happiness or sorrows. We, humans, can simply be detached and go about in life without desires and pursue happiness. When one has no desires, consumerism and materialism do not exist or is at least minimized.

Greed, desires and the lack of love or hatred can create conflicts and unhappiness; there is a need to prevent and resolve conflicts. These dark sides can, in fact, be seen when in March 2008, Newsweek featured "Buddha is back", the old traditionally quiet and meditative religion is booming and undergoing some surprising aggressive forms including playing an increasingly political – or in some spots, militant – role (Caryl, 2008). And in late 2012 and early 2013, there had been protests by Buddhist monks and ethnic-cum-religious riots in Myanmar; nonetheless, overall, Buddhism is essentially a religion of peace; "peace is every step" (Thich, 1992). "In the name of Buddhism no altar was reddened with the blood of a Hypatia, no Bruno was burnt alive. Buddhism appeals more to the intellect than to the emotion. It is concerned more with the character of the devotees than with their numerical strengths." (Thera, 2009: 36). In *The Dhammapada* (also cited in Sivaraksa, 2009: 29), the Buddha teaches, "Hatred does not eradicate hatred. Only by loving kindness is hatred dissolved. This law is ancient and eternal." Gandhi expressed it well by indicating that

"An eye for an eye just makes the whole world blind." Companies and marketers must truly promote peace and harmony; where there is peace in every step, peace – and not – war encourages growth and development. A company that wants to market well, if not be market leaders, should encourage peace, setting the examples of being recognized in business by the community for doing the right thing. (see *The Marketer*, 2007: 32-34).

Greed Is No Good

And this is contrary to *The Wall Street* (1987) Michael Douglas' movie character Gordon Gekko's immortalized words, "Greed is good". Greed is the cause of suffering (dukkha, a Pali term). The Commentary on the Sutra of Golden Light says, "Greed is like an ocean current that flows without ceasing." Excessive desire is managed and minimized by its opposite – balanced awareness. The sutra says: "Have few desires, be receptive, and you will be content in body and mind." (Hsing Yun, 2001: 57 - 59). "The tranquil sage abstains from slander and from greed." (*Attadanda Sutta*, cited in Allen, 2002: 49).

All of us should seriously note that desire (*Tanha*, desire in Pali, means thirst) is also the root of sufferings. No amount of clinging can make these pleasures last. What one wants or craves permanence, security, one cannot have. Even the desire to avoid pain is futile. Every life is visited by sorrow. Yet, like moths to the flame, one rushes toward what will ultimately destroy one – or one's peace of mind, at any rate (Oliver, 2007: 79).

Should all of us conclude, therefore, that pessimism is the only realistic view? Not at all; life is suffering is a realistic assessment of life yet when one has a choice, one is realistically optimistic. However, positively speaking, even desire is not – after all – that bad. Oliver (2007: 85) argued that freeing oneself from desire is less about giving things up than about appreciating what one has without being attached to it. Knowing that the objects of one's desire can disappear in an instant makes their enjoyment all the sweeter and richer. And in fact, we can add that this makes us even appreciate life all the more. All of us should value the resources that we now have, and be sustainable; we have only one planet that is called earth although these days, human beings are living as if there is one more planet. If we liken Earth to resource-limited Japan, then it is critical that like Zen Japan, we should accept being green or conservation as a cultural imperative (Masters, 2008: 47). When Japan was a developing country charmed by American consumption and consumerism, the Japanese thought *mottainai* (which literally means "what a waste" and is manifest in an almost reflexive desire to conserve and reuse) was outmoded. These days, the Japanese are rediscovering a desire to seek 'spiritual and mental

satisfaction' because their basic material needs are largely fulfilled. "The environment has drastically changed... 20 or 30 years ago, there were many fish in lakes and rivers. But that has changed drastically and Japanese have started to think, 'Where have my fireflies gone?' With luck and some *mottainai*, they'll soon be back," highlighted by Yukiko Kada, a former professor of environmental sociology (Masters, 2008: 47).

True, the Buddha recognized the struggles of ordinary life – all of us age, all of us get sick, and eventually we all die; we do not get what we want, we get what we don't want, and even the good times pass. But the Buddha did not leave it at that. The Four Noble Truths – the heart of the Buddha's teachings – not only establish the disease but offer the cure. "Life is hard but help is near" (Oliver, 2007: 42). Business is hard; marketing is tough but positively, help and solutions are near. Positive and right understanding/ thinking help. After all, "we are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts we make the world." (from the *Dhammapada*, translated by Thomas Byrom, cited in Kornfield and Fronsdal, 1993: 4). Followed diligently, the Noble Eightfold Path leads to nirvana and true happiness in life, business and marketing.

Good Corporate Culture and Good Marketing Are Vital

Good corporate culture, exemplary leaders with ethics upheld can lead to good performance (Steiner and Steiner, 2006). And good marketing has become increasingly critical for success, and new marketing practices/ ways can be adopted. Marketers need to be creatively smart. Marketing becomes both an art and a science as marketers strive to find creative new solutions to often-complex challenges amid intense changes in the 21st century marketing environment (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Even the character of corporate philanthropy has matured over the decades, chiefly in response to internal and external pressures to balance concerns for shareholder wealth with expectations to show responsibility for communities contributing to the company's livelihood. More and more, doing most good and corporate social initiatives should be proactive, rather than reactive, displaying a true commitment and not a defensive response (Kotler and Lee, 2005). "(Wise,) good people keep on walking whatever happens." (*The Dhammapada*; Easwaran, 2007: 127). When generating the awakening mind, it is good to cherish others rather than ourselves (The Dalai Lama, 2005: 161-2). In marketing too, it is good to cherish our customers.

Indeed *The Dhammapada* (Easwaran, 2007: 143) speaks of: "If, hoping to be happy, you strike at others who also seek happiness, you will be happy neither here nor hereafter. If, hoping to be happy, you do not strike at

others who are also seeking happiness, you will be happy here and hereafter."

The Time Has Come!

There has been too much violence and wars. The world is becoming meaninglessly materialistic. Perhaps, the time has come for Buddhism, the religion of peace and goodwill to have the tipping point, and Buddhist marketing is to be applied. The tipping point is that magic moment when an idea, trend, or social behavior crosses a threshold or limit, tips, becomes immensely popular, spreading like wildfire. Just as a single sick person can start a flu outbreak, so also can a small but precisely targeted push cause a fashion trend, the popularity of a new product, or a drop in the crime rate (Gladwell, 2002).

Gladwell (2002) identifies three key factors that each plays in the role in determining whether a particular trend will "tip" into wide-scale popularity. Gladwell explains the tipping point with these concepts: the Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor, and the Power of Context. The Law of the Few contends that before widespread popularity can be achieved, a few key types of people must champion an idea, concept, or product before it can reach the tipping point. Gladwell describes these key types as Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen. If individuals representing all three of these groups endorse and advocate a new idea, it is much more likely that it will tip into exponential success. Gladwell (2002) defines the Stickiness Factor as the quality that compels or induces people to pay close, lasting attention to a product, concept, or idea. Stickiness is hard to define, and its presence or absence often depends heavily on context. Often, the way that the Stickiness Factor is brought about is unconventional, unexpected, and contrary to received wisdom. The concept that Gladwell calls the Power of Context is immensely important in determining whether a particular phenomenon will tip into widespread popularity. Even minute changes in the environment can play a major factor in the propensity of a given concept attaining the tipping point. Then again, Gladwell defines the term context very broadly, discussing the implications of small variations in social groups and minor changes in a neighborhood or community environment as shifts that can cause a new idea to tip.

Critical to Satisfy Customers' (Stakeholders' including Community's) Needs

Human society, to avoid much pain, sufferings, agonies, injustice, bias and discrimination, needs to uphold ethical values highly and practice them in business, politics, and all areas of human conduct. In other words, they need to relate ethics to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and

day-to-day doing business and living. From the Buddhist angle, to be ethical entails that all our thoughts, intentions, and actions should be good and pure. If an individual has a good heart and a concern to improve human society – in whatever business fields (**including marketing**) and professions we may be in, the result will benefit the community at large. The example and integrity of company leaders are critical, employees quickly notice when standards are met, upheld or evaded. (Steiner and Steiner, 2006; Low, 2013a). By having good intentions, and by doing good deeds, people would do well and everyone benefits (Low, 2013, **bold author's**).

Marketers can indeed gain the wisdom of Buddhism and apply to marketing. To satisfy customers and/or others, businesses need to understand their respective needs and wants. It is a case of “different strokes for different folks!” It is worthy to note that in perceptions, all of us form impressions and judge and decide about people based on relatively *little information*. And what's worse, most times, we have our own bias and prejudices. Marketers indeed need to get more information and should understand the minds of the customers/ other stakeholders. [There is an old saying that is very relevant to marketing. NO ONE'S PLANS CAN BE BETTER THAN HIS OR HER INFORMATION. To do a good job in planning, one needs all the information available on the subject. And one needs to be sure the information is accurate; Whitman (1991: 39).] In Buddhism too, it includes a deep understanding of the human mind which psychologists around the world are now discovering to be both very advanced and effective.

Looking at the present world, we must imperatively and logically ask ourselves: Do we have a choice? Do marketers have a choice? [With increasing population growth, overcrowded conditions, food shortages; “the world is irrefutably Warming” (Stengel, 2008: 4), with so much damage to the environment, and the need for a sustainable earth,] the marketer has to be “a leader” (to lead with values one upholds and the author wishes to add, the need to be disciplined to curb our wants and be prudent) (Marsh and Grossa Jr., 2005: 13). The Buddha is a good marketer; he is a great leader, leading by example and he is very persuasive; the Buddha “always spoke to people bearing in mind their standard of development, their tendencies, their mental make-up, their character, their capacity to understand a particular question.” (Rahula, 1974: 63). “Buddha teaches not only through words, but also through his life.” (Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, 1966: 23). Additionally, like the Buddha, the marketer has to be “a teacher” (to impart information to others, spreading the message), “a decision-maker” (to influence public policy, corporate investments, the direction of institutional development and lifestyle choices in ways that can shape the course of society and its interaction with the environment) and “a healer” (to correct in whatever ways the environmental infractions)

too (Marsh and Grossa Jr., 2005: 13-14); he or she needs to play a role in the community.

The Community Is the Bedrock

Marketing invariably relates to the customers and the community as its basis. To the Buddha, the community is the foundation. To extend further, in business, companies are goaded to achieve targets and increase outputs, sales and profits; there are attachments to these targets, and interestingly, nobody mentions anything about corporate social responsibility or marketing with a social cause which can generate successful long-term growth. It is not about one's needs but the needs of others – customers', stakeholders', etc., that of the target audience that matter most. When their needs are satisfied, they are happy. So...

Marketing Is About Accountability, and these Days, Requires More Accountability

Marketing invariably does view the entire business process as comprising a tightly integrated effort to uncover/ discover, create, arouse and satisfy customer needs.” (<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/marketing.html#ixzz2e4qzKxwE>).

Having said the above, one needs to remember the Buddhists tenet, “One reaps what one sows”. On environmental footprints, already more than 90 percent of consumers think businesses must be responsible about their impact on the environment. While 92 percent believe that businesses should ensure that that responsibility continues along their supply chain. (Catulli, 2007: 6-10). Going green “makes good business sense” – there's concern for the environment, the need to reduce pollution as well as the need to cut costs (Chua, 2009: B3) and indeed businesses and marketing should thus be made more accountable.

It is worthy to note that after all, people are inclined to have a negative perception of marketing. “Marketing is often viewed as a ‘bad guy’ in environmental terms because it is seen as revolving around consumption expansion, or guilty of excessive use of materials in terms of junk mail, overelaborate packaging or freebie promotional merchandise that people don't really want or need,” Professor Ken Peattie, director of the Centre for Business Relationships, Accountability, Sustainability and Society, UK (Brass) at Cardiff University and founder of the Sustainable Marketing Knowledge Website (cited in Catulli, 2007: 7).

Marketers should be very mindful; then they can market well, and fulfill the needs of their customers and market segments. The Buddha (cited in Sivaraksa, 2009: 13) said, “The Buddha explained, “While walking, they

know that they are walking. When standing, they know that they are standing. When lying down, they know that they are lying down. ...”

Companies and “top management recognizes that marketing requires more accountability than in the past.” (Kotler and Keller, 2012: 643). The bite is more important than the bark. Performance is more important than promotion (Kotler and Keller, 2012). The marketers have to take care of the environment too. Here, packaging is a key focus in the environmental footprint since it is readily seen as litter and wasteful. Where possible, packaging should be biodegradable, natural, recycled and recyclable and any text should be printed with biodegradable materials, such as lead-free ink (Catulli, 2007).

Overall then, to put it mildly, no more bluffing, trickery, conniving or sizzling without the juicy steak; Buddhism’s ethical conduct: Right Understanding/ Right Thinking/ Right Speech/ Right Action/ Right Livelihood/ Right Effort/ Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration (the Eightfold Path; Abeysekera, 2011; Field, 2007) must be there, ethical conduct is all the more to be applied in marketing.

In Right Understanding, there is no need to be greedy or have hatred such as to increase market share at the expense of pushing the rivals out. Whenever one decides to do something, think it through, because in the end one is responsible for the outcome or results(; this is related to karma).

In Right Thinking, marketing needs to ensure a win-win situation for all, then one is thinking skillfully; the minute one thinks of “I win, and you lose” – one is thinking unskillfully.

In Right Speech, the marketer needs to ensure such things as “always be truthful in what you say”, “do not use words to hurt others” and “do not engage in profanity, verbal abuse, or harmful criticism” as well as “avoid meaningless talk such as gossip. Gossip is frequently the cause of rumors, and rumors can sideline or even destroy well-intended people and plans.” (Field, 2007: 97).

It is worthy to note that Buddhism is proactive. In marketing, customer service excellence and corporate social responsibility (“Make sure there’s substance supporting the rhetoric”; Kotler and Lee, 2005: 228) as in Buddhism, actions are more important than words.

“Right or skillful Action in marketing also means that they are relatively easy to follow. And skillful action requires one to see beyond what is lawful into what is right or skillful (i.e., causing no harm) and unskillful (causing suffering). Like all moral and ethical decisions, one has to question one’s own intentions. Actions taken on the grounds of hatred, greed, or delusion will never be ethical. Right action requires all marketers, investors, executives, and management committees to look at their individual thoughts, words, and subsequent actions in light of the suffering that they do or do not cause.

Here, this author would also add that actions too need to be responsive and responsible. He would agree with (Sangharakshita, 1996: 23) that all of us can function from the reactive mind or from the creative mind. Marketers can perhaps grow the business responsively and responsibly when they act it out creatively. If we function reactively, we are not *acting* at all, only *re-acting*. When we react, we are basically passive; we are doing automatically, in reaction to the stimuli. To function creatively, on the other hand, means to originate, to bring into existence something that was not there before, whether what we create is a work of art, a higher state of consciousness or for the greater good of humankind. It means to act in the full sense of the word.

In marketing, to succeed in the long-term, “its products or services must deliver complete satisfaction” (Whitman, 1991: 5); the marketer certainly needs to ensure fulfilling the needs of the customers or the target audience. As in Buddhism even when giving to charity, is good to fulfill the needs of the receiver. When giving is filled with a sense of purpose and with the right way to contribute, this gives people energy and enthusiasm. Charities usually get what they are given, but they become happier with their needs satisfied when they can get what they want. Wright (2013: 24) spoke of feeling “good because I’d fulfilled a need in the community”. She also helped in creating a website that matched people in need with people who have; charities could post requests for specific goods, and where people with goods could go and find out these requests. Ideally, potential donors could do this by searching postcodes and of course, with more help, more needs are satisfied, twenty volunteers now work alongside with Juliette to assist coordinate the 720 charities that regularly access the website (Wright, 2013). As long as one feels contributing, that completes the person. And others are happy too.

Right or skillful Livelihood requires that one’s livelihood – not engaging in trades or occupations that can create suffering or harm, directly or indirectly, for oneself or for living beings, and that it not be in violation of the other seven guiding principles in the Eightfold Path. Right livelihood can be said to be aligned with green marketing/ marketing with social responsibility and even marketing as a whole. Positively speaking, engaging trades and occupations such as providing education/ health/ hospital services, community giving, just to name a few, is Right Livelihood.

Right Effort requires a slowing down, so that one can divest oneself of negative states of mind.

Field (2007) spoke of the guiding principle of Right Effort teaches us to:

- i. Prevent negative states of mind;
- ii. Overcome negative states of mind once they’ve arisen; and

iii. Maintain and cultivate positive states of mind.

Not Right or unskillful Effort is being “irrational”, “negative” and “greedy”/ “not comfortable with ourselves” as opposed to Right and Skillful Effort, that is being “rational”, “positive” and “wanting and needing little, not greedy” and “being at peace with ourselves” (Field, 2007: 101). It is applying discipline versus not applying discipline, and overall being cultivated and calmed to focus on one’s thoughts and intentions.

Right Mindfulness means one should understand how to use one’s mind, and learn a new skill. The learning objective is to see to the core of oneself by detaching one’s mind from bias and opinions, concepts and constructs, and interpretations of perception. By learning to do this, one’s mind becomes sharp, undistorted, and able to penetrate deeply. Being mindful is to see each moment as a separate event, so that we can be aware of the uniqueness of each moment without

the attachments of what Bhante Gunaratana (cited in Field, 2007: 103) calls “socially conditioned responses or habitual reactions”.

Right or skillful Concentration is also known as right meditation (The Dalai Lama with Mehrotra, 2008). As such, for Buddhism, the practitioner concentrates on an object of attention until reaching full concentration and a state of meditative absorption. To this researcher, the role of Right Concentration for practitioners is like a mirror; one stills oneself to basically reflect, finding out and verifying the right view.

In essence, overall, businesses and marketers must do well by being responsible (Steiner and Steiner, 2006), doing good (Field, 2007) or giving support to others, such as for example, working parents (Reder: 1995). For the Buddhist, how profits are earned is more important than the actual profits. Profits should be ethically, rightfully, skillfully and responsibly earned with much goodwill and trust built upon by those the marketers interact and have dealings with.

Marketing Leads to Businesses Doing Well By Doing Good

Carroll (2004: 24, **bold, author’s**) spoke of the need to balance the two efforts and this author agrees with this point. Work and business seems to have a peculiar way to put us off-balance, “focusing us on the future, worrying about where we are going, concerned about whether we will arrive at our destination with our career (**business**)” and paycheck (**profits**) intact”. What keeps you up at night is quite literal in business and marketing. “Will I clinch the deal, get the business contract?” One becomes restless, and worried. One needs to let go these profits, and ‘business, forever business and nothing but business’ thinking.

It is within the responsibility of the marketers and the

corporate leaders; the marketers need to be wise and responsible, bringing about good and trusted products and services – coming from skilled, trained personnel. Marketers must not abuse their positions, and be socially responsible, caring for the society or the setting in which they are operating; in fact, one can also highlight that they should be green, kind and caring to Mother Earth, being prudent and disciplined. “The wise control themselves” (Chin Kung, 2002) for if one is greedy, then it is like drinking seawater, the more one drinks, the more one gets thirsty. Instead, one should need to strive to...

Marketing Is Social Responsibility In Mind, Motivation and Action

Field (2007) argued that for capitalism today, profits can be taken out of the business (e.g., bonuses to owners, dividends to stockholders, etc.), reinvested in new product research and development, or used to update existing products or technologies. In terms of the Buddhist persuasion, it would be ensured or confirmed that profitability reflects both financial success and human well-being. Any answer or calculation to determine the worth of a company’s stock would include a percentage assigned to financial success and a percentage to employee or community development. If the intentions were there, the difference would show up in our communities and around the globe as increased human wellbeing, reduced poverty, and overall, a better or an improved society. After all, we are all one from the same source or essence (Thera, 2009). And in terms of marketing with social responsibility and being green in mind, there should be oneness – “the world is one and all things are in it” (Agatiello, 2009).

In marketing, there is certainly a need to do it with social responsibility in mind while avoiding the excesses and abuses of marketing, and this tallies with what Buddhism has to say. Buddhism also teaches us a very important principle; and that is to do good or care for others while getting abundant merits or blessings. Loving-kindness (*metta*) is one of the boundless states that are developed by practicing Buddhist; the practice of loving-kindness involves developing the attitude that ‘may all beings be free from enmity, free from affliction... and live happily. They also practice compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity (Gruzalski, 2000; also cited in Low, 2010).

The intention must be good; and not only that, but “in the Buddhist sense, if motivation is good, the result is good.” [“The best type of motivation is bodhicitta – that is to achieve enlightenment for the sake of other sentient beings”] (The Dalai Lama with Mehrotra, 2008: 63).

Among the many things, businesses should conserve and be green, using its economic resources efficiently and recycle any reusable materials to save natural

resources (Low, 2013; Field, 2007). As in Buddhism, when the company/ marketer develops an altruistic heart; compassionate, the company/ marketer gives generously and gives unconditionally. One practices boundless and genuine compassion. When one thinks of others, one's mind widens, and within that large space, even big (personal) problems may appear insignificant. This makes all the difference (The Dalai Lama with Mehrotra, 2008). After all, living on earth is only temporary, and thus, moral principles and values must be given high honor and respect, and they are to be accordingly adhered if we are to become successful as human beings. In fact, if the company gives high regard to moral principles, social responsibility and values and it subsequently makes an integrity presence, then the company can up its branding position/ image as well as sharpen its competitive edge.

Marketing Is Better or Excellent Service Achieved through Love, Compassion and Spiritual Discipline

Let us now move on to service marketing: Marketing can also gain when applying such Buddhist wisdom. Be mindful of what one is doing or serving. Do not go all out to business without touching or serving the people. The people's or target audience needs should be more than satisfied. One has to up the service. Love others and show compassion.

Low (2013: 157, *italics author's*) in fact argued that "loving the Absolute Reality by loving others is a leadership (/ *marketing*) perspective that can be referred to as mastery in servitude. It is perhaps the highest form of service. Mastery in servitude can be better understood when one speaks in the form of the elephant metaphor. The elephant is referred to in the Indian scripture and folklore which puts it as ranking first among all animals in importance. Elephants have been trained to do hard work, lift and transport burdens and overall to serve men. A trained elephant, carrying the king, bears the arrows on the battlefield. With its strength, endurance, gentleness and remarkable restraint, the elephant has long symbolised to the Indian mind the enormous power locked within every human being. Through this analogy of the trained elephant, whose immense power has transformed into loving human service, it is accordingly said that the Buddha also conveys to his Indian audience the importance of spiritual discipline". Marketing too can be applied with such a spiritual discipline, and this definitely has its benefits.

Buddhism's greatest teacher, the Dalai Lama, has one of his favorite prayers as:

*"So long as space remains,
So long as sentient beings remain,
I will remain,*

*In order to help, in order to serve,
In order to make my own contribution."* (The Dalai Lama, 2001: 7-8).

To paraphrase the above in the marketing context and relevance, it is as follows:

So long as space/ business remains,
So long as sentient beings remain,
Marketing will remain,
In order to help, in order to serve, to fill customer/
stakeholders' needs
In order to make its own contribution."

Here, it can be said that in the same way, the Dalai Lama experiences inner peace, such sort of thinking/ attitude and being aware of inner (human) values upheld can also bring marketers the inner strength and confidence as well as supply the purpose to marketing. No matter how difficult or complicated things may be, if marketers have such a mental attitude and motivation, they give, serve and do it joyfully while enjoying the inner peace and joy. The *Dhammapada* (cited in Allen, 2002: 13) speaks of, "He who drinks in Truth proceeds with a serene mind." And "a trained mind is the cause of real happiness." (*The Dhammapada.25/19*, cited in The Buddhism Promotion Centre of Thailand, 2001: 22).

At one level, Buddhism teaches one to cope with the events and circumstances of daily life. One develops such good attitudes towards life that one's relations with one's family and with the members of the community improves. At an advanced or higher level, Buddhism teaches one to develop one's mind so that one finally sees life as it really is. From His own experience, the Buddha has shown that there is a way to end all sufferings and achieve supreme happiness. Thus the Buddha's teachings offer hope and give a meaning to our lives.

When the service is thus given with selflessness in the seller's/ service provider's mind, without ego and with spiritual discipline, "it is service beyond the call of duty". "Pure or wholesome service" and indeed "dedicated and excellent service emerges" (several respondents who expressed these to this researcher when they found out that the researcher was writing this article). Such a practice and attitude adds happiness to a greater number of people; such service augments the product, and adds cherries to the cream or icing.

The Limitations and Benefits of the Research

It is critical to note that firstly, critics may even point to the research as one of atypical Buddhist proselytizing text and secondly, that the paper is far from meeting the requirements of a scientific writing. Nonetheless, readers should seriously take note that what the author is doing is

basically showing and analyzing that values (in this case, Buddhist values) are critical to action, and that Buddhist values, being convincingly espoused, can stir or rouse Buddhist advocates and adherents to action; to emphasize, it clearly shows the power of values in giving wings to action and practice. Buddhist values indeed have their wisdom, if not, theoretical underpinnings as well as the foundations for smart and socially responsible marketing while promoting values for good living. And having said these, the paper can serve as a basis for further research and studies in terms of linking or associating Buddhism with the various business disciplines including marketing and management.

Of significance are the facts that overall the paper has argued in favor of a stance and viewpoint where marketing business and strategies are not separated or divorced from an ethical posture and attitude that includes sustainable development, ecology, spiritual values and social wellbeing. It thus advocates and generates greater thinking, research and in-depth analysis for a more holistic approach of marketing – if not, Marketing and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in a Buddhist way.

CONCLUSION

Greed is no good, and businesses and marketers must not be greedy. The needs of the target audience or customers are paramount. “Pure or wholesome service” given are critical.

Businesses should thus do good; they should “not engage in false advertising and aggressive marketing strategies that are harmful to the society”, and they “should (also) align its mission and goals with its social responsibilities of advancing human civilization” (Low, 2013: 232; Field, 2007). One can certainly say that marketing, the Buddhist way is all the more befitting – more so, today, as Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2010) observe that the world is witnessing new marketing ways – collaborative, cultural, and spiritual marketing in a values-driven era – the age of participation, the age of globalization paradox, and the age of creative society. And these three major forces transform consumers to be more collaborative, cultural, and human spirit-driven. Rather than treating people simply as consumers, marketers approach them as whole human beings with minds, hearts, and spirits, and progressively, consumers are looking for solutions to their anxieties about making the globalized world a better place. In a world full of confusion, they search for companies that attend to their deepest needs for social, economic, and environmental justice in their mission, vision, and values. They look for not only functional and emotional fulfillment but also human spirit fulfillment in the products and services they choose.

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