

Decoding Marketing in Times of COVID Era

By Shalini Singh, Chief-Corporate Communications, Sustainability & CSR at Tata Power



In Covid era, it is essential to decode marketing by being empathetic to customer needs

I recall this line I had read a long time ago saying the most dangerous thought in today's world is "we have always done it this way". Echoing a certain Darwinian sentiment which calls for adaptability, this is very integral to business and marketing, especially in the current unprecedented times. If there is one thing that Covid 19 has made us realise, it is that the uncertainty looming over us calls for drastic change in the way every brand is handled. As leaders, responsible for important communication in these times, we must be clear about how we perceive our brand and showcase it to the world to retain relevance while being sensitive.

Here are a few ways in which brands need to decode marketing in these tough times of fighting a pandemic.

Humanise the brand

The new normal of being under lockdown has not been easy on anyone and as a brand it's important to show our compassionate side. It is time to humanise our brand and shift the focus from products and services to people. At Tata Power, we have made a lot of effort in humanising the brand and cutting down on conversations regarding the products. Instead of explicitly promoting products or services, it is important to see what customers want to hear or read about at a vulnerable time. Marketers need to focus on customer's moods and listen to them before working on key brand messages. Considering the limitation that could arise in stepping out to pay the bill, online bill payment was actively promoted to the customers through 'Go digital campaign'. Since we are an essential service, we realised that our communication should also focus on employees who are working in the forefront to ensure a 24/7 uninterrupted power supply to customers. Appreciating them regularly for their sincerity was of utmost important.

Push for relatable and sensitive content

Content is the king and needless to say in times of social distancing, it is very important to create engaging content that is not insensitive in anyway. Most users are online & working from home these days and it is necessary to focus on their well-being and positivity. It is imperative to expand the brand portfolio by addressing consumer

pain points and their unfulfilled needs. There is a general disinterest followed by anxiety and it is necessary to produce exciting content that grabs attention and makes them feel better. It is also important to increase social media presence through the right content that can help gain shareability and more traction. We introduced various e-volunteering opportunities for customers, employees & their families to help others in need by #making & donating a mask, #plant a sapling at home on World Environment Day and involved them in videos & song making to keep their spirits high. The response and participation were tremendous and the brand followership jumped recorded a jump of 35%.

Relook at existing campaigns

Since things have changed drastically in the last few months, it is important to review the existing campaigns. It is important to see if the campaign is still relevant and appropriate in these times. A revaluation of media performance can help in identifying inefficiencies and optimizing programmes by channel. This will improve efficiency in the way work is done, and in getting an overall clearer picture of where the money is actually being invested, helping organisations to build a cash reserve.

Product categories that stay relevant in today's situation must also be emphasized. This could also mean taking resources from less relevant categories and quickly reallocating them to categories where there is active or potential demand. At Tata Power, activities of existing campaigns like Club Enerji were moved online and "E-learning Fridays" were introduced. We also revaluated the ongoing campaign "SwitchOffToSwitchOn" to include measures that can be taken at home (resource and energy conservation at home) to help conserve resources & be environmentally responsible.

Launch relevant campaigns

This is also the time when many relevant campaigns might gain a lot of traction while making a positive difference in people's lives. Understanding that these difficult times have left a mental toll on many of us, including the elderly, we partnered with NGOs to introduce e-volunteering which organises calls to the elderly and school children to teach them English. We also launched Saheliworld an online marketplace that sells Covid-19 essentials made by the rural artisans of the country. While understanding the needs of the customers, we also tapped into an opportunity to empower the local rural communities. We donated cloth masks made by Dhaaga, our CSR initiative, to the local communities. We also started E-daan within the organisation to collect old electronics, including mobile phones, laptops and iPads, which are then donated to the local communities. We are also providing monsoon safety tips during this time.

This is one time when we cannot undervalue the significance of being together and being authentic in all our communications. Most people who are reading about the brand online, are looking for some kind of guidance or reassurance in an uncertain world. The stand we take in the post-Covid era will determine our future communication strategy. As brands, we need to remember that humanity and empathy survive time and memories and hence it is important to keep these values in the forefront while taking any stand.