

HEB

Marketing at Kumbh Mela: A Mahaopportunity or an over-hyped exercise

CASS

*Dr Ritu Talwar

*Professor, Marketing, New Delhi Institute of Management

*Address for Correspondence: serviceheb@gmail.com***Abstract**

The history of *mela* marketing is ancient: perhaps older than marketing as we know it today. KumbhMela is a big primer on heartland marketing. KumbhMela (the festival of the sacred Pitcher) is the largest peaceful congregation of pilgrims on our earth, during which people bathe or take a holy dip in a sacred river. Most brands are able to find ways to connect with millions at one shot. Brands are nice distractions in the absence of anything else happening. It has primarily been dominated by FMCG industry but we find mobile phones, automobiles and finance too nowadays. Especially in the rural space is with any large religious opportunity on the basis of number of people, footfalls and eyeballs. This is the best place (KumbhMela), the CPT (cost per thousand) reach is too much ridiculous; look at the number of exposures at one go. I would describe it as taking advantage of a big number of people, allowing them to interact with the brand by virtue of visuals, sampling, free trials, conversations, visits to booths etc. Brands are not doing this since it has anything to do with religion; they tend to be agnostic. They are doing it because of the number of people and India does not give us too many other occasions that let us get so many of them. Everybody has tried everything and so it's a great area to get our creative juices flowing. Big brands have graduated from billboards and signs to engagement that includes sampling product trials etc both from an awards POV and with real work. "Kumbh is a symbol of our belief and is a cultural heritage. This is a unique event and UNESCO has also given it a special status now. People in India consider the whole world as our family and this is the reason why there is maximum tolerance in India. Kumbh is not a religious but a social event. The number of people who gather for Kumbh is more than the population of many countries. For sampling, selling and brand interactivity, the Kumbh presents an enormous opportunity.

Key words : Khumbh, Mela, Dabur, Maha

Access this Article Online<http://heb-nic.in/cass-studies>

Quick Response Code:

Received on 25/03/2019
Accepted on 11/04/2019@HEB All
rights reserved

Introduction

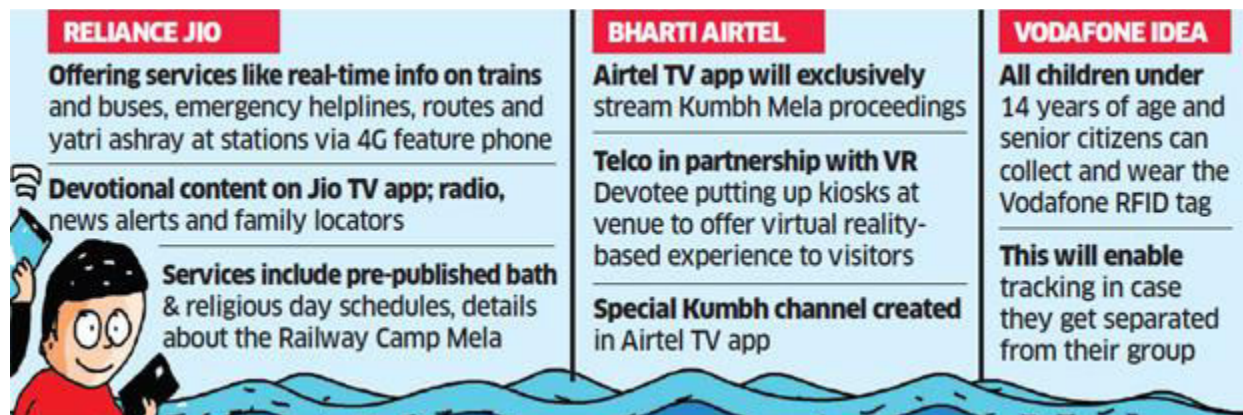
The MahaKumbh was a watershed moment. Trade the unctuous store attendants for glib salesmen, replace security with armed policemen and swap mall rats for a motley bunch of *sadhus* and saints, and we wager it would be hard to tell malls and *melas* apart. The two (melas and mall) are more similar than different: as both are sharply focused on apparel, essentials, entertainment, mobiles, footwear and food, and given to an influx of big numbers of people looking for a discount or an exciting experience, samples among other things.

The history of *mela* marketing is very ancient: perhaps much older than marketing and sales as we know it today. Predictably enough, marketers (companies) want in on *melas* to the extent possible and permissible. Both companies *psLive* (the rural specialist division of Dentsu Aegis) and WPP's Geometry Global claim to create *mela* calendars for marketers to tell them which among the 25,000 odd events every year are worth their while. Religious *melas* like the type of Kumbh draw around 5 crores to 10 crores of people over 30 to 35 days and smaller, festive *melas* that last for a shorter time frame and typically bring in 10,000 to 25,000 people a day, with both a mix of urban and rural audience." It's the greatest aggregator of an otherwise very diverse and hard to reach audience. Mass media is not a safe bet and rural marketing operations that go from village to village are prohibitively very expensive. It's an opportunity to get a big sizeable number of rural consumers at one go and in a way they come to you with money in their pockets (dhotis). The choice is getting to be between the 45,000 villages or the 200 *melas*, A choice that isn't really a choice for marketers in these cash strapped difficult times. Over 12 crore people are expected to visit Prayagraj this year to be part of the KumbhMela. Such a large congregation, lasting for 55 days, has palpably caught the interest of marketers — not just of FMCG brands but also of airlines (like Air India, SpiceJet and IndiGo), banks, mobile handset makers and also first-time Kumbh advertisers like Welspun. Around 100 brands will participate in the Kumbh this year. On the cards are digital and mobile activations, apart from hoardings and sampling activities. Colgate, for example, will distribute around three crore Vedshakti toothpastes at the mela. Meanwhile, Welspun will launch its QUIK DRY range. With the aim to engage at least five lakh consumers, the company plans to send geo-targeted invites to pilgrims to generate buzz. Reliance Jio has created an app for the Kumbh that will feature partner brands and their campaigns, along with a call to action. Jio Phone users taking part in the KumbhMela 2019 will also be able to watch the live telecast of the Kumbh events and programmes on Jio TV via KumbhDarshan, along with a 24x7 access to devotional songs and bhajans via Kumbh Radio.

A big canvas

For sampling, selling and brand interactivity, the Kumbh presents an enormous opportunity. Around 70% of the attendees are from the Hindi belt, and close to 85% of them are from SEC C, D and E. This, makes it an ideal

platform to launch product variants with a focus on the Hindi belt. This feeds into strategy of expanding regional content play to drive the adoption of Airtel TV amongst smartphone users, particularly in tier 2, 3 towns and villages,” said Sameer Batra, CEO, content and apps at Bharti Airtel. “It provides massive insights into user preferences and sharpen curation for the regional segment.



The 'mela' mindset

The major *melas* typically happen at the end of the harvest season: a happy or at least relatively work free period for the agrarian economy. Farmers, artisans and their families usually have disposable income and the time to spend. The farmer is inclined to indulge his family and kids. More than 73% claim to have come to buy specific products but end up buying more and more. The average expenditure is ₹5,000 but it could go up to ₹50,000 depending upon.

While the main peg of a *mela* is mostly religious for the elders, once the *darshan* and the *snaan* is done with, shopping and soaking in the difference of a new location, top the agenda of *mela*. *Melas* are a trip abroad for farmers: "It's like an annual or six monthly outing. They have the allowance to explore, see, experience and learn new things." Both stories and products that are new or differentiated are a key part of the extended social experience of a *mela*, fodder for bragging rights. It also offers a rare moment of intimacy for rural consumers, even if driven by purely functional reasons.

The social sanctions that usually keep women cloistered (unreached) don't apply as stringently at these *melas*. Many marketers view it as a unique opportunity to reach out to women of rural India: influencers who are otherwise notoriously hard to connect with. Pilgrims from all socio-economic backgrounds come to Kumbh and telcos get an insight into their needs along with immediate feedback.”

How to win at *Melas*: *Strategies to be followed*

Be local

The biggest successes at *melas* are not gigantic corporations powered by insight teams or experts who've quite literally written the book (or two) on Indian consumer behavior. Rural agency heads do off

their *pagdis* to local heroes -brands that urban marketers or shoppers are probably unfamiliar with like RahatRooh,coak,Paanch Bhai soap or Himgange. A popular strategy to sell cooling oil to a physical contact averse audience(rural india) is to insist they take some in their palm just to have a smell. A consumer who is unlikely to be carrying napkins, has no option but to rub oil on the scalp at which point the cooling effect works its magic leading to a sale more often than not. They use a call to attention with small rhymes in local language and make an appeal to the entire family. It's perhaps impossible for a national brand to replicate such familiarity with the audience, but a good place to start is to treat local vendors as a source of insights and not just a non-essential resource for grunt work.

Be Big

A mela regular once surprised Singh with his vivid memories of an LML scooter mock up he'd seen at a mela a few years ago, which he described as being "*Ravanjitnabada*", a reference to the gigantic effigies from Ram Leela. Creating a visual spectacle is one way of driving the message home, to the point where the memory could potentially live longer than the brand itself. There is always a prestige attached to participating in big *melas*.The local media do stories on the best stalls and it gives a brand so much added publicity without spending a thing.

The brand needs to appear ubiquitous, even if it isn't actually. At the KumbhMela, Lifebuoy(HUL) had 50 handwash stations across a 50 kilometre radius. Fair & Lovely beauty cream was being sold by 500 salesmen kitted out with trays of the style used by vendors at smaller railway stations. And yet ideas at scale are more exception than norm since most marketers opt for obligatory participation: putting up a single stall and calling it a day.

Be Inventive

Venturing into the hinterlands is no excuse to rely on technology that was old hat in the late 90s like videos on wheels. At the concluded MahaPushkaram, a huge fair held at Rajamundhary in Andhra Pradesh, HUL's 3 Roses, the largest tea brand in South India, wanted to advertise/market an improved/revised formulation. Apart from upping the visibility of the brand, HUL distributed 3000 special cups across 250 tea stalls. The brand logo and message appeared on the cup when it was filled with hot beverage, something of a novelty for large parts of the rural audience. They conveyed the message during the moment of truth, which is that of consumption. The cup transforms a mundane moment into a magical one. There was a unanimous 'wow' around the 'magic' effect. Many even wanted to take the cup home with them! While not getting into the specifics, HUL claims a rise in off take for 3 Roses within 12 days of the festival. Vodafonecompany decided to help pilgrims take on the cold temperatures at the last MahaKumbh by supplying them with branded headphones a remarkable

marketing idea. These headphones besides having pre-recorded spiritual *bhajans*, and commercial messaging, they also doubled up as earmuffs. To drive traffic to its stall, Colgate tied up with Airtel, using location based targeting(GPS) to give the network's subscribers an automated call from instantly identifiable radio personality Amin Sayani. Packed into the brief message was a promotion and the offer of attractions like a magic show and freebies. According to Colgate, visits to the stall went up by 300% post promotion.

Be Useful

"A *mela* starts when the consumers leave home and ends when they return." A pilgrim goes through many stages: anxious on arrival at an unfamiliar, quite possibly crowded city; eager to participate in the pujas and holy baths, and in an exploratory mode after settling in. In year 2003, at the MahaPushkaramela, Brooke Bond worked with the melaorganisers to create an end-to-end experience. It began at the railway stations and bus stops that saw an influx of large no .ofdevotees. The people were greeted with welcome notices and guide pamphlets with maps of the area and emergency con tact numbers of ploice,fire,ambulance etc. It extended to changing rooms for women at the bathing holy *ghats* and hot cups of tea at dorms and immediately after the holy bath. At the MahaKumbh, people were camping out and Odomos was the only protection against deadly mosquitos that works both outdoors and indoors. Dabur distributed it extensively in sachets form.

Top Marketingactivities companies did at the KumbhMela are :

While most of us who have not been to the Kumbh may not know about any of these, the ingenuity and expanse of these branding campaigns would surely take us by surprise. Here's a list of some of the craziest things companies did at the world's largest religious congregation.

Roti Branding!HUL



HUL tops the charts with a marketing solution few ever dared to think exists! They created a special heat stamp and served 2.5 million 'rotis' (bread) at lunch with the message 'Did you wash your hands with Lifebuoy?' during the 2013 KumbhMela in Allahabad. Hindustan Unilever's Lifebuoy(HUL) company ,then partnered with manyrestaurants,hotels and cafés at the KumbhMela to raise awareness and interest about hand washing habits. Hence for every food order (roti) placed by the customer , the first roti carried the branded message “Lifebuoy se hath dhoyekya?” (Did you wash your hands with Lifebuoy?). All the alphabets were heat stamped onto the baked chapati, without the use of ink, to ensure it was completely edible for eating. It reminded all of them at the right point of time (just before having the food) to wash their hands.

High tech devotion!Vodafone



Vodafone distributed free high tech earmuffs with in-built speakers that came preloaded with devotional tunes!There were also Vodafone cinema halls 'Vodafone kiDhoom' where it showed videos of the history of the Kumbh and SamudraManthan. It was weaved with information about its value-added services of course*wink*.

That's true salvation! Tata Swach



Tata Chemicals' low-cost water purifier Tata Swach partnered with UP water board to provide free water to pilgrims. The company had 300 water purifiers spread over 28 booths. The brand claims to have distributed over one million liters of water! That's enough to last 22 lives!.

Dabur India :

The company Dabur India had put up an innovative automatic toothpaste dispenser in many places with the catchy tagline 'Kya aapnedantsnankiya?' at Sarais, tents, hotel rooms and dharmshalas the places people live.. Dabur Vatika also established 'branded changing rooms' with products like combs, lights and provided assistance from beauty advisors specially for women of all ages in the pilgrims.

PSUs and Private Banks: Debit cards

Banks issued the special 'Simhastha Debit Cards' to the people to make easy and hassle free donations at religious places an innovative campaign . This was an innovative campaign .Cases of theft of money were reduced.They every time did not had to carry cash.Coin-vending machines were also installed in variouskhumbhmelacamps. This enabled the people to exchange currency notes of various denominations for coins.

Kansai Nerolac: Suraksha kawach

As part of the 'Suraksha Hai SabkeLiye' campaign, company Nerolac carried out several activities at KumbhMela.It had wrist band, tube, locker for people's suraksha as part of this mela ,It had come with 'Suraksha Wrist Band'- which were water-proof bands with the emergency contact of the police printed on them for women, senior citizen and children visiting the event. Alsoit had a space to include the emergency contact details of 2,3 relatives as well. People could easily wear it during the dip because it was water proof, the information was not going to fade away. Also there was 'Surakasha Tube' which was to be worn by divers and lifeguards, who patrol the area in case people wander into the deep end of the river thus saving them and providing Suraksha. Nerolac 'Suraksha Lounge' had an locker facility for safe keeping of belongings and clothes for the people in mela.It aimed to provide a full security to people along with branding.

Dettol's : Marketing : The brand generated trials and took it to an evolved level, beyond the commercial aspect. The 'Dettol Kadulha' campaign brought in a purity which was a combination cleanliness and Godliness. By this the brand personality got enhanced and the positioning got reinforced. The 'HaathDhonaHarBaar' campaign by Dettol aimed to educate people about hand washing. Harpic's 'Toilet Vidhi' was to sensitise people and bring about a change in their attitudes towards good toilet etiquettes

It Targetted and Saved around Three Million Litres Of Water. As part of its nationwide initiative, Dettol tied up with McCann during the Nashik KumbhMela for their campaign 'Kam Paani Mein

ZyadaSuraksha'.As part of the campaign, the brand distributed Dettol hand sanitizers and had put up volunteers at strategic locations such as food centres, health centres, bathing areas, eateries, hospitals and bus stations to raise awareness about proper hygienic practices.Information like "Clean hands mean less diseases, more safety" was disseminated through flyers and Radio channels were extensively used to reiterate the importance of proper hygiene through jingles, which proved effective.*Dettol Harpic Banega Swachh India* had the aim to raise much-needed awareness among the attendees about proper hygienic practices and incentivise them to observe environmental and river-friendly practices. Dettol had taken a very interesting marketingstrategy. It generated a lot of goodwill. The best part is it is extremely relevant to the brand. Brands and marketers are always trying to find newer ways to reach a larger audience and what better place than the KumbhMela.This DettolKumbhMela initiative was an excellent initiative, rightlyfitting in with the Swachh Bharat campaign.

Aarti by Boroplus!

Like many, Emami also indulged into the religious angle, branding aarti booklets with Boroplus! But that was not all. There were Boroplus gaming zones and even a talent hunt for women at the Kumbh.

Care for a massage?

FMCG major Emami was not left behind in its efforts to show off its brands. The company's Navratna Range (Oil & Talc) launched Navratna massage parlors where you could enjoy a relaxing massage with Navratna hair oil after a hard day at the altar.Just gorge, never worry!



India's Dabur joined hands with restaurants to serve Hajmola digestive candy sachets for free! That means we don't have to worry about how much you eat! Samples of its mosquito repellent Odomos were also distributed.

Shortcut to Moksha



Airtel sponsored travels for pilgrims to take a dip at the Sangam! Idea and Aircel did the same. There were also special 'KumbhMela plans' that included live audio coverage and dialogue from the akharas! Be Revitalised...like Hanuman!



Ranbaxy's health supplement brand Revital gave away free hanuman chalisas. It sure hoped people would take a leaf out of Hanuman's book to be strong by popping its pill.

Slam dunk = Free Horlicks+biscuits



GlaxoSmithKline(GSK) Consumer Healthcare had a basketball ring at its stalls. Any body could just shoot the hoops and earn yourself free cups of Horlicks and biscuits.

Quench your thirst cheap



Coca-Cola had around 15 outlets in the KumbhMela. Here one could get 150 ml of the fizzy drink for a discounted rate of Rs 5 only.

Conclusion

The KumbhMela sees around 100 million people gathering over three months to celebrate the fact that Jupiter and the Sun have aligned themselves at certain positions. It undoubtedly creates a matchless opportunity for companies to showcase their brands. High Involvement brands are concentrating more on experience and visibility, but getting a result out of it has operational challenges: which dealer will take the pie, who will follow up on leads, is it viable financially...etc. To succeed it is recommended, categories like auto and insurance stop behaving like FMCGs. It's a rare opportunity for these brands to reach out to a patriarch or an influencer when he's in a more receptive, less harrowed frame of mind. Brands need to make sure it's not just about marketing and dial down the hard sell. An attempt at a KumbhMela to release branded *diyas* was met with a range of protests with reasons ranging from the spiritual to the environmental. marketing at the mela is an entirely different beast. It starts not with entertainment, among the first ports of call for brands talking to urban audiences, but utility and a functional benefit. A task that some brands are naturally more adept at than others: one expects health from a health brand and hygiene from a soap, but what can one expect at a mela from a mobile phone operator or a financial services company? The trick is to calibrate an offering that enhances the consumer's mela experience. The ultimate goal: to get him or her to either start or continue a deeper more meaningful relationship with the brand.

It's an experience that no marketer or ad person should miss.

Bibliography

- brandequity.economictimes.indiatimes.com › ... › Marketing
- economictimes.indiatimes.com › Magazines › Brand Equity
- economictimes.indiatimes.com › Magazines › Brand Equity
- <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/catalyst/why-you-should.../article8332080.ece>
- www.businesstoday.in/magazine/features/how...is...kumbh/.../192380.html