

Understanding Factors Related To Voting For Reality Shows: A Framework of Cognitive Intermediation

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INTRODUCTION

Studies of organizations and stakeholders suggest that there is need of cognitive intermediation to create “Cognitively Just Organizations”. This phenomenon is well explained by the theory of cognitive intermediation (Anand, S. 2008). According to this theory of cognitive intermediation, success of organizations or products/services seem to be dependent upon their ability to create an environment for the clients -where irrespective of the socio-economic inequality, equity at the level of cognition can be delivered in terms of respect and dignified treatment. There should be equity in the treatment given to clients in terms of dignified message. So, ability of the organizations or products/services to provide cognitive justice through cognitive intermediation by process and structure of organizations/products/services is likely to define their success. The term 'cognitive justice' has been borrowed from Visvanathan's work (Visvanathan, S. 1998, 2001). In the framework of cognitive justice, one gives equal importance to people's voice across the sections of society.

In their quest for greater meaning, sustainable development and value-based management, organizations have moved from a stage where the driving force of organizations to survive was immediate gratification of basic needs and wants. 'Call to order' was only made if these basic demands could not be met, and this call lasted until the demands were made and profit margins were reinstated (Anand, S and Kumar, I, 2008). This is what is referred to as “Id of Corporations” (Anand, S., Patra B.P., and Kumar, I., 2007). With liberalization, organizations began to face the competition from the outside world and a shift from simple gratification of basic needs to striving for existence and sustainable development became paramount. Organizations realized that in order to sustain, they must come to terms with the 'Ego' and face the reality that such an existence is possible through adherence to values and ethics, which are the parameters of good behavior and thus acceptable to the society. Adherence to this behavior leads to acceptance by the society. It also makes organizations feel proud with a sense of accomplishment. The 'Ego Structure of Corporations' (Anand, S., Patra B.P., and Kumar, I., 2007) as an outcome of opening of economy in 1991 now plays a key role in the sustainable development of organizations. Organizations have now begun to realize that this higher level of consciousness (the Ego) must not only be satisfied but *that* the organization is making an attempt to satisfy it must also be communicated to the society and the world at large if the organization aims at its acceptance by the stakeholders. Such a step contributes to the development of the 'superego' structure of corporations and is termed as 'socialization of organization' (Anand, S., Patra B.P., and Kumar, I., 2007). Communicating their valued based management through their CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) policies /initiatives, VMG (Vision, Mission and Goal), etc., is one of the ways organizations attempt to socialize, their adherence is another. It is at this stage that the management principles of the west, which initially sprung from materialism, meet the management principles of the east, which are based on spiritualism (Anand, S and Kumar, I, 2008).

The principle of *The Bhagavad Gita*, viz, "*Karmanyē Vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kadachana -----*." (Do your duty and be detached from its outcome, do not be driven by the ends, but cherish the process of getting there). 2:47 *Srimad Bhagavad-Gita* (Gambhirananda, 2003), was adopted by Mahatma Gandhi in both spirit and practice. This principle still awaits its realization by most executives even today. As per this principle, managers must focus on the “action” which is always performed in the present. Fruit of an action is a futuristic event which can never happen *before* or even *with* the action. What we do today will present itself as 'result' in some future time. This future time can be soon after the action is performed or even maybe a few years after the action has been performed. Since logically, every action can be done 'now' & 'here', focusing on the future result will distract the mind from the present time while we are performing the action. In becoming anxious about the future, we not only waste our energies on an uncontrollable event (future), but we also are unable to give the present activity our entire mental focus and concentration. This is because the mind is distracted and divided in worrying about the future. An undivided mind with its focus on the

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present action is imperative for the action to become efficient and effective. Such focused action is bound to yield nothing but positive and sustainable results in future (Anand, S and Kumar, I, 2008).

The principle of *Nishkama Karma* stated in *The Bhagavad Gita* focuses on the quality of 'Karma' / action. It states that the action must be "*nishkama*" (without attachment to self i.e. 'selfless'. An action devoid of selfishness focuses on greatest good for greatest number and reflects our attitude to keep society before self. Such an attitude is possible only if the judgment is backed by serious deliberation. Mahatma Gandhi's relentless pursuit for independence beautifully reflects the influence and impact *The Bhagavad Gita* made on him. The struggle to attain freedom, with the focus on 'actions' targeted towards maximum good for maximum people, inspired by 'selfless services', is an unparalleled example of putting into practice the principles of *The Bhagavad Gita*. That it is not commitment to excellence but a commitment to self and one's understanding of that self which results in service to society rather service to self which got reflected in Mahatma Gandhi's entire struggle for freedom. The path of non-violence with its righteousness and firm moral basis proved extremely powerful in getting Independence. Gandhiji's Salt Revolution, Bhudaan movement, Fast unto Death, Dandi March, Quit India Movement are some examples. It is this principle of non-violence which exposes us to one of life's basic truth about spiritualistic management (Anand, S and Kumar, I, 2008).

THE THEORY OF G-BRANDING

In the above mentioned context, the theory of G-Branding is postulated. G-Branding is defined as Gandhian Branding which is based on the principles of Gita and have Glocal implications. The premises of 'The Theory of G-Branding' are given below:

1. The current global order, which is the result of changing geo- political context and global financial crisis, necessitates theoretical interventions from the east.
2. The context of reiteration of ethics and spirituality in business cannot be devoid of Indian Philosophy and *Gita* in general, and Gandhian actions in particular.
3. The theory of G-Branding is based upon the three key figures of archaism. The three key figures of archaism in modern India are defined as cultural knowledge, tradition, authenticity (Pandey, R. 2008).
4. Due to their classical nature, these figures of archaism are likely to define the core of branding as these have the potential to shape the dynamic capabilities of organizations. However, these dynamic capabilities need to be seen as core concurrent processes. Though these processes are concurrent, there is cyclical nature among the processes. A study by Menon (2008) describes these relationships well by showing the linkages among learning, reconfigurations, coordination and integration by organizations.
5. The genesis of these figures lies in ancient Indian texts. *Gita* is a classical example of this.
6. G-Branding through cognitive intermediation is likely to help organizations attain the goal of creating "Cognitively Just Organizations" (Anand, S. 2008).
7. The affinity of stakeholders on a long term basis can be achieved only through creation of "Cognitively Just Organizations". To deal with the issue of "Cognitive Exclusion" of the stakeholders (Anand, S. 2008), G-Branding needs to be the core of corporate branding.

To sum up, an organization or a product/service achieves the goal of G-Branding if principles of authenticity, cultural knowledge and tradition are incorporated in its structure and processes. The main objective of G-Branding is to create "Cognitively Just Organizations" through cognitive intermediation.

COGNITIVE INTERMEDIATION AND REALITY SHOWS

The idea of cognitive intermediation through G-branding touches the consumption of T.V. programmes as well. Reality television is a genre of television programming which purportedly presents unscripted dramatic or humorous situations, documents actual events, and features ordinary people instead of professional actors.

The craze for reality television hit India when Channel V came up with Viva, a band of five young singers. Since then, there has been no looking back as reality television proliferated with each passing day. The various television channels exploited the potential of reality shows and saw a huge surge in popularity. 'Kaun Banega Crorepati,' India's take on 'Who Wants To Be A Millionaire', catapulted Star TV to the number one position. Similarly, Sony's popularity saw a huge rise after it launched Indian Idol, an adaptation of a hit British reality show. It was reality television that wrote the destiny of television channel Star One. The two reality shows, 'The Great Indian Laughter Challenge' and 'Nach

Baliye', are to a great extent responsible for the popularity that Star One has got.

Reality television covers a wide range of programming formats, from game or quiz shows to surveillance- or voyeurism-focused productions such as 'Big Boss'. For our project, however, we narrowed down the range of reality shows to include only those shows where competition occurs between the participants and where the public vote is the determinant of those who stay on the show and those who have to leave.

Reality television is a win-win situation for everyone - contestants, channels or viewers. The high TRPs that these shows command in India explains the advantage they have for television channels. For the viewers, they are refreshing change from the run-of-the-mill programming on TV including the Saas-Bahu dramas. The biggest gainers, however, are the contestants who are provided with the right platform to showcase their talent. These shows give an instant recognition to the contestants. A chance to showcase their talent on such a big platform and in front of esteemed judges is something for any struggler with dreams in his eyes. Reality television can provide them with this lifetime opportunity. The rest, of course, depends on their talent.

THE MAJOR REVENUE SOURCES FOR REALITY SHOWS ARE AS FOLLOWS

❖ **Sponsorship:** Advertising is the major revenue generator for TV shows in general and reality shows are no different. Advertisers pay for slots based on the popularity of the show measured through TRP ratings. The findings from this research should enable show producers to make reality shows that are appealing and increase TRP ratings. This in turn will command a greater slot rate for ads and a corresponding increase in revenue.

❖ **SMS Revenue:** The other major chunk of revenue comes through messaging revenue from the voting public. The revenue from this source is normally shared by the show producers, the TV channels and the telecom providers. Our research will enhance the quality of contestants on these shows, and hence increase the likelihood of viewers voting for them. This in turn will increase the revenue from this source.

❖ **Product Placement:** The 'Apprentice' (2004) episodes were built around embedded brands. Dial (a part of Henkel) used the show to launch two products. In one episode, the contestants had to design a Web launch for Soft Scrub Deep Clean Foaming Cleanser (the winning "Webisode" was used by Dial). In another, they made a commercial for an air freshener (Renuzit). Placements cost on average were \$1.5 million per episode. Dial easily returned the double of that amount in ad value, says ITVX, which computes a payoff ratio for product placements. In the three-year run of the show, Burnett and Trump split \$100 million in product placement revenues (www.imbd.com). This indicates the kind of revenues that product placements bring to the bottom line of Reality show stakeholders.

❖ **Internet Revenues:** Public voting on the internet also indirectly helps contribute to the revenue stream. The revenue stream is through advertisements on websites that allow voting. This revenue is split between the reality show producers and the web host. Similar to earlier, the greater the popularity of the show, the greater the ad revenues.

So, voting drives the revenue. This poses the question -what factors determine the voting behaviour. It may be important here to understand the voting process at the level of cognition. In the literature of social cognition, Tetlock (2002) has identified 3 alternative social functionalist starting points for inquiry : people as pragmatic politicians trying to cope with accountability demands from key constituencies in their lives, principled Theologicians trying to protect sacred values from secular encroachments, and prudent prosecutors trying to enforce social norms (Tetlock, P.E. 2002). In the context of social functionalist view of cognition, it becomes important to understand which of these roles related factors become dominant; i.e. voters act as pragmatic politicians, or as theologicians, or as prudent prosecutors.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was done to find out the factors determining voting of audience in T.V. shows. The specific objectives of the study were to find out:

1. How the Contestant related factors affect voting for reality shows? and
2. How the Programme related factors affect voting for reality shows?

The broad objective of the study was to find out what kind of cognitive intermediation is needed to make a reality show successful.

METHODOLOGY

Data was collected in Delhi NCR (National Capital Region) with the help of a structured questionnaire. Delhi being a cosmopolitan city in nature was selected to represent viewers from various regions. The total sample size was 392. The questionnaire had two main sections. The first section was related to the characteristics of contestants and the second section dealt with the show characteristics. In both the sections, importance of various attributes related to voting was captured on a five point scale- Not important at all, not important, neither important nor unimportant, important, very important. Factor analysis was done of collected data on five point scale with the option of varimax.

FINDINGS

✿ **Characteristics Of The Contestants:** To find out the factors related to characteristics of the contestants on the basis of which respondents voted; factor analysis was done:

Table 1: Rotated Component Matrix

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Variance Explained by Factors	49%	21%	9%
Region	.703	-.217	.509
Religion	.616	-.525	.0851
Gender	.811	.191	.369
Family Background	.141	-.469	.682
Sympathy	.604	.014	.456
Age of the contestant	-.216	.105	.630
Onscreen Performance	.241	.283	.615
Peer Group	.717	-.431	.314
Judges' Comments	-.675	.116	.243
Trend	-.291	.844	.244
Talent	-.338	.792	.032
Controversies	.592	-.376	.109

Table 1 indicates that three factors emerge in relation to characteristics of the contestant:

Factor 1: Socio-cultural biases = Religion, Gender, Controversy, Region, Peer group.

Factor 2 : Contestant Traits = Trend, Talent, Onscreen.

Factor 3 : Emotional Response = Family background, Sympathy, Age (of contestant).

✿ **Socio-Cultural Biases:** The biases of the audiences based on which they develop a liking/preference for a contestant/set of contestants. These biases come from the religion of the contestant, region from which the contestant comes from, his/her gender and the controversies surrounding the respondent.

✿ **Contestant Traits :** The qualities of the contestants like the perceived talent of the contestant, his/her trend of performance over the episodes and his/her on-screen presence.

✿ **Emotional Response:** This is primarily how the emotional response from a contestant influences the liking/preference that the audience develops for a contestant. This is primarily based upon the sympathy (or otherwise) that is based upon the family background of the contestant, his/her age etc.

SHOW CHARACTERISTICS

To find out the factors related to show characteristics on the basis of which respondents voted; second set of factor analysis was done:

Table 2: Rotated Component Matrix

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Variance Explained By Factors	18%	9%	5%
Content	.759	.187	.157
Promotion	.733	.164	.298
Duration	.690	.389	.107
Theme	.143	.744	.354
Timeslot	.578	.367	-.432
Celebrities	.210	.573	.220
Contestant	.115	.739	-.334
Prize Money	-.115	.578	.606
Host	.402	.253	.636

Table 2 indicates that there are three factors emerging in relation to characteristics of the contestant. From **Factor 1**, it is inferred that a show, which is based on a good theme and has engrossing content, will be liked by the audience if it is slotted into a convenient time slot, with a convenient duration and if it is promoted or positioned well by the producers. **Factor 2** comprises of the celebrity and contestants, which tells us that the entire success of the show depends on the kind of contestants and celebrities who participate in the show or the celebrities who endorse the same. Ideally, a sequel should follow the theme and be a part of factor 1, but it was observed from the analysis that a sequel is a part of **Factor 3**. The inference drawn from the same is that though a good concept/theme would be appreciated by the audience, a sequel of the same show would be accepted by the audience in the subsequent seasons only in the case of shows which have a high payout and a popular host., e.g it was observed that a highly popular show known as “KBC-Kaun Banega Crorepati “ which went on to have 3 successful seasons on TV, had extremely popular hosts like Amitabh Bachchan and Shahrukh Khan.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the most important factor as indicated from Table 1 is related to viewers' socio-economic biases or characteristics. Here, it is observed that viewers are acting as prudent prosecutors, who are trying to enforce social norms while voting for a reality show. Hence, a successful T.V. reality show has to ensure that cognitive intermediation happens at the level of cognition, where social norms are well portrayed through the principles of G-branding. This means that reality show has to incorporate the tradition and cultural knowledge related to viewers/voters' background. The programme does not need only accommodation of tradition and cultural knowledge but the authenticity is also to be communicated.

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