

PEPSI AND FLEXIBLE MARKETING STRATEGY IN PAKISTAN – AN ERA SPANNING THREE DECADES

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Abstract: *This research aims to investigate Pepsi's (fizzy drink) flexible marketing strategy with a prime focus on TVCs over the years in Pakistan. The methodology encompasses a qualitative study design. Discourse analysis has been employed to interpret the meanings and themes of the TVCs. Results depict Pepsi's focus on being agile and cashing in on hit trends in the sample region. The major focus has been the sport of Cricket as a brand reinforcement strategy, with the inclusion of showbiz orientation at times. The study on Pepsi's TVC for the respective sample region and the specific period is a rare practice. The results can be useful for marketing consultancy firms and for other brands and businesses to adjust their marketing programs. Parallels can be drawn with other cultures and for the execution of strategies. The online availability of all the ads as data during that point in time in the sample region. Additionally, the findings can inform targeted marketing strategies and can be adapted across diverse cultural contexts to enhance campaign effectiveness.*

Keywords: *Flexible Marketing, Event Marketing, Brand Reinforcement, Brand Elements*

JEL classification: *M31*

INTRODUCTION

“Pepsi” – the name needs no introduction. Unarguably, there will be very few who might need to know what this soft drink is about. Such is the genericness of this brand that the word cola means Coca Cola or Pepsi Cola. Starting as a syrup in 1950, the formula became a recognized fizzy drink and a household name. With its share of controversies ranging from health effects to marketing, to its competition, or its country of origin, the drink is in the list of the top two, if not the best, for quite a few. Other than the taste and quality, Pepsi is famous for its marketing campaigns (Chen, 2023). From promotional discounts to celebrity endorsements and localization in its brand elements to product development, Pepsi used it all. The event marketing, related diversification, and the use of CSR campaigns (García, Gibaja, & Mujika, 2013),

Pepsi made the most of the marketing literature, and it is no wonder it is the most discussed brand in the marketing classes across the globe. As Pepsi has been operating across various countries (Biswas & Sen, 1999), and various cultures, thus opting for the concept of localization in its marketing campaigns, South Asian Markets are no exception (McKelvey, 2006). Market penetration strategy has been so effective that from metropolitan cities to underdeveloped towns, Pepsi enjoys the status of serving drinks to guests, and surprisingly, a luxury in underdeveloped areas where the nations are termed as low-income groups. Such is the reason that event marketing is highly practiced by Pepsi, and it is often used as a complementary food along with the traditional main course. Talking about events, family reunions, friends meet, or marriage functions, fizzy drinks are a must in South Asian culture, and they mostly end up being with Coke, Pepsi, and others to name a few (Bai, 2023). This makes Pepsi an interesting research outlet whose marketing strategy should be analyzed as to what has its impact and influence on generations. Though Pepsi's marketing philosophy remains the same across South Asia (Biswas & Sen, 1999), it can be critical to study each region specifically. As part of the research gap, there have been numerous studies on Pepsi's advertising and its marketing philosophy. While Moraru (2010) discusses Pepsi's and Coke's brand positioning, there are studies that offer a comparison of Pepsi's websites across cultures, but there exists room to research Pepsi advertisements across generations in a specific period of time. What has been Pepsi's philosophy of staying relevant across decades, how has Pepsi been coping with ever-demanding youth, and how has it successfully catered to the savvy customers in competitive markets across the world? These are some of the areas that need to be identified more precisely. Therefore, this research aims to analyze some of the attributes of Pepsi's advertising campaigns on TV (TVCs to be specific) in Pakistan that span across an era of 4 decades. This can be achieved by working out the following research objectives

- > To analyze Pepsi TVC themes
- > To understand the role of Celebrities in Pepsi's ad content
- > To review the element of localization
- > To overview the significance of event marketing

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Communication

Brand communication is rather a broader term encompassing the way a brand connects with its audience across various touchpoints (Kończak & Rewilak, 2025). These touchpoints and means of communication aim at value creation for its customers (Arbaiza, 2023), who have been suspects and prospects at some point in time. Exposure to communication requires various strategies and mediums that marketers employ to the best of their ability, i.e., both monetary and intellectual (Garcia-Collart, 2024). From strategies aiming at brand awareness to conversion, marketing communication is all about making customers believe that they are getting the best of the products/services. In the FMCG sector, Pepsi's communication is not short of an ideal way to interact with its customers. Even to win customers' emotional connection, Pepsi turned out Peci in Argentina as locals can't pronounce the word Pepsi in particular. Such is the "think global and act local" phenomenon that guarantees Pepsi's success and appeal to the masses. The use of slogans to local taglines, Pepsi's Brand communication

is a must-study option, the in-depth analysis of which is one of the objectives as the study proceeds.

Flexible Marketing

As brands continue to cope with standardization and evolvement, flexible marketing refers to adjustments in brands' life cycles as needed (Singh, 2010). This agility is not only linked to product development but also to promoting brands differently as per variant demographics, adjusting the marketing programs as per cultural understanding, and offering discounts as per the levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs in respective economies is what surrounds flexible marketing. Brands that cope with all the modernization and current trends are termed successful brands (Natashen, Kandasamy, & Rangegowda, 2025). These trends might range from customers being savvy to understanding the change in their technological needs (Oates & Polumbaum, 2024). In addition, other microenvironment factors also play a vital role in designing brands' flexible marketing strategies (King & Lybecker, 1983). This may be an antecedent of change in state regulations, e.g., a specific embargo on trade with a particular country or a brand to a must adaptation as per the environmental factor. Brands that are flexible in their approach tend to have long-term survival. Specifically, to be in line with updated marketing programs, brands opting for flexible marketing are well aware of trends, e.g., following brand activism strategy in current times where all brands aim at specific cause-related marketing and show their concern for society and noble cause in their marketing programs (Rangkuti, 2004). As flexible marketing aids in keeping brands relevant across generations, the brief analysis of Pepsi's flexible marketing strategy in the findings section of this study may turn out to be a thoughtful strategy for other brands contesting in similar marketing dynamics.

Brand Ambassadors

Brand ambassador is the term used to describe the role of individuals representing the brand (Amanda & Shanty, 2025). Though not limited to celebrities only, it's mostly famous people/ celebrities/ athletes, and influencers who appear in the advertising of brands. These days, with the convergence of industries, brand ambassadors may have been dissected further into micro and macro influencers (Karamchandani, Shukla, & Shukla, 2025). Earlier TVCs and print media used to be considered outlets for brands to employ famous personalities as brand ambassadors, where they used to promote brands and their features (Luthra, et al., 2025), but now, mediums like TikTok and YouTube, etc. have widened the scope for common people to promote products/ services with their common man mass appeal (Arya, Paul, & Sethi, 2022). Though Vloggers and YouTubers have widened the scope of the ad world (Islam, Ahmed, Kabir, & Ahmed, 2025), the credibility and reliability of movie stars and athletes are still a top priority for top brands. Catering to this, fizzy brands like Pepsi and Coke, sports brands like Nike and Adidas, mobile phone brands like Apple and Samsung, etc., have been famous for utilizing celebrities as brand ambassadors to build their respective brand image. The methodology section in this research will encompass various aspects of celebrity branding as a basis for how the brand under observation has employed different brand ambassadors over time.

Event Marketing

Event Marketing is one of the key strategies that is employed to capitalize on specific events (Preston, 2012). Marketers tend to resonate with the respective traditions and cultural ethos of a country and make their mark by employing specific promotional campaigns accordingly (Wood, 2009). Ranging from seasonal greetings to sports events, Marketers make their way to make their presence felt (Drengner, Gaus, & Jahn, 2008). This may also end up or result in sponsoring the entire event to enter further collaborations. This may not be limited to sponsoring hoardings or billboards, as marketers aim to achieve an emotional connection in terms of awareness campaigns or any cause-related marketing (Wohlfeil & Whelan, 2006). Be it a campus awareness campaign or ensuring sustainability goals, event marketing is the top priority of most brands. Pepsi specifically has been renowned for its event marketing campaigns, ranging from Ramadan (the fasting month of Muslims) in Pakistan to Navratri in India. Pepsi's ethos of sponsoring sporting events is an evident phenomenon in the study demographics under observation. It will be interesting to analyze the role of event marketing by Pepsi as the study advances.

AIDA Model

The acronym of the AIDA model is described as A= Awareness, I= Interest, D= Desire, whereas A equals "Action". As per most of the literature, the first three letters were developed by Lewis in 1898, whereas Strong in 1925 is credited for the last letter A as "Action". The AIDA model is significant for the attribution of all the above factors in developing a communication message for the ad campaigns (Lal, 2025). With the first A as Awareness, the communication message should have a clear awareness about the product features, whereas I reflect the availability of interest in the message (Ferguson, 2025). This interest can be generated by focusing on customer benefits and the ability of a product to satisfy its target audience/ viewers. The third letter D for Desire can range from the premium Ness of the brand to the usage of a color palette in the ad or the effectiveness and following of a message source I.e., the brand ambassador, who bears the ability to take the target audience to last stage of call to action with letter "A". Any ad or communication message bearing these four elements for a

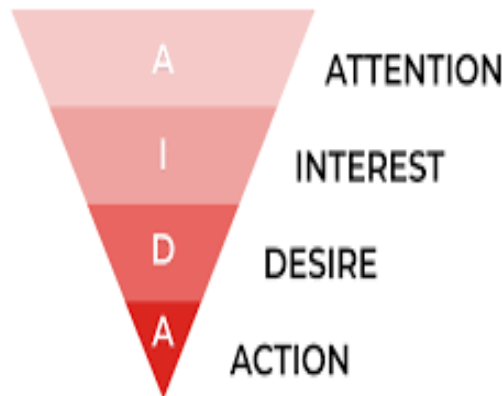


Fig 1. AIDA Model

Source (Lewis, 1898)

successful campaign reflects the execution of the AIDA model (Ghirvu, 2013). Brands are found to employ the theory of the AIDA model in their practical campaigns and aim at achieving the desired results as well (Fortenberry Jr & McGoldrick, 2020). In the respective sections of this study, the author will correlate the theoretical aspects of the AIDA model regarding Pepsi's TVCs.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The study is qualitative, whereas the discourse analysis technique has been applied to extract findings. Discourse Analysis is a method that interprets the meaning behind the text, with further inclusion of nonverbal text (Gee, 2014). To be further specific, this paper uses discourse analysis to understand Pepsi TVCs for specific decades. This may further incorporate discussion in the social context as well.

Sampling Strategy

The object of research is the brand Pepsi. Pepsi was selected based on its recognition and mass appeal. Not only is the brand known to the masses, but its ad content is also widely viewed. The sampling region is Pakistan, and ads shown in Pakistan are chosen, spanning from 1987 to 2017.

Data Collection

To have a better overview of Pepsi's ad campaigns across generations, a video containing 20 ads from 1987 to the year 2018 was taken from the online platform YouTube. Again, the ads taken belong to Pakistani Origin only. Out of the 20 ads, 19 have been studied to keep the analysis limit to 30 years. The rationale for ads till 2017 surrounds factors such as availability, accessibility, the era surrounding almost three decades, and before digitalization.

Developing categories for analysis

Categorizing the data is an important measure of qualitative analysis. The ads are divided into four categories to ensure cohesion with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). These are 1) Ad theme, 2) Brand Ambassadors, 3) Slogan, and 4) Logo. The rigor of the CDA further ensures reliability and validity as Category 1 discusses the theme the ad is based upon, i.e., Sports, showbiz, etc., and Category 2 demonstrates the usage of Brand Ambassador, i.e., sportsman, movie star, etc. Category 3 to justify the rationale for using slogans, whether based on energy or youth. In contrast, category 4 discusses whether there is any change in the logo during that duration or not. The ads are grouped based on 4 years, justifying the relevance of ad themes as per sporting titles, and the starting year of ads is

RESULTS

Table 1. Ad evaluation 1987 - 1991

Ad year	No of ads observed	Ad theme	Brand Ambassador/s	Slogan	Logo
1987	1	Cricket Net Practice	Imran Khan	The Choice of a New Generation	Blue, Red, Light Blue
1991	1	Cricket Net Practice	Imran Khan, Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis	The Choice of a New Generation	Blue, Red, Light Blue

Source: (Author's own)

The two ads observed in Table 1 depict the use of a cricket theme. An attempt is made to exploit the rising cricket fever as a top sport in the country. This sports association has been aided by brand ambassadors such as Imran Khan – the equivalent of Maradona or Pele of Football. The second ad further incorporates emerging stars at that time, i.e., Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis. This entails Pepsi's approach to market penetration and aiming as a generational brand. This is also backed by the usage of a slogan, i.e., "The choice of a new generation".

Table 2. Ad evaluation 1992 - 1995

Ad year	No of ads observed	Ad theme	Brand Ambassador/s	Slogan	Logo
1993	1	Public Concert	Junaid Jamshaid (The Vital Signs Band)		Blue, Red
1994	1	Couple Connection	Haroon (one of the then-singing sensations)		Blue, Red
1995	1	Concert, Youth Connection	Junaid Jamshaid (The Vital Signs Band)	The Choice of a New Generation	Blue, Red

Source: (Author's own)

Table 2 reveals an analysis of 3 ads from 1992 to 1995. In the first ad, Pepsi has continued with its philosophy of keeping up with current sensations as the theme is a Public Concert where the then-hit music band "Vital Signs" has been found consuming and promoting Pepsi at public gathering. The same goes for the coming years (1994 and 1995) when Pepsi continued with the music spree and opted for another music sensation of that time. While it stuck with the same slogan, it was found to use 2 colors in its logo, specifically on the bottles. To add to it, it can be said that Pepsi might have used cricket and sports ads during that tenure also, but they adjusted their marketing campaigns to a music theme as well.

Table 3. Ad evaluation 1996 – 1999

Ad year	No of ads observed	Ad theme	Brand Ambassador/s	Slogan	Logo
1996	1	Cricket - Fast Bowling, Pepsi relatability with cricket	Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis, West Indian Fast bowlers		Blue, Red
1997	1	Cricket -Dressing Room need	Shahid Afridi, Wasim Akram	Generation Next	Blue, Red
1998	1	Cricket, Urge for Pepsi	Saqlain Mushtaq	Ask for More	Blue, Red
1999	1	Cricket, Urge for Pepsi	Shoaib Akhtar, Wasim Akram	Yeh dil mange aur (The heart wants more)	Blue, Red

Source: (Author's own)

As per Table 3, here again, Pepsi is shown focusing on the cricket theme with the inclusion of new cricket stars. Here, the emerging stars (Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis) had become established, whereas new sensations such as Shahid Afridi and Shoaib Akhtar were introduced as emerging stars who could have better relatable to the new fan club. The slogan in the context of “Generation Next” compliments its strategy. In addition, other slogans emphasize the urge to use more Pepsi, i.e., the Usage rate had also been incorporated into the strategy.

Table 4. Ad evaluation 2000 – 2003

Ad year	No of ads observed	Ad theme	Brand Ambassador/s	Slogan	Logo
2000	1	Cricket, Couple Connection	Shahid Afridi, Female Model	Yeh dil mange aur (The heart wants more)	Blue, Red
2001	1	Cricket, Net Practice,	Wasim Akram	Yeh dil mange aur (The heart wants more)	Blue, Red
2002	1	Gully Cricket	Dareen Lehman, Shane Warne (International cricketers)	Dil hai tau mango aur (Ask for more straight away from the heart)	Blue, Red
2003	1	Cricketers in the Safari, World Cup Campaign	Waqar Younis, Wasim Akram, Inzamam ul Haq, Shoaib Akhtar, Shahid Afridi		

Source: (Author's own)

Table 4 above shows not only Pepsi's continued association with cricket but also its ability to cash in on the brand persona of the cricketers as brand ambassadors. Shahid Afridi's chocolate boy appeal was depicted in one of the ads, whereas there was an inclusion of international cricketers (non-Pakistani) in one of the ads in 2002. The very ad also stresses the element of gully cricket and Pepsi's likeability among youth. There is also found the event marketing strategy where Pepsi developed a multi-star campaign for the 2003 World Cup scheduled in Africa. The ad theme demonstrated a safari setup for a relatability effect. Also, there has been a continuous change in slogans urging the need for Pepsi consumption with the emotional appeal. The word "Heart" has been used on multiple occasions in slogans to serve the cause.

Table 5. Ad evaluation 2004 – 2007

Ad year	No of ads observed	Ad theme	Brand Ambassador/s	Slogan	Logo
2004	1	Showbiz, Singing	Reema		Blue, Red
2005	1	Showbiz, Singing, Urge for Pepsi	Ali Zafar, Shaan		Blue, Red
2006	1	Showbiz, singing	Adnan Sami Khan		Blue, Red
2007	1	Cricket, World Cup Motivation Campaign	Younis Khan, among others (Inzamam, Kamran Akmal, and others), Imran Khan		Blue, Red

Source: (Author's Own)

Table 5 evaluates 4 ads from the year 2004 to 2007. It was a time when some of the previously used cricket stalwarts had resigned, and Pepsi had to cash in on other hit trends, i.e., showbiz. However, Pepsi didn't lose its hold on the cricket connection completely, and it continued with the World Cup event campaign for 2007. The discussion section will further encompass the peculiarities of not keeping up with the cricket theme as aggressively as in previous years for this duration.

Table 6. Ad evaluation 2008 – 2011

Ad year	No of ads observed	Ad theme	Brand Ambassador/s	Slogan	Logo
2008	1	Gully cricket, Urge for Pepsi	Wasim Akram		Blue, Red
2009	1	Cricket	Shahid Afridi	Badal do Zamana (Change the era)	Blue, Red
2010	1	Tennis and Concert Singing	Assam ul Haq, Call (band)	Josh, Cha ja, Agay Barh Multiple (Spirit, Make Impression, move ahead)	Blue, Red

2011	1	Cricket, World Cup campaign (airport setting)	Shahid Afridi, Shoaib Akhtar, Abdul Razzaq	Dunya hai dil waloan ki (The world belongs to those with hearts)	Blue, Red
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Source: (Author's own)

Table 6 demonstrates Pepsi using everything coming its way. Bringing back the old Wasim Akram, capitalizing on Shahid Afridi's established star image, and bringing in Tennis star Assam ul Haq in campaigns to continue with the 2011 World Cup campaign, Pepsi made sure that the motivation to move ahead and spirit to change the world was something to get connected with the target audience. Multiple taglines incorporating words like "move ahead", "change the world," etc., were utilized to the best of their emotional connection with the target market.

Table 7. Ad evaluation 2012 – 2015

Ad year	No of ads observed	Ad theme	Brand Ambassador/s	Slogan	Logo
2012	1	Hard-Hitting Cricket	Shahid Afridi		Blue, Red
2013	1	Cricket, Urge for Pepsi	Misbah ul Haq, M Irfan, Saeed Ajmal, Junaid Khan	Dil Mange Abhi (Heart wants it right now)	Blue, Red (modified)
2014	1	Cricket, World Cup campaign	Shahid Afridi, Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis		Blue, Red
2015	1	Cricket	Shahid Afridi, Umar Akmal		Blue, Red

Source: (Author's own)

Table 7 shows ads following the previous pattern. The cricket theme was preceded, dominated by Shahid Afridi's presence as the main lead, who had turned up as an established star then. A cricket World Cup campaign's ad also witnessed the reunion of the legendary duo of Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis, along with others. There was also a change in logo design as well with the previously followed color pallet.

Table 8. Ad evaluation 2016 – 2019

Ad year	No of ads observed	Ad theme	Brand Ambassador/s	Slogan	Logo
2016	1	CSR, Sufi Music in the background	Hamza Ali Abbasi		Blue, Red
2017	1	CSR, lightning bulbs, and Sufi Music in Background	Nauman Ijaz		Blue, Red

Source: (Author's own)

Table 8 reveals that Pepsi continued to be agile as it followed the CSR orientation in its ads. The ads encapsulated famous showbiz stars (new and established) and a focus on community service.

DISCUSSION

As part of the findings in relation to the existing literature on marketing, Pepsi has been found to employ the best marketing strategies that are taught worldwide. There is an observed *product development strategy* in terms of Lays, Kinley, and Sting, the energy drink. There is the exercise of event market strategies where Pepsi comes up with a *global and act local* approach. Beyond what we discussed in this study about the relationship of Pepsi with cricket in Pakistan, Pepsi does Eid (a Muslim celebrated event after the month of Fasting) promotions, which perfectly follows the concept of cultural consciousness as one of the social attributes of *macro environment factors*. Then, it is found that practicing the *corporate social responsibility* strategy during COVID-19 times. So, Pepsi presents an adequate understanding of applying the majority of the macro environment and event marketing philosophy.

The use of *Brand Ambassadors* and *Product Life Cycle* aspect is adequately showcased in Pepsi's campaigns. It capitalizes on the life of brand ambassadors and aids not only its brand development to stay relevant but also contributes to the longevity of celebrity brands. This signifies Pepsi's *brand reinforcement strategy*, where the idea is to bring *nostalgia marketing* to its campaigns. This strategy can further be linked to *brand recall* to reassure *brand loyalty* parameters as well. Also, Pepsi is found to readjust its *brand elements* at times. This depicts Pepsi's understanding of being agile with the trends. Its slogans, as far as the Pakistani market is concerned, have found trendy connections, whereas the use of Urdu (the National Language of Pakistan) ensures brand connection with the target audience. To add to it, this also accounts for *adaptation practices/strategies* in the context of international marketing literature. However, very smartly, Pepsi logos haven't shown great variation but notable ones to address and connect with the audience.

CONCLUSION

There is no denying that the brand Pepsi has been successfully implementing marketing knowledge in its campaigns. Pepsi's philosophy of keeping up with the trends is evident in the Pakistani context. Catching up with influential sportsmen and living up to the nation's liking for the sport of cricket, Pepsi kept on signing the cricket sensations for all those years. The greater the sportsman who was hit, the bigger has been and will be the affiliation and endorsement with Pepsi. This effect of celebrity being an effective influencer has been depicted in the works of Macheka, Quaye, & Ligaraba (2024). Continuing with being agile in its marketing approach, Pepsi has been found hiring showbiz and music sensations as well. This is a clear depiction of Pepsi's staying relevant with trends and customers' choices. Whoever turns out to be a hit, whether a sportsman, showbiz star, or singer, Pepsi is ready to sign them. Another aspect of significance lies in Pepsi's approach to event marketing. From Independence Day to sporting events, Pepsi exercises the basics of event marketing and sponsorship and also adds to the cause of brand promotion. Boronczyk & Breuer (2021) describe the essence of event marketing as a means of brand recall. Along with brand ambassadors and event marketing, the study reveals Pepsi's strategy of adjusting to its brand elements. Though not aggressively, Pepsi kept on changing the slogans and adjusting its logo on some occasions. This again solidifies Pepsi's approach to staying relevant to generations and their thought process, thus adding to the execution of adaptation in its

marketing. Reghunathan & Joseph (2021) in their study also discusses the importance of brand elements in building brand image. The significant role of Corporate Social Responsibility can't be denied in building a concerned corporate image; therefore, organizations should not only continue to genuinely apply CSR activities but also opt for new ways/ strategies encompassing CSR initiatives.

Overall, Pepsi TVCs and marketing campaigns offer a comprehensive view-point of Marketing theory and practices, which can be beneficial for marketing scholars and practitioners, depicting the aspects of a bigger brand's effective, agile, and flexible marketing strategy.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research may surround the replication of the very study with minor modifications in other countries where Pepsi is actively marketing. Parallels can broaden the scope of the standardization versus adaptation approach in the context of international and global marketing. The advertising firms can get hold of marketing protocols in the FMCG sector, which can give them an opportunity for strategy implementation and execution for meaningful results.

Ethical Statement

There are no competing interests for this publication.

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