

How brands can act as a driving force in the fight against novel coronavirus

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India needs to implement SPF100- Scientific Temperament, Propriety and Faith to counter COVID19 threat



Scientific discussions from credible sources, in every vernacular language possible is a great opportunity for brands to do their bit to contain this pandemic

By Anirban Chaudhuri

SPF is not new to urban Indians who are conscious about personal care, specifically skincare. The Sun Protection Factor has been the core of many sun shielding lotions and creams. There are also arguments on whether going for more than SPF50, that blocks about 98% of the UVB radiation, is worth anything. SPF100 blocks at best 99%

of the UVB radiation. With the ensuing summer as this debate might find one more round of deliberation, a far more virulent threat is here and now – The Novel Coronavirus – knocking at the door of India as we prepare to contain its natural quantum leap.

At this point of time, India needs SPF100 to counter the COVID19 threat but here SPF stands for three behavioral pillars of Scientific Temperament, Propriety and Faith. Moreover, we cannot have any less leveraging than 100% of this SPF.

I would like to refer to a recent global study by IPSOS on the issue that corroborates this context. In one of its March 2020 publications titled 'Coronavirus and Behavior Change' IPSOS opines, "The spread of and response to COVID-19 has made our physical and social environments increasingly fluid, operating without fixed, solid patterns. Our thinking and planning about how to navigate the world cannot depend as much on automatic behaviours." In addition, in a time where dependence on automatic behaviors does not hold ground, we need to anchor the nudges for new behavior on a framework that is robust enough to accommodate the idiosyncrasies of the population in any market. SPF100 offers us that framework for India.

Going retro to bring back the hacks of enhanced living from traditional wisdom like Ayurveda has been an emerging social trend leveraged by various marketing campaigns in India for some time. New brands have been built on such premises. Longstanding multinational brands have launched variants with subliminal connect to ancient wisdom like Vedas to sustain their market share. Consumers of new India, amidst such arguments and counter arguments seem to be building a renewed empathy for residual beliefs on mythological remedies, at times even on placebos. How else can one explain the crowd involvement in congregations that have been promoting cow excreta as immunity builder for our fight against Coronavirus? Unscrupulous businesses like a furniture shop in Mumbai, hawking an 'anti-corona virus mattress' is another testimony of attempts to capitalize on the falling scientific temperament of the society. It is time to push that quotient up. Build more platforms and dialogues for scientific discussions on the antecedents and treatment protocols for COVID-19 that can weed out the unscientific speculations and augur medically acceptable

procedures. [Google](#) has been on it for some time now by prompting scientific truth as one explores various offerings from their stable. Lifebuoy, the committed champion of hand washing across the globe, in Saudi Arabia has launched specific content on fighting Coronavirus in Arabic apart from English. Until the time of writing this note, the brand seems to have disbursed similar online content only in English for India.

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The other important pillar to activate is that of conscience. Lack of propriety is a practice that can ruin any amount of organized effort to fight this battle. Media is full with stories of impropriety where individuals with full awareness of their susceptibility to be a carrier, kept on traveling and even partying instead of observing a self-imposed quarantine.

While brands need not be blamed for such acts of deliberate omissions by consumers, there can still be a role for them in the current world. Empirical work done over time, like the Consumer Culture Theory, opine that brands give us the inventory of artefacts that we need to evaluate our place in society and the market. Therefore, when a branded salt narrates the global achievements of a national hero and signs off by a testimonial where she links her success as a payback to the nation – every Indian reinforces the pledge of self-propriety in service of the country. Can it now remind the people to be forthright about symptoms of COVID-19 so that Desh Ka Sehat (the health of the nation) remains unaffected by the pandemic?

The other aspect of maintaining propriety from businesses' end is a proactive effort to make essentials needed to fight COVID-19 affordable and available circumventing any urge of windfall profiteering.

Finally, in a pluralist nation like India faith as a social influencer has an integral role to play in times of crises. Places of worship are the most sensitive symbolic structures for any believer and mass prayers a sign of cultural identity. Nevertheless, when contagion like COVID-19 with exponential capacity to spread is looming large, should religious rituals not make way for precautionary health protocols? Many of the large temples of the country have suspended 'darshans' (visits to temples) with the onset of Coronavirus.

Two mosques in Kerala called off the Friday prayers to tackle the chances of contamination at large gatherings. However, we need more hyperlocal influencers – the leaders of every faith to come forward and help the followers choose the path to safety with all the blessings from their God. In an era of 24X7 online life can devotees unite on social platforms, as rituals at these places of worship are ‘streamed live’ – keeping their faith intact.

Brands have spoken to us on festivities spreading the message of positivity. They have used social influencers to connect with audiences. They can surely leverage the hyperlocal influencers to motivate every community to imbibe safety protocols over anything else now.

Time is running short. Brands and businesses, as driving forces of today’s consumer culture, have a role to play in these behavior change initiatives. Applying SPF100 without any delay can be a force multiplier along with all efforts from public administrations, as we gear up to take on COVID-19.

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The article can be read online [here](#).