

**IMPACT OF CORPORATE PROPAGANDA ON BRAND
TRUST, CORPORATE REPUTATION IN
INDIAN BUSINESS HOUSES**



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Abstract

The research (inspecting) exploring the link between Corporate Propaganda and Indian Business Houses (IBHs) and its bearing on Brand Trust and reputation is (scarce) rare as studies in the role of trustworthiness in managing reputation of IBH have not been undertaken in a consistent manner. An exhaustive literature review of available resources reveals the absence of any pre-existing work that has examined the activities of IBHs from the perspective (and as a means to generate) of Brand Trust generation. Corporate Propaganda has been leveraged by IBHs as a tool to help them grow from being identified as local trading entities to being transformed as multinational corporations. The study traces the changing stance of IBH communication and their growth trajectory from trading entities to managing agents progressing to industrialist and multinational corporations.

In this study, we focused on the elements of Corporate Propaganda that impact Brand Trust in twenty IBHs identified based on five research reports, namely Brand Finance 2018, BrandZ India 2018-Millward Brown, Inter Brand Survey 2018, and Brand Trust Report 2018, derived from the Trust Research Advisory. In addition, we validated the parameters of market capitalization, brand valuation, segment leadership, and generational leadership from available resources. The sources of market capitalization, brand valuation and segment leadership have been collated from research reports published in Business magazines including international magazines and reports on financial web portals, BSE, Money control, Rediff money, etc. Generational leadership information is traced from the organizational history published on corporate website

Corporate narratives derived from available resources such as press releases, advertisements, marketing literature, SEBI disclosures, Chairman/CEO/MD messages, management discussions in annual general reports were carefully examined for propaganda themes. These themes were derived using methodologies of word cloud, discourse markers,

reoccurrence of phrases and persuasive rhetoric on websites. Consequently, themes such as green/sustainability, finance, corporate governance, advertising, marketing, human resource management, corporate social responsibility, and generational leadership emerged. The examination of narrative reveals that Corporates use economic development and employment to mask the damages caused to the environment by the non-compliance of regulations. Corporate stories loaded with the founders' contribution to nation-building and pioneering efforts legitimize the use of national resources and help sway public sentiments for capitalistic gains.

Analysis of collected data streams reveals IBHs circumvent the issues exposed in their financial reporting by controlling the media to influence stakeholders by using propaganda narratives for leveraging and defending their actions. Corporate governance and leadership emerging from the promoter family offering transparent, credible, and accountable reporting have been challenging for the IBHs. The use of family names as corporate brand names and vice versa and in the process ensuring the legitimacy of the business leader forms an integral part of corporate communication. The goals of corporate propagandist or communicator can broadly be classified into long and short term strategic goals - the primary being offering cognitive shortcut be it for product, service or organisational branding and the long term goal being defence and strengthening the position of the organisation or the brand to become iconic or near monopoly by inducing behavioural or ideological changes in the target group.

Propaganda tools are used in advertising and marketing to offer cognitive shortcuts, arresting the option to exercise free will, and to seek behavioural changes; establish monopoly, which is the ultimate goal of every marketer and a goal of IBHs too. IBHs are increasingly using employee branding and corporate social responsibility (CSR) to promote their brands legitimizing the action and freezing social scrutiny, to generate credibility for their actions. This trend has developed in the past two decades and is gaining momentum

with the use of refined propaganda techniques. CSR (is also) used as a strategic tool (Porter, 2006) to sustain businesses, to build Brand Trust, to invest in social capital for averting crises, and to safeguard long-term business interests, all of which together act as stimuli to establish Brand Trust.

Based on their corporate operations and interrelatedness, the emerging themes are organised in four broad categories. (into four sections,) They are

a) Green Propaganda and Capitalist Propaganda Regime focusing on the use of natural resources by corporations for capitalistic gains presenting incomplete picture to the consumers and policy makers.

b) Propaganda in Finance and Corporate Governance (Propaganda) which emphasizes on the issue of management of finance and investor capital, issues of ethics and corporate governance norms its implementation and implication.

c) Propaganda through Advertising and Marketing. Corporations using use mediums and tricks to offer cognitive shortcut and to take advantage of ignorant consumers. They also use brand power to maximize gains.

d) Propaganda in Human Resource and Corporate Social Responsibility which deals with the use of self-governance and policy influence to fulfill the goals of IBHs, use of CSR as a PR and Marketing tool. This rhetoric of the emergent themes was appraised on the three variables of Truth, Clarity, and Actions to evaluate their effectiveness in brand trust building and reputation management as researched and as reflected in academic and corporate literature also established as an evaluating parameter by the international brand advisory brandtrust.com.

This study is a novel attempt and contributes to praxis of corporate communication for brand trust and reputation management. Hence, a narrative analysis based on secondary

sources would not have done full justice to the subject. Therefore, a second study based on primary data was undertaken to validate the findings from the narrative analysis to develop theoretical proposition by interviewing industry experts as former directors of conglomerates, heads of digital media, advertisement agencies, brand, CSR, and Corporate sustainability managers, public relations practitioners, partners in proxy firms (with a minimum experience of 15 years in respective fields). One-to-one interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire, and replies were transcribed and analyzed to derive inferences and develop propositions related to Brand Trust and corporate reputation.

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