

ROLE OF ADVERTISEMENT IN CHANGING PERCEPTION OF BUYERS

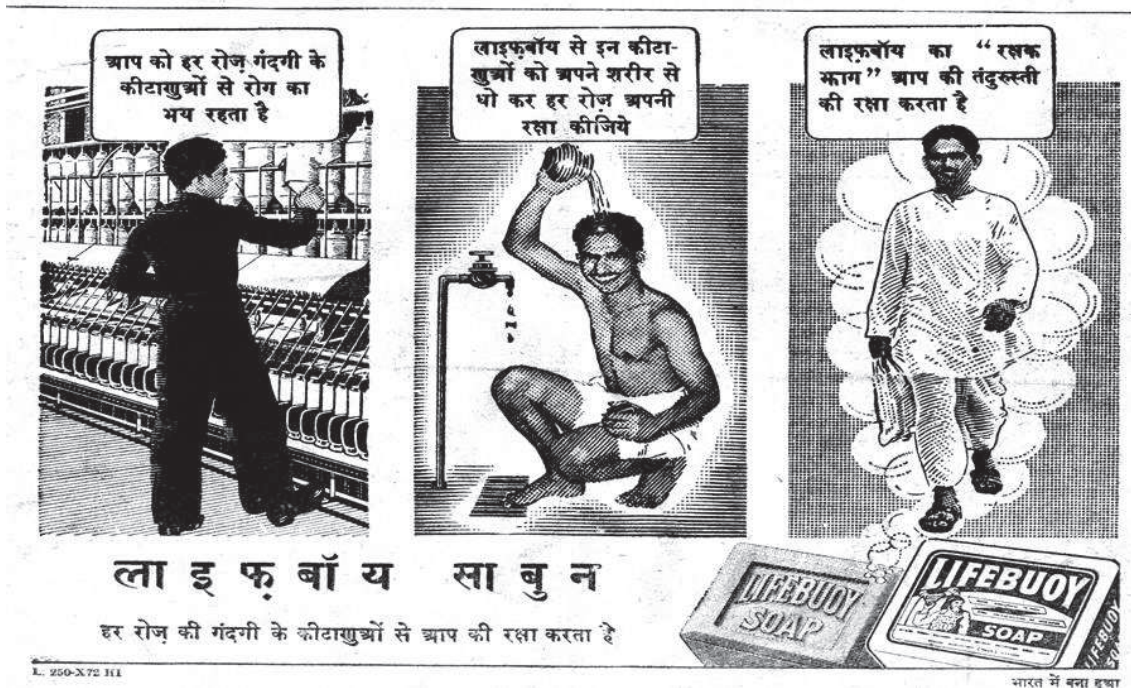
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Abstract: Modern business history in our country has witnessed the phenomenon of 'sickness' which is often the symptom of stagnation and decline of organizations that did not change. Therefore, change originates from vitality and is a positive and necessary sign of growth and progress. Absence of change should be a matter of concern as it could be a sign of internal decay.

Introduction: Over the years, Hindustan Lever Limited has been steadily changing its character, composition of business, ownership and organization. This made it possible to strengthen the marketing function because products could be tailored locally to local consumer needs. With the consequent expansion of the market, the company built up a very extensive and efficient sales and distribution system. Because of the close involvement with the market place and the intimate contacts with the trade and consumers, it was only natural to develop local management. In the present context 'Lifebuoy' has been selected as a representative of multinational company Hindustan Lever Ltd. Lifebuoy launched in the domestic market in 1895, began addressing the Indian consumer's need for a no-nonsense health bath. The carbolic product came in a boxy red 150-gm cake, with an odor reminiscent of a disinfectant, wrapped in a plain red-and-white wrapper. The brand's unique formulation made it a brutally effective germ killer, which guaranteed it a

hygiene position in consumer's minds. It's the world's largest selling brand of soap, marketed here by Hindustan Lever Limited.

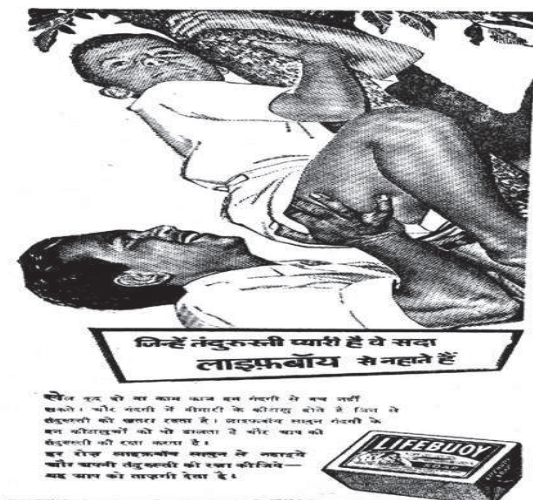
Domestic manufacture started 40 years later while other popular Hindustan Lever's soap brands such as Lux and Rexona had woven their selling stories around skin and complexion care, Lifebuoy stood firm as the massmarket alternative for plain and simple hygiene. A majority of the target audience had no clue to what the actual brand name was meant to convey 'life sustainer', but the company used vernacular advertising to deliver the proposition. A large potential area for such a soap was the rural market. Though primitive local makes were available here, many bathers were using mud, ash and other naturally abundant scouring agents. The company began building up a massive distribution infrastructure to take Lifebuoy deep into India's heartland-a strength that powers many of its brands till date.





In the late 1950s, the company activated a series of rural promotions. The 'Intensive Rural Contact Programme', it used village-to-village vans to distribute the product by day and screen open-air films by night. The in-between brand messages drew attention to hygienic living in general, and portrayed bathing as a key constituent of health. Direct contact efforts were started at rural health centers and

schools, the two places where people give serious attention to health related issues. Large rural wall-side, shop-shutter and bus-panel paintings gave the brand enviably high signage. Meanwhile, a powerful radio jingle "Tandurusti Ki raksha karta hai--," the familiar tune of which became an intrinsic part of the brand's identity.



To fortify its positioning, Lifebuoy's advertising turned to sports, particularly all those games involving contact with plenty of dirt. The reasoning: a soap that could clean up a sports person would be

perceived as being even more effective for others. While urban audiences were shown tough footballers making an immaculate emergence from a Lifebuoy bath after a grimy field game, villagers were shown a

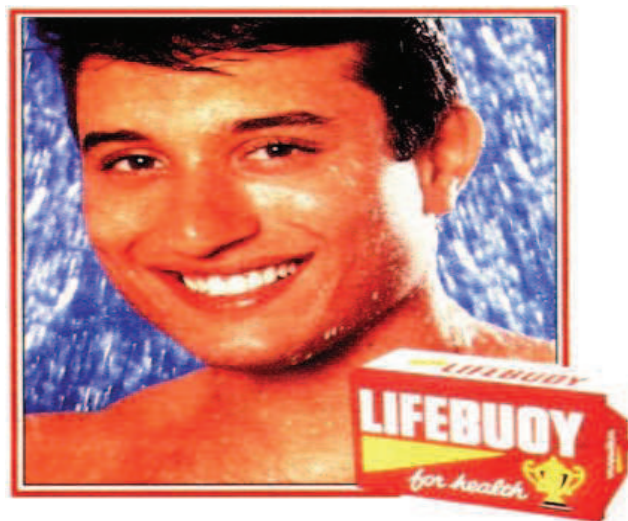
similar transformation among kabaddi players. The brand took up wide ranging sponsorships from

hockey and football in urban areas to bullock-cart races and hardy wrestling matches in rural India.



For the lower-income consumer who is sensitive to price per unit, the company introduced a 75-gm Lifebuoy pack in 1987, and priced it at half the regular 150-gm pack. The company realised that though Lifebuoy had expanded the soap market by reaching the rural consumer, his urban counterpart was beginning to sneer at the ugly product as a

downmarket soap for those who can't afford more glamorous brands-at variance with its actual positioning. Convinced that the brand could easily deliver hygiene in a different form to better-off consumers also, the company introduced a fancier-looking perfumed variant, **Lifebuoy Personal**, in 1987. But it was observed that the new



variant didn't distance itself well enough from its parent; it didn't offer any additional tangible benefit, its perfume was too faint, and its pink red colour didn't look very appealing, Lifebuoy, the brand, was so deeply ingrained as a robust soap in the skin-conscious urban consumer's mind, that he refused to switch over to any other variant. The image-driven brand buyer saw no charm in it, the rational Lifebuoy loyalist saw no reason to upgrade. Lifebuoy Personal was withdrawn from the market after about four

years. Losing its grips on the germ-killing franchise could prove disastrous. Ideally, the same proposition had to manifest itself as a solution for a more relevant urban need. The company found that the one problem, which urban Indians faced, was perspiration and its unpleasant odour. In 1991, **Lifebuoy Plus** was created. In addition to slaying germs, the brand variant promised to muffle bad smells through trichlorocarbonalide (TCC), an ingredient which helps destroy the bacteria causing body odour.

Lifebuoy Plus had talc like perfume, talcum powder being a common anti-perspirant used in India. Lifebuoy Plus launched an ad campaign to demolish the common consumer misperception that a fragrant soap was enough to tackle unpleasant body odour. The variant turned out to be a success in the growing popular segment of the Indian soap market. In 1993, the company launched **Liquid Lifebuoy Antibacterial** soap a non-bath variant. Priced at Rs.40/- for a 250ml. pump dispenser. The Lifebuoy liquid soap was meant to be kept at wash basins and used to eliminate germs on people's hands, especially

children, which tend to carry lots of little organisms. Overnight, the company saw Lifebuoy's down market association vanish, as a reason-why TV ad campaign spelt out the new product's benefits to the urban housewife. One commercial showed a mother habituating her mud-happy child with Liquid Lifebuoy as a meal pre-requisite, while another had a nurse stating her preference for the product on sink counters at home as much as at lab work. Though the variant makes up only a tiny sliver of the brand's overall sales, it had solidified its hygiene credentials.



A bathing option for women and children, whom lifebuoy's distinct macho image had kept away, in August 1995, the company launched **Lifebuoy Gold**, a white soap in a white wrapper priced at Rs 6.50 for 75-gm, the same as Procter & Gamble Godrej's Camay. With its strong fragrance, round edges, high lather and gentle action, it's a far cry from the original carbolic product. This represents the final phase of the brand's evolution with Lifebuoy mixing its medical story with "fresh, clean family" charm. The advertising for Gold-currently on air-tackles the most obvious problem directly, with an ad film of a mother allaying her daughter's fears about the damage Lifebuoy could do to her skin.

In 1995, Lifebuoy Plus was relaunched as **Lifebuoy Plus Double Action**, and was priced at Rs. 9.25 for a 100-gm cake, at par with Hindustan Lever's other popular brands Lux and Rexona. Another active ingredient, trichlosan, was added to its formulation, to prevent the regrowth of germs killed by TCC. The benefit: longer lasting protection. In the past few years, Lifebuoy's growth has outpaced that of the market. Today, the brand is becoming a part of every Indian consumer's life, without letting of hygiene as the basic value on offer. Lifebuoy derives its strength from mine earners, rural buyers, and low-income consumers, among whom it India's no.2 brand.

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