

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY ON BRAND COMMUNICATION DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

The entire world had come to a standstill due to coronavirus pandemic. Widespread stress and slowdown of the economy has taken over the minds of individuals, government as well as the big companies. Individuals are concerned about their health and are thus trying to stay safe and protected. The government is trying its best to be as resourceful as it can by providing top notch healthcare facilities, announcing relief packages. However, brands are struggling to keep up with the new market place changes and are finding it hard to survive. We can see many companies going out of business and many taking advantage of the situation. Brands are clueless as how to proceed and what role to play in this situation, and we can see brand communication playing a vital role in the brand's survival. Brands are undergoing a total shift from their usual communication strategies and networks to a completely digital platform. Companies are trying to incorporate positive, educative and transparent information in their communications to gather the trust and loyalty of their customers. They are trying to engage with consumers majorly through social media and are running several covid 19 specific campaigns.

To understand and explore the same the following study has been conducted using primary and secondary sources of data which shows the different communication strategies being employed by the brands and also identifies the ones which actually worked and helped the brand to survive. We see how the brands' creative strategies helped them develop their digital presence and how it added economic and social value to the brands reputation. The study also highlights the consumers' reaction towards this change in the brand communications and how was it received. The study proves beneficial to the upcoming brands, marketing and advertising enthusiasts, small scale business as well as the well established brands.

Keywords: *Creative strategies, Brand, Communication, Digital presence, Economy*

INTRODUCTION

The world has entered into some different space where everything has been divided into pre corona and post corona time. The widespread pandemic has created ruckus not only in terms of healthcare safety but has also turned the economy upside down. The government is trying its best to spread as much awareness about the pandemic. With such a varied response from the government, we see private enterprises rising up to the occasion and helping the community at large. Brands are communicating broadly as to how they will work with different communities for the betterment of consumers in these difficult times. When we particularly speak about communication in this scenario we see brands internally communicating with the employees through group meetings over video conferencing apps, then we see brands communicating with their business partners through detailed weekly reports and lastly and most importantly we see brands trying to engage with the consumers at the maximum level through many mediums.

LITERATURE REVIEW

(Sheridan, Debia, Tia, Franke, & Rodgers, 2020)

In a report published by Ipsos, the authors talk about how the brands are finding different ways to help the people to survive which in turn is helping them to revive their brand. The report then poses the question as to what private companies and brands do during these times. The authors conducted a poll and interviewed 999 adults aged between 18-65 in USA to know about the consumers point of view about the changing brand communication strategies and had the following findings:

- People trust big corporations more than the government, thus highlighting the great expectations people have from the brands
- Majority of the people felt that brands had a social responsibility to offer aid

(Avery & Edelman, 2020)

In an article published by the Harvard business school, the authors argue that now is the best time for brands to communicate with the consumers. The report mentions some quick reactions from brands (eg. Walmart and Nike) to the changing scenario. The analysis resulted in a major finding that consumers are looking forward to hearing from brands but only if the communication is comforting and positive.

Rationale Of The Study

This study helps to identify and understand the different communication strategies brands are using and how consumers are reacting to it. The study proves to be of importance to various marketing and advertising enthusiasts, small scale businesses, different brands looking for new techniques , as well as the government as to how they can make use of brand communication strategies to communicate things of law and order to the citizens.

Objectives Of The Study

- To understand the basic communication strategy of brands during Covid 19
- To understand the consumer's expectations from the brands.

Challenges And Limitations Of The Study

- The study's sample size is limited to a small number of 184 respondents and thus the results cannot be generalized to a whole population
- The respondents majorly belong to the city of Mumbai and thus the results cannot be matched with the global sentiments.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Primary Data Collection- Questionnaire survey was conducted to collect data from consumers about brand communications and their expectations from the brands during the pandemic times.

Sample size(n)= 184

184 consumers participated in the survey which was circulated through Google forms and specific data was collected upon which analysis was done to link consumer trust to brand communications.

The research study conducted was descriptive and qualitative in nature.

Secondary Data Collection - Secondary sources of datlike blog posts, newspaper articles , websites , published articles, Internet Surveys and reports were used to study the brand communication pre and during corona world .

Findings And Interpretations

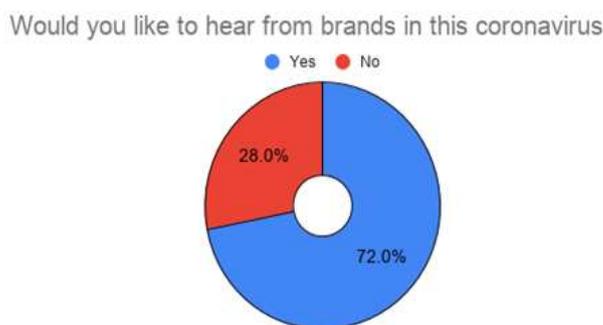


Figure -1 The survey revealed that 72% of consumers do want to hear from brands about their practices and their preparedness to the crisis. They are willing to hear but only when such communications are positive.

Fig-2 The participants were hearing from the brands mostly through the digital routes such as emails, text messages and hugely from social media channels. Thus it highlights how essential it has now become for brands to have a social media presence.

A small percent of people heard from brands through sources of outdoor media like hoardings, this might be because brands are not putting in huge amounts to advertise on hoardings put across roads which are now mostly empty.

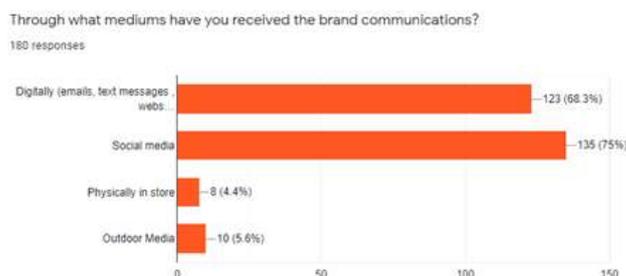


Figure 2

Fig-3 Consumers were mostly interested in hearing about brands safety practices . People are also interested in regular coronavirus updates as they want to receive pandemic related information too from the brands apart from their usual offerings related information.

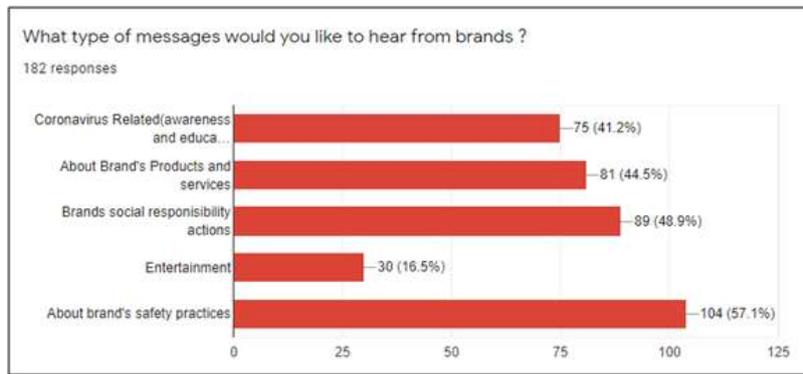


Figure 3 .

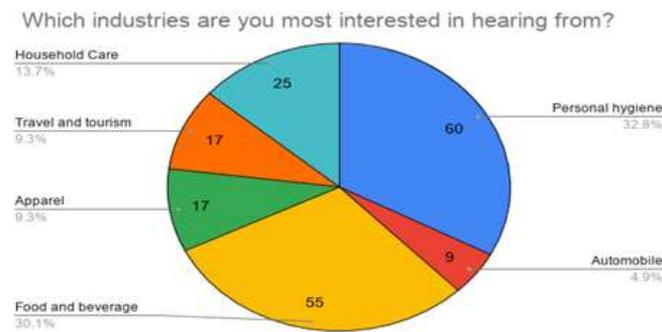


Fig-4 The survey shows that almost 30% of the people are interested in knowing about the food and beverage industry and how it is operating. 32% of the people want to hear from the personal hygiene industry followed by 13.7% of them who want to know about the household care industry.

Fig-5 In a healthcare scare like Coronavirus , consumers' trust in doctors and healthcare authorities has increased many folds and thus they want to receive direct communication from them. 40.3% of the people wanted to receive communications from doctors and healthcare authorities due to their belief in them. 18.2% of the participants were interested in hearing directly from the brand's technical experts. Very few of the consumers were interested in hearing from celebrities or social influencers or peers. This highlights that consumers are looking forward to human communications in the market

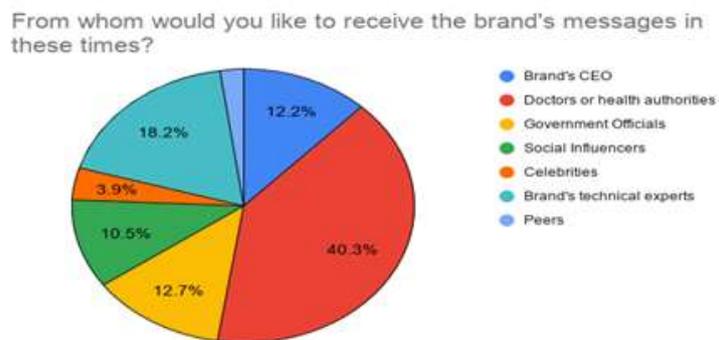


Figure 5

Fig 6 When asked if participants made a purchase from these new brands solely based on their brand communication during covid 19, 68.9% said no and that they stuck with the usual brands whereas just a small 18.6% said that they had made such purchases from new upcoming brands. The reason behind this might be the brand loyalty factor and the concern for security and safety that these new brands are yet to address and establish.

Figure 6

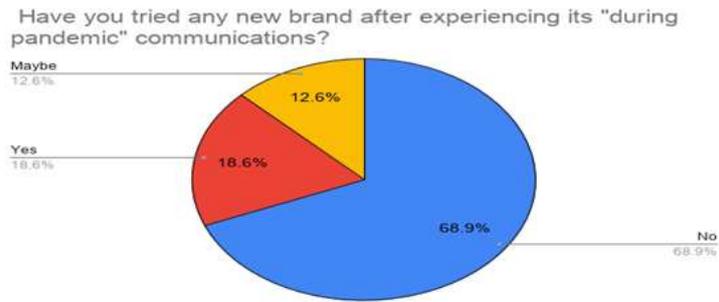


Fig-7 In order to understand how customers wanted to feel by looking at the advertising, we saw that majority of them wanted to associate with the feeling of positivity through advertisements. Next people want to have a sense of security and they need reassurance that things will get back to normal sooner or later. This was followed by the desire to know about products and services of the brand through advertisements.

Figure 7

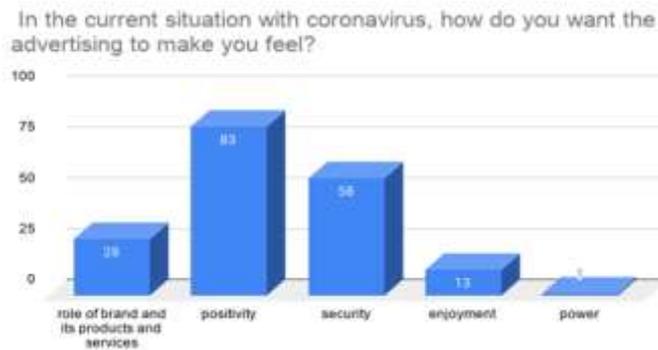


Fig-8 Most Participants chose television as the medium through which they wanted communication to take place. As television caters to audiences of all age groups, it would be the appropriate platform for the brands to communicate their messages through. This was then followed by instagram, an app which is highly used by the young generation , followed by Whatsapp , a text messaging app , and other social media channels.

Figure 8

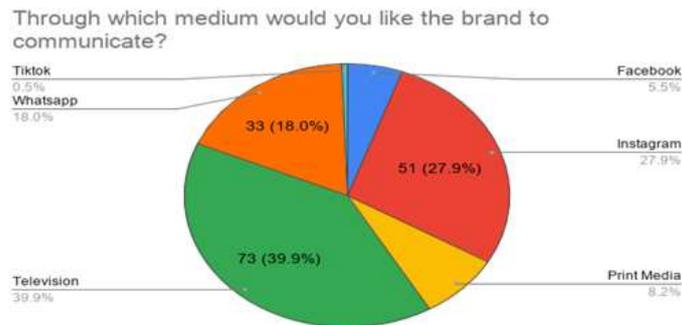


Fig-9 When participants were asked what behaviors of the brands increased their trust during the crisis, it was revealed that taking care of customers was the top ranked attribute (31.3%), followed by not taking care of employees(29.1%) , and donating to the needy (19.2%).

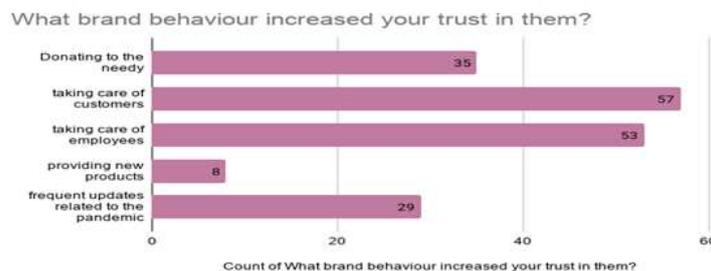


Figure 9

Fig-10 Lastly respondents were asked if the brand communications done during pandemics would have an effect on their post corona world purchases, a majority of them(48.4%) said yes and some were not yet sure and responded with a maybe(34.1%). As discussed before, these brand communications would have a long lasting effect as these create trust in the minds of customers and help in building relationships.

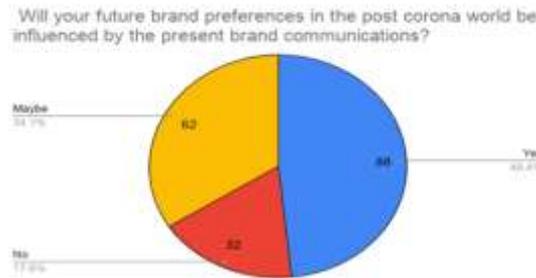


Figure 10

Conclusion & Recommendations

We can see that brands play a crucial role in the economy and are very essential for its recovery. In these times of Coronavirus, brands have a new opportunity to tap and turn this challenge into an advantage. Brands have the potential to connect with customers virtually and have time to understand the new rituals. This understanding will further help brands to build durable, relevant, repeatable and associated communications that will have a positive effect on consumers purchase decisions. Consumers now know about the pandemic and are already scared about it , and thus instead of giving consumers coronavirus related content, brands should focus all efforts on solving a problem rather than selling it. They should find practical solutions and develop products that ease out people's lives during this pandemic. And lastly brands need to communicate. The most important part is that communications need to be empathetic, filled with compassion and should consist of relevant facts and up to date information.

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