

# MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS AROUND FESTIVALS AND HOLIDAYS IN INDIA

**Dr Prateek Kanchan**

MBA(Marketing), Ph D(Advertising),  
Professor and Director,  
B.K School of Professional and Management Studies(University School of Management),  
Gujarat University,  
Ahmedabad-380009, Gujarat, India  
Ph:079-26304811. Mo:9898098033.

India is a land known for festivals. As per www.google.com, synonyms for 'festival' are anniversary, commemoration, competition, fair, feast, gala, holiday, carnival, etc., A big number of Indians across the length and breadth of India as well as abroad literally live and breath festivals to such an extent that with the close of a festival, they wait for another festival to come, planning for it in advance for quality family time on a holiday. In fact, it is a trend in many Indian homes to scan the new year calendar at the beginning of the year for the dates of various festivals from the beginning to the end of the year and plan in advance for them. These festivals may be national, regional, religious, cultural, sporting etc. If we look at the annual English calendar, from January 01 to December 31, every year the line up of festivals become a part of planning for lot of people in India. Major festivals having holidays as mentioned above can be listed as follows:

1. Makar Sankranti-January 14.
2. Republic Day-January 26.
3. Mahashivratri-Date not same every year.
4. Holi(Dhuleti)-Date not same every year.
5. Cheti Chand, Gudi Padwa-Date not same every year.
6. Shri Ram Navmi-Date not same every year.
7. Mahavir Jayanti-Date not same every year.
8. Good Friday-Date not same every year although it is Friday.
9. Ambedkar Jayanti-April 14.
10. Parshuram Jayanti-Date not same every year
11. Id-Ul-Fitr-Date not same every year.
12. Id-Ul-Adha-Date not same every year.
13. Independence Day-August 15.
14. Pateti(Parsi New Year)-Date not same every year.
15. Raksha Bandhan-Date not same every year.
16. Janmashtmi-Date not same every year.
17. Ganesh Chaturthi-Date not same every year.
18. Id-E-Milad-Un Nabi-Date not same every year.
19. Gandhi Jayanti-October 02.
20. Dussehra(Vijaya Dashmi)-Date not same every year.
21. Deepawali-Date not same every year.
22. Bhai Dooj-Date not same every year.
23. Guru Nanak Jayanti(Dev Diwali)-Date not same every year.
24. Christmas-December 25.

The above list is not exhaustive. However, it gives the importance of festivals and declared holidays in India throughout the year.

This whole 'festival planning' is not done only by the citizens or residents of India, but by business organizations of all dimensions as part of their business growth through aggressive marketing involving equally aggressive marketing communications. The emotional connect which many consumers have with these festivals is utilized well by companies providing all types of products and services through their marketing communications before these festivals as well as during the time of these festivals, in the course of the entire line-up of the festivals, year after year, thereby becoming a constant phenomenon.

This marketing communication is done by companies, not only in private sector but also in government sector and across all categorizations viz., fast moving consumer goods, consumer durables, as well as services. All types of marketing communications are resorted to as a calculated plan regularly. These may be advertising, Public relations, sales promotions, internet and interactive marketing, publicity and public relations, personal selling, and event marketing etc. However, there are variations in content and context of marketing communications depending upon the type of festivals:

- A. Religious festivals
- B. National festivals
- C. Regional festivals
- D. Sporting festivals

A. **Religious festivals** : A substantial number of festivals mentioned above are related to one or the other religion/s followed by different sections of society in India. These festivals have lot of respect due to beliefs and sanctities associated with them. Families, neighborhoods, as well as communities come together to celebrate them with full gaiety and joy, thereby spreading love and harmony not only within communities but even outside them. These festivals also demonstrate perfect communal harmony in India when followers of religions other than the one celebrating the festival also join in celebrations, thereby making the festival a perfect example of universal brotherhood and shared happiness. Marketers communicate for their brands around these festivals to consumers buying for themselves as well as buying for their near and dear ones for the purpose of gifting. Moreover, certain products/brands are used as part of rituals during festivals and companies appeal to the consumers for their respective brands. At times, festivals go beyond single day, may be two or more than two days, thereby generating more demand for the products/brands used. Companies put their best creative communications to come closer to the consumers and their sentiments attached to the festivals. However, it is very important that in the name of creative marketing communications, these very sentiments and sensitivities are not hurt. At times, due to incomplete understanding of the consumer behavior and their sentiments or sensibilities towards their respective religions, marketing communications by some companies hurt consumers and companies face strong criticism for it. If the companies are not sure about the sentiments and sensitivities of consumers towards their religion, they should not take the risk of hurting these consumers. In other words, marketing communications around religious festivals should be done with utmost care, and if the companies are not sure of it, they should avoid it, failing which controversies may develop. It has happened in the past and companies have suffered a strong backlash at times in the form of boycotts and protests, resulting in the withdrawal of advertisement/s as well as apologizing for the same. There are numerous examples of companies across industries who made these mistakes and suffered because of it. However, certain companies do it very responsibly, and their marketing communications across all media vehicles come out beautifully without hurting religious sentiments.

B. **National festivals**: Across India, just like any other country, there are certain festivals which have the whole country enthusiastic and liven up in a patriotic fervor. Republic Day, Independence day and Gandhi Jayanti are days on which every Indian feels more proud of his/her country and companies of all types come up with patriotic messages in their marketing communications in advance of these national festivals culminating on the festival day itself. Companies relate every product or service offering to the country's history through some or the other narrative, thereby trying to convert or reinforce the nationalistic feeling of the consumer into an immediate or future sale. It also happens that during such festivals, special schemes, discounts etc are also used to make the most of the opportunity available from the consumers. Consumers also feel pampered around these festivals generating a feel good factor in them resulting in big buying from many of them. Although it is the commercial interest of the companies which gets served, but as it is related to important national festivals, companies are projected as nationalistic organizations serving societies by communicating their products and services differently at such times. In other words, companies are taken as more responsible by consumers during these times. As these festivals are related to important and landmark historical events of our country, companies take extra care that controversial marketing communications do not come out.

C. **Regional festivals**: There are certain festivals which have a regional fervor implying that due to regional origin of certain landmark events of historical perspective, celebrations in particular regions take place from time to time. Such festivals also have holidays in particular regions of their operations and not across the country. As India is having many cities where people move for work and eventually settle and which are away from their birth place, their festivals, although regional come to be known at their place of work and become popular among native residents there also. In this way, marketing communications targeting such people transcend and move beyond specific regions. In a way, such festivals over a period of time get popular and respected in different regions of the country and people following them also increase in numbers expanding marketing opportunities for companies of all types. Companies constantly keep a track of such consumers or potential consumers and their movements across the country and target them with creative marketing communications wherever they are. Off-course, companies have to be careful here also about the sensitivities of such people.

D. **Sporting festivals**: Sports in India have followings which resemble a festival and in which people across different cultures, religions, and geographies participate round the year. It may be team sports like cricket, hockey, football, kabaddi, basketball etc., or individual sports like athletics, chess, etc. Marketing communications as part of overall marketing around such sporting events have become a regular feature across India and

companies across products and services categories make full use of these exciting opportunities besides giving best deals to the consumers. Moreover, with different tournaments at different levels, International, national, regional as well as local, happening at regular intervals, it has resulted in a year round series of events which give constant marketing opportunities for companies of all types across all categories throughout the country. This trend got more prominent in 21<sup>st</sup> century and T20(20-20)Indian Premier League(IPL) Cricket tournament from 2008 on an annual basis has played a catalytic role in this direction. Other team and individual sports organizations got motivation from IPL and we have regular events of different sports year after year giving not only career opportunities to thousands of young boys and girls across the country but a big marketing opportunity to companies of all types.

In a nutshell, it becomes very clear that marketing communications in and around festivals mentioned above as well as other festivals across India, throughout the year keeps the companies going even when they may not be having anything new to offer. Simply speaking, smart marketing communications around old and existing products/services, linked to various festivals have served and will continue to serve companies of all types.