

Storytelling Long-Format Ads - A Better Way for Effective Consumer Engagement

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Abstract: - Brands are betting big on the storytelling format of long duration advertisements or series of ads. Digital medium today gives brands the opportunity to delve deep into the heart and minds of their consumers through long duration ads or series of ads. Long duration ads have undoubtedly allowed the brands to go beyond the regular 30-second short format which not only used to restrict the brands from highlighting its essential story but was also a challenge for the advertising agency to integrate the essence of the brand. The duration of ads have now increased from 30 seconds to 3 to 4 minutes. Everyone surely remembers and cherishes the long-format ads like Google reunion; British Airways' A Ticket to Visit Mum, Fortune oil, Amazon's 'when a woman shops', Tata Sky Prison break, Dabur Vatika's Brave & Beautiful and many more. Brands like DBS, Google, Amazon, Star Sports, Vodafone launched their brand story through a series of ads in an innovative manner leaving a high impact on each and every consumer. The storytelling long-format of ads or series of ads make the consumers connect quite closely with the product's core thought thereby leaving a high impact on them with possibly a better engagement.

The storytelling long-format ad or series of ads allows for greater creative freedom and thus allows various routes to customer education, product information/gamification, category and brand build and customer engagement. Engagement can be built around these storytelling long-format ad or series of ads thus captivating customers for even longer.

The advantage of a well-made, clutter breaking, creative storytelling ad – irrespective of its format (long duration or short duration) is that its impact is far greater than a run-of-the-mill ad. While advertising should never be created with duration in mind (as a constraint), the fact is the duration factor does affect them subliminally. Every creative person will reject an idea in his/her own mind if he/she thinks it warrants more than 40-seconds of air time. With dictats like product window and consumption shots also being forced on them by the client, it is natural that most creatives are on expected lines. In that context it is wonderful to see a 4-minute storytelling long-format ad being created for a brand. Brands today are going beyond making the stereotype ads that shows consumption, comparison, product windows etc. Brands are finding ways of communication for better consumer engagement and here is where storytelling long-format ads or series of ads are helping them do it more effectively.

Key words: Consumer engagement, long-format ads, storytelling, digital medium, brands

From 30 seconds to now 3 to 4 or may be 7 minutes, brands are betting big on storytelling long-format of advertisements or series of ads. Undoubtedly it has given the

brands an allowance to go beyond the regular 30-second short-format which used to restrict the brands from highlighting its essential story and to integrate the essence of the brand. Brands are seeing the storytelling long-format ad or series of ads as an opportunity to delve into the heart and minds of their consumers.

Storytelling long-format ad or series of ads allow for greater creative freedom and better storytelling and make the consumers connect quite closely with the product's core thought thus leaving a high impact on them. The storytelling long-format advertising tend to have strong emotional connects and have gained immense momentum of late with brands realising its potential to connect with its target audience.

Brands like DBS, Google, Amazon, Star Sports, Vodafone launched their brand story in an innovative manner leaving a high impact on each and every consumer. There is an mistakable trend of a gradual shift from a 3-minute-long ad format to a 5-8 minute storytelling long-format ad or series of ads. The focus is on branded storytelling and content, which is why we are seeing more and more brands creating engaging content. The key challenge for brands is creating work that breaks the clutter with the focus being on creating relevant and impactful communication through storytelling.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on secondary data. The data is collected from journals as well as newspapers such as Brand Equity of Economic Times, Mint and several websites on the Internet, blogs, online news articles have been thoroughly checked with. The study has been carried out to understand the effectiveness of brands using storytelling long-format ads as well storytelling through a series of ads in essentially communicating to the consumers and engaging them. The study has been conducted from the time period of May to October 2017.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this attention-span starved digital age, storytelling long-format ad or series of ads have found acceptance with the marketers as these ads potentially deliver on four important communication parameters – impact, creativity, relevance and repeat value. The most important aspect is that storytelling is not limited by time, but it is rather a way to break the clutter and monotony that ads were getting into by

following a cookie-cutter approach with strong category codes. Storytelling long-format allows for better emotional connect... it's like a mini-movie rather than an ad film which consumers had started switching off from in their minds. For example, a brand story has the luxury to afford a storytelling long-format pace while a tactical communication may require a shorter and tighter edit. Sometimes the storytelling long-format needs a shorter version too to suit the medium or a long-format can be launched only on digital medium i.e. internet. The long and short duration film exist in tandem to fulfil a marketer's priorities on communication and media.

Today, the definition of prime time has changed. For everyone, the prime time for checking news and browsing could be anywhere – while travelling or during free time and so on. Digital is taking over big time. People today are not regularly watching television. Today, digital advertising is being accepted by marketers and consumers quite positively. Digital as a platform gives an opportunity for a brand to engage with the consumer quite well. As of now, for the Indian consumer as well as the marketer, TV still plays an important role in the media mix. So, whatever the format, a large proportion of the media budget gets allocated to television. Hence, the storytelling long-format ads are often used for launching the campaign on TV, getting into shorter edits for sustenance or used for digital only or vice versa.

Google Reunion Campaign

Google India had launched a flawless Google Search ad called “Reunion” on November 13, 2013, the duration of which was just over 3 minutes. The storytelling long-format ad was relatable to both the old and new generations; secondly, the ad touched on the region's history; and third, it utilized the product and its features to build a bridge between

both generations and regions. In the ad, Google “facilitates a reunion between two childhood friends separated by the 1947 India-Pakistan partition in this touching ad from Google India.” The ad features two grandfathers who get separated in the 1947 India-Pakistan partition and are reunited by their grandchildren.

Google is probably the first thing that comes to mind when we talk about the internet. The search engine is one of the most loved brands of the current generation. The question arose what's the point of making a three and a half-minute film when Google already enjoys 97 per cent search market share in India? Sandeep Menon, Director Marketing of Google said that Google wanted to strike up a conversation to showcase the different uses of Google and at the same time, tell magical stories that show why users love the product. “One of our core philosophies is that our users are smart and intelligent. Hence, the attempt was to have a conversation and tell users that they can do a lot more, and a lot quicker, by showcasing some of the innovations that allow the product to be used in different ways,”

The “Reunion” ad got over 4 million hits in under a month and which just kept increasing. Google India then came up with a successive series of smaller ads starring these two long-lost best friends and their grandkids. The narrative was the same in each one. The two old men were recounting the past or simply enjoying old age together. At some point, a question pops up that prompts them to ask their grandkids - who then refer to Google Search. The ad has become a part of the viewer's family because everybody could relate to old snarky grandparents with their idiosyncrasies. The ads were charming and relatable because of the already laid groundwork of the “Reunion” ad.



Google – Reunion

DBS Bank – Chilli Paneer Campaign

The objective of this campaign was that the brand – DBS Bank, wanted to showcase how banking and support to take financial decisions is at your fingertips. The message they wanted to convey was that as an Asian bank they believe in not just offering banking solutions but being an integral part of financial decisions of the consumers. In the first leg of the campaign there were 4 four-minute episodes/films and the second leg comprised the entire 16-minute-long film. The story was weaved around two characters *Ken*, native of Singapore, and *Asha*, a foodie from India, the film displayed everyday emotions around decisions that we make in our lives.

For a relatively unknown bank in the country, ‘*Chilli Paneer*’ – the title of the film, created a sizzling entry for DBS Bank. The concept of how banking with DBS can give wings to a love story was a refreshing take from the usual banking related promotions. It created more than 6 lakh viewing/engagements

After the success of the first film, *Chilli Paneer 2* was done which was a first-of-a kind interactive digital ad film in India and it created a lot of buzz. In the second film, the viewer was required to click to decide the next course of action for the protagonists of the film. The approach was to engage with the consumers and create conversations. The campaign seamlessly integrated the products and embedded the brand message of being there when the customer needs the

bank products. The idea was not to make viral videos but engage with people through unique storytelling long-format ad and series of ads. The crux of the campaign was to seed and amplify relevant content which the consumers associate with which in turn drove conversations and encouraged interaction with the brand thereby increasing brand awareness.

KV Sridhar, chief creative officer, SapientNitro, the agency which created the campaign said, “The difference between the two films - *Chilli Paneer 1* and *Chilli Paneer 2* is that, *Chilli Paneer 1* was about the story of love and commonalities because of their love of food and it the same time falling in love and that is where the story ends. In *Chilli Paneer 2*, the challenge was, how do you take the story forward and then how do you make it different and add more

people to the story. The brief was to take it forward, while making it exciting and more engaging for both the brand and the story. So what we did is to take from one of our philosophies which is, ‘a story lived is better than a story told’. People are not interested in a brand story; they are interested in their own stories. So unless you make them part of the story, they won’t be engaged in the story you are telling. That was the biggest challenge”

Chilli Paneer 2 created more than a million views and engagements which is big number considering that it’s a banking product. Both the films created a big impact and increased the awareness of DBS band which was relatively unknown to a large number of Indians.



DBS – Chilli Paneer

Amazon’s Chonkpur Ke Cheete Campaign

In the 2017 Indian Premier League (IPL) season, an unsuspecting team called “Chonkpur Cheetahs” kept viewers amused during ad breaks. The series of ads were created for e-commerce giant Amazon India by advertising agency Ogilvy and Mather, Bengaluru, Executed as a series of ads, Amazon introduced the fictional team as a part of the company’s IPL campaign which traces the journey of an aspiring team which wants to play the T20 tournament through a series of ads in the 2017 IPL season. The objective was to communicate how Amazon was helping aspirational Indians in fulfilling their dreams through its extensive product portfolio (over 10 crore products), convenient delivery and value for money pricing. The story telling communication was done albeit differently to hold the audience, tease a bit, have fun, create that extra bit of

engagement and involvement to extend the campaign. In this advertising campaign format, the theme and characters remain the same while the storyline changed in each commercial. Amazon was able to create a strong brand recall and superior engagement with the viewer’s owing to interesting storyline in each commercial. Keeping in mind the increasing spread of mobile data enabled telephony, the ad showcased a Tier II/Tier III town setting thereby effectively connecting and engaging consumers from smaller towns which enabled increasing the awareness of brand Amazon.

According to Amazon India, the campaign has so far garnered over 100 million views, 5 lakh engagements and 75,000 conversations across mediums. Needless to say, the brand recall was strongest for Amazon within its category.



Amazon’s Chonkpur ke Cheete

Star Sports’ Mauka Mauka Campaign

For Indians, cricket is next to religion. While the World Cup which happens once in 4 years was doing rounds for the year 2015, the prime focus of Star Sports was to achieve as much high viewership across the country for all matches including India during the year. The World cup 2015 kicked off for India with its arch rival Pakistan. While this became extremely critical for the Channel to garner all eyes on the match, Star Sports just went all guns blazing to ensure it garners the desired eyeballs. The ‘*Mauka Mauka*’ campaign

assisted the channel to get into limelight. Immense amount of talks, comments, sentiments were flowing with its world cup theme ads. The string of ads was an effort to create sufficient excitement around the matches.

The ‘*Mauka Mauka*’ campaign was in commemoration with all India matches, starting with India vs. Pakistan on Feb 15th 2015. The first viral ad in the series features an ardent Pakistani cricket fan going through adolescence, marriage and parenthood while getting increasingly frustrated over his team’s inability to beat India

during the World Cup since 1992. In the subsequent films, he has been shown supporting multiple teams like West Indies, South Africa and United Arab Emirates (UAE), which are playing against India.

The first ad released on digital platform YouTube was on 7th February, 2015. Within 12 hours of being online, the ad got more than a million organic views. The buzz went viral, not just in India, but all the way to Pakistan as well. Just after 12 hours of going online, the ad already had over a million views and fetched 2.3 million views in 3 weeks. The

first ad of Mauka Mauka, India vs Pakistan, was so successful, it set the trend for a creating a series of Mauka Mauka campaign. The India vs Pakistan ad crossed 3 million views, and India vs Bangladesh crossed 4 million views. Ad spots rate shot up to Rs. 20 lakhs for 10 seconds of air time vis-à-vis an usual operating rate of Rs. 8 lacs. TVR's for India vs. Pakistan went up to 18 as against an average of 10 TVR. All India Matches clocked an average of over 12 TVR's post the India vs. Pakistan match which gave Star Sports overall a very good ratings on ICC Cricket World Cup 2015



Star Sports – Mauka Mauka

Vodafone 4g - The Old Couple's Second Honeymoon Campaign

Vodafone's campaign for the 2017 IPL featured an elderly couple celebrating their second honeymoon in Goa. The campaign with a series of 5-6 ads features the smart old couple, probably in their sixties, going to Goa after 35 years, and their experiences, all of which are captured through the mobile services of Vodafone. The story of their visit or holiday to Goa was showcased in a series of interesting ads.

One of the most refreshing aspects of the commercials is the choice of models — a couple that could easily have been next door uncle and auntie - cheerful, modern and completely at ease with their accent! Often, a touch of realism and characters who don't look and act like

models, can create a huge difference from the often phony, superficial stuff that most commercials subject us to. Whether the old couple ad in 2017 IPL matches up to the earlier Vodafone ad in terms of creativity is a subjective, but it is certainly something that consumers have noticed and recall mainly because of the storytelling and sequential format.

The Vodafone campaign had a high recall and helped the brand drive significant engagements. Vodafone ended up having a high recall during that period in an extremely competitive category of telecom service where it was pitted against the market leader Airtel and the high spending new entrant Reliance Jio.



Vodafone 4G – Old Couple

Interpretation

The paper is an attempt to understand how story telling helps brands to create an emotional connect with the consumers which is so very essential today for better engagements with consumers. With the lack of restriction on duration and cost, storytelling long-format ad is allowing

brands to narrate better stories and form a deeper connect with its audiences. Yes, the storytelling long-format ad has an upper hand over a 30-second TVC as it allows you to create interactions and micro-target users, given that it is seen on the digital medium. It also enables the advertisers to slice down the video and create several versions of the communication

that can be leveraged online or on television. The long-format is here to stay and will complement the more traditional ad formats. Also, it is a great acknowledgment that the best way to get consumers' attention is to tell a story with an emotional hook.

It's not the first time that such experiments of ad series or long-format have been done by brands. Long ago telecom major Airtel experimented with the ad series format featuring Bollywood actors Vidya Balan and R. Madhavan as well as Rakul Preet Singh and Pulkit Samrat, who played love-struck couples promoting various offers like instant recharge, cheap STD calls and cheaper night plans.

Vodafone also introduced its iconic "ZooZoos" series of campaigns during the second season of IPL in 2009. Vodafone ZooZoos did really well for first three years but then stories became repetitive and they lost their charm. This is a major challenge with campaign series format; the brand and the agency have to constantly improve and outdo the creative idea with each commercial. If they fail, the viewer will lose interest. Also in the long-format, the challenge is to sustain the attention of the consumers.

A majority of the storytelling long-format ads out there are tear-jerkers; they are human interest stories, which tend to be about heady emotions, hope and fighting the odds. Consumers are bored of the 'fastest, strongest' pitch; they want to hear stories that connect. Brands that have taken a human angle without trying to oversell the product have done well by using the storytelling long-format ad.

It is easier for a brand to sustain viewer attention over three minutes with emotions, than with, say, humour. A joke cannot be stretched for that long, but an emotional film can use the build-up to its advantage. Storytelling long-format ads also fetch repeat views if they are nuanced and layered; while the first time people want to know how it ends, they will watch it again to enjoy the finer details and the storytelling of the tale. Storytelling long-format films confirm that good content drives high levels of engagement and memorability, and the length of the film is not a deterrent to repeat viewing.

Releasing storytelling long-format ad or series of ads on the web allows marketers to test the waters with the consumers. Depending on the kind of feedback an ad generates, an advertiser can either pull the plug or release the shorter version on TV. If a brand is looking at targeting consumers who spend most of their time online, then a storytelling long-format film fits the bill. If majority of its consumers spend most of their time offline, then television is the best medium. But on TV, one cannot afford to tell a 2 or 3 minute long story, as it is an expensive medium. Lastly, in many cases, a long-format ad film is released first on the web and later a shorter version is aired on TV. The length of the film does not determine the quality of it or the connection or the story. So it really does not matter if it is 40 seconds or three minutes or three hours long. It all depends on the content. If the content is bad, even if the film is only 20

seconds long, people will only see for two seconds. If the content is good, even if the film is four hours long, people will see it.

SUGGESTIONS

Spending on digital is not an expensive affair if compared with its traditional counterparts like Television. What matters is how the medium is used. A brand can't just have a 90 seconder or a 30 seconder on digital and on TV respectively. Both the mediums need to work together. Sometimes there might be a need to have a longer story which may not be told on television and vice versa in some cases. It is not about one medium v/s the other. What is important is to know what are the objectives and the medium that best meets/delivers on the given objective. It is all about having a dialogue with the consumers and somewhere digital as a medium gives that opportunity to interact and engage with the target audience. For example if a brand is present only in 12 cities, then digital as a medium also helps in reducing the spillover. On the contrary, taking this unique approach by leveraging technology and building interactivity - has made the task of building brand awareness and brand affinity easier. Now-a-days quite a few brands just launch their videos online and not on other mediums which clearly shows the acceptance of the medium. The question still exists on whether digitally first launched campaign brings better response than when launched first on the television. Each medium delivers on its own strengths hence it should not be looked at from medium A vs medium B.

CONCLUSION

Short duration ads automatically do not make for more sensible advertising. This is not to say that all short ads are ineffective. However due to the duration constraint, their dependence on media muscle for impact & memorability is quite high. In Marketing Communication *it's all about not trying to outspend the competition, but to outwit them*. The storytelling long-format ads' dependence on media weight to deliver memorability and impact is a little lesser because of better storytelling. Fact is, the long duration may not see much airtime on television. However, the edited version will run on TV. But given the buzz it creates thanks to the full version being played out online, the impact has already been created, which means half the job is achieved. Brands today are trying to tell stories that are compelling, engaging and can fuel conversations and storytelling long-format ads or series of ads are enabling this.

The long-format ad has an upper hand over a 30-second TVC as it allows you to create interactions and micro-target users, given that it is available on the digital medium. The other big contributor to the rise of the storytelling long-format ad is the growth of digital medium. More and more brands have got into the digital phenomenon. With advantage of digital the storytelling long-format advertising enables the brands to underline their core essence and to integrate their core essence. Brands are able to build consumer engagement

around their storytelling long-format advertising thus captivating customers for even longer. With the increasing internet reach, most brands are taking the longer ad format route as it gives brands a liberty to express itself in a much more beautiful and glorified way since the online broadcast is more about content, conversation, engagement and commitment and conversations. Fact is also that consumers click on the advertisement and watch willingly and are not forced to watch. Storytelling long-format ads or series of ads are here to stay and are becoming more popular with the marketers.

Properties like IPL and International Cricket Council (ICC) matches which extends over a longer duration give brands a window to experiment with storytelling formats. In IPL and ICC matches because a considerable number of active viewers watch these matches, if a brand bombards them with a single creative, it creates significant ad fatigue while the series campaigns with different storylines tend to keep them engaged.

According to an article by Millward Brown, smart long-form videos reinforce core ideas and enhance brand associations that can influence future purchase occasions. The storytelling long-format advertising or ad series presents a greater chance of polarisation. Marketers should thus embrace the opportunity to develop an ardent following or build buzz, by long-form ads or ad series that must "inspire, surprise, or excite to maintain viewer attention and interest.

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As the review conducted was confined to secondary data and internal company data, result may vary if research is

conducted with help of primary data. Alos if the survey is conducted all over India, results may substantially differ. As the research was conducted from existing secondary and internal company and advertising agency information, the result may not be the same if the survey is conducted by using other company or brand information details.

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