

COVID 19- BRANDS THAT MADE A DIFFERENCE

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Abstract – Throughout the pandemic, Social Media, Facebook, Instagram, You -Tube have not only connected people throughout but also have revolutionarily changed the way in which brands advertise and communicate. They have made brands more innovative and responsible in fulfilling their humanitarian goals and rising to the needs of fulfilling their social obligation. This research paper precisely highlights those brands that did not isolate from the reality on the ground. These brands rose to do their bit during this grim situation arising out of the covid 19 surge by choosing to allow commercial objectives take a backseat and communicate sensitively during this human tragedy. This paper is a study of those brands that made a difference through social media campaigns and showed their humane face during the pandemic.

Keywords –Brands, responsible, Pandemic, Social Media, Marketing

Introduction - On 11th March 2020 the WHO declared Coronavirus disease (COVID) a global pandemic and little did we know that our lives will be changed forever. (WHO, 2020) The pandemic has affected us in more ways than we could imagine. To put it in numbers the virus has infected more than 17 crore (World Bank,2020) people approximately and many have referred to the corona virus as the 'Black Swan' of 2020, a phenomenon that was never witnessed before in a century. People were locked in their houses and while they were not meeting and going out, they were thankfully still connected. Yes, you guessed it right. I am talking about social media. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and the use of this mode of networking helped people to stay connected, convey their message and use it as a source of recreating and entertainment. I wish to study what brands did and how they communicated during the pandemic. But talking about brands and their marketing strategies when lives have been lost may sound a bit boorish, but what if I tell you that some of your favourite brands saved lives and impacted people in positive ways. What if I tell you that brands were by your side all throughout the lockdown? Right from the time you were binge watching your favourite movies on Netflix, indulging in dairy milk and homemade Oreo cakes for your comfort food needs to working out with Cult fit's home workouts, brands have been a part of our lives.

A lot has been going on and a lot has been said too. But whenever humanity has faced something of this magnitude, one thing has happened for sure and that is helpers and saviours have come forward. Today we are going to talk about one such helper group, the brands. Because when the pressure is on, and government machinery is overloaded, it is up to big brands and companies to do that will better their employees, customers and the community at large, until this difficult time passes. What drew me even close to this area of study is that brands did all this in the most creative manner and as I like to say, creativity moves the world.

Brands that actually made a difference - Given the grim situation because of the covid surge it is appropriate that commercial objectives take a backseat and brands communicate sensitively. Some brands choose to remain silent and they did their bit by not pushing ahead their commercial agenda. To help our country grapple with the pandemic, many brands came forward to do their bit, like provide financial aid, donate and do their bit like for example

ITC. Though this was important, what needs to be applauded at this juncture were the brands that helped people cope the pandemic in a purposeful and appropriate way. Apart from financial aid, there is another powerful tool that some brands have used and that is, advertising through Social Media. Now why this is important is because brands have their assets and by using the brand assets like communication spends or social media assets to communicate can help messages or logistical resources to move healthcare related equipment reach people in no time. To use brand assets for the service of the people sans commercial motive is being humane and staying sensitive to the cause during this large humanitarian tragedy is paramount. Many brands stepped forward to halt their advertising to give space to launch empathetic campaigns as a reminder of togetherness and better tomorrow. Many brands and organisations came to the rescue of the sufferers by using their social media reach to amplify requests for hospital beds and oxygen supply. This research paper precisely highlights those brands that did not isolate from the reality on the ground.

Dunzo opened its social media platform to those who need their request amplified. One such brand is Dunzo. It was quick to convert its social media page into an SoS helpline for its users. (Ambwani.V.M,2021) Very early on during this on-going pandemic Dunzo was founded in July, 2014 by Kabeer Biswas, an alumnus of Mumbai University. Before Dunzo, Kabeer founded ademic, Dunzo also reminded consumers that we are all in this together by swallowing its pride and uplifting its competitors in its social media posts.

The Tata Group announced that it is importing 24 cryogenic containers through special chartered flights to meet the oxygen crisis caused by Covid 19 across the country. The move helped supply liquid oxygen to medical centres across the country. Tata Steel also diverted its industrial manufacturing capacity to meet the shortage. (Vijaya Raghavan, K.2021).CRED's Founder Kunal Shah announced that the platform will be sourcing 1 billion litre of oxygen for India. In association with NGO Milaap, every 10,000 CRED Coin will go towards 1,000 litre of oxygen, transport liquid oxygen and help ease the oxygen shortage in the country.

Another payment platform Paytm claims to have sourced supplies of different sizes of oxygen concentrators and is raising ₹10 crore to donate them to health institutions across the country. It has already collected ₹1 crore. Paytm Foundation planned on raising ₹14 crore to donate Oxygen Concentrators across India. Paytm matched the contributions received through their app and helped ease the oxygen crisis in India. Rs 1.5 crore were raised within hours of starting the campaign and it is getting an overwhelming response till date. The campaign was amplified on social media via taking on board influencers and celebrities. Also, Paytm included an option of a sharable story poster which donors could share on social media, this created a buzz around it and motivated even more people to join the cause. Importance of online payment options to pause, reflect, rework its strategies and most importantly, prioritise consumer interest leveraging their social media presence to either amplify citizens' SoS for ICU beds or to spread awareness around vaccination registration was truly commendable.

Online class company Coursera has launched the Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative which provides free classes for newly unemployed workers at no cost. To talk more about our first helper brand Dunzo, not many would know it across India but this delivery app based start-up has done wonders on social media. With a following of 54K this brand has also received awards for being one of the best brands on social media. This brand used their social media presence to amplify citizens' requests for ICU beds and to spread awareness around vaccination registration. With a good social media engagement and reach Dunzo was able to help and save lives by changing their brand communication and making it useful for the viewers.

Nike is one of the most followed brands online. It is also known for its wonderful storytelling and powerful messaging. We all are pretty much familiar with their tagline, 'just

do it'. This time during the pandemic they just added a twist to it with their social media posts saying, "Just do it , stay at home 'with the viral hashtag #playfortheworld. This creative yet strong message resonated with everyone where Nike talked about staying inside and playing for the world and doing the bit. Social channels and Nike are providing athletes around the world with tools, motivation and affirmation to help fuel physical and mental health.

Conclusion – Times like the pandemic call for different strategies to deal with it. What is truly commendable is that these brands reworked and reprioritized its strategies to serve the people. These brands reached out to humanitarian goals, not with an eye towards short term sales but with a view to providing support and strengthening existing relationships of humanitarian goals. By using their brand assets, they kept their commercial interest at bay and positively impacted the lives of the people during this large humanitarian tragedy.

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