

Research Article

‘Adopt-Adapt-Create’: An overview on the Story of Lux Selling Soap and Stardom

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Introduction

The message by the commercials of Lux beauty soaps is not just an authority figure perception created by a celebrity which convinces customers to buy the product. Rather the commercials have made their way through a massive course of time by passing the perception to every generation and what makes it special is the consistency of convincing the same proportion of consumer populations in each newly added generation. Moreover, the low price tagging strategy which may be misinterpreted to have worked as a general affordability contingency does not appear to be true. ‘Each generation has unique expectations, experiences, generational history, lifestyles, values, and demographics’ [3]. The authors mention in their research, “Thanks to the power and reach of the internet, consumers all around the world have been able to become aware of the various services and products of different organizations and brands. They have access to information non-stop 24/7” [2]. The authors argue “It is obvious that distinct generations will react differently to pricing strategies and marketing decisions, due to the significant differences in their revenues [4]. The relationship between each generation and the media also influences promotional strategies and operations [5]. Even relationships to more traditional promotional media such as TV differ between generations. When targeting new generations through traditional promotional channels, companies should simultaneously engage the social networks associated with them and give preference to the promotional tools considered as social events

Abstract

Creating the perfect sensory experiences through customer interactions is an effective marketing strategy. Hindustan Unilever, promoted Lux beauty soap as a “luxury soap affordable for all”. Pradip Unni (theprint.in), a marketing and branding strategist based in Kerala, said, “The celebrity endorsement, or them calling Lux the secret behind Bollywood actors’ beauty, in the past as well as today, worked because it created memorability for the product, not just because a celebrity says so.” It requires a thorough understanding of the product, its history, market presence and consumer perceptions to map and reveal a marketing strategy formula that has worked for a company for nearly what could be called a century and still continues.

Research Objective: *The research aims to reveal the way Hindustan Unilever for Lux beauty Soap has constructed a connection to a mass consumer category by repeating the formula of ‘Adopt-Adapt-Create’ on a decade-to-decade basis.*

Keywords: Lux soap strategy; Marketing mix; Swot analysis; Lux soap saga

by younger TV watchers [6]. The latest TV commercial of Lux soap titled ‘Chand Sa Roshan Chehra’ featuring star couple Saif Ali Khan and Kareena Kapoor Khan presented its new proposition on the glow. Shot at the couple’s home, conceptualized by Wunderman Thompson, the plot focused on Kareena’s ‘moonlit glow’. From the days of ‘Nahana toh bahana hai..’ to now the moonlit glow, Lux has had many phases.

Research Objective: The paper mentions ‘Adopt-Adapt-Create’ to be the commercial strategy formula to be used by Hindustan Unilever for Lux beauty Soap to construct the same connection to its target consumer segment which must have undergone with changes in its perception towards products due to generation change which is caused by exposure of information on subject matters also sometimes called as current market trends.

Lux - The Global Brand

History states that Lux soap started as ‘Sunlight Flake’, laundry soap in 1899 produced by then, Lever Brothers, now known as Unilever. The name was changed from “Sunlight Flakes” to “Lux” in 1900, a Latin word for “light” and suggestive of “luxury.” It was launched in the United States in 1925 and in the United Kingdom in 1928, this is also when it acquired the status of becoming the first mass-market toilet soap in the world. Subsequently, Lux soap has been marketed in several forms, including

handwash, shower gel, and cream bath soap. Distribution began on a large scale in the US with the tagline 'Made as fine as French Soap'. The advertisements offered consumers "a beauty soap made with the French method" at an affordable price, with the promise of smooth skin. It highly reflected the product features like made with fine-texture and rich in fragrance. Initially, Lux campaigns educated users about its credentials as a laundry product. The shift in communication came through when the Lever Brothers conducted a contest and learned: women used Lux as toilet soap.

When Lux travelled to India

It was in the late 20s that the foreign soap brand stepped its foot in the Indian market and was officially launched in 1929. Taking forward its global brand building strategy between 1928-1940, Lux concentrated on building its association with the increasingly popular world of films, highlighting movie stars and their use of the product. Initially, it was rolled out in Indian metro cities with a higher price range than its competitor at the time - Lifebuoy. The reason sighted was to recover the initial cost of production while the advertisements were aimed at 'the early adopters' i.e., the consumers who were most willing to buy that product. In 1929, a global campaign featured 26 of the biggest female stars of the day, creating a huge impact among the movie-loving target audience. This was followed by Hollywood directors talking about the importance of smooth and youthful skin. Brand custodians believe that this also pioneered the trend of celebrity product endorsements.

The Lux Saga

An extract from Sabeena Gadihoke's blog traces the origin of 'Lux romancing Indian cinema stars. During the early 40s, the strong presence of a fast-evolving local film industry enabled a different trajectory for Lux in countries like India and China that began to use their own actresses instead of Hollywood stars. In fact, Lux girls from the Indian film industry also featured in Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka long before globalization in a way that we know it today would make it possible. Some of them travelled through exports of Indian magazines like *Filmfare*. Lux soap's very first photographic advertisement in India featured vintage actress Leela Chitnis as its brand ambassador. In those days, appearing in a Lux advertisement paved one's way in the glamour industry and was indeed a "must do" thing for a female movie star in India. While associating itself with the movie stars, Hindustan Lever (Unilever) sold stardom along with the soap. It made people believe that the Lux soap is the secret behind the beautiful faces of the Hindi film industry and if they start using it, they too can obtain similar beauty standards. The sepia-toned images transformed into colored audiovisual advertising overtime where the actress appeared as the glamour girl clad in the latest fashion suits with trendy hairstyles. The commercial portraits often reflected the styling that was in tandem with the movie characters and adapted to their personality. When the soap was first launched in India, the company targeted urban and semi-urban populations keeping the significance of 'beauty of women' and positioned itself as the 'luxury soap affordable for all' – the primary target audience being upper and middle-class population. During this era, Lux also launched campaigns featuring interviews up close and personal with stars, where the magazines and newspapers featured beauty secrets of vintage Bollywood heroines like Madhubala, Praveen Babi, Zeenat Aman, and more. The series of print ads had stars talking about preserving youthful skin. In order to reinvent itself with time and stay relevant amidst competition

from brands like Pears and Nirma, Lux underwent rebranding often by changing its color and packaging. The five principal colors used for Lux in 1958 were pink, white, blue, green, and yellow. Apart from keeping its pricing and consumer learnings at fore, Lux also introduced variants to offer everything under one roof - ranging from almond, saffron, oil and honey glow, sandalwood, rose, international, chocolate, crystal shine, purple lotus and cream, peach and cream, strawberry and cream. Lux expanded its operations in over 100 countries with a turnover of 1.0 billion euros alone in 2005.

The Purpose that Powers it

LUX believes every woman has the right to express her beauty and femininity unapologetically and without fear. That's why the brand is taking a stand against sexism, seeking to empower women to find strength through beauty and overcome sexist judgements. Because the harsh reality is that women constantly face judgements – from family, colleagues and complete strangers – and many of these criticisms relate to the way they look. LUX understands that beauty isn't superficial or frivolous. When inner strength is nurtured through self-care and solidarity, beauty can be a source of confidence, and that unstoppable power is exactly what the brand wants to help women find.

A Luxury Affordable to all

Targeting the upper and middle-class population, the British multinational company Hindustan Lever, now called Hindustan Unilever, promoted the Lux as a "luxury soap affordable for all". From "Hema Malini's dream girl complexion" to "the light of Vidya Sinha's smile", the soap branded itself as the "secret behind beautiful faces" in the Hindi film industry. When asked if it was an effective marketing strategy, Pradip Unni, a marketing and branding strategist based in Kerala, said, "The celebrity endorsement, or them calling Lux the secret behind Bollywood actors' beauty, in the past as well as today, worked because it created memorability for the product, not just because a celebrity says so." In the 2000s, in a bid to further popularise their "*mujhme star jagaaye*" theme, the company launched its first promotional contest called "*Lux star bano, Aish karo*" featuring Aishwarya Rai. The commercial sought consumers to buy the special promotional pack of Lux soap that came with a special scratch card. There were various rewards for the winners, including coming to Mumbai and living a day like Rai would. Later, the company also made commercials with real-life Bollywood couples, with one featuring Aishwarya Rai and Abhishek Bachchan, and another with Virat Kohli and Anushka Sharma. Another major event was when Lux roped in its first male ambassador, Shah Rukh Khan, that flipped the game of advertising women's beauty products by focusing gaze on a man instead of sexualising women.

Female Stardom and the Fashioning of the Self

Looking at successive Lux advertisements of a particular star could reveal the shifts in her self-image as she sought to define and reinvent herself over a period of time. For instance, two advertisements featuring Shashikala in 1965 and 1969 mark very different personas of the actress. Besides obvious differences in form (the Lux portrait of Shashikala in 1965 uses vivid colours as it is embellished by artists while the one in 1969 is a more 'real' but muted photographic reproduction), the advertisements just four years apart mark different images of the actress. Shashikala was a major vamp figure of Bombay cinema for several decades. The non-conformist face of femininity in the film text, vamps

were 'bad girls'. They also had a longer run in the industry as compared to the 'chaste' leading heroine. Shashikala appeared in Lux several times during her career.

These images of Shashikala as a glamour girl with a modern hairstyle and a 'serious' actor clad in a sari and *bindi* could be seen to represent the shifting iconography of the actress who was 'modern' as well as 'traditional.' Lux portraits could also be used to track changes in styles and fashions—for instance, the bobbed hair and covered head (most advertisements for Lux in the tabloid *Blitz* in 1948 have heroines with their heads covered) in the 1940s or hairstyles with fringes and bouffants in the 1960s and the use of adornment such as specific pieces of jewellery or the *bindi*. Nanda, a prominent heroine of the 1960s remembered for a mole on her face, is a particularly striking example as she morphed into a more glamorous persona after her role in *Jab Jab Phool Khilen* (1965). Her famous beauty spot shifts place several times in Lux portraits over this period! The vast majority of actresses who appeared in the Lux advertisement were drawn from the Hindi film industry. However, as a product that reached the entire country, regional advertising was critical to the success of Lux. Well known stars of Bengali, Tamil and Telegu cinema regularly found place in Lux advertisements in *Filmfare*.

As we have seen, in keeping with the specificities of popular cinemas in India, a Lux appearance was predicated not just on a lead appearance but on glamorous and iconic performances of different kinds. While almost all major actresses barring Nutan were Lux girls, all the leading 'vamps' of the Bombay film industry appeared in the advertisement as well. In this sense the campaign highlighted and awarded female performance of all kinds. Diverse stars jostled for attention in the world of Lux, featuring known and bankable actresses but also those who appeared in fleeting memorable roles or remained on the margins of success. It is also important to remember that star charisma for the purpose of advertising depended on the image of the star outside filmic life as well—on her public appearances and sartorial style, for instance. Some of these points will become clearer with an examination of the following set of photographic images [8].

Marketing Mix of Lux

Markets are studied and a wide variety of information is collected. In this way, companies can set the direction of the marketing programs needed for their products and decide on the strategies to be applied for their strategy and the satisfaction of customer needs. They must also overcome the challenges posed by the competitors in the industry. Companies' variables to define this strategy are those of the marketing mix [10], composed of: product, price, place, and promotion. With these variables, firms can focus on the achievement of their main objectives: profits, sales volume, market share, return on investment, etc [9].

Product Strategy

Lux is the oldest and most used beauty and bathing bar in India. It deals in the manufacturing and marketing of soaps and related products. The variety of products includes beauty soaps, hair shampoos, shower gels, bath additives and conditioners. It has been marketed in several forms, including bar, flake and liquid (shower gel, hand wash, and cream bath soap). Lux in step with the changing trends and evolving beauty needs of the consumers offer an exciting range of soaps and body washes

with unique elements to make bathing time more pleasurable. One can choose from a range of skin benefits like firming, fairness and moisturizing. Lux soap comes in packages of 40g, 80g and 120g. Also, colours like white, pink, yellow, green and blue and several fragrances. Some of Lux's demanded variants are as follows:

- Lux Almond Delight
- Lux Orchid Touch
- Lux Rose
- Lux Crystal Shine
- Lux Peach and Cream
- Lux Golden Glow

Price Strategy

Lux is a product that speaks to the middle class and targets a large number of customers. Lux is available at a low cost and stands as an affordable lux soap with good quality for all. The price of the soap starts from Rs 5 to Rs 40 for different SKUs. Lux focuses on being a cost leader and has acquired a competitive pricing mechanism in its marketing mix to compete with other competitors and survive in the marketing competition. This is further carried by being a large-scale producer which has resulted in achieving economies of scale. The first received advantage is that Lux has resulted in being the market leader in 5 countries. Thus, the pricing strategy of Lux soaps and gels has enabled the brand to keep its spot as a market leader. The new products or variants launched by the company are priced keeping in mind the demand for the product and consumer's purchasing power and hence the brand always makes sure that its products are affordable.

Place and Distribution Strategy

Lux has a well-built distribution network with over 1.4 million outlets just in India. Lux follows the traditional mechanism of distribution channels. It deals with the distributor who supplies to the wholesaler and then in turn supplies to the retailer. The retailer then provides the product to the ultimate customer. However, the distribution process is lifted by a third party that works in tandem with Unilever Company. They supply Lux products to retailers all over the country. There are around 71 manufacturing plants of Lux products present worldwide, identifying and the products are available in more than 80 countries. Lux products are present everywhere and occupy large shelf space. Lux is found everywhere, be it a retail store, wholesale store or Kirana stores. With the increasing use of eCommerce, Lux products are widely available online. The extensive distribution network ensures that the reach of Lux products is as wide as possible.

Promotion Strategy

Lux uses 360-degree marketing communication through print media, TVCS, online ads etc as a mode of its complete marketing mix strategy. It has always placed itself as a soap that gives a good fragrance and leaves one with a beautiful and glamorous feeling. Lux is involved in vast marketing be it through televisions, radio or print media. One special way of promotion was through cartoon ads and online games. Lux has used celebrities like Kareena Kapoor, Katrina Kaif, Aishwarya Rai, Shahrukh Khan, Audrey Hepburn for promotion and has positioned itself as a soap made and used by celebrities. It had numerous promotional schemes which included meeting celebrities, offering

gold coins. Lux has been sponsoring different television shows like Dance India Dance etc. The brand is so big and well established, it focuses more on restating the brand value proposition of being a popular beauty soap. One of the core potentials of Lux is the marketing it does for its products.

SWOT Analysis for LUX

SWOT Analysis is an analysis method used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats involved in an organization, a plan, a project, a program, a person or any kind of business activities. SWOT Analysis is the most commonly used strategic planning tool to access the Internal and External factors of any organization. This is considered as an effective framework plan and manage the organizational resource to achieve certain goals in a specific period of time. The purpose of the implementing SWOT analysis in an organization is to formulate the strategy of business based on existing internal and external factors [11].

Strengths

Lux possesses a very strong network of market research. Door to door surveying and sampling is done annually in rural as well as urban areas selectively.

- Lux has a very wide range of products to offer.
- The parent company of Lux has helped in establishing a strong supply and distribution network. Besides, it also has access to the resources of the parent company of Unilever.
- Lux possesses a very strong brand image in the market.
- The focus of Lux is going strong on beauty segment.
- Lux is a dynamic brand and is undergoes changes as per the changes in demand and trends, which is evident from the launch of the new range of body washes – Magical Spell, Scarlet Blossom, Strawberry & cream and Peach and cream have been launched with the tag line of the secret to liquid silk skin.
- The brand has innovative sales promotions tactics that spread across different forms of media – print, electronic and social.
- The brand is known to deliver value-for-money in the eyes of the consumers.
- It has a broad market presence and mass appeal, being the market leader in so many countries. As per the BCG matrix, developed by the Boston Consulting Group, Lux can be put into the STAR category for high market growth and high market share.

Weaknesses

- Lux lacks a unisex appeal as it has essentially been portrayed as a women's beauty soap and has a lot of feminine appeal.
- The wear rate of the soap is very high. It gets dissolved pretty fast and gets mushy and soggy quickly.
- Certain variants of the soap, like the Haute Pink, Sunscreen, etc did not do so well in the market as some of its other variants have.
- Some of its advertisements have been quite controversial, specially the one with Shah Rukh Khan in the bath tub, and the one of Haute Pink soap with the model in the bath tub flying

up in the air in a hot air balloon.

- The stock replenishment in semi-urban areas and rural areas is quite long, despite having such a wide distributor network. This leads to stock out in these areas.

Opportunities

- The industry today, is growing at a rate of more than 10% per annum.
- The compounded annual growth rate, better known as CAGR is also rising at a steep pace. This is evident from the performance of Fair and Lovely in its segment. So, Lux can yield great benefits by reinforcing itself in the beauty segment.
- Promotions strategies like kiosks, price offs, sample distributions, etc are essential with competitors like ITC, etc catching up fast.
- The soap, as mentioned above, is in the maturity stage of its life cycle. So it is essential that a retentive strategy be adopted so that this can be sustained.
- Ayurvedic variant of Lux could have a big scope in the market. So far, the only variant of Lux that has somewhat come close to Ayurveda, though not actually is the festive glow variant, which had the goodness of haldi and chandan ubatan. This could cater to a new segment in the market.
- A Lux Kids Special soap would also help the brand greatly, as this segment has been running dry for quite some time now. In this way, brand loyalty could be caught young!
- The brand extension products of Lux – the body washes, with its new range launched recently, is in the growth stage of its life cycle. They can pick up fast pace is positioned and marketed properly. Active marketing of these body washes is going on in the social media.
- During the sales promotion's schemes, the level of servicing goes very high and this needs to be brought down.
- Lux has only near about 20% penetration in rural markets. Lux holds great scope if it taps the rural markets.

Threats

- Number of competitors is rising – ITC, P&G, etc are fast catching up.
- High internal competition also exists for the soap.
- Lux seems overly relied on the beauty segment, so in case the consumer trends or preferences change, then Lux stands to be highly vulnerable.
- More focus needs to be put on the newer technology – currently body washes being the latest technology. This can already be seen in the market, but it needs to be enforced further.
- If constant reinvention is not there, then Lux can slip down from the maturity stage it currently is in and get into a declining phase.

What is the 'Adopt-Adapt-Create' discussing the commercial strategy of lux soap

In simple terms if the same campaign can be rolled out with the bare minimum change (language dubbing / language super), then it falls in the 'Adopt' bucket. Think of Apple and its outdoor campaign. But if the campaign needs some local talent,

and small changes in communication then it falls in the 'Adapt' bucket. Finally, if the campaign idea, the consumer insight driving it, is irrelevant to the audience of a country, you may have to go back to the drawing board to 'Create' a new campaign based on a fresh consumer insight. Lux has used film stars (and TV stars) for its campaigns that run around the world. But it doesn't 'Adopt'. It almost always 'Adapts' the campaign to the local taste. Recounting the fact that when Lux entered the Indian market in 1940s, it decided to 'Adapt' its global campaign and roped in Leela Chitnis to be its first Indian star model. The campaign for Lux in the US, circa 1927, went 'Nine out of ten screen stars use Lux toilet soap for their priceless smooth skin'. What Leela Chitnis started was a trend that was followed by almost all the big actresses of India. In the 1950s, '60s and '70s it was a sought-after assignment. Film stars believed that featuring in the Lux ad was the sign that they had arrived. Remember those were the days before TV and internet. The only exposure a film star got was in the big screen. Seeing their faces plastered over outdoor sites and magazines was a great bonus that Lux offered. HLL [as Hindustan Lever was called those days in India] did not pay its star endorsers big amounts for the modelling contract. But there was no paucity of takers: Waheeda Rehman, Rekha, Hema Malini, Sridevi and more. In the south it had Padmini, Savitri, Sharada, Jayanthi and more. In 2005, Lux even roped in Shah Rukh Khan to feature in its ad with former and current endorsers, Hema Malini, Sridevi, Juhi Chawla and Kareena Kapoor. In its 100th year, Shah Rukh's daughter Suhana is the face of the brand.

Final Thought

While Lux stayed true to the 'Beauty Secret to Film Stars' promise, the Lux ad films have become bigger and glossier. The films are often produced in exotic locales abroad. The brand attempts to provide escapist entertainment to its consumers by taking them on a vicarious trip around the world. Lux has also expanded into facewash and bodywash, both of which have not done too well. The brand's attempt at moving up the ladder to more premium offerings like Lux Supreme or Lux International, have not panned out too well. But that said, the brand continues to be one of the top soap brands in India, a brand that has weathered attacks from numerous Indian and International

brands like Cinthol, Camay, Nivea and Fa. Visit any departmental store or retail outlet, and you find its shelved stocked with Lux Beauty soaps in different variants, with attractive colours on the packaging and its permanent sign of the female model present on the package. Today, Lux is a household name when it comes to soaps and in many places (especially in rural areas), it has become a synonym for soaps. People often walk into a shop and ask for Lux, when they mean, that they wish to buy a soap.

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