

**BRAND CULTISM**  
(A study with special reference to “The Hindu”)  
by

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**Introduction:**

Branding today has evolved too far more of a complex system than it ever used to be. There has been a key shift from the brand being a corporate identifier to becoming a personal identifier in today's market. Now a day, customer mind is flooded with the brands. When the brands delight the customers, they build the brands. In case of dissatisfaction, the customers tear the brands down. So marketers should make the customers to be passionate about their brands. A cult in general notion is a sect or group or a faction. Like religious cult that attracts thousands of devoted disciples, certain brands have magnetic characteristics. They attract die-hard customers who will be devoted to the brand.

**Brand Cult is defined as a phenomenon where customers display an unusually strong emotional involvement with a particular brand; thus lending the brand an exceptionally high degree of customer loyalty, along with an amplified sense owing the brand.**

Cult branding creates an experience, a feeling an aura of a group identity-involving the customer in a way the employs them. Consumers become passionate and empowered about the cult brands. If a product or a brand fulfills this desire of a person, the customers become a core loyal to the brand/product. This serves as the basis for

Brand cultism. Some of the remarkably successful and powerful cult brands are Harley Davidson,. Apple computer, vans shoes, etc. Building cult Brands is a widespread strategy now across global. This concept is relatively new and is gaining importance in the Indian market. Indian brands are now concentrating to attain cult status.

### **Cult Branding:**

Cult has the dictionary meaning as admiration, craze, creed, devotion, faith and idolization. The ideal objective of all brand managers will be to make their brands to attain cult status. The cult brands are not necessarily the biggest and most well known brands, but cult brands should have the most fanatical and most loyal customer's followings. Cult brand will consistently connect with their customers at the very highest levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and form deep and lasting emotional brands with their followers.

Mathew Ragas defines Cult Brand as "By making deep and unique emotional connections with their customers, cult brands are able to turn their followers into strident brand evangelist who can exhibit an extremely high degree of customer loyalty and happily spread word about the product. The customers not only choose those products over the competition once or twice, but keep doing this over months, years and years together".

Mathew ragas identified nine cult brands, they are Harley Davidson,. Apple computer, vans shoes, Oprah Win Frey, Volkswagen Beetle, Star Trek, World Wrestling Federation,

and Jimmy Buffet. Each comes from a different part of the business world, but all have similar lessons to teach. All of them have fanatically loyal customers- not just customers- who have supported these brands for years now. Mathew Ragas had selected these brands to provide cult based on the following rules:

### **SEVEN GOLDEN RULES OF CULT BRANDING:**

1. Consumers want to be part of a group that's different.
2. Cult brand inventors show daring and determination.
3. Cult brand sell lifestyles.
4. Cult brand will make the customers as brand evangelists.
5. Cult brand always create customer communities.
6. Cult brands are inclusive.
7. Cult brands are sharing and collaborative.

The brands and the branding principles that have worked in other countries may not strictly work in India, as India has some perceptible differences from the western countries. The chief among these differences is the fact that India has still very much an rural culture. Bullets, Ambassador, Amul, Khadi are some of the cult brands in India.

The following research study illustrates how and to what extent "The Hindu" fits the frame work for cultism based on the seven rules as above mentioned.

## **Facts & Figures:**

**The Hindu**, started in 1878 as a weekly, became a daily in 1889 and from then on has been steadily growing to the current circulation of over 9,00,000 copies and has a steady readership of over 3 million. In southern States the sales was over 27, 33,000 in the Urban areas and over 3, 50,000 in the rural areas. It employs over 4600 news agents and uses over 250 surface transport routes for distribution.

This study was undertaken by me in the year 2006 with a sample size of 250 customers. Samples have been collected from six corporations of Tamilnadu namely, Chennai, Madurai, Coimbatore, Tiruchirapalli, Salem and Tirunelveli.

## **Objectives of the study:**

1. To find out whether “The Hindu” has obtained Cult Status.
2. To find out the awareness level of sub-brands of “The Hindu”.

## **Cult Brand Analysis:**

The major objective of cult brand analysis is to find out whether customers perceive “the Hindu” as Cult Brand. This can be done based on following essential elements of cult brand.

1. Brand Loyalty Score
2. Awareness & Preferences of the Sub- brands.
3. Fulfilling the seven golden rules of Cult Branding.

### **Findings of the Study:**

#### **Brand Loyalty Score:**

Brand loyalty is defined by Jacoby-chestnut as biased, behavioral response expressed over time by some decision making unit with respect to one or more alternative brands and is a function of psychological processes.

#### **Formula:**

**Brand Loyalty =  $(\sum \text{attitude towards favourite brand} / 40) \times (\text{Proportion of purchase of favourite brand over the last ten occasions})$**

The following attitude statements are evaluated on five point likert scale reflecting the readers attitude towards their favourite newspaper are:

1. Highly reliable & credible source
2. Unbiased news presentation
3. I am enhancing my language/fluency by reading this paper.
4. Wide coverage of Political & Sports News.
5. More Entertaining and colorful pictures.
6. High Print quality and easy to read.
7. I love this newspaper.

8. I will recommend this paper to my friends / relatives.

The behavioural component of brand loyalty can be found by calculating the proportion of buying the Newspaper. This method has taken both attitudinal and behavioural component together.

### **Brand Loyalty Scale:**

Brand Loyalty Scale is developed based on Brand Loyalty Scores calculated from above formula.

**Table No.1**

**Classification of Loyalty Scores**

<b>Loyalty Scale</b>	<b>Loyalty Scores</b>
<b>Least Loyal Customers</b>	<b>20-39%</b>
<b>Less Loyal Customers</b>	<b>40-59%</b>
<b>Loyal Customers</b>	<b>60-79%</b>
<b>Strong Loyal Customers</b>	<b>80-100%</b>

Customers who are having the loyalty scores less than 20% are called as Switchers. The customers who are having loyalty scores of 80-100% are called as strong loyal customers.

**Table No.2**

**Brand Loyalty Scores of “The Hindu” across Tamilnadu**

<b>Regions</b>	<b>Loyalty Scores</b>	<b>Loyalty Scale</b>
<b>Chennai</b>	<b>76.24%</b>	<b>Loyal Customers</b>
<b>Madurai</b>	<b>78.31%</b>	<b>Loyal Customers</b>
<b>Coimbatore</b>	<b>81.31%</b>	<b>Strong Loyal Customers</b>
<b>Tiruchirapalli</b>	<b>72.71%</b>	<b>Loyal Customers</b>
<b>Salem</b>	<b>67.12%</b>	<b>Loyal Customers</b>
<b>Tirunelveli</b>	<b>71.06%</b>	<b>Loyal Customers</b>

From the above table it is found that The Hindu has strong loyal customer base in Coimbatore but it stood third in the loyalty level of Chennai, even though the circulation of Chennai market stood at 2,67,349 copies. The reason for reduction in loyalty level may be due to launch of Deccan Chronicle in Chennai market.

**Awareness of Sub-Brands:**

Business line, Sports Star and Frontline are sub-brands of The Hindu. Sports Star enjoys 71% OF AWARENESS AMONG CUSTOMERS FOLLOWED BY FRONTLINE 69%. Business line is having the awareness of 59% in the study area.

The Hindu speaks on Management, The Hindu Index, From the Pages of The Hindu, Indian Cricket- An annual record book, Survey on the Environment, Survey on Indian Agriculture, Survey on Indian Industry are some of the books which have come from The Hindu, but they do not have high awareness. More than 50% of the customers are not aware about these books.

## **Cult Brand:**

**Table No.3**  
**Cult Brand status of “The Hindu”**

<b>SEVEN GOLDEN RULES</b>	<b>SCORE</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE ANALYSIS</b>
Consumers want to be part of a group that’s different.	<b>2752/5250</b>	<b>52.42</b>
Cult brand inventors show daring and determination.	<b>4856/5252</b>	<b>92.50</b>
Cult brand sell lifestyles.	<b>3772/5250</b>	<b>71.85</b>
Cult brand will make the customers as brand evangelists.	<b>4420/8750</b>	<b>50.51</b>
Cult brand always create customer communities.	<b>4998/10500</b>	<b>47.60</b>
Cult brands are inclusive.	<b>7523/8750</b>	<b>85.98</b>
Cult brands are sharing and collaborative	<b>6581/8750</b>	<b>75.21</b>

### **Rule1: Consumers want to be part of a group that’s different.**

About 52.5% of the customers felt that they wanted to identify themselves with The Hindu. These customers would like to discuss about the issues published in The Hindu regularly.

### **Rule 2: Cult brand inventors show daring and determination.**

The Hindu can be proud of having the image of daring & determined Newspaper. About 92.50% of the customers felt that The Hindu is showing daring and determination.

### **Rule 3: Cult brand sell lifestyles.**

About 72% of the customers strongly believe that The Hindu has not changed not only their lifestyles but also their friends life style..



**Rule 4: Cult brand will make the customers as brand evangelists**

Only 50% of the customers will convince their friends to buy The Hindu. They consider the brand as one among member of their family. They don't even consider other newspaper to read. Remaining 50% don't share their views.

**Rule 5: Cult brand always create customer communities.**

Only 47% of the customers will prefer to become the member of customers club and having the discussions with the other readers of The Hindu.

**Rule 6: Cult brands are inclusive.**

About 86% feel that The Hindu gives News for all ages and across various income and occupation categories. Most of the customers agreed that the brand is universal and inclusive. They do not identify with the particular group.

**Rule 7: Cult brands are sharing and collaborative.**

About 75% of the customers have felt that The Hindu represents customer opinions & beliefs through its writing and it always response to reader's voice. They strongly validate The Hindu is functioning in sharing and collaborative mode.

From all above we can conclude that The Hindu is in the right direction in attaining the cult status.

**Suggestions:**

The first noteworthy thing that could be inferred from the findings is The Hindu is going on the right direction in attaining the cult status. But, The hindu has to take steps regarding the facts of chennai market as it is having relatively less loyal customers.

The Hindu should make the loyal customers in to strong loyal customers by desingning and effective implementation of loyalty development programmes. As it is the biggest player in Media in Tamilnadu, it may consider initiating the reader clubs or forum to strengthen their affectionate towards the brand.

The Hindu should make customers aware about its books. It may develop a marketing plan for boosting the awareness and preferences of these books. It should enable the customers to make them extending their preferences to other brands like business line, frontline and sports star.

### **Conclusion:**

As the Chennai market is already taken up by Deccan chronicle and times of India is also coming off in a big way, The Hindu has to concentrate on strong loyalty programmes and follow the strategies given above which may definitely help The Hindu to reach the magic destination of “Cult Status”.

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