Did The Art Of Storytelling Enter The Elite Band Of Proven Digital Strategies? A Case On Paperless Postcards

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Abstract- "I wanted to create something that was powerful and would inspire people but wouldn't be intimidating or hostile. I felt that content with a 'me' element would help people relate to it and build something lasting" says Bistriti Poddar in an exclusive interview by The Quint ([1]). Bistriti's firm conviction was that the excitement generated through usual conversations would always be on the higher side and her initiative 'Paperless Postcards' proved her right in all senses. Inspired by real life scenarios and nostalgia, the innovative concept, 'Paperless Postcards' was India's first and the largest social hub for micro and non-fiction conversations. The launch of 'Paperless Postcards', indeed disrupted the micro content space after clocking 3 million impressions per week. The most interesting part of the entire concept was that the conversations were extracted from real life situations.

Keywords: Storytelling, Paperless Postcards, Digital

I. INTRODUCTION

Are creative writing and content writing the same?

There has always been a debate on whether creative writing skills and the content creation skills lead to the same output. The industry experts feel that while content writing is massively used to promote brands, the creative contents help emotional expressions free of the business intentions ([2]). In other words, the heavy content versions are more to attract the target audiences to a certain product or service by elucidating its features and benefits. The creative writing which is verbose, is directed towards imagination and self-expression. But there could also be a format where a brand could be promoted with a distinct blend of creativity and exceptional contents. Paperless Postcards is a classic example of such a format. With personalized subject, Paperless Postcards stands out from the content clutter in the current business scenario.

Different products marketed through different content specialities

Content writers belong to different genres from where they contribute to various aspects of a brand ([3]). A copywriter reduces a massive, lengthy message into a catchy, power-packed sentence. An influencer comes with a bunch of existing audiences. A lead generator, by virtue of his strong data or analytical familiarity, drives business transactions. The presence of a UX designer (User Experience) is a saving grace in the digital environment where websites are interactive, and several touchpoints are created to facilitate better customer involvement. Brand journalists are good masters of storytelling and generate appealing headlines to induce extensive readership. Paperless Postcards seems to embrace multiple styles. The virtual postcard narrates the features of the brands in a captivating fashion as a brand journalist. It plays a lead generator and drives the growth and marketability of brands. The reader connect is created and they are emotionally touched upon through replication of their life experiences in the form of a short poetic expression which is typical of a copywriter.

Writing is the painting of the voice

'Content is the reason why search began in the first place' goes a famous quote. Consumers started to engross in the contents with interesting brand stories and narration. Such attention-grabbing descriptions have a few objectives behind them like establishing customer relation, holding on their focus for a considerable time, to showcase a company's corporate culture artistically and drive the readers to develop a like or preference towards a brand. Precisely, the message that has to be voiced loudly to the readers, employees and the readers takes the shape of a creatively constructed content to do the needful.

Marketing starts from the consumers

Paperless Postcards was the brainchild of Bistriti, who was then Head-of-Content at Bewakoof, an online shopping site for men and women. Her experiences with people, trials with the social stereotypes, and the way she wanted to fight hypocrisies were translated into rich non fictional conversations ([4]). The

conversations were collected and pruned into exciting content for the new age digital audiences who could relate to them.

The organization under the creative leadership of Bistriti and her co-founder Ankit Gehlot (An IIT Mumbai alumnus) conducted lively workshops in the country's coveted institutions like IIM Indore, IIT Dhanbad, NMIMS and NITIE Mumbai with interactive sessions on how Paperless postcards had started to be recognized as one-of-a-kind content model in the non-fiction genre. Bistriti's TEDx talks at IIT Roorkee and IIM Raipur elevated the brand awareness to the next level.

The revived art of storytelling

Bistriti's decision to revive the art of storytelling through letters and postcards proved to be the right verdict taken at the right time. She, along with her co-founder Ankit Gehlot and a team of writers, data scientists, digital marketers, brand propagators, designers and filmmakers at Paperless Postcards worked relentlessly to build a premium brand.

As revenue was also a focal point in business, the team worked on brand collaborations and conducted content marketing, creative writing and entrepreneurship workshops. The brand collaborations worked on the influencer marketing format, where Paperless Postcards created different hashtags for brands, on the basis of which non-fiction stories and articles were written. Within a year of its inception, the brand collaborated with 6 hugely successful and content-driven movies like Toilet Ek Prem Katha, Lucknow Central, Rukh, Kadvi Hawa, Qarib Qarib Single and The House Next Door. The brand's association with Cipla, Charcoal Biryani, Shoppers Stop and Kohinoor Hotel group took it to a new magnitude of limelight.

Building the brand, the hard way

The team had to struggle with the brand positioning initially. However, Bistriti was very clear about what she wanted to achieve. She didn't want to be a rip-off social page but wanted to go beyond the usual and become a compulsive habit for the world by what she had to offer. So, the team eventually and consistently got recognition because of its unique designs and rich and original content. The brand built a loyal and returning follower base of 'evolved' readers and it was when Bistriti realized that when one keeps doing something consistently and propagate a thought-provoking idea, the world does give a grand reception sooner or later.

With Open Letters, Narrations, Trending and Poetry as its four major offerings, Paperless Postcards created ripples amongst the digital literature readers. An open letter could be written by anyone to anyone and they were based on experiences. The non-fiction conversations induced a wide readership. Poetry, as the name suggests made use of poetic expressions to conquer the readers' attention.

UNBOOK – the unobvious

'Unbook', an aesthetic compilation of postcards carrying the brand's viral conversations, proved to be an unobvious, unusual concept and the 'Unicorn' of design innovation by Paperless Postcards. It raised one's eyebrows and widen eyes in surprise and disbelief because of its distinct creativity. These postcards, with 30 most viral conversations of Paperless Postcards, were nested in detachable envelopes for easy reading. Unbook, which was launched by Himanshu Malhotra and Piyush Mishra in 2018 ([5]) garnered attention from every corner as the postcards with a wax seal instead of pages spoke of different human emotions and was one of the finest gifts one could give to a loved soul.

Source: http://gallery.wacom.com/gallery/78992969/UNBOOK-(Book-Merchandise-for-Paperless-Postcards

Would the emotional route work with the new age consumers?

Valay Lakdavala, Director-Client Relations, NeoNiche Integrated Solutions Pvt. Ltd, in an interview, expressed his observation that tapping into the emotional quotient of a consumer, would help a brand build strong connect as the human brain could recall emotions more effortlessly than logic. Anurag Kumar, Chief Communications Officer, Tata Sky endorsed the opinion of Valay stating that emotional commercials created a long-term brand recall and relatability which decided the brand choices of many consumers. The emotional branding strategy of Tata Sky, he said, had helped the brand cut clutters in the industry, where belief, joy, family togetherness, fun and care were some of the major emotional dimensions witnessed in the commercials [6].

Deloitte survey unravelling a new dimension of the millennial

Deloitte, a multinational professional services network, published a report [7] on its observation on the preferences of the global millennials in 2019 which considered 13, 416 millennials across 42 countries and 3009 Gen Z samples. One of the findings revealed that those consumers were different from the previous generations in the way they viewed advertising. According to the report, those consumers got discouraged with underperforming brands which failed to create and maintain good relationship with the customers. 42% of them had expressed that they had deepened their connect with those brands which had created positive impact on the society. The art of story telling about brands thus went a long way in helping brands reach out to the target audiences which comprised majorly the millennials and Gen Z consumers.

Paperless Postcards.....creativity personified
#1 Immuno Boosters with the campaign-'Yes Mom'

In the global competitive environment, companies always strived to stand aloof not just in the quality of their offerings, but also in the way they promoted themselves on the media. Paperless Postcards had lent its creative brain to develop many advertising campaigns with fascinating captions and messages that fuelled the customer's liking and desire.

From company sources
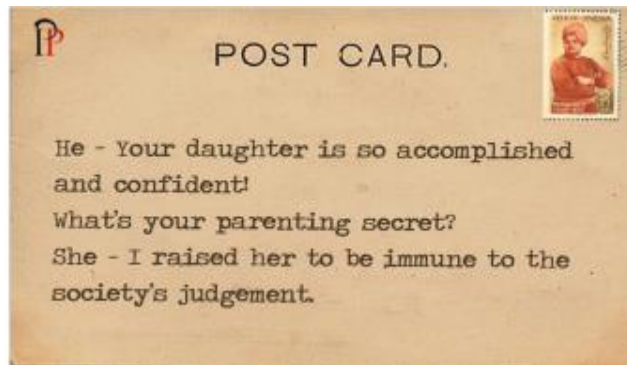
From company sources

With an underlying theme of empowering the girl child, ActivKids Immuno Boosters from Cipla was promoted through Paperless Postcards which resulted in reaching 18.6 lakh customers on Facebook and Instagram. With an advertising campaign which ran for 60 days and with Rs.60,000/- as ad spend, Paperless Postcards could engage 1,40,000 customers potentially where the major respondents were women between the ages of 25 and 34.

#2 Qarib Qarib Singlle (Hindi Movie meaning 'nearly or almost single')
Paperless Postcards generated 1.6 million impressions on the social media when it projected the outspoken nature of the hero of the film who exuded confidence and believed in living in that current moment. The dialogue about being serious about anything (***"When was the last time you took something seriously?" – "Life is too short to be serious"***) between the 2 main casts of the film brought about the essence of life and the disparity between the very nature of the hero and the heroine. The promotion through Paperless Postcards also was very successful with substantial number of impressions.

From company sources

 # 3 – Kadvi Hawa (Hindi movie which meant 'bitter breeze')
This was another Bollywood film which was promoted over the social media via Paperless Postcards, portrayed the misery of the farmers who had to face the nature's wrath in the form of drought. With its outstanding style of making the audience understand that the genesis of the issue, Paperless Postcards made very thought-provoking posters with simple, yet powerful messages to safeguard mother nature. As usual, there were 8,00,000 impressions created on the social media with a reach of 6,14,000 digital views.

From company sources

 # 4 Toilet Ek premkatha (Hindi movie which dealt with the issue of open defecation in the rural India)

The movie was released in August 2017, was based on the predicament of the rural women who faced the issue of open defecation. Paperless Postcards was roped in to create a potential responsiveness from the

observant public and to make the urban population know the ground realities of the Indian villages with reference to the sanitation-related glitch. The creative conversations which Paperless Postcards generated were well received by the online Indian customers and the movie buffs, as the virtual cards spoke of the emotions of the underprivileged women which otherwise would have remained hidden. The honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi applauded the movie as a good effort at the time when 'Swachch Bharat abhiyan', a nationwide movement to advocate cleanliness and stop defecation [8] was gaining momentum. The online promotion by Paperless Postcards reached around 80,000 people and 1.1 million impressions were registered.
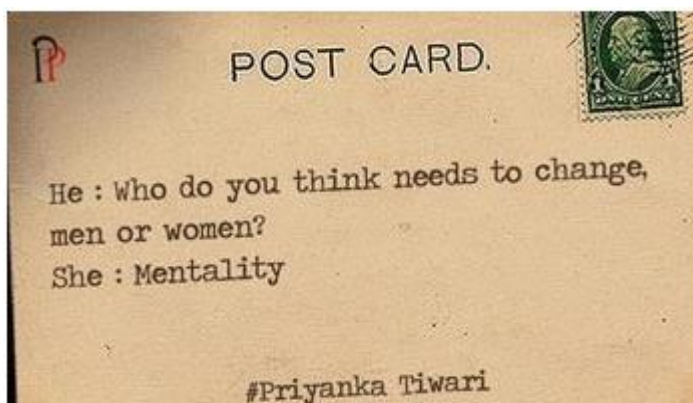

The insider's perspective

In an exclusive interview with the Indian Express in 2018 [9], Ms.Bistriti Poddar enlightened the readers on the essence of the concept of Paperless Postcards which was creating thought-provoking one-liners on digital postcards, making them look visually appealing to the digital content seekers. Those one-liners, she said, were drawn from real-life events and experiences which could not be replicated. She further said that while 90% of the conversations were created by her own team the rest was user-generated content.

Where did storytelling as an art come in?

In the new age of marketing, where the chatbots and digital assistants took the front seat in helping consumers get what they wanted, human touch became a rare phenomenon. The brands needed to connect with their respective audiences through some means which would not fail them. In the digitally-driven communities, brands became agile enough to understand that a conversation with their customers would foster better and long-standing relationships with their stakeholders. Interactive pages were being used by some brands to pull the probable customers where the artistic images or icons worked wonders to lead the viewer to what he wanted to look at or observe. Brand storytelling again, was intelligently used by the companies to narrate the evolution, milestones or the accomplishments of their brands [10]. Creative contents like interesting infographics, videos, webinars, podcasts, live chats and many such, made all the difference to the marketers and the marketed. The brand promises, emotions, values and beliefs took a perfect shape in an artistically made creative content. The customer engagement was ensured where there was an effort to narrate an episode innovatively to the audiences.


Source: https://www.indianwomenblog.org/bringing-back-the-charm-of-postcards-bistriti-poddar-is-adding-a-magical-twist-to-conversations/

Paperless Postcards spoke through expressions and nostalgia which connected instantly with the readers. The nonfiction was relatable with anyone as the episodes were drawn from real life stories and events. Most of the conversations had 'he-she' pattern where she would always be bold enough to be herself. Bistriti strongly felt the need to see through a brand to effectively create a strong concept and positioning which would become her signature. And that's where the team succeeded too!!

**Could a brand break the clutter with creative conversations?**
The big question which loomed large was whether a brand could impress upon the online audiences considerably with the art of storytelling the Paperless Postcards way? In the midst of many proven digital strategies of drawing customer attraction which may warrant a substantial investment like interactive pages, Search Engine Optimization, and video marketing and those which were cost effective like blogs and Social promotion, one pondered if Paperless Postcards would make it big among the Indian brand-savvy customers in the years to come. Mr.Prateek Chatterjee, Senior Vice President, Corporate communications and Marketing, NIIT said many brands missed out the opportunities to create a proper connect with their customers for long time relationship for which tapping into their emotions could be a solution [11]. He elaborated a little to say that a story or a simple thought was also enough to create that connect which should develop a desire in the reader to be a part of the brand's success story.

In the report titled 'Digital Dexterity, Marketing Trends and Forecast Digital India 2019' [11] by Octane Annual Research, the marketing professionals who participated in the survey had said that they had planned to invest massively in digital contents to foster the image of their brands.
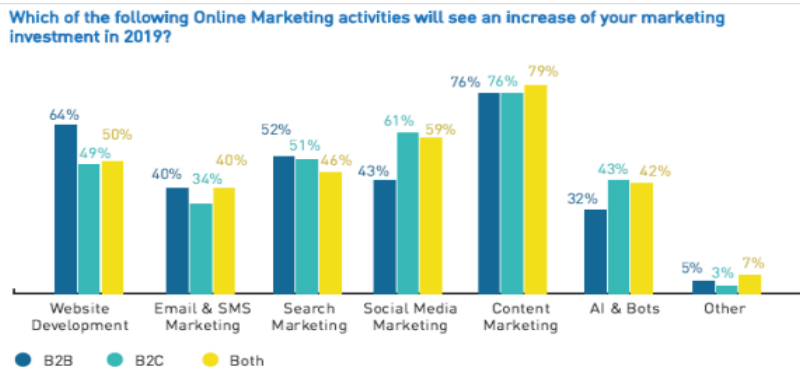
Source: Digital Dexterity, Marketing Trends and Forecast Digital India 2019

To another query as to how the social media advertising and marketing had helped them in effective marketing, they had prioritized engagement with the customer as the major benefit. The report, in its entirety, highlighted many responses from the marketers on their opinions about the digital strategies which they considered would take India by storm from 2019. They spoke on the probable trends in the Indian digital marketing landscape where social media marketing and the content marketing were considered important. Customer engagement was again regarded as a chief benefit of social media marketing. With its inimitable presence on the social media, Paperless Postcards and its creative style of crafting brand image had the potential to prove a definite way to break the promotion clutter.
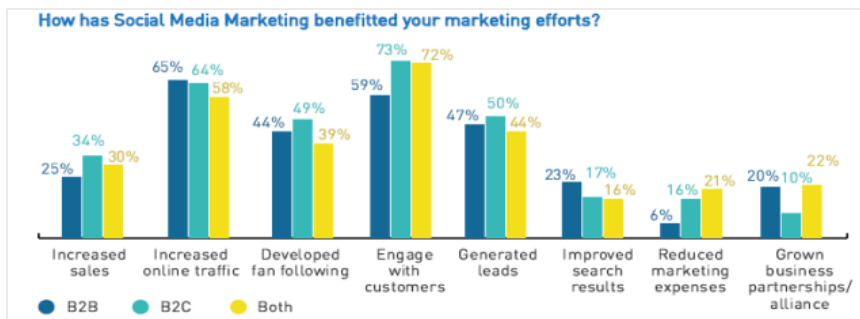
Source: Digital Dexterity, Marketing Trends and Forecast Digital India 2019

Focus determines reality....

The ambiance may look optimistic and the customers' attention may sound encouraging. But many brands from different industries like Tata Nano, Chevrolet, Danone, Bisleri Pop, kingfisher airlines, Pepsi Blue and Vanila Coke had failed in the Indian market for various reasons and they also had a huge marketing team with creative copywriters and content makers. The place of the art of storytelling followed by Paperless Postcards had still to be examined for its capability to withstand the pressure exerted by time-tested strategies like SEO and PPC in awareness generation and to convert leads into customers.

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