

# Business Standard

## Brands sharpen the local pitch

HDFC Bank, Parle-G, McDonald's, Coca-Cola and a slew of advertisers have opened their festive accounts in the south

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In an indication of the growing importance of the south in terms of consumer power, the Tamil harvest festival of Pongal, which began on Tuesday, ending on Thursday, has an A-list of brands turning up the advertising heat.

While the south has traditionally been an important market for companies, engagement has increased.

Brand Horlicks from GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) Consumer, which is merging with Hindustan Unilever, has an on-ground activation as well as a digital campaign this week in the south around Pongal.

ITC is running a 360-degree campaign to pitch its brand of incense sticks called Mangaldeep. While others such as McDonald's, Maaza, Reliance Fresh, HDFC Bank, Parle-G, and Tata Sky are all promoting their brands using local themes around the festival.

Advertisers have long accepted the importance of regional markets in India, but involvement with local consumers has increased only now as disposable incomes inch up. Not surprising then that local festivals have gained prominence as has multi-lingual communication. "Festivals in India are driven by the value system of celebrating life. They are a perfect opportunity to connect and celebrate with consumers," says Vikram Bahl, executive vice-president, marketing, GSK Consumer Healthcare about the sustained engagement that Brand

### LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

Consumers are engaging more with vernacular content

- There has been a 10x growth in local language searches
- More than 90% of video consumption in the country happens in local languages
- There has been a 100% jump in watch time for regional entertainment on YouTube
- 88% of Indian language internet users are likely to respond to a digital ad in their language rather than in English

Source: India's mobile-first ecosystem in numbers, Google

Horlicks has around Pongal.

Siddharth Bhardwaj, chief marketing officer and national sales head, UFO Moviez, says, "While regional movies already attract ads from local brands, interestingly, of late, national advertisers are showing more interest to promote their products around regional festivals."

According to Google India's Year in Search Report (2018), more Indians are engaging with vernacular content than ever before. There has been a ten-fold increase in local language searches in 2018, almost 90 per cent of video is consumed in local languages and 88 per cent of language users of the internet are likely to respond to a digital advertisement in their language. "In almost every vertical, search query growth rates are far higher in non-metros. And while Hindi is still the dominant language, Tamil, Marathi and Bengali are quickly gaining prominence online," the report adds.

Horlicks, for instance, is running a campaign asking for consumers to hand in their empty

jars and using these to create a larger-than-life installation of the 'Pongal Pusanai' (pot) in Madurai, Tamil Nadu. It also has a digital campaign that has already been shared widely on social media. Bahl explains that the brand's connection with the state has grown over the years, and in 2018, the company launched a country-wide platform on how 'Horlicks kids' are re-imagining festivals including Pongal. The campaign gathered force through Onam, Durga Puja and Chat pujas last year. In 2019, the brand has launched its digital campaign around the need to promote drip irrigation among farmers in Tamil Nadu.

While ITC is pushing its incense sticks during Pongal, it is conscious of local tastes. A company spokesperson said, "Festivals and religious congregations are great platforms to build salience among consumers. The brand engages with devotees during various important festivals by integrating Mangaldeep and its variants with the identified rituals of the local festival."

Morarji Anand, an ad film maker and who was involved with the campaign for Horlicks said that regional festivals offer one of the most effective engagement opportunities for brands. He says that the demand for short films and other digital properties around local festivals has been growing year on year.

For cola brands too, the south offers a big market opportunity and over the years both PepsiCo and Coca-Cola have used local festivals to promote local favourites from their family of brands. This year, Coca-Cola has used Pongal to push Maaza via a new ad campaign that leverages nostalgia around the way festivals are celebrated in the country.

To connect strongly with consumers, Coca Cola India said it followed a hyper-localised approach, both with its product portfolio as well as its campaigns. "We try to customise our messaging to strengthen connections with our consumers and deepen our engagement during moments of celebration," a company spokesperson said.

Apart from the overall message of celebration around a festival, Coca-Cola said it wanted to talk about women and their time to let go during special occasions. The Maaza campaign has been released in Tamil and Telugu and across all media in the two states.

Brands have begun to appreciate the need to be present across media, even during local festivals because as the spokesperson for ITC says, "The objective is achieved through multiple vehicles including on-ground work, TV, print, outdoor and digital."

Brands also pay attention to design and launch limited-edition products around festivals. Usha International says that it places its products in such a manner as to enhance their utility and relevance around a festive occasion. "We understand the importance of regional festivals. We have worked towards marrying our product offerings and bundling them with festive offers," a company spokesperson said.