



Buzz Rides On Trust

[Why brands need both to thrive]

Successful brands build a long term relationship with consumers. Like all relationships, this has to be nurtured and built over time. A relationship taken for granted will soon lose its charm and the bond will wither away. Excitement keeps a relationship alive; trust binds it for the long haul. The two together keep the relationship thriving. Lose any one of the two and the relationship is strained if not sour.

A brand that excites but lacks the bond of trust will fail the test of a relationship. Without trust, all the excitement will be seen as din that diverts attention from the lack of a basic value. On the other hand, a brand that enjoys trust but fails to excite in these times runs the risk of becoming dull, even boring, and fading out of the mind of the consumer. Tata, although a late



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entrant into the car segment, has been successful in launching various models leveraging the trust enjoyed by the Tata brand while creating excitement around the innovation, be it the Indica or the Nano! While at the same time other established Indian car makers who enjoyed high trust have faded into oblivion. Trust alone cannot rescue a brand that is seen as jaded.

However, there are many examples of brands that lived by excitement alone and fell by the wayside because they never delivered trust. Akai became a household name because of its penetration pricing strategy and delivered a high level of excitement. But the brand soon suffered because it fell short on delivering the expected quality and therefore was seen as having violated trust.

In today's world of instant messaging, T20 thrills and fast lifestyles, excitement can cut through the clutter, help negotiate information overload and allow brands to win mindshare. So excitement is a legitimate and required goal to keep the brand buzzing in a crowded marketplace. Lifebuoy is an example of a brand that has built excitement and delivered value with trust. From a carbolic soap, it morphed into a toilet soap and then went on to offer many variants and formats that appealed to different sets of people. The promise of Lifebuoy has similarly evolved from a simple 'germ kill' proposition one that reflects hope and national pride: 'Healthy Hoga Hindustan'.

Through its pioneering initiative — Lifebuoy Swasthya Chetna — the brand works at raising

standards of rural health and hygiene and deliver on its promise of a healthy Hindustan. Both the product and its promise have kept up with the changing social context and the changing aspirations.

It follows that successful brands must deliver trust and excitement and keep investing in both if the success is to be sustainable. However, no two attributes can be as dissimilar. Excitement is fleeting; trust is lasting. Excitement can be created; trust must be earned. And the challenge before marketers is to deliver excitement in a manner that does not violate trust, but enhances it.

At its core, excitement is about offering consumers something beyond the ordinary or the expected, an element of pleasant surprise that delivers value, renews interest and attracts attention. As consumers seek out newer experiences and the half life of excitement itself diminishes, marketers are under intense pressure to keep the buzz going. Overall, the importance of the 'excitement quotient' in building, sustaining and growing brands is well accepted.

Yet, excitement can be a double-edged sword. There remains a fine dividing line between a proposition that dramatises ideas and delivers attention and the one that dramatises promises that cannot or will not be kept. The dramatisation of an idea can help cut through the clutter because consumers understand it as legitimate creative license to promote an inherent value. But when this creative license is stretched to offer promises that border on the untruth, the excitement fails and the brand violates trust.

The advertising for Axe deodorants seeks to build excitement around the brand by selling the idea of fragrance that is attractive. So women are seen running around a man using Axe. Consumers understand that this is dramatisation of a message that promotes the properties of the deodorant, and will not decode it literally. Such excitement is part of the legitimate creative license to cut through the clutter and be seen, heard and remembered.

However, if in the garb of creativity, the

message starts to put forth propositions that are decoded as promises that the brand fails to deliver, consumers will punish the brand hard. This is where trust is violated. A fleeting emotion violates a lasting bond. Long term value is traded for short term gain. Such excitement would have reduced the brand rather than enhanced it in the eyes of the consumer. The more brands start falling prey to the temptation of offering promises that they are unable or unwilling to deliver, the more we risk devaluing not just the brand but the very credibility of the process of exciting consumers and winning their attention.

If consumers are regularly let down on a diet of promises that brands fail to live up to, then the entire consuming class will tend to disbelieve all advertised propositions. That eventually imperils both legs of the relationship — trust as well as excitement — and can become a destroyer of brands. Google stands out as a brand that marries trust and excitement rather well. The product is built entirely on trust and has consistently excited customers with newer offerings that are relevant and fit into the world of instant transactions. As the company proclaims: 'It is a core value for Google that there be no compromising of the integrity of our results. We never manipulate rankings to put our partners higher in our search results.' This is the base on which Google has built its relationship with consumers. The irony is that it's grown so big that size is raising newer issues of trust in a situation of commanding market share!

Marketers who still doubt the value of trust will do well to remember that the very birth of brands as a concept is rooted in trust. Brands have grown out of the need for consumers to trust the merchandise they bought. A brand was and still is bought when it is trusted to supply the promised and expected product — time after time. So trust is a perennial requirement. Buzz and excitement vary with time and must ride atop this trust, which is the inviolable base that created brands in the first place.

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