Strategies for brand communication in new normal

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Abstract
During the pandemic many businesses have been shut down, but at the same time a few businesses saw an opportunity to grow. Particularly in health, hygiene and personal care segment. Because of their limited presence smaller brands find it difficult to sustain the operations. Larger brands leverage their marketing might to promote their products,
introduce different pack sizes for grammage correction when needed, and also presence in the shelf space. Customers wanted trusted names inthe category which had universal
impact. This phenomenon gave companies an opportunity to introduce new products and position their products around immunity, health and hygiene, mostly the safety proposition. The opportunity did not restrict only to new launched it offered newer segments like floor cleaner as well, which was by far dominated by unorganized unbranded products. The
innovation that segment offered was in the category of immunity booster. Additional niche segments were created to the category. During the pandemic the demand for hygiene and wellness products was exponentially increasing from customers. The category has not been restricted to hand wash, floor cleaner, sanitizers. The segment is widening eventowards
wellness drinks for adults. There is significant rise in demand for the health drinks for children and immunity-boosting drink for the adults. The segment grew at 87 per cent.
Key words: Product categories, Immunity boosters, niche segments, sanitizers

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At the time of nationwide lockdown an opportunity was presented to small companies in the FMCG sector, however, now it appears that the opportunity is over and in the rural and urban markets consumers are now preferring trusted brand names. The bigger companies are returning to normal with respect to operation and distribution. With this the companies are making more inroads into the rural market.
This phenomenon is seen predominantly in the health care products, where trusted brands are preferred. During the pandemic particular March, April and May as the distribution network was disrupted, smaller brands had an opportunity to build, particularly in the food and hygiene category. Smaller brands could take advantage of the situation by trade push as trade was aggressive in selling available stocks. It was situation of pantry loading.
However, with the availability of well-known, trusted, established brands the trend reversed.
The bigger brands came back strongly during the July-December period. Most of the established players like HUL, ITC, Dabur, Nestle, Marico and Britannia with improved supply chain were back to pre-covid levels with respect to production capacity. The brands got better acceptance even in rural areas as consumers preferred safety over economy. This was also because of the reverse migration, people migrating to villages who had exposure to these brands.
Manufacturers having over come the supply chain disruption were aggressive in the rural market and were looking forward to leverage the demand in these markets. To leverage the demand, companies also improved their distribution network in rural markets. The gap between the leading players and followers was narrowed not only in terms of outlets covered but also the field personnel. Because of their limited presence smaller brands find it difficult to sustain the operations. Larger brands leverage their marketing might to promote their products, introduce different pack sizes for grammage correction when needed,

and also presence in the shelf space. Thus, even if there is localised lockdown the sustaining power of the bigger brands is more. The bigger national brands have grown faster than the smaller regional brands. The growth of national brands between February 2019 and 2020 was double (8%) while that of the regional brands was half of that (4%).

During the pandemic many businesses have been shut down, but at the same time a few businesses saw an opportunity to grow. Particularly in health, hygiene and personal care segment.

The segment was improving its presence and simultaneously reinventing at the very high speed. There were more than 350 brands of sanitizers launched during March-May 2020, while hand wash brands were aggressively penetrating the market, adding some 300,000 households per week.

Earlier, i.e., prior to Covid-19 the segment was restricted to hygiene only. However, during the Covid-19 the segment made inroads into cleanliness and wellness category as well.

Further, it did not restrict itself to urban markets as earlier but made entry into the rural markets as well. More so, the pandemic converted this unorganized, highly fragmented, unbranded market into the organized branded market. In this way the Covid-19 significantly changed the landscape, as customers wanted trusted names in the category which had
universal impact.

This phenomenon gave companies an opportunity to introduce new products and position their products around immunity, health and hygiene, mostly the safety proposition. The opportunity did not restrict only to new launched it offered newer segments like floor cleaner as well, which was by far dominated by unorganized unbranded products. The innovation that segment offered was in the category of immunity booster. Additional niche segments were created to the category. During the pandemic the demand for hygiene and wellness products was exponentially increasing from customers.

The important factor is it's not going to be a pandemic only demand but the demand will be perpetual as customers will be more concerned about health and hygiene.

This is the opportunity for the players to consolidate their presence in this new normal through innovations, category expansions and most importantly promotion.

A few companies have already started leveraging the opportunity. Godrej Consumer Products (GCPL) has introduced new products to cater to the new needs of the customers with a comprehensive 12 products in personal and home hygiene category. One of the products being one-rupee hand sanitizer sachet.

Considering the intensity of the pandemic, the way pandemic changed the use of hygiene products the shift does not seem to be short term. The change seems to be permanent, thus the manufacturers should not lose out on the opportunity presented.

Pandemic played a role of catalyst in accelerating the growth the health, hygiene and
immunity segment which includes products like sanitizers along with hand wash and floor cleaners. The category today is worth ₹ 11,495 crore, a 24 per cent jump YoY. The segment was growing steadily till 2019 at 10 per cent over 2018.

The category has not been restricted to handwash, floor cleaner, sanitizers. The segment is widening even towards wellness drinks for adults. There is significant rise in demand for the health drinks for children and immunity-boosting drink for the adults. The segment grew at 87 per cent. There is a significant growth in the immunity products also like chyawanprash, honey etc. Dabur has added fifteen new products in its personal and hygiene space.

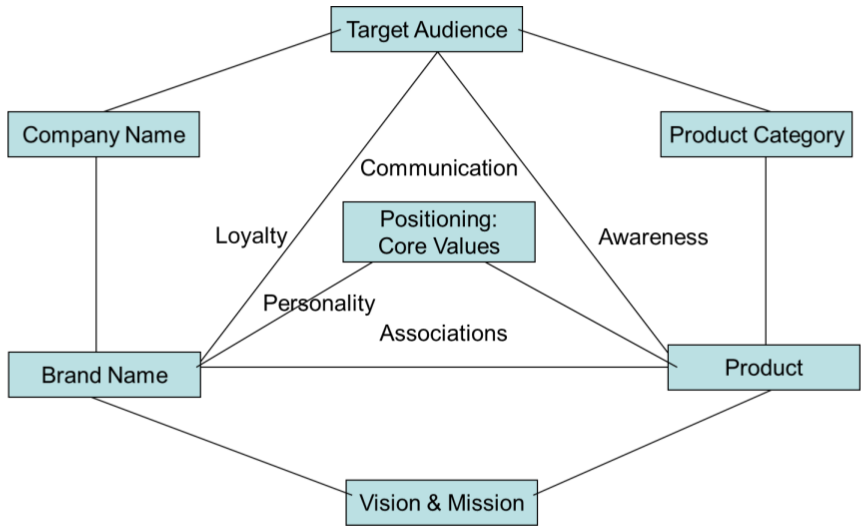
Many companies have advanced their launch of new products in the personal and hygiene space category. For instance, Emami rushed its launch of personal hygiene products and hand sanitizers to market almost a year ahead of schedule.

Many marketers feel that the pandemic proved to be a boon for these categories. However, important thing is that the brands must communicate promise and purpose clearly to the target audience and make the most of the opportunity presented.

The communication will have to be precise and accurate.

The premium ledge for quite a few years has been used very frequently and is now cluttered with the

brands. Not only in the health and hygiene category but across the categories premium positioning is used. Categories like herbal natural tag, creating cult-like communities like exclusivity, personalisation around a brand has been quite common. In the new normal of Covid-19 the premium tag may not appeal the customers as behavioural norms have changed during the pandemic.
With this changing consumer behaviour and preferences brands will have to rethink about the positioning norms. Some of the products will be de-prioritised as a result of reduced income of the households. Consumers discretionary spending will change and de- prioritization in premium category and daily wear apparel.
The early signals coming from the market which have begun to emerge from lockdown, down trading is a major fallout of the Covid-19. The Indian consumer may not be an exception to this, at least in near future, once the new normal comes up. Though in India the young consumers have not been exposed to scarcity or rationing, the Covid-19 crises may hit harder and leave a lasing impact.
Marketers need to understand the purchase behaviour carefully, though it is not being suggested that the premium brands will completely fade out unless they change positioning. The demand for the premium products may not be as high as it has been. But down trading between categories is quite likely. Consumer durables may not see this compromise for a few lakh rupees.
The consumers are likely to more conscious of value offering than ever before and be mindful of positioning between budget, premium and luxury category. The consumers are likely to be more conscious of preferences and will weigh the price value offering. Brands will have to be more transparent and provide timely information.
Value for money equation will be more important than ever before, even for luxury consumer durables. The brands will have to communicate value for money equation more transparently now than ever before.
Brands will be required to understand the consumer needs and wants more carefully and consciously. And not just go by generalizing the needs and wants of the customers. Brands will have to communicate premium values with precision, accuracy and sensitivity. These are experiential categories leading to consumers becoming more kinesthetic while buying.
Post pandemic, what was earlier considered to be discretionary spending will be an essential good in perpetuity.
There are indicators of dramatic shifts in consumer behaviour after the lockdown. This may warrant for a complete overhaul in the brand is communicated, positioned and priced. For in case of instance liquid hand wash, sanitisers, lifestyle appliances some changes in discretionary spending will take place. Consumers are likely to spend more on these categories for functional benefit of hygiene and safety.
As the consumers discretionary spending will change the marketers will have to realign their priorities. The price-value equation will change. And the same will have to be effectively communicated to the target audience. Safety, reliability and ready availability of the brand will have to be communicated to the target audience.
While addressing to the issues of the target audience, marketers will have to address the issues of the trade channel as well. Since the acceptance to the new products will take a while, not because of the need but because the communication will take a little while, the trade will have to get financial support from the manufacturers. The credit period to the channel partners, wholesalers, retailers will have to be extended.
In order to ensure the proper communication with the target market, marketers can make use of the brand hexagon.



To communicate effectively marketers will have to look at the vision and mission it has for the brand. For the brands communication to the target audience marketers will have to use suggestive brand name or go for brand extension if the opportunity is there to extend an existing brand name with a suitable product category. An excellent corporate image of the company can come handy for communicating commitment to the target audience and other stake holders. A loyal customer base is always great help in this kind of brand building and communication.

If the company has presence in the product category, say for instance hand wash then moving to sanitizers is relatively easy. The image of the brand can be leveraged and brand extension strategy can come handy in this case. The awareness is already there among the consumers and prospects the company needs to leverage its recall value and keep the communication around the new product category and the message. Presence in the segment helps communicate quality to the target audience. Similarly the product category and the brand associations emphasize the communication effectively if the mother brand is effectively communicated. Personality of the brand can play effective role as well.

We strongly recommend that the new normal will give great opportunities to marketers introducing new products, going for brand extensions for growth.

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