

BLOW HOT, BLOW COLD

Increasingly erratic weather patterns are throwing marketing calendars into disarray. Shannon Tellis looks at how brands and creative agencies navigate an uncertain playing field

Last month, Marches woke up to its wettest March day in 100 years. In the same month, the city recorded its hottest day of 2023 at 83.3 degrees Celsius. In a similar surprise, temperatures in Delhi, which are normally scorching this time of year, have been kept in check by the surprise March rains. Down south, Kerala has received more than the usual summer rains — 327mm of rain against the average of 94mm.

Unexpected weather changes play havoc with agriculture by disrupting crops and leading to unintended inflation — especially in the food sector among other industries. Another often overlooked side effect is in advertising and marketing. For instance, if a brand rolls out a summer campaign but the weather is rainy, the conversation may not resonate with consumers. Similarly, a winter-themed campaign might backfire if most of the country is experiencing a heat wave.

This mismatch is unavoidable since scripts are approved months before a campaign's launch, says Anoop Desai, COO, creative@experientia, West Bengal, Creative, India.

"Weather changes have been erratic recently. On many occasions, it changes in hours. Predicting and committing to what is happening [weather-wise] when an ad release is impossible," he says.

FOLLOW THE DEMAND
With extreme temperature fluctuations, companies with each passing year are brands struggling to adapt their marketing strategies? Not at all the nearest, say Starbucks, Ice Cream and Starbucks. The brands have to release regular seasonal campaigns.



Despite the seasonally warm weather in December 2022, Starbucks says it saw one of its biggest months propelled by its seasonal menu. "To an extent, we're protected from seasonality because Starbucks has always been positioned as that third place where you go after your home or office. Our consumers come in to experience our seasonal menus or treat up for different occasions — Valentine's Day, Friendship Day, Mother's Day," explains Deepa Krishnan, director - marketing, category loyalty and digital, Starbucks.

However, she notes that the brand has seen fluctuations in the demand for hot versus cold beverages whenever the weather shifts.

Prasad Paul, co-founder of Briton Water Design Studio, the creative agency behind Natural's Ice Cream, says unpredictable weather hasn't really affected sales, since "ice-cream is still an indulgence category," but it does play a crucial role in the quality and availability of stocks. Last year, the brand had to cut down a three-month campaign promoting Natural's 5 annual 'Berry Festival' to two months because transportation issues had led to limited berry stocks.

Unpredictable weather can be a deterrent for a day or two, but the market tends to recover, adds Anoop Desai, COO, experientia, India.

Ramul Nandhi, business head and EVC, Godrej Appliances, was infatuated when it suddenly started raining in March this year, causing a temporary dip in demand. With multiple parts of the country experiencing one of the hottest Februarys on record, Godrej Appliances had enjoyed a 2% value growth and a 3% volume growth in its cooling categories.

LONGER CAMPAIGN SEASONS
However, the story changes a bit when it comes to spending. As the seasons get longer and temperatures more extreme, Desai Creative's Desai says clients are more inclined to run traditional seasonal campaigns for longer.

There was a time when seasonal ads would run for two to three months on average; this has now increased to four or five months, he says.

In the case of an early summer, summer-specific campaigns and brands tend to start advertising earlier to maximize the opportunity, according to Mohit Joshi, CEO, Havas Media Group India. For instance,

both Coca-Cola and PepsiCo India kicked off their bevvy of summer campaigns in February itself. The former launched two ad spots with Janvri Kapoor and Tiger Shroff on February 23, while Pepsi's 'Run Up Run!' campaign with Ranveer Singh went live on February 28.

However, Joshi cautions that overall spends will not increase but the phasing of campaigns may change in line with the 'weather realities' closer to the date of implementation. The most recent trends in weather (at the time) and predictions for future will trigger these decisions.

YEAR-ROUND MESSAGING
With erratic and unpredictable temperatures, there is a case to be made for generic ad campaigns over seasonal-themed ones, ice-cream makers, for instance, face a lot of their marketing spend on year-round advertising to push the idea that there is no open the season or occasion to argue an ice cream. Think of Amul's year-round 'No Cream No Dessert' campaign or the advertising Natural's does around their 'This is the Original' brand positioning.

"The result [of these year-round campaigns] is evident in the sales patterns that has changed over the years with a

reduced seasonality index," says Anand's Mehta, citing how the difference between the peak season for sales (February to June) and low season for sales (July to January) has decreased over the years. "The seasonality of ice-cream has reduced, it's no longer a product restricted to only summers. This has changed the way we decide on advertising or marketing spends. Our advertising campaigns — print or media — are [now] spread across the year with increased frequency during the summer months or festival weeks."

These factors — year-round visibility and year-round point of sale advertising — have added to the double-digit growth of the ice-cream industry year-on-year, he adds.

The efficacy of a generic campaign is however dependent on the category, says Joshi. "Generic campaigns will not work for a seasonal category unless you have innovative products — like all-weather ACs — which extend the product's relevance beyond the peak summer months."

A Vinay spokesperson adds that if the product proposition is made relevant throughout the year, even seasonal

WEATHER-BASED CAMPAIGNS
In 2023, a weather-based 100M ad for beer brand Stella Artois wanted consumers to grab a cold one in the unpredictable British summer. The ads activated only when the temperature went up by 2 degrees in targeted locations.

Customer Personalization
Coca-Cola Customer Intelligence leveraged Google's Rules by Weather Analytics, thereby targeting customers when they're most likely to get cold and the flu.

Real-time Weather Data
To target customers during specific weather moments, QSR restaurant Wendy's leveraged real-time weather data to turn Twitter ads on or off depending on hourly weather assessments.

campaigns can be de-seasonalized. "The brand may not get the peak volume during the low season, but it will stay relevant to the consumer's mind which can be leveraged during peak seasons," he claims.

TAPPING INTO THE IMPULSE
Vikas also noted that the delayed fire cooling products is no longer restricted to the March-June and October months. A weather update for the next week or a hot Friday afternoon can trigger a purchase decision, they spokesperson noted. "This requires marketers to approach their end-customers in real time and be flexible with their marketing communication."

However, unpredictable weather patterns also present a marketing opportunity. Starbucks offers hints to social media to capitalize on the moment. Krishnan explains, "During the March rains, we put out post saying, 'Don't let the rain dampen your mood. Cheer yourself up by visiting a Starbucks.'" Since their beverage and food planning is usually done for an entire season, social media helps the brand stay agile by doubling or dialing down certain offerings in keeping with the weather outside.

Weather-based advertising, which uses real-time weather forecasts to reach relevant messaging to customers, is another path advertisers are exploring. Timely personalized weather-triggered communication can drive customers to make unplanned purchases. Categories such as travel, apparel and accessories can benefit from it.

However, with the weather fluctuating — sometimes in hours — Krishnan believes brands shouldn't react to every single change. Instead, they should take more of a staid view and differentiate between climate and weather. In short, not each unexpected rainy afternoon needs a rethink at the marketing table.

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