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Negative Effect of Meme Culture: A Case Study of KTM Motorcycle in India

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Introduction:

Few months back, a couple of pages on Facebook posted a meme about KTM where it was written "50% people who have bought Duke is no longer with us" along with a picture of a KTM motorcycle.

This above meme was the reason which started the whole controversy. The reputation of Bajaj-KTM was damaged. The business subsequently filed a complaint with the Pune Police's Cyber Crime Division, including links to the profiles where the image had been shared. The Facebook page published an apology and removed all of the posts that contained that specific image. But the damage has been done.

Meme marketing:

A meme is an idea, behavior, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture, often through the internet. Memes typically take the form of an image, video, piece of text, or other type of media, which is modified or repurposed in creative ways to convey a particular message or meaning. Memes can be humorous, satirical, political, or social in nature, and are often shared widely across social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The term "meme" was first coined by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book "The Selfish Gene," and has since been popularized in internet culture.

Meme-based marketing is a form of marketing that uses internet memes to promote a product or brand. Memes are humorous or satirical images, videos, or text that are shared online and can spread quickly across social media platforms.

Meme-based marketing can be effective because it is often low-cost and can generate a lot of engagement on social media. However, it can also be risky because memes can be unpredictable and may offend some audiences. To successfully use meme-based marketing, brands should make sure that the memes they use are relevant to their target audience and align with their brand values. They should also be aware of current events and cultural references to ensure that their memes are timely and not outdated.

As per previous studies, memes have been characterized in earlier research as genuine examples of user-generated content and, thus, as effective marketing tools (Csordás et al., 2017). The advent of Web 2.0 and social media (e.g. Facebook,) microblogging services (e.g. Twitter), content-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube), meme communities (e.g. Reddit), wikis (e.g. Wikipedia), review sites (e.g Tripadvaisor) have offered large scale online participation (Rotman et al. 2011). The internet, including social media sites, messaging services, and other online media outlets, is used to spread memes among users. (Bauckhage, 2011). Memes have an intuitive appeal to consumers and can be used to boost advertising effectiveness (Williams, 2000). Marketers may turn an ad into a meme, which, if it becomes viral, can trigger a quick reaction and naturally increase customer engagement (Bury, 2016). As internet users actively share content online, brands must adapt to this new form of communication and advertising. There is no doubt that memes are growing in importance and popularity in the advertising and marketing strategies of various companies and brands. Malodia et al., in 2022, highlights the potential of viral memes in marketing messages since they increase brand engagement and recall. According to the report, viral memes enhance consumer engagement and brand memory because they are timely and highly relatable, which appeals to the target audiences. Memes let customers connect freely with marketers, offer their thoughts, and facilitate the effective gathering of feedback on their goods and brands (Brubaker et al., 2018).

Case of KTM:

The KTM Duke was released in India in 2012. Bajaj Auto owns about 40% of KTM and is responsible for manufacturing, selling, and servicing the KTM motorcycles in India. Young people like the Duke's pure and international standard designs, excellent parts, and unparalleled performance in power and handling.

Bajaj Auto Limited, a leading Indian two-wheeler manufacturer, partnered with KTM AG, a European motorcycle company, to bring KTM motorcycles to India. Bajaj-KTM partnership began in 2007 and resulted in the establishment of a manufacturing plant in Chakan, Pune, India, where KTM motorcycles are produced for the Indian and export markets.

In India, KTM has a range of motorcycles, including the Duke and RC series, ranging from 125cc to 390cc. These motorcycles are known for their performance, handling, and styling, and have been popular among motorcycle enthusiasts in India. KTM also has a dedicated dealership network across the country, providing sales and after-sales service to customers.

Overall, the Bajaj-KTM partnership has been successful in India, with KTM motorcycles being a popular choice among enthusiasts looking for high-performance motorcycles.

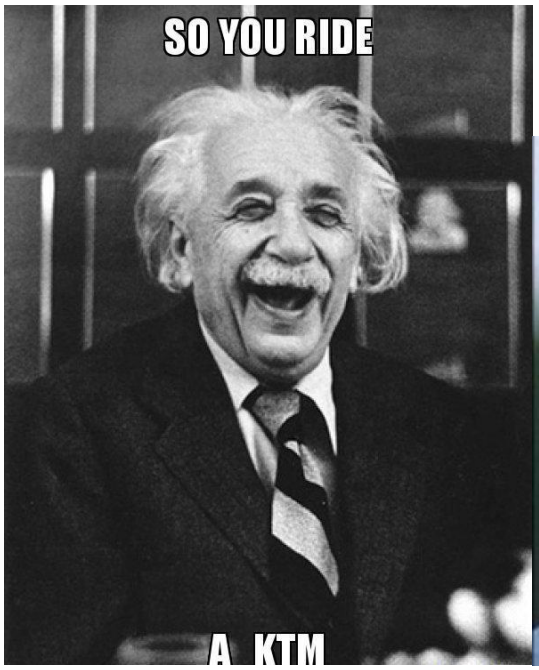
As per one of the leading Motorcycle magazine “KTM riders are not accustomed to that kind of power and performance due to which KTM motorcycles are more likely to be involved in collisions. Riding a performance monster like the Duke 200 or RC390 requires a lot of discipline, patience, and most importantly, prudence, especially on Indian roads where drivers frequently don't know what the indications are for or who should be given priority at intersections.

It is started with social media contents and the people behind it with the props in those videos. Most of the TikTok videos, Instagram reel or Youtube shorts which are viewed as “cringe” in nature had using mostly the KTM motorcycles in their video. By nature of their video, they were not directly or indirectly promoting the motorcycle, but the association of those content creator, with a specific motorcycle they were using remained with the viewers. In due course of time, the motorcycle garnered the negative image due to those memes and short videos. The motorcycle got nick named as “Khatam” motorcycle (a Hindi word play on KTM phonetics) and “Chhapri” (Loosely translated as “Wannabe guys who try to seek attention by doing unusual stuffs”) motorcycles. As per one of the motorcycle enthusiast “KTM has its share of immature riders who think they're invincible because a photo of their motorcycle fetches them a few likes on social media and they occasionally get stared at.” (Annexure 1: KTM Motorcycle in meme culture)

The magazine reviews paint a different story. One auto magazine named “BikeDekho” hails KTM motorcycle with high performance and easy to source parts. “BikeWale” on its website reviews it as easy to handle and low maintenance motorcycle. Autocar India adds that it is one of the most well-behaved and all-round capable motorcycle of India.

This ongoing marketing fight of perception between "performance" and "image" has reached to the echelons of Bajaj Auto. Let's see how they devise their future branding strategy so that this power machine does not get annihilated in the throes of social media memes.

Annexure 1: KTM Motorcycle in meme culture



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