



COVID-19 Lockdown Phase 1: A Study of Awareness Campaign in India by Anand Milk Union Limited (Amul)

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Abstract

Public Service Advertising has created awareness amongst the general populace and has always helped change the attitude and behaviour of the masses towards any social issue. Mass media has always played a significant role in disseminating information to society and it has acted unblemished in the best interest of society during the novel Coronavirus pandemic across the nation. The Indian Government has initiated awareness campaigns through various mass communication means but print media advertising and specifically, Public Service Advertising circulated the conventions of the spread of COVID-19 after the voluntary curfew on March 22, 2020, which was followed by the enforcement of a nationwide lockdown Phase 1 in the country's COVID-19 affected areas announced by the Prime Minister of India on 24th March 2020 for 21 days.

The novel coronavirus pandemic instigates speculations about how it changed everything in the world. The crisis has bombarded life-altering modifications for which no one in the world was ready when it stuck. And this new normal has become a significant part of every individual. This paper will try to address the role and significance of Public Service Advertising by a brand in spreading the cognizance of the pandemic and the challenges faced during the Lockdown Phase 1. It will also speculate on the prospects of mass media tools in publicising the information to the population.

Keywords: Advertising, Covid-19, Coronavirus Pandemic, Mass Communication, Print Media, Public Service Advertising, Lockdown

Introduction

Advertising is a marketing tool that is considered a reliable and effective way of influencing the buying behaviours of customers and attracting the target audience towards a product or service through a direct line of communication. Advertising influences viewers in innumerable ways and helps advertisers connect with them through a relatable message which grasps their attention and diverts it towards the product or service being advertised. Advertising has always been around us even though we might not have been aware of it and might have even influenced our decision-making process when buying any product or availing of any service, both knowingly and unknowingly. It has also played a role in spreading information and has helped people become more aware and informed. Advertising has reached us through a variety of mediums like radio, television, newspapers, banners, posters, hoardings, events, etc. and the most recent addition to this list is the digital medium. Advertising has always played a major role in every situation and even during times of an unexpected major outbreak, COVID-19. In this view, Public Service Advertising (PSA) helps educate the masses, increase their knowledge and remove the misconceptions about any social, economic, or political issues about the virus and the precautionary measures to be undertaken by the masses. It even leads to a change in attitude and strengthens the support of the people.

At the time of the pandemic, PSA has created awareness amongst the general populace and has always helped change the behaviour of the masses towards social issues. The world has witnessed a lot of unimaginable circumstances that have led to unpredictable changes in the way all industries used to function. There isn't a single industry that didn't experience some sort of difficulty in going about things and sticking to the way it used to function earlier before the pandemic. Since the virus was spreading so quickly, people couldn't stay around each other to work together. Therefore, almost all the factories, industries, markets and offices had to be shut down for the protection of the people and prevention of the virus's spread. ("Sectoral impact, responses and recommendations (COVID-19 and the world of work)," n.d.). This had a huge impact on the supply chains as the daily wage workers, labourers, technicians involved in the production and manufacturing of products in the factories and all other employees irrespective of the sector they were working in, had to stay at home, locked up inside with no idea as to when the situation would normalize and things would get back to the way they were. Most of these labourers and daily wage workers were forced to go back to their villages with little or no money left to survive. And some working in other sectors lost their jobs or were forced to work on a lesser salary. Ultimately, everyone saw a huge shift in consumer behaviour which in turn impacted the buying behaviour of consumers too.

During the pandemic, people were restricted to their homes and therefore social media was being used extensively by everyone to connect with their known and loved ones. The public spent a lot of time watching Television and content on OTT platforms and this grew abundantly, especially during the lockdown. Also, since it wasn't safe to go outside, most people relied on ordering essential things through online portals to avoid physical contact with people and prevent the spread of the virus. All sorts of planned purchases were put on hold as people had no idea when things would become stable and what every consumer wanted to spend on was, only essentials. ("consumer demand recovery and lasting effects of COVID-19," 2021). As all the people were

confined inside their homes, advertising in cinemas and out-of-home advertising shrunk as there was no point in investing in mediums that wouldn't reach the people. ("Culture shock: COVID-19 and the cultural and creative sectors," n.d.). Instead, mediums like TV; especially news channels, OTT platforms and social media platforms grew substantially as their consumption reached unprecedented heights. (Mitter, 2020)

Consumer behaviour directly affects the advertising budget and therefore all these changes in consumption and lifestyle patterns led the media agencies to change their approach toward their customers. It leads to strategies to cater to their needs and maintain their relevance even during the pandemic. ("consumer is changing, but perhaps not how you think," n.d.). They had no option but to put their planned campaigns on hold, revamp their marketing strategies and send relatable messages to make their customers feel connected to the brand. Also, most of the companies launched new products that were developed based on the ongoing requirements and expectations of the people.

A lot of media agencies, marketing agencies, advertising agencies, newspaper agencies, and scholars have written about it and there is a wide variety of information that was reviewed to understand the impact of the awareness campaigns by brands on the consumer behaviour of the public in India during the phase-1 lockdown.

If we consider, the first reference is TAM Media Research's 'The Digital Advertising Report'-Part 1, from July to September 2020 analysed the monthly trends of digital ad insertions leads to web publishers, leading digital platforms, count of categories, advertisers, brands new categories and top advertisers and brands. (TAM Media Research Pvt. Ltd. – Switch ON Data Monetisation, n.d.). Other references from TAM Media Research include an overview of advertising categories through product line:

Table 1

S.No.	Advertising Category
1	Personal Care/Personal Hygiene
2	Retail
3	Hand Sanitizer
4	Washing Powder/Liquids

These reports provide data about the ad volume growth in various mediums, the top categories of personal care/hygiene for various mediums, top advertisers and top new brands in each medium and transaction methods of digital advertising in personal care/hygiene.

The television and Digital Advertising Report by TAM Media Research from January to June 2020, compares the advertising volumes on TV between March to June 2019 and 2020. ("television advertising report – Part 3 – Jan to June'20," n.d.). According to the report, no. of categories, brands and advertisers, top categories and advertisers also highlights how there was an evident resurgence in June 2020 Quantum of advertisers and brands surpassed the average count of January 2020.

In another article, 'A post- COVID-19 commercial recovery strategy for B2B companies' by Minti Ray from McKinsey & Company, Stefano Redaelli, Damian Rudichand Andrew Wong provide insights about how the B2B companies can recover from this crisis using certain strategies. ("post-covid-19 commercial-recovery strategy for B2B companies," 2020). McKinsey & Company conducted a survey on Indian consumer sentiment during the Coronavirus crisis. ("Global surveys of consumer sentiment during the coronavirus crisis," n.d.). It shows Indian consumers as more optimistic than the people of other countries in other parts of the world about its economic recovery. The majority of Indians have tried new shopping behaviour and want to continue using them even after the pandemic. It also shows how Indians have adopted digital activities during COVID-19 and expect to make most of their purchases online and how they are becoming more careful about their spending habits and the importance of saving money.

Another article published by Nielson titled, 'Innovating in the Digital Era: The Evolving Role of Digital Media on new Product Launches' by Giles Watts shows digital media as a vehicle carries a wide range of benefits but a healthy balance between traditional and digital media is important.

It took some time for brands to adapt to all that was happening around which was so deeply impacted by the Coronavirus outbreak. There was a digital transformation and even those brands which weren't a part of social media and didn't advertise regularly on the digital medium had no choice but to shift their focus on the digital medium, which proved to be a prominent mode to reach out to their respective target audience. Digital has become an ideal way to spread awareness, promote brands and connect with the target audience. These mediums provided brands with an opportunity to get a direct response from the customers and at the same time encouraged quick responses for brands who wanted to drive sales and spend cautiously. It became extremely important for them to reach out to people and show them that the brands whose products and services they've been buying and using are with them and wish for nothing but their health and safety, and for that, it is even taking steps to do their bit. Many brands even launched campaigns focused mainly on helping the needy and giving back to society in these tough times. The way the advertising industry has adapted to these sudden changes and has found ways to work even in this sensitive and volatile market environment proves that adaptability is the only way to survival.

In the past, there were many hygiene brands such as Lifebuoy, Dettol, Savlon etc. which used to promote the image and connect with the public by focusing on social and economic issues and concerns. These brands used public service advertising to produce similar strategies to circulate information during such outbreaks. But the present study is focused on the Indian brand which is not involved directly with sanitation and hygiene but initiated public service advertisements during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. There are various brands across categories other than hygiene and sanitation which have created a buzz in the nation with their awareness campaigns around the pandemic, the research emphasises one brand name; *The Hindustan Unilever's (HUL), Amul; Anand Milk Union Limited*, with the major aim to point the significance of the public service advertising used to educate the general populace about the pandemic.

Amul has contributed to disseminating the information and educating the masses about various precautionary measures to learn and unlearn certain habits such as maintaining distance, washing hands properly with soap

and water, sanitizing products, covering mouth and nose while coughing and sneezing, wearing a mask to help reduce the spread of the virus within the nation, vaccination, etc. It even helped in circulating accurate data via scientists and doctors mainly to figure out how to tackle this depressing situation, how to reduce the panic among the masses and how to soothe them and the people around them.

HUL dairy giant Amul, Anand Milk Union Limited was a result of a dairy cooperative movement in India that originated on 1st December 1946 initiated by the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd. (GCMMF). Derived from a Sanskrit word, *Amulya* which means priceless, Amul was inaugurated or rather opened by the then Prime Minister, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru on 20th November 1955, spurring the White Revolution of India. From milk deficient to being the largest milk producer in the world, Tribhivandas Patel, the founder and chairman and Dr Verghese Kurian changed the model of milk production and distribution in the nation.



Figure 1: Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru inaugurating Amul on 20th November 1955



Figure 2

Since then, Amul is known as a simple Indian brand that became famous for its taste, quality and specifically for its sociable nature. Amul is famous for its promotional strategies specifically the advertisements. It tried to appreciate the nation in various areas including spreading awareness campaigns in the country to educate, inform and safeguard the citizens.

Despite manufacturing different products, Amul is a synonym for butter using amascot involving a Girl (Amul Girl) for the advertising campaigns designed in 1966 by Eustace Fernandes, the art director of DaCunha Communications, an Ad agency of Mumbai.

The first appearance of the Amul Mascot was on a billboard with the tagline, 'Utterly Butterly Delicious'. ("New book captures history of India through the Amul girl's eyes," 2013)

Following this, the Amul advertising campaign flourished and the nation reacted positively. This only happened with the creative freedom provided by Verghese Kurian to the ad agency and it is rather still maintained.

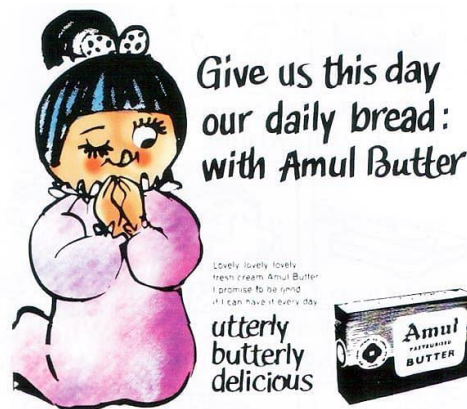


Figure 3: Utterly Butterly Delicious, Amul tagline

In early, 1990, Sylvester DaCunha handed the agency to his son, Rahul DaCunha and with the copywriter, Manish Jhaveri and illustrator, Jayant Rane, they changed the colours of the advertisement using the Amul girl trademark. The agency managed to take political, entertainment, sports, economic and even social issues through their timely campaigns.



Figure 4: Amul girl mascot

This paper helps understand and demonstrate the nuances of PSA using content analysis methodology through the famous Amul Ad campaigns during the COVID-19 crisis, which stuck the world in December 2019 and was declared a pandemic in 2020. In January 2020, Amul famed the magnificence of the government for bringing back the Indianstrapped in Wuhan, China. The government helped safeguard the Indians from the outbreak in China. The ad copy (Figure 5) stated, 'Wuhan Se Yahan Le Aaye...'



Figure 5

Amul is the pertinent brand for communicating, informing and educating the nation about the various areas, helping the masses to aware and educate about the numerous concerns of the pandemic. In March 2020, Amul did a topical ad (Figure 6) featuring in print and social media handles; Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, which represents the brand mascot the Amul Girl, washing hands in the basin with the phrase, 'Better safe than sorry!'. This ad appealed to the people about the importance of washing hands during a pandemic and staying safe by following all precautionary measures. On the social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, the company posted the ad with #Amul Topical: Precautionary against the Coronavirus!



Figure 6

Another ad was published in March 2020 about 21 days of nationwide lockdown which was implemented by the Indian government on 24th March 2020 (Figure 7). This ad communicated to the masses about being healthy during the lockdown and even informed them that the essential items will be available to the general populace of the country.

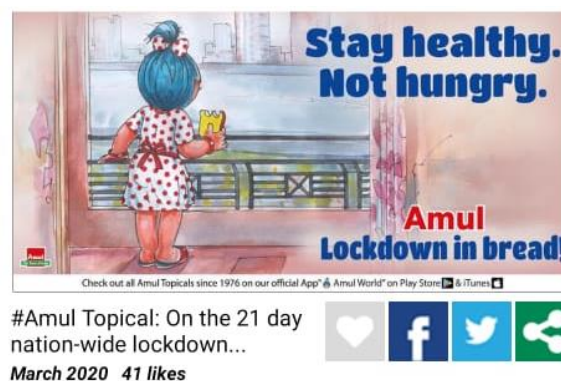


Figure 7

The third ad published by Amul in March 2020 (Figure 8) stated, ‘Khaalihaathnahin, thaalihaath thanks kijiye!’ which was directly envisioned to appreciate and thank the Corona warriors, healthcare workers; doctors, nurses, staff and everyone who worked tirelessly and served round the clock to help the public in the desperate times. This idea was communicated by the Prime Minister, Shri. Narendra Modi to all the Indian citizens on 22nd March 2020 at 5:00 pm to express their gratitude towards the frontline workers and to create an optimistic atmosphere in the nation. The advertisement also intends to approach the Indian nationals to be safe by following all the precautionary measures such as covering their nose and mouth while sneezing, washing hands regularly and even maintaining distance from each other to break the chain of the virus.



Figure 8

The next ad in April 2020 (Figure 9) was about people learning digital apps to communicate with their loved ones. The pandemic was harsh on everyone, therefore, the level of isolation, depression and concerns about mental health was amplified during the phase-1 lockdown. (Singh et al., 2020, p. xx) It affected everyone and specifically the youth of the nation. The advertisement tries to explain the value of staying connected with family and friends using audio/video online platforms such as Zoom.



Figure 9

Through another advertisement in April 2020, Amul paid gratitude to the healthcare workers who risked their lives for the nation by stating, ‘MBBS: Makhan Bole Bohat Shukriya’, Amul: In Sickness and in health (Figure 10). Amul always understands the intricacies of the situation and tries to help the masses by informing and educating them and giving tribute to the ones who helped in the dire situation.



Figure 10

In May 2020, as a disaster management plan, the Government of India divided all the districts into three zones based on the spread of the virus to understand the intricacy of the virus crises in different areas and warn the public according to the coloured zones. The Amul also tried to communicate about the three zones; Red Zone, Orange Zone and Green Zone and appealed to the public to be safe in every zone (Figure. 11).



Figure 11

After the Lockdown Phase 1 of the coronavirus spread, Amul significantly played a pivotal role in spreading the information about the precautionary measures to be taken by the public to overcome the crisis and stay safe in this crucial time. These ads focused on the information to adopt this new normal.

Advertising has been around for a long time but it became a movement when it came to television and radio in the early 1900s. Since then, it has been used to reach out to people, create awareness, spread information, and of course, promote brands. Advertising is so diverse and has been here for a long time and nothing can stop it from existing. During the Covid-19 pandemic too, even though the world stopped and at some point, in time even the advertising industry seemed to have hit a hard rock but it survived and adapted its way of getting past the harsh impacts of the pandemic. The situation during the Covid-19 Pandemic was completely unpredictable and led to nationwide lockdowns and brought the complete world including people and industries to a standstill. The governments were imposing nationwide lockdowns which led to the complete isolation of people. It impacted the people and industries in a lot of ways and therefore the advertising industry too suffered its consequences and experienced many changes due to a variety of factors.

The major purpose of the current study was to focus on the impact of Public Service Advertising and its impact on consumer behaviour during the pandemic. It also tries to understand the changing trends in advertising and how the brands had to re-strategize every campaign they had planned. The reasons behind the changing trends due to shifting in demand and supply of varied products and finally the aim or set of goals that one expects to

achieve by carrying out research is the coping strategy of the brands, consumer behaviour and spending habits towards essential and non-essential things. This all leads to analysing and assuming the future of PSA in comparison to digital media advertising.

This paper is based on the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on advertising so it is of relevant as it is significant for brands and advertising agencies to adopt the latest trends and overcome the misfortunes of the global crisis. It emphasizes the ways the brands have re-strategized their advertisements and is therefore of use to those in the same field who want to understand how to cope up with such unpredictable business shocks, the companies which were able to survive this phase and the brands which benefitted from it. It can provide readers with the necessary information about this topic, helping them in their future endeavours which are somewhere spontaneous and involve quick thinking and the ability to adapt to situations.

Through observation and considering the new normal, the study tends to observe and analyse the importance of public service advertisement to spread the message in the interest of the masses. The major changes observed during the pandemic were firstly by the brand and their product lines and specifically the announcements made to raise awareness and change the behaviour of the masses and educate society. The writing style of the copy of advertising changed as it focussed on the alarming precautionary measures to be applied with immediate effect. Many other brands also came out with awareness campaigns to observe the change and spread the trending change. These ads were analysed based on the product being advertised, the message being delivered and the medium being used, etc. This analysis focuses on a better understanding of how the advertising industry has adapted to the changes and was able to stay vigilant even during the pandemic. This is important and has helped us to understand the impact of the revamped marketing strategies of the brands was like.

Conclusion

The new normal with the impact of the Covid-19 Coronavirus pandemic has changed everything in the marketing industry and this has specifically affected the print media in terms of PSA and brands' promotional strategies. Digital advertising on social media and OTT portals turned print media upside-down due to the fear of the public. These public service advertisements educated the masses to take precautionary measures and even taught them to be safe during the novel Coronavirus crisis. It was a time when the industry saw a thriving force with some hygienic product lines such as sanitizers, personal care, washing products, etc. which even focussed on managing the crisis at large and not only for the brands. At the same time, rather than a negative effect of online advertising, it shattered brand loyalty, therefore, the consumer tends to try new brands and products, even balancing the sustainability and hygiene of the products and services.

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