

## Opinion

# The 'Swad' vs 'Sehat' conundrum

---

Pankaj Priya | Updated on November 15, 2020



Food companies have a tricky balancing act on their hand as they can ignore neither taste nor health

A sumptuous and wholesome food is supposed to tickle our taste buds thus igniting the digestive fire and simultaneously provide the essential nutrients for our physiology. Processed and packaged foods have always been caught in this quagmire, which one to promote over the other, '*swad*' (taste) or '*sehat*', (health) or to be on the safe side, balance between the two. But this is easier said than done.

With the pandemic bringing back focus on immunity and hygiene, '*sehat*' seems to have edged past '*swad*'. Maggi Noodles started its India journey on the plank of 'two minutes' and taste, but gradually shifted to 'atta', 'dal'

and veggie noodles. Even Maggi's latest add-ons have been instant poha and upma , desi foods, perceived to be more nutritious than noodles.

## 👑 SUBSCRIBER EXCLUSIVE



### GADGETS

Galaxy A52s 5G review: A quintessential Samsung phone

Players such as Mother Dairy, Amul and Tata Chemicals are stressing on '*sehat*' in their commercials for their products like paneer, ice creams and salt. Yet the popularity of Maggi is largely dependent on its 'tastemakers' which has been recently extended to Magic Masala to give the taste makers a 'desi' flavor.

Patanjali products positioned strongly on *sehat*, rather synonymous with healthy living, are increasingly displaying deliciousness of their food products. When their initial launch of atta noodle could not sustain an enthusiastic response from the customers, they introduced many variants of noodles based on 'chatpata' and 'desi masala' taste. Their fast selling light packaged snack 'suji rusk' stresses on '*swad*' followed by '*sehat*'

Therefore, if '*swad*' and '*sehat*' are equally important to the customers then it raises some pertinent questions. Any segmentation exercise based exclusively on '*sehat*' or '*swad*' was flawed, as they never existed. Or have customers' preferences changed over the years? If yes, then only one broad segment exists, that is "*swad bhi, sehat bhi*" – taste along with nutrition. If it is too broad, then can this new segment be micro-segmented with variations of both the dimensions: one segment preferring taste over health and the other vice versa, but both co-existing?

Responding to the first question, would require a flashback to late eighties. Indians were gradually getting exposed to new categories like ready-to-prepare beverages, ready-to-cook foods and fast foods. An obvious plank

to market these new products was taste as lifestyle diseases had yet to display their fangs, yet a considerable segment consisting of late majority and laggards were still hooked on to home cooked hygienic and healthy food. Therefore, the exclusive health seeking segment was left to be catered to by revitalising tonics, supplements and nutritious drinks.

## Shift to health

Come 21st century and lifestyle disease started spreading their tentacles across young India forcing Indians' food preference to shift gradually towards '*sehat*' (health or nutrition). Consequently, all food and beverages marketers started fortifying their offerings with minerals and vitamins supplements, supported by an element of wellness in their communication programme.

After the pandemic hit the world, the mood of the customers has turned sombre. Wellness has been prioritised over taste. Marketers have resorted to increased fortification or relaunching of their food products/supplements and in some cases launching entirely new products fully based on health plank. The best example is the relaunch of health tonic 'Cinkara' by Hamdard after 35 years and introduction of immunity boosting drinks by Pepsi.

But can taste be ignored for long? After all taste is reflection of excitement and colour in our life. Then what would differentiate a general food from a medical formulation. Yet the traditional dictum from Ayurveda: 'Consume food for physiological and psychological well-being per se', is also an eternal truth.

The initial phases of lockdown and subsequent restricted movements beyond the confines of home have shifted consumers preference for home cooked foods. Consumers gradually realising that they have to co-exist with Covid for long, taste has been put on an even keel as wellness which is reflected by the increased postings of new and tasty home recipes on social media as well as viewership of food channels. These home

experimented recipes have emerged as the new competition for street foods. Rather trying out new tasty recipes is perceived as novel way of distressing during these tough times.

## Striving for a balance

Therefore, the reality that both '*swad*' (taste) and '*sehat*' (nutrition) are indispensable to human life has been again proved convincingly. Viewing it from a marketer's perspective, any value proposition offered to consumers is the sum total of functional and emotional benefits.

In case of food products, where '*sehat*' signifies the functional benefit, '*swad*' portrays the emotional benefit. Attitudinally, a customer's orientation towards any food consumption is the result of a complex interplay of the cognitive and affective responses, in this case represented by '*swad*' and '*sehat*' respectively.

Marketers would have to balance the two so as to be in tune with the ever changing social and cultural environment as these two influence the mood of the customers during any time period. It implies that one large intersection of the two segments comprising both the above mentioned dimensions exist which can accommodate many players.

The other two extremities, i.e. only taste or only health, could be catered to by dedicated supplements and junk foods marketers.

Marketers serving the intersection of the two could keep on introducing and dropping variants with varying focus on taste and health, depending on the customers' mood during a particular duration or accompanying taste makers with their product.

The gainers in this exercise seem to be the new permutations and combinations of spices acting as add-on 'taste makers' being introduced by food marketers as there is a limit to introducing variants and taste being an individualistic preference.

The writer is Faculty- Marketing & Retail Management, Birla Institute of Management Technology

Published on November 15, 2020

Follow us on **Telegram**, **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **Instagram**, **YouTube** and **Linkedin**. You can also download our **Android App** or **IOS App**.

Get more of your favourite news delivered to your inbox

Your e-mail address

SUBSCRIBE



COMMENTS

## You May Also Like



Global demand boost for Indian steel



Freak trade at NSE, yet again



Galaxy A52s 5G review: A quintessential Samsung phone