

The 3-D approach to digital marketing strategies

The 3D's of the digital marketing era is the synergy that is offered by the Big , Small and Thick data...

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Picture for representational purpose (iStock)By [S Ramesh Kumar](#)

This is the era of the [Big Data](#), that involves several aspects of data involving consumer interaction with the brand and [social media](#) along with several related data. While the digital era has created a complete awareness about the Big data, it is important to recognize that several brand related and segment related decisions in [marketing](#) may involve the usage of Big data along with Thick data and Small data. This is because the contexts come into the picture for important decisions and without consumer behavior and consumer insights, several meaningful directions may get overlooked after the “big picture” is identified through the Big Data.

Big data provides the “What?” of the context and does not shed light on “Why?” associated with the consumer interaction. This is not to imply that the Big data is not important but to emphasize that small data and thick data is equally important for brands. The 3D's of the digital marketing era is the synergy that is offered by the Big , Small and Thick data.

Thick and Small data in a competitive context

Let us consider a context associated with diet foods. The big picture may indicate that a well-known brand of diet cookie that has the proposition of being “Light” (as projected on its label) is losing share to several other competitors in a changing environment cluttered with not just biscuits as competitors but with energy bars, low calorie yogurts and other offerings. Incidentally it is to be noted that the consumer mind set needs to be captured for many categories, as these categories may compete for the same need (healthy snacking in the context being explained).

Data available across brands , retail outlets (kirana and modern retail outlets) , stock keeping units and respective competitive categories may be captured. Despite the reputation of the brand and its advertising, the brand may find itself losing share in several markets. There are two aspects to a product , intrinsic attributes and extrinsic attributes. The former is associated with the intrinsic product offering (ingredients, features and benefits) and the latter is associated with packaging , labels , visual graphics and in general several brand related aspects not covered by intrinsic attributes. Perceptions and attitudes about the brand that includes the two sets of attributes, may capture consumer data, that may also be a part of the larger data set.

An insightful consumer insight may reveal that the problem is more associated with the perception on packaging rather than the intrinsic attributes. To quote from the work of Phil Barden who is internationally known for his work on decision sciences and implicit research, the problem in the context presented may be solved by the finding that the word “Light” being carried on the top of the visual rather than in any other place in the brand’s label. This is because the word always reminds the consumer at an implicit level (meaning that the consumer is unaware of impact of this word and its position on the label) that anything that is light is likely to “float above”. Such an implicit effect is likely to enhance the credibility of the claims of the brand , though the consumer may not be even aware of it.

While the scenario is hybrid of a practical and hypothetical situation , the usefulness of the Thick data (analysis of the data that is useful insightful interpretation using the lens of social and behavioral knowledge) and Small data that is associated with the context associated with the consumer’s context (as interpreted by this author) .

Cultural Challenges

India is a country of celebrities sports and films, (given the historical usage of celebrities). From soaps, cosmetics, cars , two wheelers , online portals, jewelry to banks and incense sticks used for worship (agarbathis). The range and diversity of categories and the number of brands using celebrities may be much more than perhaps any other country’s usage of celebrities, though the celebrity usage is a is not uncommon in some developed markets. The combined impact of credibility and love for celebrities has resulted in an emotional pull that brands use in an appropriate manner.

The woke culture with respect to women's empowerment, gender equality, discrimination, religious sentiments, racism, exploitation of labor are some of the issues, ushered in by the changing environment and social media. This has also added another dimension to the usage of celebrities by brands. The woke culture is diffusing fast. A well-known fairness creams has changed its brand name and recently brands like Tanishq, Kent RO and Zomato (celebrity usage) had to face a barrage of protests due to their ads (regardless of the brand's intent of releasing such ads).

Across cultures, emotions may be universal but the manner, in which they are expressed may vary. What is considered as an exaggerated manner of expression in culture, may be considered as a way of life in another culture. For instance, a sense of celebratory "high pitched" happiness is something that we generally observe all around in restaurant, mall, trains, wedding halls, places of worship and several other places in India. The expression happiness or joy in public places is very different in the western world and may vary across the western world. An unusual (given the type of the category) example may be the ad for a self-usage sugar level testing device (used by diabetics) had conveyed the joy a family (showing a young couple with a kid), in welcoming the brand as a useful device. The point to be noted is that it may be very difficult to find a similar ad in any part of the western world. And diabetics is something that is generally not something that is celebrated with so much of elan!

The 3D approach is pre-requisite for exploring any marketing insight using the Big Data .

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