

Dharma and Ethical Marketing – A Holistic Approach

Ms. Neesha R Chhabria

R.A.Podar College of Commerce and Economics (Empowered Autonomous College) Self-financing Programs, Assistant Professor | Email: neesha.chhabria@rapodar.ac

Mrs. Divya Naresh Lalwani

R.A.Podar College of Commerce and Economics (Empowered Autonomous College) Coordinator, Self-financing Programs | Email: divya.lalwani@rapodar.ac.in

Abstract

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Marketing develops, communicates, distributes, and exchanges products and services that are valuable to consumers and the general public. This concept places a strong emphasis on using marketing as a discipline to deliver value that helps society as a whole. Value can only be delivered if the role of marketing is consistent with modern ethical and moral philosophy. Ethical marketing techniques place a strong emphasis on responsible and transparent behavior from both individuals and organizations, which guarantees honesty and fairness towards customers and other stakeholders. Integrity and justice in product or service pricing, promotion, and distribution are crucial for the organization as a whole as well as for the professionals in sales and marketing. The systematic examination of unethical practices in product distribution, including unfair pricing, misleading advertising, and discriminatory practices, is known as ethical marketing. This paper explores the integration of Dharma, an ancient ethical and moral framework, with contemporary ethical marketing practices. It examines how Dharma can guide businesses in creating marketing strategies that are not profitable but also socially responsible and morally sound. Through a theoretical analysis, this paper demonstrates the potential benefits and challenges of a Dharma-based approach to ethical marketing. This paper aims to bridge the gap between ancient ethical frameworks and modern business practices. By integrating Dharma into ethical marketing, it seeks to propose a holistic approach that benefits businesses, consumers, and society.

Keywords: Dharma, Ethical marketing, Indian knowledge system, Holistic Approach, Business Ethics, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Introduction:

“यस्य सर्वे समारम्भाः कामसंकल्पवर्जिताः।

ज्ञानाग्निदग्धकर्माणं तमाहुः पाण्डितं बुधाः॥”

(Bhagavad Gita 4.19)

"One whose every undertaking is free from desire and selfish motives, and whose actions are burned up by

the fire of knowledge, he the wise call a sage." This verse emphasizes that a truly wise person is one whose actions are not driven by personal desires or motives. Instead, their actions are informed by the knowledge that transcends worldly attachments, and this wisdom purifies their actions. Such a person performs duties selflessly and is considered enlightened by the wise.

This verse from the Gita highlights the significance of acting with pure motives, free from self-interest, and rooted in knowledge. It suggests that true insight, especially in marketing, arises from moral conduct and righteous deeds.

In the constant pursuit of success, it's easy to lose sight of what's right and wrong. The relentless pressure to achieve quick results, especially in a data-driven world, can sometimes compromise our core values of honesty, transparency, and respect. However, as the Gita teaches us, true success and understanding come from adhering to ethical principles and acting virtuously.

Marketing often faces criticism for promoting excessive consumerism, making exaggerated claims in advertisements, and engaging in unfair pricing practices. Despite these concerns, marketers should prioritize ethical practices. In today's world, companies that prioritize social, environmental, and governance issues (ESG) are often rewarded with higher valuations. By adopting ethical marketing practices, all stakeholders, including marketers, consumers, and society as a whole, can benefit.

Marketing, a potent tool, can shape consumer preferences and societal values. However, the relentless pursuit of profit and market dominance can sometimes lead to unethical practices like misleading advertising, manipulative sales techniques, and exploitation of vulnerable consumers. Marketing is a complex and ever-evolving field crucial for business success. It involves understanding consumer desires, developing valuable products, and effectively communicating their benefits to boost sales and cultivate strong customer relationships. To tackle these challenges, a comprehensive approach that integrates ethical principles into marketing practices is essential. Renowned marketing expert Philip Kotler defines marketing as “a societal process where individuals and groups obtain their needs and wants through exchange”.

Marketing is a societal process that enables exchanges between customers and organizations, creating value for all stakeholders. Hence, marketing plays a vital role in society.

Dharma, a central tenet of Indian philosophy, offers a comprehensive framework for ethical decision-making and behavior. Dharma, a core concept in Indian philosophy, emphasizes righteousness and duty. In marketing, Dharma promotes ethical practices, honesty, and transparency. It advocates for social responsibility, environmental consciousness, and fair treatment of all stakeholders. By adhering to Dharma, marketers can build trust, foster long-lasting relationships, and contribute to a sustainable future. Dharma guides marketers to prioritize customer satisfaction, employee well-being, and societal impact, ultimately leading to a more equitable and harmonious business environment.

Interpretation of Dharma: Dharma is a multifaceted concept with deep roots in various Eastern philosophies and religions, particularly in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. The term originates from the Sanskrit word “धर्म” (Dharma) which can be translated as “law”, “duty”, “righteousness”, or “moral order”. Dharma embodies a range of meanings and applications, but fundamentally, it represents the ethical and moral principles that govern the behavior and actions of individuals and society.

Principles of Ethical Marketing:

- All marketing communications are truthful and do not misleads consumers.
- Providing clear and transparent information about products, pricing, and terms of service.
- Avoiding exploitation of vulnerable populations such as children or the elderly and manipulative tactics that take advantage of customers' lack of knowledge or understanding.

- Engaging in the practices that benefit society and the environment.
- Respecting consumers privacy and protecting their personal information
- Creating marketing campaigns that are inclusive and considerate of diverse audiences.

Key principles of Dharma relevant to marketing include:

- ❖ Righteousness (Satya): Truth and Honesty in marketing practices
- ❖ Duty (Karma): Responsibility towards customers, society, and the environment
- ❖ Morality (Niti): Ethical norms and values in advertising and promotions
- ❖ Justice (Nyaya): Fairness and equity in pricing and consumer treatment
- ❖ Natural Order (Rta): Sustainability and harmony with the environment
- ❖ Compassion (Karuna): Empathy and consideration for consumer needs and well-being
- ❖ Non-Violence (Ahimsa): Avoiding harm to people and environment through business practices.

Application of Dharma:

- Personal Conduct:** On an individual level, Dharma guides personal behavior and decision-making. It encourages people to act ethically, fulfill their duties, and strive for moral excellence.
- Social Harmony:** In society, Dharma promotes social order and harmony by outlining the duties and responsibilities of different roles and relationships, such as family members, teachers, rulers, and citizens
- Environmental Stewardship:** Dharma emphasizes the importance of living in balance with nature and recognizing the interconnectedness of all life forms.
- Spiritual Path:** For Spiritual seekers, Dharma

provides a framework for pursuing spiritual growth, self-realization, and ultimately, liberation (Moksha or Nirvana)

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Interpretation of Dharma is not limited to our duties, it extends to our deeds namely Karma.

❖ Stoll (2002), in his paper has mentioned that companies that contribute to charitable organizations rightly hope that their philanthropic work will also be good for the bottom line. Marketers of good corporate conduct must be especially careful, however, to market such conduct in a morally acceptable fashion. Although marketers typically engage in mild deception or take artistic license when marketing goods and services, these sorts of practices are far more morally troublesome when used to market good corporate conduct. I argue that although mild deception is not substantially worrisome with respect to the marketing of most goods and services, it is a far greater moral blunder to use such methods in the marketing of good corporate character. These erode trust and demonstrate a lack of adequate respect for the moral good. In light of these concerns, I suggest that such practices must be re-examined when applied to the marketing of corporate character and good conduct. Finally, I develop a revised set of ethical guidelines that are needed in order to address the problems peculiar to the marketing of morally praiseworthy behavior.

❖ According to Palmer and Hedberg (2013), A conventional perspective in marketing ethics posits that marketing goods to particularly vulnerable populations in ways that exploit their vulnerabilities is morally unacceptable. Brenkert's influential article, "Marketing and the Vulnerable," provides a strong foundation for this view, which has become well-established in the field of marketing ethics. In this paper, we delve deeper into the topic of marketing to vulnerable

populations by critically examining the core arguments presented by Brenkert.

- ❖ Rajan, K.P.S. (2016) in his paper 'Marketing Ethics', analyzes how marketers leverage their dual-background to evaluate and uncover opportunities for ethical marketing. The conclusion emphasizes the importance of ethical marketing in fostering customer loyalty and building a strong brand reputation. As ethics permeate all professions, marketers must adhere to ethical codes of conduct in all their endeavors.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE:

In today's globalized and highly competitive market environment, the role of ethics in marketing has become increasingly significant. Businesses are not only evaluated based on their financial performance but also on their ethical conduct and social responsibility. The concept of 'Dharma,' rooted in ancient Indian philosophy, provides a unique lens through which ethical marketing can be understood and practiced. Dharma, often translated as duty, righteousness, or moral law, emphasizes the importance of ethical behavior, social responsibility, and the pursuit of a just and equitable society. In the Indian context, the integration of Dharma into business practices is not a novel idea. Many Indian companies have traditionally incorporated ethical principles inspired by Dharma into their operations and marketing strategies. However, the formal study of how Dharma can influence modern ethical marketing practices is still in its nascent stages. This research aims to explore the integration of Dharma into marketing strategies and how it can lead to more ethical and sustainable business practices.

There are several reasons behind integrating Dharma into Ethical marketing behavior. Some are listed below:

1. Growing Consumer Awareness and Demand for Ethical Practices: Consumers today are more informed and conscious about the ethical aspects of

the products and services they purchase. They demand transparency, fairness, and social responsibility from businesses. Studying Dharma and ethical marketing can provide insights into how companies can meet these consumer expectations while maintaining their competitiveness.

2. Cultural Relevance in Indian Context: India has a rich cultural heritage, and the principles of Dharma are deeply embedded in its societal values. By aligning marketing practices with these principles, companies can resonate more deeply with Indian consumers, fostering trust and loyalty.

3. Sustainable Business Practices: Ethical marketing grounded in Dharma can lead to sustainable business practices. Dharma encourages businesses to consider the long-term impacts of their actions on society and the environment, promoting sustainability and corporate social responsibility.

4. Addressing Ethical Dilemmas: The marketing field is fraught with ethical dilemmas, such as misleading advertising, exploitation, and privacy concerns. Dharma provides a comprehensive ethical framework that can help marketers navigate these challenges and make morally sound decisions.

In today's global marketplace, there is an increasing scrutiny on the ethical practices of businesses. Traditional marketing strategies often prioritize profit maximization, sometimes at the expense of ethical considerations such as honesty, transparency, sustainability, and social responsibility. This can lead to consumer mistrust, brand damage, and negative social responsibility. There is a need to explore alternative frameworks that can guide business towards more ethical practices.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE:

- ✓ To understand the concept of Dharma and its relevance to modern business practices.
- ✓ To delineate the principles of ethical

marketing and how they align with the concept of Dharma.

- ✓ To examine how Indian companies, incorporate Dharma in their marketing strategies.
- ✓ To explore how sustainability initiatives are incorporated into Dharma-based marketing strategies

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION:

Data used in this research is secondary data, collected from company reports, academic journals, social media and online platforms, news media and periodicals.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

This study is significant because it seeks to address the gap between profit-driven marketing and the growing demand for ethical business practices. By integrating Dharma - a concept rooted in Indian philosophy that encompasses duty, righteousness, and moral values - into marketing, businesses can adopt a more holistic approach that aligns with ethical principles and societal well-being. The findings could provide a valuable framework for

businesses worldwide, offering a blueprint for ethical marketing that goes beyond compliance to foster genuine trust and long-term sustainability.

Importance of Dharma in Ethical Marketing:

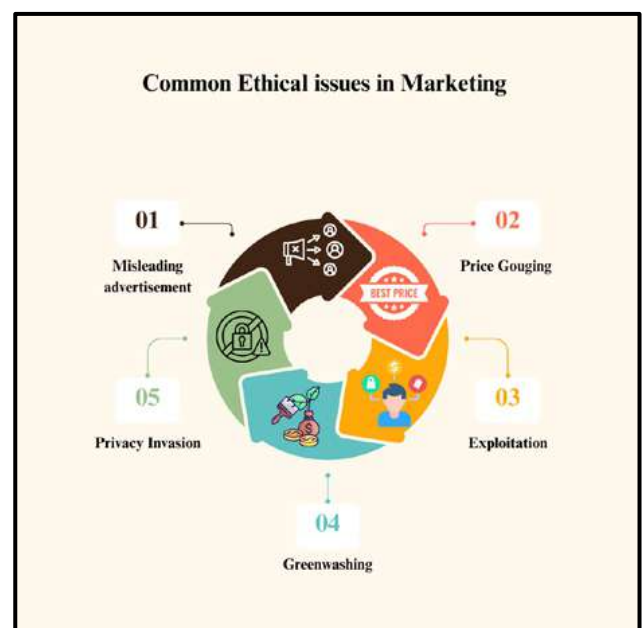
Integrating Dharma into Ethical marketing implies conducting business in a way that upholds these principles of righteousness, duty, and moral order, it means being transparent, fair, and socially responsible in all marketing practices. By aligning business strategies with Dharma, companies can build trust, foster long-term relationships, and contribute positively to society and the environment.

Overview of Ethical Marketing:

Ethical marketing refers to the practice of promoting products and services in a manner that is honest, transparent, and socially responsible. Ethical marketing involves integrating ethical principles into all the aspects of marketing, from product development and advertising to sales and customer service. Ethical marketing aims to build trust and long-term relationships with consumers by prioritizing their well-being and respecting societal norms and values.



Importance of Ethical Marketing:



Common Ethical Issues in Marketing:

Relationship between Dharma and Marketing:

The relationship between Dharma and marketing is a complicated and evolving concept, especially within the context of ethical and holistic business practices. Dharma, in its essence, refers to the moral and ethical duties that guide individuals and organizations. When integrated into marketing, it promotes a framework where business practices are aligned with ethical standards and social responsibilities. Here are some important aspects of this relationship:

1. Dharma emphasizes truthfulness by honest advertising and transparent communication with consumers, avoiding deceptive practices and exaggerations. It upholds ethical integrity which means messages should be consistent with the actual quality and performance of products or services, fostering trust and long-term customer relationships.

2. Marketing strategies influenced by Dharma often prioritize community welfare, promoting products and services that benefit society. This can include environmentally friendly products, socially beneficial services, or initiatives that give back to the community. Ethical marketing under Dharma advocates for sustainable practices that do not harm the environment, ensuring that business growth does not come at the expense of ecological well-being.

3. Dharmic approach respects consumer rights and dignity, ensuring fair treatment, privacy, and the provision of accurate information. It ensures that products and services are priced fairly and justly, without exploiting consumers, aligns with the principles of Dharma.

4. Marketing strategies informed by Dharma often adopt a holistic approach that considers the well-being of all stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, and the broader community. Instead of focusing solely on short-term gains, dharmic marketing emphasizes long-term relationships and sustainable success.

INSTANCES OF COMPANIES THAT INTEGRATE DHARMA INTO THEIR MARKETING PRACTICES:

1. Tata Group

The Tata Group's "Leadership with Trust" campaign is a powerful statement of its commitment to ethical business practices, social responsibility, and long-term value creation. It highlights the group's focus on establishing trust with its stakeholders, including customers, employees, shareholders, and the communities it operates in. This campaign reflects the Tata Group's core values, which are deeply rooted in the philosophy of its founder, Jamsetji Tata. These values include truthfulness, excellence, innovation, and social responsibility. The group's commitment to these values has enabled it to build a strong reputation for trust and reliability over the years. TATA group has consistently demonstrated its commitment to ethical business practices, even during challenging times. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Tata Group played a crucial role in supporting India's fight against the virus. It donated billions of rupees to relief efforts, set up COVID-19 testing facilities, and produced essential medical supplies.

2. Amul

Amul is a prominent Indian dairy cooperative society, known for its high-quality dairy products. It's owned by the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), a cooperative body representing millions of milk producers in Gujarat. "Amul, the Taste of India" campaign is synonymous with the brand itself. It's a tagline that encapsulates Amul's deep-rooted connection with Indian culture and its position as a beloved household name.

This campaign has been instrumental in shaping Amul's brand identity and making it a cultural icon.

3. Infosys

Infosys has a comprehensive Code of Conduct that

outlines ethical guidelines for all employees. This code emphasizes integrity, transparency, and fairness in all business dealings. The company actively engages in various social initiatives, such as education, healthcare, and environmental conservation.

They prioritize the well-being of its employees, offering fair compensation, safe working conditions, and opportunities for professional development. It promotes sustainable business practices, including energy efficiency, waste reduction, and responsible resource consumption.

4. FabIndia

FabIndia is a prominent Indian lifestyle brand known for its commitment to ethical and sustainable practices. It directly sources products from rural artisans and craftspeople, eliminating middlemen and ensuring fair practices for the producers reflecting Duty (Karma) and compassion (Karuna). The company adheres to fair trade principles, provisioning fair wages, safe working conditions, and opportunities for skill development to its artisans. By working with rural artisans and communities, FabIndia contributes to economic development and poverty alleviation in rural areas. The brand empowers women artisans by providing them with sustainable livelihoods and opportunities for growth. The company promotes eco-friendly production methods, reducing waste, minimizing the use of harmful chemicals.

5. Hindustan Unilever

Hindustan Unilever Limited is a leading Indian Fast-Moving consumer goods company. Hindustan Unilever's Project Shakti is a remarkable initiative aimed at empowering underprivileged rural women in India by provisioning them with entrepreneurial opportunities while expanding the company's rural distribution network.

- Women from self-help groups are selected trained to become "Shakti Ammas"

- HUL provides training in basic sales and distribution, communication skills, and product knowledge.
- Shakti Amma purchases HUL products in bulk at a wholesale price and sells them in their villages, earning a margin on sales.
- HUL offers ongoing mentoring and logistical support, including access to mobile tools for business tracking.

6. Godrej group:

The "Good and Green" initiative by the Godrej Group is a strategic sustainability and social responsibility program aimed at fostering inclusive growth while addressing environmental and social challenges. Launched in 2010, it aligns with the groups vision of creating a more sustainable and equitable future by integrating sustainability (Green) and Social good (Good) into their business operations.

Key pillars of the "Good and Green" Campaign include Ensuring Employability, creating a Greener India, Innovating for Good and Green Products.

7. Patanjali Ayurved

Patanjali Ayurved, an Indian multinational consumer packaged goods company, is renowned for its integration of dharma into its marketing practices. The company's marketing strategies are deeply rooted in traditional Indian values and Ayurveda, which are key components of dharma. Here are several ways Patanjali incorporates dharma into its marketing:

- Promotion of Ayurveda and Natural Products
- Cultural and Ethical Messaging
- Health and Wellness Advocacy
- Swadeshi Movement
- Social Responsibility

8. Mahindra Group

The Mahindra Group's initiative "Rise for Good" is part of their broader philosophy of "Rise," which

focuses on driving positive change and empowering people to rise above their challenges. This initiative embodies the group's commitment to creating a positive impact on society through various corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities and community engagement programs.

Some key aspects of the “Rise for Good” initiatives are:

- **Education and Skill Development:** Mahindra Group places a strong emphasis on education and skill development. They have initiatives like Nanhi Kali, which supports the education of underprivileged girls in India, and Mahindra Pride Schools, which provide vocational training to youth from socially and economically disadvantaged communities.
- **Health and Wellness:** The group supports various health and wellness programs aimed at improving healthcare access and outcomes. Initiatives include mobile health clinics, eye care camps, and support for primary healthcare centers in rural areas.
- **Sustainability and Environment:** Mahindra Group is committed to environmental sustainability. Their initiatives focus on renewable energy, water conservation, and waste management. They have projects like Mahindra Hariyali, which aims to plant one million trees every year.
- **Community Development**

9. Reliance Industries:

Reliance Industries, one of India's largest conglomerates, has been involved in various social campaigns and initiatives that reflect an integration of dharma or ethical principles into their marketing practices. While the concept of "dharma" in marketing can be broad, it often encompasses promoting ethical behavior, social responsibility, and contributing to societal well-being. Reliance Industries invest significantly in various community development programs, including education,

healthcare, rural transformation, and environmental sustainability. Reliance Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Reliance Industries, runs several educational programs to improve literacy and education quality in rural and underprivileged areas. They operate initiatives such as Reliance Foundation Drishti, which provides free eye care, and the Sir H.N.

Reliance Foundation Hospital and Research Centre, which offers world-class medical services. The Bharat India Jodo (BIJ) initiative focuses on enhancing the livelihoods of rural populations through sustainable agriculture, water conservation, and skill development. Reliance Industries emphasizes sustainable development through its environmental initiatives. They have undertaken several projects to reduce their carbon footprint, promote renewable energy, and ensure efficient use of natural resources.

10. Wipro

Wipro, a leading global technology company, has a strong commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) through its entity, Wipro Cares. Their initiatives focus on several key areas:

- Education
- Healthcare
- Environment
- Disaster relief and Rehabilitation

Listed below are some of the notable initiative designed by Wipro:

- i. Wipro Earthian: A national level program focused on sustainability education.
- ii. Wipro Cares Foundation: A not-for-profit trust that engages with communities and supports long-term rehabilitation efforts.
- iii. Wipro Consumer Care CSR: Focuses on education, disaster relief, and community healthcare.

11. ITC Limited

ITC's E-Choupal initiative is a groundbreaking digital platform that empowers rural farmers in India. It has revolutionized the way farmers connect with markets, access information, and improve their livelihoods.

- Direct Farmer-to-Market Connectivity
- Information Access
- Skill Development:
- Community Engagement
- Financial Inclusion

CONCLUSION:

This research paper delves into the profound intersection of Dharma, an ancient Indian philosophical concept, and contemporary marketing practices. By examining the core principles of Dharma, such as righteousness, truthfulness, and social responsibility, we have explored how these principles can be applied to modern marketing strategies.

The study reveals that integrating Dharma into marketing can lead to a more ethical, sustainable, and socially conscious approach. By adhering to Dharma's principles, marketers can build stronger brand reputations, foster long-term customer relationships, and contribute positively to society.

Prominent findings from this research include:

- ❖ Ethical Decision-Making: Dharma provides a moral compass for marketers, guiding them to make ethical choices in their professional endeavors.
- ❖ Social Responsibility: Dharma encourages marketers to consider the social and environmental impact of their actions, promoting sustainability and community welfare.
- ❖ Customer-Centric Approach: Dharma emphasizes the importance of treating customers with respect and fairness, fostering trust and loyalty.
- ❖ Employee Well-being: Dharma promotes a

workplace culture that values employee well-being and ethical conduct.

- ❖ Long-Term Sustainability: By aligning with Dharma's principles, marketers can build sustainable businesses that contribute to the overall well-being of society.

In conclusion, the integration of Dharma into marketing practices offers a holistic approach that transcends traditional profit-driven models. By embracing the values of righteousness, truthfulness, and social responsibility, marketers can create a more ethical, sustainable, and meaningful marketing landscape.

Dharma, with its profound emphasis on ethical conduct, reminds us that marketing isn't just about selling products or services; it's about building relationships, fostering trust, and creating a legacy of genuine value.

Ethical marketing is essential for building trust, enhancing brand reputation, and fostering long-term consumer relationships. By adhering to principles of honesty, fairness, social responsibility, and transparency, companies can create value for their customers and contribute positively to society. Implementing ethical marketing strategies requires a commitment to ongoing education, consumer engagement, and a steadfast dedication to doing what is right.

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