

REAR-VIEW DRIVING ON THE MARKETING HIGHWAY – A CASE TO SHIFT GEARS

It all started on a typical monsoon day in Mumbai. I was taking a ride to work with my roommate & colleague, Mishka. The roads were pot holed and often submerged, the traffic was crawling in many parts and rain was lashing at the windshield.

Throughout the 45-minute ride Mishka kept her eyes firmly fixed on the road ahead. She probably took her eyes off the road just about a dozen times, to check her rear and side view mirrors, especially when she needed to cut lanes or slow down. We reached our destination faster than we had anticipated, with absolutely no mishaps, which further strengthened my conviction on my roomie's driving skills.

My recollection of that ride led me to think about the way we drive our brand's agenda on the busy marketing highway. A road that is strewn with other brands, of all shapes and sizes, each trying to weave its way to the top position, using every trick of the trade that it can think of. For my brand to survive on such a busy highway, I would quite obviously need to keep my eyes trained on what lies ahead and navigate around all the obstacles, to reach my goal ahead of the other brands, that too in one piece.

At this point in my thought process, I braked sharply!

It struck me, that when it comes to navigating my brand, I spend inordinate amounts of time and energy looking into the rear-view mirror to examine what lies behind me, review the road I've travelled and take note of the obstacles that came in the way. Rear-view driving seems to have served me well in steering the brand, when the road ahead held fewer surprises. In the past couple of years, I have often found rear-view driving has not helped get my brand to its destination – smoothly, in the desired time and, within the allocated budget.

Is it time to switch attention from the rear-view mirror to focus more on the windscreen to see what lies ahead? Will checking out what is creeping up from behind, my past performance, the obstacles I overcame (or did me in), etc. help me as much as looking ahead at what is coming up next and learning how to navigate around these potential events?

Certainly, if one has to switch from rear-view to front view driving, it requires a shift in the way we navigate through the marketing highway.

It calls for one to have more ability and confidence in anticipating the road condition (all the marketing & environment variables) the possible behaviour of fellow travellers (brands), the potential twists and turns, the bumps and pot holes and everything else that we can imagine. Certainly, we need to base our navigation on what we have already experienced BUT, our overdependence on the past, to decide the future, needs to be dialled down.

Brands need to develop their Marketing 'Google' Map, which constantly updates the condition of all 'routes' to the desired destination, along with estimate of time & cost to reach. Armed with such a map we are likely to have an edge over those who continue to drive while peering into the rear-view mirror.

Looks like it's time to go in for refresher driving lessons, which teach us to read signs and respond differently, on the modern marketing highway.