

Moti Soap: A Success Story or Failure?

Snehal Chincholkar

Faculty Of Management, Vivekanand Education Society's Institute Of Management Studies & Research, Mumbai.

Background: Soap is an integral part of our daily routine and available in different forms. Soap can be classified in to hard and soft soap having two major components oil/fat and alkaline solutions. It is believed that first soap produced in Babylon in 2800BC.

A survey by Euro Monitor (2000) showed that soaps and detergents together covers around 12.4 % and 2.6 to 5 % of consumer expenditure on household goods for developed and developed countries respectively.

In India soap was introduced by the Lever Brothers during the British time. Afterwardsthey were imported from England and sold in India Market. Mr.Jamshedji Tata started the first local soap manufacturing unit in Cochin, Kerala in 1918. Since then it has become an essential part of Indian consumer's monthly shopping list. It is available in different forms such as-bath soap, liquid soap, detergent etc. In the past, soap manufacturer targeted only urban consumers but over time they understood the need to reach out to the mass market including rural area which they have now made inroads into. HUL is one of the most successful company which has been able to penetrate Indian rural market.Some of the most popular soap brands in India include Lux, Cinthol, Pears, Lifebuoy, Liril, Dove, Rexona, Nirma, Dettol etc.

Amongst the manufacturers, Hindustan Unilever is leading soap market in India, followed by P&G and Nirma. Despite the large players cornering a major portion of the market, some local players have managed to corner a small part of this market such as Mysore sandal soap,Medimix etc.

I. Major Players In Indian Soap Industry

- Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL)
- P & G
- Nirma
- Reckitt Benckiser
- Wipro

II. Consumer And Bathing Soap

Earlier soap was commodity and main objective of using soap was cleaning but with time consumer's expectations have been changed. Now it is more than just a bar of soap, it is a bundle of attributes such as moisturizing and anti-bacterial properties, fragrance, freshness etc.

Katiyar, A., &Katiyar, N. (2014) suggested in their studies that consumers are now both quality and price conscious and look for value for money product. Wide choices, awareness and good distribution increasing customers bargaining power. Most of the companies have understood that and are trying to position their products based on certain attributes by advertisements.Popular examples are,-Dove gives stress on ¼ Moisturizer, Cinthol on Freshness, Dettol on Anti-bacterial properties etc. Consumer develops perception about any product based on their communication mix and their own experience with product. During purchase of soap attributes(Moisturizing properties, anti-bacterial properties etc.) and price are two important decision factors. Here perceptual Mapping canbe used to identify the positioning of products/brands that consumer haveand consumer's preference.Fig-1 is trying to put popular soap brands in India on Perception Map, constructed on two factors attributes and price.

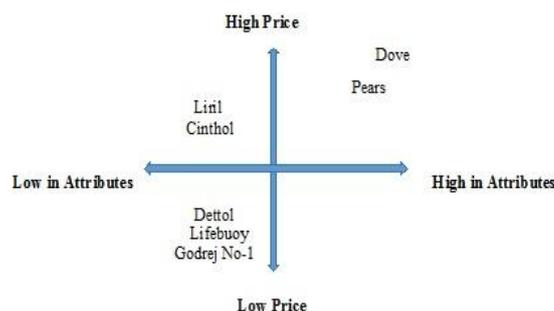


Fig-1: Price and Attributes Perception: Bathing Soap

III. Origin

After the introduction of soap in India variety of soaps came in to the market by multinational and local players. Among these Moti was quite popular during seventies. It is thick round shaped soap positioned as luxury soap. It was a brand of Tata Oil Mills Company (TOMCO). In 1993 after merger of TOMCO with HUL, it became the property of HUL.

Moti soap was launched keeping in mind certain points to differentiate it from other competitors. Such as its shape and thickness which was different from rest of the competitors. Its name was taken from Hindi language whose meaning is Pearl. It was introduced in different variants such as Sandal, Rose and Khus. At the time, Sandal, Rose and Khus were perceived to be precious and devout in our Indian society. In Hindu mythology it has been found that queens used to take bath with exotic herbs and flowers such as Rose, Khas, Sandal etc. In this way soap was positioned as exotic soap.

As it was promoted as luxurious soap, it was priced around 25/- per soap in eighties competing other brand such as Dettol, Lux etc. But at the same time as it was quite big in shape so it was long lasting. Packaging was simple with respective colour of variants such as orange for sandal and pink for rose.



Fig-2 Moti Soap Sandal



Fig-3 Moti Soap Rose

Two variants of Moti soap

It was promoted heavily and as name of product was “Moti”, print advertisement was giving importance to pearls. One of the popular print advertisement for magazine shows a soap anchored in big seashell on a beach, just like pearl. It also gave stress on its ingredients. (Fig-4)

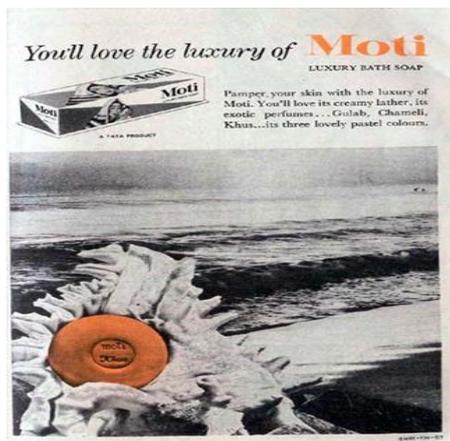


Fig -4 Print advertisement for Moti soap



Fig-5 TV commercial for Moti Soap

IV. Repositioning

In the nineties Moti was positioned as special occasion soap by its latest TV commercial (Fig-5). TV commercial of Moti soap gave stress on spirituality and purity. In this advertisement an Indian lady was shown as lighting the lamps, making Rangoli and using Moti soap. Overall the advertisement was all about celebration, purity and tradition. As soap's ingredients are traditional, consumer started to perceive it as special occasion soap such as using at the time of Diwali. After this advertising campaign, Moti has become a special occasion (such as Diwali) soap. Unfortunately after this company did not show any aggressive marketing efforts to increase sales.

After merger with HUL in 1993 Moti soap lost its sheen and HUL did not focus on this brand much. The fallout was that competitors such as Mysore sandal soap, local handmade soap and Ayurvedic soaps, HUL's own products started overpowering this brand. In addition to this lack of innovation and increasing customer expectation from soap led to decrease in its sale. It became necessary over time to either reposition the product or to take a strategic decision on the future of the brand because till this time Moti had become a soap which was having seasonal demand than regular demand.

HUL relaunched a campaign to get back its market share by airing a new commercial in 2013. This commercial gave stress to the old Indian Diwali Custom of taking bath early in the morning on the first day of Diwali. Achawl has been shown in the commercial where a small boy knocked on everyone's door early in the morning and ask them to take bath with Moti Soap, similar to the habit of an elderly man who carried out this activity in his younger days (bringing the viewer to recall the earlier advertisements of the 80s and 90s). This advertisement was able to create nostalgic feeling among consumers. It was also telecasted in Regional languages. Overall this advertisement got lot of appreciation from customers and critics.



Fig-5 Moti Soap's TV commercial

Though market share of Moti soap is very low, but still it exists and people know this brand. Moti soap is available in retail outlet, shopping mall and even on some of the popular online retail outlet such as Amazon.com. But stocks are more seasonal. Currently 150 gm soap is available for 56/-. Looking at overall journey of this brand it can be concluded that it's a successful brand because sustaining for more than 40 years is not an easy task and that too in era of dynamic market. While it has a selected and small market, it still has its set of loyal customers. Using Moti soap on special occasion has become a tradition and is getting passed on to next generations as cultural heritage in most of the Indian middle class family.

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