

Amit Bapna

Innovation is nobody's job and everyone's business, seems to be the common belief these days amongst the marketers. Except that some companies and brands are taking it more seriously than others. Even as the debate rages over whose job it is to drive innovation or take the fall if it flops, the consumer is very clear about the need for innovation across various facets of her life, whether opening a bank account or buying

daily household stuff. "People have time for things that catch their attention, whether it is potato chips or cars or political parties, as amply proven", says Dheeraj Sinha, chief strategy officer, South & South East Asia, Grey. And equally spot on, they have scant time (or loyalty) for things that are status-quoist.

Being a low involvement category ought not to be equated with being low on innovation, as many brands in Nielsen's 'Breakthrough Innovations Report' for 2015 have shown. While being innovative has been the common thread for all brands that have made it to the list, what makes it even more impressive is breakthroughs by brands in low-involvement categories like toothbrush, candies, mosquito repellents and condoms, amongst others.

Even as most condom brands were busy getting people to do the Rex (Durex had unveiled a campaign, #DoTheRex featuring Bollywood actor Ranveer Singh as the brand ambassador) or fantasise about Sunny Leo-

penliebe, the flagship brand of Milan-headquartered confectionary major Perfetti Van Melle in India has been keeping itself busy with offerings that have been suitably localised and customised. Three of its brands feature in the listing: Juzt Jelly, Alpenliebe Spicy 1 and Alpenliebe 2Choco Eclairs. Elaborating on the category, Nikhil Sharma, head - marketing, Perfetti Van Melle, India says, "The category is characterised with low entry barrier and low levels of involvement, which imply consumers rapidly switch from one brand to another." The organisation's DNA has constantly evolved to battle the challenges of lower price-points.

For instance, what worked in the case of Alpenliebe Spicy 1 is its localised concoction of a sweet candy filled with locally blended spices — the idea being to use spices that appeal to the Indian palette. In the case of Alpenliebe Juzt Jelly, the hook is a vegetarian jelly product for the Indian market using natural fruit pulp and launched in real fruit shapes with a distinctive soft bite. Typically, jelly internationally is a big segment but had registered negligible presence in India largely owing to the prevalent usage of non-vegetarian ingredients and product instability in extreme weather conditions. On both parameters, the confectionary brand innovated successfully and became the largest brand in value market share in the candies segment by end-2014, according to industry sources.

Innovation becomes even more important in low involvement categories since it keeps the buzz around the brand. Points out Seema Gupta, assistant professor of marketing, Indian Institute of Management, Bengaluru, "As compared to high involvement categories its often easier to innovate in low involvement categories, but where it becomes challenging is the budget required for communicating and promoting the innovation which needs a leap of faith that the innovation can make it big." It's all about being brave and sticking the neck out.

Being a relative late entrant in a ₹800 crores plus category with well-entrenched players like Vaseline, Pond's, Nivea and Emami did not make Marico break into proverbial cold sweat when it set out to launch Parachute Advanced Body Lotion. The

brand managed to create a differentiated proposition made relevant for the Indian consumer. Says Sameer Satpathy, chief marketing officer, Marico, "It has been designed for Indian skin; it encapsulates the goodness of coconut and has world class sensorials." In addition, the differentiated packaging and engaging advertising has been able to drive trials for the brand, he adds.

Marketing consultant, Harish Bijoor makes an interesting point, "Most brands that find themselves in mundane and overtly-

touted categories such as toothbrush and candy find it difficult to move too far ahead from the herd." In such a scenario the task becomes even more challenging for the brands trying to create a niche within the stuffy boundary-walls of their categories. For instance in the case of toothbrush, one of the three brands that have emerged winners is Sensodyne, along with Colgate and Pepsodent. The reasons for Sensodyne's success are quite

revealing since the brand has never really gone out and spent mega marketing dollars for the toothbrush portfolio. The toothbrush portfolio is essentially reaping the benefits of the parent brand taking the leadership stance on sensitivity in oral care and in the process democratising the idea of sensitivity in the country.

The outcome: Sensodyne is seen as owning the benefit in the consumer's mind even as it goes about building the franchise on sensitive teeth, with not just toothpaste but even toothbrush. Agrees and shares Prashant Pandey, marketing head, GSK Consumer Healthcare, "The idea was to further drive and entrench the brand into everyday habit of teeth brushing thereby strengthening the presence of the brand amongst existing users as well as reaching out to new ones." Accordingly product design was enhanced to provide better grip and angle to ensure a better cleaning experience to meet the identified unmet needs of the category — 'cleaning with care' and 'maximum protection'. The brand has shown the power of differentiation and innovation in a mature category.

For now it is business as usual as the plucky marketers stealthily go about identifying unmet niches and crafting products to meet those across the categories.

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I Can Innovate Too...

Why do low-involvement categories call for high levels of innovation?

ne's skills at smearing herself with gooey chocolate (for Manforce), the innovation template typically ground to a halt at flavours and textures. But Chennai-based Skore (from TTK-PDL) managed to stand apart and gain marketshare with its orientation towards user experience. It claims to be the first to launch colour and flavour together — others have done so separately. It also unveiled India's first m-Commerce platform for condom shopping. Another interesting first: to address the issue of getting rid of a used condom, the brand introduced a disposal pouch with the pack. Shares Vishal Vyas, general manager - marketing, Skore condoms, "The idea was to make the overall experience pleasurable — not just from a product point of view but even from the user experience perspective," explaining the success of the brand in an category by and large inhibited both by social norms as well as government regulations on pricing.

In the edible confectionary category, Al-