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ISSN - 2347 - 503X

Research Chronicler

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Vol IV Issue I : January 2016

Editor-In-Chief

Prof. K. N. Shelke

Research Chronicler

ISSN 2347 – 5021 (Print); 2347 – 503X (Online)

**A Peer-Reviewed Refereed and Indexed
Multidisciplinary International Research Journal**

Volume IV Issue I: January – 2016

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Single Copy	₹ 600	\$40
Annual	₹ 3000	\$200
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Rin and Tide: A soapy Saga**Prof. Soumyamoy Maitra***Assistant Professor, Netaji Subhash Institute of Business Management, (W.B.) India***Abstract**

Criticizing a rival's products is a high-risk, but increasingly popular marketing strategy. Consumers have historically reacted negatively to direct comparisons between competitors and tended to sympathize with the underdog. Recent debate on the comparative advertising between Rin and Tide has focused on its ethical rather than its effectiveness dimension. The article is an attempt to highlight the importance of the phrase 'compare with care'.

Key Words: Rin, Tide, market, competition

Know that the amount of criticism you receive may correlate somewhat to the amount of publicity you receive. - Donald Rumsfeld.

Business markets are today as uncompromising and aggressive as they can be. Every brand tries to prove its superiority over the rival. Sigmund Freud once said, "Humans are born screaming for attention." Indeed, it is from this very basic survival instinct that competitiveness is born. Success at every stage of life is judged by how one can weigh up to competition and to deny competitiveness in advertising is both duplicitous as well as impractical. Hence to outdo the competition and prove oneself as the best, marketers often resort to comparative advertisements. Theoretically, comparative advertisements are a form of little aggressive promotional strategies adopted by a company. They aim to establish competitive supremacy by attacking the rival brand/brands directly or indirectly. The comparative claims done by different advertisers are of variable nature. They may range from being explicit about the name or feature of the competitor's product or may give subtle implicit reference of the same. Comparative advertising thus aims to objectively and truthfully inform the consumer, and

promotes market transparency, keeping down prices and improving products by stimulating competition. However, most of the times, comparative advertising leads to confusion, misleads or discredit a competitor.

The early years of glorified television commercials saw the attractive and appealing housewife extol the benefits of her favorite product rather than the infamous competitor's brand. The viewer would often try to guess the real identity of the compared brand. Today, advertisers are no longer shy to highlight on air or in print their leading competitors. They celebrate the merits of their products, explaining why they are better than the competitors' products'. Globally, comparative ads have been around for decades. The model ads of Penn Tennis Balls from Fallon McElligot, the "Get a Mac" for Apple are some of the prominent examples of the same. The battles between brands are now growing intense in India also which is evident from the most famous cola wars in the past decade to the recent Onida vs. Nokia advertisement war. The latest provoking commercial from Rin claiming to be better than Tide has opened the doors by frontal attacks, a so-called offensive

marketing strategy. The punch line in the advertisement “Tide se kahin behtar safedi de Rin (Rin gives more whiteness than Tide)” says it all direct on the face, it not just names but shows the competitive product, bringing the debate on comparative advertising back in spotlight.

Early Show to Latest Shock:

The two powerful detergent brands of HUL and P&G, Rin and Tide respectively carry a strong heritage a rich background story.

During 1990s Rin was the first national detergent bar in India; however, the market saw the launch of Rin Powder White in the year 1994. Tide, on the other hand, paved its entry in the year 1998. The 1990s was a period of continuous innovations and product improvements for Rin where it tried to position the product in the minds of the customers through memorable campaigns like Uski saari, meri saari se safed kaise to Safedi ka Shehanshah. During the same period, Tide was launched as the premium detergent in the market. The launching price of the product was Rs. 120 per kg. According to the analysts, Tide could not catch up in the market mainly because of its launching price that acted a deterrent and the existence of the other brand, i.e., Ariel of Procter & Gamble that was doing quite well in the market during this period. Thus, Tide was slow on growth in the Indian market; it could not manage more than 0.3% share in the total detergents market in the 1990s.

Expect the Unexpected: Price War Begins:

January 2004 saw the advent of New Rin Powder with a unique double whiteness proposition. Also, it maintained that unlike the other detergents available in the market,

the new Rin dissolved in water completely leaving no mud like residue behind, the product also promised enhanced fragrance. The product was priced at Rs. 42 for a one kg pack, Rs. 80 for a 2 kg pack, Rs. 20 for 500 grams, Rs. 10 for the 250 gram pack and Rs. 1 for the 25 gram sachet. This was a bold and a confident move from HUL.

All these years, Tide had been pitted against Rin on the `whitening' platform. Even P&G did not seem to be too aggressive for the brand, however realizing that pricing being one reason for not being accepted by the market, it slashed the prices and the product entered into the mid-market segment rather than the premium segment. The price slashing exercise was seen to bring in tremendous improvement in the volumes of sales and the market share. The price was brought down to Rs. 23 for 500 grams as against the previous price of Rs. 43, Rs. 50 for 750 grams as against Rs. 70 at which it was available earlier. Therefore, the market saw a slash from 20 to 50% in case of the Procter & Gamble product Tide. Thus, with these price slashes, the market observed the two armies on the battlefield, being desirous to fight.

Get Off MY Planet: The Era of 2007-09:

Since 2007, Tide has been steadily gaining share with Rin close behind it. Tide had set the standards in delivering whiteness and cleansing benefits unmatched by other detergents. The point of difference that it suggested was that the powder would prevent dirt molecules from setting on the clothes, thereby giving better cleanliness and whiteness to the clothes. An additional augmentation was the pleasant lemon flavor added to the powder to enhance the

fragrance component. This led to Rin losing out its leadership position in the market ground in terms of whiteness also. The year 2009 saw a substantial gap in the value share, where Tide was capturing 8% of the market share and Rin only had 5.1% of the market share.

Tide Naturals enters the Market - December 2009:

The cold war of the two brands turned into an aggressive war when P&G came out with a new product called Tide Naturals. Tide Naturals was an attempt by the organization to enter into the mid-market segment, which the parent product, Tide was not catering to, and at the same time, to give the benefit of line extension to Tide Naturals. The notable fact was that Tide Naturals was priced lower than Rin. There was an approximate difference of Rs. 20 in the prices for a one kilo gram pack. The reason behind this strategy of P&G was to cater to the rural markets. This move from P&G posed an immediate threat to HUL. Rin faced a share fall of 2.5% in December 2009 so the only available option was to react by cutting the prices. The price was cut down by 30% to Rs. 50.

The Year 2010 - Attaining the Supreme:

February 25, 2010 HUL challenged the Tide Natural's claim in the Madras High Court. Hindustan Unilever challenged P&G in the court that Tide Naturals did not contain lemon and chandan and convinced the court that P&G should drop the word 'Naturals' from the name and merely displaying a disclaimer" It does not contain lemon and chandan" was not enough. The advertisement was considered to mislead the customers at large as it promoted Tide

Naturals as a natural detergent, whereas it was actually a synthetic detergent. P&G admitted in the court that Tide Natural used only the fragrance of lemon and chandan. Thus, P&G was instructed by the court to clarify to the customers the fact that its product did not contain the ingredients as claimed by it. Finally, on February 26, 2010 the Indian market saw the very bold comparative advertising on the television screens that took comparative advertising to new heights in the Indian history.

Legal Nuts and Bolts:

Alyque Padamsee, the famous ad filmmaker once said, "Bad publicity is better than no publicity." Sounds so true. No doubt from marketing angle, deliberate or not, it's an extended publicity to both the brands, Rin and Tide. Yet the main controversial issue is whether HUL's explicit TV commercial of Rin being superior to P&G's Tide amounts to denigration or is a permitted form of free speech protected under 'commercial speech' as part of freedom of speech under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. If we look at the advertisement very carefully, there are few areas of concern. First is that the advertisement clearly shows the packet of Tide Naturals, the premium brand of P&G, whereas the voiceover mentions only Tide. Now does this amount to misleading claims as per Indian Law?

Second issue is that at the end of the advertisement, a line is displayed stating that "this claim is based on laboratory tests done through globally accepted protocols in independent third-party laboratories' and schematic representation of superior whiteness is based on Whiteness Index test of Rin vs. Tide Naturals as tested by

Independent lab.” The challenge is whether the statement(s) can be substantiated by way of evidence.

Though P&G has sought a legal remedy, HUL definitely has gained on its strategic move of launching the commercial over the long colorful Holi and enjoying the splash of attention. HUL has subsequently challenged Tide's claim in the Chennai High Court. On March 1, the court asked P&G to modify the ad since they were not really able to substantiate the claim. A written judgment is still awaited on this matter. If the case does wind up in litigation, it would be rather interesting to watch how Indian courts react to this form of advertising.

Janta ki Adalat:

Debates and endless discussions over different advertisement strategies have become a common phenomenon of the day; however when an advertisement can generate a response which may either be negative or positive, surprising or shocking or is capable of evoking any other emotion among the masses, the advertiser's job is done. Similar was the response to the famous Rin-Tide controversy that was seen by the viewers all over the country on February 26, 2010 which generated huge buzz in the market.

Two Sides of the Same Coin:

The advertisement saw mixed reflections from the customers across the media. While one set of customers saw this move of HUL as an unethical practice, the others took it as awareness and educative step from HUL.

Heads - Chunk Gaye:

The first set of people is of those who were shocked to see the advertisement for the first time. The surprising element of the ad was

the appearance of two different brands in the same ad.

The very first response generated by the advertisement was both the products are from the same company otherwise this kind of advertisement is not possible. According to the supporters of this view, it was an unnecessary move from HUL to prove its superiority, primarily because, out of the 30 seconds ad, the first 22 seconds are solely devoted to Tide which means more than 75% of the expenditure on the ad was spent on your competitor's product. This would only lead to sympathies of customers to tied to the competitor's product. The advertisement was also viewed illegal, because the ad voice says “Rin is better than Tide” whereas the visual shows Tide Naturals, which means defaming a brand over which you do not have superiority.

Also, the advertisement was considered unethical because it deliberately took the advantage of the break in the court due to a long weekend. HUL was well-equipped with the fact that the courts decision would take at least three days to be announced and hence it continuously showed the ad during the period so as to do maximum damage to the competitor's product.

Hence, the customers supporting the Heads side of the coin did not see it as a long-term objective and rather considered it bad on part of global player like HUL to adopt this kind of competitive strategy which conveys how desperate the company was to increase sales and in the process lose out on the brand equity and respect. Last but not the least, now that Rin has publicly declared Tide as its competitor the market would see more aggressive responses from P&G.

Tails - Bold and Brash:

The other set had a view that was opposite of the first one. The blogs were flooded with comments with supporters of the tails side. The tails side believed that HUL by no means did cross the lane, and did not consider the advertisement illegal. They were of the opinion that rather than misleading, it was an educative step from HUL to educate customers. Tide is giving the impression to the customers that the product is available to them at a lower price while what actually is available to the customers is the other version of the Tide which is Tide Naturals. The lady in the advertisement portrays that she is getting Tide at a very low price, which is not factually true. All that HUL attempts to do is to educate customers that it is not Tide but Tide Naturals that is available at lower price. And also that if the comparison has to be made it should be between Rin and Tide, not Rin and Tide Naturals.

Also as per the legal affects, HUL has played it safe with small disclaimers below and at the end of the ad, "As tested by Independent Lab" and "Issued in the interest of Rin Users". Therefore, it doesn't come under any disparagement.

Hence, supporters of this approach view this ad as an eye opener for the customers, marketers and the other ad agencies. This is definitely seen to bring new reforms to the advertising industry. The ad has given a new dimension to the marketers, a different angle of communicating to the advertising agencies and a factual comparative methodology to the customers. After all at the end of the day, it's the customers who spend money for value of the product. The

responses from this category of Indian customers shows that the Indian customers are now modern and educated enough to understand and appreciate the concept of comparative advertising.

Expert's Opinions:

Let's see what Marketers and Ad Makers have to say:

The opinions of marketers differ from each other. Harish Bijoor, CEO, Harish Bijoor Consults feel that all this is being done by HUL just to create an unnecessary noise in the market. According to him, the chances that Rin being able to prove the facts are very less. On these lines, Prahlad Kakkar, MD, Genesis Film Productions also feels that what Rin is actually indulging into is comparing the product with the variant of tide.

Conclusion:

The rule of caveat emptor wonderfully fits into today's marketing environment. Advertisements, more specifically comparative advertisements are the brainchild of our creative advertisers. These advertisements are just the tools in the hands of people who are designing them, so any complaints or criticisms need to be addressed to and against their makers and not against the tools (comparative advertisements). Marketers and advertisers must remember that it's easy to look at a competitor and find gaps in his product or services. It's harder, but definitely more valuable, to fill these gaps in one's own offering and build real competitive advantages with which you can offer delight to the customer rather than just satisfying them.

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ISSN - 2347 - 503X

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