

REALITY SHOWS: THE NEW MARKETING TOOL

* *Dr. Debashish Sengupta*

REALITY SHOWS- THE LATEST FAD!

Reality Shows are fast replacing the daily 'daughter-in-law versus mother-in-law' soaps in Indian Television. The high TRPs of the reality shows have made them the number one choice of every possible television channel. From Talent-hunt shows, to dance dramas, to acting-flicks, talk shows, chat-shows, cookery shows, art and craft shows, astrology shows... the list is endless. All such shows have engulfed most of the television space and they have a strong audience following to bail them out.

WHY REALITY-SHOWS ARE SO POPULAR?

The happiness of watching the transformation of a common man into a celebrity is immense and to an extent it is a virtual realization of our subconscious wishes. This combined with the amount of drama that these shows manage, also makes a strong emotional connect with the audience. Millions of Indians find a part of their dream come true in these reality shows and relate with the characters a lot. Some people have identified with the dreams, aspirations and struggle of the participants, some have identified themselves with the straight-talking judges, and others have found a voice to identify- within the shows with a strong social tag. Talent shows have perhaps been the biggest hit among the lot with the exception that Kaun Banega Crorepati hit the jackpot despite of being a quiz show.

Many even equated the recent trust-vote in parliament as a huge reality show. The debates, blames, defense, drama, controversy, emotions, suspense, tension-all necessary ingredients were there in the day-long live show of Indian democracy to make it one of the most watched events. There is no doubt that we identify very strongly to the success as well as failures of the characters in such shows and somewhere reckon a dramatized personification.

MARKETER'S PARADISE - BUT WHY?

The reality shows in India have opened floodgates for the marketers. Everyone is making a lot of money and no one seems to be complaining. And why not! After all it is giving gains to everyone.

Let's look at some international as well as national examples as to how reality shows have meant a boom-time for the marketers:

- In the **U.K., Big Brother** (launched in July 2000) saw a 140-percent increase in market share from Channel 4's average, while TV1 in Portugal (on which Big Brother launched in September 2000) had an impressive 245-percent increase on the channel's average share.
- **MTV Hero Honda Roadies' 4** showed an astounding 230% increase in ratings over the previous year, and made MTV the most watched channel, in that 1 hour duration, towards the final episodes, beating even the general entertainment channels. The popularity of Roadies has spawned an underground cult resulting in over 1,50,000 people forming Roadies communities across various social-networking sites, scrapping & dissecting each episode and each Roadie. Last year, MTV Gear (MTV India's clothing & accessories business) also launched Roadies Cargoes (pants with too many pockets) for both men & women. The cult of Roadies also extended into music, with the launch of 'Roadies' theme song by 'Agnee', one of India's well known rock bands.
- **Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC)** received nearly 70 million calls for one of its reality shows (providing phone-in revenue) from 22 Arab countries.

The market today has become hypercompetitive and in order to survive in this maddening world, marketers need to come-out with innovative marketing ideas which can create a splash among the customers and can hold their imagination for long. A medium which can create an 'ocean of appeal' yet be cost-effective is every marketer's dream. More or less it can be said that reality shows have almost been a dream come true for the marketers. Let us try to analyse why reality shows have become a marketer's paradise:

Some of the very obvious reasons why marketers find reality shows very attractive marketing vehicle can be summarized as follows-

*Associate Professor; Alliance Business School, Bangalore, Karnataka. Email : dev104@rediffmail.com

Exhibit 1: Types of Reality Shows on Indian Television

Type of Reality Show	Description	Few Examples
Adventure/Fear Based Shows	Shows based on adventure sports or acts that involve risk	<i>MTV Roadies, AXN Who Dares Wins India Special, Idea Khatron Ke Khiladi</i>
Celeb-Reality	Reality Show featuring a celebrity	<i>Koffee with Karan, Rendezvous with Simi Garewal, Rakhi Sawant Showz, Big Boss, Nach Baliye, Jhalak Dikhla Ja, Sajid's Superstars, Biggest Losers</i>
Comedy Shows	Shows mostly involving stand-up comedians	<i>The Great Indian Laughter Challenge, Comedy Circus</i>
Dating Shows	Shows which have live dating/speed-dating concept	<i>MTV's Romance Reality Show</i>
Fashion-based Shows	Shows which exhibit fashion trends	<i>Nerolac Colour Styles 07-08, Channel V Get Gorgeous</i>
Game Shows	Reality Shows based on games	<i>Kaun Banega Crorepati, Kya Aap Panchvi Paas Se Tez Hain, Dus Ka Dum, Bollywood Ka Boss, Bid 2 Win</i>
Job Search Shows	Shows which air live interviews, live job seekers and providers	<i>Dream Job-Harsha Ki Khoj, Clinic All Clear Dream Job, CNBC Tv-18 & Naukri.Com's Job Show</i>
Makeovers	Shows which focus on individual or material transformation	<i>Sony's Naya roop Nayi Zindagi, Nerolac Impression Jama De</i>
Prank Reality	Shows in which practical jokes are played on unsuspecting people whose natural reactions are recorded.	<i>Champion Chaalbaaz No. 1, Chuppa Rustam, MTV Bakra</i>
Social Cause	Shows which uphold some social cause	<i>NDTV's Environment Reality Show, Lead India, Teach India, Aap Ki Adalat</i>
Talent Hunt Shows	Shows which primarily target to spot-out talent	<i>Amul Star Voice of India, Sa Re Ga Ma Pa, Chak De Bacche, Jo Jeeta Wohi Superstar, MTV Miss Teen India 2008, Say Shava Shava, K for Kishore, Indian Idol</i>

1. Cost Effective: Marketing through reality shows is a lot cheaper compared to other traditional medium and the gains are very high. It is possible to tap a very large dedicated heterogeneous audience base at very less cost. This makes reality shows a very cost-effective marketing tool and consequently has gained popularity.

2. Emotional Connect: The reality shows perch on a very strong emotional content which makes their connection with the audience very strong. This strong emotional connect also subconsciously translates to a large extent with the products/services being marketed. This not only attracts a new customer base but keeps the existing customer base loyal because of the emotional-connect.

3. Disguised Promotion: Reality shows are either for entertainment or infotainment. They do not appear to be marketing vehicles. Yet they market very strongly. The product/service being marketed becomes a part of the entertainment and does not appear as if it is being marketed. Take for instance the now very popular method of marketing films through reality shows. Inadvertently, just few days before the release of a new film, we would find the lead stars of the film in some or the other reality show either as guests or as guest-judges. During the course of the show, they would simply mention the upcoming film, get some sponsored praise for the movie and implicitly suggest that the movie is a must-watch. This is a very clever and disguised marketing of the film. Why only films, the recently concluded 'Lead India' campaign by the Times group became a huge promotional tool for the group but most of that was not explicitly done. Basking on the success of the 'Lead India' campaign, the group has come-out with a 'Teach-India' campaign. And to provide loads of authenticity, they have reportedly roped in Aamir Khan, the most famous on-screen-teacher after the very popular hindi film 'Taare Zameen Par'.

4. Relatedness: Reality shows have a strong reflection of the dreams, aspirations, struggle and emotions of common-man. Hence people tend to relate very strongly to the characters of such shows. This strong-relatedness spills into the products/services being marketed, leading to strong recall-value. This high recall-value for these products/services holds them in much better perspective in getting a favourable nod from the customer when he/she makes a purchase decision.

5. Mass Appeal: Most reality shows boast of large audience base emanating out of popularity of such shows. This provides on palate to the marketers to tap a very large audience-base or rather in their perspective a large customer base. It is much more convenient to reach to the nook and corner of a vast country like India through reality shows.

6. Family Appeal: Reality shows are mostly family-catchers. Grand-parents, parents, children all watch such

shows mostly together. The formats of most shows are such that they attract audience across age-groups and genders. In other words, the reality shows have a family-appeal to them. Marketers in India well know the fact that most of the purchase decisions are family decisions and not individual decisions, owing to the strong family-centric nature of our country. Hence reality shows provide an ideal platform to send a strong message to the entire family at one-go and make them to think and discuss together about their products/services.

7. Quick Results: The formats of the reality shows have a built-in quick response-seeking factor from the audience. And this helps marketers, atleast some, in getting an equally quick response for their products/services. Take for instance the mobile telephone service providers: the 'sms' voting trend has spread across reality shows. The audience can vote for their favourite participant by sending a 'sms'. This requires an instant response. The mobile companies vying each other for getting their subscribers a right to vote, get an almost instant response in form of millions of 'sms' flying out of subscriber's mobiles. And this happens week after week till the show is on. Most of this 'sms' cost more than the normal rate and the gains are even higher.

8. Easy to measure ROI: Owing to the quick response rate that the marketers get out of their investments in promoting these reality shows, it's much easier to calculate the return-on-investment (ROI). Most other promotional media do not provide such quick reach to the ROI. This makes marketers to take a stock of their cost-benefit factor faster and hence make their marketing campaigns more efficient. Its more or less like a feedback-on-the-go rather than getting a feedback at the end or even later, when hardly anything could be done to reverse the effects.

9. High Involvement Level: Most of the reality shows demand conscious as well as subconscious involvement of the audience. The conscious involvement is in terms of getting an opportunity to vote for their favourite participant, or to make a live call and chat with their favourite celebrity or make a telephone call and pour-in one's own views in a talk show and so on. The subconscious involvement is in form of living through the woes or joy of the participant, praising/ criticizing a comment by a judge or a celebrity etc. This high degree of involvement on the part of the audience is beneficial for the marketers, since every marketer seeks a high degree of involvement on the part of the customers in trying their product or sending comments/feedback and of course in purchasing their product. The marketers have an opportunity to translate this high degree of audience involvement in to high degree of customer-involvement.

10. Synergized Appeal Factor: When a particular soft-drink giant stepped into Indian shores, it came-in with a promotional policy: that it promoted its product and not persons and hence did not get their products endorsed by any celebrity, initially. But soon it realized that India is a country which liked to create demi-gods out of men and followed them religiously. This altered their promotional policy for India and soon their products were also being endorsed by celebrities. Reality shows come with a star-studded package which has a celebrity appeal, a reality drama, plenty of raw emotions- a perfect ingredient for a synergized appeal factor. The effect is mostly total and mesmerizing. Some marketers even pick-up shows, the theme of which matches their product appeal for example

- **Nivea Simply-Sorted:** Simply-Sorted is a chat show in which every week there is celebrity to 'sort-out' the problems of the people who can find simple solution to their problems and can sort out their life better. This matches with the product theme of Nivea as a simple solution to all skin-beauty problems.

- **Hero Honda Sa Re Ga Ma Pa:** Youth appeal is common in both the show and the brand.

- **Philips Simplicity Challenge:** The objective of the show is to find out an entrepreneur with a simple business idea. It matches with the Philips punchline of 'sense and simplicity'.

11. Sustained Exposure: Marketing through reality shows provides an opportunity to promote their products week after week. Not only this, but at times, clever marketing tactics lead to a product or its logo being exhibited implicitly on the television screen for the entire episode of a show for instance, display of a car to be given to the winning participant, display of the sponsors logo with the title of the show, presence of filmstars on the show (their continuous presence is a constant reminder of their upcoming film to the audience) etc. This sustained exposure of the audience to the products/services or to the product ambassadors or logo creates a repetition factor in the perception process of the target customer.

12. Overuse of Traditional Media: The traditional medium of marketing has become common and hackneyed. Overuse of such media has led to clutter and hence marketers are on the look-out for something different which draws customer attention. Reality shows fit perfectly to this slot, atleast for now and for quite some years to come.

(Cont. on page 24)

Indian Journal of Marketing • January, 2009 19

fighting multinational companies. These feeling further endorse the belief of the fans in the Brand they support.

CONCLUSION:

The common belief that most marketers have is that great brands are built upon product exclusivity and targeted marketing. The better targeted and exclusive the brand, the better the results in terms of sales. Marketers have been following this dictum like the Pied-Piper and many large companies have bought into this strategy. Print and broadcast advertising copy for many major brands is now peppered with both direct and subliminal messages asserting their distinctiveness. Our message inboxes, magazines, and TV sets overflow with this same message. Exclusivity has become the order of the day and all highly targeted, of course!

But here is a Brand which has mass customized itself, believes in mass marketing and has been successfully able to build a 'cult' for himself. This brand has universal appeal, is sharing and collaborative, and the customer range hails from all age groups and regions. All the marketing mix elements are fine tuned to support and strengthen brand personality. This Brand is a result of consistent hard work and carefully and meticulously followed strategy and can be, without hesitation, called a "cult". So far so good but "Will it last the course".

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bueno Bolivar J. and Ragas Matthew W., "The Power of Cult Branding", Prima Publishing : Landmark
2. Coal Capital under Baba Spell, HT: Dhanbad-Bokaro Live, Hindustan Times, 30th March 2007, pg 1
3. Chernatony, Leslie de (1998), "Developing an effective brand strategy. In C. Egan and M. Thomas (ed), The Chartered Institute of Marketing Handbook of Strategic Marketing, Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann
4. Datta Damayanti(2007), 'The Karma Chameleon', India today, 1 October, 2007, pg79-81
5. Gardner, Burleigh B. and Sidney J. Levy (1955), "The Product and the Brand." Harvard Business Review, 33, (March-April), 33-9.
6. 'Golf Ground turns into a Fortress', HT: Dhanbad-Bokaro Live, Hindustan Times, 30th March 2007, pg 1
7. Kaushesh Ansul (2003), Cult Branding, Marketing Mastermind, April,2003, Pg:46-59
8. Kapferer, Jean-Noel (1997), Strategic Brand Management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Long Term, Kogan Page, London.
9. Kumar Anil, (2007), 'Baba Rains Blessings As Doc Yields To Yoga Salve' HT: Dhn-bokaro live,Hindustan Times, 31st March 2007, pg 1
10. McEnally, M and Chernatony, L. de(1999) " The Evolving Nature of Branding: Consumer and Managerial Considerations", Academy of Marketing Science Review Volume 1999 No. 02 Available: <http://www.amsreview.org/articles/mcenally02-1999.pdf> Copyright © 1999 -Academy of Marketing Science.
11. Pranayam pierces jail bars HT: Dhn-bokaro live, Hindustan Times, 31st March 2007, pg 1
12. Ramdev Swami(2007), 'Imagine The India That Can Be', HT: Dhn-bokaro live,Hindustan Times, 9 th October 2007, pg 1-2
13. Reynolds, Thomas J. and Jonathan Gutman (1984), "Advertising as Image Management", Journal of Advertising Research, 24, (February-March), 27-38.
14. <http://www.swamiramdev.info/>
15. <http://www.swamiramdevyoga.com/>
16. <http://www.yogapranayama.com/Credentials-Swami-Ramdev-Medicines.htm>
17. http://www.yogapranayama.com/Package_for_various_Disease.htm

(Cont. from page 19)

THE ROAD AHEAD...

Reality Shows have had their share of controversy along with their popularity. Surprisingly, even controversy has paid dividends to the marketers. Over the years, there has been a constant debate that whether reality shows are real-enough! But the matter of fact remains that reality shows have hit big-time in India and are here to stay. Marketers have also hit a jackpot with such shows, churning huge revenues for their respective companies. But this may be only tip of the iceberg. The advantages of using reality shows as a marketing and promotional vehicle outweigh most of the traditional marketing mediums. And in the years to come, we may see a spurt in using reality shows as a huge marketing tool.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

'MTV Hero Honda Roadies' 5.0 Goes International', www.herohonda.com/media_mtv_roadies.htm
Cohen Tony*, The Future of Reality TV, <http://www.worldscreen.com>
Reality TV: A success story, www.zawya.com