



IIMC CASE RESEARCH CENTER (IIMCCRC)

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DEODORANT WARS IN INDIA: REVIVAL CHALLENGE FOR AXE

Axe deodorant was launched by Hindustan Unilever Limited (known as Hindustan Lever Limited until June 2007) in the Indian market in 1999. Axe led the Indian deodorant market since its launch up to 2012. However, by the year 2016, Axe did not even figure in the top five positions based on market share. Axe enjoyed a market share of over 20 per cent up to 2012, which had reduced to about six per cent by the year 2016. Axe had succeeded to catch the attention of Indian youth through its racy advertisements that portrayed Axe deodorants as a tool for men to attract women. In the wake of Axe's success, many other brands took up to the same theme in their advertisements and some of these advertisements, including one of Axe's ads, were found going overboard with sensuality and ended up courting controversy. A few of the late entrants in the deodorant market, however, succeeded in breaking the clutter with a different proposition. For instance, Vini Cosmetics' Fogg brand of deodorant, in 2011, disrupted the market by launching itself as a product with all perfume and no gas that gave consumers more number of sprays per bottle. This new concept redefined the expectations of the consumers from a deodorant. It helped Fogg dislodge Axe from its top position for the first time in 2013, and since then it continued with its leadership position in the Indian deodorant market.

During the same time, across the world, there was a growing criticism over stereotypical gender portrayal and objectification of women in advertisements. Unilever, the parent company of Hindustan Unilever Limited, consciously decided in 2016 to do away with sexism from its advertisements and change the positioning of Axe on a global level such that it inspired men to celebrate their originality and reject the traditional stereotypes of male attractiveness. In view of this decision, Axe launched a new advertising campaign in the US

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asking men to 'find their magic'. The ads conveyed that it was not important to meet the fashion norms to make oneself attractive, but men should figure out their authentic self and then work on it.

In light of the above developments, should Axe India too launch a new advertising campaign or should it continue with its ads relying on stereotypical ideas about gender that had worked for it for a long period of time? Would the different campaign help Axe in regaining its lost market share in the Indian market? Could Axe make a comeback by merely repositioning its brand or did it need to alter its marketing strategy altogether? Did it even make sense to invest time and money to chase a loser, or should it discontinue the product?