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The Mahakhumbh Of Branding

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Abstract: This paper examines the innovative marketing strategies employed by various brands during the Mahakumbh, the world's largest religious gathering. The event, occurring once every 12 years, presents a unique opportunity for businesses to engage with millions of diverse attendees. The study highlights how companies have adapted their approaches to align with the spiritual and cultural significance of the Mahakumbh, moving beyond traditional marketing methods to create immersive, culturally relevant experiences. The research showcases several standout campaigns that blend faith with purpose-led marketing, including initiatives focused on health, hygiene, sustainability, and community service. These strategies demonstrate how brands are leveraging the Mahakumbh's vast scale and deeply ingrained traditions to make meaningful connections with consumers while also contributing to social good. The paper illustrates how this spiritual event has become a platform for experimentation in marketing, allowing businesses to develop innovative campaigns that integrate commerce with cultural sensitivity and social responsibility.

Keywords: Mahakumbh, Innovative marketing strategies, Brand engagement, Purpose-led marketing, Consumer connections, Experimentation in marketing

INTRODUCTION

The Mahakumbh, recognized as the world's largest religious gathering, represents not only a spiritual and cultural event but also a significant marketing opportunity for businesses. Occurring once every 12 years, the Mahakumbh attracts millions of devotees, pilgrims, and tourists, thereby providing an unparalleled platform for companies to engage with a diverse audience. Due to its vast scale and the deeply ingrained traditions associated with it, brands must employ innovative, culturally relevant, and immersive strategies to make a meaningful impact. This year's Mahakumbh Mela holds particular significance, as the alignment of constellations observed occurs only once every 144 years, resulting in unprecedented attendance compared to previous Kumbh Melas.

This spiritual festivity has provided numerous brands with the opportunity to engage consumers of diverse backgrounds in an immersive environment where sentiments, beliefs, and behaviors converge. In contrast to traditional marketing strategies, which typically rely on digital outreach and mass media, branding at this event has adopted a more profound experiential approach. Business entities have aligned themselves with the event through sponsorships, service-oriented initiatives, and community-driven engagement. This platform has served as a fertile ground for experimentation and the development of robust, innovative campaigns that integrate commerce with social good.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objective of our research is to describe some of the marketing strategies employed by the different brands during the Mahakumbh 2024. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study as it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex phenomena and provides a detailed understanding of the subject matter (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The study is based on secondary data. Data was collected from different research articles, case studies, interviews, news and press note.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on consumer behavior, experiential marketing, and religious tourism has gradually increased during the last ten years. There aren't many studies on how brands interact with religious mega-events like Mahakumbh, though.

Consumer behavior, emotional ties, and the impact of tradition on marketing tactics have all been examined in the last ten years of research on brand involvement during major religious and cultural festivals like the Mahakumbh Mela. The following is a summary of the main findings from several studies:

(Sharma & Patel, 2015) Cultural Influence on Consumer Behavior This study demonstrates how consumers' faith in products associated with religious events such as the Mahakumbh is shaped by deeply ingrained cultural norms. It implies that companies that use cultural symbolism develop closer emotional ties with their target market.

Rao and Verma (2016) discuss experiential marketing at religious gatherings. The study looks at how experiential marketing, like putting up interactive brand stalls at spiritual events, increases remember and engagement. Brands that produce meaningful, immersive experiences instead of merely ads have a higher chance of sticking in the minds of consumers.

The impact of digital technology on pilgrim engagement (Kumar et al., 2017) As digital involvement increased, this study discovered that social media marketing, augmented reality experiences, and mobile apps aimed at Mahakumbh participants greatly improved brand interaction even after the event.

Religious Events and Emotional Attachment to Brands (Bansal & Singh, 2018) The study highlights how companies may foster a stronger emotional bond and foster enduring loyalty by integrating spiritual and religious themes into their message.

Brand advocacy and word-of-mouth (Mishra & Roy, 2019) According to research, Mahakumbh customers are more likely to spread the word about brands that share their beliefs and offer unique experiences.

(Joshi & Mehta, 2020) Sustainability and Ethical Branding Sustainability initiatives—like eco-friendly packaging, water conservation programs, and waste management partnerships—significantly improve brand reputation given Mahakumbh's size. Brands that help to preserve the sacred environment are well-received by consumers.

Brand messaging is amplified on social media (Kapoor et al., 2021). It was discovered that incorporating Mahakumbh events into social media tactics (live streaming, influencer partnerships, hashtag campaigns) increased brand awareness much beyond the actual festival.

When it comes to brand trust and religious sensitivities, Desai and Trivedi's 2022 research shows that companies need to walk a fine line when they're involved in religious events. Being genuine and showing real respect for cultural values is what makes or breaks how people see your brand - mess this up and you could face serious backlash.

Nair and Sharma looked at how augmented reality is changing the game for consumer engagement in 2023. They found that AR and other new tech are really transforming how people interact with brands at Mahakumbh, giving companies cool ways to create virtual experiences that connect with people on a deeper level.

The most recent work by Malhotra and Jain in 2024 reveals something pretty interesting about what happens after these events wrap up. When brands nail their activations at Mahakumbh, people don't just forget about them afterward. Instead, these participants are way more likely to keep buying from these brands and stick with them for the long haul.

DISCUSSION

According to PTI, Mohit Malhotra, CEO of Dabur India, emphasized the importance of direct consumer engagement during traditional melas, which serves to fortify the company's relationship with its consumers. This interaction allows consumers to physically interact with and experience Dabur's products, thereby reinforcing their enduring trust in the Dabur brand. Dabur Red, an Ayurvedic toothpaste brand, has introduced an innovative oral hygiene initiative at Maha Kumbh 2025, inviting pilgrims to participate in Dant Snan (Brushing Zone), Dant A Sur (Nukkad Natak), and Dant Manthan (Activation Zone). These interactive installations are designed to enhance dental health awareness through engaging activities, street performances, and on-ground activations. With the Harbola Brothers' invitation garnering attention, Dabur Red is leveraging cultural engagement to promote oral hygiene at Maha Kumbh 2025, thereby making dental care both accessible and pertinent to devotees.



In February 2013, Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) initiated a guerrilla marketing campaign through its Lifebuoy brand to promote handwashing prior to meals. With creative collaboration from Ogilvy, Lifebuoy engaged with over 100 dhabas and hotels to imprint the message "Did you wash your hands with Lifebuoy?" (in Hindi) directly onto freshly prepared rotis using a specially designed heat stamp. This "Roti Reminder" was disseminated by 100 promoters across 100 kitchens, reaching an audience of 2.5 million individuals over the course of the 30-day mela. The campaign aimed to underscore

the essential role of soap in preventing germ transmission, particularly in the context of hand-based food consumption prevalent in India. The initiative resonated with the Cannes jury, ultimately securing a bronze award for HUL in the Public Relations category. Lifebuoy had a strategic relaunch done in the Mahakumbh, it used a very engaging Drone show to relaunch which mesmerized the pilgrims on the ground.



Hansaplast is giving out free waterproof bandages and first-aid help to more than 2 million people attending the Maha Kumbh Mela. They've got trained volunteers spread throughout the event who can help people right away and direct them to medical areas when necessary. The company is also bringing in pain-relief patches to help pilgrims deal with soreness from all the walking and ceremonies. This way, people can keep focusing on their spiritual experience without being bothered by small injuries.

Swiggy Instamart put together a booth at Triveni Sangam for the Maha Kumbh Mela, where they're handing out useful stuff like portable chargers, flashlights, batteries, and towels to help people stay ready for anything. Since it's so easy to get lost in those huge crowds, they've also put up a giant version of their S-pin logo that works as a meeting spot, complete with a QR code people can scan to save where it is. They added a fun sign that says "Bichhad gaye toh Swiggy par milte hain" (Lost? Let's meet on Swiggy), making their booth both helpful and entertaining for visitors.



Reckitt Benckiser started up cleanliness campaigns at the Kumbh Mela that focus on washing hands and staying sanitary, encouraging pilgrims to make cleanliness a priority. Dettol's "Haath Dhona Har Baar" campaign pushed people to wash their hands regularly using catchy phrases and stressed how important it is to stay free from germs.



Harpic's "Hoga Toilet Vidhi Ka Gyaan, Toh Badhega Kumbh ka Maan" asked visitors to be considerate of others by cleaning up toilets after they use them. To get these messages across, both companies put on street plays right there at the event, painted big murals in 54 villages nearby, and sent out Dettol "Hand Mascots" who told stories, taught people about good hygiene practices, and handed out soap to help everyone develop better habits.

LG India stepped up to help make things better for people visiting the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh. They set up water purifiers at 15 different lost and found camps so folks could get clean water to drink, and they put washing machines in certain spots where visitors could wash their clothes without paying anything. On top of that, LG Electronics handed out these special "Suraksha Dhaga" bands at the lost and found center that had the mela helpline number and family contact info on them, making it easier for pilgrims to find each other again if they got split up in all the crowds.

In 2019, the Indian detergent company Wheel came up with something pretty clever called the "Wheel Wash-o-Cycle." Picture this: they took a regular stationary bike and attached a water-filled drum to it. When people pedaled for about 10 to 12 minutes, it actually washed their clothes without needing any electricity. They set up two Wheel Washing Centers with over twenty of these contraptions each, complete with clean water, detergent, and proper drainage so pilgrims could keep their clothes fresh and the area clean. What's really cool is that Wheel also taught people how to build these washing cycles themselves, so they could take the idea back home to their villages and keep using it long after the Kumbh Mela ended.



Over at the Maha Kumbh Mela, Fevicol spotted a real problem: kids getting separated from their families. So they came up with TeekaID, which is basically a QR code sticker that looks just like the traditional black dot parents put on their children's foreheads. It was a smart way to help reunite families while still honoring the cultural traditions of the festival.



But here's where Fevicol got really playful: they made these massive T-shirts that could actually fit two or three people at once. Families could squeeze into these huge shirts together, which was basically Fevicol showing off their whole "unbreakable bond" message in the most literal way possible. Sure, it made for some adorable photos, but it also drove home their point about sticking together in a way that was both touching and pretty funny. Just imagine trying to navigate the crowded Kumbh Mela grounds while you're all crammed into one giant T-shirt with your family members - talk about the ultimate test of teamwork and patience!

Amazon India decided to make things easier for pilgrims at Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj by setting up what they call a 'Suvidha Kiosk.' Basically, it's a one-stop shop where people can order all kinds of essentials - think phone chargers, clothes, religious items, blankets, you name it - and either grab them right from the kiosk or have them delivered anywhere within about 2 miles. They put this thing at Kumbh Kutir in sector 24, Arail, and you can even handle returns through the Amazon app if you need to. But it's not just about shopping - they've also got places to rest, drinking water, spots to charge your phone, and first aid supplies.

Amazon India has introduced a 'Suvidha Kiosk' at Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj, offering pilgrims a seamless shopping experience by enabling them to order essential items—from mobile chargers and garments to pooja samagri and blankets—and pick them up directly from the kiosk or get them delivered within a 3km radius. Located at Kumbh Kutir, sector 24, Arail, the kiosk also facilitates easy returns through the Amazon app. Beyond shopping, it provides resting areas, drinking water, mobile charging stations, and first aid kits.

In a creative move, Amazon India has introduced a novel project called 'Aapki Suvidha Ke Liye, Aaram Ki Delivery; Amazon—Dibbon Se Badhkar,' where its well-known cardboard packaging boxes have been transformed into cozy beds for the devotees gathering at Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh for the Maha Kumbh Mela.

Eveready Industries is supplying the Maha Kumbh Police with 5,000 Siren Torches (DL102) equipped with powerful safety alarms, along with Ultima batteries. Managing the crowd is crucial at such a large-scale event. Eveready's torches not only provide illumination but also contribute to a safer environment for the millions of attendees.

ITC Mangaldeep is leveraging 3D Augmented Reality (AR) technology to transform spiritual experiences for attendees of Maha Kumbh 2025. This initiative allows devotees to virtually engage in significant rituals such as the Shahi Snaan, Deep Daan, and Aarti from their homes. By using a customized AR filter, users can craft unique keepsakes and share their spiritual experiences with others.

Furthermore, Mangaldeep is hosting a hybrid Deep Daan ceremony, where virtual offerings made through AR will be physically transported to the Ganges on a weekly basis. Mankind Pharma has initiated a 45-day healthcare mission at the 2025 Mahakumbh in Prayagraj, scheduled from January 13 to 26. The camp, operational daily from 12 PM to 4 PM, offers free health check-ups, blood pressure monitoring, and first-aid services to pilgrims. Supported by Mankind's medical team and Pathkind facilities, the initiative aims to meet the medical needs of the large number of attendees, providing hundreds of free check-ups each day.

Coca-Cola India, along with its foundation Anandana, has teamed up with the PHD Rural Development Foundation (PHDRDF) and Prayagraj Mela Authority (PMA) for the Maha Kumbh 2025 event. As part of the "Maidaan Saaf" initiative, they are distributing 21,500 jackets made from recycled PET to sanitation workers, boatmen, and waste management volunteers, ensuring their safety while emphasizing the importance of recycled materials. Additionally, they have set up 1,000 women's changing rooms along the river ghats, constructed entirely from recycled multi-layer plastic. These structures, adorned with artwork by local artists, offer privacy, advocate for responsible plastic use, and inspire visitors to see waste as a resource rather than a burden.

ITC Bingo! Tedhe Medhe is introducing an experiential campaign called "Bhaukaal Lok" at Mahakumbh 2025, which combines the vibrant culture and bold flavors of Uttar Pradesh with the brand's quirky character. The campaign includes an immersive Bhaukaal Zone featuring attractions such as a BYOB (Bring Your Own Bingo!) Chaat Zone for crafting unique snacks, an Interactive Content Zone for social media interaction, and a Bingo! Bonfire for fiery flavors and celebrations.

Catch Salt and Spices has formed partnerships with more than 100 dhabas and eateries throughout the city, establishing a special area for engaging with consumers. The 'Sangam Ki Goonj' campaign uniquely combines the spiritual practice of bell ringing with culinary enjoyment. Digital bells are incorporated at every interaction point, while physical bells are strategically placed, creating a harmonious mix of tradition and flavor.

A 30-foot tall, illuminated Mountain Dew bottle acts as a landmark within the Mela. Under the Sting energy drink brand, over 500 charging stations for devices are available. Given the vastness of the Mela, staying connected and finding one's way can be challenging. PepsiCo's striking solutions highlight how brands can merge visibility with practical utility. Ola has introduced 1,000 electric scooters to offer an eco-friendly and economical travel option throughout the Mela grounds.

In partnership with event organizers, Ola has also launched tech-driven solutions. Leading this effort is the Kumbh Sah'AI'yak app, created by India's first AI unicorn, to provide navigation and personalized insights about the Kumbh Mela. Additionally, Ola Consumer has introduced electric vehicle shuttles, budget-friendly cab rentals, and dedicated transit services at airports and railway stations to further enhance accessibility for pilgrims.

FINDINGS

- **Consumer Sentiment:** Followers show a favorable response to brands that support spiritual and social initiatives, including health, hygiene, and environmental sustainability.
- **Brand Activations:** Prominent FMCG and telecom companies have effectively engaged with consumers by offering free products, religious items, and community services.
- **Digital Engagement:** Brand recall has been boosted through social media campaigns, partnerships with influencers, and location-specific promotions.
- **Challenges:** Balancing commercial goals with cultural sensitivity continues to be difficult, as some brands have faced criticism for seemingly commercializing a sacred event.
- **Success Metrics:** Brands that utilized storytelling, devotional activities, and CSR efforts experienced increased engagement and consumer trust.

LIMITATIONS

- The study is limited to selected brand and their marketing communication strategies in the Mahakumbh 2024.
- Limited availability of real time and accurate data due to the nature of the event.
- Due to limited availability of literature, literature review is not conscience with the subject.

CONCLUSION

The Maha Kumbh Mela transcends being merely a religious event—it offers a profound spiritual journey that unites millions of devotees from around the globe. In recent years, companies have acknowledged this exceptional chance to engage with individuals in a setting rich in faith, culture, and reverence. However, the future of brand interaction at the Maha Kumbh will necessitate more than mere visibility—it will require authenticity, cultural awareness, and a true comprehension of the pilgrims' experiences. Looking forward, technology is set to play an increasingly significant role in enriching the experience for both attendees and brands. Picture AI-driven personalized support, AR/VR-based narratives that vividly portray ancient myths, and immediate digital interactions that establish meaningful connections between brands and participants.

However, at its core, brands must surpass mere promotions—they need to deliver genuine value. This could involve providing respite areas for tired travelers, offering navigation assistance for lost visitors, or launching eco-friendly programs to safeguard the sacred rivers. Brands that resonate with the authentic essence of Kumbh will leave a lasting impression. Sustainability will also play a crucial role in the future of brand engagement at the Maha Kumbh. With millions converging in one location, responsible marketing will be essential—campaigns focused on minimizing waste, cleanup efforts, and using biodegradable materials will establish a new benchmark. Pilgrims are looking for more than just products; they desire experiences that enhance their spiritual journey.

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