

The Role of Dharma in Ethical Marketing - Lessons from Hindu Philosophy

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Abstract

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This study highlights the pivotal role of the Indian knowledge system in the field of marketing, particularly the influence of Hindu pillars of ethical principles in ethical marketing. It examines how Indian firms are incorporating these principles into their corporate social responsibility activities. The primary objective of this study is to showcase the application of traditional Indian values in contemporary business practices and to demonstrate how ethical marketing is deeply rooted in the Indian knowledge system through Hindu philosophy. This influence not only shapes consumer perceptions but also aids in creating a strong brand image and sustainable business practices on a global scale. The study focuses on selected firms that are taking the initiative to integrate religious principles into their business operations.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Hindu Philosophy, Firms, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Introduction

Hindu philosophy is one of the oldest traditions in the world, and it has a distinct system of thoughts and ideas. This philosophy has a wide range of texts, schools of thought, and ethical frameworks that provide different insights into our existence and moral duty. There are both spiritual and practical dimensions to this ideology. It offers rich ideas and values that shape individual life. It plays a significant role in individuals' ethical journey. Its principles include Dharma, Karma, Moksha and so on. It includes both orthodox and heterodox schools differing in their acceptance of the Vedas. This philosophy seeks to understand the nature of reality, self, and the universe and provides a framework for ethical living. The fundamental texts in Hindu philosophy consist of Vedas, Upanishads, The Bhagavad Gita, and Epics like 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata' that offer narratives interwoven with

moral and ethical settings.

Ethical marketing is an approach that emphasises religious principles like transparency, fairness and social responsibility in all aspects of Marketing. It addresses the ethical implications of marketing strategies focused on consumer and society welfare, respecting consumer rights, promoting honesty in production and advertisement and contributing to a positive environment. The principles of ethical marketing are based on core principles such as honesty, transparency, fairness, sustainability, respect for consumers and responsibility. At the same time, its specific practices include truthful advertising, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), sustainable practices, fair pricing and cultural sensitivity. Ethical marketing helps companies build consumer trust, create a distinct brand image, attract new consumers and foster employee pride and loyalty.

Literature Review

Ahmed, T., & Singh, V. (2020) analysed the role of social media in promoting ethical marketing by using content analysis of social media campaigns, analysing 50 comparisons from various brands. Their findings demonstrated that Ethical marketing increases consumer engagement, if social media is used appropriately. In another study conducted by Alavi, M., & Al-Rashid, K. (2020) on 500 Muslim consumers in urban areas revealed that Islamic values, including honesty and fairness, enhance consumer trust and loyalty. Choudhury, R., & Banerjee, K. (2018) discussed how ethical marketing affects consumer loyalty in emerging markets in Canada. Their findings revealed that marketing strategies, including fare pricing and fare advertising, enhance consumer loyalty to a great extent. Roy, M. (2021) conducted a comparative study on Ethical Marketing in Emerging Economies across 5 companies from 2 emerging economies. The authors found that ethical marketing practices differ widely across imaging economies, influenced by their local culture and regulations.

Gupta, A., & Sharma, P. (2019) conducted a study on consumer responses to ethical advertising to understand consumer responses towards truthful advertising. Using surveys and experimental designs with 300 consumers in advanced regions, they found that consumers show higher trust and purchase more, when the companies carry ethical advertising. Hassan, A., & Rashid, R. (2019) conducted a qualitative study of 15 marketing managers from various religious faiths to examine how religious beliefs influence ethical marketing decisions and discovered that values like honesty and integrity influence ethical decision-making in marketing practices. Kim, J., & Hall, T. (2020) conducted a study on 600 consumers from diverse religious faiths to examine how religious affiliation influences ethical expectations using survey and quantitative analysis. They survey found that consumers appreciate business honesty and transparency. Kim,

J., & Lee, D. (2020) carried out a study to understand the rules of transparency and ethical marketing for creating brand trust. They used a mixed-method approach consisting of a survey and analysis of 300 respondents to examine the role of transparency in building brand trust. They observed that transparency in marketing communication always leads to higher brand trust and customer loyalty. Patel, S. (2020) focused on ethical marketing practices in sustainable businesses by using qualitative interviews with 25 marketing executives. The study highlighted the importance of balancing transparency with social responsibility for business sustainability.

Patel, R., & Desai, S. (2021) conducted a study on 10 Jain-owned businesses to understand the impact of Jainism on ethical marketing and consumer behaviour using case studies and interviews. They observed that non-violence and non-possessiveness encourage ethical consumerism. Raj, S., & Mehta, P. (2019) studied 20 marketing managers in Indian firms to explore Hindu principles in promoting ethical marketing. They found that these principles help companies to grow. Thomas, E. (2018) studied 300 consumers in Christian-majority regions to analyse how Christian ethics impact brand perception. They found that consumers prefer brands that reflect Christian values such as honesty, charity, and humility.

Wang, L., & Kim, M. (2017) explored consumer perceptions towards ethical practices in luxury goods by surveying 30 consumers to learn their perceptions. They found that consumers value ethical practices in luxury brands. Jones, L., & Smith, R. (2021) carried out a study on ethical marketing, giving insights from CSR in the consumer group sector by examining the impact of CSR on consumers' perceptions of ethical marketing. Their qualitative study on ten leading consumer group companies revealed that positive CSR improves consumer perception and helps build brand loyalty. Another researcher Taylor, C. (2019) examined ethical marketing and its impact on EM

consumers using service and focus group methods. The study involved 200 young consumers aged between 18 and 24. They found that EM consumers prefer brands with ethical values, which helps create brand loyalty.

While various international studies have been conducted on ethical marketing, there is a noticeable gap in research focusing on Indian companies.

Objectives of the Study

1. To discuss the main principles of inter-philosophy aligning with ethical marketing.
2. To analyse how Indian firms integrate into philosophical principles for ethical marketing.

Relevance of the study

In today's connected world, consumers are concerned about the ethical practices of the companies from which they purchase their products. The concerns about fair trade practices, environmental sustainability, corporate responsibility supports their customer choices. This study gives insights into how Indian companies are responding to the customer's expectations, keeping traditional ethical values in their operations, thereby increasing consumerism by linking graphical marketing and cultural values in

their business. With the rising number of consumers in India, the concern for the ethical practices of these companies also increases.

Significance of the Study:

This study holds significance as it sheds light on how Indian companies incorporate religious and traditional values into their ethical marketing practices that enhances consumer trust and help them create brand loyalty. The firms are aware that the emerging consumers are concerned about ethical practices. Therefore, some Indian firms incorporate traditional values in their business strategy model. The study is critical because it gives scope for promoting fair business practices, stopping consumer exploitation, and holding the firms accountable for social responsibility.

Methodology of the study

This study mainly employs a secondary data collection method that includes analysing CSR reports, company websites, industry publications, etc. A thorough review of existing literature on ethical marketing and individuals is also used to create the theoretical background. A few case studies of Indian firms are discussed to explain the implementation of the principles.

- ❖ Hindu Philosophical Principles Aligning Ethical Marketing:
- ❖ Principles Aligning Ethical Marketing

Sr. No.	Hindu Philosophical Principles	The firm’s ethical marketing moves
1	Dharma	Righteous duty
2	Ahimsa	Consumer well-being
3	Swadharma	CSR activities- as duty
4	Karma	Building positivity to get a good reaction
5	Detachment	Balance profit
6	Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam	Global ethical practices
7	Dhyana	Self-Regulation in Marketing
8	Satya	Transparency

- **Dharma:**

In philosophy, Dharma is not just a rule but a guiding principle with moral and social responsibility that emphasizes truthfulness, fairness, social welfare, and profit-making from the firms' point of view. Dharma is deeply rooted in ethical marketing, which helps prevent manipulation and deceitful tactics. This principle promotes authenticity and respect for the consumer's rights. For this, the fundamental component of 'truthfulness' is given importance by ensuring that advertisements are actual and accurate, and avoiding exaggerated or misleading information that could deceive consumers. Additionally, every firm has its own duty to create value for society by providing good products and services that benefit the society.

- **Ahimsa:**

The principle of Ahimsa is one of the guiding principles in ethical marketing. It prevents products and services from harming or exploiting consumers and society. Thus, companies following this principle put the safety and well-being of consumers above everything else, making sure that their products do not harm consumers' physical and mental health. Harmful products are also not sold to consumers. Consumer and Labour Safety is the core objective of the ethical model.

- **Swadharma and CSR:**

Swadharma is one's duty, and a unique responsibility towards society. It identifies the purpose behind earning profit and adopting ethical marketing for the community's welfare. This should not be imposed on them, instead they should take it as their duty. To fulfil this principle, many companies work on supporting local communities, sustaining the environment, and creating a suitable environment for labour. This demonstrates that the firms are accountable to their shareholders and stakeholders, which consist of consumer labour and society as a whole.

- **Karma:**

The philosophy of "Karma" teaches that every action has its own consequences. Therefore, ethical marketing states that firms grow when they follow ethical business. The ethical actions build a positive reputation and trust, contributing to have long term success. Ethical marketing aligns with the understanding that good actions create good karma for the brand, leading to sustainable growth. Investing in ethical marketing is the best investment that creates positive vibes among the consumer community.

- **Detachment**

In philosophy, Detachment speaks about non-attachment to material position and excessive profit. It does not discourage profit but warns against greed and supports a balanced approach to profit-making. The companies can still make profit but the principle encourages fair practices in the producing and pricing and advertising of goods or services. This principle helps keep products affordable and accessible by promoting equality and inclusivity rather than only earning huge profits.

- **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam:**

In philosophy, this word means 'the world is one family,' which shows that ethical marketing is universal and not confined to the local area. Therefore, firms with global businesses follow ethical practices that impact global human parameters. For this, they must stick to their ethical principles as a global responsibility, keeping cultural sensitivity and environmental sustainability in mind.

- **Dhyana:**

In the philosophy, 'Dhyana' means mindfulness, which encourages companies to be aware of the intentions behind their marketing and constantly reflect on whether they are aligned with ethical practices. Self-regulation helps companies to resist unethical shortcuts and fostering in truthful marketing culture for the benefit of the consumers.

The company focuses on understanding consumers' needs and values rather than merely producing the

products and pushing all that to the consumers.

❖ **Companies engaged in Ethical marketing in India.**

Sr.	Company	Aligned principle	Ethical initiative
1	TATA Group	<i>Dharma and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam</i>	Social responsibility and welfare by channelising their significant portion of the profits through the trust
2.	Amul	<i>Swadharma and Karma</i>	Empower dairy farmers and promote local dairy business
3.	Infosys	<i>Dharma and Aparigraha</i>	Promotes diversity, inclusion and environmental sustainability.
4.	Hindustan Unilever	<i>Dharma, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam</i>	Promote empowerment among rural women for their livelihood through micro-entrepreneurship.
5.	Godrej Group	<i>Dharma and Karma</i>	Promotes green initiatives by focusing on zero waste, reducing carbon emissions and promoting sustainable goods.
6	Dabar India	<i>Ahmisa and Satya</i>	Promotes Ayurveda-based natural health products using ethical sourcing and promotes nature for health campaigns.
7	Asian paints	<i>Dharma and Ahimsa</i>	Producing safe and eco-friendly products or pains ensuring consumer health and environmental safety
9.	Zomato	<i>Dharma and Vasudhaiva Kutubakam</i>	Runs food donation campaigns to combat hunger by contributing surplus food.

The above table shows few selected companies which follow ethical marketing to sustain their business. They promote welfare to different stakeholders. They do not adhere to all the principles in implementation, but they follow a few principles for the betterment and growth of the society. These companies incorporate ethical marketing practices by focusing on social empowerment, fair trade, and environmental sustainability, and they promote consumer choices that align with the principles of

Hindu philosophy.

Conclusion:

Through the framework of Dharma and Hindu philosophy, ethical marketing incorporates business practices with moral duty and accountability and respects the human community as a whole. It encourages marketers to adopt non-violence, authenticity, responsible and accountable conduct. When applied willingly and thoughtfully, these

principles can help organisations to build sustainable and positive relationships with their stakeholders and help them to sustain their business for a long time and have long-term success.

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