



Brand Communication strategy during and after Lock down days.

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Abstract

This article has been prepared to understand the impact of COVID-19 Lock down days on the brand communication and to suggest the brands a few insights to stabilize the position they had achieved. These are observational reflections and ideas that are gathered from the various experiences, learnings and interactions during these COVID -19 days. This paper examines various possibilities and challenges brand may face in terms of brand perception, positioning, media engagement etc. These insights would be useful for brand managers and marketing communication team to execute future brand decisions.

Introduction

Covid-19 is spreading at a dangerous mode across the world making the people and business unsettled, restless and desperate. Every section of the society is affected by and nobody had any clue on how to cope up with the unforeseen situation. The initial days of lockdown made people panic and most of the people slowly started to settle. The same was happening with the business of brands also.

During the last one month of Covid-lock down days, I have been observing the media contents quite seriously as the work from home opportunity allows most of us to have sufficient time. You would have noticed that the number of pages in every newspaper has come down to half. You would have also seen many movies in different channels with a single advertisement break. What would be the reason for such unseen practices in the print and visual media space? Absolutely no need to think too much. The advertisement revenue has fallen sharply. Is it because of the lack of content in the media? I would not agree with it completely because if we look at the newspaper every day, a lot of knowledgeable and insightful materials targeting readers of all age groups and obviously Covid- related news across the world and articles are placed in it. In the visual media also, I do not think that entertainment contents have come down heavily because many of the Malayalam channels have aired some blockbusters during this period. It simply indicates that brands are unwilling to advertise or communicate in difficult and uncertain times. Brands follow the notion that when there are no sales do not favour advertisement. Brands are not showcasing the courage to invest in any communication expenses during these Lock down days. The trend was visible in the initial days but later many brands have realized that it is not advisable to stay away for long days from the communications with the consumer. They have initiated brand conversations with the customers and started launching some outstanding campaigns during this season. I strongly believe that any communication attempt originating from brands will definitely pay off.

Need for the study

Consumers after lockdown days will get back to their shopping but it will not be the same way as to how they were enjoying shopping before the pandemic. They will exhibit some unusual behaviours and decision-making patterns while buying expensive and nonexpensive commodities. Because they have gone through some strange experiences which will trigger them to undertake some changes. Consumer confidence has come down and many of them must have already reworked on their financial planning also. Few of the products which had a usual presence in our shopping baskets may not find their place after lockdown because most of the families will be on a task of selecting the most essential commodity for their everyday life. Consumers will stay away from crowded shopping places and maybe unhappy if somebody is making contact during their shopping. Movie experience in a multiplex and fine outside dining from the best restaurant would not fascinate the families at least for a genuine duration. Festivals and holiday destinations are no more exciting for the consumer as it may bring a huge crowd to celebrate. I think a lot will happen similarly to these changes for which we need to closely observe the customers. This article is developed to help brands on deciding an approach and strategy of brand communication and how it would help a brand to become more meaningful and relevant to the consumers

Objectives of the study

To observe the consumer behavior changes during and after COVID 19 Lock-down days.

To understand the strategy adopted by brands to manage the adversity.

To suggest brands on brand positioning, communication, media space utilization

Literature Review

From a recent study, it is learned that of most of the consumers do not think brands need to withdraw from advertising during the Covid-19 outbreak, although they anticipate companies to think about their tone and messaging and communicate around values.

A survey of more than 35,000 consumers globally by Kantar found that just 8% thought brands should stop advertising. However, there is a clear expectation that companies should play their part, with 78% of consumers believing brands should help them in their daily lives, 75% saying brands should inform people of what they're doing, and 74% thinking companies should not exploit the situation.

Information or irritation? Brand promotion might not seem like the best idea during the coronavirus crisis, with people taking to Twitter to express their annoyance at being sent marketing emails from companies they haven't heard from in years.

And most ad agency executives agree that trying to advertise during unprecedented times is a difficult balance.

Crisis communication can be thought of as a public relation activity intended to take care of an organization's image and reputation during crisis events. It includes the official communication from the organization with any media inquiry, legal entity, and government representative regarding any ethical, legal or financial issue regarding the organization. The motto of crisis communication during disaster or crisis is to help the organization achieve the regular day-to-day work mode and keep the information flowing within and outside the organization. Crisis communication may be expressed as a technique or strategy to mend the image of an organization after crises (Coombs, 1998). Scholars have recommended many solutions to managing crisis including the impression management strategy designed by Allen and Caillouet (1994), the information strategy conceived by Sturge (1994) and the image restoration theory by Benoit (1995, 1997). Theory says that the official communication from an organization should be goal oriented and the main goal of the communication should be the preservation of a constructive reputation of the organization

Listen to your customers, they have a problem

The foremost thing a brand should do is to engage with their customers quickly and figure out what are their fresh behaviours, new needs, and what creates value for them. This is the relevance of brand communication in a situation like this. Let us try to examine how a brand can initiate a conversation with the consumers. Let me present a campaign run by “Kellogg’s” during these days which is one of the best case studies for brands those who search for brand communication topics. The campaign is named “21 Days and 21 Breakfast recipes”



21 Days and 21 Breakfast recipes

Through this campaign, the brand addressed concerns of customers during these lockdown days as most of the home-makers are in search of online recipes that offer both nutrition and convenience on food choices. These episodes are conceptualized and developed for interacting and keeping in touch with the consumer category who are facing a real-time problem in lockdown days. A brand should seriously engage in social listening if they want to address consumer problems and concerns.

Focus on your campaign themes.

The advertisement theme adopted by many of the reputed multinationals during these days were coronavirus based educational films, that I consider as a good option to go with. Especially personal care and hygiene brands were focussing on the same theme and that is the need of the hour. Teaching consumers how to protect themselves from the virus and thus to safeguard society. But when the lockdown days are moving fast, and the society is entering into the next stages of this fight, can the same theme would be an ideal one to retain and attract your consumer segment? Choosing a perfect theme synchronizing with such a situation would be the most complex task for brand communicators. Here needs an introspection in your brand communication. In the next phase of COVID fight, your brand can reiterate that you are with the customer and let us fight together for a better future. I would suggest another choice is to create social cause themes through which the brand can motivate its customers to contribute to social welfare. Another suggestion is to create campaigns with positive emotional appeals like care, protection, togetherness, etc. Brands can launch campaigns that are related to the happy- at-home experiences and they can even ask consumers to share the finest moments captured with the family during lock-down days. It would be also appealing if the brands can join social education as governments and health organisations around the world preach about coronavirus etiquette, it makes sense for brands to echo or amplify their messages.



Surf excel advertisement

Surf Excel came up with a social cause theme-based campaign that has integrated Ramdan, Kindness, and Covid concerns.

Invest in your public relations.

How effectively a brand is executing the PR strategy in these difficult times. I am doubtful that many brands are undermining the role of public relations in the overall effectiveness of brand communication. I firmly believe that public relationship and engagement can gain wonders at this moment and also for the future of your brand. Your brand must be undertaking a lot of social responsibility activities during these days and you should not be hesitant to share these good deeds with the public. Here you can depend on print, visual, and online media together to ensure that your activities are shared with the customers. Your PR team can create press notes and media contents for visual and social media separately to share the social responsibility initiative organized by your brand. Undoubtedly the brand will acquire respect and recognition from the public.

I must say that our Kerala Government is a prime example of how to approach Public relations effectively in Covid days.



Press meet of Kerala prime minister

Do not hesitate to reposition because post Covid days demand it.

We must admit the fact that the consumers after the lockdown days will be expecting their favourite brands to be more trust oriented rather than playing with gimmicks. Many successful brands are in a comfort-zone because consumers are loyal to them and nothing came as adverse like this pandemic so far. This new situation urges brands to take up a serious approach to reposition, otherwise, there is every possibility that loyal consumers may switch to more value offering brands that are relevant to them. Immediately after the lockdown days when the customers reach the outlet, they must experience their most preferred brand to be more responsible and agile. Brands should try to build confidence and motivate the consumer segment through their repositioning. The objective of repositioning should not be an attempt to capture the sales results rather it should focus on winning the hearts of the consumers. Brands should be known for authenticity, integrity, and honesty during and after lockdown among the consumers. It is obvious that no brand would be in a position to execute high decibel promotional campaigns at this stage to communicate about the repositioning exercise. So, brands must ensure that they do not spend too much money to accomplish this objective. It can be achieved through experiential marketing campaigns, conventional marketing activities, virtual launches, and also through properly orchestrated digital activations also.

Keep trust in print and visual media.

There is absolutely no discussion required on the power of digital media and especially these days the role of digital media was tremendous. Many people have learned a lot from digital media and this will enhance the usage of the platform in the future. But does that completely kill print and visual media? Many of us read newspapers twice or thrice on a day. The children in our homes did not have time to read anything apart from their textbooks

started reading newspapers and magazines. The television programs were also well received by the audience as we had sufficient time left in our family after the entire engagements. So the power and influence of traditional media still remain unchanged. But our brands were reluctant to advertise in such a golden media space. Most of the brand advertisements were through the news channels these days. Either the brands did not want to waste the money as the sales of every product was disappointing or they have ignored the possibility of catching the audience effectively.

I am sure that the recent change that happened in the traditional media space would continue for a while and I would like to believe that after the lockdown days brands can reach target groups through print and visual media also.

Ubiquitous Social media.

The influence and role of social media in our life have risen steeply in these days because if we measure the overall media engagement of a particular individual on a day, I am sure more than half of it would have been consumed by social media. Lock-down videos, conversations, discussions, talent exhibitions, cooking experiments, family chats, the list of activities in social media go on. It was all enabled through social media and undoubtedly it has a soothing effect on our recent life. It has made us a little more relieved. Many people have explored social media not like the way they have approached it early and many others started engaging in social media for the first time. This surely establishes that social media engagements and activities of a brand should adopt a different approach from now onwards. It is desirable for a brand to constantly learn the social media behavioural changes of consumers these days and every brand can shape the strategy for marketing communication through social media.

Conclusion

To conclude, I wish to emphasize that brands should be agile and responsible in these days by initiating creative interactions and proper media utilization. It will surely hit positive results in the long run. These are a few of my random thoughts and suggestions related to the brand communication strategies which can be considered by brands during and after lockdown days.

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