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Mint Ahmedabad

THE “—ER” POSITIONING AND A BROKEN MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

MARKETING MANTRA

BusinessMarketing

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ISHUBHRANSHU SINGH

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness...”

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But, here comes the second part, the legacy media ecosystem is broken and digital media is constrictive.

When one brand is just like another except cheap-er, small-er, bigg-er, thinn-er, sharp-er, light-er, fast-er, or even bett-er, we can see there is trouble.

Denise Lee Yohn (brand expert) called it the “-er position”. It relegates a brand to a subordinate status bound to use another brand as a reference point. If a brand spotlights its comparative value, it implicates its inherent value. Its value proposition becomes: I am just as good as Brand X, but ‘_er.’

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Great brands don’t operate in a reactive mode. They are bold and confident. They create a consumer mindset and cultural reference points. They identify powerful ideas on the horizon and discover ways to advance them. They create markets.

The fact is that the “-er” product or service doesn’t win unless the perceived value is ‘- er’ too.

How to do that?

Think in terms of emotions. Humans will always be emotional, irrational, and unpredictable. That is why marketing can never be reduced to a Newtonian science.

The texture, quality and intensity of human interaction matter. Brands are trusted, but building that trust needs engagement. As communicators, brands need charge of social dialogue to transmit facts. But there is now less opportunity to do so.

Media has shifted from being big, broadcast and infrequent to being small, social and always on. The 20th-century content world was about hits. The 21st-century digital entertainment economy is about niches. Within niches, brands try to efficiently target prospects. But, successful marketing isn’t about optimizing efficiency.

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Without evocative meaning, every brand is a base commodity. So, when sameness is enforced—be it in specs, use of media, processes, references, faces, places, and the route to market—one ends up in a massive undifferentiated heap along with everyone else.

Audience access is controlled by social media platforms with self-serving algorithms. India's consumer world is organized around the mobile phone. Brands need a mobile-first strategy to have a chance.

This disruption has been introduced by TikTok across the world. Vertical short videos on auto play mode and injected by algorithms.

Billions of people with smartphones have led to stupendous amounts of content. In 2007, YouTube had 6 hours of content uploaded every minute. In 2024, on average, 500 hours of content were uploaded every minute.

Spotify has 60,000 tracks added every day in 2022, totalling a staggering 21 million tracks in a year. In 2008, the entire iTunes music store was at only 8 million tracks.

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The casualty is attention span. We don't look and find. We get served and consume reflexively.

Algorithms are responsible for Google's search results, Facebook feeds, Spotify's playlists, the thumbnails on the Netflix homepage and even how our mail is sorted into folders.

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Shubhranshu Singh is chief marketing officer of Tata Motors Commercial Vehicles.

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