

THE RESHAPING OF INDIAN MINDS: CITIZENS, CONSUMERS & BRANDS

SEMIOTICS DECODES HOW INDIAN MENTALITIES COULD BE ALTERED BY THE CORONA VIRUS EXPERIENCE

HIGHLIGHTS



THE playing field for brands and marketing was very well laid out prior to the entry of the corona virus and the lockdowns imposed to control its spread. The government hardly mattered in the realm of private consumption, brands had well worked out communication strategies to sell products and the core ideologies of CMA – consumerism, materialism and aspiration were the foundation of India's GDP growth based on private consumption.

This playing field has been shaken up and upended by the pandemic and government efforts to control its spread. First of all, the government has in-

truded into private consumption in ways never seen before. The war metaphor used at the start of Lockdown 1.0 had companies rushing to act as good citizens and patriots. The extended lockdowns from 1.0 to 4.0 with a forced essentialism has had people re-evaluating their consumption. The blow to the economy and threats of job loss have further compounded the re-assessment of spending habits.



We see a concerted effort by the Government to create and valorise the citizen and patriot and to inculcate a new set of values, values different from CMA into the Indian public. These values for e.g. national-

ism, vocal for local, technology for solutions, survival ingenuity, simpler lifestyles with a greater sense of purpose, a shift away from focus on the individual (me



and my needs) to focus on the group and community membership are all likely to act as filters for regulating consumption. Some of these filters might control and reduce consumption and some might keep it the same. But the narrative around consumption and its meaning will shift towards citizenship based values from completely consumerist values.

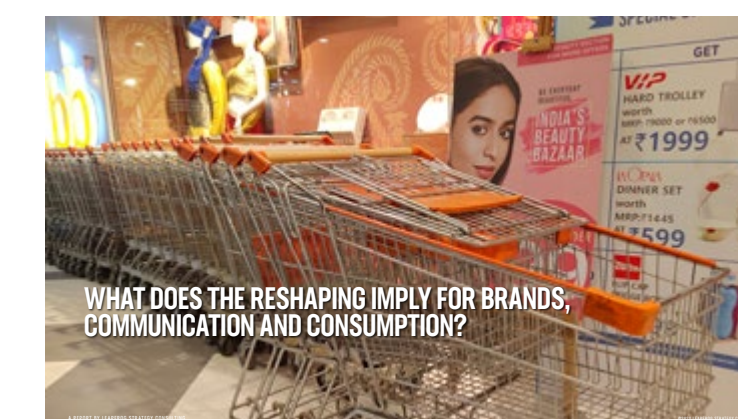
The consumer is now beleaguered. In pre-covid times, the consumer was King, he/



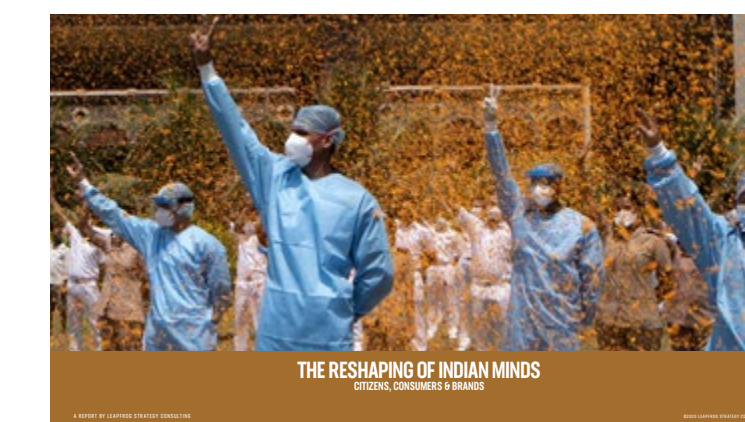
she was woo-ed by companies and brands of all kinds to shop and spend – through offers and deals as well as endless variety and choices. Every problem had a market based solution, if you had the money to afford it.

Now, the consumer not only has to rethink spends but is also subject to joyless experiences. The more the rules imposed in offices, airports, malls, beauty parlours, eateries to control and prevent the spread, the less pleasure there is in consumption. Which takes consumers towards satisfying needs rather than indulging in fulfilling their wants and desires. Finally, brands which had been

all out sellers of products and services, with the stopping of advertising and responding to the sentiment of a war-like crisis, responded by abandoning their seller face and putting on their humanist and nationalist faces. They began to connect with the public not as merchants and traders in markets but as fellow human beings and fellow citizens.



Now, with the gradual opening up of economic activities, Un-lock 1.0 in June, yet with covid infection numbers rising, the next set of choices and actions are expected from brands and marketers. Whether they revert completely to seller stance or



continue with their other faces, how they seek to integrate pleasure with safety and how they deal with the growing importance of the citizen – these we believe are the key questions they would need to grapple with as we continue to live in the Covid economy.

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