



Three things that will have an impact on Marketing, on the road to 2010

Three years ago, our *bai* didn't have a mobile phone. Nor did our driver. Today, our *bai* is thinking of getting a second phone, and the driver changes his caller tune about seven times a month.

Three years ago, I might not have considered this a possibility. This is the trouble with forecasting. One half of the things you forecast get delayed; the other half happens sooner than you think.

This is why, as I look at the next three years and try to forecast what will impact marketing the most, I can see several hazy possibilities. One thing is clear to me though. Most of those 'impactful' incidents will be result of changes that are continuous, outcome of processes that have already started. But our realization will be a bit sudden. Like our *bai's* decision to buy a second phone appeared to me a sudden change of our world.

Seen from the consumer's viewpoint, three broad areas that will have serious effect on marketing as we know it and practice it are: *Attention, Advocacy* and *Addressibility*.

ATTENTION

Everything around us is getting compressed in size, time and space. It's a process we call **Digitisation of Life**. Large parts of what we consume today - products, services, information - are being created, stored or delivered to us digitally, whether or not vast majority of us actually think we are using digital technology, most notably the Internet. This alone is putting enormous pressure on the attention consumers are willing to 'lend' to marketing and its messages. Result: *marketers have to learn very soon how to attract and retain consumer attention, in a world that is getting more heterogeneous by the day.*

My driver might actually sell his attention to a marketer for a few free ring tones every month. Our *bai* might order several items of provision for her own home by sending text messages to a server, while she is on the way to ours. As mobile phones start serving the role of a PC for most people, the endless debate of whether computers will really become affordable, will actually end.

The realization that the control over information has permanently shifted from the marketer to the consumer will not come to everyone at the same time. Some of us will continue to think we have a few more years, before we have to wake up. I reckon those will provide case study material to business schools a few years hence.

ADVOCACY

In a choice starved world, marketers decided what they produced, and how they delivered it to us. The transaction ended with a sale and would not begin until the next time we had to buy the product again. In a world where every product is getting *servicized*, where consumers are increasingly

being coaxed with lower price, they are also willing to pay a premium for what they want.

Either way, they have learnt to speak up the way most of us did not know when we were growing up. Our parents at best wrote a letter to the editor when they were unhappy with a product or service. Tomorrow consumers will not hesitate to sue a company or start a massive word of mouth campaign over relatively frivolous failures. Marketing has to recognize that consumer advocacy will be one of the biggest issues they have to deal with, no matter which category we operate in.

Naturally, advocacy will neither restrict itself either to individual experiences, nor, when it comes to being sensitive to the world around us, will it restrict to a minority group we call activists. Every consumer will potentially be an activist and the only thing they might forget is the age old advice: forgive and forget. Consumer Advocacy will raise serious concerns about business in general and marketing in particular and 'ethics in business' will no longer be a seminar topic alone.

ADDRESSIBILITY

As young and impatient consumers want to try out everything at half the age their parents did, marketing has to reckon with the near collapse of the practice of segmenting the market the old way - notably, on demographics and affordability. One of the consequences of this will be the addressable market growing rapidly to cover many more people than we previously thought possible. Marketing has to perhaps forget the old model of a carefully chosen segment buying products repeatedly, and embrace a world where a lot of consumers are trying the products at least occasionally. Another outcome will be how marketers look at role of brands in their portfolio as mainstream and niche. In the past, niche brands got very little marketing support; they had to fend for themselves. As the definition of niche itself undergoes transformation, as the retailing structure allows small brands to be overnight as successful as large brands, there will be a place for every kind of brand, regardless of size, as long as it is serving a market gap.

MANAGING THE PARADOX

Here's two paradoxes marketing will have to reconcile with on the way to 2010. One, even as contact options get more niche and targeted, the number of people marketers will need to address will dramatically shoot up. Two, while the cost of marketing to attention is challenged and time starved consumers will rise sharply, almost at the same time, that cost will also crash. Look around yourself and you will see another Google or an i-Pod somewhere. Or perhaps, the Nirma of twenty first century.



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