

***What's In A Brand ? Building Brand Equity Through Advertising* by John Philip Jones, Tata - Mcgraw Hill, 1998.**

J. P. Jones is a respected name in the field of Advertising, who has successfully combined a fruitful career with J. W. Thompson with an influential academic and consulting experience subsequently. His book "What's in a name ? Advertising and the concept of brand," first published in 1986 has now been brought out in an Indian edition in 1998 with a slightly different title by Tata-Mcgraw Hill publishing company.

The original title has gone through ten reprints and has been an acknowledged best seller primarily with the advertising and marketing practitioners.

The current Indian edition is a complete reproduction of the original edition with a last chapter added on "Asia-the consumer market of tomorrow". This additional chapter and the revised title are presumably two marketing add-on's to augment the salability of the new edition. However, none of these were strictly necessary. The chapter on Asia is a journalistic piece, which adds nothing to the already known facts and is too superficial to be appended to a book, which is otherwise technically comprehensive and rigorous.

Likewise, including the term "Brand equity" in the subtitle is obviously a ploy to give the 1986 book a 1998 look by incorporating a term which is a current hot favourite. However, it is merely cosmetic and partly misleading since the book does not deal with the concept of "brand equity" anywhere. As a matter of fact, the subject index at the end of the book is totally silent on brand equity.

Barring these two gimmicky attempts to market the 1998 edition, the book remains a useful and a practical guide to the advertising and marketing professionals.

J. P. Jones is a myth-buster. He strongly holds that emergence of oligopoly in the packaged goods industry has not been a stifler of earlier existing atomistic competition. On the contrary, it has pumped competitive adrenaline in the industry, which typically originated as a monopolist or a quasi-monopolist. Similarly, he does not subscribe to the concept of product lifecycle-which he derides as nothing ordained but brought about by managerial beliefs leading to self-fulfilling prophecy. "Lifecycle dogma" according to him, has

prevented many brands from being restaged during the maturity or decline phase leading to lost sales and profit opportunities. While demolishing the so-called myths, the author mostly relies on his own experience, observations and anecdotal examples. Thus, occasionally the reader is tempted to ask whether she should accept the author's viewpoint as a matter of faith.

The book constantly reflects the underlined premises of the author, which are : a) theory is only good enough if it agrees with practice or can explain a practical phenomenon ; b) consumer behaviour must be studied at the overt level only without delving into the cognitive, affective or conative aspects of the mind ; c) much of the published research work in marketing and advertising do not seek market-level understanding and hence are mostly useless. His use of reference material makes his position quite evident as he draws most of his inspirations from the writings of other practitioners.

Research data cited by the author are those related to direct market behaviour as to be found in A. C. Neilson reports or in consumer panel diaries.

Within the boundaries set clearly by the author, the book offers useful and comprehensive decision guidelines for managing a brand through its introduction stage and subsequent stages of growth and maturity. In the context of brand building, he dwells at length on what effective advertising should be. Issues related to strategic thinking, creative ideas and effective executions have also been dealt with. Readers would find interesting guidelines on advertisement scheduling, frequencies, thresholds and ceilings. All in all, the book under review, is a lucidly written guide to Marketing and Advertising professionals.

Finally, a word of caution to the Indian reader. This book is focussed entirely on the matured, developed markets of the First World. Conclusions and findings are all relevant to that context. In such markets, a vast majority of the packaged goods are in a stationery state in the maturity stage locked in oligopolistic market-share based competition. Distribution channels in such markets are becoming increasingly concentrated in the Hands of few major chains or large independents.

None of the above conditions truly apply to today's Indian market nor are they likely to be relevant in foreseeable future. Therefore, while Indian practitioners would do well to learn the lessons given in the book, they should not try to apply them unthinkingly in their more typical environment.

**– Sudas Roy
IIM Calcutta**