

Olympics and brand connections

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/catalyst/olympics-and-brand-connections/article9042789.ece>

My attention was held by the ads of two familiar brands in the same category – Tissot and Seiko – during the Olympic season. Tissot had used Virat Kohli and Seiko the Olympic long jump athlete Darya Klishina who had got her Olympic ban overturned in the midst of a controversy associated with Russian athletes. The interesting point to be noted is that while Tissot chose to get associated with a cricket celebrity during the Olympic season, Seiko opted for an athlete relatively unknown, considering the Indian audiences.

The ads of both these brands trigger the following questions; Should a brand make use of Olympics in the Indian context? How should a brand make use of sports and games which have been a part of Indian culture? Should a brand create brand awareness or brand recall, or both? How can celebrities and events such as Olympics be integrated from the viewpoint of a brand's strategy?

Brand awareness, recall

For a brand, its familiarity is a very useful characteristic. How many familiar brands do we buy in our everyday life? Nestle, Cadbury, Surf, Bournvita – the list could go on and on. Even in categories in which there is greater consumer involvement, familiar brands in all likelihood enter the considerations of consumers.

Brand awareness is broadly about the consumer recalling any aspect of a brand that he had been exposed to in the past. Much of brand awareness happens through involuntary exposure over a period of time – Coke, Pepsi, Colgate, Mercedes, Rolex, Toyota, Whirlpool, Walt Disney, Vicks, and such are examples. Brand recall happens when a consumer thinks of a brand when she needs to use a product from that category. Does a consumer think of Tropicana orange juice or Mountain Dew when he is thirsty?

Also, research says that mere exposure to a brand may enhance the likeability associated with it. How many times have we changed the detergent or tea or coffee brand – it is difficult to answer definitely as exposure, habit, a state of inertia and consumers' need for variety pose a complex combination of factors that challenge marketers. Also, in high-involvement categories, there may be an active search process. But we can safely declare that at least in the fast moving goods sector, there is a significant cross-section of consumers who may stick to the same brand. The ready-to-eat noodle brand Wai-Wai had maintained a stable base for 35 years, but the

brand is not into high-decibel advertising, as per an article in the business press. In the case of durable categories, brand awareness and brand recall need to be considered with the brand's ability to provide both functional and symbolic benefits. Titan from the Indian context, Tissot (Swiss) and Seiko (Japanese) are brands that accomplished these aspects, though Tissot and Seiko had started advertising themselves during relatively recent times.

Cultural appeal/targets

Cricket is more a part of Indian culture than tennis or Olympics. There is also the target segment interest with regard to selection of celebrity associated with an event. While both Tissot and Seiko may appeal to the respective target segment (along with sport that may be of interest to the appropriate segment), the reputation of the brands, both on functional and symbolic aspects (even without the specific association of the celebrity) may be of interest to those who may not reflect a high degree of involvement with Olympics or cricket. Hence, cultural factors need to be taken into account with the reputation of the brand. Both brands, by advertising, would also be strengthening brand awareness as well as brand recall, especially in a lifestyle where a target segment may possess more than one watch. The replacement market is another aspect where brand awareness/recall can help the brand if it is refreshed and associated with either ongoing events, such as the Olympics and cricket matches, or/and a cultural association.

Consider the association of some Indian brands in the fast moving consumer goods segment with the Olympic Games. Tata Salt and Amul provide interesting pointers. Both these brands, along with milk and salt, are very much a part of the Indian historical context (with the Salt Satyagraha and the milk revolution) and being fast moving brands, would benefit on counts of brand awareness and brand recall. Besides, Amul is a brand that is associated with topical messages.

Impact of associations

For a brand such as Tissot, after a fashion association earlier with a cine celebrity, the choice of cricket celebrity adds to its strength. Seiko's association with a Russian celebrity sets it apart from the clutter in the backdrop of its strong brand presence. Samsung is another brand that had used several mega events including the Olympics, beginning with the 1988 Seoul games. The brand had capitalised on mega events after building itself as a valuable functional brand across categories with several technological collaborations before its full – fledged branding efforts. In the Olympics at Rio, Samsung showed off its virtual reality head phones through 13 Galaxy studios across Brazil. The brand's technological prowess is likely to have an impact on many consumers, especially when mobile phones have become an inseparable part of life around the world. Incidentally Seiko was associated with the 1964 Olympics.

