

Time To Unmask The Face Mask: A Marketer’s Perspective

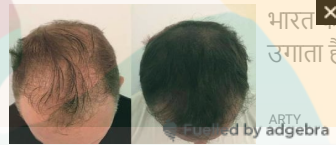
COVID 19 Pandemic gifted an additional protective gear for humanity: Graded Partial Face Mask. It was not that we were not exposed to wearing these face masks, but only during exceptional circumstances i.e. in medical exigencies. COVID 19 made its usage mandatory in public place.

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21 August, 2020 by Pankaj Priya

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With the Government and medical fraternity emphasizing its importance and further prodding by the media, it has become a mainstay for humanity. Even in the case of threat from this pandemic waning out in future, the chances of its repetition through new and more dangerous strain or looming of new viruses due to global warming, as some scientists claim, humanity would be forced to wear mask as a situational precaution if not as a regular practice. Rather wearing a mask at public places is viewed as civic etiquette in some parts of the world like Singapore.

Marketers have been suddenly handed over a new product to deal with, a product which had totally escaped their notice till date. It is a new accessory for consumers. They have already responded to this new need of their customers by launching masks of various hues and colour. The companies largely entering this arena have been pharmaceutical and apparel manufacturers, especially in the SME sector.

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But with the gradual realization that wearing mask would not be short term but a permanent affair, marketers would be forced to give serious thought to this "small shred of clothing", so essential to human survival. An in-depth analysis of the customers' discomfort and new expectations from this imposed accessory could throw light on formulating a coherent marketing strategy to respond effectively in meeting this 'novel' need.

Let us list down various discomforts and possible solutions for the same. The prime discomfort is in 'hindered breathing' and laughing their heart out (the most crucial aid to keep our spirits high during testing times). Can the masks have some inbuilt elasticity to cater to obstacle free inhaling and exhaling while maintain their tightness and shape at the corners for safety?

The other issue is related to their washability. The solution obviously would be their ease of washing/ wrinkle free dry cleaning. The next discomfort lies in the failure of people to display their identity in the midst of public gathering and further more displaying their facial beauty and expression.

The solution would lie in 'see through' masks or masks hanging around the neck akin to our reading glasses with an exquisite chain. The see through masks would also be beneficial from security point of view. Therefore, going further, if the masks are the new accessories then they should be matching with the overall attire of the person, thus adding to his/ her personality. This would lead to creation of designer masks matching a person's facial structure and the dress being worn by them.

The designer masks would also bypass the ears as the hanging hook, providing much needed relief to our 'silent' and uncomplaining ears. Marketers have already launched 'trikinis' for women and two piece for men' beachwear. This would be extended to formal and party wears as well. The implications are that if masks are the new accessory on board, then they have to be in sync. with the other accessories and main wears i.e. watch, spectacles cufflinks, shoes, duppatta, angvastra, shirts, trousers, suits, sarees, dhoti and so on.

So players presently operating in these categories would be well advised to consider their foray in developing and marketing matching/ complimentary face masks in addition to the above merchandise. Therefore, the present engagement of few SMEs and NGOs in creating and marketing masks would expand to various players operating in apparel, accessories, glass frames and related merchandise with the pharma companies only restricting themselves to medical purpose masks.

As this product gradually evolves into a category over a time span, few marketers would like to specialize in masks per se by offering a wide range of masks ranging from plain, designer, climate specific, medically approved, occasion specific to masks for people with special conditions.

It is time to start unmasking the mask and create an aspiration and aura around this small, yet significant piece of cloth. This unmasking of the mask would bring out the 'superman' and 'superwoman' in customers, an urgent need in the present tough times.

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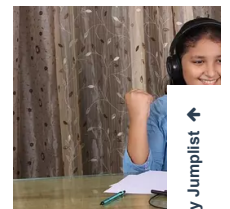
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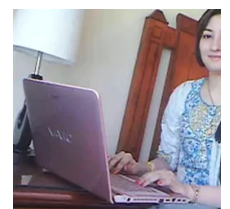
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