

## **Branding, Advertising and Sustainable Development**

Marketing plays a vital role in economic development as it helps in providing necessary goods and services for the community. Since branding and advertising are coherently associated with marketing, these also contribute significantly for economic and social development. However, development should be sustainable. Today world is very much concerned on sustainable development. Sustainable Development is defined in many ways. When this concept was introduced in 1987, it was defined as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Economic development, social development and environmental protection, are considered as pillars of sustainable development.

On September 25<sup>th</sup> 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 development agenda consisting of 17 sustainable development

goals (SDGs). These are as follows (UN 2015).

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable,

- sustainable and modern energy for all
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
  9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
  10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
  11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
  12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
  13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
  15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
  16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
  17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

To achieve most of these SDGs branding and advertising is necessary. For example, to achieve the SDG of Ending

hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture, it is necessary to brand and advertise high quality seeds, equipment and other necessary substances such as fertilizer required for agriculture as well as nutritive foods.

In this regard. It is necessary to provide the absolute truth to the people and those contaminated with impurities should not be advertised. It is now hypothesized that one of the factors contribution to the Chronic Kidney Disease of unknown etiology (CKDU) is the fertilized contaminated with Cadmium and this fertilizer is imported and distributed by a well-known Company.

Sometime back, we were forced to watch a TV commercial regarding a brand of powdered milk which gave false information. We as Biologists and all medical personnel knew that the things shown in the advertisement never happens. But many people who do not have a biology background thought that what was shown was correct. Although that brand of milk powder is

advertised today, luckily that false information is not there in that advertisement. It is the duty of the advertisers is to give the absolute truth to the people. However, one main issue that the advertisers do not know what the truth is. They depend on the information provided to them by the client, who is the producer or distributor of that product. However, when an advertisement with false information appears on media, there will be many responses from the society and the advertiser should attend to those without fail.

In addition, it is better to refrain from the advertisements promoting harmful substances such as pesticides and weedicides; nevertheless, advertisements of educational nature, such as those showing the precautions that should be taken when using pesticides and weedicides, environmental impacts of using agrochemicals than the recommended amounts may be used for the benefit of the people. It is noteworthy that advertising pesticides and weedicides are now banned in Sri Lanka. However, some food additives which are harmful to

human health are still being advertised.

Although Sri Lanka has banned advertising pesticides and weedicides, still Sri Lanka is a country with heavy usage of pesticides and weedicides. No precautions are taken by farmers when applying these. In addition they do not adhere to recommended dosages and timing. Most of the time, the dosage used is very much higher than the recommended level which causes lot of pollution. Such information can be provided to the farming community through advertising on hoarding boards so that they are much aware of those as they frequently see those advertisements. Although this is not advertising a product or a service provider, this type of information displayed on hoardings are necessary to educate people so that this SGD can be met.

Information regarding the importance of proper use of soil and proper use of fertilizer can also be provided to the farming community in the same manner. As pesticides and herbicides, Sri Lanka is one of the countries that use large amounts

of fertilizer, which is in fact in excess. Although use in excess, the yield does not increase. It has a limit. But use of excess amounts of fertilizer will have other environmental problems such as eutrophication of water bodies, which leads to excess growth of algae some of which are toxic, reduction of dissolved oxygen content leading to death of animals including fish and reduction of the growth of large aquatic plants some of which are economically important (e.g. Sedges, Lotus, water lily etc.) Hoarding boards can be used to provide such information also to the society.

Today, most of the food items advertised in Sri Lanka are those that can be afforded by the middle income people. In addition, nutritive food items, which are available at low prices should also be advertised. This is a great service that can be to the society through advertising.

Another SDG where branding and advertising are helpful to achieve is ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being of all ages. In this regard, branding and advertising of high quality medicine and

health service providers should be carried out. Nevertheless, it is absolutely necessary to provide the absolute truth to the society. Today we see many advertisements regarding medicines and vitamin supplements. These will somewhat contribute to healthy life and well-being. The advertising company of course may not know the truthfulness of the message given to the society through their advertisement. However, if the truth is not given and when the society come to know about it, which usually happens, the reputation of the will be tarnished. It should be kept in mind, whatever the amount of advertising used, majority of the people cannot be taken in to a ride, as we have experienced recently in the elections. The word of mouth is mostly more powerful than the advertisement.

Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities is another SDG identified in the United Nations 2030 Agenda. Here too branding advertising is very much needed. Today one of the biggest industries in the world

is education. Even in Sri Lanka, although we boast about free education, how much money the parents have to spend on the education of their children from the age of 3 years (or even before). In the field of education too, as we are already aware, advertising plays a big role by providing information regarding the education service providers. This is very important to a country like Sri Lanka, especially in the field of higher education where the opportunities for formal higher education provided by the state is limited although the number qualify for higher education far exceeds the number that can be admitted to state universities.

In addition to formal higher education, there are many avenues in the tertiary education sector and vocational education sector in Sri Lanka. However, people are not much aware of these. Most of the people want to get formal higher education. They do not have a much concern about the requirement of other services to the society. Advertising can play a major role in this regard. Now in Sri Lanka, a National Vocational Qualification Framework is developed with 7

level, where level 7 is equivalent to a degree. Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework is also developed with 12 levels. Any person who has gone through vocational stream can also get lateral entry to higher education stream and get a higher degree. This is now in operation through the Ministry of Skills Development and Vocational Training and the University of Vocational Technology (UNIVOTEC). As such, a person who has gone through vocational training can ultimately end up with a Doctorate. This information should reach the public. Advertising of such information will play a significant role towards achieving the sustainable development goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation is another SDG where branding and advertising is necessary to achieve. Although scarcity of water is not expected in Sri Lanka in near future, we have experienced severe droughts in some regions in certain years.

In addition, although water is there, in some regions, water bodies are covered with plants and people cannot utilize them properly. Therefore, unless we use our water resources in a wiser manner, we will not be able to have continuous supply of clean water. If we continue to carry out our activities in the usual manner which accelerate eutrophication and pollution of our water resources, although water is available such water may not be in a potable condition as already experienced in some regions of Sri Lanka. One of the reasons hypothesized for Chronic Kidney Disease (CKDU) in Rajarata area, and also in some other parts of the country now, is the drinking water contaminated with heavy metals such as Cadmium, which probably has come through contaminated fertilizer. Excess use of such contaminated fertilizer would have leached this heavy metal into the environment and this couples with hardness of water would have contributed to CKDU. Hence sustainable management of water resources is of utmost importance and proper advertising is very much important in this sense. In

addition, to ensure sanitation for all also, branding advertising of necessary equipment and educating the society regarding the importance of proper sanitation, which can be done through hoarding boards and other means is necessary.

Another SDG where branding and advertising can contribute to achieve is ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. Sri Lanka has a great potential for sustainable energy from solar and wind power. The equipment that can be used in households to harness solar energy have to be branded and advertised more. In addition more advertising is necessary to promote wind power. It has been estimated that there is very high potential to harness wind energy from the area extending from Mannar to Jaffna, central highlands and from some regions of the Sabaragamuwa province. According to sustainable energy Authority, the meteorological potential of all wind sites is 25,000 MW. People can be made aware of these by advertising. In addition solar power panels and small wind energy plants that can be

used in households can be promoted through branding and advertising. Environmental benefits of these should also be conveyed to the people through advertising.

A recent study has shown that most frequent products that are promoted in advertisements related to environment are those associated with energy (Leonidou et al 2011). However, all advertisements that these researchers have studied are from developed countries. When consider the Sri Lankan advertisements on household electrical appliances, almost all of them are concerned about low electricity consumption and hence can be considered as green advertisements.

Consumers in developed countries are very much concerned about the environmental impacts when making their purchase decisions (Quill Advertising 2007). According to survey carried out in 2007, 93% of the US citizens are of the view that companies have a responsibility to help in the preservation of environment (Quill Advertising 2007). This % may have increased by now.

However, in developing countries not many consumers think about the environment and therefore, not much attention is given to environmental advertising, which is also called green advertising.

Environmental advertisements are those that include ecological or nature friendly message that targets the needs of the people. Three types of environmental advertisements have been identified (Banerjee et al 1995)

1. Advertisements that address the relationship of a product or a service with the environment
2. Advertisements that promote environmentally responsible lifestyle with or without highlighting a product or service
3. Advertisements that present an image of environmental responsibility.

Some of these advertisements are of educational nature. However in developing countries such advertisements are rare. In order to achieve

sustainable development, or in other words, if our development is to be sustainable, much emphasis should be paid on green advertising and green branding.

Another SDG in the UN 2030 agenda where branding and advertising are necessary is building resilient infrastructure promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and fostering innovation. It is absolutely necessary to brand and advertise new innovations as well as household appliances and industrial equipment which consume low energy and less water and also emit lesser amounts of pollutants in to the environment. These features, which are highlighted in the advertisements of developed countries should be highlighted in advertisements of developing countries also. Such advertisements not only help to highlight the relationship of the product with the environment and the environmental responsibility of the producer but also help to promote environmentally responsible life styles and educate the consumers on the need for environmental and social



sustainability of the development.

Conservation and sustainable use of oceans, sea and all marine resources is another SDG identified in the UN 2030 agenda. It is very important because 75% of the earth surface is covered with oceans and seas and these are very rich in resources. Fish and minerals are important marine resources which are highly useful to humans. However, fishery resources in most regions of the oceans are now overexploited. Hence advertising and branding of inappropriate fishing gear and crafts that are harmful to fishery resources should not be carried out and only the appropriate fishing gear which do not harm the environment and do not result in overexploitation of the resources should be promoted through advertising. As stated earlier, advertising can be used to educate the society on such gear so that environmental concerns of the society can be improved.

Advertising will be useful to achieve another SDG identified in the UN 2030 agenda, i.e., protecting, restoring and

promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainable management of forests, combat desertification, halting and reversing land degradation and halting biodiversity loss. Advertising can be used to educate the society on the need for these. In Sri Lanka, this is done to some extent. For example, From Habarana to Minneriya, there are large number of hoardings indicating the need for protection of our biodiversity. Need for protection of soil is also shown in hoardings in some places.

Another very important SDG identified in the UN 2030 agenda, where branding and advertising is need very much to achieve is taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. The main reason for climate change is our own activities. This occurs due to global warming.

Due to global warming, wind patterns change and as a result climate changes. There will be rains in places where it was dry earlier. There will be unexpected storms and lightning also. We are now experiencing them. Lot of

damage occurs to property, lives and agricultural products. Sometimes agricultural fields are flooded just before harvesting resulting in the loss of all the crop that was to be harvested. Lot of lives are lost due to landslides, floods and lightning.

The main reason for these is climate change, which occurs mainly due to global warming, which is a result of release of more and more greenhouse gasses to the environment by man. The main greenhouse gas is carbon dioxide which is produced by the burning of fossil fuel such as petroleum, coal etc. Due to GHGs, the solar heat that is received from solar radiation is not transmitted back into the universe. And this results in the warming of our atmosphere resulting in global warming and climate change. Therefore, in order to combat climate change, it is necessary to reduce the amount of GHGs released into the atmosphere and also protecting the trees which absorb Carbon dioxide. This can be done by reducing the amount of fossil fuel burnt in industries and in the generation of electricity, promoting the generation of

sustainable energy, and also reducing the amount of trees felled for different purposes.

Today industries and companies are very much concerned about their carbon footprint, which is the amount of carbon dioxide produced during their production cycle or the amount of Carbon dioxide produced due their activities. The consumers in the developed countries are very much concerned about the carbon footprint of the products they buy. Hence the companies are very much concerned about utilizing low energy, recycling of material, etc.

Branding and advertising is highly needed to promote such material and hence will contribute towards combatting climate change. Branding and advertising of low energy consuming appliances, advertising the carbon footprint of companies, advertising the green technologies will be very useful to achieve this very important SDG of the UN 2030 agenda.

Hence branding and advertising are very important to achieve economic and social

development in a sustainable manner. While doing so it is extremely necessary that highest ethical guidelines are adhered to so that the absolute truth is provided to the society.

## References

- Subhabrata Banerjee, Charles S. Gulas and Easwar Iyer, 1995. Shades of Green: A Multidimensional Analysis of Environmental Advertising, *Journal of Advertising*, 24 (2): 21-31.
- Leonidas C. Leonidou, Constantinos N. Leonidou, Dayananda Palihawadana and Magnus Hultman, 2011. Evaluating the green advertising practices of international firms: a trend analysis, *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 28 (1): 6-33.
- Quill Advertising 2007. Branding and Environment - A Whitepaper, Quill Advertising USA, 09 pp. <https://www.contentpilot.net/portalsresource/envirowhitepaper> (Accessed on 12.10. 2015)
- UN 2015. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for

Sustainable Development. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld> (Accessed on 12.10. 2015)

*M J S Wijeyaratne*  
**Department of Zoology and Environmental Management**  
**University of Kelaniya, Kelaniya**

(This article is based on the Keynote Address delivered by the author at the First International Conference on Branding and Advertising 2015 organized by the Department of Marketing Management of the University of Kelaniya and International Institute of Knowledge Management, Sri Lanka, which was held on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2015 at Hotel Galadari, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka).

*The author is the Senior Professor and Chair of the Department of Zoology and Environmental Management of the University of Kelaniya, Chairman of the Research Council of the University of Kelaniya, Chairman of the Research Advisory Board of the National Science Foundation, Chairman of the Board of Study of the Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing and Chairman of the National Science and Technology Commission of Sri Lanka*