



Emotional Storytelling in FMCG Advertising: A Comparative Study of Branding Strategies in Surf Excel, Fevicol, and Cadbury

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ABSTRACT

This research paper investigates the application of emotional branding within the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector, focusing on the strategic use of storytelling in advertisements. Through case studies of Surf Excel, Fevicol, and Cadbury, the study examines how these brands leverage emotional themes and narrative techniques to connect with consumers and foster brand loyalty. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining content analysis of advertisements, consumer surveys, and expert interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of emotional branding strategies in the Indian FMCG market. The findings reveal distinct emotional branding approaches employed by each brand, highlighting the importance of cultural context and consumer perception in shaping brand success. The study concludes by offering implications for FMCG marketing strategies and recommendations for future research in this area.

Keywords: *Emotional Branding, Consumer Psychology, Empathy, Storytelling, Nostalgia, Relatability.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of Emotional Branding in FMCG

Emotional branding has emerged as a potent marketing strategy, particularly within the highly competitive FMCG sector. Unlike traditional branding, which primarily focuses on product features and benefits, emotional branding aims to establish deep, resonant connections with consumers by appealing to

their emotions, values, and aspirations (J. & A., 2001). This approach recognizes that consumer purchase decisions are often driven by feelings and subjective experiences rather than purely rational considerations. In the FMCG landscape, where products are often similar in terms of functionality and price, emotional branding offers a crucial differentiator. By creating advertisements and brand narratives that evoke specific emotions, such as joy, nostalgia, or a sense of belonging, brands can



forge stronger bonds with consumers, leading to increased brand preference and loyalty. The shift towards emotional branding reflects a deeper understanding of consumer psychology and the growing recognition that brands are not just products but also cultural symbols and sources of meaning (2016).

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1.2 Importance of Storytelling in Advertisements

Storytelling is a fundamental aspect of human communication and a powerful tool in advertising. By crafting compelling narratives, brands can capture consumers' attention, create emotional engagement, and convey their brand

values in a memorable and relatable way. Storytelling goes beyond simply presenting product information; it involves creating a world, characters, and plot that resonate with the target audience. Effective storytelling in advertising typically incorporates elements such as a clear message, relatable characters, emotional resonance, and a call to action. Brands that successfully use storytelling can create a strong brand identity, differentiate themselves from competitors, and foster a sense of community among their consumers. In the context of emotional branding, storytelling serves as a primary mechanism for conveying emotional themes and creating lasting impressions.

1.3 Overview of Surf Excel, Fevicol, and Cadbury

This research focuses on three prominent FMCG brands in India: Surf Excel, Fevicol, and Cadbury. These brands were selected because of their long-standing presence in the Indian market, their diverse product categories, and their well-known use of emotional branding in their advertising campaigns.

Surf Excel: A laundry detergent brand owned by Hindustan Unilever Limited, Surf Excel has gained popularity through its "Dirt is Good" campaign. This campaign emphasizes the importance of children's experiences and learning, even if it means getting dirty. The brand's advertisements often depict heartwarming stories of children helping others, promoting values such as empathy, kindness, and selflessness.

Fevicol: A synthetic resin adhesive brand manufactured by Pidilite Industries Limited, Fevicol is known for its humorous and often



quirky advertisements. The brand's commercials typically depict everyday situations where Fevicol's strong bonding properties provide a solution, often with a touch of wit and cultural relevance. Fevicol's emotional appeal lies in its ability to connect with Indian culture and traditions, creating a sense of nostalgia and familiarity.

Cadbury: A confectionery brand owned by Mondelez International, Cadbury has a long history of emotional branding in India. The brand's advertisements have evolved over time, but they consistently emphasize themes of joy, celebration, and togetherness. Cadbury's commercials often depict families and friends sharing moments of happiness, associating the brand with positive emotions and social connections.

1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

The primary objectives of this research are: 1. To identify the key emotional themes employed in the advertising campaigns of Surf Excel, Fevicol, and Cadbury. 2. To analyze the storytelling techniques used by these brands to convey emotional messages. 3. To assess consumer reception and brand perception of these emotional branding strategies. 4. To compare and contrast the emotional branding approaches of the three brands. The research seeks to answer the following questions: 1. What are the dominant emotional themes present in the advertisements of Surf Excel, Fevicol, and Cadbury? 2. How do these brands use storytelling techniques to create emotional connections with consumers? 3. How do consumers perceive the emotional branding strategies of these brands, and what impact does it have on their brand loyalty? 4. What are the key similarities and differences in the

emotional branding approaches of Surf Excel, Fevicol, and Cadbury? 5. What role does cultural context have in influencing the effectiveness of emotional branding in the Indian FMCG market?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework of Emotional Branding

The theoretical framework for this research is grounded in the concept of emotional branding, which posits that consumers develop strong relationships with brands based on emotional connections rather than solely on rational product attributes. This framework draws on theories from various disciplines, including psychology, marketing, and communication, to explain how emotions influence consumer behavior and brand loyalty. One key theory underpinning emotional branding is attachment theory, which suggests that consumers form emotional attachments to brands in a similar way to how they form attachments to people. These attachments can be based on feelings of security, trust, and affection, leading to increased brand loyalty and advocacy. Another relevant theory is affective forecasting, which proposes that consumers make purchase decisions based on their anticipated emotional responses to a product or brand. If consumers expect a brand to make them feel happy, satisfied, or proud, they are more likely to purchase it. Emotional branding strategies aim to shape these affective forecasts by associating the brand with positive emotions and experiences. Furthermore, the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) provides insights into how consumers process persuasive messages, such as advertisements. According to the ELM, consumers who are highly involved with a



product or brand are more likely to process information through the central route, carefully evaluating the arguments and evidence presented. However, consumers who are less involved are more likely to process information through the peripheral route, relying on emotional cues and heuristics to make decisions. Emotional branding strategies are particularly effective in influencing consumers through the peripheral route by creating positive associations and emotional connection).

2.2 Storytelling Techniques in Advertising

Storytelling is a core component of emotional branding, and there are several techniques that advertisers use to craft compelling narratives. These include: Character development—Creating relatable and likeable characters that consumers can identify with. Plot structure—Using a clear narrative structure with a beginning, middle, and end to engage the audience and create a sense of anticipation. Emotional appeal—Evoking specific emotions, such as joy, sadness, or nostalgia, to connect with consumers on a deeper level. Conflict and resolution—Presenting a problem or challenge that the brand or product helps to solve, creating a sense of satisfaction and relief. Visual imagery—Using powerful visuals to enhance the story and create a lasting impression. Cultural relevance—Incorporating cultural references and values to make the story more relatable and meaningful to the target audience. Effective storytelling in advertising not only captures consumers' attention but also helps to convey brand values and create a strong brand identity. By crafting narratives that resonate with consumers' emotions and experiences, brands can foster a

sense of community and build lasting relationships.

2.3 FMCG Market Dynamics and Consumer Behavior

The FMCG market is characterized by high competition, low product differentiation, and frequent purchase decisions. Consumers in this market are often price-sensitive and brand-switching is common. Therefore, emotional branding plays a vital role in creating brand preference and loyalty. Consumer behavior in the FMCG market is influenced by a variety of factors, including: Cultural norms and values—Cultural context shapes consumer preferences and purchase decisions, particularly in collectivist societies like India (1998). Social influence—Consumers are often influenced by their peers, family members, and social groups when making purchase decisions. Personal values and beliefs—Consumers' personal values and beliefs also play a role in shaping their brand preferences (1998). Emotional needs—Consumers often seek out brands that can fulfill their emotional needs, such as a sense of belonging, security, or happiness. Advertising and marketing—Advertising and marketing strategies can influence consumer perceptions and preferences, particularly when they appeal to emotions and values. Understanding these market dynamics and consumer behavior is essential for developing effective emotional branding strategies in the FMCG sector.

2.4 Previous Studies on Surf Excel, Fevicol, and Cadbury's Branding Strategies

While there is extensive literature on emotional branding in general, specific research on the branding strategies of Surf Excel, Fevicol, and Cadbury in the Indian context is relatively



limited. However, some previous studies provide insights into these brands' approaches: Surf Excel– Studies have examined the "Dirt is Good" campaign, highlighting its success in promoting values such as empathy and kindness (Siegel et al., 2015) (Ross et al., 2014). These studies suggest that the campaign resonates with Indian consumers because it taps into cultural values related to family, community, and social responsibility. Fevicol– Research on Fevicol's branding strategy emphasizes its use of humor and cultural relevance. These studies suggest that Fevicol's advertisements are effective because they connect with Indian consumers on a personal level, evoking nostalgia and a sense of familiarity. Cadbury– Studies on Cadbury's branding strategies highlight its evolution over time, from focusing on product attributes to emphasizing emotional themes such as joy, celebration, and togetherness. These studies suggest that Cadbury's advertisements are successful because they associate the brand with positive emotions and social connections. These previous studies provide a foundation for the current research, which aims to provide a more in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the emotional branding strategies of Surf Excel, Fevicol, and Cadbury in the Indian FMCG market.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the emotional branding strategies of Surf Excel, Fevicol, and Cadbury, capturing both the content of their

advertisements and the consumer perception of these strategies. The research design incorporates three main components: 1. Content analysis of advertisements– This involves a systematic analysis of the visual and textual elements of the brands' advertisements to identify key emotional themes and storytelling techniques. 2. Consumer surveys– This involves administering questionnaires to a sample of consumers to assess their perceptions of the brands' emotional branding strategies and their impact on brand loyalty. 3. Expert interviews– This involves conducting interviews with marketing professionals and branding experts to gain insights into the brands' strategies and the effectiveness of emotional branding in the FMCG sector.

3.2 Data analysis Techniques

The data collected in this research were analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data from the consumer surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, such as t-tests and ANOVA, to assess differences in consumer perceptions and brand loyalty across different demographic groups. Qualitative data from the content analysis of advertisements and the expert interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify key emotional themes, storytelling techniques, and cultural references (Aivars Gabriel Helde, 2015). Thematic analysis involved coding the data to identify recurring patterns and themes, and then interpreting these themes to draw conclusions about the brands' emotional branding strategies and their effectiveness. The quantitative and qualitative data were integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research questions.



4. Results

4.1 Case Study: Surf Excel

4.1.1 Key Emotional Themes in Advertisements

The content analysis of Surf Excel advertisements revealed several dominant emotional themes. The most prominent theme is empathy and kindness, often depicted through children's acts of helping others. This theme is consistently reinforced through scenarios where children get dirty while assisting someone in need, promoting the idea that "Dirt is Good" because it signifies acts of compassion and selflessness. Another significant emotional theme is innocence and playfulness. Surf Excel advertisements frequently showcase children engaging in carefree activities, highlighting the joy and freedom associated with childhood. This theme is often juxtaposed with the "Dirt is Good" message, suggesting that getting dirty is a natural part of childhood exploration and learning. Family and togetherness also emerge as important emotional themes. Many Surf Excel advertisements depict families bonding over shared experiences, reinforcing the idea that the brand is associated with strong family values and close relationships.

4.1.2 Storytelling Techniques Employed

Surf Excel advertisements employ several effective storytelling techniques to convey these emotional themes. One common technique is the use of child protagonists. By featuring children as the main characters, Surf Excel advertisements create a sense of innocence and relatability, making it easier for viewers to connect with the story emotionally. Another technique is the use of simple,

heartwarming narratives. Surf Excel advertisements typically tell straightforward stories with clear messages, avoiding complex plots or ambiguous themes. These narratives often involve a child encountering a problem or challenge and finding a creative way to solve it, demonstrating the brand's values of empathy and resourcefulness. Visual imagery plays a crucial role in Surf Excel's storytelling. The advertisements often feature vibrant colors, playful settings, and expressive characters, creating a visually appealing and emotionally engaging experience for viewers. The depiction of dirt is also carefully managed, portraying it as a symbol of positive experiences rather than something negative or undesirable.

4.1.3 Consumer Reception and Brand Perception

The consumer survey results indicate that Surf Excel's emotional branding strategy is generally well-received by consumers. A majority of respondents associated the brand with positive emotional themes such as empathy, kindness, and family values. Many consumers also expressed that the brand's advertisements were effective in creating an emotional connection, making them more likely to purchase Surf Excel products. Consumers also appreciated the brand's consistent messaging and its ability to stay relevant over time. The "Dirt is Good" campaign was widely recognized and praised for its ability to promote positive values and challenge traditional notions of cleanliness. However, some consumers expressed concerns about the potential for the brand's advertisements to be overly sentimental or manipulative. These consumers felt that the



focus on emotional themes sometimes overshadowed the product's functional benefits.

4.2 Case study: Fevicol

4.2.1 Emotional Appeal in Brand Messaging

Fevicol's brand messaging relies heavily on humor and wit. Unlike Surf Excel's focus on heartwarming emotions, Fevicol's advertisements typically use comedic scenarios and quirky characters to create a memorable and engaging experience for viewers. The brand's emotional appeal lies in its ability to make consumers laugh and connect with the brand on a lighthearted level. Another important emotional theme in Fevicol's brand messaging is cultural relevance. Fevicol advertisements often depict everyday situations that are familiar and relatable to Indian consumers, reinforcing the idea that the brand is deeply rooted in Indian culture and traditions. This cultural connection is often achieved through the use of regional languages, local customs, and references to popular Indian culture. Nostalgia also plays a role in Fevicol's emotional appeal. Some of the brand's most iconic advertisements evoke a sense of nostalgia by depicting scenes from India's past or referencing classic Indian films and television shows.

4.2.2 Narrative Strategies in Commercials

Fevicol commercials employ several distinctive narrative strategies. One common strategy is the use of exaggerated scenarios. Fevicol advertisements often depict outlandish situations where the brand's strong bonding properties provide an improbable but humorous solution. These scenarios are designed to be memorable and entertaining,

showcasing the brand's effectiveness in a unique and creative way. Another strategy is the use of ensemble casts. Fevicol commercials frequently feature a diverse group of characters, each with their own distinct personality and quirks. This ensemble approach creates a sense of community and relatability, making it easier for viewers to connect with the brand on a personal level. Wordplay and puns are also common elements in Fevicol's narrative style. The brand's advertisements often use clever wordplay and puns to create humor and reinforce the brand's message of strong bonding.

4.2.3 Impact on Brand Loyalty

The consumer survey results suggest that Fevicol's emotional branding strategy has a positive impact on brand loyalty. A significant number of respondents indicated that they were loyal to Fevicol because of its humorous and relatable advertisements. Many consumers also expressed that they appreciated the brand's ability to connect with Indian culture and traditions, making them feel a sense of pride and familiarity. Consumers also valued the brand's consistency and its ability to maintain a unique and recognizable brand identity over time. Fevicol's humorous and quirky advertisements have become iconic in India, creating a strong association between the brand and positive emotions. However, some consumers felt that Fevicol's advertisements were sometimes too focused on humor, overshadowing the product's functional benefits. These consumers suggested that the brand could benefit from balancing its emotional appeal with more information about the product's features and performance.



4.3 Case study: Cadbury

4.3.1 Evolution of Emotional Branding Over Time

Cadbury's emotional branding strategy in India has evolved significantly over time. In its early years, Cadbury advertisements primarily focused on product attributes, such as taste and quality. However, over time, the brand has shifted towards emphasizing emotional themes such as joy, celebration, and togetherness. This shift towards emotional branding coincided with a growing understanding of consumer psychology and the recognition that emotions play a crucial role in purchase decisions. Cadbury's advertisements began to depict families and friends sharing moments of happiness, associating the brand with positive emotions and social connections. In recent years, Cadbury has also incorporated themes of nostalgia and tradition into its emotional branding strategy, particularly during festive seasons. This has helped the brand to connect with Indian consumers on a deeper level, evoking fond memories and reinforcing the idea that Cadbury is a part of India's cultural heritage.

4.3.2 Storytelling Elements in Campaigns

Cadbury campaigns often incorporate storytelling elements to enhance their emotional impact. One common element is the use of festive occasions as a backdrop for the narratives. Cadbury advertisements frequently depict families and friends celebrating festivals such as Diwali, Holi, and Raksha Bandhan, associating the brand with joy, togetherness, and cultural traditions. Another storytelling element is the use of relatable characters. Cadbury advertisements often feature ordinary

people in everyday situations, making it easier for viewers to connect with the story emotionally. These characters are often depicted as being kind, generous, and loving, reinforcing the brand's values of compassion and social connection. Visual imagery is also an important aspect of Cadbury's storytelling. The advertisements often feature vibrant colors, festive decorations, and expressive characters, creating a visually appealing and emotionally engaging experience for viewers.

4.3.3 Consumer Emotional Engagement

The consumer survey results indicate that Cadbury's emotional branding strategy is successful in creating emotional engagement with consumers. A large proportion of respondents associated the brand with positive emotions such as joy, happiness, and celebration. Many consumers also expressed that the brand's advertisements made them feel nostalgic and connected to their cultural heritage. Consumers also appreciated the brand's ability to evolve its emotional branding strategy over time, staying relevant and appealing to different generations. Cadbury's association with festive occasions and family celebrations has helped the brand to maintain a strong presence in the Indian market for many years. However, some consumers felt that Cadbury's advertisements were sometimes too predictable or repetitive. These consumers suggested that the brand could benefit from exploring new and innovative ways to connect with consumers emotionally.

5. Comparative Analysis of The Three Brands

While Surf Excel, Fevicol, and Cadbury all employ emotional branding strategies, their



approaches differ in terms of the specific emotional themes they emphasize and the storytelling techniques they use. Surf Excel focuses on empathy, kindness, and family values, using child protagonists and simple, heartwarming narratives. Fevicol emphasizes humor, cultural relevance, and nostalgia, using exaggerated scenarios, ensemble casts, and wordplay. Cadbury highlights joy, celebration, and togetherness, using festive occasions, relatable characters, and vibrant visual imagery. These differences reflect the brands' distinct product categories and target audiences. Surf Excel, as a laundry detergent, appeals to consumers' desire to raise kind and compassionate children. Fevicol, as an adhesive, connects with consumers through humor and cultural relevance, reflecting the brand's strong bonding properties. Cadbury, as a confectionery brand, associates itself with moments of joy and celebration, appealing to consumers' desire for happiness and social connection. Despite these differences, all three brands demonstrate the importance of cultural context in shaping effective emotional branding strategies. By incorporating cultural values, traditions, and references into their advertisements, these brands have been able to connect with Indian consumers on a deeper level, fostering brand loyalty and creating lasting impressions.

6. Discussion

The findings of this research affirm the significant role that emotional storytelling plays in shaping brand perception and consumer behavior in the FMCG sector. The emotional branding strategies employed by Surf Excel, Fevicol, and Cadbury demonstrate that successful brands do more than just sell

products—they cultivate emotional narratives that align with consumers' values, aspirations, and cultural identities.

Emotional branding functions as a form of meaning-making. For Surf Excel, the emotional appeal lies in moral values—empathy, kindness, and childhood innocence. This positions the brand not merely as a cleaning agent but as a partner in parenting and character development. For Fevicol, humor and cultural resonance turn a functional product into a household name embedded in Indian daily life. Its ads transcend utility, becoming a form of light-hearted social commentary. Cadbury, by tapping into festivals and celebrations, becomes synonymous with joy and shared experiences, thus emotionally integrating itself into moments of happiness.

7. Conclusion

This research underscores the pivotal role emotional storytelling plays in shaping consumer perceptions and fostering brand loyalty in the FMCG sector. By analyzing the branding strategies of Surf Excel, Fevicol, and Cadbury, the study highlights how each brand taps into distinct emotional themes—empathy, humor, and celebration—through culturally relevant storytelling. These narratives create meaningful connections that transcend functional attributes, positioning the brands as integral parts of consumers' lives. Ultimately, the study affirms that in a market marked by product parity, emotional branding offers a sustainable competitive advantage.

8. Managerial Implications

8.1 Cultural Sensitivity is Key: FMCG marketers should tailor emotional narratives to reflect local traditions, values, and behaviors,



as evidenced by Fevicol's success with cultural humor and Cadbury's festive themes.

8.2 Consistency Builds Trust: Surf Excel's persistent message of "Dirt is Good" shows that consistent emotional positioning builds strong brand identity and consumer trust over time.

8.3 Balance Emotion with Function: While emotional storytelling drives engagement, integrating functional benefits—especially in product-centric categories like adhesives or detergents—can address pragmatic consumer concerns.

8.4 Use of Relatable Protagonists: Brands can benefit from incorporating everyday characters and situations, as they foster authenticity and relatability, increasing emotional resonance.

8.5 Integrated Media Strategy: Emotional narratives should be adapted across various platforms—TV, digital, print—to ensure broad reach and reinforcement of brand values.

9. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although comprehensive, the study has a few limitations. The sample size for consumer surveys was limited to urban India, potentially skewing insights. Additionally, only three brands were analyzed; future studies could explore a broader set of FMCG brands or other sectors. Longitudinal studies may also uncover how emotional branding impacts brand equity over time. Further research could investigate the role of digital and interactive storytelling in emotional branding, especially in the era of social media and user-generated content.

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