

Host

Hi, Saheli, welcome to Mrigashira, finally we get to speak, can't tell you how inspired I've always been with the Vivel #AbSamjhautaNahi campaign. For many, many years, we've seen the communication around personal care brands like soaps, deodorants was completely reliant on mass media, we see a sharp shift in the last few years, why the need for bringing in this change?

Saheli Chatterjee

Thanks, Charu, for inviting me and I think it's, excellent that we are having this conversation today because I think with the shifts that are happening, it's a lot more radical. What we've seen years back where there was, I mean, you could pretty much call it a monologue, because it is mass media, and you're communicating to a large base, not taking away from what mass media is doing, or will continue to do. But, you know, the radical shift in technology, visibility, and media, this has given individuals the power to, stand up and express their opinions, express their beliefs, at a very, very large scale. When you look at that kind of power for example, if you look at any of the social movements that have happened in the recent past, be it the entire uprising of me too, which was a social first aspect, or if you move to, you know, things like taking a brand stand or communicating with a brand or calling out a brand, consumers, stakeholders, everybody is very, very vocal. And there is a huge shift that has happened because the expectation from a brand is no longer that they give only quality products, the expectation has moved beyond as to how they impact society, and how do they impact think positive.

So, this entire aspect of responsible brands is not only how the businesses are shaping up to be, but it is also from an expectation of how the consumer understanding has changed, or what the consumers today are expecting brands to do for society, you know, build back better, reset the way they think and ultimately look at how society is improving, what is the sustainable future looking at. That's a massive shift, which has enabled brands to look beyond even just a transactional communication that you would have with consumers. It has more to do with, you know, what the consumers reality is? Is there any way that our brand can help make that reality a little different, make it more positive, enable and empower in various ways as you go? Actually, that was that was also the genesis of this huge shift, which is not only personal care, or fmcg, but largely overall, everybody's seen that, yeah, fmcg joined the race, a little later. But moving into sustainable thinking, a positive future, a more purpose led communication is something that that everybody is thinking of. Because today, that is the need, simultaneously, you also look at environmental replenishment, as well as building a social capital. And that is the transformational change that has happened and that is very rightly pointed out. And that is where we are heading towards, because it will continue.

Host

You've said very rightly that consumers expectations have changed. In fact, they are changing and evolving every day. And you know, and it's not just now it's been there for a while and you have different generations looking at things. You have the millennials, you have the Gen Z's, Gen Y's all of them you know it's so difficult to keep up with the definitions, all of them looking at brands in a different way with consumers and how difficult or easy is it for a personal care brand, to have that two-way conversation? And how has ITC personal care per say risen to the challenge.

Saheli Chatterjee

Conversation or a dialogue is what the thesis is going to have a relationship and for very long time, if somebody asked the question that, you know, who owns the brand, people would look at you puzzled

saying that, you know, what is this kind of a question. Because if you look at the ecosystem that the brand thrives in it is the company who's made the brand who's created the brand, but the stakeholders around it, be it its employees, be it the investors, be it consumers, each of them play a role in this brand ecosystem, where they are continuously refining the brand journey, they are continuously knowingly or unknowingly, you know, positioning the brand in a manner that shapes this brand. So, from a communication point of view, it's not only the organization or the brand to everybody else, but we are moving into a more participative kind of a dialogue, it is essential for any forward-looking business to routinely collaborate across the network to create these new solutions or innovative communication that bolsters the agility of any organization.

So, just a case in point from our own organization's aspects, the ITC is more than 100 years old, as an organization, but the existence or the journey, if you see, it has always looked at what is next and how the ecosystem is, evolving. because change is the only constant, you keep on moving with things. Just a small example of last year, the launch of Savlon surface disinfectants, it created a category altogether. And it was one of the fastest products launched in the market because it was in record time that fmcg had never seen 24 days is when we launched a particular product. Now this the genesis of why this product is needed came from a consumer interaction. When people started thinking, that ok there are the things that I need to do, yes, hand hygiene has been spoken about and hygiene overall is being routinely encouraged and that is when in that consumer interaction was when came out, I don't know what to do about, about the surroundings or the surfaces. It's such a time taking process. And that is where you know that little insight, what created a completely new category where Savlon today leads that entire category of surface disinfectants placed. So, it is it is a two-way dialogue but in multiple ways that it is facilitating a change. It is bolstering a new community behavior. The second again, was how #AbSamjhautaNahi came around when we were thinking Vivel is a personal wash brand and what it caters to is with body washes and soaps. Now soap is the most penetrated product in the Indian household. So, if you look at it, it's an extremely low involvement category. And if you think through, when we began this journey, people questioned us on Twitter, on Facebook, and we heard this quite a lot of times that, you know, you are soap brand what do you have to do with women empowerment.

And we've heard this so many times that I can't tell you Charu that, you know, at times it feels that, there is something that as a brand I can enable which is beyond just the selling of soaps, I can probably try and impact a little bit of reality change of those women who use my soaps and that is what the brand wants to take a little more towards impacting lives or towards bringing in a positive change in society and that is where also when we did #AbSamjhautaNahi, women empowerment again is a space that a lot of brands speak. And yes, it is a reality because I think it is required and more and more people should take up this and there was a very simple definition that we went around asking people that we do identify yourself as a feminist. And we were shocked to understand in that conversation that how feminism itself is not understood, that it is equality just because it starts with Fem people think that it is it is against, against men. And even women don't want to stand up and say that I am a feminist. So, you know, all of these dialogues is when shaped #AbSamjhautaNahi as a sample that will help unconditioned the mind, irrespective of which gender, of course, we primarily focus on women, because women are more in this entire zone of being asked to conform to every structural societal boundary that is available.

But even patriarchy is a two way you know, it's a double-edged sword. Because it's equally overbearing for men if you look at the patriarchal construct of society. So that is where we started and it came about through conversations with people. So, two-way communication has been a part of our lives. I mean, it earlier, it used to be a more of a face-to-face element, but with this entire migration to

digital and digitization of everything around it still continues it's a necessity. And I think, with ITC, I've always seen that happening, be it any brand that is launched, there is a very stringent, you know, not only the quality aspect, the quality test that happens, but there is a huge amount of conversation on why is that brand required? What is the need that the brand will fill? And how does the consumer experience, so, you know, the test market or the pilot markets essentially do that to take in consumer feedback.

Host

This was one example, which actually was, just perfect in in terms of timing, because, we had reached a stagnation point and it was really important that the conversation around what we call today, gender and diversity had to be taken to the next level, and it kind of, help bridge that gap and, and now, it's a different story, what's happening around us, I do hope and would like to believe that companies genuinely are walking the talk when it comes to gender and diversity and not just doing a lip service. ITC always been a visionary company but, somewhere it's always also been a kind of traditionalist what were the major deterrent? and also how do you see the shifts in communication going forward in the post COVID era?

Saheli Chatterjee

Sure. So, just reconstructing the question a bit, what you said in the first part of your questions is very rightly put, that you know actually walking the talk of what you believe, it is a little linked to how the company has been nurtured or what is the DNA of the company? Okay, so if you look at ITC, the DNA has always been to look at ground level, I mean today if ITC is a global exemplar in sustainability is water positive, carbon positive and it's a world exemplar. It is one of the only companies that have that totally believe in green and that is how every constructive, if you go to ITC hotels, if you go to you know, various other places under ITC, because that's something that that we take very, very seriously. Similarly, when a brand enters into a space, so it was when we were getting into #AbSamjhautaNahi, these are some of the questions that we are asked, you know, this is a thought, how do you see it translating on ground? Everything needs a certain level of approval, yes, that is part of how a traditional company is. But I don't think that's a deterrent because that only helps you question your motives more seriously because it is enables you to think through how you want to take it or how you would you take it forward.

Now while you have a communication tech through it, which is on social media, and you're reaching out and you're doing the collaborative PR aspect. But if you look at the ground level aspect, how's that change being reflected? What are you doing to do that, and that is where we were pushed to think further and come up with yes, there is economic independence is very, very critical for women, and a lot of brands are already in that space of, you know, trying and giving women economic elements. That is where we identified again this was through conversations with various people, that confidence that comes in when somebody has knowledge. So, knowledge empowerment is also an equally important space and here, I mean, our distinction was for legal rights, because legal rights are already there. It is a framework that exists in the judicial system. But for women, somehow, we don't relate to these legalities or law, because we think only once we are faced with an adverse situation is when I will probably think of a lawyer. But there are so many basics in it, which a woman needs to know so that at least she knows that our rights are not being denied or violated.

And that brought us to a journey of, you know, #KnowYourRights, which is now led by Karuna Nundy, who's helped us make the model of what the workshop model is and before COVID era, we had actually taken it to 700 colleges across India. And believe you me, we thought that it will only be the

women turning up for these workshops. But the number of men who increasingly started coming in to participate was amazing. And that is what we say when we say that, yes, #AbSamjhautaNahi is something that I believe in and I'm doing it from a communication point of view to encourage more conversations to provoke this realization. But on the ground level, I'm also trying and making equality champions. And that's a long-term process, it is not going to change overnight. Similarly, for Savlon, Savlon Swasth India, the entire mission for, you know, making hygiene champions out of children and we began on Children's Day in 2016. And the first tool that we brought in was the Savlon Swasth India Chalk Sticks, which was just to excite children. So that they get interested in washing hands, and they believe that yeah, it's a fun thing to do. So, we don't believe in, in preaching. We don't believe in saying that no, you're supposed to do this in the regular rhetorical. So, it's always been exciting, and interesting to move and think about different things to excite people.

Yeah, so the deterrents actually have not been any, I don't see them as deterrents but only for us to push ourselves beyond to think more and activate. Now, if you look at the shifts also that are happening there is rapid digitization right. Upskilling is an imperative to be future ready and of course, from a communication point of view, it is adaptability, flexibility and a commitment to continue to communicate through various platforms. So, it is no more only new space but the focus is now shifting to digital channels, to entire aspect of collaborative PR and this shift actually, very interestingly also beckons a new era of safety requirements, or brand seeing fakes and counterfeits. So safeguarding privacy and information security. So there is a huge shift from what we were communicating, how we were communicating to where we are moving next. And it's a very, very exciting process because there is automation. However, there is also this entire aspect of building connections, and how do you go about building those connections in this entire virtual world? So, I think that's a shift that we are in, right now.

Host

Truly in line with what ITC has always believed in a visionary. Thank you so much for talking to us.

Saheli Chatterjee

Thank you so much Charu it was wonderful.