

Will Wai-Wai be able to challenge Maggi's authority in the Indian noodle market?

By Amit Bapna & Ravi Balakrishnan, ET Bureau | Aug 17, 2016, 05.18 AM IST

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Navin Theeng (40), ECD at the advertising agency Havas Worldwide lives in Gurugram now, but has grown up in the North-East, Darjeeling to be precise. He has been a noodle eater for many years now. For him Wai-Wai is what noodles should taste like and Maggi was never an option. But then fate had its own plans - his Punjabi wife is a hardcore Maggi fan while he and the kids remain Wai-Wai loyalists. He thinks her taste buds are dead and she has pretty much the same opinion. But they have made their peace for now as they go about slurping their regular quota of noodles.

Theeng is just one of the many fans of the brand. Rigved Sarkar (29), copy supervisor at Bates CHI & Partners, Mumbai, got hooked on to the brand after he tried it first while on a trip to Sikkim. Now he's a hard-core Wai-Wai aficionado even if it means a trip to the



The surprising bit here is that in its 35 years in India, the noodle brand had never pushed itself via a large scale mass-media campaign.

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According to its latest calculations, the brand claims an all India share of 27%, which makes it the second largest selling noodle brand after Maggi. North East and North continue to be relatively stronger markets followed by West and South. The reason the brand doesn't figure in major category tracks is attributed by Chaudhary to inadequate coverage of the North East its strongest market, where it stakes a claim to the No 1 position. Chaudhary claims "Till date, we have `55 crore per month sale at the consumer level and half of it is still accounted for, by the North East."

Anindya Banerjee, executive creative director at Scarecrow who has worked on Maggi brand for many years at his earlier agency, believes that while it will stay the king of instant noodles for quite some time, with a population of 1.2 billion, there is ample room for a strong second. Wai-Wai noodles in his view appeals to a very different set of people - the young adult, as opposed to a slightly younger audience for Maggi and Sunfeast Yippee. The noodle for adults position is there for the taking. According to Manoj Menon, group business director, IMRB Kantar Worldpanel, "Wai-Wai has entered almost 1.5 million new households in the last one year with penetration of the brand moving from 0.6 to 1.8% in 3 years."

Helping realise Wai Wai's ambitions of increasing its national footprint, is Colvyn Harris, CEO, Harris-Mint who is also the strategic advisor to CG Foods. This is one of the first projects of the former JWT-man who has recently launched Harris-Mint, a brand consultancy. Elaborating on the differentiators for the noodle brand, Harris shares, "It is ready to eat against ready to cook, is on a youth specific platform, and is playing in a very mature category that has not had much innovation." The communication will carry forward the brand's positioning 'Munch It! Soup It! Lunch It!' with its primary audience, the youth

itself via a large scale mass-media campaign. That in a hyper-advertised category dominated by Maggi noodles, followed by others like Sunfeast Yippee, Top Ramen etc sounds unreal. The brand has been built purely on word of mouth and post-trial positive buzz, says Dr Binod Chaudhary, chairman, CG Corp Global that owns CG Foods, makers of Wai-Wai noodles. About any comparisons, Chaudhary quickly points out that the brand, its promise and its category are distinct. "We are no competition to Maggi and vice versa," he says. Wai-Wai is a fully cooked product that can be eaten straight out of the pack, and even today in India, people consume it either like bhel, or a soup or a full meal, he shares.

Galvanised by its intrinsic pull as well as enhanced production capacity (CG Foods has 8 plants in India currently), the brand has rolled out its maiden brand campaign. While the marketshare snatching game has its limitations, according to Chaudhary, the huge opportunity is in lifting the size of the market. India's per capita consumption of noodles is only four, as compared to 40 in both Nepal and Thailand, and 80 in Japan and China. "This is an Rs 2500 crore industry that has the potential to be `25,000 crore industry in 10 year," he adds. Harminder Sahni, founder of the consulting firm Wazir Advisors, reckons with the enormous number of young people coming to urban areas for work, this category along with other instant and quick options will continue to grow.

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